
Part Five

HEAR GOD'S WORD



GOD IS A GOD OF COMMUNICATION AND WORDS. Throughout the ages he has spoken to us through the written Word, the spoken word and the incarnate Word. The *H* disciplines address our need and desire to hear a word from God. Our world of printed as well as verbal noise can drown out the reality and wonder of God's Word. There are always other books to read and speakers to listen to. Of course God does use books and people to speak to us. But Scripture is a primary way that the Holy Spirit opens us up to the God who is beyond us.

In the Bible God reveals to us both our sin and our belovedness. Our desires for nourishment, strength, comfort and joy are all addressed in Scripture. Reading God's Word, listening to Scripture on tape or singing biblical texts all put us in a place to attend to the God who speaks. Though there is no new word of revelation today, God is still speaking and guiding us personally and intimately through the Word. Regularly being with God in his Word is a way we open ourselves to truths and guidance outside us.

"In the Bible God gives us revelations of himself which lead us to worship, promises of salvation which stimulate our faith, and commandments expressing his will which demand our obedience. This is the meaning of Christian discipleship."—John R. W. Stott

BIBLE STUDY

DESIRE	to know what the Bible says and how it intersects with my life
DEFINITION	Bible study involves engaging the mind and focusing attention on Scripture in an attempt to understand and apply truth to every part of my life.
SCRIPTURE	<p>"Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way." (2 Timothy 3:16 <i>The Message</i>)</p> <p>"Let the word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God!" (Colossians 3:16 <i>The Message</i>)</p> <p>"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11)</p>
PRACTICE INCLUDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attending to biblical instruction (oral or written) with an open mind and heart in order to grow in love and understanding of the truth • systematically studying Scripture to gain the big picture of what God is doing on planet earth • using study guides, manuscript studies, small group Bible studies, etc.
GOD-GIVEN FRUIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping company with Jesus no matter how little or much God speaks to me through his Word • loving God with my mind • learning and internalizing what Scripture teaches about God • having Scripture shape and form my thinking and lifestyle so they are increasingly redemptive and life giving • using my understanding to build the community of faith • putting myself in a place where God can instruct and correct my behavior and attitudes • growing in my ability to rationally defend and express my faith

BIBLE STUDY



THE BIBLE IS DIVINE REVELATION. God's own word to us. It reveals who God is, who we are and why we are here. Through Bible study we gain insights into God, human nature and creation.[†] Studying the Scripture can equip, guide and reveal how to live in life-giving ways that deepen our friendship with God and others. Both Old and New Testaments encourage regular study, meditation, contemplation and memorization of God's Word. The benefits of Bible study are directly related to how open, attentive and obedient we are to what we read.

Jesus exemplified the love of God's Word in every area of his life. He used Scripture to answer those who tested him, resist temptation, find guidance, encourage his heart, comfort others, explain his actions and ultimately face his own death.

Several Ways to Study the Bible

Artist method. Read a passage of Scripture, considering three questions as you read:

1. What speaks to my heart? Draw a heart beside the word that speaks to your heart.
2. What new thought or idea comes to me? Draw a light bulb beside the new thought or idea.
3. What does Scripture move me to do? Draw a hand beside the action you want to take.

Consider how you can apply one of your insights today. Share your insights with a friend.

Detective method. Read a short narrative passage from one of the Gospels. Let the story take shape in your mind's eye. Imagine the scene. Observe all the facts. Ask the *who*, *when*, *where*, *what* questions. Once you have the facts, *interpret* the facts. Ask the *why* and *wherefore* questions. What meaning did the actions have for the characters? What meaning do the actions have for you? Then *apply* your study to your own life. Ask *how* will this change my life? What do you take away from the story?

Treasure-seeker method. When reading Scripture consider the following application questions:

[†]I owe my understanding of Bible study to Ada Lum and Ruth Siemens. These two wonderful IFES staff mentored me in inductive study, fueling my desire to study the Scriptures.

Is there an example here for me to follow? Is there a promise to claim or a command to obey? Is there a truth to be applied? Is there a prayer for me to pray? Is there a sin to be confessed? Is there a question God is asking me?

Jesus' apprentice method. If you are unfamiliar with Scripture and don't know where to begin, choose one of the Gospels (Mark or Luke) and study to discover all you can about Jesus. Ask yourself the following questions: What seems important to Jesus? What sort of questions does he ask people? What sort of questions do people ask him? What is Jesus inviting me to be and do?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How has God spoken to you through the study of his Word?

How has Bible study affected your life?

2. When the Word of God seems dry to you, what do you make of this season in your life?

3. What are you looking for when you read Scripture—information, comfort, understanding, guidance, a word from God, communion with God?

4. How does what you are looking for influence how you study?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Experiment with different ways of listening to Scripture.

- Read the Bible out loud. Savor the words. Which words stand out for you? Keep these words with you all day.
- Listen to the Bible on tape or CD while driving or exercising.
- Print a verse on a card and place it where you will see it throughout the day. Put a verse on your screen saver.

2. To enhance your understanding of the biblical context and meaning the text may have had to its original audience, invest in a Bible commentary, a Bible dictionary or go online and type in places, cultures and peoples you are reading about in your Bible study.

3. Go to a Christian bookstore and look through the array of Bible study guides available. Does one of the study guides intrigue you? Let your desire guide you in choosing one for further study.

4. If systematic Bible study appeals to you, consider joining a Bible study at your church or in your community. Or begin your own neighborhood Bible study.

5. Study the questions Jesus asks people in the Gospels. What do you learn about Jesus and the importance of questions?

Resources on Bible Study

How to Lead a Seeker Bible Discussion by Rebecca Manley Pippert

How to Study the Bible by Jack Kuhatschek

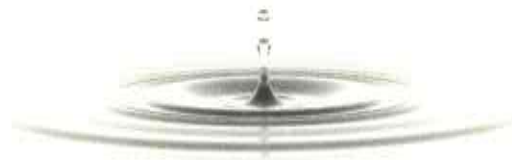
Discovering the Bible for Yourself by Judson Poling

"Our desire to know more, read more and study more can be another expression of our culture and its acquisitive nature. Knowing God, not knowing more, is the goal."—Richard Rohr

DEVOTIONAL READING

DESIRE	to prayerfully encounter and surrender to the living God through attending to Scripture
DEFINITION	Devotional reading or hearing of Scripture requires an open, reflective, listening posture alert to the voice of God. This type of reading is aimed more at growing a relationship with God than gathering information about God.
SCRIPTURE	<p>"Turn my heart toward your statutes. . . . Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. . . . How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! . . . Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart." (Psalm 119:36, 97, 103, 111)</p> <p>"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight." (Hebrews 4:12-13)</p> <p>"The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it." (Deuteronomy 30:14)</p>
PRACTICE INCLUDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prayerfully dwelling on a passage of Scripture • listening deeply God's personal word to you • reading not to master the text but be mastered by it • staying with one text until the Lord prompts movement to another • reading for depth, not breadth • contemplative and formational reading of Scripture or other devotional texts
GOD-GIVEN FRUIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping company with Jesus whether or not he speaks to you • seeking and listening for a personal word from God • dwelling in a text until it begins to live in and master you • responding to God's Word with your heart and spirit, not just your rational, cognitive and intellectual prowess • softening of your heart so that the head-heart schism is mended and you live more and more out of love • having Scripture guide your dialogue with God • a growing receptivity and submission to God's Word

DEVOTIONAL READING



WE UNDERSTAND WHAT WIND IS BY FEELING IT BLOW IN OUR FACE. We know what snow is like when we make a snowball or watch snowflakes collect on our mittens. This sort of knowing transcends the intellect; it is direct, sensate and experiential. Devotional reading, or *lectio divina*, invites us into this kind of knowing. It is the kind of knowing for which Paul prayed when he said,

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to *know this love that surpasses knowledge*—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19, emphasis added)

The first 1,500 years of church history were characterized by the practice of *lectio divina*. Since many people were illiterate and many that could read didn't have Bibles, *lectio divina* offered a way of attending to Scripture as it was read in church, with an ear to hearing a word from God. Some brief and memorable word or phrase became bread for the soul throughout the week. Devotional reading is not an exercise in mentally critiquing or exeging the text. It exists to further divine companionship. *Lectio divina* invites us into God's presence to listen for his particular, loving word *to me* at this particular moment in time. In *lectio* one listens to the word as it is read aloud, or you read the text aloud for yourself.

Devotional reading of Scripture is rooted in the assurance that every part of the biblical story—letters, parables, Gospels, Prophets, history—is inspired and can give voice to God's particular word to us.

Devotional reading was traditionally made up five movements:

1. *Silencio*—quiet preparation of the heart. Come into God's presence, slow down, relax, and intentionally release the chaos and noise in your mind to him.
2. *Lectio*—read the word. Read a Scripture passage slowly and out loud, lingering over the words so that they resonate in your heart. When a word or phrase catches your attention, don't keep reading. Stop and attend to what God is saying to you. Be open to the

word. Don't analyze it or judge it. Listen and wait.

3. *Meditatio*—meditate. Read the Scripture a second time out loud. Savor the words. Listen for any invitation that God is extending to you in this word. Reflect on the importance of the words that light up to you. Like Mary, who pondered the word in her heart, gently explore the ramifications of God's invitation.
4. *Oratio*—respond, pray. Read the Scripture a third time. Now is the moment to enter into a personal dialogue with God. There is no right or wrong way to do this. The important thing is to respond truthfully and authentically. What feelings has the text aroused in you? Name where you are resistant or want to push back. Become aware of where you feel invited into a deeper way of being with God. Talk to God about these feelings.
5. *Contemplatio*—contemplate, rest and wait in the presence of God. Allow some time for the word to sink deeply into your soul. Yield and surrender yourself to God. Before you leave, you might consider a reminder that can help you dwell on or incarnate this word throughout the day.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How has your faith journey been characterized by a head-heart split?
How has God's love moved from being a matter of belief to a real and lived experience?
2. How would you characterize the way you tend to read?
How has the way you read Scripture been influenced by reading habits in general?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of scanning and hurrying through material in search of the main idea?
4. How and when have the Scriptures been the voice of God to you?
How have they brought you into the presence of Christ?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Using Mark 10:46-52
 - *Silencio*. Put yourself in the presence of God. Become quiet and offer yourself to God.
 - *Lectio*. Read Mark 10:46-42 out loud, slowly allowing the words to resonate and settle in your heart. Linger on the word or phrase that catches your attention and lights up for you. Sit with the word or phrase and savor it as a word of God for you.
 - *Meditatio*. Read the passage again and listen to where the word connects with your life right now. Enter into the scene in your imagination. Imagination is a God-given gift. Envision the scene. Carefully watch the people. Listen to how they interact. What do you hear and experience as you watch and listen?
 - *Oratio*. Read the passage one more time, listening attentively. Has God addressed

you in this Word and invited you to respond? Allow the Scripture to lead you into a prayer response. Do not censure your thoughts or requests. Let them flow out spontaneously and freely before the Lord who loves you. Hold nothing back. Respond to God's invitation to you.

- *Contemplatio*. Deeply receive God's Word and rest in his presence and love. Give yourself some time to wait and be still before you reenter life as usual. Take God's Word to you with you throughout the day. Return to it and remember it all day long. Stay with God until you feel prompted to leave.
2. Before reading Scripture, open yourself to the presence of God. Say something like "Here I am, Lord" or "Open my eyes to see wonderful things in your Word." • Read slowly until a word or phrase lights up for you. When you sense a word lighting up for you, attend to this word. Do not read any further. Listen to your feelings and God's nudging around this word. Let this word summon you into prayer. • Reflect on this word throughout the day.
 3. In your Bible reading, ask God to give you a prayer response to his Word. As a word or phrase lights up for you, consider the prayer God may be calling you to pray. Then pray that prayer for the coming week.
 4. When you read Scripture, insert your own name into the pronouns that stand for *you*. What is it like for you to read Scripture in this personal way? • For example read Isaiah 43:1-3. Insert your name in the blank space.

But now this is what the LORD says—

he who formed you O _____,

Fear not, for I have redeemed _____;

I have summoned _____ by name; _____ is mine.

When _____ passes through the waters,

I will be with _____;

and when _____ passes through the rivers,

they will not sweep over _____.

When _____ walks through the fire,

_____ will not be burned;

the flames will not set _____ ablaze.

For I am the LORD, _____'s God,

the Holy One of Israel, _____'s Savior.

What is this experience of reading Scripture like for you?

5. Choose a biblical character with whom you identify. Turn to Scripture passages in which this character shows up. Read the passage aloud, placing yourself in the story as

an onlooker. Let the story settle deeply into you. Listen for similarities between you and this biblical character. Where do you struggle like he or she does? How do his or her circumstances give deeper meaning to your journey? Listen to what the Lord is saying to you through this character and his or her story. • How does this story help you understand your own story and where God is in that story? Talk to God about what it is like to have his Word speak to you.

Resources on Devotional Reading

Gathered in the Word by Norveen Vest

Shaped by the Word by Robert Mulholland

"A spiritual kingdom lies all about us, enclosing us, embracing us, altogether within reach of our inner selves, waiting for us to recognize it. God Himself is here waiting our response to His Presence. This eternal world will come alive to us the moment we begin to reckon upon its reality."—A. W. Tozer

MEDITATION

DESIRE	to more deeply gaze on God in his works and words
DEFINITION	Meditation is a long, ardent gaze at God, his work and his Word. Slowing down and giving one's undivided attention to God lies at the core of Christian mediation.
SCRIPTURE	<p>"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." (Joshua 1:8)</p> <p>"If I'm sleepless at midnight, I spend the hours in grateful reflection." (Psalm 63:6 <i>The Message</i>)</p> <p>"I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished, and give a long, loving look at your acts." (Psalm 77:12 <i>The Message</i>)</p> <p>"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)</p>
PRACTICE INCLUDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading creation as "a most elegant book, wherein, all creatures great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things of God" (Belgic Confession) • mulling over, chewing on and ruminating over God's Word and its application • meditating on people; seeing them as God sees them and expressing delight in them as he does • paying attention to God with your body by slowing down, relaxing and breathing deeply • meditating on Jesus and on Scripture
GOD-GIVEN FRUIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing sight for the interior things of God in the natural and external world • seeing beyond a first glance and first impression to the heart of God • developing depth of insight • developing a love for gazing on God • experiencing calmness, serenity and quietness stemming from an awareness of the nearness of God

MEDITATION



MEDITATION IS NOT SIMPLY A DISCIPLINE OF Eastern religions and New Age gurus. Meditation rests at the core of Judeo-Christian spirituality; it's an invitation to apprehend God. In *The Pursuit of God* A. W. Tozer writes, "God dwells in His creation and is everywhere indivisibly present in all His works." And Psalm 139:7 asserts, "Where can I go from your Spirit? / Where can I flee from your presence?" God is near. In the words of C. S. Lewis in his *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*: "God walks everywhere incognito." Clues to his presence can be found in creation, in history, in human beings, in worship and in Scripture. But we must stop and pay attention. Meditation runs counter to our busy culture, where speed reading, first impressions and skimming are as deep as we go. In meditation we gaze at something or someone long and longingly. We seek the treasure and truth of what we see. Just as moving a prism reveals different bands of color, meditation allows God to shine his truth and light into our hearts.

Meditation is not about emptying the mind so there is nothing there. Christian meditation opens us to the mind of God and to his world and presence in the world. As we enter times of mediation, it is important to let go of our preoccupations so we can focus our minds and become present to God. Our minds are naturally designed to make associations and follow tangents. Meditation is a way we train the mind to stay put so it can explore appropriate associations. Simple physical exercises like stretching, sitting comfortably and breathing deeply can help us pay attention, listen deeply and even curb our distractibility. These exercises are not an end in themselves. They simply seek to put body, mind and spirit on the same page so we can better pay attention to God and treasure what he reveals.

To meditate on Scripture choose a verse, chapter or book of the Bible. Don't hurry. Listen to the Scripture. Write down your questions. Use your imagination. You may wish to memorize a short part of the text to keep it clearly before you. Like a cow chewing the cud, keep returning to your text with your mind and heart. When you are distracted, gently return to your text. Express once again your desire to pay attention. The impact of meditating on Scripture can show up later in our interactions with others. (See "Devotional

Reading," "Praying Scripture" and "Memorization.")

To meditate on God's good creation, attend to what God has made. Open yourself to the beauty around you and drink deeply. Let the Spirit move you into praise. Meditation on creation is meant to lead us into the arms of our Creator. (See "Care of the Earth.")

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How would you characterize your ability to pay attention?
2. When do you find it easiest to focus your mind or heart?
3. How might the tendency to do everything quickly affect your ability to meditate?
4. What is your gut reaction to the word *meditation*?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Prepare yourself to meditate on Scripture by choosing a comfortable and quiet place. Do not rush. Stretch, arrange your chair, take off your shoes. Sit in a position that you can maintain without effort or attention. Place yourself in the presence of God. Release your anxieties and to-do list to the Lord. Ask him to open your heart to his Word.

Read Psalm 139, Psalm 86, Psalm 42 or another short passage from Scripture.

Take your time, and when a word "lights up" for you stop and attend. Let the word or phrase roam around in your mind and heart. What do you hear? What feelings do you notice in yourself? Write down any questions that surface. You can attend to these at another time.

- When your mind wanders, gently bring it back and continue your meditation. Do not feel you have to finish anything. Take your word with you.
 - Begin again tomorrow with the same passage.
2. Take a walk in nature, meditating on the handiwork of God. The lilies of the field and the birds of the air spoke to Jesus of God's care (Matthew 6:26-31). How does God speak to you in his creation?
 3. Meditate on the news. How is God speaking to you through current events? Is he inviting you to see the world through his eyes in some new way? Is he inviting you into prayer in a new way?
 4. Meditate on the great truths of the faith using the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed or a confession of faith. Spend time deeply entering into the words and their meaning.
 - The following is a quote from the Heidelberg Confession of Faith and is a lovely truth for meditation:

Question: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

Answer: That I belong body and soul, in life and death, not to myself, but to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has freely paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil.

5. Meditate on the work of God in the lives of individuals throughout the ages. Listen to what they can teach you and how they can shape you.

Resources on Meditation

The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed

Devotional Classics by Richard Foster and James Bryan Smith

"If I had to find one word to describe how belief came to take hold in me, it would be 'repetition.'"
 —Kathleen Norris

MEMORIZATION

DESIRE	to carry the life-shaping words of God in me at all times and in all places
DEFINITION	Memorization is the process of continually remembering the words, truths and images God uses to shape us. Memorization provides us with a store of learning, which can be accessed anywhere and anytime.
SCRIPTURE	<p>"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long." (Psalm 119:97)</p> <p>"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11)</p> <p>"Then they remembered his words." (Luke 24:8)</p> <p>"I think it is right to refresh your memory. . . . And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things." (2 Peter 1:13, 15)</p>
PRACTICE INCLUDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • memorizing Scripture, hymns, poems, quotes, etc. • rereading portions of Scripture until they are committed to memory • memorizing Scripture verses that clearly reveal God's plan of salvation • memorizing the books of the Bible, particular dates and times as well as where various verses are found • learning by heart portions of Scripture that encourage you when you are tempted
GOD-GIVEN FRUIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping company with Jesus by hiding his Word in your heart • recollecting God-given encouragement and exhortation • developing a habit of remembering that anchors your life in biblical truth • committing to memory Scripture, hymns, poems and quotes that God is using in your life • knowing where well-loved portions of Scripture are located

MEMORIZATION



FOR MILLENNIA, COMMITTING THINGS TO MEMORY served as the foundation for religious, political and educational instruction. Memorized matter was known to have staying power. It was not at the mercy of being relevant or hip and didn't depend on books or literacy. Words, stories and prayers known by heart could be stored deep in the mind, pop up out of the blue and amuse, comfort, and educate others.

But the world has changed. The printing press, the increasing accessibility of books, the flood of information, the World Wide Web—all these make memorization less important. If we want to know something, we can just Google it. If we like a poem by Emily Dickinson or want to know who the Chaldeans were, we type in a few words and have it on our computer in a heartbeat.

No doubt the ability to read and access to books and computers are wonderful gifts. But a mind so overwhelmed with information that nothing is known by heart can leave the soul at the mercy of the last mental image that took our fancy. Memorization allows us to choose words and images that shape our minds and hearts. It gives the mind somewhere to go when all the media is turned off. Furthermore, memorizing God's Word allows us to access divinely inspired thought and wisdom. And it works in us even when we are not conscious of its doing so.

If you are someone who forgets birthdays and can't remember why you opened the refrigerator door, the whole notion of memorization can seem ludicrous. Don't be too discouraged. Consider the things you have already memorized without trying. What songs do you know by heart? What proverbs or sayings or Bible verses? Memorization depends on repetition. Choose what you want to memorize and tape it where you constantly see it. Return to it again and again.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is your attitude toward memorization?
2. What do you believe the benefits of memorization can be?

When have you experienced the benefits of memorization?

3. What sort of things have you memorized without trying? What was that like for you?
4. If you were put in solitary confinement, what sort of things would you have learned by heart to nourish your soul?
5. Do you find yourself memorizing sporting statistics, line-ups or world records; recipes; phone numbers; e-mail addresses; directions?

How does memorizing these things help you or encourage you in memorizing words that can nourish your soul?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Begin by memorizing some of the choruses or songs that you enjoy. Sing the bits you remember. Listen again to the bits you forget. Write them out if it helps you. • When you have committed the song to memory, notice when the song simply pops into your mind. Let the song be a way God enters into your life and speaks to you.
2. When you find yourself captivated by a Scripture, write it on a card that you can tape to a mirror, a window or even the shower wall. Every day read the verse, rehearsing it in your mind and heart. On a daily basis remind yourself of the Scripture until you know it by heart. Only then are you ready to move on to another portion of Scripture.
3. Memorize a chapter of the Bible. Take your time with this. Let the words sink into your soul. If singing helps you to remember things, don't be afraid to sing the words.
Memorize a book of the Bible.
4. Develop a group that memorizes the Scripture passages for worship services. Work together to dramatically speak God's Word.

Resources on Memorization

Delighted by Discipline by Mark R. Littleton

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, chapter 2, by Donald S. Whitney

The Topical Memory System by NavPress