SIXTY-SIX BOOKS

The world’s best-selling book, the Bible, was written between roughly 1500 B.C. and approximately A.D. 100 by some forty authors. Each of these authors had different cultures, educational backgrounds, personalities, and languages, yet their writings do not contradict each other under the rubric of Christ. If it weren't for the same Spirit who inspired all of these writers, a similar harmony could not exist if forty random shepherds, farmers, tentmakers, physicians, fishermen, priests, philosophers, and kings from different times and cultures were to write a 66-book compilation.

Today the Bible is translated into hundreds of languages and continues to grow in its circulation. What is it about the text that continues to impact thousands of souls daily? The evidence remains that the Bible is a book that has supernatural ramifications, regardless of personal background. This is why the Word of God plays a crucial role in discipleship.

We have established that disciples are called to make disciples. But there are limitations to human ability. So last week, we studied prayer as one power source that involves God in discipleship. This week, we will look at a second source that connects disciples directly with the power of God.
Write out Isaiah 55:1–13 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write Isaiah 55:6–11. You may also re-write the passage in your own words, outline, or mind-map the chapter.
WAYS AND THOUGHTS

More than a compilation of other peoples’ spiritual experiences or a record of ancient Near Eastern history, the Bible is the Word of God. Christian clichés have blurred the import of this phrase. But the Word of God denotes that the Lord has the ability to create, transform, change, generate, produce, and affect—all through the medium of communication. It is profound to think that the basis of all creation is thought and sound. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1–4).

The Bible then becomes a book that not only contains historical references to the Word of God affecting the course of humanity, but it is the Word of God itself. Psalm 33:6, 9 states that everything was made “by the Word of the Lord.” Verse 6 emphasizes the actual “word of the Lord” having “breath” and coming from His “mouth.” Verse 9 points out that God “spoke, and it was done,” signifying the immediate creation of existence by mere spoken word.

As a result, there are things that God cannot do! Yes, “for with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37) in the sphere of humanity. But in the realm of divinity, God cannot go against what He has said (the Word of God), for not only is it what He said, but it is also that which He is! Titus 1:2 declares that God “cannot lie,” while Hebrews 6:18 maintains “it is impossible for God to lie.” It is this basis that reflects the power of God to change and to cause results and fruit in the life of the disciple.

Isaiah 55 highlights the power of God through His Word. Verse 7 highlights the dual words of repetition: ways and thoughts. In imploring humanity to seek and return to God, He admonishes the wicked and unrighteous to forsake their ways and thoughts. Then verses 8 and 9 emphasize the ways and thoughts of God. Notice the pattern that flows from one couple to another: My thoughts to your thoughts; your ways to My ways; My ways to your ways; and, My thoughts to your thoughts.

First God implores us to leave our ways and thoughts behind. Second, He emphasizes how our ways and thoughts are different from His ways and thoughts. Then, in verse 9, the chapter points out that His ways and thoughts are not only different but also higher. This height is not a problem, because as the rain comes down from heaven to earth, the ways and thoughts of the heavenly God come down to earth.

This condescension is dually manifested in the written Word of God, the Bible, and in the living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. This Word will not return to God void but will accomplish what pleases God and shall prosper in the intention that God sent it/Him (v. 11). Verse 12 showcases the ways that the Word of God is effective: transformation of the people’s hearts, singing, rejoicing, the created world acknowledging its Creator, the removal of the negative, and the eternal remaining of the positive (verse 12).

The power of God is in His Word (Matt. 22:29; Mark 12:24). This power must be experienced today by every disciple of Jesus. There are trends in religion that deny this power and attribute God’s power to other spiritual fads and programs. But history and personal accounts throughout the ages testify to the power of God in the Word of God.
THE CONTACT POINT

Paul writes, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6). In other words, Paul had a role to play, and another individual named Apollos had a role to play, but it was God who empowered these two and is generally responsible for the fruit at the end of the day. But how does God cause this “increase”?

Other religions and denominations acknowledge the gulf between humanity and divinity. As a means to connect the two, each propose a contact point to bring the divine and human together. For some, it is through human works and ritual. For others, it is through objects and actions of meaning. Even within Christianity, some forms of contact points are through the medium of water, others of bread and wine, and yet others through a form of worship. Some encounter God through dreams, others through music, and still others through tangible objects.

Hebrews 4:12 records, “For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Unlike other books, the Bible is not read merely for information. This living and powerful Book is the disciple’s source of spiritual life and power. It is not when the Bible is carried in the hands, read with the eyes, studied with the mind, or even memorized by the brain that we encounter divinity; but the true contact point between divine and human occurs when the heart hears the voice of God and obeys with its entire will. The encounter is then when disciples experience the power of conversion through the Word. Just as metal swords cut through human flesh, the Bible cuts through the inner ways and thoughts of humanity in a manner that only the divine can do.

The discipleship process must be saturated with the Word of God. There are different types of Bible studies. One type is original Bible studies, in which the individual discovers the truth through their own search. The second is baptismal preparation studies to start their formal discipleship with Jesus. The third is discipleship studies after baptism that continue to support their beginning stages of training. And last is practical training to give Bible studies to others, continuing the discipleship process.

While the four types of Bible studies given to new disciples are vital altogether, the most important contact point happens during their Bible study time alone to connect with God.
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Psalm 119 (particularly vv. 11, 50, 154)
James 1:21, 22
2 Peter 1:2–4

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with discipleship and Bible study?

Too often Christian disciples are in want of a spiritual life or deeper devotional experience, yet cannot find it. Coupled with air/prayer is the concept of feeding/reading. Just as the new man of Christ is born and needs to breathe without ceasing, the same also needs nourishment. Just as we eat physical food, in our spiritual life we must eat to gain strength, nutrition, and energy. Just as we have the choice between nutritious foods and empty calories, the spiritual life can also be affected by profound and enriching truths or by empty rituals and “fluff.” The lack of study of God’s Word results in atrophy, lack of motivation and energy, weakness, hunger, and eventually death. The ideal balance of discipleship will incorporate all three sources of discipleship’s power (more on the third one next week).

Disciples who do not feed on the Word have no spiritual life. Jesus says in John 6:53, 63, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. . . . The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” Just as any follower would know and treasure the words and teachings of his or her teacher, Christian disciples should know and treasure the words and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. The difference is that His Word is not just a philosophy or way of life but the actual means by which supernatural transformation and conversion occur.

Disciples who feed on the Word have positive energy and joyous enthusiasm. Jeremiah describes His experience with God’s Word in Jeremiah 15:16 as such: God’s words were “found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.” Again, not taking a rhetorical or scholastic function, the Bible takes on an existential role that impacts purpose, identity, calling, and attitude for life.

The Bible should be read as many times as it is needed for spiritual sustenance. Without air/prayer, spiritual death by asphyxiation is immediate; without feeding/reading, however, spiritual death by starvation is gradual. Scripture records that there is a special affinity between God’s Word and the morning (Ezek. 12:8; Ps. 119:147; Jer. 25:5). The exact time of day is not as important as establishing a consistent relationship of speaking (prayer) and listening to God (Bible study).
CHRIST IN ALL THE BIBLE

“The power of Christ, the crucified Saviour, to give eternal life, should be presented to the people. We should show them that the Old Testament is as verily the gospel in types and shadows as the New Testament is in its unfolding power. The New Testament does not present a new religion; the Old Testament does not present a religion to be superseded by the New. The New Testament is only the advancement and unfolding of the Old. Abel was a believer in Christ, and was as verily saved by His power as was Peter or Paul. Enoch was a representative of Christ as surely as was the beloved disciple John. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. To him was committed the message of the second coming of Christ. ‘And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all.’ Jude 14, 15. The message preached by Enoch and his translation to heaven were a convincing argument to all who lived in his time. These things were an argument that Methuselah and Noah could use with power to show that the righteous could be translated.

“That God who walked with Enoch was our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He was the light of the world then just as He is now. Those who lived then were not without teachers to instruct them in the path of life; for Noah and Enoch were Christians. The gospel is given in precept in Leviticus. Implicit obedience is required now, as then. How essential it is that we understand the importance of this word!

“The question is asked: What is the cause of the dearth in the church? The answer is: We allow our minds to be drawn away from the word. If the word of God were eaten as the food for the soul, if it were treated with respect and deference, there would be no necessity for the many and repeated testimonies that are borne. The simple declarations of Scripture would be received and acted upon.

“Its living principles are as the leaves of the tree of life for the healing of the nations.

“The word of the living God is not merely written, but spoken. The Bible is God’s voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe would we open God’s word, and with what earnestness would we search its precepts! The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One.

“When Satan presses his suggestions upon our minds, we may, if we cherish a ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ be drawn into the secret pavilion of the Most High.

“Many fail of imitating our holy Pattern because they study so little the definite features of that character. So many are full of busy plans, always active; and there is no time or place for the precious Jesus to be a close, dear companion. They do not refer every thought and action to Him, inquiring: ‘Is this the way of the Lord?’ If they did they would walk with God, as did Enoch.”

(Testimonies, Vol. 6, 392, 393)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How many times a day do you eat? How many times a day do you eat spiritually? Can the Bible be overeaten?

How can you incorporate the study of Scripture in your daily schedule?

How can the Scriptures be made more a daily part of our spiritual walk in contemporary times?

What are your ways and thoughts that need to be forsaken? How can the Word accomplish this?

Up to what point should Scripture be adapted, or would that be altering the potential power of Scripture?

In what ways are the written and living Word of God the same?

What role does the Bible really play in your daily spiritual warfare?