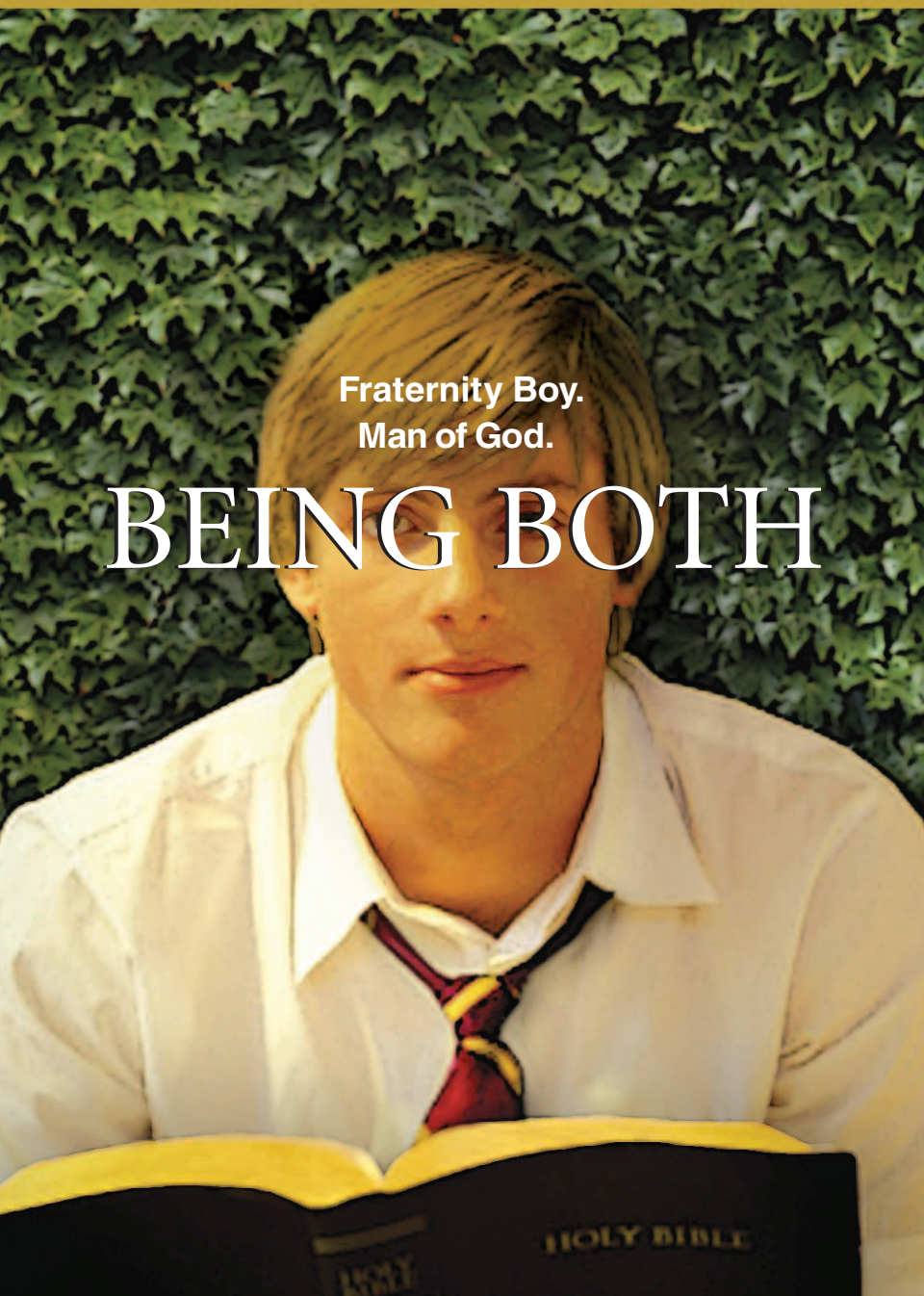


Charles W. Slaton, Jr.

Fraternity Boy.  
Man of God.

# BEING BOTH





CHARLES W. "SLATS" SLATON, JR. is passionate about the relevance of The Holy Bible in today's society. "Being Both" is his second publication. The first was "We've Had Dessert. Biblical Malnutrition & Today's Episcopal Church." That booklet was a written call for Christian orthodoxy within the Anglican community and was later adopted and distributed at the national Anglican "Hope and a Future Conference" in Pittsburgh in 2005. It was also cited as a reference source at many Episcopal diocesan conventions around the country. In 2006, the booklet was reprinted for Anglican educational efforts in Texas and then again by the Anglican Mainstream of South Africa in 2009 as part of a campaign to educate the clergy and laity in that area. "We've Had Dessert" is posted on a number of religious Web sites, including that of the American Anglican Council. Because the message speaks to ongoing universal issues, it continues to reach not only Anglicans, but people within a variety of denominations and Christian communities.

"Being Both" carries a similar message about Scriptural authority. Drawing from his personal experiences at the University of Alabama in the late Seventies and early Eighties, Slats wrote this booklet to help young men with their Christian journey as they transition into the college realm – specifically, those in college fraternities.

A native of Alabama, Slats grew up in the small town of Union Springs and later moved to nearby Montgomery, where he ultimately began his career in advertising. He is a graduate of the University of Alabama and also attended Parsons School of Design while living in New York City. He continues to be involved with his college fraternity at the University.

Today Slats lives in Decatur, Alabama, along with his wife and daughter. All three cater to the fourth member of the family – an old black dog named Penny. Slats devotes a lot of time to his work as president and creative director of The Slaton Agency. His free time is generally spent writing or playing tennis. However, ask which of these he prefers, and he will point out that his wife and daughter don't regularly beat him in writing.

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BEING  
BOTH

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*Charles W. "Slats" Slaton, Jr.*

Two natures beat within my breast.  
One is foul and one is blessed.  
One I love and one I hate.  
But the one I feed will dominate.

– *Unknown*



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*NOTE: The second chapter of this booklet, "Brain, Meet Bible." originally appeared in a separate work, "We've Had Dessert: Biblical Malnutrition and Today's Episcopal Church" (Charles W. Slaton, Jr. /2004/ [www.haddessert.com](http://www.haddessert.com)). Portions of that text are slightly modified so as to work within the context of this publication.*

chapter one

# BLACKBALLING WISDOM

*I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.*

– Proverbs 4:11-13 (NIV)

Subconsciously, my plan was to take a four-year vacation from God.

The year was 1979, and I had just pledged one of the older fraternities at the University of Alabama. One hundred and ten years earlier on a moonlit night in Virginia, three VMI cadets met secretly after a Bible study and formed this brotherhood of which I was now a member. They established it upon the Christian principles of love, honor and truth – and each shared the dream of a new society comprised of upright and principled young men.

That was then.

Today, members of such organizations are simply referred to as "fraternity boys," and hallmarks such as "love, honor and truth" seem to have faded somewhat. As a pledge, I can remember learning of our founders' lofty principles and dismissing it all as ancient history. We looked to the present culture instead. To our way of thinking, the then-recent movie "Animal House" provided a much livelier blueprint for the college experience. As for me? I could not wait to put on a toga. Little did I realize, however, it would take nearly twenty years to get the darn thing off. For as it turned out, my hiatus went on much longer than the intended four years and lasted well into early adulthood.

No doubt, my fraternity membership was a part of God's plan for my life. There is just too much good that resulted from it for it to be otherwise. I owe that affiliation a huge debt of gratitude, as it taught me many, many valuable lessons and gave me dear friends that I have to this day. However, that very same environment was also a breeding ground for a lot of deficient thinking and reckless behavior. Nonetheless, fraternity membership and Christian discipleship are not mutually exclusive.

Many outsiders, I'm sure, would disagree. Familiar only with the "party animal" stereotype, they assume the entire system is depraved and figure that anyone who joins a college fraternity is automatically incapable of godliness. It's like the joke about the fraternity boy who went home for the weekend. On Saturday night



as he was leaving to go out with his buddies, his mother yelled out: "Now, don't you be coming home drunk!" To this, the boy replied with confusion, "Well, then where am I supposed to go?!"

The truth is that fraternity boys have a choice like everyone else. Each of us can choose a life that glorifies God, which leads to Him – or we can choose one of self-indulgence that does not. The problem is that we are inclined to both. The answer? Feed the one inclination and starve the other.

Obviously, the title of this booklet, "Being Both," is not intended to promote or condone a "double life" – suggesting that one can live for Jesus Christ by day, and engage in debauchery by night. Quite the contrary. The Scriptures say we must choose whom we will serve. I urge you to choose the habit of reading and obeying God's Word. Write His wisdom on the tablet of your heart, and in time, your life will be transformed.

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**It is entirely possible to join a  
college fraternity, enjoy its benefits,  
and still remain faithful to the  
decrees of Christianity.**

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Of course, the point here is that it is entirely possible to join a college fraternity, enjoy its benefits, and still remain faithful to the decrees of Christianity. Greek life is no different than real life. It is full of all kinds

of traps and temptations. The charge is to learn to navigate past these and fulfill a higher call. Christians are to be a light in this world of darkness. *All* are to be a bright, Christ-like example, so as to "Christianize" his own particular environment.

Thinking back on my own fraternity experience, I can remember certain members who spoke openly of their faith and walked the walk of believers. I had respect for those guys, but only from a distance. The inescapable truth is that those were spiritually dead years for me, and a host of regrets were born within that timeframe. I know now that my time in college could have been much richer and more meaningful had I better known the voice that discerns right from wrong. No question, I squandered a lot because my heart and mind were fixed on the empty things of this life. Had I been in tune with God's Word, I could have strengthened my character for the days that lay ahead. Had I sought and applied His wisdom, those regrets of mine would have surely been avoided.

My message to you is this: Don't abandon God now, or at any other point in your life. Stay connected to Him through prayer (talking to God) and Bible study (God talking to you). Give thanks for this exciting time in your life. And have fun! College should be enjoyed. But make no mistake – these years are a critical leg of your life's journey. God has graciously placed you on this road, and He has much He wants to tell you along the way. My sincere prayer for you is that you learn early to recognize His loving voice.

## chapter two

# BRAIN, MEET BIBLE.

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

– 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

Mark Twain once said, "Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand. But I always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those that I *do* understand." Truer words were never spoken.

When confronted with the entire Bible, some challenge it with comments like, "That was thousands of years ago! We know more today!" Or they may say sarcastically, "Like all those outrageous stories really happened!" I have a friend who shares this skepticism, and he suggests that common sense be our guide when reading the Bible. More than once, he has said to me, "God gave you a brain – use it!" And that comment always reminded me of my brother-in-law.

My wife's older brother is most energetic. There is a healthy restlessness about him in that he is always the first up for hiking, skiing, hunting – or whatever – as long as he can put his body in motion. One day he and I were on the subject of horseback riding. I forget how it came up, but when it did, I was surprised to hear him say, "You won't ever catch me on the back of some horse!" Now, this comment was totally out of character for such an avid outdoorsman. But when I questioned it, he told me, "I don't ride anything with a brain!"

Planes? Sure. Boats? Fine. Some free-thinking animal? No thank you. It was a matter of trust. Because at times, we all know that the brain has the capacity to throw us.

Most of what we believe is tied to the logical and the reasonable. In a learned and sophisticated society, we hesitate to even question the findings of our modern age – scientific, sociological or otherwise. In the areas where we are ignorant or uncertain, we rely on the intelligence of others. Thus, we anchor our personal beliefs and opinions on conclusions that we ourselves have not even confirmed. We all do this. C.S. Lewis called it, "believing things on authority." He said, "Believing things 'on authority' only means believing them because you have been told them by someone you think trustworthy." More interesting, however, was his estimation that "Ninety-nine percent of the things you believe are believed on authority."

All of this prompts Pilate's famous question: "What is

truth?" Is truth the intelligent answer of the day? Our definition here is important. If we seek truth in morality and law – and our authority is only each other – then we are doing nothing more than just comparing standards. And human standards, as we know, can erode over time (look at what happened to television). The problem with relying on our individual sense of truth is that it is always subject to change. And there will always be an absence of absolute authority.

Now suppose the truth I seek is about which jacket looks best on me – the blue one or the brown? I can certainly live with differences of opinion, or even with an inaccurate consensus. But let's say the question is weightier, and my very salvation depends on the correct answer. Well then, I want the absolute truth.

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So if Lewis is right, and I am subject to believing things "on authority" – then on what authority do I believe? Does my pastor or priest hold that authority? Certainly not – especially since some have bought into the wisdom of the current age and the revisionist movement. With such a wide range of Biblical interpretations today, no longer can the church be looked upon as guardians of truth. We can only turn to the Scriptures for that. Not some of them. Not the

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**If, in fact, we are to know the  
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ones that sound reasonable to us, but the complete, immutable and enduring words of the Bible. If, in fact, we are to know the absolute truth, then this is our only source.

In an effort to dilute the Bible's authority, there are some who remind us that the Church was not founded on Scripture – but that Scripture is, in fact, a product of the Church. This is true in a sense. The Word of God actually began with God; it was then given to His chosen people (the Church) – and they wrote it down as God inspired them. However, revisionists will also have you believe that the Bible is riddled with the misguided words of man. As they see it, God may have inspired these writings, but man apparently got a lot of it wrong. And sadly, God only managed to make a few points of His own. So in their minds, we are to take it upon ourselves to decipher what is divine and what is human error.

This is what is happening in some churches now, and it is a fatal path. It is no surprise, and certainly no coincidence, that this authority we are crafting for ourselves allows for our own sinful nature. This

"humanization" of God should be so obvious and yet to many, it is not. We should all take issue with the notion that man inherits the right to update and revise Scripture as he sees fit. This is what the revisionist movement is all about: changing God to accommodate man.

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**It is no surprise, and certainly no coincidence, that the authority we are crafting for ourselves allows for our own sinful nature.**

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In recent years, a few mainline denominations have been guilty of reducing the Almighty God into a sort of one-dimensional beacon of love. People have summarized what little they have been taught of the Scriptures, and incorrectly concluded that "love" is all that really matters – that this is all that God expects from us. Basically, the new theology is that God is love, and we should try to be like God. End of story. Folks don't want to get bogged down with a lot of Scripture or be "preached to" and told how to live. It's easier to just love people.

Others take a broader view and rightly proclaim the necessity of obeying God's direction for their lives. However, these people are often regarded as unenlightened Christians who are needlessly obsessed with behavior. So often, they are dismissed and lumped in with the

Pharisees and Sadducees – whom Jesus scolded for their arrogance and blind preoccupation with the law. Of course, it is true that keeping God's law does not save us – nor is it meritorious. This is because grace is free to those who follow Christ. But for us to outwardly reject and defy Jesus' directives as a *way* to experience grace is to fall into a state known as "antinomianism" (meaning anti-law). The apostle Paul spoke directly against this. He wrote in Romans 7 (NIV): "Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'" So, if we are not aware of what is sinful, then it is impossible for us to live rightly – and therefore impossible for us to repent and experience grace when we fall short.

I would submit, however, that a preoccupation with either side of this issue is dangerous. Yes, we can focus too much on the rules and miss God's purpose, but it is also quite possible to sin against God in our distorted attempts to show reverence to man. Certainly, we are commanded by Christ to love one another – but just because we do something in the name of love does not necessarily mean that it is a Christian act (Dr. Kevorkian, the "Doctor of Death" proved that point). God is love. But God is also law. Jesus stated this best when He said: "If you love Me, keep My commandments." – *John 14:15; (NKJV)*

Revisionists often attempt to discredit one passage of Scripture by citing another that makes it appear contradictory or suspect. For instance, I have heard



doubters cite ancient dietary laws and then discount the entire Book of Deuteronomy. Such correlations are irresponsible in that they only confuse people and create doubts about the overall reliability of the Bible. The fact is, Jesus often quoted the Old Testament. More specifically, He quoted the Book of Deuteronomy. In the New Testament, there are almost 100 quotations from, and allusions to, Deuteronomy. So, to challenge this book's authority is to challenge the Founder of our faith.

A complete and thorough understanding of the Bible is still our best road map for living. However, some might say that only a "fundamentalist" would claim such a thing. We don't like this label. But Christians should know that the term "fundamentalism" actually originated with a series of pamphlets that were published in the early 1900s. They were authored by

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leading churchmen of the day and were circulated among clergy and seminarians. Entitled "The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth," these booklets simply expounded on five basic beliefs of Christianity: 1) The infallibility of Scripture; 2) The virgin birth and the divinity of Christ; 3) Atonement through the blood of Christ; 4) The Resurrection; and 5) Jesus' miracles and His ultimate second coming.

Today, these same beliefs are widely taught and

accepted throughout the Christian world. Still, people regularly use the term "fundamentalist" as an assault on others they perceive to be too serious about their walk with God. Granted, there are Christians who misinterpret the Scriptures. These are the people who might physically follow through with Jesus' command to gouge out and throw away an eye because it caused them to sin (thus making a strong case for NIV footnotes and Bible study guides). So, our process of reasoning when interpreting Scripture is crucial. But we should always guard heavily against moderate translations and the propensity to rewrite it to our own way of thinking.

In a speech on Constitutional Interpretation and the dangers of "evolving standards of decency," U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia argues that there's really no such thing as a moderate interpretation. He asks his audience, "What is a moderate interpretation of the text? Halfway between what it really means and what you'd like it to mean?" The truth is, most Scripture that is contested today is quite clear and requires no interpretive skills whatsoever. If we are honest about it, we know that it is less about interpretation and more about looking for loopholes.

When reading the Bible, I always start with the assumption that it means what it says. Frankly, I struggle with some of the Scriptures, especially with God's wrath found in the Old Testament. But I choose to believe it happened. If I begin to reject any part, my mind is led to the thought of, "What else requires my editing?" So mentally, I always close

the door of doubt when I open my Bible – and I find I learn more. When I do this in reading the passages of wrath, I always gain an increased sense of gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice and His new covenant with God's people.

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**For many who struggle with the stories of the Bible, probability becomes their focus. And because of this, they miss the point entirely.**

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Many stories found in the Bible are difficult for us to fathom: Noah's Ark; the Parting of the Red Sea; Jonah and the Whale; and so on. Again, I choose to believe they happened. However, someone once said that even if these were myths within the Scriptures, they were God's chosen myths – because they came from God's chosen people. The conclusion here is that whether these things took place or not, God must have intended them for our hearing and, thus, for our learning.

For many who struggle with these stories, probability becomes their focus. And because of this, they miss the point entirely.

A few years after starting my career, an old college friend called me at the office one day. Bob and I had been fraternity brothers, but it had been a while since we had talked. I was telling him the latest news on the

guys that I had kept tabs on, when finally he asked, "What about Tim? How's he doing?" Well, there was much to tell about our friend, Tim. He was married and his wife had just recently given birth to triplets. But even more recent at that time was the news that he had been involved in a pretty bad automobile accident. The factual bits and pieces that I had been able to assemble were like a script for television drama. It happened on a rainy morning and involved a tanker truck, a lot of state troopers and a rescue team. Tim was driving on the interstate and lost control of his vehicle. He then rammed into the back of a large 18-wheeler and his car slid around, and ended up going down a steep embankment. When everything came to a stop, he found himself injured and stuck at the bottom of this wet ravine. Amazingly, after they finally pulled him out, he had escaped serious injury. There were some broken ribs, a few cuts and bruises, but he ended up spending only a couple of days in the hospital.

When I finished telling Bob the drawn-out details of our good friend's real-life rescue story, he was speechless. Then finally, after a considerable pause, he said: "*Triplets!?*"

A funny story, but isn't this exactly what happens with the Scriptures? They tell us that a child was born unto a young virgin, and that He grew up to be the Savior of the world. And to this, we say: "A child born unto a *virgin!*?" And the story stops there – and we miss the most exciting part. You see, we distract

ourselves questioning things such as the likelihood of a virgin birth, and we get stalled. And in that process, we abandon the God of miracles and the transforming power of His Word.

It seems that many people have a real need to make total sense of God before they invest in a relationship with Him. This, of course, is impossible. Jesus tells us that we must "seek *first* the kingdom of God" – and only then do we discover that it is through our initiation and our submission, that we can begin to understand Him.

So don't strap your idea of truth on the back of what society is telling you. To turn a friend's phrase, "God gave you a Bible – read it!" Pick it up and allow the Holy Spirit to show you real truth. Yet, it requires that you take the initiative. It's like God is saying, "Trust me, and I will give you the truth." But He is also saying, "You go first."

## chapter three

# MAN WITH A PLAN

*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.*

– Ephesians 5:15-17 (NIV)

Any measure of success typically has two ushers: organization and routine. Both can bring about the discipline needed to fulfill our duties in life.

I'm a business owner and an obsessive planner. My advertising agency is responsible for developing and producing marketing components for a large, multifaceted corporation. Every morning before leaving the house, I spend a good fifteen minutes over coffee charting the day's tasks, meetings and deadlines. And I'm not just talking about making a "to-do" list. Oh no. I'm much more obsessive than that. "The List" is only the first step for me. Once I've jotted down all that needs to take place, I then stop and review each item. That is to say, I stare at them.

Then I review my company's lengthy project list. Next, I review the pages of my calendar. And then I go back to "The List" and I stare at it some more. And in this seemingly monotonous process... guess what? Things occur to me. Inevitably, I realize that I've forgotten something, or that one or more of my jotted entries has some prerequisite that I've overlooked. Oftentimes, these recovered omissions can totally change the day's direction. Finally, after prioritizing each entry, I reach the last step: "The Rewrite." This is where I list the items again (on a clean sheet of paper, mind you) in their logistical order.

Now the word "neurotic" may come to mind. However, over the years, I have found that this little routine helps me eliminate two pests: hurry and indecision. Because I've allotted time for each item on my list, rarely is my day rushed – and consequently, my mind is better focused on the task at hand. Of course each day holds the unseen, and things do pop up. But for the most part, few things take me by surprise throughout the course of my workday. This is in contrast to a lot of people in business who seem to run around with their hair on fire, unable to make it to the other side of the room without a sudden remembrance yanking them in a different direction.

It's interesting to me that throughout my career, I have yet to tire of this morning ritual. When my feet hit the floor, I actually look forward to getting that cup of coffee and sorting through my mind's disarray. It is my attempt to seize control of my day. Because I know that if I don't, the day will no doubt attempt to seize control of me.

One of the ongoing items on my daily list is quiet time for personal Bible study. I'm convinced that were it not on the list, I would never find the time for it. I look forward to this time and I believe wholeheartedly that the Lord uses it to help guide my life. I admit, though, there are times when it's hard to keep it in the schedule. Some days, the squeaky wheel of business simply takes precedence. The Scriptures indicate that God understands these human predicaments – however, on such occasions, I can't help but be reminded of Jesus' parable about the sower and the seed that fell among the thorns:

"Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."  
– *Matthew 13:22-23; (NKJV)*

"The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches." Are those not the very culprits that separate us from our Creator? The truth is, we all live among the thorns. Our lives are filled with a multitude of worldly

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## **We know that Scripture should be an integral part of our life, but just how are we to work it in?**

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distractions. And so, there exists a real need to continually weed and cultivate our hearts so that we become "good soil" for God's Word. We know that



Scripture should be an integral part of our life, but just how are we to work it in? The answer: organization and routine. You need a plan.

When structuring any Bible study program, remember that there is no set approach. Our lives are varied and each has its own rhythm. So it's important to craft a plan that's right for you. Though I currently study on my own, in the past I have been a member of some small Bible study groups and have benefited greatly from those experiences. So, you may want to consider joining an existing study circle – or even forming your own. Mention the idea to your fraternity brothers. You may be surprised to discover that there are others like yourself who desire a closer relationship with God.

Before you begin any study regimen, there are some decisions that must first be made:

1) **Decide on a Bible.** Because the English language has a way of changing from one generation to the next, a number of efforts have been made over the years to present Scripture in a contemporary language. Such translations make Bible study easier and more palatable to the modern-day reader. There are a variety of Bible versions out there. Following are some of the more popular ones:

- The New International Version (NIV)
- The New King James Version (NKJV)
- The New American Standard Bible (NASB)
- The New Living Translation (NLT)
- The King James Version (KJV)\*

*\* The King James Bible is not a modern translation. It is the old English version compiled in the early 1600s. However, it's the version from which the others originated and is considered authoritative by many.*

While of course the phrasing is different in each version, the intended message is largely the same. A quick online visit to Bible Gateway ([www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)) will let you compare passages from these and other translations.

2) **Decide on a Time.** Create a standing appointment with God – keeping in mind that there is no right or wrong time of day. Many prefer the first thing in the morning since this is a time that is generally less susceptible to interruption. However, the evening may suit your schedule better. It is entirely up to you.

3) **Decide on a Place.** The right environment is an important element of a successful Bible study. My choice has been to spend this quiet time in the privacy of my office away from the goings on of my family. When I get to the office in the morning, I return to my same spot where everything is in its place and ready for me to pick back up. Find a quiet spot that is right for you.

4) **Decide On a Timeframe.** What day will you start? Will your plan include weekends? How much time will you allow for each session? Fifteen minutes? Thirty minutes? An hour or more? Be realistic here, but also be flexible – willing to reevaluate or make adjustments to your plan until you find a good working routine. Whatever timeframe you choose, be sure it works within your day-to-day schedule.

5) **Decide on a Study Method.** The best method for any undertaking is one that begins with prayer. The greatest men in our society prayed to God. Robert E. Lee prayed with his soldiers in the midst of battle. Eisenhower prayed on D-Day. And the Bible tells us that

Jesus Himself spent much time in communion with the Father. They all knew God to be our most reliable source for guidance in anything we do. So, before you begin each Bible study, take a moment and ask God to prepare your heart for His Word and counsel.

There are many systematic approaches to Bible study. A lot of people have read the Scriptures by taking it one book at a time. However, if you do this, I would advise against starting at the first page and reading through to the last. Do that, and chances are you'll burn out on the Old Testament, fall away from your study and never reach the Gospel books (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John) and the all-important story of Jesus.

Whatever your approach, you should adopt a study method that fosters commitment – and there are many tools on the market that can help you do just that. Though the teachings in the Bible are timeless, qualified commentary is important and can bring clarity and understanding to otherwise hard-to-follow passages. Research the various concordances, study guides, and commentary books out there. They can help you in your resolution to assimilate the Bible.

One great study tool for busy people is the “NIV One Year Bible.” This book is divided into 365 relatively short readings – requiring only 15 or 20 minutes a day. With this study tool, the reader is led through the entire Bible in a 12-month period. Each reading contains a portion of the Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs. Though intended for daily use (the pages are even marked with the month and date), the format is still helpful no matter how long it takes the reader to complete it. Of course, there are many other viable approaches to Bible study. Check out the bookstores and see what appeals to you.

6) **Decide on a Church.** Wait a minute! Who said anything about going to church? Seriously, though, you might consider attending a good Bible-based church in your area to reinforce what you learn in your study. Church sermons and lessons can go a long way in illuminating the stories of Scripture. Not to mention, church attendance honors God and allows you to interact with other believers. It can also strengthen you in your daily Christian walk. However, be judicious in choosing a place of worship. Their teachings are not all the same, and not all churches under a cross emphasize the importance of the Bible.

7) **Decide to Apply What You Learn.** The Book of James tells us to be "doers of the word." It says: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it. He will be blessed in what he does."

– *James 1:22-25; (NIV)*

Remember, God's wisdom is to be understood and *employed* – not just read and checked off the list. So, as you read your Bible, look inward and ask yourself things as you go along: Is there something here for me? Do I need forgiveness? Do I need to forgive? Should I stop doing that? Do I need to share this with someone else? Enter into every study expecting divine direction in your own life.

Hopefully, these seven points will help you customize a Bible study plan that is right for you. Work towards making it a permanent part of your life. There will be days when God's Word speaks to you in profound ways. However, there will also be days when it does not. On such occasions, you may even find the reading dry and boring. Persevere nonetheless, and continue the regimen of study. Do this, and years from now, you will be able to look back and see how that one simple commitment shaped and blessed your life.

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**Feed on God's Word regularly  
and you will be amazed at how  
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Regular Bible study is vital to your Christian walk. Because none of us are likely to encounter a burning bush or hear an audible voice from above, it is our obligation to search God out in the Scriptures. Feed on His Word regularly and you will be amazed at how often His direction shows up in your daily life. When this happens, it is not mere coincidence, but your Heavenly Father speaking to you! The Scriptures are His mouthpiece and if we are not familiar with them, then receiving His counsel becomes next to impossible. Many may profess to having a relationship with God, but unless they are grounded in the words of the Bible, then they have no real reference for this God they claim to know. Unless you get in on His side of the conversation, it's sort of hard to call what you have a relationship.

You may have grown up in a Christian home and already know what Christ did for you. Or it could be that you've never darkened the door of a church, or cracked open a Bible. Or perhaps, you know just enough about Christianity to feel comfortable with the language and the main points. Or maybe you don't want to think about any of it at all because of a fear that you don't quite measure up.

Whatever your situation, background or experience, please remember, God calls all people to Him – whoever they are, wherever they are, no matter what they've done. In fact, accepting the grace of Jesus Christ is the only way any of us can make it through the door. This tremendous "come as you are" invitation is a first step that is available to all. And yet... what happens next is important as well.

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**"Okay... just who *is* God?"  
No man could convince me  
that he really knew.**

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Like so many others, you may be under the impression that since God is a good God, man's salvation is certain – therefore our attitudes and behaviors are inconsequential. Whatever your understanding or position, consider the fact that the Bible says that our lives do matter. They matter a great deal. Every man, Christian or not, will one day face God's ultimate judgment on the basis of his life. Therefore, mere intellectual Christianity (simply acknowledging that Christ is Lord) is not sufficient to deliver someone from that judgment. Of course, this is a strong statement. But don't just take my word for it. Go to the source.

I remember reaching the point in my life when I asked, "Okay... just who *is* God?" No man could convince me that he really knew. Nor could any human theory ever satisfy my yearning to grasp the true nature of our Creator. I had to search Him out for myself. I was compelled to read with my own two eyes, the Scriptures of old – and use whatever study guides I could find to process their meanings first hand. Only then, could I *really* know the Lord God. Only then could I know how to conduct my life so as to please Him. And only then, could I ever hope to recognize my Father when the inevitable day came for us to meet face to face.

In the summer before my junior year at The University of Alabama, I had an encounter with someone considered to be the greatest "man with a plan" that ever walked the campus. As a matter of fact, he was a bonafide legend. It was Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant, and my visit with him was memorable, to say the least. In fact, the short amount of time I spent with him turned out to be one of my life's most embarrassing moments.

Back in the early eighties I was rush chairman in my fraternity. At that time, we had been entertaining Coach Bryant's grandson, Marc, in hopes of pledging him in the fall (which we did). One night, Marc was in Tuscaloosa staying at his grandfather's and six or seven of us drove there to pick him up for dinner and a night out. Arriving in front of Coach Bryant's home, it was agreed that it would look pretty ridiculous if we all piled in at the front door – so we decided that only two of us should go. To settle on which two, we flipped a coin. The winners: Myself, and a husky new initiate named Nick.

Most people I know become quite disturbed by this next statement. I am not a huge football fan. I mean, I like it okay... but I don't live and breathe the stuff the way most Alabamians do. So, while I was glad to go in and perhaps meet this legendary coach, I was not what you might call jazzed about it. And due to my lack of passion for the game, I wasn't really up to speed on all the stats and lingo that seemed to flow so endlessly from the hearts and mouths of my fraternity brothers. Nonetheless, I went on up to the door, though it was difficult to keep up with Nick – a hard-boiled football enthusiast – who was a good eight to ten steps ahead of me. The second I reached the first of the front steps, Nick rang the bell. Shortly thereafter, Marc answered the door, and (as we had hoped) he asked if we would like to come inside and meet his grandfather. So, with a quick sneer directed to the losers left in the car, we stepped inside.

I probably know a hundred people or more who would have paid a lot of money to see what I saw next. We walked into the den of what I remember as being a surprisingly modest home, and there sat Coach Bryant – in his stocking feet, eating supper at a card table in front of the TV. His charming wife, Mary Harmon, was very sweet and friendly to us as she was darting in and out of the room with all kinds of plates and platters. She was laying out quite a spread for her husband. There was fried chicken, a variety of hot vegetables, sliced tomatoes and – I'll never forget – a basket of rolls.

Nick walked right over and sat down in the chair closest to the coach, while I took my seat on the sofa just inside the doorway. Marc remained standing there behind me. I recall Coach Bryant



being cordial and kind but still very much true to the rock-like image that most of us hold in our heads. Naturally, Nick was full of questions and gridiron commentary, while I struggled pronouncing my own name when asked for it. I was nervous, and Coach Bryant knew it. He could see it in my eyes.

I'm sure we had not been there a good five minutes before I privately decided it was time to get the heck out of there. I had done what I came to do. I met the famous football coach and now it was time to leave.

Perhaps sensing my discomfort, Marc broke the ice by offering us all something to eat. However, because he was standing behind me, I never saw his gesture toward the basket on the table when he tapped me on the shoulder and asked, "Do y'all want a roll?" I misunderstood him. Because what I *heard* was, "Do y'all wanna roll?" And in that instant, I jumped to my feet, and in a sort of Barney Fife fashion, I tucked in my shirt a bit and replied, "Yeah... I guess it *is* 'bout time for us to be going."

I bet I'm one of the few people who ever saw Coach Bryant laugh like that. The whole room laughed at me standing there all alone. And a memory was made.

Looking back on that experience, I realize now that my nervousness stemmed from the fact that I didn't speak Coach Bryant's language. Of course, I knew he was a great football coach and I was well aware of his celebrity status, but that was about it. I went into that house without really knowing the man. And that was okay, because he was just that – a man.

But one day, a far greater encounter is in store for me. This is when I meet my Creator. And on that day, I intend to be a little better prepared. I'll need to really *know* Him. Because if I don't, He will surely see it in my eyes. So, my plan is to carefully organize my life right now – so when that big moment comes, I'll know Him. I'll know Him going in.



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