

The Pursuit: Desperate for God's Word Bible Intake (part 1)

There's a human pattern to forget God. What about us?

Laziness and familiarity can take their toll. God becomes a habit – fading into the background of our busy lives.

Francis Chan: *There is an epidemic of spiritual amnesia going around, and none of us is immune. No matter how many fascinating details we learn about God's creation, no matter how many pictures we see of galaxies, and no matter how many sunsets we watch, we still forget. Most of us know that we are supposed to love and fear God; that we are supposed to read our Bibles and pray so that we can get to know Him better; that we are supposed to worship Him with our lives. But actually living it out is challenging...*

It may sound "un-Christian" to say that on some mornings I don't feel like loving God, or I just forget to. But I do. In our world, where hundreds of things distract us from God, we have to intentionally and consistently remind ourselves of Him.

So how do we do fight this "spiritual amnesia" we all struggle with?

We fight our forgetfulness of God with high doses of Biblical truth – by entertaining high thoughts of God.

Will you dare to believe all that the Bible reveals about God?

He'll become to you who he *really* is: terrifyingly exciting!

AW Tozer writes, *"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."*

We need to ask ourselves, *"Where do my thoughts about God come from?"*

"Are my thoughts rooted in what the Bible says about God?"

How is my surrounding culture and past experiences influencing my view of God?

Am I taking time to think?

Several years ago I had my first snorkeling experience ever

I remember it well. I eagerly jumped into the water from the boat and when I broke the surface – what I saw absolutely blew me away!

The fish, the colors, the coral reef, the sun beams breaking through the water, the sea turtle, the ocean floor far beneath me....it was all breath-taking!

When I surfaced I remember thinking – "there's a whole new world beneath me....a world I couldn't see before I jumped in...a world I couldn't see without

these goggles!"

Then it hit me. I was swimming in this massive body of water – the Atlantic Ocean! I realized this was not my natural habitat – I realized that if something wanted to attack me it could and would win!

I felt so small and yet I wanted to discover more!

God, like this ocean experience, is massive – He's full of beauty and majesty – He's unlike anything and anyone – and He has invited us to jump in!

Each day we stand looking at the surface and He invites us to jump. He's invited us to take a look through the goggles of His Word – and see Him in all His splendor and glory!

If we would only look! Will you look? Will you jump in?

The Christian life is an exciting journey into the depths of God!

Will you dare to feel small?

Will you dare to discover more?

Do you have an ever-increasing desire (hunger and thirst) for God?

We won't thirst for God if we don't love Him. We can't love Him if we don't fear Him. We won't fear Him if we don't know Him and see Him and marvel at His greatness.

Do you see God as beautiful? Do you long to be in God's presence (personal, intimate fellowship)? Do you *enjoy* God?

Do you desire to look at and understand the wonders of God's character?

This is the heartbeat of the person who thirsts for God. **Psalm 111:2**

Paul longed for God's presence when he said, "*I want to know Christ....*" In Phil 3:10.

The word "know" is an experiential knowledge. It's a knowledge that is actively involved in the object of that knowledge (Christ).

What is a **grace-driven** relationship with God all about?

Because Christ lived, died and rose again there is heart-transforming grace available for you to grow in desire for Him like never before!

Deuteronomy 10:21

"He is your praise; He is your God...."

Is God your praise? Or are you your praise? Is she your praise? Is he your praise? Is that degree, or that activity your praise?

A right view of God leads to spiritual renewal!

He calls us to live radical lives, set apart for His glory; one's set on praising him. We're called to a different lifestyle.

"We need to stir our hearts up to a more appropriate...response to the truth about the God we know."

This is informed emotion. This is emotion based on objective truth.

Do you find that your heart is cold?

Do what David did...talk to yourself and remind yourself about the God you serve. **Psalm 103:6-18**

This should be a normal activity in a Christian's life.

Mark 12:29-31 ²⁹...'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and **with all your strength.**' {30 Deut. 6:4,5} ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' {31 Lev. 19:18} There is no commandment greater than these."

Loving God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength isn't for the faint hearted, or the apathetic, the lazy, or indifferent –

It's for those who have considered the cost of following Christ; considered the sacrifice involved – who are pressing on toward the goal of knowing Christ more no matter what.

It's a serious call.

We aren't left to do this on our own! We have a Helper!

I Timothy 4:7-8 tells us to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness. It's not a suggestion, it's a command.

THEN our lives begin reflecting, displaying and proclaiming God's presence; God's reign; God's absolute Lordship.

That's what it means to be a disciple, a disciplined one.

The very *purpose* and *evidence* our justification before God is a life of obedience and spiritual growth (sanctification).

The Word of God is *the* most valuable item on the earth.

Our very survival depends on God's Word (**Matt. 4:1-2**).

Through the Word of God, God makes Himself most clearly known and declares to us the way to Himself through Christ.

We've been given a way to know God's revealed will for our lives – we've been given the means that will enable us to hear His voice.

What could be more important in the life of a believer than this - than drawing near to God through His Word? *"Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no*

healthy Christian life apart from a diet....of Scripture.” This is God’s chosen way!

His chosen means to encounter Him.
Without knowledge of God, no matter how long and prosperous
someone’s life is, it’s meaningless!

Nothing else in all the world can provide something as essential as the Bible
does: a transforming knowledge of the Savior.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Why do we do what we do as Christians? Why do we live how we live? What’s
our standard? How do we discover who God is and what He’s done for us?
Through the Bible.

The Bible is unlike any other book in history – it’s unique

- A. Written over a 1500 year span, by over 40 different authors, written in
different places, times, during different moods, and in different languages.
Yet the Bible presents a single unfolding story to us – the story of God’s
redemption (rescue) of human beings.

The OT points us forward to the cross, revealing man’s desperate need for
a Savior - while the NT points us back to the cross and our need to cast all
our faith in what was accomplished there for us in Christ Jesus.

The Bible is the *inspired* Word of God.
This means that God worked through human authors without destroying
their individual personalities and styles to produce something absolutely
divine, a book holding no error, and holding all authority over our lives.

Donald Whitney in his book “*10 Questions to Diagnose your Spiritual
Health*” asks this, “*Are you governed (controlled) increasingly by God’s
Word?*”

My prayer is that we will walk away with a greater desire to open the Bible and
begin to live our lives according to what is revealed *there*.

- B. Every day of our life counts for something. Our choices matter. Every day
we are either training ourselves for godliness or for ungodliness.

Are you intimidated by the Bible?
How frequently do you read the Bible?

Have you ever been to a foreign country before?

The more and more you submerge yourself into that culture, the more you
will become familiar with your surroundings – the more you will be able to

get around without the help of others....

Don't allow the Bible to remain a foreign country to you!

Do you *study* the Bible? Do you know *how* to study the Bible?

Maybe you don't like to read or study.

Do you think *that's* a good reason not to read the Bible?

What will happen if you don't read and study the Bible?

"The Bible characterizes a genuine believer as not merely an admirer of God's truth, but one who loves it." (consider **Psalm 119:9-18; 1 Peter 2:1-3**)

C. **We're all in this together**

Some of us will need to be "taken by the hand" through the Bible.

Others will find that an occasional word of encouragement will do.

Wherever you are in your relationship with God, I want to encourage you to see this one thing: **WE DESPERATELY NEED GOD'S WORD!**

So what is this book, this unique and inspired and absolutely trustworthy book, all about?

1. The Bible is all about God

Everything else really falls under this category.

In the Bible God tells us about Himself, who He is, what He's done, what He's going to do and what he desires from us.

The main character in this book is God!

So we need to read the Bible with this in mind!

2. The Bible is about God's gracious provision of a Savior.

We need a Savior to save us from the holy wrath of God - the wrath that we deserve because of our sins.

God has provided a way for us to be reconciled (brought into a right relationship with Him) – that way is through His Son Christ Jesus. The Bible tells us to call on His name – to place our faith and trust in Him alone.

3. The Bible is about God purifying a people for Himself whose lives will bring Him glory.

A. Piper: *"The whole Bible has this aim and this power: to create hope in the hearts of God's people."*

Who's your biggest influence in life?

We're being influenced everyday by people, books, movies, friends, peers, co-workers, etc.

You won't be influenced by something you're never around or involved with!

Here's how you can tell if God's Word is influencing your life:
when you can point to an increasing amount of beliefs and actions that have been changed because of the power of specific passages of Scripture.

- B. How does the Bible affect your prayer life, your worship, relationships, family, church, education, etc? There's no corner of your life the Bible shouldn't be influencing.
Do you find yourself consciously asking how the Bible speaks to specific areas of your life?

4. The Bible shows us God's *revealed* will for our lives

- A. **Sunsets are good but the Bible is *far* better...**

Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:16

We have the revealed will of God sitting before us every day!

(Excerpt taken from *Forgotten God* by Francis Chan)

Exegesis: *an attempt to discover the meaning of the text objectively, starting with the text and moving out from there.*

Eisegesis: *to import a subjective, preconceived meaning into the text.*

Start with (1) God's Word; (2) pray that the Spirit gives you clarity; then (3) study to see what the text actually says.

The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible, so who better to help us as we seek to understand it? Scripture tells us that the Spirit not only inspired the Bible, but also illuminates it for us today (1 Cor. 2:12-16 and 2 Tim. 3:16).

The word exegesis comes from the Greek word meaning "to lead out." ...you start with the text and draw out its meaning.

Eisegesis, on the other hand, is when you start an idea or conviction, then search for verses in the Bible to prove your point.

The danger in this is that we can take verses out of context to support just about any point of view. For years people have used this style of interpretation in order to justify greed, lust, divorce, and countless other sins. Cults also use eisegesis to justify their beliefs.

God has revealed specific things to us through His Word. Are we eager to find out what those things are or will we remain complacent and satisfied **NOT** knowing more about the God we say we serve.

When we cherish God's Word we show a love for God **and** a love for His will.

If we're indifferent to the truth – to God's Word - (if we just don't care),

then we need to ask ourselves why that is.
Indifference to the truth is subtle and dangerous and always justifies sin – it's a mark of spiritual death.
Indifference always comes with excuses -

- *"I don't have time..."*
- *"I don't understand the Bible...it's too complicated..."*
- *"What does it matter anyway? I'm not gonna change in this area."*
- *"You know, I read the Bible a couple days ago for a whole 30 minutes. I'm good to go for a couple more days at least!"*
- *"God understands...I'm sooo tired. I need to sleep in today."*
- *"I'm serving the family by making sure **they** are reading the Bible...."*
- *"You don't know how often I've tried!"*

- B. I have my own share of excuses! Trust me!
How many times have I committed to read the Bible in a year to find myself bogged down in Leviticus or caught in Numbers a few months later?
With little kids in my life, finding time to read in the morning is tricky!
And I can be easily tempted to discouragement.

CJ Mahaney: *"Do you feel hopelessly weak when it comes to the spiritual disciplines? Excellent! You're a perfect candidate for the grace of God..."*

Luke 18:9-14

The Pharisee in this story is saying he is:

1. Morally upright
2. Religiously devout
3. He believed the two things are from God (thanks God for them)

He was trusting in this thought: "I am righteous because I _____"
How helplessly dependent are you today?

5. The Bible *corrects* our thinking (Hebrews 4:12-13).

- A. How will we know where our thinking is whacked unless our thinking is being confronted with God's Word?
The Spirit of God in us brings conviction and leads us into all truth.
He "turns the lights on" for us.

Ask Him to do this every time you read. (**Psalm 119:105**)

Have you ever placed a glass or a container over a candle and watch the

flame slowly go out? It can't thrive without oxygen - it basically suffocates.

- B. We are either giving our sin an atmosphere to live in or we're suffocating it with massive doses of God's Word!
The scriptures are our only infallible (never wrong; no error) guide for filling our minds and hearts with thoughts of God

6. The Bible *satisfies* our thirsty souls.

- A. Do you really believe this? Do you believe that God is speaking through His Word?
We need to develop a dependence on God's Word like nothing else.
- B. Lets be thankful for the gift of God's Word by delighting in it! Using it. Going to it. Looking through it. Wrestling with it. Finding answers to tough questions. Asking others to help you understand it. Reading it. Praying through it. Worshiping with it close by your side. Using it to encourage others with. Using it to confront others with. Letting it rule your life and thoughts, and control your actions.

Ask yourself, *"Why am I the way I am? Why do I do the things I do?"*
I pray the answer is: *"God, by His Spirit, through His Word is transforming my life – that's why!"*

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Our self-sufficiency needs to be beaten down, our pride needs to be unmasked, our unbelief needs to be addressed.

7. Putting all this into practice

Warning: Distractions abound!

Anything and everything from TV to other books to music to movies....I think we would be surprised at the amount of time entertainment steals our attention.

We love to multitask! We can watch TV, email someone, and talk on the phone at the same time – and be having a conversation with someone at the same time!
Get away from the noise!

Romans 12:1-2; Phil 4:8-9

Three specific tools we have at our fingertips for walking out this wonderful discipline of Bible intake:

Meditation - Application - Memorization

Why do you feel so dry or seem to get nothing out of Bible reading from time to time?

Donald Whitney: *"Why does the intake of God's Word often leave us so cold, and*

why don't we have more success in our spiritual life? Puritan pastor Thomas Watson has the answer: 'The reason we come away so cold from reading the word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.'"

What's meditation? It's not emptying your mind or creating your own reality like some form of Eastern meditation.

Lets define it – *"deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application and prayer. It goes beyond hearing, reading, even studying the Word of God."*

Laziness, insecurity about how to study the Bible, and even where to begin reading are just some of the excuses that we buy into.

Failures in the past to remain devoted can be discouraging but we can't allow that discouragement to lead us –

In a fight, both discouragement and arrogance are very dangerous.

Some of you are discouraged and weary and some are arrogant.

These are rooted in pride, self-sufficiency and unbelief.

We have to eliminate distractions, fill our minds with truth and simply wait.

James 1:22-24 – Do you look into God's mirror every morning?

It's during times of meditation that God will get specific with you about a particular area of your life.

There's a big difference between hearing and listening.

Have you ever been in a conversation when you were hearing the other person but not really listening to them?

A. **Here's what I do** (bowl of cereal)

It can feel monotonous. It can feel like work. It can feel less than adventurous.

That's why I've learned not to evaluate the quality of my personal time with God based on my emotions.

No matter how enthusiastic I am, here's what I know: God is at work – He's changing me.

Imagine what would happen if we went into our time with God, through His Word, thinking, *"God you are speaking to me and teaching me personally. I want to hear and obey what you reveal, I want to admire and actively engage you...so I will read on."*

We need to open the Word of God each day expecting to be spoken to; anticipating the discovery of a truth that demands a practical response.

The fruit of our meditation will be seen in our conversations and our actions.

Jl Packer: *"If I were the Devil, once of my first aims would be to stop folk from*

digging into the Bible. Knowing that it is the Word of God...I should do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalent of pits, thorn hedges, and man traps, to frighten people off...at all costs I should want to keep them from using their minds in a disciplined way to get the measure of its message."

B. What do you do?

- Ask God to rekindle the flame that once burned bright

Decide what you're going to do.

Decide what book of the Bible you're going to read and read it.

- Maybe you have a Bible reading plan
- Maybe you can start with one book.

Take it and read it. Interact with it. Interview it.

Write things down. Put questions marks and exclamation points and stars and underline, etc. Journal if you want to. The important thing is that you begin somewhere.

15 minutes. One chapter. It becomes contagious. You will want more.

Decide when you're going to do this.

If you don't do this it most likely won't happen. None of us are drifting towards godliness!

Guard that time with everything inside of you!

Decide what time and what place.

Don't just talk about your need to do this. Actually do it.

It should become a daily discipline – think of the other daily disciplines you have: you brush your teeth, comb your hair, you eat, you sleep...

How you do this matters.

Take your time: stop, read, listen and respond

This is more than obtaining a head knowledge – this is about seeing what the Bible says about God and God's perspective on *your* sin, *your* obedience, *your* Christian life.

Don't close the Bible until you've learned something about God and until you've thought about how that truth will change your thinking, decisions, actions, work, etc.

Read through the passages **prayerfully**

Meditate on the passage

Take advantage of the resources around you.

Use a dictionary. A good commentary. A good Bible translation.

O – observations

I – Intended meaning

A - application

Questions to ask when reading the Scriptures:

1. What truth does this passage tell me about God and the Lord Jesus Christ?
2. How does this passage point me to the gospel? (the good news that Christ died for my sins)
3. What lesson can I learn from this passage?
4. What particular sin does it warn me against?
5. Does this passage tell me to start doing something or stop doing something?
6. What verse, word or phrase can I carry around with me for the day?

Tell someone else what you're learning. It will make a difference.

Remember, God is eager to give you a fresh view of who He is, but he doesn't do this for the casual onlooker, he does this for those who seek him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength...it's his delight to do so!