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REACHING THE TOP

Understanding the Bible is a lot like going on a trek. First, observation. You scope out the terrain, observing the content of Scripture. It's much like surveying a map. Second, interpretation. You read the trailmarkers, interpreting the content in context. Third, application. You go on the trek, stepping out in faith, trusting and obeying what you've read. Then, transformation. You are being changed on the journey as you are reaching for your goal. But there are lots of switch-backs along the way.

1- CLIMBING a mountain. Many years ago I scaled Mt Hood in Oregon. At 11,250 feet, it stands 10,000 feet higher than Iowa. Looking at pictures made me want more. Reading about a mountain is nothing like being there. Even viewing it from valleys below is rewarding in itself, but it's nothing like being on the trails. And hiking the forests and foothills is just not the same as climbing to the summit.

You don't just hit a trail and keep going until you reach the top. There are rockfalls, fumeroles, crevasses, avalanches, etc. A climb begins with preparation. Maps, gear, tools, crampons, ice ax, carabiners, ropes, practice, group training, etc. Then you start about 3:30 am above timberline, embarking on a physically taxing, time-consuming, frustrating, exhilarating, life-changing experience. The view from the top is truly transformative. You've overcome all the obstacles, enduring, persevering. You see all the other peaks and ranges yet to be conquered. You're changed by the climb, and ready for more.

2- PRACTICE drives change. Understanding the Bible is much like climbing a mountain. Reaching a summit is a once-for-all achievement, but the transformation that comes from the Bible never ends. Your whole life becomes a climb for a summit that ends in heaven, joined with Christ. It takes all day every day moment by moment, all of your lifetime, to put into practice what you learn each day. As in 2 Corinthians 3-4, believers are in union with Christ and are transformed by degrees to become like Him, day by day. This is your goal, as you choose to believe what He has written, and to live it out, by His power within.

3- FOUR Ls of life. Daily reading of Scripture puts God's truth in your minds, along with constant prayer, talking with God about your response to His written Word. That's how you'll experience His indwelling and His outworking power, as His truth transforms your life by His grace, as you trust and obey. In the observation stage of understanding the Bible, you "look" at what God says. In the interpretation phase you "learn" what He means. In the application stage you "live" it out, and in the transformation phase you truly "love." You love God, as Father, Son, Spirit, and you will love people around you, as never before.

4- BELIEFS drive behavior. No matter what you say you believe, your behavior reveals the truth. God is not fooled. As in Mark 12:30, if you say you love God, it will show up in your whole being, heart and mind and will. That's why being a Christian is not just a personal trek, but a public one. You are part of the community of believers. It's in the corporate context of the church that we are transformed together as members of the body of Christ, interacting and growing together as His followers. God's commands to us are lived out in relationship to Christ and to one another. You learn to "be" in Christ so that you can "live" for Him and "become" more like Him, by His power within, as together you're knowing and growing.

5- INDICATIVES drive imperatives. That's theological language for "contextual truth drives commands." You can do what God commands you because of how He has changed you, as you believe it and live it. In the Greek text, "indicatives" point to what God has done for you, as the basis for the "imperatives" to live it out. Romans 12:2 says "*do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" The basis is Romans 1-11, the "therefore" which spells out all God has done. Romans 15:4 says God wrote down His word for our instruction, for endurance, encouragement, hope. God's truth transforms how you think, which changes how you live. If you trust Him, you will obey Him.

6- TRUTH drives transformation. Because, since, if, etc transitions in Scripture signal transformations, how you are to be changed by its teaching. Observation is about content, interpretation is about context, application is about conforming to Christ, and transformation is about continuing, choosing to be changed by truth. You work out your salvation because God is at work in you (Philippians 2:12-13). Increasingly, as you come to understand the Bible, praying its truth into your life, living it out by His power, you ask:

7- FIVE Ws of life. - **Who?** does God need to change me, or to love someone? **What?** specific response to God's truth will change my thinking and actions? **When?** right now or in time, depends on the truth and application. **Where?** always start right where you are but it may take you elsewhere. **Why?** you're being transformed to become more like Jesus, which is God's purpose. **How?** the power of the Holy Spirit.

8- HOW? As you read and study the Bible, God's Word renews your mind and reveals Christ in you, so you can live and love in relationship with the Lord and His people. The transformation principle is, "*the Spirit of God works the Word of God so the People of God become like the Son of God.*" What this looks like in your life depends on how you choose to be changed, by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, as you obediently live out the truth of God's written Word, day by day. Read it and live it today! □