

# Making Wise the Simple



**“The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.”**

**Psalm 19:7**

Let me introduce you to a man named Jose Muniz.

It is likely you have never heard of him, but through this man, God has impacted my life.

Jose was one of seven children, and although he grew up in the USA, he knew nothing about God or what generally went on inside church buildings, and he had never even heard anything about Jesus Christ.

By the time he was sixteen, Jose had entered a total of nine churches. Three of those visits involved funerals; the other six occasions involved breaking and entering. He said of the latter, ‘Anything that six Mexicans could haul out of a church, we took it!’

The first funeral he ever attended was held in a Catholic church. Observing a giant crucifix statue behind the altar, he murmured to his brother, ‘Who’s the guy in his underwear?’ His brother shrugged, and Jose concluded that the statue must be a Mexican man because the crown of thorns around the head resembled a bandana. Throughout the funeral, Jose also noticed the statues of twelve men around the church, six on either side. He nudged his brother. ‘I wonder who these guys are.’

His brother whispered back in all seriousness, ‘I think these guys are the presidents of the United States!’

Jose may not have known anything about the Christian faith, but he did know a lot about drugs. When he was a child, two uncles frequented the Muniz household as babysitters for Jose and his siblings. These men were drug dealers with the Mexican mafia, and while in their care, the children witnessed far more than little ones ever should. Jose and his brothers mimicked their uncles’ behaviour as they played together. Sometimes they gathered grass clippings from the lawn and pretended to sell bundles of weed to each other using monopoly money. Perhaps it’s not surprising then that Jose began to smoke real drugs himself at the tender age of seven.

As Jose grew into a teenager, he lived a life of partying, drugs and alcohol. After a couple of overdoses and getting arrested on drug trafficking charges at the age of seventeen, he reached a point of desperation. Not only was he facing the prospect of ten years imprisonment, but he also felt sure he was about to die. His skin and eyes were turning yellow from all the alcohol he drank.

One night, he soaked his pillow with tears of despair. ‘Man, what am I going to do?’ He had no one to talk to, so he cried into the empty air. ‘I don’t want to die! I don’t want to go to jail! Somebody, please help me!’

Soon afterwards, Jose was with three of his brothers in a city park. They sat on a bench smoking some joints, minding their own business when an old man named Brother Van Meter walked over to them. He was four feet, eleven inches tall, and around his neck hung an enormous cross with a leather strap. He carried a book in his hands. Brother Van Meter told the brothers about Jesus Christ: how he had died on the cross for their sins, was buried and rose back to life. He told them how they could know God and be saved from their sins by trusting in Jesus and asking him for forgiveness.

Jose dismissed the old man’s message outright, but it hit one of his brothers head-on. He accepted the message and put his faith in Jesus Christ that day. Over the next few months, Jose watched his brother’s life radically change — he no longer wanted to smoke weed, chase girls, or do any of the things that had previously filled his life. This brother also began to carry a book everywhere, just like Brother Van Meter.

His brother started pestering Jose to come with him to church or a Bible study. Jose didn’t want to go to either, but eventually, as a means of passing the time and hoping his brother would stop bothering him, he finally agreed to attend a Bible study. Jose smoked a joint as he walked to the meeting. Once inside the building, he sat in the back row, completely stoned and unable to focus deeply on what was being said.

After about an hour or so, a strange sensation suddenly hit the top of Jose’s head. It felt like a gigantic drop of hot syrup. The warmth slowly flowed over him and started going down his arms and all the way down to the soles of his feet. His high vanished, and he was unexpectedly back in his right mind. Jose looked around in bewilderment. *What was going on? What was this?*

No drugs had ever had this effect on him.

Then, without any warning or understanding of what was happening to him, Jose began to cry.

Brother Van Meter said to the crowd, 'If you're out there and you want God to change your life, come up to the front.'

Jose knew these words were really spoken just to him as everyone else in the room was already a Christian, but as he sat in his chair weeping, he suddenly realised that he did want to go forward and put his faith in Jesus Christ. So, he did. For an hour or more, he continued to weep. Another pastor, Brother Deva, came beside him and dipped his finger into some oil. It had a sweet aroma, and as Brother Deva anointed Jose's forehead, he prayed, 'You will be a witness to thousands and thousands.'

Jose said later about that evening, 'I didn't know what I was doing, didn't understand, but I knew something had happened inside my heart. Man, I felt so good!'

After the meeting, he went home, and without understanding why, he began pulling posters of Van Halen and Iron Maiden off his bedroom walls. He also gathered four or five boxes full of albums, tapes, and drug paraphernalia and dumped everything into a fifty-gallon barrel in the alleyway.

*Boom!* Jose set it all alight.

Nobody had told him to dispose of any of these items. It was the Holy Spirit who now dwelled within him who motivated him to do this.

From this time onwards, Jose's life began to change. He stopped taking drugs and committing crimes, and he, too, began to carry around a book. When Brother Van Meter handed Jose a Bible, he said, 'This is the only book you'll ever need for the rest of your life.' He also gave Jose an assignment: 'After you've read the Gospel of John ten times, you come back to me.'

Jose took this first assignment to heart, although it took him some time to complete. He had been kicked out of high school in his freshman year, and reading didn't come easily to him.

He eventually returned to Brother Van Meter, who said, 'Okay, now go and read Matthew ten times.'

After Jose had completed that task, Brother Van Meter said, 'Okay, now go and read Mark ten times.'

Jose did that too.

His next instruction was, 'Okay, now go and read Luke ten times.'

Jose looked at his mentor. 'This is dumb! They all say the same thing!'

'You just read it!'

Jose went away, and when he returned yet again, he asked, 'Now, what do I do?'

'Start at Matthew and go all the way through to Revelation ten times.'

Jose managed that task as well. 'So, what do I do now?'

Brother Van Meter answered, 'Now, go to the beginning and read Genesis all the way to Revelation and do that for the rest of your life.'

Jose did precisely as his mentor suggested and has read the Bible in this manner ever since. He soon discovered that God spoke to him through the Bible and that it contained instructions for every aspect of life.

I heard Jose Muniz recount his story more than a decade ago after I stumbled upon his video message on a website called *SermonIndex*. My life experience couldn't have been more different from Jose's. I was raised in a Christian family and attended church regularly as a child, but as I listened to his story and how he had learned to love and respect the Word of God, the Holy Spirit brought deep conviction to my heart.

In his message, Jose related some observations he had made as he began hanging around the 'church crowd.' He noticed that many churchgoers didn't often read the Bible, and most had never read the whole Bible all the way through, not even once. As a young Christian, he wondered to himself: *How could this be? Isn't this discipleship? Isn't the Word of God meant to be a priority for Christians?*

As Jose spoke these words on the video, the Holy Spirit showed me that up until that point in my life, the Word of God had not been a priority to me. I did believe the Bible was God's truth and that it was authoritative, inerrant and sufficient, but I had never once read it through in its entirety. In fact, sometimes, several days passed by without me opening my Bible at all. On the occasions I did pick it up, I usually dipped into it randomly to read a Psalm or some other encouraging passage. Then, as I read, I would search for a verse that 'jumped out at me.'

The Lord began to show me that my haphazard method of reading the Scriptures was extremely self-focused. It was also severely inadequate in gaining an understanding of God in all his glorious fullness.

Some years ago, I worked in the kitchen of a Christian ministry. I oversaw the catering and took great delight in presenting an appetising spread to the crowds attending the teaching courses at the centre. Often for lunch, I placed a feast across the serving tables at the front of the dining hall. There was always an enormous basket filled with various kinds of bread and bread rolls. There were also numerous bowls of salads, as well as platters of meat, cheese, tuna and egg. Often there were trays filled with colourful fruit, homemade cakes or biscuits fresh out of the oven. Each person could grab a plate and fill it with whatever they wanted. There was an abundance of food to choose from.

Imagine, however, if all I chose to eat for lunch was a single grape from the banquet set before me. Nothing else. Not even another crumb. After one meal, I might be ravenous, but I could survive. But what if I only ate a single grape now and then, and some days I ate nothing at all? If I did this for weeks or months on end, I would soon become undernourished and starving.

This is a picture of what I was doing to myself spiritually by not prioritising the Word of God in my life. I was spiritually anorexic. What a fool I was not to partake of the entire feast God had set freely before me in the Scriptures.

After God had convicted me, I picked up my Bible, flipped it open, and began to read it exactly in the manner as Brother Van Meter once instructed Jose: 'Go to the beginning and read Genesis all the way to Revelation and do that for the rest of your life.'

My first time reading through the whole Bible was slow and often tedious. Leviticus and the genealogies in Chronicles just about did me in! But I managed to read the whole Bible through from cover to cover. Sometimes I didn't understand what I was reading, but I persisted. As I read, I took to heart something that Jose said: 'We need to get back to the basics, to the simple Word of God. Even if you don't understand it at times, just read it. Let the Holy Spirit teach you what he wants to teach you. Just take it in. The Holy Spirit will bring it back when you need it.'

When I had finished reading the Bible once, I went back to the beginning and started all over again. This has become my habit ever since. I'm not sure how many times I have now read the Bible in its entirety, but I have discovered something incredible: my understanding increases each time I read it through. Everything written in the canon of Scripture fits together in the most breathtaking way. Rather than becoming dull and repetitive, it grows more alive with every reading. There are times now when I don't want to stop reading! The Bible teaches me the truth about the one and only Living God. It also teaches me about how I should relate to him. He speaks to me through the pages of his precious, sacred, and life-giving book. As he does, the Lord convicts, encourages, guides, equips and counsels me every day.

The Word of God is truly a magnificent feast that is able to satisfy the deepest spiritual hunger. That's not so surprising when you consider that the origin of all Scripture is God himself: The Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit wrote it together. The Bible is God-breathed, and the sum of its entirety is his truth (1 Tim 3:16, Ps 119:160). Over a period of about 1500 years, the Lord spoke his truth to forty different humans, and the Holy Spirit carried each of them along as they wrote down his words. All human authors were from diverse backgrounds, but each was guided and entirely inspired by the same God. The result was a collection of sixty-six books collected into one volume known as The Bible.

The Word of God is changing my life as I read it and learn to obey it. It is like gentle rain on arid ground, cleansing and softening my heart so it becomes a place where Christ's righteousness may flourish.

Isn't it like God to use the foolish things of this world to shame the wise? God used a man who had been thoroughly unchurched throughout his childhood to convict someone like me who had been in Christian circles their whole life. Jose's testimony is evidence of God's power at work. The person of Jesus has transformed him into a new creation, while the trustworthy truths of God's Word have been making him wise (Ps 19:7). He now encourages Christians to read their bibles so that they will be equipped to evangelise. The Word of God is a feast to be shared with a spiritually starving world. Jose says, 'You can read every book written by Christian authors, but if you do not read the book that was written by the Holy Spirit, then you will not have the truth that the lost world needs.' The gospel of Christ revealed through the Scriptures is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes (Rom 1:16). Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom 10:17).

How thankful I am for Jose's testimony.

How thankful I am for Jose's mentor, Brother Van Meter.

Both of these men have been instruments of God to convict my heart.

Let me encourage anyone reading this to follow the advice of Brother Van Meter: 'Go to the beginning and read Genesis all the way to Revelation and do that for the rest of your life.' With the Holy Spirit's help, regular time in the Word of God will increase your faith, deepen your relationship with the Lord, and begin to change you from the inside out. It will make the simple wise.

'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.' (Is 55:1).

## ***Afterword...***

Here are four practical steps when reading the Bible:

1. Read each book in the Bible from beginning to end. Learn to understand the **context** of a verse or passage (what it means in relation to the verses before and after and in relation to the book as a whole). Context also involves understanding the historical setting. Also, learn to understand the **co-text** (compare it to other parts of Scripture for a fuller meaning). E.g., Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd in John 10. Compare this to other Bible passages that refer to God as a shepherd, such as Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34.
2. Each time you open your Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to teach and help you understand. There is no better teacher than the author himself. The Holy Spirit will illuminate the lamp of God's Word so that it becomes a light for your path. (John 14:26).
3. Look for Jesus in every book of the Bible. The Scriptures testify about Jesus (John 5:39). He is the foundation of all truth, and you will discover that both the Old and New Testaments point to him.
4. Make your Bible reading God-focused rather than self-focused. Don't ask, 'What does this passage mean to me?' (Scripture can be twisted to mean anything at all if read in a subjective manner). Rather, each time you read a Bible passage, ask:
  - a. 'What does this passage teach me about God?'
  - b. 'What does this passage actually say?'
  - c. 'How can this apply to my own life today?'

***Dear Heavenly Father,  
Please send the Holy Spirit to illuminate the truths of Your Word. Teach me about you. Teach me your ways that I may know you. And please use your Word to change me where I need to change, so that I can become more and more like Jesus.  
In Jesus' Name, Amen.***