

What Drives Me To Deep Study?

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I'm now 34 years old. I think I preached my first sermon when I was about 15. For almost two decades, I've tried at every given opportunity to faithfully declare the Word of God in preaching. And I once would have said that the desire to faithfully handle the Word of God was the reason for my (amateurish) study of the original languages. And it's a fine reason.

I was raised in a Fundamentalist context that taught that the KJV was the preserved Word of God in English, and the 1881 Scrivener Textus Receptus was verbally identical to the original autographs. Several years ago, when I came to disagree with this belief, I was removed from that movement and banned from preaching or teaching there again (that's the best way to keep the heresy of modern versions out, don't you know). For the first time in my life, I had to go through the painful process of finding a new, more grace-filled and gospel-centered, community of faith. And once God graciously brought me to a new home, it of course took some time before I had demonstrated faithfulness in such a way as to be trusted to preach and teach in that local church context. Thus, for almost 1.5 years, I didn't preach at all - the longest period of my adult life that I had ever gone without standing behind a pulpit. But I learned one of the most powerful lessons of my life at that time; a lesson about our true "End."

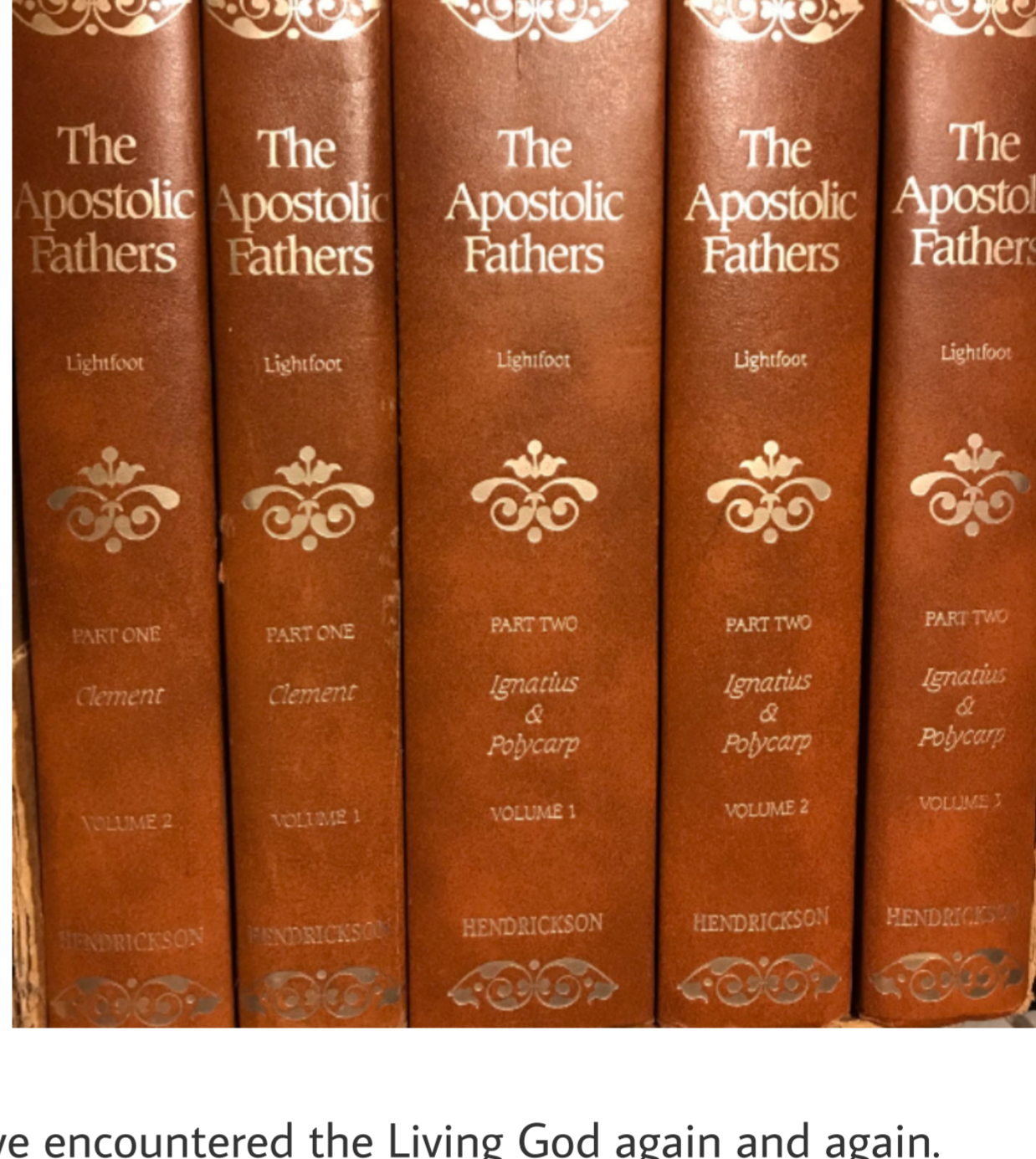


It has been for many years my habit to frequent a coffee shop to study the text I am soon to preach. BibleWorks would be open on my computer, the little Greek Reader's NT beside it, and a stack of WBC, PNTC, BECNT, or ICC volumes lying next to a piping hot pour over. This was my natural habitat every week, as anyone who knows me could tell you. And I always told myself (and others who asked how I could spend so much time in such a nerdy spot) that this was because of my calling to preach and teach. Not all need find themselves in such a setting. Yet God had given me a task which required such study.

But after about a year had gone by when I wasn't teaching, I found myself at Cuppies and Joe, like always, with William Lane on Hebrews and a Greek NT open in front of me. "Why all the books?" people had asked me so many times before. "Oh, I'm studying to preach a sermon" I had always replied. And I kept answering that way when others asked. It wasn't really true anymore. I wasn't preaching anymore. But I didn't know what else to say. How do you explain a Bible and a Greek NT and a stack of commentaries any other way? When you're no longer a student in school, and you aren't preparing to teach or preach, what other reason could you even give? Yet here I was again, my habit continuing unbroken, long after its stated goal had disappeared into obscurity, my stack of books still open, my Greek NT still thumbed, my little lonely corner still occupied for hours every day by my scrawny frame. Why? Why was I here? My reasons had all gone, yet my study had remained still.

It struck me in that moment that I had always been wrong. Digging deep, learning (what little I know of) Greek, pouring over the text - faithfulness to a call to preach is a fine reason to engage in such tasks. But that never really was why I did it. That wasn't what drove me to skip out on the pool, the game, or the time with friends to chalk up another "nerdy hour" at the coffee shop. No - I was there in that spot, because in the pages of the text, I had met the Risen Savior. I had heard His Voice, and felt His arms around me. I didn't know then if I would ever get the privilege to preach again. Maybe I never would. And yet I came to realize that nothing would change for me if I never preached another sermon. The books would stay stacked with me. The coffee would stay hot. The text would still lay open.

See, the pages of my study tools are not only covered in sloppy highlights and coffee spills - they are marked with tear stains. Contrary to what I once thought, they don't just mark out "times I studied that one passage for sermon X." They are rather landmarks in a journey I've walked with the Divine. They are moments in the history of a relationship, as real and powerful and memorable as the time you remember when your arm first brushed against that of your first crush; the time when your foot touched your one-day lover under the table as you caught her eyes and knew you were falling in love; the time you held your grandfather's hand on his deathbed for the last time, or hugged your oldest child before their first day of school. They are moments in my story, because it is in the pages of the biblical text that I have encountered the Living God again and again.



Some have a prayer closet. Some pray in a special place. Some sense God's presence most in a gathered service. All these are valuable. But for most of my life I've heard his Voice most clearly in the pages of the biblical text itself (perhaps, in some ways, that experience has been eclipsed in a more powerful encounter in public worship than I had known before). Encountering the Risen Christ, who is best known through the Word in which He has revealed Himself - that's the reason. That's the goal. That's the only "End" that can consume me with a passion to reach it that will endure all the hardships. The beauty of Jesus, seen and experienced most clearly in the accurate understanding of His revealed Word, is the only worthy "End" to keep in sight.

My heart was stirred and I was challenged again to recall those moments once more as I read Ben Merkle put into words for me what I have come to feel so deeply. He said so well, in words that describe better than I could what I have come to see as the most worthy reason to study the languages;

"The study of Greek is not an end in itself. The end goal of studying Greek is to know the God who has revealed himself through his Word. God chose to use the Greek language to convey his will for his people through his apostles and prophets. The goal of learning Greek (or Hebrew) is not to parade one's knowledge before others, seeking to impress a congregation or friend. Rather, the goal of learning Greek is first and foremost born out of a desire to behold unhindered the grandest sight: God himself. Therefore the journey of learning Biblical Greek has as its goal the most important thing in all of life: the knowledge of God as revealed in the New Testament" ([Greek For Life](#), pg. 2-3).

Not all of us are called to learn Greek. Certainly not all of us are given by God the gifts of teaching or preaching. God distributes his gifts at his sovereign will. But I think all Christians are called to study. Because in study we learn more of God, and in learning more of him, we experience more of him. A friend shared [this meme](#), and I felt like it captured much of my life. So I share it here.

It captures my life so well.

Not because books mean anything. They are just a means of adding more voices to our internal conversations. And not because the minutiae of theological debates are important. Not because knowledge matters. Not because one wants to "score more points" in an argument. Not because our heads feel better full than empty. All that may have its value.

But because, when one catches even a small glimmer - a brief glimpse - of the glory of God, the passion to pursue that glory can (and should) become all consuming. The yearning to see it again. And again. To feel that ineffable something that we can only describe as "his presence" yet one more time. For a longer time. That indescribable joy that comes when you discover a nuance of who Jesus is that you hadn't known before, and his greatness flattens you again. That wonder and awe that pulls you to fall on your face when you feel that you've only but touched the hem of his garment, and yet you are undone.

It becomes the passion that consumes you.

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