

Getting Help From the Bible

by J.R. Miller

The Bible is not a sealed book, and with the right spirit and method, anyone can find beauty and blessing in its pages.

Scripture: Psalm 19:7-10, Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 2:3-5, Matthew 7:7, John 15:7, Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, James 1:22, 1 Peter 2:2

Topics: "Bible Study", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

J.R. Miller addresses the struggles of young Christians in finding beauty and help in the Bible, emphasizing that the Scriptures are not meant to be a sealed book but are accessible to all, regardless of scholarly background. He encourages readers to approach the Bible with a spirit of inquiry and meditation, suggesting methods such as reading thoughtfully, marking passages, and engaging in topical studies to uncover its treasures. Miller highlights the importance of reading the Bible not just for knowledge but for practical application in daily life, asserting that spiritual discernment is key to experiencing its richness. He concludes by reminding us that as we grow in our relationship with Christ, the Scriptures will reveal their beauty and significance more profoundly.

Transcript

Ofentimes young Christians say, "I cannot find the beautiful things in the Bible, nor can I acquire a taste or relish for it. I want to love it and to use it so as to receive help from it--but it does not open its riches to me. I appreciate the wealth and beauties which others find in it and point out to me--but when I look for them--they do not reveal themselves to me. After I have read a chapter and found nothing beautiful or helpful, another will read it and point out the sweetest bits of beauty and the rarest words and suggestions of comfort and helpfulness, not one of which I had seen! They seem to have hidden from me, like coy birds amid the branches--but when another came they appeared, and in their shining plumage sat on the boughs or perched on his shoulder and sang snatches of heavenly song. I read the book--but I confess that it yields me no honey, no food, no wine of life!"

It is quite possible that this experience is more common than we think--or than many are honest enough to confess. There are few, if any, who find in the Bible--all the beauty and blessing that lie in its pages. Not one of us gets from it--the utmost possible of help; and no doubt most of us in our reading--pass by many rare and precious things which we fail to see at all.

Yet it surely need not be a sealed book to anyone. It does not aim to hide its good things away--so that men cannot easily find them. It is not intended to be a book which great scholars alone can understand. No doubt a knowledge of the languages in which the Bible was originally written explains many an obscure passage and resolves many a difficulty--yet it is not a book for the learned alone--but for the unlettered and the little children as well. In proof of this, we have only to remember that oftentimes those who find the richest treasures and the sweetest joys in the Scriptures, are not the greatest scholars and the grandest intellects--but God's little ones, strangers to the world's lore, and ignorant of its wisdom.

Very much depends upon the spirit with which we come to the Bible. In the minds of many Protestants there is almost as much superstition regarding this sacred book, as there is among Romanists regarding the crucifix or rosary. Soldiers entering a battle fling away their cards--and put Bibles in their pockets. They feel that they are safer then. Many think if they read a certain portion every day, though they give no thought to the meaning--that they have done a holy service and are safe for the day. But the mere reading of so many chapters each day--does no one any good! It would be as well to say Latin prayers--and fumble over a string of prayer-beads for ten minutes. To receive blessing from the Bible--it must be read thoughtfully, with inquiry and meditation. It must be allowed--to read itself into our heart and life.

As to the METHOD of reading, several suggestions may be made. It is important to have a good copy of the Bible, well bound, with clear, plain type and with references. On many passages there is no commentary so helpful as the reading of the references. Scripture interprets Scripture. Hence, a copy without references is shorn of much of its value. We want a copy, too, that will last for many years. A book is like a friend; it grows familiar and confidential with use. At first shy and distant, it lets us into its heart--after we have long pored over its pages. It opens of itself to the choicest chapters, and it seems to carry its sweetest secrets on the surface for us. A Bible that we have long used, seems to say things to us we never hear from a strange or new Bible.

Besides, it is good to mark our Bible as we read it. Any precious passage that we find--may be indicated on the margin by some sign or by drawing a line around it or under the sacred words. Thus we write our own spiritual history--on the pages of our Bible. These marks are memorials, also, showing where we once found blessing--stones set up to mark our Bethels and Peniels and Ebenezers. A book thus read, and holding on its pages such treasures, becomes in a few years, inestimably sacred and precious.

Hence the importance of having at almost any cost--the very best copy of the Bible that can be obtained--one that can be used for a lifetime.

No one can afford to dispense with the old-fashioned way of reading the Bible through consecutively. It is well to do this every year. Some open at random and read whatever comes under their eye, without method or plan. Others read over and over a few favorite passages. In both cases, large portions remain neglected and are never read at all. Reading the whole volume in course, in regular daily portions, we become familiar with every part, and discover the very richest things--in places where we least expected to find any beauty or blessing!

But in addition to this--it is well to pursue other special methods. Topical reading is excellent. We select a subject and by the aid of concordance, find out all the passages in the whole Scripture which speak of it or throw any light upon it. Thus we learn what are the doctrines of the Bible. In this way we may bring all the teachings of men--to the bar of God's truth; we may verify the doctrines of the Church; we may refer all questions that arise in our own minds, as to belief or as to duty--to the infallible test; and thus we shall

build our personal creeds, not on the formulated statements of theologians--but on the simple words of Scripture.

In the daily life of each one, there arise peculiar questions and experiences on which we need light or in which we need counsel and guidance. These should be taken at once to the divine word. Thus we bring the book of life--into our daily history. We make it our counselor, our lamp, our guide.

This leads to another method of reading and study which is very profitable and which yields great help.

The habit of having a verse for the day has also been adopted by many, and has been a source of great instruction and comfort. Either out of the morning's chapter, or selected in some other way--let one verse be taken, fixed in the mind, and carried all through the busy day in thought and meditation. It will often prove a fountain of water, a bright lamp, or a rod and staff before the day comes to a close. It is impossible to estimate the influence of a simple Scripture passage, thus held all day in the thoughts. It keeps us from sin. It is a living impulse to duty. It is an angel of comfort in sorrow. Then its influence, as it pours its soft, pure light all through the life hour after hour--is full of inspiration--and purifies, cleanses and sanctifies.

So much for methods. Still more important, is the SPIRIT in which we read. We must come to the sacred Scriptures, as to the oracles of God, infallible and authoritative. We must hear the voice of God in its words. Then we must come in the spirit of docility, ready to be taught. Some read it, not to learn what they ought to believe--but to find in it what they themselves do believe already, to have then opinions confirmed or their conduct justified. Only those who come as little children, with teachable spirits, to hear what God will say, and ready to accept it however it may clash with their own opinions and preferences--can find the Bible an open book, disclosing to them its most precious things.

The sacred Scriptures must be read thoughtfully, slowly and patiently. Many of its richest gems--lie deep, and must be dug for. It is not so much a flower-garden--as a gold-mine. There is a great deal of hurried, superficial reading, which skims over the surface, which pauses to weigh no word, take in no thought, apply no lesson, and which leaves no impression, not even a memory, behind. Such superficial readers may read the same chapter over and over--without realizing it!

Then it is necessary to read the Bible not only to know the will of God--but that we may DO it. If it is not the guide of our life--it is nothing to us. Its truths are to be applied! If we read the beatitudes, we are to compare ourselves with their divine requirements, and seek to be conformed to them. If we come upon a word that rebukes any habit or attitude of ours--we are straightway to make the needed amendment. We are to accept its promises and precepts, believe them, and obey them. We are to allow its comforts to enter our hearts and support us in sorrow. There is nothing written in the Bible--merely for ornament or beauty. Every word is practical. There is no truth in it--which has not some bearing upon practical living. When we come to it eager to know how to live and ready to obey its precepts--we shall find it opening to us its inmost meaning!

We are told that the Bible must be spiritually discerned. Only a spiritually-minded reader finds the truest and best things in it. We must bring to it a certain kind of mind-set. This is true in all departments of life. Many people never see anything lovely in nature. They will stand amid the most picturesque landscapes, walk amid the rarest flowers, and witness the most gorgeous sunset splendor--without a thrill of pleasure, or an expression of admiration! They have no sympathy with nature. There are many who will pass through a grand art-gallery rich with paintings and statuary--and see nothing to seize their attention; while others will spend days in enthusiastic study of the works of art that are stored there. Some knowledge of

art and an interest in it--are necessary to the appreciation and enjoyment of paintings and statues.

In like manner, he who would find the beautiful things in the Scriptures, must have a mind and heart prepared for it. Hence the more of the divine life we have in our souls--the more will the sacred pages reveal to us. It is not so much intellectual acumen and fine scholarship that we need--as spiritual culture, love for Christ and the warmth of devotion.

A young lady purchased a book and read a few pages--but was not interested in it. Some months afterward she met the author, and a tender friendship sprang up, ripening into love and betrothal. Then the book was dull no longer. Every sentence had a charm for her heart. Love was the interpreter. So to those who do not know Christ personally, the Bible seems dry and uninteresting. But when they learn to know him and to love him--all is changed; and the deeper their love for him becomes--the more do the sacred pages glow with beauty and light!

It is good to store away in our hearts, all along the bright years of youth--the precious truths of God's Word. In visiting the Mammoth Caves, they placed lamps in our hands before we entered. It seemed a very useless and needless thing to carry these pale lights while we walked in the full blaze of noonday. But we moved down the bank and entered the cavern's mouth. Quickly the splendor of daylight faded out, and then the lamp-flames began to shine brightly. We soon found how valuable they were, and how necessary. Without them we would have been lost in the thick gloom, and in the inextricable mazes of the cave.

Likewise, God's promises and comforts, may not seem needful to us--in the brightness of youth, and in the days of health and gladness. They may then seem to shine with but a pale light. But as we move on we shall pass into shadows--the shadows of sickness, of trial, of disappointment, of sorrow--and then their beauty and splendor will shine out and prove the very joy and strength of our souls.

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