

Up until now watching the Olympics has been a big thing in our home. We enjoy the Olympics. The summer and winter Olympics feature the finest athletes in the world coming from every nation on the face of the earth. The Olympic ideals the athletes strive for is to be swifter, higher, and stronger than any other person in the world. I have watched special segments showing the workout schedule of specific athletes. Often it is 8 hours of working out plus going to school and doing their job. The discipline it takes is absolutely astounding. They only get to the top through hard work and the support of family and friends.

Being a Christian does not come from our works or from living a highly disciplined life. The Lord Jesus saves us by grace through faith. We receive the Lord Jesus into our lives by faith and God makes us His children. In the Gospel of John we read, **John 1:12-13 (NLT2)** ¹² *But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ They are reborn - not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.* We are born again into the family of God, and it is all a free gift from God.

Like Olympic athletes, Christians are called upon to train, make sacrifices, and to adopt specific spiritual disciplines in order to give God “our utmost for His Highest.” I am calling our Wednesday night Lenten services “spiritual exercises.” Five of the exercises given to us by God to stay in great spiritual fitness are these. 1. Bible study, prayer, worship, service, and stewardship. We will cover one each week. As the Olympic athletes work out faithfully, these five spiritual exercises or disciplines will help determine our effectiveness in serving our Lord. As Christians we do not strive to win a gold medal and hear the adulation of the fans. But we want to hear someday these words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Paul writes, **1 Corinthians 9:24-25 (NLT2)** ²⁴ *Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! ²⁵ All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.* I want us all to enjoy the race.

I was personally introduced to the spiritual exercise of Bible Study at the age of 5. My parents were living the secular dream and on Sunday mornings would drop my brother and I off at church and pick us up after Sunday school as they were recuperating from their Saturday night hangover. The pastor began to stand at the curb so when the parents dropped off their children, he would personally invite the parents to come to worship. My parents accepted his invitation. The year was 1963. The pastor involved my parents in the Bethel Bible series which takes you through the entire Bible in two years. Their secular lives of living the dream of booze and parties came to a sudden halt. They had to be ready for class every Sunday morning so on Saturday nights they stayed home and studied their Bibles until it was way past midnight. At 5 years old I would walk from my bed into the kitchen to get a glass of water and there they were pouring over the Scriptures and discussing what they were learning. At five I saw the difference of the life changing power of the Word of God makes. The Bible study brought them into the Christian faith, and they were made brand new by receiving the grace of God that saved them through faith in Jesus Christ. The Word of God birthed faith inside of their souls. The Bible says faith comes by the hearing, the hearing of the word of God. My parents were models of the spiritual discipline of Bible study for the rest of their lives. The last time I saw my father alive he was reading Exodus, getting ready to walk into the real Promised Land. He was still using his old RSV Bible whose pages were all marked up. The life changing power of the word of God is absolutely true my friends for God's Word is truth. The spiritual exercise of Bible study stretches us and strengthens us to run the race for God, day in and day out so we never peter out or give up until we cross the finish line.

The Bible says **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT2)** ¹⁶ *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.* ¹⁷ *God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.* The Bible says, **Psalms 19:7 (NLT2)** ⁷ *The instructions of the LORD are*

perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The Bible says, **2 Peter 1:20-21 (NLT2)** ²⁰ *Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, ²¹ or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.*

1. God births faith inside of you as you hear the Word of God. Yes, God's word is a means of saving grace into our lives that saves us for eternity. Martin Luther was saved by God's grace through faith when he came to understand Romans 1:17. R.C. Sproul writes, "Luther suddenly saw the truth of the Gospel, that the righteousness of Christs [that saves] us is given by faith alone" (R. C. Sproul, 5 Things Every Christian Needs to Grow, pg. 14). The truth of that verse finally sunk into Luther and he felt as if he had entered the gates of Paradise. That verse when understood changed Luther forever and launched the Protestant Reformation" (ibid 15). Please do not doubt the life changing power of the Word of God.

2. Once we are saved, studying the Bible is essential for Christian growth. It is God's food for our soul by which we grow by. I quote, "By immersing ourselves in the Word of God, we begin to gain the mind of Christ and learn what discipleship is" (ibid pg. 16).

3. The Word of God prepares us for troubled times. The Apostle Paul was under a death sentence from the Roman government and awaiting his imminent execution. When you know you are about to die, it makes your last words even that much more important and meaningful. Paul writes, **2 Timothy 3:12-15 (NKJV)** ¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. ¹³ But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. It was because of Paul's continued study of the Scriptures that he

could say this at the end of his life, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"* (2 Tim.4:7). [I am relying heavily on R C's book mentioned above]

Jesus warns us in Matthew 24. **Matthew 24:9 (ESV)** ⁹*"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake."*

Matthew 24:21 (ESV) "²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." By immersing ourselves into the Bible and understanding its truths, it prepares us for the heavy lifting to come as the days grow worse. Last week I moved my son and daughter-in-law to Orlando Florida. My son and I loaded the truck and then he had to fly. My daughter-in-law and I emptied it. She is a weightlifter and a runner. She lifts weights on a disciplined basis every week. I told Bob Yarbrough that anything his two grown sons can lift, my daughter-in-law can lift. She is as thin as a rail and as strong as a horse. That is the type of spiritual strength that we need to grow into as the days grow darker and the evil becomes thicker. This is no time to be a lazy Christian. It is time to work out, to exercise by lifting the truths out of the Bible and applying them to your life. It is time for some heavy lifting because the days are not going to get any better. Tough times demands a tougher faith. God's Word is sufficient and gives to us exactly what is necessary to endure faithfully until the end. **Romans 15:4 (ESV)** ⁴*"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."*

Earlier I read that the entire Bible was inspired by God. The Bible comes from God. It has his authority. **4. The Bible teaches us sound doctrine.** There have always been false teachers in the church and today there are more than ever. False teaching sounds good and makes you feel good. It does not mention sin nor the need for salvation. It tells you how to have a happy marriage and have a successful business. It tells you how you can get away with your sin and still feel good about yourself. Paul warns us that in the end times people will be

following doctrines taught by demons. In order to be able to detect counterfeit false teachings it is absolutely essential that we study the Scriptures day by day. When you hear a false teaching, it will sound and even smell terrible, giving an **order** that comes from the enemy, Satan. You will know it is not from God because you have studied the word, digested it, lived by it, and understand it. False teaching becomes easy to detect. The Bible corrects us. If we disagree with the Bible, guess who is wrong?

5. The Bible renews our minds, changes our sinful way of thinking into thinking the very thoughts of God. The Bible convicts us of our sin and then moves us forward to repent and receive the blessings of forgiveness, setting us free to soar for Christ with great confidence. Last year my goal was to read the entire Bible and that I did in less than a year. There were readings that I had not touched for years. It is as if I was deficient of certain Biblical vitamins. When I chewed the vitamins I was deficient on, I did gain strength in the Lord. Some of you even witnessed that as I was told in my evaluation.

The New Testament calls us to a life of discipleship (ibid. pg. 22). The term disciple means learner. In order to understand the Bible, I want to give to you right now an outline of the entire Bible. **6. 5, 12, 5,5,12. 4,1,21,1 – O.T. 5 books of the Law, 12 books of history, 5 books of poetry, 5 major prophets and 12 minor prophets N.T. 4 Gospels, 1 book of church history, 21 letters, 1 book of prophecy.** That is an outline for the entire Bible that is simple to learn and helps you gain an overall view of the Scriptures.

On my desk I have 9 different translations of the Bible. I also have scholarly tools that help me understand the Bible. This is my point, there are excellent Bibles today with study notes at the bottom of each page helping you understand what you are reading and gives personal application. It is like having your own personal professor teaching you. The notes help bring out the meaning of the text from people who study the Bible as their mode of living. There is the Reformation Study Bible and all sorts of Life application Bibles.

“Another helpful resource is the dramatic audio recordings of the Bible” (ibid pg. 30).

From my app on my phone the word is read directly into my hearing aids. I learn better from what I hear than from what I read. I am an audio learner.

Parents and grandparents. Have your children or grandchildren ever seen you studying the Bible intently? Do you ever read the word to them in your home? I like what Bob said Sunday. Do yourself a favor and spend more time in the Word rather than listening to the news. There is an ache in your soul, a real hunger in your soul that can only be met and satisfied by the study of the Word of God. God’s Spirit speaks to your spirit. God’s word is eternal and has exactly what your soul needs to flourish.

Every day when you lift the weights of God’s word, God will teach you something about Himself, something about yourself, and strengthen you to live it out. The days are coming when we will need to be stronger than ever and the Word is what will make us strong. Amen and Amen.