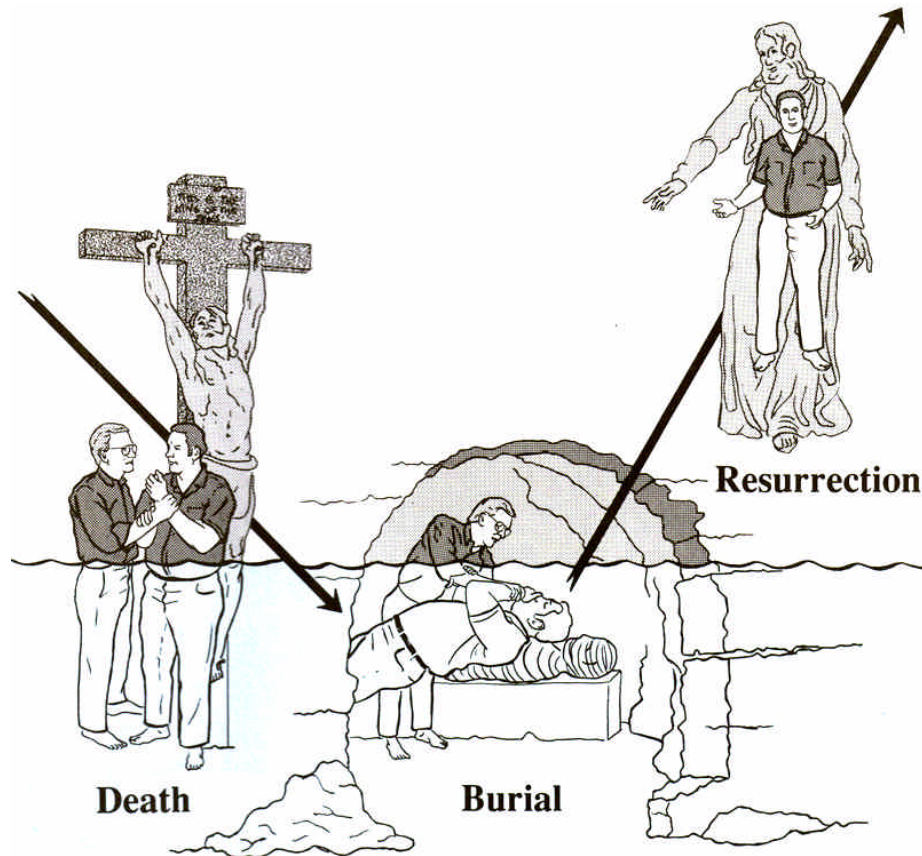


Since You Have Been Raised...



"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:1-3).

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Lesson 1: Introduction

Overview:

The purpose of this study is to give an introduction to the Christian life that centers on the meaning of your salvation experience and its practical implication for daily life. It is interesting that in the Gospel of John, Jesus almost never uses the word, "salvation," but instead uses the word, "eternal life" or simply, "life," and makes it clear that it is not merely something to expect in the future, but something to be lived now (Jn 5:24; 6:47; 10:10; 17:3). In other words, your baptism was not merely about being saved, but about being saved so that you can live the Christian life daily and for eternity.

Transformation, not just Salvation

Baptism is no mere ritual, but a first step that is rich with meaning that shapes your outlook on yourself, the world, and your place in it. You have died with Christ and have been raised with him to walk a new life. God's goal is more than merely for you to "be saved," but to live a transformed life. Consider these passages:

- Eph 4:22-23 - "that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,"
- Rom 12:2 - "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,"
- Rom 8:29 - "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;"
- 1 Pet 2:2 - "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,"
- Titus 3:5 - "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,"

God desires for you to be transformed, to grow. This does not happen overnight, but is a life-long process. In the last passage cited above, Titus 3:5, you will notice that there is a "renewing" by the Holy Spirit. In 1 Pet 2:2, you will notice that the "pure milk of the word" is what causes you to grow. The Spirit and the Word work in tandem with each other. Both work together to transform you into the image of Christ and to help you to grow. In other words, it is not something that you can do all on your own. The next section deals more with the relationship between the Spirit and the word of God.

The Place of the Word of God in Your Life

A central part of the transformation process is the Word of God. Bible study needs to be a central part of your devotional life along with prayer.

There are two ways to read scripture.

1) Study: One is to study it. There are skills involved in the "study" of scripture. Researching customs and historical and cultural backgrounds can illuminate an obscure passage. Knowing the genre of a particular passages, whether it is poetry, prophetic oracle, a letter, a historical narrative, etc., can aid in knowing how a passage is intended to be read. Being able to read the original languages the Bible was written in, ancient Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, can help illuminate passages that are difficult to translate into English. Being able to use a concordance and look up all Bible passages that deal with a particular topic to get a large picture of what the Bible says about a topic can be a big help. In this way of reading the Bible, you, the reader, are typically in control of the process. After you learn these study skills, you can analyze, dissect, investigate various passages of scripture.

One of the pitfalls to this kind of study is that it can become rather academic. There is a place for academic study of the scripture. Biblical scholars have made this type of study their life's work. However, there is a serious limitation to academic study of the Bible. There are those who study, lecture, and teach the Bible academically in universities but who do not believe it is the word of God. To them, it is nothing more than a historical artifact, or a book of ancient stories. It does little to guide them, transform them, or lead them to becoming more godly. Merely having study skills does not necessarily mean the word of God will transform you.

2) Sacred Reading: The other way to read scripture is to simply read it as God's communication to you. In ancient times, Christians called this "sacred reading." Reading it often, prayerfully, humbly, and submissively puts the Spirit in control of the process. Rather than you analyzing, dissecting and investigating the word, the word is actually analyzing, dissecting, and investigating you. This is not to say that this cannot happen when you "study" scripture; you can study a topic in the Bible, getting the word what you are looking for. However, merely spending time reading the word lends itself more toward getting from you what God is looking for. So, sacred reading lends itself more toward life transformation. Getting in the habit of spending time with God's word every day and acquiring an appetite for it will give you a greater variety of "spiritual food" and contribute toward your spiritual, emotional, and even physical health. So, even if you have the skills to "study" the scripture, remember to always keep daily "reading" primary. Consider these passages:

- 2 Tim 3:16-17 - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

- Heb 4:12 - "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
- Eph 6:17-18 - "And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit,"

2 Tim 3:16 points out that the word of God is "inspired by God." To "inspire" means to "breath in." In other words, as we read scripture, we are "breathing in" the breath of God, and according to Genesis 2:7, it is the breath of God which gives life. This is why Hebrews 4:12 says that the word of God is "living" and active. The second passage says it is sharper than any two edged sword, that it can get to your inner being in a way nothing else can. In other words, the word is the Spirit's primary surgical tool for carving and shaping us into the image of Christ. This is how the word and the Spirit work in tandem together.

All of this means that the Bible is an inherently different book. It is in a class all its own. Since it is the breath of God, since it is living and active, since it is the sword of the Spirit, you do not read it like Shakespeare or some other piece of literature. This is why ancient Christians often referred to this as "sacred reading."

Since the primary tool of the Spirit to transform you is the word, it is of the utmost importance to spend time reading it prayerfully, asking questions of God such as, "what are you saying to me?" or "what does this teach me about you?" or even, "what does this teach me about myself in relation to you?" If you are a new Christian, then it is important to develop the habit and acquire an appetite for the word of God by reading significant portions of it daily. A suggested amount would be four to five chapters a day. It may be difficult at first to keep the habit going, so it may be helpful to have a reading partner or two, someone who is reading the same passages as you throughout the week and meets with you to share insights from it and pray together. This would be in addition to your "study" of the Bible.

If you are not sure where to start reading in scripture, just start at the beginning. You could also read a portion of the Old Testament, a Psalm, and a portion of the New Testament daily. In the appendix is a suggested Bible reading schedule should you wish to use it. Whatever your strategy is, the ultimate goal is to do what Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you..."

The Daily Readings

In this study, there are daily Bible readings associated with the study. These are small portions of scripture for the purpose of meditation, reflection and prayer on topics related to the lessons. This is a cross between "study" and "sacred reading." The purpose of these readings is to wrap up the previous lesson and prepare your heart and mind for the next lesson. These readings are not intended to take the place of your daily Bible readings, which will involve much larger portions of scripture.

Why the book of Colossians?

The book of Colossians is perhaps the best exposition on Christian baptism in the New Testament. It reviews the identity and atoning work of Christ and highlights many of the practical implications of your baptism concerning how you are to think, believe, and behave.

Before Beginning:

In preparation for this study, I would recommend that you read through the book of Colossians three times. This will help familiarize you with the contents of the entire book and give you the big picture.

Using this Study:

Though it can be used in a one on one mentoring setting, this study is designed to be used in a small group or a class. It is important to be at every meeting, to do the daily work, to spend time in prayer and reflection, and to commit to allowing God to transform you as you go through this study.

Please note that this study is not intended to be merely completed slavishly (merely filling in the blanks and getting right answers). Please read the questions carefully, allow them to stimulate reflection, meditation, and discussion so that you can grasp both the meaning and the practical implications of what you are reading in scripture.

COVENANT:

In preparation for this study, I commit myself to the following:

1. I commit to being to the study at every meeting and on time. If I am not able to make it, I will call.
2. I commit to doing the assignments
3. I commit to doing the daily reading, reflections, devotionals, and prayer exercises.
4. I commit to personal transformation of my character, activities, patterns of behavior, and attitudes toward Christ likeness.

Signed

☐ Day 1

1. Read Matt 4:1-11

2. Look over the passage, write down any thoughts or insights that come to you here.

2. Spend time in prayer with God. Share your thoughts with him. Thank him.

☐ Day 2

1. Slowly read Matt 7:1-6

2. Look over the passage, write down any thoughts or insights that come to you here:

3. Spend some time with God in prayer. Share your thoughts with him. Thank him.

☐ Day 3

1. Slowly read Matt 7:7-12

2. Look over the passage, write down any thoughts or insights that come to you here:

3. Spend time with God in prayer, praying about what you have read.

☐ Day 4

1. Slowly read Matt 7:7-14

2. Look over the passage, write down any thoughts or insights that come to you here:

3. Spend time with God in prayer, praying about what you have read.

☐ Day 5

1. Slowly read Matt 7:15-20

2. Look over the passage, write down any thoughts or insights that come to you here:.

3. Spend time with God in prayer

4. Begin to read over the next lesson and do the questions.

☐ Day 6

1. Slowly read Matt 7:21-27

2. Look over the passage, write down any thoughts or insights that come to you here:

3. Spend time with God in prayer

4. Read over the next lesson and complete the questions.