

A few years ago I started to experience pain under my ribs. It happened periodically, especially after I ate. It also hurt when I drank my morning glass of orange juice. So I went to see my doctor. He sent me to have an x-ray and ultrasound. It revealed that my gall bladder was full of stones. As far as I understand it, the gall bladder shoots out bile juice to help in the breakdown of food. So when I ate, the digestive system would kick into gear. The gall bladder would contract and press in on all those stones. So that's why I had pain.

My doctor then got me an appointment with a surgeon. He showed me what was happening and he recommended surgery to remove the gall bladder. So at that moment, I had basically 3 choices. I could refuse the surgery and adjust my diet dramatically in an attempt to manage this. I could go ahead with the surgery and trust the surgeon.

Or maybe I could do the surgery myself. I knew where the pain happened. I could take one of our steak knives out, cut myself open, find the gall bladder, cut it out and use our desk stapler to patch myself together. But that probably wouldn't work so well. I might make a mistake or pass out in the midst of my surgery and leave a big mess. So I decided to let the expert help me. I depended on the surgeon and his team to remove that gall bladder. And they did.

Now of course, I'm joking about doing my own surgery. But I wanted to point out that there are times when we need to depend on others to get things done that we can't do ourselves. We may depend on mechanics to do major repairs on our cars. We depend on dentists to deal with our teeth issues. We may turn to hair stylists to get a good haircuts or plumbers to look after plumbing issues.

But who do we depend on when reading the Bible? Who do we turn to for help in reading, understanding and living out God's Word? We most naturally depend on ourselves. If we can read, we can conclude that we don't really need to depend on anyone else to read the Bible. In one sense, that's true. But in another, we need help to both read and see what God wants us to see. We have seen how the devil works to keep people from God's and His glory. 2 Corinthians 4:4 – "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Or remember Romans 1:18 which talked about how people "suppress the truth about God by their unrighteousness." So this can also distort or blind

our understanding. Then there are the struggles in our own hearts when we don't desire God or His Word and are easily distracted by something else.

We need to depend on the expert to help us read and understand the Bible. The best expert out there is the author – God. But how do we actually do that? How do we read our Bible's while depending on God to help us understand and live by it? That's what we'll discover today. We will look at a passage that reveals to us how we need to live every day in humble dependence on the Lord. Then we'll apply that to reading the Bible and find some specific ways to depend on God as we read. My hope is that by the end of this time, you will be encouraged with all the help available to you from God in reading and living out His Word.

Galatians 2:11-21 (ESV) (Page 825)

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.^[a] ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷ But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness^[c] were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

This passage reveals a big issue of contention between Jews and non-Jews or Gentiles. Religious Jews would not even eat with Gentiles because they thought them spiritually unclean. Gentiles did not take too kindly to this. So there was this racial tension between the two groups. This spilled into the early church. They struggled to figure out what was required for a person to actually become a Christian and be accepted into the church. Some people who came from a Jewish background insisted that anyone joining the church basically had to become a Jew. So they would continue to separate themselves from eating with Gentiles until the Gentile person would go through with all the ceremonies required to convert to the Jewish faith.

Paul speaks against this in the letter to the Galatians. In fact, it has become such a problem that Paul likens the “You must become a Jew to become a Christian” teaching to another gospel or a false gospel. Paul identifies that requiring people to become Jews to become Christians meant adding works to salvation. Since God’s gift was solely by grace, Paul shut down and spoke strongly against this in the early church.

Now Peter, the unofficial leader of the 12 disciples. He and the others were all Jews. But God had showed him that the Gospel was not only for Jews but for Gentiles. So he had begun to adjust his behavior to be more inclusive of Gentiles. He even was willing to eat with them and spend time in their homes.

But here in our passage, Paul tells of a time when Peter came up to Antioch in Syria for a visit with the Christians there. Some were Gentiles. Peter was fine with eating with them. But then some other Jewish Christians came up from Jerusalem. Apparently, some in this group still had problems eating with Gentiles. So when they showed up, Peter sensed this. When they ate together, he pulled back from eating with the Gentiles and only ate with Jews. His example influenced other Jewish Christians to join him in this.

Now imagine this scene. There is this great gathering of Christians in Antioch – Jews and Gentiles. Maybe they gather in the morning to hear Paul or someone speak about the Gospel and the church. Then it’s time for lunch. Some Gentile Christians whom Peter has sat with for meals have more questions about what it was like to walk with Jesus. So they say, “Hey Peter, we’re saving a seat for you over here.” The room goes quiet because the Jewish Christians coming up from Jerusalem have not ever eaten with Gentiles. Peter sees the tension. Instead of addressing it by going to sit down with the Gentiles, he caves to the pressure. Maybe he said something like, “sorry, I need to sit over here with my Jewish brothers.” Or maybe he didn’t say anything at all. He just ignores the request and sits with the Jews. Other Jewish Christians see this pillar of the church doing this. So they also go and sit with the Jews. Maybe some were already eating with the Gentiles but they get up and separate themselves.

Paul sees all this happening. He didn’t have a problem with confrontation. So he says to Peter in front of everyone Galatians 2:14 “if you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

And we’re not sure where Paul’s words to Peter end. It seems he blends seamlessly into his words to the Galatians. Paul could have said verses 15 and 16 to Peter at Antioch. But it also applies in this context. Verses 15

and 16 turn out to be central to this letter and to the understanding of the Gospel. So he writes, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.”

This is his main point in this whole letter. “A person is not justified (or made right with God) by works of the law but through faith in Christ.” Then he makes the same point two more times in verse 16. “So we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.” So Paul shows that even though he and Peter were Jews by birth, they were justified or made right with God only by faith in Christ.

Then he makes his main point again at the end of verse 16. “Because by works of the law no one will be justified.” So notice it is through faith in Christ Jesus, we are justified. This is how the Christian life starts.

We receive Christ by faith. Faith is the channel through which God pours His Gospel into us. Faith is the pipeline through which we receive forgiveness, adoption and right standing with God. Ephesians 2:8-9 states “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God not a result of works so that no one may boast.”

But the Christian life isn't complete when we receive Christ by faith. We see this as Paul continues his argument. In verse 17, it seems like he responds to a charge leveled against him. It went something like this. “Paul, you are saying that we are justified only by faith and not by works of the law. So you're throwing the law out Paul. You're saying that people can live however they want to once they're justified. So your Jesus actually promotes sin or encourages it.” Paul responds by saying at the end of verse 17, “Certainly not! There is no way Christ promotes sin. The Holy one of God will not promote ungodliness.

So in verse 18 he continues this defense. “For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.” He's referring to the law here. He's saying in a sense, “the law got torn down as a means to be justified with God. If I go back to trying to gain right standing with God by keeping the law, I return to being a sinner that is not right with God. So verse 19, “For through the law, I died to the law, so that I might live to God.” The law showed Paul that he ultimately couldn't perfectly keep the law. It shows us our need for a Savior. So Paul died to the law as a means for justification. Now he lives to God.

Then he shows us what this looks like in everyday in verse 20. Galatians 2:20 is a critical verse to understand in living the Christian life. “I have been crucified with Christ.” So he’s talking about his sinful self. In some way it has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer the has mastery over us when we receive Christ. Then he writes, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Now that doesn’t mean Christ obliterates Paul’s personality. It doesn’t mean Paul becomes a doll held by the ventriloquist Jesus. It means that Paul now chooses to live and follow Christ. Every one of us has this choice to make every day. Who will we follow today? Which nature will we live by – our old sinful nature or Christ in us.

But then look at what he says about living the Christian life today. “And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” “Now Paul, you’re already a Christian. So why do you need to live by faith in the Son of God?” Well to live as a Christian; to respond to life as a Christian; to speak as a Christian; to bear witness as a Christian; to live in a way that honors God all the time requires the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot live the Christian life in our own strength. We cannot respond to the challenges of life in a Christian way by gathering up some sort of inner strength. We need to constantly turn to Jesus and trust Him for strength and power to live as a Christian. We must live in constant dependence on the Lord. We live each day and each hour by faith in the Lord.

We need to live everyday by faith in Christ or dependence upon Christ.

This also applies to our Bible reading. We need to read our Bibles with faith.

So we need to read our Bibles with faith in God’s Promises. When we do that, we glorify God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 states “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” So if we trust a promise of God to read our Bibles, and we depend on God to keep His promise, we will glorify Him as He keeps His promise. Remember Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing?” So we admit this to be true even as we approach reading the Bible. Then we turn to God’s promises for help as we read.

Now we might think that we don’t really need to know specific promises of God to trust His Word. But if we don’t know them, we can enter into a mental and spiritual fog. We can think of some vague idea about God. But we don’t really trust for something specific so we don’t watch for how God will answer.

It's kind of like going McDonalds and looking at the order menu. Say the person behind the counter asks to take your order. Maybe they say "what would you like?" You answer – "food." They say, "Yes but which food? Which order?" You respond with "food." So they don't bring you anything because they have no category on their key pad for food. You leave hungry.

But if you say, "May I have a chicken bacon wrap," they'll bring you a chicken bacon wrap. You will leave with something in your stomach.

So if we come to our Bible reading and pray "God help me as I read," that's at least a start. God can provide help. But it's pretty vague. You might leave your Bible reading empty because you didn't really specify the help you needed.

How different it might be if you claim a specific promise from God.

But which promises?

We could claim some broad and all-encompassing promises like Romans 8:28 – "We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." So if we love God, we can approach every task with a strong confidence that God will turn it for our good – including the task of reading the Bible.

Or what about Philippians 4:19? "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Imagine asking God to fulfill that promise prior to reading the Bible. Then as you read, God supplies whatever you need in that moment from His Word.

2 Chronicles 16:9 – The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.

Isaiah 41:10 – Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you by my righteous right hand.

Psalms 23:6 – Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

Psalms 84:11 – The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Matthew 6:33 - Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

2 Corinthians 1:20 – All the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

With these sweeping promises, we can come to the task of reading our Bibles greatly encouraged that God will help us.

But there are also focused promises we can claim regarding God’s Word. They focus on the need to understand God in Scripture and see His glory.

Psalm 25:8-9 – “Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.” He instructs sinners in the way. John Piper writes “What a relief! It is usually sin that makes our task of seeing the glory of God in the Scripture so hard. So we might fear that we have utterly disqualified ourselves from God’s help because we have blinded ourselves by our own sinning. But God comes to us in Psalm 25 and reminds us of his mercy. He will help sinners understand. He will instruct sinners. But broken and humble sinners. So even though we don’t deserve it, God will instruct us. So that turns Bible reading into an experience of grace.

Psalm 25:12 – “Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will I instruct in the way he should choose.” “God helps sinners understand the Bible. These promises are given to us so that we might believe them. Not just hear them. Believe them. Trust them. . . . So we prepare to read; we pray; we hear or see a promised; we put our faith into it. The Spirit moves in the channel of faith. We act the miracle.

- Proverbs 2:6-7
 - The Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright.
- Proverbs 3:5-6
 - Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.
- Psalm 32:8

- I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
- Psalm 73:24
 - You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.
- Luke 12:11-12
 - Do not be anxious about . . . what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.
- John 8:31-32
 - Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”
- James 1:5-8
 - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with not doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Imagine praying “Lord, you promised in Psalm 73:24 to guide me with your counsel. So please show me your counsel now as I come to your Word.” And the Lord answered and showed you something in your reading that really helps you in your work or with that child or in that decision or in that relationship. Your Bible reading could be transformed because you are experiencing God as you read His Word. Through your faith in Him and His promises, He pours His answers into your life.

We don’t do surgery on ourselves, we depend on surgeons. We don’t do plumbing ourselves, we depend on a plumber. We can’t read and understand the Word ourselves, but we can go to the Author.

So I want to close today by inviting you to ask God to identify one of these specific promises that He wants you to pray today. Which one does He draw your eyes too? Then I would invite you to take some time now and pray to the Lord. Quote the promise. Ask God to fulfill this promise the next time you read His Word, maybe this afternoon. After you have a had a little while to consider this and pray, I will close our time in prayer.