

Announcing a Year of Biblical Literacy: A Call To Action.

By the grace of God, starting on Sunday, July 1st 2018 and concluding on Sunday, June 30th, 2019, the Restoring The Core Initiative and the Finding Hidden Treasure podcast will be focused on conducting an online version of the Year of Biblical Literacy.

Patterned after an initiative by Reality Church San Francisco and Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon, this initiative is designed to help us, as believers in Christ, become more engaged with the Bible, whether we've been reading it for decades or just started reading it recently.

The Year of Biblical Literacy will structure our involvement with the Bible at four levels, the individual, the group, the worship community and in education. You can find out more about these levels at the Restoring The Core website under the heading of Year of Biblical Literacy.

Typically, we think of a "reading the Bible in a year" plan as something we would do at the start of a new year. Beginning a new year by starting a Bible reading plan is a great idea. However, I think the need for believers to engage in the Scriptures is a strong and pressing need. It is so strong and pressing that we must not wait until the start of a new year to begin. If, for example, you were to suffer a health crisis, such as a heart attack, and were told that you needed to start a therapy to heal you such as walking or exercising, it would be extremely foolish and dangerous to think that you should put off such therapy till the start of the new year, several months away. I think that the need for Christians who have been putting off engaging the Scriptures is similar but even more serious spiritually.

Doctor Kenneth Berding has observed that biblical illiteracy in the United States is resulting in the church starving itself. This can happen to individuals who fail to read, study and reflect on Scripture. This can happen when the leadership of a church will preach anything on a Sunday except the Bible.

I think that a fitting comparison can be found in the Old Testament account of 1 Samuel 14:24-31. The text reads:

And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people had tasted food. Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with

the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright. Then one of the people said, "Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food this day.'" And the people were faint. Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies that they found. For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great." They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint.

King Saul's vow had the outward appearance of being holy and noble. Note that Jonathan, unaware of his father's vow, correctly assessed the situation. While it might have seemed a good idea to Saul, it is a very foolish thing to fast before going into battle. I fear that in a similar way, many Christians, as individuals and as congregations do the same thing when it comes to the spiritual bread of the Word of God.

Each generation of believers in Christ has faced its own set of challenges to their faith. Our generation is no different. Perhaps that challenge is persecution fueled by the devil. It might come from a culture whose very workings interfere with the life of a Christian. Worse yet, it may come from a culture that offers a variety of ongoing distractions which offer no pain to the body but do violence to our souls.

Lastly, there is the challenge we face in which our old nature, what the Bible calls "the old man" wars against our new self. On these three levels, each follower of Christ faces a spiritual battle every day of his or her life on Earth. In light of this, are there seemingly noble or good reasons to put off the intake of the heavenly bread of God's Word?

Without a doubt, our lives are busy. Our schedules reflect that. Yet, the events and activities that make up our schedules are those that we make a priority. In light of this, I don't want to ask you to deepen your life in Scripture by trying to guilt you into it. There is so much of this in our culture and unfortunately even in the church.

What I do ask is that you would be willing to prayerfully re-think the priority and place that the Bible has in your life. Once again, I think that Scripture gives us a wonderful example to use as a pattern.

In Luke 10:38-42 we read:

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's

feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Mary understood her priority. It was to hear, with delight, not drudgery, the teachings of the Lord Jesus, the Living Word of God. How often though do we think as Martha did? We have a lot of things to do. Many of them are quite important and ultimately necessary to life here on Earth. In the account I just read, ask yourself: Was preparing the dinner important? Yes. But it was not as important as what Mary was doing. Martha was being diligent. But her thinking had not yet been re-oriented to the priority of taking in the Word of the Lord.

As we start our Year of Biblical Literacy, I have two areas of prayer for all of us who are going on this journey. First, I pray that our mindset will shift concerning the priority of Bible intake. The second area of prayer is actually three-fold. It is that we will be diligent, disciplined and realistic about what will be needed to complete this journey. This will take time that you might not be taking for Scripture now. I encourage you to carve the time out of your daily schedule. It might mean getting up a little earlier for your daily readings. It might mean a little less time in social media. The daily reading and as well as the praying of a Psalm might take up to 30 minutes on some days. The time and effort that it takes will be worth it. In the written Word of God, we encounter the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ. Abiding, or remaining, in His Word comes with a promise. In John 8:31-32, we hear the Lord Jesus tell us:

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

It is also important to be realistic about this year-long journey. Perhaps you can't do the reading all in one sitting. Parse it out in several smaller lengths of time throughout the day. Perhaps you can listen to the daily reading. There are plenty of Bible apps (such as the ESV Bible from Crossway) or websites such as Bible Gateway through which you can hear Scripture as well as read it.

I can tell you from personal experience that this journey will be of tremendous benefit to you spiritually. I encourage those who are new to the Bible to join us on this pilgrimage through God's Word. I encourage those who have read through the Bible already to do this again, knowing that you will be given fresh insight from God's unchanging Word.

Please visit the other Year of Biblical Literacy pages on the Restoring The Core website (restoringthecore.com) for further information. Using the comments on our posts as well as using Google Hangouts, we will have a virtual community to discuss what we've been learning and reflecting on. I encourage you to also listen to the Sunday sermons in your church for their biblical content. There will be links for hearing some great sermons which could supplement those you already hear. Lastly, there will be educational videos and audios to boost your understanding of the Bible. There will be content from the Bible Project as well as other sources which we will compile to help "raise the bar" in your knowledge of and about Scripture.

To close, keep in mind that a famine of the Word of God among God's people is not a good or noble thing. There is no virtue in spiritually weakening ourselves in the midst of our daily spiritual battles. By His grace, God has supplied us with His written Word. That Word of God is truly a feast for God's people. Flee the famine. You're invited to the table.