

How I Use The Bible In Student Ministry

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When the call came for me to write this article, it was a very busy time for me. Due to my schedule, this topic was one of the few that would have elicited a response from me. I wanted to do it because of my deep feeling about the place of the Scriptures in the ministry God has given me.

If your students could be interviewed and asked, "What place do you honestly think the Bible has in the life of your director?" what would they say? Perhaps the place the Bible occupies in the lives of our students is determined more by the place it occupies in the director's life than any other one thing. The principle of pacesetting is written large in the New Testament. Among other verses, Philippians 4:9 says, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you." I know that the importance or lack of importance of God's Word in my life will be communicated to students where I minister.

I think student directors face a great danger. Due to our training and exposure to more critical approaches to the Bible, we must be careful in what we communicate to students. First of all, we need to do some evaluating in our own lives. What place actually does the Bible have in our lives? What kind of time do we spend in the Word of God? I mean, for ourselves — not to teach a New Testament survey or at a BSU meeting or a Sunday School class, but just to meet God? What kind of time do we spend in His Word just to know Him?

I want my student's first contact with the Bible to be that of a trusting relationship. I want to present the Bible as God's Word to them. Call it a devotional approach, if you like, but I want a student to know that God has spoken and that that message is recorded in the Bible. I want the student to trust the Bible — to know that every day of his life he needs to go to the Bible seeking to know God beyond the pages. I want him to know that he can trust the Bible to be God's revelation to him. I want him to know that for the rest of his life he can be assured that God will speak to him from the pages of the Scriptures.

First, I try to build my own life upon the Scriptures. The theologian would say that the authority of our lives should be "the triune God in self-revelation." That is true, but what I know of that triune God, I know through His Word. I may learn something of God's character through experience, but what I learn of Him is already revealed in His Word.

Therefore, practically, I have chosen to build my life and ministry upon the Word of God. Every day I seek to spend some time in His Word and in prayer. For several years I have sought to read the Bible through in my devotional time. I want each year to be exposed to the whole Word of God. During this devotional time, I go to the Bible for me — not for my ministry, not for others, but for me. I go to God through His Word to allow Him to speak to me. I read and pray over it. Sometimes He speaks through allowing me to see a principle. Sometimes He speaks through a promise (even out of context — not for doctrine but for guidance). Sometimes I am encouraged and sometimes there seems to be nothing, but I keep going back to the Word. I not only read the Bible, I also study it, memorize it, and meditate upon it.

I think every ministry has a central emphasis, even if it is a broad emphasis. I believe the central emphasis of my ministry is the Bible. I seek to exalt its place in the lives of students so that they may truly exalt the Lord of its pages.

Much of our outreach ministry is built around Bible study groups. This semester we have almost sixty students committed to trying to lead a Bible study group. They go out onto the campus, into dorms, apartments, classes, etc., meeting people interested in investigating the truths of Scripture. Some Bible study groups are made up mostly of Christians, some of all non-Christians and some, a blend of both. As they are exposed to the Word, something begins to happen. In some lives God obviously does a work through the loving concern and witness of the leader and others in the group. Some become Christians and in that small group begin to be nourished in their Christian lives. From there, most eventually move to the larger fellowship of the BSU and the church. But that little group, with no great theologian or expert to guide, just a little group trying to discover what God has to say to them through His Word, becomes a group in which God can and does do His work.

This past year a college junior had nine girls accept the Lord in the dorm where she led a Bible study. A few weeks ago at the opening assembly in Sunday School, Drew, a sophomore, said, "Meet Jeff, he accepted the Lord Friday night." Drew was in a Bible study group this past year and this year is leading one. Only two guys came regularly, but one was Jeff. And Jeff said that week by week as he did the assignment for the study, and in the group itself, God dealt with him. Now he is a Christian. Last night I was told of two other people who just accepted the Lord in dorm Bible study groups.

And in those groups many students are being nurtured in their walk with God. Students are learning how to have a ministry. Their ministry is centered around the Word. And we are getting reports back from graduates: what they learned in college regarding the Bible works out in the world. According to Acts 17:17, there seem to be two places Paul had his ministry — the synagogue (where people interested in God and religion gathered) and in the marketplace (where people worked and "rubbed shoulders" with others). Today we need to equip our students to have a ministry in these places, the church and the world. The Bible helps equip us for both. "The scriptures are the comprehensive equipment of the man of God, and fit him fully for all branches of his work" (2 Timothy 3:17 Phillips).

In those Bible study groups on campus the young leader shares what God is doing in his life and how the Bible is meaningful to him. He shares how to have a devotional time. Those in the group see the leader being able to quote verses. Thus, it is very natural for him to be able to share Scripture memory and meditation.

I, through example and instruction, seek to get the students under my influence to memorize Scripture. I use the card method — writing the verses on small cards, a method that has proved effective for many years. This method of always having a small pack of cards with me helps me to memorize verses during odd moments. Students can be taught to do this and it is undoubtedly one of the fastest ways to become equipped in the use of the Bible. On our Ministry Team of almost sixty people, we are committed to helping each other memorize Scripture.

One fear many people have when discipline is emphasized in the devotional life, Scripture memory, and Bible study is that they might become legalistic. On our Ministry Team we have talked about

this danger — but we realize we all need help, so each one sets his own personal goals alone before the Lord. Then we are committed to helping each other reach our goals. This greatly helps, because each student should not have the same goal. They have different abilities, time commitments and desires; but each is committed to getting the Word of God into his life. This leads to discipline, not legalism.

The result of a strong emphasis on the devotional life, Scripture memory, Bible study, and meditation is very encouraging. Students are learning to walk with God. They are excited about their relationships with God. Witnessing is truly becoming a lifestyle with them. They are sharing with Christians and non-Christians. Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:36). The exciting thing is that they are becoming equipped to have a ministry.

Because they are learning to love God and walk with Him, they very naturally are able to share about Christ with others. Nothing helps evangelism like an abundant heart. Many in their Bible studies begin to center their focus on the Lord through His Word. Many are learning to make disciples of others. Once they know how to feed themselves and are truly learners themselves, they learn to share with others. Once they have seen the tremendous value of meeting God through His Word on a daily basis through the devotional life, through Bible study, Scripture memory and meditation, they know what to do to help others grow. We are seeing even sophomores now working closely in a discipling relationship with freshmen.

One of the real benefits of a strong emphasis on the Word of God is that students begin to see where to go for guidance. When they see that an individual seeks God's face through His Word, when one earnestly searches the Scriptures for insights and a message from God in his daily circumstances, they will also. What is important to you, the leader, becomes important to them.

Directors, I plead with you. Let the Bible become more of a focal point in your ministry. Deliberately seek to make it central — not in the place of God — but Christ is not central in a ministry where the Bible is not of extreme importance.

And never quit. I am working at Scripture memory, reviewing verses memorized, and studying the Bible as hard as I ever have in my

ministry. I see danger in slacking off. I have been a BSU director for 18½ years, the past 13 on one campus, and I have never been more excited about the ministry. I like what I see. I like the results and can live with them. Students' lives are being transformed. And word is coming back from lay men and women and other fulltime ministers who have come out of this ministry: the emphasis is right because it is built around the Bible. They are taught to discover in every way possible its truths and to build their lives on them. And God is honoring those lives, because God always honors those who honor His Word (Psalm 119).

In summary, how can I help my students become better equipped with God's Word?

1. Help them develop a consistent devotional life with a daily plan for going though the Scriptures.
2. Give the students some help in how to lead a Bible study group.
3. Give them some help in how to memorize successfully and retain key passages of the Scriptures. Give them some help in Bible study, meditation, and application of the Scriptures.
4. Most of all, give them an example to follow — a leader who walks with God through His Word. Let them see in the director a person who has an effective devotional life, is leading a Bible study, is still studying and memorizing the Scriptures and seeking to be obedient to them.

(I have worked with some other BSU directors in developing a plan for the devotional life, a series of booklets for student-led Bible study groups, and a Scripture memory plan. These are available through the Real Purpose of Life Publications, 435 West Boyd, Norman, Oklahoma 73069.)

—Max D. Barnett