

Countless Hours 2023

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[0 : 0 0] All right, well, this morning I'm going to completely abandon my usual style and method, and I'm going to tell you right at the start of the message what my main point is and what the aim is.

This one's for you, Ellie. This morning, I want to encourage and motivate you to spend countless hours in 2023 with God in the pages of His Word.

Now, I realize that Christmas is two weeks away, and probably the last thing on your mind right now is when and where and how much you will read the Bible this next year.

I know that there's lots left to do in preparation for Christmas. We're just two weeks away, and there's probably shopping and preparations and decorating and cleaning and tidying, and the list goes on.

And you're right, most of the things of 2023 can just wait until 2023. But there's one thing that I hope you'll start to think about now before you wake up to a new year, and it's arguably the most essential and important thing that we can give our time to in this new year ahead.

[1 : 1 2] It's so foundational to how this next year will go for you and for me. And so I am praying that by the end of this message, you will take a Bible reading plan off of the table right there at the back of the sanctuary and resolve to spend countless hours with our great God and Savior in the pages of His Word and follow through with it.

Let me start by asking you this question. How do you want 2023 to go? What kind of year do you want it to be?

Do you believe that the time you spend reading your Bible can make all the difference in the year ahead? What is this book?

This is the most precious and valuable book on planet Earth. It's the collection of the many times and various ways that God has spoken to us.

It's the true story of what's been going on in our world since God made it. And through these pages are written the very words that God has said to men and women and even children through the ages.

[2 : 3 4] There is no other book like this. If this book contains the very words of God, should we not read it and meditate on it again in this year ahead?

Why spend countless hours scrolling through feeds filled with the words of men when we can spend countless hours turning through these pages that are filled with the words of the living God?

I hope that some of my enthusiasm and passion is contagious, but I know that it's not enough to change your heart. And so this morning we want to look at a number of passages from God's Word that can motivate us and encourage us to give ourselves to His Word in the year ahead.

We're going to start with John 17, verse 3. All these passages will be on the screen. And my first reason out of five for why you should spend countless hours in God's Word in 2023 is because this book is at the heart of our relationship with God.

It's not just a history book or some ancient writings. This is a book through which we can have relationship with God. Jesus was praying to His Father in this passage in John 17.

[4 : 04] He said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You. For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him.

Now this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

What is life? Let's just set aside that adjective eternal for just a moment. What is life? This is life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

How do we know who God is? We know it from His Word, from what He has said about Himself, and revealed to us in the pages of the Bible.

How do we know who Jesus is? How do we get to know Him better? We know it through the eyewitnesses accounts that we have right here in the Word of God. Do you want to experience more fully that abundant life, that joy of having relationship with Christ in this year ahead?

[5 : 26] Then you need to get to know Him even better. And you can do that by spending countless hours reading and meditating on the things God has revealed about Himself in His book.

This book is at the heart of our relationship with God. For my second point, I'm going to borrow a little from David Jeremiah and something I heard from him here in Sunday school a couple weeks back.

This book is the place where our faith grows. Another reason why we should spend countless hours reading it in this coming year we often use this language of growing in our faith.

And it sounds wonderful. Yeah, I want to grow in my faith. Can we grow in our faith? Well, the Bible says, yes. Paul, speaking to the church at Thessalonica, said this in 2 Thessalonians 1 verse 3.

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more. Can our faith grow?

[6 : 40] Yes, it can. It can increase. But how does it happen? Paul wrote this to the church at Rome. Romans 10 verse 17.

Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of Christ or hearing from the word of God depending on your translation.

The point Paul's making here is that faith comes when we hear the word of God. We cannot trust unless we have something to trust in. And God has spoken.

He's given us words. He's revealed himself to us so that we could put our faith in him and in his word. And so we can grow in our faith in God as we hear and read and come to understand more about him.

And the more that we know him in these pages of his word, the more we trust him. The more we see just how trustworthy he is.

[7 : 42] So this book, the Bible, is the place where our faith grows because this is the place where God speaks. And think about this.

We want to grow in our faith. The more that we trust God, the more faith we have in him, it changes and affects everything in our lives, doesn't it? Worry gives way to the peace that passes all understanding.

The problems and the challenges that we face in our daily lives, they begin to shrink as our faith grows because we know the good and gracious king who has promised to carry us through them.

The one who calms storms with a word. As our faith grows, God leads us down paths that we might have been reluctant to choose.

Paths that really will spare us hardship and heartache, pain and trouble. This book, the Bible, is the place where our faith grows.

[8 : 47] Do you want your faith to increase in 2023? Do you want all the benefits that come with that? Then resolve to spend countless hours in this coming year in God's word, in the greenhouse of faith, the pages of his word.

number three. This book is the place where we find everything we need for life.

2 Peter 1, verse 3. Peter writes and he says, God's divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Through these, he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Do you hear this? We know that God's words are powerful. When we go back to the beginning, Genesis chapter 1, we read about how God's words brought the whole universe into being.

[10 : 07] He spoke and it was. That same divine power has also provided you and me with everything we need for a godly life.

for life and godliness. How does it come to us? Through our knowledge of him. There it is again.

How do we get to know him? Through the pages of his word. This is where he has revealed himself through the centuries. So this book is the place where we find everything that we need for a godly life.

Now we might be tempted to push back here and say, really? Everything? You know, I believe the Bible has lots to help me with some things. Maybe spiritual things, maybe the things about salvation.

But everything? Well, I didn't write this. This is God's own word. Everything we need for life and godliness or for a godly life, God's word provides us with the knowledge of God that we need.

[11 : 25] That's what it says. I think that's what it means. Think about it. What does God's word, the Bible, touch on? does it not provide the comprehensive framework and understanding of all that we need to know for life, for a godly life?

It tells us how the universe began, where life came from, where we came from, how and why God made us, what the purpose of our lives is, how defying God ruined everything, how God in his goodness has been working mercifully to redeem and save and restore.

It gives us many pictures of how everything will come to its final end in our world, what the final destiny will be for the universe and everything in it.

This book reveals to us who God is, his glory, his many wonderful attributes, how he relates to all kinds of people in all kinds of situations.

This book is full of wise words and loving instruction for every area of life, from the beginning of life to the end of life.

[12 : 39] God gives us what he knows is essential for relationships, for marriage, for parenting, finances, prayer, worship, work, administration, planning, speaking, justice, for knowing good and evil, for helping the needy, for how to prioritize, for character building, for encouraging those who are discouraged, for how to live together as the people of God back then and today, for how to make peace with others, for how to endure hardship and suffering, for how to handle temptation, for how to make decisions, for how to act wisely in countless practical ways, for how to love and be a neighbor.

And the list could go on. This book really does reveal to us everything that we need for life, for a godly life.

It touches on every emotion that we will experience. It speaks to us about what to do with all of them, whether it's anger or frustration or grief or unforgiveness or bitterness, sorrow, worry, anxiety, fear, doubt and unbelief, joy, happiness, passion, zeal, laziness, apathy, the list goes on.

It speaks to all of it. And what's so beautiful about this book is that it doesn't just come to us all this knowledge of God in the form of a rule book or a dictionary or an encyclopedia.

God gives it all through a great variety of genres. History and poetry, law and love song, liturgy and victory chant, proverbs and parables, spectacular visions and dreams, records and personal letters, covenants and confessions, prophecies and proclamation, wisdom and oracle, all of these woven together through the great narrative telling us the story of God and of us and our world.

[14 : 58] This book really is the place where we find everything we need for life and godliness, the place where we grow in our knowledge of God.

So, why should we spend countless hours in God's words in 2023? three, we've heard a few different reasons. Number one, this book is at the heart of our relationship with God.

This book is the place where our faith grows. This book is the place where we find everything we need for life and godliness.

And number four, this book is full of very great and precious promises. We're still in 2 Peter chapter one verse four.

Peter says, through these, through his greatness and glory, he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.

[16 : 03] Having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. Do you know that the Bible is full of very great and precious promises?

One pastor said it this way. He said, the entire Bible can be summed up like this. Old Testament promises made. New Testament promises kept.

God's word is full of promises and not just any old promises but very great promises. Precious promises.

And as we read through God's word we see that we see part of why they're so precious is because God always keeps his promises. He is faithful. He proves it over and over and over again throughout history.

Let me ask you something. Do you want to know all that God has in store for you? If you are a Christian, if you are a believer in Jesus? I do.

[17 : 16] It's all in here. Countless promises. Both the details of what he has promised and the assurance that he will deliver on those promises through our relationship with Jesus.

2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 20. I love this verse. Paul says, for no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ.

It's as though Paul reflects back on all the promises God has made throughout history, throughout the Old Testament and he says, the answer to all of them is yes, I will do that for you through Jesus Christ, my son, through the union that we have with him when we come to believe and be born again.

God keeps every promise he's ever made to Jesus, the son of man, and all those who have been united with him through his death and resurrection by faith.

It's a wonderful assurance that God gives. But notice what else Peter has to say about these very great and precious promises.

[18 : 35] He has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature. What does that mean?

I love this verse. God speaking through Peter, God is not afraid to tell us how close we can get to him through his promises.

We get so close to God through the promises that we find in the pages of his word that we become partakers of the divine nature. Would you like to partake of God's divine nature?

Would you like to participate and be brought into this wonderful person, God, this glorious God? Would you like to have that most intimate of relationships with him?

Peter says that's what these very great and precious promises do for us. That's where they lead us. Now some of you might be thinking, whoa, this sounds close to blasphemy.

[19 : 50] Are you saying that we are going to become God? No. Let me clarify. Peter's not saying that we become God, but that we become partakers in God's nature.

How does it work? Well, elsewhere, Jesus and Paul teach us very clearly that we who believe in Christ and are born again by his spirit we become one with Jesus.

We are united to Christ so deeply, born again by his spirit. So much so are we one, are we united that we are said to be co-heirs with Christ, sons of God, adopted into the family.

We get to share in Christ's glory. we get to share in his reign. And there are many things that Christ has that we will have forever.

Life, immortality, holiness, perfection, incorruptibility, glory. And like Jesus, we will have the most intimate relationship with God that we can ever imagine.

[21 : 15] Let's look at a couple quick passages. Colossians chapter 1 verse 27. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery which is Christ in you.

The hope of glory. A little later in the same letter, Colossians chapter 3 verses 3 and 4, Paul says to them, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ who is your life appears, you also will appear with him in glory. There's this union that we have with Jesus.

And a passage we haven't got to yet in John chapter 17 is Jesus prays to his father. He says, my prayer is not for my disciples alone, that's the ones with him that evening.

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

[22 : 24] I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity.

These are wonderful words. There is only one God and there will only ever be one God. We sometimes refer to God as the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And the good news of Jesus is that we by faith can become united to a member of the Trinity, united with Christ, that he and his spirit live in us and we in them.

And so God lives in us and we in him. We can become partakers in this way of his divine nature.

And this comes as a gift of his glory and goodness through his promises. through believing his promises and receiving what they offer.

[23 : 36] So we ought to give ourselves to countless hours in this book, carefully reading it, meditating on it in this year ahead, because it's through the promises found here that we can become partakers of the divine nature, lovingly joined to God forever.

this book is full of very great and precious promises which believed and embraced will lead us up into the glory of God, into union with God, through union with Christ.

There's a second half to this one, a part B for those of you who love outlines. God's very great and precious promises, not only do they make us partakers of the divine nature, but it's actually through them that we are empowered to overcome evil here in the world right now.

Back to 2 Peter 1 verse 4. He has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

How do we break free from the allure of sin? How do we win the battle when we're tempted and enticed to do evil?

[25 : 07] How are we set free from the corruption in this world? Peter says it's by, it's through the very great and precious promises that God has made. Now what does that mean?

what does that look like? Sin and temptation make promises to us as well. Do this thing and it will make you happy.

Try this thing over here, it will satisfy you, it will give you what you long for. And these promises that sin and temptation make, they're powerful. We feel them so deeply.

But these promises of sin and temptation start to lose their power and their appeal when we see the far greater promises that God has made to us, to those who love him.

Let me give an example. I'd love to be rich and have all the pleasures and comforts of this world. But Christ warns me that if I were even able to obtain all of that, it wouldn't last.

[26 : 19] the day would come when my life would be demanded from me. Death will come knocking on my door. And so Jesus promises me that if I give up my life for me in this world and lay it down, die to myself and follow him, he will give me something far greater that does last forever, eternal life and the salvation of my soul for eternity.

This is just one of many very great and precious promises that kills the appeal of earthly riches. It breaks the power of greed.

It helps us escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desire, specifically the evil desire to get more and more and more and more for myself.

And amazingly, this promise of Christ breaks the power of greed by offering me a superior treasure.

Something that just when I get my gaze on it, it enables me to let go of the treasures of this world, the things this world loves so dearly. It's truly a wonderful thing.

[27 : 36] How does God help us win against temptation? He offers more. He guarantees something better in its place.

Superior pleasures, delights, experiences, greater possessions than this earth contains for a life that never ends in the glorious kingdom of God when Jesus returns.

The promises of God give us the power that we need to say no to temptation and to evil desires. Which means that to overcome sin and temptation in 2023, we need to keep these very great and precious promises right there in front of us.

Reading them, meditating on them, even memorizing them. Do you see the benefit of spending countless hours in these pages days in the year ahead?

This book is at the heart of our relationship with God. This book is the place where our faith grows. This book is the place where we find everything we need for life.

[28 : 51] This book is full of very great and precious promises which enable us to partake in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

And number five, this book is full of the instructions that we need to stand firm through 2023 and through the rest of our lives.

Matthew chapter 7, verse 24. Jesus said this, he said, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down and the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell.

[30 : 03] with a great crash. This little parable gives us such a powerful illustration. How will you fare through the storms, through the challenges, through the difficulties of this coming year, 2023?

Jesus says it all depends on whether you hear his words and put them into practice. practice. And to put them into practice, you must first hear what he has to say.

And to hear what Jesus says, you must spend time in this book listening to what he has to say. Jesus says if you hear his words and don't put them into practice, you're a fool.

You're an idiot. The way you're living your life is like a guy building his main residence on the sand of a beach. church. How short-sighted. It's going to be a disaster.

Why is he a fool? Because he was told where and how he should build it. And he chose to ignore it. Foolishness. But there's something even more foolish than this.

[31 : 12] The person who has all the words of Christ right here in his Bible and doesn't even open it to listen, to hear.

Imagine that you were there as Jesus was speaking these words to the crowd. And you look beside you and there's this guy there who's got a scowl on his face. And he takes his fingers and he puts them in his ears.

I don't need to listen to this guy. That's you. That's me. When we look at our Bible sitting on the shelf or on the coffee table and say, eh, I don't need to do that.

I've got better things to do, more important things to do. That's boring. You're an idiot, says Jesus. You're a fool. If you disregard my words, the house of your life will go splat.

So let's resolve today, before this new year, to not be idiots and fools, let's resolve today to spend countless hours with Jesus, listening to his word, reading it, meditating on it in 2023.

[32 : 35] This book is at the heart of our relationship with God. This book is the place where our faith grows. This book is the place where we find everything we need for life. It's full of very great and precious promises, and it's full of the instructions that we need to stand firm through 2023 and the rest of our lives.

As elders, we were talking about this, and we've agreed that each of us elders are going to read through the Bible, the whole thing, in 2023. We want this to be the normal for those in leadership in our church.

kind of the unwritten expectation for everyone who serves as an elder in this church, that every year we carefully and prayerfully read through God's word, cover to cover. And we want to encourage all of you, we want to invite you to join us, to read God's word with us.

And so on the table at the back, we've made available a few different kinds of Bible reading plans so that you can do that. Now, we know that everybody's at a different place.

For some of you, you've maybe never tried this before. And so reading through the whole Bible may be a bit much for you. We've got a plan for you. Five by five by five plan, five minutes a day, five days a week, read through the whole New Testament in the year.

[33 : 54] And you get two days a week just to catch up and reflect in case you get behind. We've got a plan for kids. We want all the kids to read. Parents, help your kids read through God's word this year.

We've got a plan back there called the sweeter than honey plan. And it just takes kids right through select chapters through the main story of the Bible with a good mix of old and new testaments, Psalms, and Proverbs.

If you're thinking, yeah, I want to feast on God's word this year. Give me the whole Bible this year. We've got two plans for you. We've got one that takes you through the Old Testament chronologically.

It even puts the Psalms and the prophets in their place in the narrative so you can kind of know when they happen and when they spoke. That's at the back there.

And we've got a plan called the book at a time plan where you just work through a book at a time alternating back and forth between the Old and the New Testament. And all of these plans are just 25 readings per month so you get days for catch up and reflection.

[34 : 56] Christian, and let's do this. This could be a really good year for us as a church. This is how we grow in our faith as a church. If you're really up for a challenge, maybe you've already been through the Bible several times and you just want to go deeper, I've got something special for you.

I will give you your own copy of the Holman Bible Atlas with all the maps, all the stuff that talks about what happened in those trickier parts, where the Assyrian Empire went down to attack and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

It's all back there. You can have a look at that and just throw your name down there. If you want a copy of that, I will give that to you as my Christmas gift this year. Read through it with your Bible reading plan this year.

Finally, if you don't have a Bible, we would love to just give you one as a church. We've got Bibles for kids of a couple different ages. We've got Bibles for just nice Bibles for you if you're an adult and we would be happy to just give you that.

We want to see you know God and know his son Jesus and we want this to be an awesome year for everyone. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of your word.

[36 : 16] I pray and ask that you would work in our hearts, that we would hunger and thirst for it, that we would know that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from your mouth.

Work that into each one of us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.