

### Transformative power of the word (w/c 10 March 2019)

In his equivalent chapter in *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster focuses on 'study', noting Paul's command to: "*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*" (Romans 12:2). As young Jewish boys in the first-century, both Paul and Jesus would have spent much of their time in memorising the words of the Torah (first five books of OT) by the age of ten. They would also by then have learned much of the Mishnah – the first part of the Talmud or interpretive tradition relating to scripture.

Given the almost universal access in this country to physical and/or electronic copies of the bible, how much need is there still for us to memorise chunks of scripture?

#### Read Psalm 119: 9-16

Meditate, consider, delight – how do we ensure that all these play a part in our study of God's word?

Current estimates are that nine million adults in the UK are functionally illiterate. Firstly, how do we help them access biblical material? Beyond this, how do we address the structural injustice that leads to this situation in the first place?

Across the whole of the Old Testament, it is only in Psalm 119 that we find 'word' referring to the written rather than the spoken word of God. In the New Testament, 'word' is also generally used as meaning the spoken word or as shorthand for the good news (see for example, Acts 13:49; 14:25).

Do you think that Jesus was implying a set of facts or a relationship with him when he said that "*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32)? How would you explain to others that, for a Christian, the written word exists essentially as a pointer to living word rather than being an end in itself?

Romans 1 (in particular, verses 19 and 20) makes it clear that creation itself is source of understanding of God. How do we balance our learning from what Richard Foster calls a "non-verbal book" with the study of written material? How do Paul's word in Philippians 4:8 help you with this – bear in mind that a better translation (I am told) of the last phrase may well be '*let your mind dwell on these things*'?

#### Next steps

Make some time to think how you could take your study one step further; as well as conventional study notes, there are plenty of online resources, for example from the Bible Society<sup>1</sup>. If you need some daily encouragement then Scripture Union's WordLive<sup>2</sup> may be right. This provides daily readings in either a 'traditional' or *Lectio Divina* style. If you would like some further detail about the latter, there is a useful page on Bible Gateway<sup>3</sup>.

*Just as food eaten without appetite is a tedious nourishment, so does study without zeal damage the memory by not assimilating what it absorbs.* (Leonardo da Vinci)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/study/>

<sup>2</sup> [www.wordlive.org](http://www.wordlive.org)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement/lectio-divina/home>