



Chapter 1: Overview of Walk with the Word

God's Word is not just a book for Christians to read, but the only offensive weapon provided in our spiritual warfare arsenal:

*"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. **Put on the full armor of God**, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having **girded your loins with truth**, and having **put on the breastplate of righteousness**, and having **shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace**; in addition to all, **taking up the shield of faith** with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And **take the helmet of salvation**, and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**"*

—Ephesians 6:10-17

As the preacher said, "There's nothing new under the sun." Well, there's nothing new on this web site either; nothing that hasn't been suggested and advocated for a couple of millennia. Walk with the Word is but a reminder—as every generation is reminded by someone—that Believers need only commit themselves and their ministries to consistent immersion in the Bible to hear God speaking personally today.

Three times that we're aware of, God personally wrote instructions for man: The original tablets provided to Moses, on the wall for a king during Daniel's time, and in the dirt for over-zealous religious leaders during Jesus' time. This demonstrates that God *could* have personally

written and handed down the entire Bible without man as an intermediary but rather **CHOSE** to speak through man, through what has been captured as the books of the Bible.

As noted in the passage from Ephesians above, the Bible is not only the medium that connects God's mouth to our ear, but is the **ONLY** offensive weapon with which we wage spiritual warfare. If we don't pay attention to it—don't clean it, keep it sharp, practice wielding it—we're vulnerable to the persuasions of another voice not of God. Every successful "revival" or "movement" has been sparked by recommitment to wielding this weapon, to hearing God speak through His Word.

The Cultural Mandate for Walk with the Word

*"My zeal has consumed me,
Because my adversaries have forgotten Your words."
—Psalm 119:139*

Churches today exist in a culture of ethical relativism. The rapid moral decline of American society is entirely consistent with the erosion of Judeo-Christian values on which the country was founded. The only absolute tolerated by the culture today is that there are no absolutes. One's personal values tend to be acquired from the entertainment industry, truth is a matter of individual interpretation, and what is right is a matter of personal choice.

Josh McDowell and Norm Geisler clarify the problem in their book *Love Is Always Right: A Defense of the One Moral Absolute*:

"If you believe that the conscience of the Western world is still guided by objective truth, honesty, moral purity, and the Golden Rule, you need to take a close look at how the people around you are living. And if your Christian values have not been challenged or ridiculed as archaic or irrelevant by a neighbor, coworker, teacher, or student, then your lamp is under a basket or the people you interact with day by day are blind and deaf.

"...About three decades ago, we transitioned into what the late Christian thinker Dr. Francis Schaeffer termed the 'post-Christian era....' But in the last decade of the twentieth century, we have reached a new low. American society has entered a period that may well be called the 'anti-Christian era.'"

(excerpts from pages 18-21)

If there are really no absolutes, then truth is relative and subject to interpretation by the individual. One's religious beliefs are self-designed and self-serving, customized to the perceived needs of the individual at any given point in time.

Christians are not immune from the influences of society. Being "in" the world but not "of" the world is a narrow road that cannot be safely traveled without clear directions. Through a hedonistic entertainment media, through a justice system dominated by personal rights, and through public education ruled by humanism and liberalism, children in particular are subject to and will continue to be influenced by the secular ideologies of the day.

Like the culture, Christians can be lured easily into the errors of Israel at the time of the Judges:

*"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
—Judges 21:25*

The context in Judges is one of civil law, but the principle remains the same. Without a source of absolute truth, every person—Christians not excepted—will believe and do what is right in his or her own eyes.

Evangelical Christian apologists are crying out for help from the local churches. One can hear over and over again the need to disciple believers, to teach the Bible, to teach sound doctrine, and to teach that the Word of God is the only absolute upon which spiritual truth can be based. It is also well documented that the average Christian is

woefully ignorant, if not illiterate, concerning knowledge and the truth of the Bible.

The proclamation ministry of the church is another area where in many cases secular influences have prevailed. In an attempt to stay in touch with an anti-authoritarian culture, and through the influence of liberal biblical scholarship, many mainline denominations and churches have demoted the pre-eminence, authority and relevance of the Word of God. The Bible is sometimes employed only pragmatically and in no less capacity than spiritual "consultant."

At the other end of the spectrum, many evangelical churches have dug in their heels with "meaty, expositional teaching" of the Bible. In doing so, however, some have become so "meaty" as to fail to communicate effectively the big picture of what the Bible is all about, or to make God's Word applicable to the believer's life.

Adding to the confusion of ministry and teaching focus for churches today is the impact of the Church Growth Movement. Though some church plants have found these strategies successful, many well-intentioned pastors have been left confused and frustrated, especially those in smaller churches which are desperately in need of greater numbers. They have attempted to implement church growth principles, only to find themselves with little or no growth and a lot of division within the church. It is no wonder that over 1,400 pastors leave the ministry every month.

A clear and effective biblically based plan is necessary to provide all its members with a personal knowledge of God and a practical understanding of His Word. A comprehensive, church-wide ministry is needed that centers around the Word of God and is taught at all educational levels of the church on a repeating cycle. The basic model is taken from Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, under the leadership of Pastor Chuck Smith who, from the beginning, has taught through the Bible every couple of years.

It is felt, however, that this plan can be easily adopted to fit just about any church ministry, large or small. For this reason, Walk with the Word may be implemented by any church without prior permission. As God's Word is freely given to us, so Walk with the Word is freely given to others. For it is our earnest desire that every believer who seeks to worship God "in spirit and in truth" will be able to say earnestly from the heart...

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

—Psalm 119:105

The Believer's Need for the Word

"My soul cleaves to the dust;

Revive me according to Your word...

My soul weeps because of grief;

Strengthen me according to Your Word."

—Psalm 119:25, 28

Many Christians have an earnest desire to know God's Word. Barely a Christian can be found these days who does not own and carry a "study" Bible. Christian marketing has seized upon this apparent hunger for Bible acquisition and presented the Christian community with a tantalizing array of study Bibles, study helps, and a multitude of versions from which to choose. Elaborate and complex computer Bible programs can be purchased and entire Bibles in a variety of versions are available for hand-held Personal Digital Assistants (PDA's). There is a Bible for every personal need.

Knowledge of God's Word is important; without it we would not know about God. However, facts, information, doctrine and theology do not always put us in touch with God; they do not connect us to God personally. Knowledge about God does not necessarily translate into knowledge of God experientially. Facts and information about God's Word may be one step to knowing God, but is only one step towards God.

God is not known or experienced fully until we connect with Him personally through His Word. Christians seek to experience God in a variety of ways. Some seek to experience Him in worship, while others attempt to discover what "God is doing," and then join in. Some seek to experience God through the expression of charismatic gifts, while others seek to experience Him through prayer, meditation, or encounters in spiritual warfare.

Walk with the Word is based on the belief that the best way to know God personally is to experience Him through His Word. How does experiencing God personally through His Word happen? It happens when we allow Him to "speak" to us through His Word. It doesn't take a study Bible to make that happen, but it does take time. We believe that every Christian is capable of hearing God speak through His Word. Too few Christians today are truly experiencing God through His Word because they have assumed that the attaining of facts and knowledge about God's Word is sufficient.

[See "*Hearing God's Voice*" on the Walk with the Word web site.]

The Theme of Walk with the Word

"Your word I have treasured in my heart..."
—Psalm 119:11

As stated previously, simply having knowledge of the Bible and its content is not enough. There is a marked difference between knowledge of the Bible in the mind and having the knowledge of God through His Word in the heart.

Knowing God through His Word at the level of the heart implies that the Bible is one's personal source for all truth and meaning. To know the Bible means that the truths of the Word of God have infused every aspect of a person's being—the thought life, one's personal conduct and lifestyle, and in particular, relationships. It is not enough just to have a good knowledge of the Bible. The Bible is living and is to be "fleshed out."

Additionally, we believe that the "voice" of God these days is no different than it has always been—the voice of God is the Word of God. While many promote reliance upon practical approaches to Christian living, upon self-help sources, upon charismatic manifestations such as tongues, prophecy, healings and miracles, and even upon the very act or worship itself, at Walk with the Word we believe that the only reliable and trustworthy source for "hearing God" is through His Word. Therefore, it is our desire that every reader learn how to become intimately connected with God through His Word.

Walk with the Word provides a systematic method for reading through the Bible every 3 years. The program is designed to be implemented by churches on a church-wide basis, as a small group ministry, or for the individual. Teaching through the Bible every 3 years is not for the mere purpose of completing a noble task.

In summary then, Walk with the Word primarily focuses on three things:

- (1) ***to receive the Word*** (accurately understand the Bible and be able to interact with it on a personal level, to the point that God speaks to the heart);
- (2) ***to live the Word*** ("flesh out" God's Word to the point that the truth permeates every aspect of the believer's life, affecting decision-making, behavior and relationships);
and,
- (3) ***to spread the Word*** (share the good news found in God's Word with pre-Christians, and help them to receive the Word and begin living the Word).

Reading Schedule

The Walk with the Word plan calls for studying the entire Word of God every 3 years (actually, 144 weeks) in a variety of ways so as to make the Word a vital and living part of every believer's life

Completing the Bible in 3 years requires a reading schedule that covers an average 7 chapters a week in the NT (there are 260 chapters in the NT) and an average 11 chapters a week in the OT (929 chapters in the OT). This 3 year cycle of reading through the Bible can be repeated going through the Bible left to right (Genesis through Revelation), chronologically, etc.

The question might be raised, "Why not go through the Bible every year?" The answer is this: a one-year-through-the-Bible plan calls for too much reading. It gets overwhelming for the average reader.

[See "The Reading Plan" on the web site for more information.]

How to Use Walk with the Word

On this web site is further information on how to use the foundation of Walk with the Word for:

- ***A Church-wide Program.*** Tie the Sunday School, pulpit and small group Bible study ministries in your church to the reading plan to guide every age group and maturity level through a coordinated study of the entire Bible.
- ***A Small Group Ministry.*** By using the Bible studies provided on this web site, small groups can learn together how to hear God speaking through His Word.
- ***An Individual Guide.*** Personally follow the reading schedule and subscribe to the Walk with the Word email newsletter that delivers a weekly study based on a portion of each week's reading.

As you read through each page as we've ordered them, you will see how the foundation is laid with the individual and how it is leveraged for small groups and even throughout the whole church.