

lesson 1. 101

You and the Bible

The Bible is an extraordinary book, not just in terms of its unique history and compilation but also in its claims to hold the ultimate revelation of God himself. We should never lose our sense of

wonder at the fact that we can even hold it in our hands. Many Christians around the world today do not have such open access to the Bible and the majority of Christians down through history never held a Bible in their hands.

First-century believers would have been amazed at the ease at which today's Christians can buy a Bible, and equally astonished at the casual attitude most Christians hold toward the Word of God. For them, the scrolls and parchments that recorded God's Word were a treasure beyond comparison.

As Antony of Egypt commented back in the third century, "Be astounded that God should have written to us."

It is not uncommon in the West for a home to have more than one Bible. And yet for many people, the Bible remains on the shelf, dusted off for special occasions or maybe carried as a symbol of spirituality on church visits. We may have open access to the Bible, but for the vast majority of people, the Bible remains a closed book.

An Open Book

God's intention, however, is that the Bible be an open book for you. He has invested within its pages a description of his will and plan for your life. So what makes the Bible open up come alive, so to speak?

Read Luke 8:11-15

This parable of Jesus highlights the one factor that makes the difference between the Bible being a closed book or an open book for you the receptivity of your heart (for the full parable, read Luke 8:4-15). In this famous parable, four kinds of hearts are described:

A calloused heart - a heart that is hardened against God's Word.

A shallow heart - a heart with little depth for God's Word to take permanent root.

A distracted heart - a heart pulled away from God's Word, torn in many directions by desires or worries.

An open heart - a heart receptive and responsive to the Word of God.

Now here comes the important question. Which kind of heart do you have? By taking a regular inventory of your heart's condition, you can make sure that you have an open heart toward God's Word.

The hardening of a person's heart can happen if he or she consistently refuses to obey the promptings of God's Spirit or puts up barriers against God due to hurts and emotional wounds. If you find that your heart is in any way hardened, the answer is simple: ask God to soften it. Even that request is a major step forward toward God opening your heart to his Word.

If you believe your heart lacks depth, the answer lies in two areas - 1) maintaining a daily intimacy with God in prayer and 2) obedience to his Word in the face of difficult circumstances. Remember: a shallow heart still receives God's Word. What is needed is to allow the Word of God to take root and bear fruit. This can only happen through consistency and perseverance (read Romans 15:4).

If you find your heart is distracted by the "cares of this world," the Word of God itself holds the answer. By responding specifically to God's promises concerning issues of material concerns (Matthew 6:24-34; Hebrews

Read Hosea 10:12

Regardless of the condition of your heart, the Holy Spirit has been sent to help you plow up the ground of your heart in preparation for receiving the Word of God. The action of God's Word itself can have a plowing effect, exposing the thoughts and attitudes of your heart (read Hebrews 4:12).

KEY THOUGHT

The key to the Bible becoming an open book for you is this:

1) Closed heart

2) Closed book

3) Open heart

4) Open book

An open heart to God's Word is not a rare condition. It is a result of the plowing action of God's Spirit and constant exposure to God's Word. And, as we shall see as we continue through this course, having an open heart to God is part of what it means to be a new creation in Christ.

Two Characteristics of an Open Heart

There are two main characteristics of a heart open to God's Word:

Hunger for the Word of God

Nothing can substitute for a driving hunger for God's Word. It is not enough just to open the Bible. There must be a hunger for God to reveal himself in his Word. If you feel like there is not yet a hunger for the

Word of God, make this a priority in prayer. Ask God to give you a hunger for his Word and you will find that this is a prayer he delights in answering.

A hunger for God's Word is the hallmark of a close walk with God. If you feel you don't yet have a deep hunger for the Word of God, you will probably find that your relationship with God is somewhat distant. Conversely, if you consistently spend time with the Lord each day, you'll find that your hunger for his Word will deepen.

in the story of Aladdin, a hidden labyrinth of treasures - spiritual gold, silver and precious gemstones. But the key that unlocks all those treasures is the hunger of an open heart.

Read Proverbs 2:1-6

If you've already discovered the stirrings of hunger for God's Word, then you will find that the Bible's pages will ring with the voice of God's Spirit. God has hidden treasures for you in his Word. Each page is like the "cave of wonders"

Read Psalm 19:7-11