

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Unit 2
Using Your Bible
Week 1 – Introduction to Inspiration

Editors' note:

- *Italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline.*
- **Bold (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline.**
- Regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis.

Introduction to Christian Ministry 2

The focus of Christian Ministry 2 is the Bible itself: why to trust it, how to navigate your way through the various books, and how to apply it in your life and ministry.

Every week 100's of Bible studies take place all across Xenos—in cell groups, in home groups, in Oasis classrooms, and at Central Teachings. As cell groups, home groups, and spheres multiply, how can we ensure that the truth is being taught?

(David Garrison) “Missionaries experienced in Church Planting Movements would never admit to sacrificing orthodoxy (sound Bible teaching) for the sake of rapid reproduction. Instead they have learned to build the theological controls into the DNA of each church rather than trying to continually reinforce them from the outside.”¹

How are you going to pass on good “DNA” to your disciples and the cell groups and churches that you send out? Everyone will have to answer to God for the legacy of their own ministry. It is only as we use the Word effectively to back up our advice, encouragement, our counsel, our praise, and our rebukes that others around us will see its importance and do the same.

(Acts 20:20) “...I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house . . . 27I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”

(2 Timothy 4:2) “...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”

We have to develop a ministry that in all aspects is anchored in and informed by God's Word.

What kind of response unleashes the power of God's Word?

¹ David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Midlothian, Virginia: WIGTake Resources, 2004), p. 196.

- A humble and teachable heart that seeks to OBEY what is learned.

(James 1:22) And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself.

- A heart that regularly MEDITATES on God's Word.

(Psalm 1:1) How blessed is the man (whose) 2 delight is in the law (instruction) of the Lord, and in His law (instruction) he *meditates* day and night. 3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and its leaf does not wither; in whatever he does, he prospers.

(Joshua 1:8) But this book of the law (instruction) shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall *meditate* on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Biblical Meditation

What is biblical meditation?

- The Hebrew word (*hagah*) means literally to “mutter” to oneself. The idea is to linger over a truth—to ponder, muse, ruminate, obsess on, ingest it—so that it gets down into your soul and profoundly changes your deepest beliefs and values and affections.
- J. I. Packer: “What is meditation? Well may we ask, for meditation is a lost art today, and Christian people suffer grievously from their ignorance of the practice. Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God . . . Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let his truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart. It is a matter of talking to oneself about God and oneself; it is, indeed, often a matter of arguing with oneself, reasoning oneself out of moods of doubt and unbelief in to a clear apprehension of God's power and grace.”²
- Does this practice sound foreign to you? You already meditate in many harmful ways! Compulsive worry or anger or self-recrimination are forms of meditation. You keep rehearsing a past offense, or plotting revenge, or you keep imagining fears concerning the future. You keep going over and over these things in your thoughts and imagination, and they destructively affect your emotional state and

² J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 23

choices. God calls on us to replace these “natural,” spontaneous meditations with the deliberate, habitual (“day and night”) choice to meditate on his Word—and to reap the above rewards of doing this!

Why is biblical meditation so important?

- See the *positive reward* promised in Ps. 1:3 – we will become “like a tree” in spiritual stability, fruitfulness, vitality, and prosperity if we develop this habit.

George Mueller was a faithful Christian worker until he died in his nineties. At the age of seventy, after many years of ministry in England, he became a world-wide evangelist until he was 87. When he was asked the secret of his long, faithful life, one of the three reasons he gave was “the love he felt for the Scriptures and the constant recuperative power they exercised on his whole being.”³ Mueller described how he was strengthened by the Bible in these words: “I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord . . . I saw that the most important thing I had to do was give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to *meditation* on it . . . What is the food of the inner man? . . . The Word of God; and . . . not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.”⁴

- See also the *negative alternative* promised in Ps. 1:1,4,5 – we will become “like chaff” – light and easily blown away, not nutritious to others, and highly perishable. (See also Eph. 4:14; Rom. 12:2). Our thinking and decisions are never neutral or “just ours.” We are always ultimately listening either to God or to his enemy, and the results of our listening will lead either toward becoming more “like a tree” or more “like chaff.”
- **WARNING:** Christian workers often neglect meditation because they are busy, and think that preparing for teachings is sufficient. It is true (and wonderful!) that we *are* nourished through such interaction with God’s Word (1 Tim. 4:6). But this is not sufficient. Workers who try to get by without personal biblical meditation will become malnourished and less effective in the long run!

How to get started in biblical meditation

- **There is no one-size-fits-all recipe for biblical meditation. It is more like an art that anyone can begin (no matter how biblically literate or illiterate you**

³ *George Mueller: Man of Faith*, ed. A. Sims (privately published in Singapore by Warren Myers), p. 52.

⁴ George Mueller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord’s Dealing with George Mueller*, 2 vols. (Muskegon, Mich.: Dust and Ashes, 2003), 1:272-273.

may be) and keep growing in. You may find it helpful to purposefully change how you meditate from time to time. The main thing is to start meditating and stay at it! Here are some ways to get started.

- **METHOD #1:** Take a very small passage (i.e., one or two verses), memorize it, and “chew” on it for one or more days. Speak it to God as a prayer when you wake up, during the “seams” of the day, before you go to sleep, etc. Emphasize different parts of the verse (e.g., Ps. 118:24). Ask God to show you how to apply it to your life—and take whatever steps He shows you. After you have “chewed” the life out of it (for now), go on to another small passage.
- **METHOD #2:** Memorize a small psalm (e.g., Ps. 131), a part of a larger psalm (e.g., Ps. 73:23-28), or a several-verse New Testament passage (e.g., Rom. 5:1-5). Pray it to God verse by verse or point by point, pondering and personalizing it as you go. Use these passages this way to get your prayer time off to a good start before going on to petition, intercession, etc.
- **METHOD #3:** Write a small (e.g., one paragraph) New Testament passage out long-hand. This will help you slow down and notice things you may otherwise skip over. Notice especially if a specific part of the passage “lights up.” Muse on this – why you think God is emphasizing this now, how your life would be different if you believed this, what step God is asking you to take, etc. Write out your prayer to God in response to what He showed you. (This is an excellent way to gradually go through whole New Testament letters.)

Introduction to the Inspiration of Scripture

The Bible is the foundation of our faith. Through the Bible, we learn who God is, what he is like, how we were designed, how we have been corrupted by sin, and how God has moved in history to help us. But increasingly, the Bible is coming under attack from WITHIN the church. This statement, made by the leaders of a well known denomination, is typical of what many *Christians* think:

OBJECTION: “The Bible is true in passages relating to human salvation, but we should not expect total accuracy from the Bible in other, matters (e.g., history, geography, science).”

Satan is always trying to undermine our confidence in the trustworthiness of the Bible. If he can get us to move away from the Bible as a source of truth, the door is opened to introduce all kinds of error into the church.

Therefore, Christians need learn how to defend the claim that the Bible is God’s Word, and that it can be trusted.

(1 Peter 3:15) but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence...

Over the next few weeks, we will argue that God has spoken the words of the Bible (INSPIRATION), that our Bibles contain the correct set of inspired books (CANONICITY), and that we can interpret the meaning of the Bible with sufficient accuracy (HERMENEUTICS). But before we do that, let's define a few important terms.

Revelation

To reveal (Greek: *apokalypto*) is to unveil something that was previously hidden or to bring into view something that was out of sight.

General revelation is *information that GOD has revealed about himself in nature and within our hearts*. This information is available to anyone. (See Christian Ministry 1, Week 1 for more information on general revelation.)

Special revelation is *more specific information about God that was revealed through Christ and in the Bible*. Unlike general revelation, special revelation explains how Jesus has provided a way of salvation for us. It also provides information about God, humans, the world (material & spiritual), and the interrelationship of all of these that we could never learn on our own.

Special revelation has come to people in the past through direct encounters with God (e.g. Moses - Exodus 20:1 ff.), visions (e.g. Daniel - Daniel 2:28-30), hearing a word from the Lord (e.g. prophets like Jeremiah - Jer. 1:1,2), through the incarnation of Jesus (Jn. 1:1,14,18), and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (e.g. the 12 disciples - John 14:26).

Over the centuries, many people have claimed that God has given them special revelation. How do we know who to trust? The Bible's claim to be special revelation from God is the most credible claim out there. The 66 books of the Bible are the only authoritative source of special revelation that we have. That's a strong claim to make, and we'll spend the next two weeks defending it.

Unless God had chosen to reveal himself through the Bible, we could not have come to understand what is really true about him.

(1 Cor. 2:9-14)“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.” 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by

God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

When human beings try to figure out without God's revelation what God is like, the result is speculation. This is the next key term we'd like to define.

Speculation

Definition: *Speculation is what HUMANS think about God, ultimate reality, etc.*

Is it possible for man to figure God out? If we study the way people are and how the physical world operates, will we be able to make sense of it all and figure out how to live our lives? The Bible says that humans, although capable of amazing insights, are unable to come up with an accurate depiction of God on their own.

(Isaiah 55:7-9) “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. 9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

What are the results of speculation? Other world religions and belief systems (Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age, atheism, optimistic humanism, etc.) are mixtures of natural revelation and man's futile speculations about God (Rom. 1:18-23).

What about you?

The key difference between revelation and speculation is the *origin*—revelation is from God; speculation comes from us. Christians have to decide which source of information will guide their life. Sadly, many Christians choose to speculate instead of learning the Word well enough to let it shape their decision making. It's easy enough to do. When confronted with the challenges of day-to-day life, we often fall back on our wits, on common sense, on what seems right. This is our default approach to a variety of situations:

- How to handle a recent conflict.
- Determining what constitutes a problem and what we should do about it.
- How we should interact with coworkers.
- Where to live and what kind of home to buy.
- What kinds of activities to direct our children to pursue.

Every one of these daily decisions is advised by some source of information. What will it be for you? Will God's perspective, revealed in the Bible, be a deciding factor? That's not likely if you're unsure God has spoken in his Word. Without confidence in the truth

of the Bible, whether you consider yourself a Christian or not, you'll default back to speculation.

Verbal Plenary Inspiration (VPI)

VPI is another important concept we'll refer to again and again.

Definition of Verbal (the words are inspired) Plenary (all of the Bible is inspired) Inspiration (God-breathed):

God so moved the human authors of scripture that the resulting product was the Word of God, written totally without error in all that it affirms in the original autographs, in every area including theology, history, geography and science.

Why must the definition include accuracy in things like history, geography and science? Why not just theology?

Because if it can't be trusted in the areas that we can test, why should it be trusted in the areas we can't test?

"Inspiration" does NOT mean:

- *People being emotionally moved* by the beauty of creation or the pathos of human life, etc. That is the literary definition of inspiration, but this kind of inspiration has its origin in man, not God.
- *Dictation in most cases* (cf. 10 commandments), no "automatic handwriting" ("I'll just let God get a few pages done while I sleep.") God worked through human authors in a way that used their particular style and cultural setting to present his truth.

(2 Tim. 3:16*) All Scripture is *inspired* by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

"Inspiration" = theopneustos: literally "God-breathed."

(2 Pet. 1:20,21*) But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The message originates from God, whose Spirit "bears them along" as they record it.

There are **two important qualifications to this definition** of inspiration:

- *"in the original autographs"* - Only the original documents were completely without error. It is undeniable that there have been minor copyist errors.

“What good does it do to believe in verbal plenary inspiration if we don't have the autographs?” The number of copies are so plentiful that we can identify most of the errors, and the copyist errors are so minor that they do not affect any major doctrine (YARD BAR analogy – even if the platinum bar at Bureau of Measures & Standards would be lost, we wouldn't be).

“Why didn't God preserve them?” Maybe because he knew the human tendency to worship things like this (2 Kings 18:4).

- *"in all that it affirms"* What the Word "affirms" or "intends" must include these considerations:

Figures of speech – Hyperbole (Luke 14:26), observational language (e.g. "sunset"), and anthropomorphisms (e.g. God is a door, a vine, hands of God, His wings - Deut. 32) are not to be understood as literal assertions.

Precision – Don't insist on modern accuracy levels; sometimes round numbers are used (e.g. mustard seed - Mark 4 says it's the smallest of all seeds when this isn't really true).

Narration does not equal affirmation – Abraham w/ Sarah (lied twice!). Solomon had many wives & concubines.

Literary genres – We need to pay attention to the genre of literature we are reading. Parables, for example, should not be held to reflect actual history. Was there a prodigal son? Did he really run away from his father's house with his portion of the inheritance? Did he really spend all his money on loose living? Exploring the historical details of a parable like this is misguided because parables are FICTIONAL stories designed to illustrate spiritual truths. Narrative accounts of events, however, should be taken as accurate history. This includes narratives describing Adam and Eve, the great flood, Jonah and the whale, etc. Biblical narratives record events that actually occurred in history.

Selective history does not equal errant history – The Bible never claims to be an exhaustive account of what happened. (John 21:25)

Topical arrangement – Sometimes events in the Bible are grouped by topic (e.g., Matt. 8, 9). Sometimes they are sequential.

Irregularities of grammar and spelling – Grammar is only description of norms and changes (Paul's run-on sentences - normal then, not now) - punctuation added later.

"Why does it matter that we have a high view of scripture?" (This ties into the assignment)

- Once you reject verbal plenary inspiration, there is no logical stopping place ("*SLIPPERY SLOPE*"). Some do stop at a fairly conservative place, but not because it is irrational to do otherwise.
- *Your view of scripture is closely related to your view of Christ himself.* He has a very high view of scripture (as we will see), so it is impossible to denigrate scripture without denigrating him.
- *Your preaching and evangelism will lack confidence and power unless you trust the truthfulness of God's Word!* (See 1 Thess. 2:13)

Memory Verses

2 Timothy 3:16,17* - All scripture is "God-breathed."

2 Peter 1:20,21* - All scripture has its origin in God rather than in humans.

Assignment

Read chapters 1-5 of *Does Inerrancy Matter* (see handout). Write a one-paragraph summary of each chapter.

Get started on church visitation assignment.

Write out your meditation on 2 Cor. 2:14-17 as explained in class.