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# *Any Old Bush Will Burn*

THE TRANSFORMING POWER THAT GOD UNLEASHES through His Word literally changes lives. We know this, don't we? We read from time to time about people in the Bible who were simply over the top for God. We see the neighbor down the street who is fired up for Jesus not just in the way she talks, but also in the nitty-gritty of life. We go to a conference and hear that special speaker who has spiritual passion radiating a twelve foot circle around her. We see our pastor tirelessly laboring for the Gospel of Christ because of his overwhelming love for the Savior and for His people. We have this friend who actually has purpose in life and seems to know truth. We see people who have been set ablaze by God, and in them, we catch glimpses of what our lives might be if God set us ablaze with a holy passion for Himself.

Why is it that the life-changing power of the Word of God is always changing some other person's life? I think it is very often because the enemy is selling lies, and we are snatching them up like sale shoes at Nine West. Perhaps we fail once in our reading, we find something we don't understand, we have a hard time sticking with Bible reading, and all of a sudden we find ourselves believing that we can't study the Bible. It's too

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hard. We will just never understand it. But these are lies...all of them! The truth is, as the old saying goes, “any old bush will burn” when it is set ablaze by God.

As we look at how to draw near to God through His Word, I am going to offer some very practical suggestions. You see, I’ve failed in almost every possible way in Bible reading, which makes me something of an expert in the area of what not to do.

Remember, the goal we have is getting into God’s Word and falling more and more in love with Him and His Word. Every suggestion I make, every suggested reading or assignment has that in mind. Everything in this book is designed to help you get into the Word of God. If you start reading this book and halfway through find yourself bored with me and enthralled with God’s Word, then please, pass this book along to someone else and marinate in the true Word!

### GETTING STARTED

Don’t become depressed if you’re not that far along on this journey. If you’re not that far along, you’re not that far along. It’s all right. Just ask God to help you. Remember, no one comes to God as a spiritual adult.

Let’s think about our spiritual journey as if it were a physical trip from Chicago to Florida like the one my family does on an almost annual basis. Many of us don’t have the patience for a long car ride through Marion, Illinois, to Paducah, Kentucky, on to Nashville and Chattanooga and Atlanta, and finally to the Sunshine State. We want a jet to pick us up in front of our house and sweep us to Florida in a couple of hours. Spiritual growth, however, doesn’t happen that fast. It takes time. In fact, it looks more like an extended car trip than a ride on a jet.

So whether you’re all the way to Atlanta, spiritually speaking, or just getting out of the Chicago suburbs, remember that a trip takes time. The only way you get where you’re going is by getting started in the first place.

And speaking of getting started, at the end of each chapter, you’re going to find a section entitled, “Drawing Near.” Here you will find op-

portunities to get into the Word of God for yourself in ways that, hopefully, will spur you on to more and more and more and more reading. However, before you look at all of the opportunities for reading, and keel over in sheer excitement, you need to know that you are not supposed to take advantage of all of them. At least not all at once. I am often grieved by people who decide not to study God's Word at all because they feel that if they become part of a Bible study group, for instance, they may not be able to finish everything the class requires; they may not be able to do it just the way they'd like. That has got to be on Satan's top ten list of effective lies. This study doesn't have a bottom line amount of homework to be completed each week. It is purposely designed to ebb and flow with your life and to push you more and more to read, not just this book, but God's Book.

In Part 1, I'm going to offer some gut-level practical suggestions for reading God's Word, many of which I've learned from the experience of trying approaches that haven't worked. I'm all for learning from other people's mistakes, and in this section you'll have the opportunity to learn from some of mine without having to learn by making the same mistakes yourself.

If the operative words of Part 1 are "How To," then the operative words of Part 2 are "So What?" So we've learned to read the Bible, so we've drawn near to the flame, what then should our lives look like?

Part 1 is all about drawing near to the flame of God's Word while Part 2 looks at being set ablaze by God and His Word and considers the mission to which Christ has called us.

With that said, you should understand that my goal is not to present a system, per se. Rather it is to help you identify barriers to reading. To help you identify lies you've snapped up and wrong thinking patterns that you probably haven't even considered to be faulty. It is to help you to remove them so you can put yourself more and more into contact with God's life-changing Word—to draw near the flame.

GETTING UNSTUCK

So often our minds simply get “stuck in the mud,” and we find that we are crippling ourselves by limiting our thinking. For instance, we let the enemy tell us that we can’t read the Bible, and we just take him at his word.

My mind goes to the story of the woman who always cut the end off the roast before putting it in the oven. One day as she was preparing dinner for the family, her daughter asked her, “Mommy, why do you always cut the end off of the roast before you cook it?” Her mom answered, “Well, sweetie, that’s what Grandma always did.” The girl was not satisfied. Later that evening, when the extended family arrived for dinner, the girl asked her grandma, “Grandma, why did you always cut the end off the roast before cooking it?” Grandma answered, looking over at her mother, the girl’s great grandmother, “I always did it, because that’s how Great-Granny always prepared her roasts.” The girl looked toward Great-Granny, who laughed and said, “I cut off the end of the roast because it wouldn’t fit in the pan.”

For years, I kept “cutting the end off the roast” in my Bible reading. I had developed set ways of thinking that I constantly applied to my Bible reading, thoughts like:

- ✦ If I’m going to read through the Bible, then I need to start at the beginning and read through to the end.
- ✦ If I’m going to read the Bible, then I have to understand everything that I read right away.
- ✦ If I’m going to read the Bible, then I have to have “quiet” time and read under perfect conditions.
- ✦ If I’m going to read through the Bible, then I have to stick to a set reading schedule.
- ✦ If I’m going to read through the Bible, then I have to muster up the energy to do it by myself—and I just can’t. I simply don’t have it in me.

I don't know exactly when I picked up these thoughts, but I operated by them, nonetheless, and each in its own way hampered me as I sought to read. They became real barriers to reading through my Bible. Every time I tried to read, I went about it the same way, with the same set of presuppositions, listening to the same lies from the enemy, and every time with the same results...failure. I got stuck. I wanted to read the entire counsel of the Word of God. Honestly, I did, but I felt powerless to accomplish the task. Finally, I started praying that God would give me a relentless desire for His Word. And that is where it all begins, asking God for the desire. As He answered that prayer, and as I began reading, God helped me out of the ruts I had been in and revolutionized my reading.

As you read, feel free to skim over the truths. You may already have a handle on some of truths we'll talk about, so don't linger there. Spend your time in the areas where you need help. Don't waste time on issues that don't apply to your situation. Don't waste time on my words unless they will help point you to His Words. The goal here is not for you to get a heapin' helpin' of my opinions, but to help you get into the very Word of God itself. His Words, ultimately, are the only words that matter.

#### CALLING THE MAN

In my family and extended family, we have a phrase that gets bantered about quite often. "Call the man." You see, "call the man" is what you do when the man (or woman) of the house can't deal with a problem at hand either because of a lack of ability, skill, knowledge, or time. The toilet's plugged up and no amount of plunging seems to work. "Call the man." The freezer sounds like a raccoon is dying somewhere in its bowels. "Call the man." Something smokes every time the dryer is started. "Call the man."

Have you had a "call the man" incident in your household recently? Most of us do from time to time. But sometimes, for whatever reason, we don't "call the man." Instead, we sort meander along with the problem hanging around. We kind of ignore it and hope it will go away or that someone else will deal with it.

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We had one of those not too long ago. It was a bitter cold Chicago night and for some reason, my house was full of children...and dogs. Ten, as I recall—seven human, three canine. I was minding my own business in another room of the house and trying to put some distance between the pack and myself when I noticed a child slinking past his father and into the room where I was. When big things break, most children seem to prefer Mom. As my then fourth-grader approached, I could almost hear the ka-ching of repair bills in my head. The victim: a double-paned thermal window in the corner of the living room had been assaulted by a posse of kids and dogs all piling onto one badly placed recliner. What happened wasn't a pretty sight.

My husband patched the inner pane with duct tape—the universal repair tool—and we ignored the broken window for a while. After all, it was sub-zero outside. It was the middle of the winter, and we didn't want to take the window out and then take it somewhere leaving us exposed to the elements. We also figured that if we “called the man,” he'd probably have to take it with him too, it would cost even more, and we'd still be without a window for some time. So we decided to wait until warmer weather. We knew there was nothing we could do in our own power to fix it apart from “calling the man” or bringing the window to “the man.”

Well, warmer weather came and went, and it came and went again. I kept waiting for someone to take the window out and take it to “the man.” It obviously wasn't fixing itself. It was, after all, hidden in a corner and, oh, so fashionably taped. One day, I finally had had enough. I picked up the phone and “called the man.” What happened amazed me. A couple of days later “the man” came and measured my window. He told me how much a replacement would cost. I learned that this type of window couldn't be fixed. It has to be replaced. He ordered the new window and put it in a few days later. Sure, the one hundred fifty bucks set me back a bit, but I had no other options. I can't fix a window. The only way for me to confront this problem was to call for help.

It is exactly the same thing when it comes to reading your Bible. It's not something you can pull off on your own. Please understand that I mean absolutely no irreverence here. I am simply making an analogy: When it comes to drawing near to God through His Word, we need to "call the Man" in prayer. Oh, how He longs to answer the prayers of those who long to know Him better!

Take a moment to read some of Jesus' last words to His disciples before He went to the cross. They are recorded in the gospel of John in chapters fifteen through seventeen printed below.

As you read these three chapters, take a pen or pencil and mark any reference(s) you can find in which Jesus tells His disciples to pray or to ask things of the Father.

## JOHN 15

*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every [branch] that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither [can] you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and [so] prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and [that] your joy may be made full.*

*This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down*

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his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and [that] your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another.

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before [it hated] you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "A slave is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But [they have done this] to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, "They hated Me without a cause."

When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, [that is] the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you [will] testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

### **JOHN 16**

"These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour

comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.

“But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

“I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear [them] now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose [it] to you. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose to you what is to come. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.

“A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.” [Some] of His disciples then said to one another, “What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father?’” So they were saying, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.” Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, “Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’? Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the

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anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one [will] take your joy away from you. In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.”

His disciples said, “Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God.” Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? Behold, an hour is coming, and has [already] come, for you to be scattered, each to his own [home], and to leave Me alone; and [yet] I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

### **JOHN 17**

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work

*which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

*“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received [them] and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.*

*“I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. I am no longer in the world; and [yet] they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, [the name] which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We [are]. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil [one]. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.*

*“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, [are] in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the*

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*world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*

*“O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”*

## *Questions*

1. What did Jesus say about making requests of God?
2. What did Jesus have to say about the Holy Spirit?
3. What role do you see prayer and the Holy Spirit playing in your life?

When we come to God humbly in prayer, there is a sense in which we are taking off the rubber gloves of our soul. We are opening ourselves up to “catch” what He’s giving. It is His work, but we are no longer in a state of resisting, or as Paul would put it in the book of Romans, of holding down the truth. As you prepare today to draw near to God through His Word, ask Him to help you to remember to seek Him in prayer every time you open your Bible.



## *Drawing Near*

As you go along throughout your week, pick one—or several—of the opportunities for drawing near. Some days you'll have more time than usual. Other days you'll be so busy and stressed that you'll find drawing near to God to be your only refuge. Some days you'll have running noses running around the house or other metaphorical fires to put out, and you may not be able to draw near to God through His Word as much as you'd like.

Would you do something for me? Would you consider resolving right now that this will be okay? Decide that you won't go overboard and take the attitude, "If I can't do as much as I think I should, I'm not going to do anything at all." One of the favorite sayings that my Precept class has is, "Some is better than none." So, now's your chance. Ask God to guide you with His Spirit—and let's begin learning to draw near to the fire by completing one or a few of the following:

- ♦ Review the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 15–17 and commit to memory one or several key verses on prayer.
- ♦ Read the apostle John's other letters: 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John.
- ♦ Read the full gospel of John.
- ♦ Read the Sermon on the Mount located in Matthew 5–7 to see what else Jesus has to say about making requests of the Father. Note what you learned.

