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INTRODUCTION

Nothing can be known, if God be not known; nor is any study well managed, nor to any great purpose, if God is not studied.

If God be not enough for you, you will never have enough. Turn to Him more, and know Him better, if you would have a satisfied mind.

—RICHARD BAXTER

THERE THEY WERE, ALL TEN OF THEM, SEATED AROUND THE long wooden table next to our kitchen, slowly responding to my transition from our “guys night out” steak dinner to a Bible study that I agreed to facilitate (with no small measure of resistance). I remember laboring over those first few words that might have been an introduction to a sermon, were I preaching. But this wasn’t a sermon, and the last thing I wanted to do to these guys was preach to them. What I did want, and prayed for the grace to do, was host a series of gatherings that would facilitate a serious contemplation of who we are, and who we are becoming as men; men with roles like dad, friend, and husband. And, whose various titles were linked to, at least in word, an overarching one: Christian.

Now, how a middle school teacher, a retired MLB pitcher, two construction entrepreneurs, a former rock-n-roll band manager, a golf pro, a dentist, a retired military Intel officer, an Apple computer consultant, a lawyer, and a theologian came to sit together at a table, can only be explained

by the one thing we all had in common: kids at the same private Christian academy. Somewhere amid the jesting at school sporting events, concerts and get-togethers, we discovered that we all suspected there was more to the Christian life than our middle-aged experiences had yet offered.

So at 8:05 p.m. on that first Wednesday meeting, we knew at least two things: 1) There were eleven women thrilled and amazed that we were meeting to study the Bible; and 2) It was time to turn from New York strips and ESPN banter to a more serious topic.

But where to start? That question nearly overwhelmed me the morning I began to prepare for that first steak dinner. But not for long. That's because it gnawed at me twenty years earlier until I found, and have turned to again and again since, a rock solid answer.

My approach to what many of us call a "devotional life" emerged during the great education I received in seminary. Over time it became an indispensable practice for gaining and maintaining the direction, focus, and power I needed to live my Christian life. Not the one contemporary Christian culture says I'm supposed to live, but the one I must actually live. I learned a manageable set of activities that began to bring me into a confident rest in the Lord, and they are activities to which I have returned, again and again.

The evolution of my devotional life went something like this: I began studying a variety of Bible passages using time tested steps from what theologians and pastors call the "his-

torical grammatical” approach to understanding and applying the Bible. By the time I got my seminary diploma, I had read some fifty books on the subject and had distilled this approach to Bible study into fifteen simple steps that would bring accuracy and practical application together. It wasn’t exhaustive, but it worked, and it was easy enough to use on a regular basis. My professors called it Biblical Theology, and it helped me answer the question: “How can I understand a passage of Scripture?”

This method of study helped me collect and apply truth from particular passages, but I needed a way to arrange them into a framework that made sense of the overall message of the Bible and of my life.

In seminary, I had been shown several categories into which major biblical truths fit. I likened them to mental filing cabinets. These filing cabinets can be used to organize, store, and retrieve truths according to the most prominent themes found in Scripture. They emerge quite naturally from what theologians call Systematic Theology. These categories helped me organize the truths I learned from individual Bible passages using the first kind of study into a useful framework of truth and meaning.

I had also become attracted to a third kind of Bible study called Historical Theology. I had not, to date, been a big fan of history—too many dates and details. But there were several reasons why I became increasingly interested in studying biblical truth in this way.

To begin with, it translated abstract biblical propositions and principles into concrete persons and events—stories of

real people in real time. The old Apostle's creed says Jesus actually lived in time and space and was put to death under the historical rule of Pontus Pilate. History, and not just philosophy, was at work in my soul.

Historical Theology also helped me see, despite the great diversity through the centuries on less important teachings, the great common unity on the essential teachings of Christianity. These essentials were corroborated by people of all time periods and cultures. How did they come to the same conclusions? I began to see that history reveals the continuity I long for in truth about God.

Perhaps most important, I found in the confessions of those who've gone before me the same struggles and questions that I face. Christians from the past reiterate and illustrate the answers I need to, and do, find in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These are history lessons worth discovering!

Lastly, I found, mainly through the writings of the English Puritan, Richard Baxter, how to live out truth in my own life. That's what it's all about anyway isn't it? Learning truth so it can be lived out in real lives, like mine and yours.

What I lacked as a younger Christian was a kind of essential body of information, or specific knowledge, that made it possible to begin to know who I am, who God is, and how in the world I relate to Him. And these four kinds of Bible study held the keys to that knowledge.

That night at the table, I sensed a similar struggle in my friends. These were real men who wanted more, but who also lacked what God has made available—specific knowledge about Himself and His creation, what Thomas Aquinas

called, “the truth of things.” In other words, they knew a bit about God, but not enough to enjoy Him truly or to be motivated and equipped to live in cooperation with Him.

So, where did we start? The same place this book will start. With a concern to learn and develop a practical, personalized, compelling, and comprehensive way of getting to know the God of Scripture that will affect real life. I want to help you gain knowledge that will lead you into such satisfaction in Him and His ways that you actually begin to live in the confident rest and joy promised in Jesus. And the result is that He receives the unbounded glory He deserves.

Chapters 1 and 2 describe the problem of lacking essential specific knowledge about God, and why our efforts to know and relate to Him through His Word often fail. Chapter 3 explores how you can overcome typical set backs in gaining this specific knowledge. Chapter 4 overviews the actual model for minding your faith using the four kinds of Bible study that are explained in the final four chapters of the book: Studying targeted biblical *passages* (Chapter 5), studying key truths, or *propositions* in Scripture (Chapter 6), studying the lives and lessons of learned, godly *persons* from Church history (Chapter 7) and studying the life giving, God glorifying *practices* we are commanded and empowered to pursue by God’s grace (Chapter 8). Life is filled with trials, training, and triumph—all designed by a loving Father who will conform us to the image of His Eternal Son.

Where do we begin? Every time I find myself languishing in self-pity, smoldering in anger or sinking in doubt; every time another failure strips my last hope or fatigue squelches

my best intentions; whenever distractions jar my focus; whenever circumstances challenge my beliefs, or when my pain eclipses my joy, I begin, not by tending to my emotions, but by minding my faith. So my hope is to help you do the same for your own satisfaction and for God's Glory.