

Is It of the Spirit?

Recently, I listened to Spurgeon's lecture entitled, "On the Choice of a Text." This is just one of the chapters from his helpful book, *Lectures to My Students*. His method for choosing his next passage to preach has fallen on hard times these days. He did not work his way consecutively through a book of the Bible. In fact, he was personally quite opposed to this (now current) practice. Instead, he valued far more highly the dependence on God that was needed to find the right passage for the coming Sunday, and sometimes he did not settle on a text until nearly the last minute. He believed people grew weary of a sermon series from consecutive passages. Instead, he wanted to preach what most gripped him and what would meet the listeners in their current state.

No preacher should disagree with Spurgeon lightly. Still, on this matter I see things differently. God can work through careful, humble plans just as much as he can work through the needs of the hour. By planning ahead, I steward my time better and free up my individual weeks to *study* the text rather than to *choose* the text. Also, I have repeatedly seen the glory and richness of God's Word while studying particular books of the Bible slowly and methodically. God's Word does not disappoint! Studying a book of the Bible chapter by chapter or paragraph by paragraph can feed your soul with Scripture's rich nutrition. Sometimes, the only way to lay hold of and take in that rich nourishment is by studying a book of the Bible consecutively. Don't believe me? Find someone who loves God's Word and together study a book of the Bible carefully over time. I dare you to prove me wrong!

Even though I am not persuaded by his overall argument, Spurgeon's lecture still gripped me. Specifically, I was challenged by his call to be dependent on God while preparing a sermon. But what does this mean? Well, it comes down to the extras that aren't truly extra: prayer, reading the Scriptures, and meditation. Spurgeon believed that the pressure of finding the right text for Sunday kept him dependent on God. Through the practice of such dependence, he could be faithful in the pulpit on Sunday. I'd like to believe, with a careful nod to Mr. Spurgeon, that I can strive to be a godly man who depends on the Spirit even as I plan out and follow a preaching calendar, working my way through a book of the Bible passage by passage. What I must not be – avoiding at all costs – is a man who can put together a sermon while not in communion with God. For this reminder and warning, I'm thankful for Charles Spurgeon's lecture.

But what about you?

You might never teach or preach through a book of the Bible, but I deeply hope you know the joy of studying God's Word! Consider the following:

- If you would love God and others rightly, you must connect the truths of the Scriptures to your heart, soul, and mind – to your whole person (Matthew 22:34-40). Prayer and Scriptural meditation are essential if you would love God and others rightly. Do not be content with prayerless and even thoughtless study of the Bible!
- Those who live before God's throne, deeply aware of their need for his grace, are those who will be most ready to pick up and use the powerful Word of God in their daily living.
- It is essential that I pursue God through Scriptural meditation and prayer while I prepare weekly sermons for you all. Please pray for me often, that I would train myself for godliness (1 Timothy 4:7), delight in God's Word, and meditate on the Scriptures constantly (Psalm 1:2).