



# Drawing Close to God through Study

Corné J. Bekker

# The Problem of Our Age



“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem.

The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”

- Richard Foster

# Making Sense of Study



Bruce Nauman (1970) "None Sing/Neon Sign"

"Why do we seem to think we must choose between the two? Why do many Christians live as though they've been told, 'Choose you this day whom you will serve: scholarship or devotion'? I maintain that a Biblically balanced Christian has both a full head and a full heart, radiating both spiritual light and heat."  
- Donald S Whitney

# The Burden of Study



Maurizio Cattelan (1998) "If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one around, does it make a sound?"

"In prayer, theological work is the inner, spiritual and vertically directed motion of man; while study, although similarly external, it runs in a horizontal direction. It is also an intellectual, and physical, if not fleshly, movement. Theological work can be done only in the indissoluble unity of prayer and study. Prayer without study would be empty. Study without prayer would be blind."

- Karl Barth

# Defining Spirituality



Kendell Geers (2003) "Noitulover".

"Christian Spirituality is about a process of formation. We are formed by, and in, Christ. It is a form of Christ-ening – being clothed with Christ, and so being transformed. Our goal through Spirituality is to grow to maturity in Christ, to become more Christ-like and share His nature...Christian Spirituality is a process in which Christ takes the initiative; it is a 'putting' on of Christ (Galatians 3:27) and so is a work of grace from start to finish."

- Kenneth Leech

# The Consequence of the Fall



K.O. Lab (2001) "Live"

“After Adam had passed through the center of himself and emerged on the other side to escape from God by putting himself between himself and God, he had mentally reconstructed the whole universe in his own image and likeness.”

- Thomas Merton, *The New Man*

# Losing Our Central Truth



Kendell Geers (2005) "In the Garden of Eden"

“Everyone of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man I want myself to be but cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him.”  
- Thomas Merton, “New Seeds of Contemplation.”

# The Problem of Study



“Here then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail to study God’s Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy”

(Sproul, R C 1997. Knowing Scripture. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.)

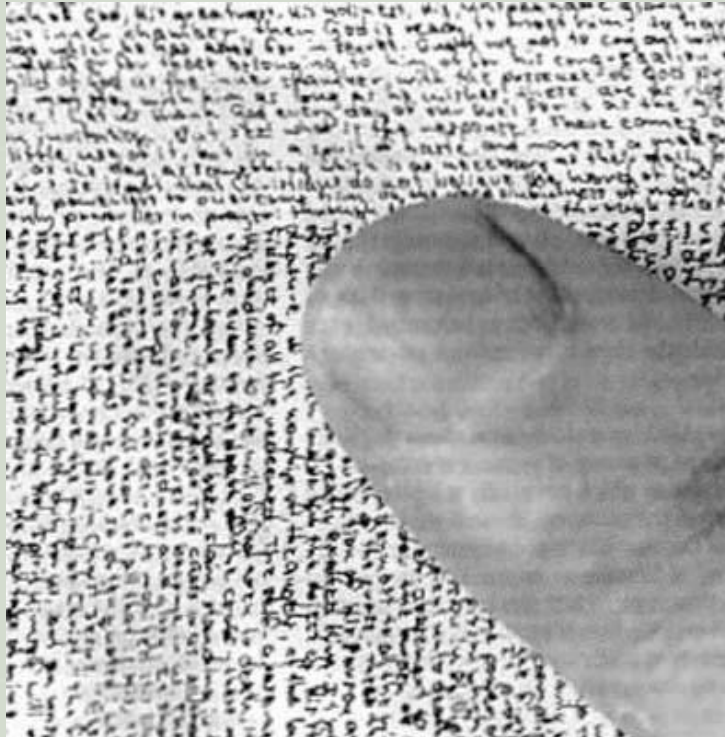
# The Devotional Discipline of Study

<p><b>One way to divide the text:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Lord of Creation (v 15-17).</li><li>2. Lord of the New Creation (v 18).</li><li>3. God's Purposes in Christ (v 19-20).</li></ol> <p><b>Term needing definition:</b> <u>Firstborn of all creation.</u> "The simplest explanation is the best; the 'first-born' son was always the <i>father's heir</i>. God's Son, Jesus Christ, is 'heir of all things' (Heb 1:2)." [Fullness &amp; Freedom: The Message of Colossians &amp; Philemon by Rev. R. C. Lucas (IVP) p. 51.]</p>	<p>Col 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the <u>firstborn over all creation</u>.<sup>1:16</sup> For by him <u>all</u> things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; <u>all</u> things were created by him and for him. <sup>1:17</sup> He is before <u>all</u> things, and in him <u>all</u> things hold together. <sup>1:18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the <u>firstborn</u> from among the dead, so that in <u>everything</u> he might have the supremacy. <sup>1:19</sup> For God was pleased to have <u>all</u> his fullness dwell in him, <sup>1:20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself <u>all</u> things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.</p>	<p><b>Meaning of observations:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Why does the author repeat <u>all</u> (<u>everything</u>)? What does it teach us?</li><li>2. What does it mean for Christ to be "the firstborn over all creation" and "the firstborn from among the dead"?</li><li>3. What does it mean for Jesus Christ to "have the supremacy"?</li></ol> <p><b>Theme:</b> Jesus Christ is High King of all that was, is, &amp; is to come, the Lord of Creation, the Lord of the Church, Redeemer &amp; Reconciler.</p>
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"Our age has been sadly deficient in what may be termed spiritual greatness. At the root of this is the modern disease of shallowness. We are all too impatient to meditate on the faith we profess... It is not the busy skimming over religious books or the careless hastening through religious duties which makes for strong Christian faith. Rather, it is unhurried meditation on Gospel truths and the exposing of our minds to these truths that yields the fruit of a sanctified character."

- Maurice Roberts

# Defining the Discipline of Study



“Study is a specific kind of experience in which through careful observation of objective structures we cause thought processes to move in a certain way.”

- Richard Foster

# The Wisdom of the Ages



“Let no day pass by without reading some portion of the Sacred Scriptures and giving some space to meditation; for nothing feeds the soul as well as those sacred studies do.”

- Theonas of Alexandria (c. 300)  
(From the Epistles of Theonas)

# The Wisdom of the Ages



“It easy to see that  
the Sacred  
Scriptures, which so  
far surpass all gifts  
and graces of  
human endeavor,  
breathe something  
Divine.”

- John Calvin (1509-1564)  
(From the Institutes of Christian Religion)

# The Wisdom of the Ages



“At any price, give me the Book of God! Here is knowledge enough for me. In God’s presence I open. I read this book, for this end: to find the Way to Heaven.”

John Wesley (1703-1791)  
(From Sermons on Several Occasions)

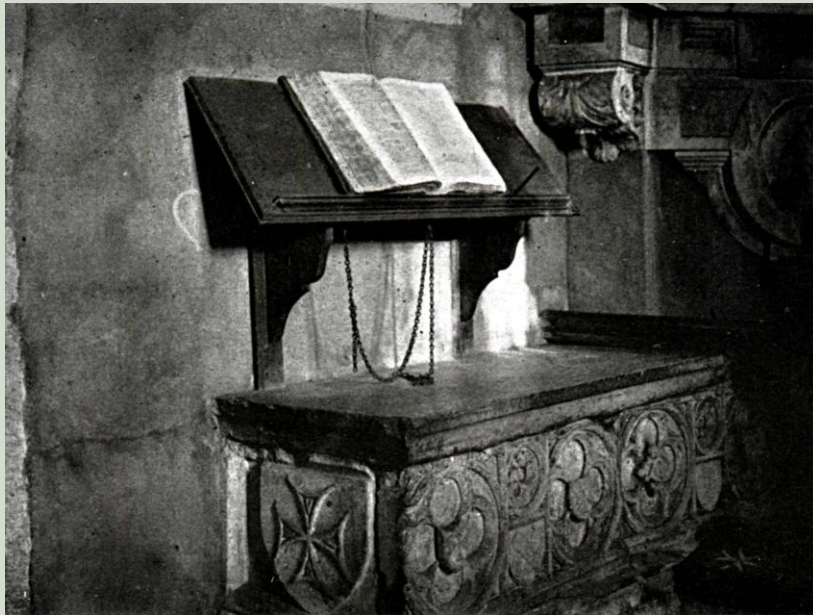
# The Wisdom of the Ages



“In our meditation we ponder the chosen text on the strength of the promise that it has something utterly personal to say to us for this day and for our Christian life.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)  
(From Life Together)

# The Wisdom of the Ages



“I thoroughly believe in a University education...but I believe a knowledge of the Bible without a college course is more valuable than a college course without the Bible. Everyone who has a thorough knowledge of the Bible may truly be called educated.”

Dr. William Lyon Phelps of Yale University

# How to Study?



The Bluebird of Happiness long absent from his life, Ned is visited by the Chicken of Depression.

“We must face the fact that many today are notoriously careless in their living. This attitude finds its way into the church. We have liberty, we have money, we live in comparative luxury. As a result, discipline has disappeared. What would a violin solo sound like if the strings on the musician's instrument were all hanging loose, not stretched tight, not ‘disciplined’?”

- A. W. Tozer

# How to Study?



Repetition

Concentration

Comprehension

Reflection

# Repetition



“Repetition is a way of regularly channeling the mind in a specific direction, thus ingraining habits of thought. Repetition has received something of a bad name today. It is important, however, to realize that sheer repetition without even understanding what is being repeated does affect the inner mind.”

- Richard Foster

# Repetition



“Everything is habit in biology, and habits are created only by means of repetition. Experiments have shown how much of our behavior is determined by the mental images to which our minds are constantly returning.

If we bring our minds back again and again to God, we shall by the same inevitable law be gradually giving the central place to God, not only in our inner selves, but also in our practical everyday lives.”

-Paul Tournier

# Concentration



“Concentration centers the mind. It focuses the attention on the thing being studied. The human mind has incredible ability to concentrate. It is constantly receiving thousands of stimuli, every one of which it is able to store in its memory banks while focusing on only a few. This natural ability of the brain is enhanced when with singleness of purpose we centre our attention upon a desired object of study.”

- Richard Foster

# Concentration



"I have learned to distrust speed reading and instant knowledge. Few joys of the mind can compare with the experience of lingering over deft character description, or hovering over a well-wrought passage. 'Some people', said Alexander Pope, 'will never learn anything..., because they understand everything too soon.'"

- Norman Cousins

# Comprehension



Kendell Geers (2005) "John 8:32"

"Comprehension leads to insight and discernment. It provides the basis for a true perception of reality. When we not only repeatedly focus the mind in a particular direction, centering our attention on the subject, but understand the 'what' we are studying, we reach a new level."

- Richard Foster

# Comprehension



Bruce Nauman (1975) "AH/HA"

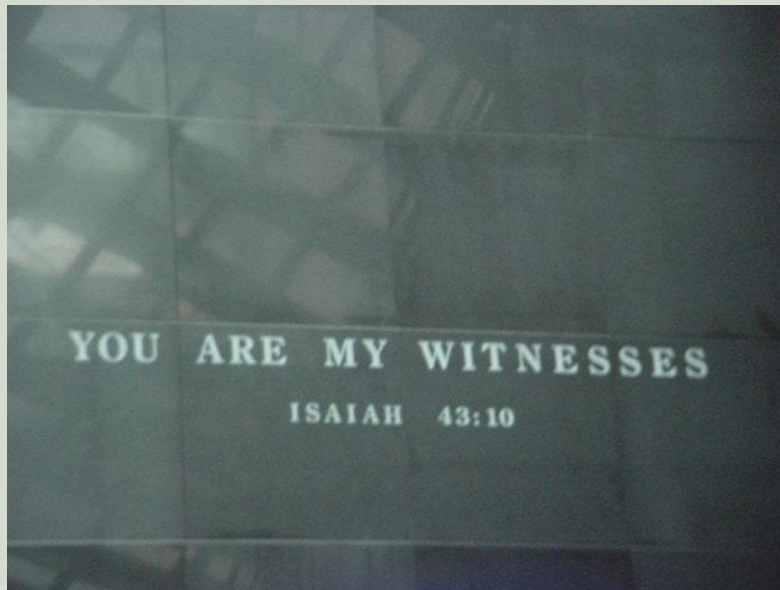
"To be informed is to know simply that something is the case. To understand is to know, in addition, what it is all about: why it is the case, what its connections are with other facts, in what respect it is the same, in what respect it is different, and so forth."  
- Mortimer Adler

# Reflection



“To reflect, to ruminate, on the events of our time will lead us to the inner reality of those events. Reflection brings us to see things from God's perspective. In reflection we come to understand not only our subject matter, but ourselves.”  
- Richard Foster

# Reflection



“To take a book of the Bible, to immerse one's self in it and to be grasped by it, is to have one's life literally revolutionized. This requires study and the training of attention. The student stays with it through barren day after barren day, until at last the meaning is clear, and transformation happens in his life.”

- Elizabeth O'Conner

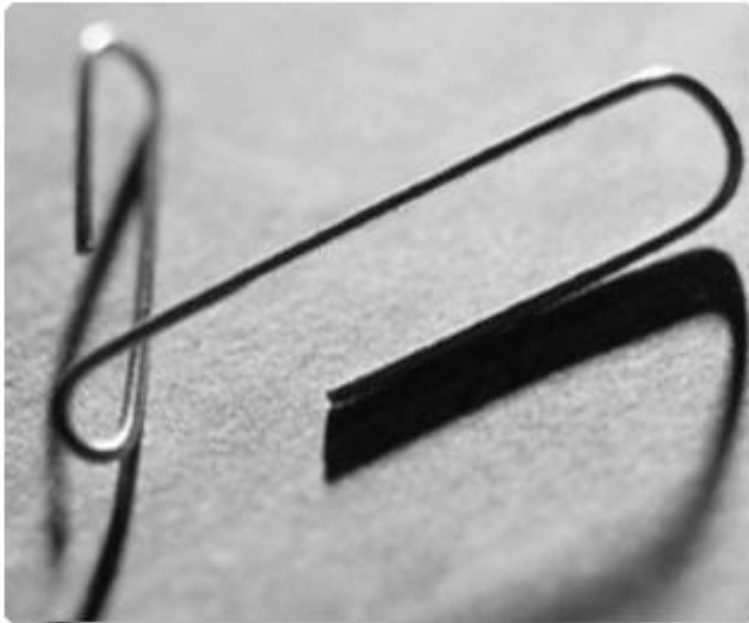
# What Should I Study?

Verbal Sources

Non-Verbal Sources



# What Should I Study?



“He that studies only men,  
will get the body of  
knowledge without the  
soul; and he that  
studies only books, the  
soul without the body.  
He that, to what he  
sees, adds observation,  
and to what he reads,  
reflection, is in the right  
road to knowledge,  
provided that in  
scrutinizing the hearts of  
others, he neglects not  
his own...”  
- Caleb Colton

# Study and Prayer



“Study is  
prayer and  
prayer is  
study”

- Martin Luther

# The Ancient Disciplines of Unceasing Prayer



“When the Spirit has come to reside in someone, that person cannot stop praying; for the Spirit prays without ceasing in him. No matter if he is asleep or awake, prayer is going on in his heart all the time. He may be eating or drinking, he may be resting or working – the incense of prayer will ascend spontaneously from his heart. The slightest stirring of his heart is like a voice which sings in silence and in secret to the Invisible.” – Isaac the Syrian

# Unceasing Prayer



“Let the  
memory of  
Jesus combine  
with your  
breath”

– John of the Ladder



# Unceasing Prayer: The Apostle Paul



“Pray without ceasing....” – 1 Thessalonians 5:17

“Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer....” – Romans 12:12

“Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication....” – Ephesians 6:18

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in with it thanksgiving....” – Colossians 4:2

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God.” – Philippians 4:6



# Unceasing Prayer: The Jesus Prayer



**“Jesus,  
Savior,  
Son of God,  
have mercy on me.”**

- based on Luke 18:13

# The Quest of Study



“My life shall  
be a real life,  
being wholly  
full of Thee.”

- Augustine of Hippo



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Habits of the Heart #3 – Study

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