



Spiritual Warfare and the Christian Life

by

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An Audio/Video Study Guide

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About this video guide

This video guide was designed to be a study aid as you watch the series taught by Dr. Victor Matthews on Spiritual Warfare. It contains a general outline of the content covered in each tape, as well as the handouts and overheads that are referred to by Dr. Matthews. Ample space has been left for taking notes and making observations.

How to study and apply the truth taught in these sessions

Note: This section is taken from Dr. Dallas Willard's book, *In Search of Guidance, Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (HarperCollins, 1993), pp 171-176. It is included in this video guide because it contains sound and practical wisdom regarding the study and application of God's Word to our daily lives.

The Written Word of God in the Progress of Redemption

Once the life of Christ has entered into us, there are many things we may do to increase the extent and depth of our identification and union with him. But the proper use of the *written* Word is most central to our cooperative efforts with God toward our full conformity with Christ.

Of course the written Word may come to us in many ways. It may come through sermon, art, casual conversation, dramatic performance, literature, or song. All of these are important.

Although all of these means are good and helpful, those who wish to grow in grace are best advised by far to make a close and constant companion of *the book*--the Bible. This does not mean that it should be worshipped. Its uniquely sacred character is something that does not need to be exaggerated or even insisted on, because it is self-authenticating to any earnest and open-minded user. For just as openness to and hunger for God leads naturally to the Bible, if it is available, so the eager use of the Bible leads naturally and tangibly to the mind of God and to the person of Christ.

The written Word of God is an expression of God's mind as surely, though in a different manner, as are creation and the living Word, Jesus. As we read and study the Bible intelligently, humbly, and openly, we come evermore to share God's mind.

In a manner already explained, this use of the of the Bible is not superstitious or magical, precisely because there is a natural connection between a proper use of the Bible and its ideal result: union with Christ. The Bible expresses the mind of God, since thought its pages God himself speaks to us. Thus, we, in understanding the Bible, come to share his thoughts and attitudes and are even quickened by the Word to have his life. The Scripture is a *communication* that establishes *communion* and opens the way to union all in manner perfectly understandable once we begin to have the experience of it.

We will be spiritually safe in our use of the Bible if we follow a simple rule: *read in a repentant manner*. That is, read with readiness to surrender all we are, all of our plans, opinions, possessions, positions. Study as intelligently as possible, with all available means, but never merely to find the truth and still less merely to prove anything. Subordinate your desire to find the truth, and your desire to have others do the truth, to your desire to *do it yourself!* Those who wish to hear the Word and know the truth often are not prompted by their desire to *do* it. The light such people find frequently proves to be their own snare and condemnation.

“Praying the Scriptures”

Therefore the Scriptures should only be read in an attitude of prayer, trusting to the inward working of the Holy Spirit to make their truths a living reality within us. (William Law)

There is a simple technique or routine that all believers, no matter how trained or untrained, can follow with assurance that the very bread of life will be spread for them on the pages of the Scriptures. It is a practice very similar to the one encouraged by Madame Guyon in her little book, *Short and Very Easy Guide to Prayer*, first published in 1688 in Lyons, France. This book is still available today, having been recently published, with some modifications, under the title *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*. You will find it very useful to read the first four chapters of it as supplement to what I am about to say.

When we come to the Scriptures as a part of our conscious strategy to cooperate with God for full redemption of our life, we must desire that his will in all things revealed should be true for us. Next, we begin with those parts of the Scripture with which we have some familiarity, such as the Twenty-third Psalm, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sermon on the Mount, 1 Corinthians 13, or Romans 8.

You may think that this is not a “big” beginning. But keep in mind that your aim is not to become a “scholar” or to impress other with your knowledge of the Bible, which is quite a dreadful trap for so many fellowships aiming to be “biblical.” Such an aim will only cultivate pride and lay a foundation for the

petty, quarrelsome spirit so regrettably, yet commonly, observed in those outwardly identified as the most “serious” students of the Scriptures.

If you remember these words of Thomas à Kempis, it will help you:

Of what use is it to discourse learnedly on the Trinity, if you lack humility and therefore displease the Trinity? Lofty words do not make a man just or holy; but a good life makes him dear to God. I would far rather feel contrition than be able to define it. If you knew the whole Bible by heart, and all the teachings of the philosophers, how would this help you without the grace and love of God?

Your aim must be only to nourish your soul on God’s word to you. Hence, go to those parts you already know, and count on your later growth and study to lead you to other parts that will be useful.

In addition, do not try to read a great deal. As Madam Guyon wisely counsels: “If you read quickly, it will benefit you little. You will be like a bee that merely skims the surface of a flower. Instead, in this new way of reading with prayer, you must become as the bee who penetrates into the depths of the flower. You plunge deeply within to remove its deepest nectar.” You may have been told that it is good to read the Bible through every year and that you can ensure this by reading so many verses per day from the Old and New Testaments. If you do this you may enjoy the reputation of one who reads the Bible through each year and you may congratulate yourself on your accomplishment. But will you thereby become more like Christ and more filled with the life of God?

It is a proven fact that many who read the Bible in this way, like taking medicine or exercising on a schedule, do not advance spiritually. Better in one year to have ten good verses transferred into the substance of our lives than to have every word of the Bible flash before our eyes. Remember as always that “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor 3:6). We read to open ourselves to the Spirit.

Come to your chosen passages as the places where you will have a holy meeting with God. Read a small part of the passage selected and dwell on each of its parts, praying for the assistance of God’s Spirit in bringing fully before your mind and into your life the realities expressed. Always ask What is my life like because this is true? and How shall I speak and act because of this? You may wish to turn the passage into a prayer of praise or request.

Perhaps you are reading the great “God is love” passage from John 4. You find it written that “there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love” (v. 18 NASB).

You dwell on the ways in which love--from God to us and from us to him and between people on earth--pushes fear out of all relationships. You think of the fearless child surrounded by loving parents, of how loving neighbors give us confidence and assuage our anxieties. You contemplate how assurance of God’s love given to us through the death of his Son suggests that we will never get beyond his care. You then seek divine help in comprehending this and in realizing what your fear-free life might be like. Then lift your heart in joyful praise as you realize how things are for you, living in God’s Kingdom. God’s Word now speaking in you, not just *at* you, creates the faith that appropriates the fact *for you*.

Don’t hurry. Don’t dabble in spirituality. Give time for each stage to play itself out fully in your heart. Remember, this is not something you are doing by your self. *Watch* and pray.

The general train of development again is:

1. *Information* with longing for it to be so;
2. *Affirmation* that it must be so;
3. *Invocation* to God to make it so; and finally,
4. *Appropriation* by God’s grace of its being so.

This last stage must not be forced or, especially, faked. The ability for it will be given, as you watch for God to move in your life.

When there is the inner agreement of our minds with the truth expressed in the passages, we have these parts of the mind of Christ in us as our own, for these great truths conveyed from Scripture were the very things Jesus believed. These truths constituted the faith, hope and love in which he lived. And as they become ours, his mind becomes our mind. We are outfitted then to function as true co-laborers with God, as brothers, sisters, and friends of Jesus in the present and coming Kingdom of God. We are then in position to know and understand in its fullness the guidance God gives to his children.