

Spiritual Practices: Dwelling in the Word

Week 3

Reading God's Word is obviously a big part of being a disciple. It is an important way to learn about Him, *and* in which He communicates with us. But there are different methods of reading, and they depend on how you've been taught, your mindset and your openness to the Holy Spirit.

Most of us learned to read the Bible the Western way, which is to read for **information**. In this method we are mostly intellectualizing what we're reading, and it is important to understand stories, languages, interpretations, perspectives, logistics, etc. This method promotes cognitive activity, or, "head" knowledge. (*ex. "What does it say? What does it mean? How do I apply it to my life?"*)

When we engage the Scriptures for **Spiritual transformation**, we engage our mind but also our heart, our emotions, our imagination, and our curiosity. We open ourselves to a deeper level of understanding and insight which leads us to a deeper relationship with God. Scripture becomes an instrument of God's control rather than a tool that we control to our own ends. The Spirit changes the way we live our lives, and it is noticeable to others.

1. Can anyone relate to this quote?

"...the Scriptures were becoming a place of human striving and intellectual hard work. Somehow, I had fallen into a pattern of using the Scriptures as a tool to accomplish utilitarian purposes rather than experiencing them primarily as a place of intimacy with God for my own soul's sake."
-Ruth Haley Barton

2. What are possible questions we could ask after a Scripture reading, that take us beyond the usual answers, and closer to a place of intimacy with God? (*How do I feel about what is being said here? Is there anywhere I am resisting or pulling back? What aspect of my is being touched or spoken to through this Scripture?*) Suggestion: One exercise to produce more of this type of question is to place yourself in the scripture, if it is a parable, or a story in the life of David, imagine yourself in the scene as you read.
3. In your own experiences with God, have you ever had a Scripture "gut punch" – just hit you in a different way even though you've read it many times? Tell of an example. Did you feel like you were encountering God in a new way?

To practice reading in this slower, more intentional way, here is an example. In a group, you can select a reader, or you can do this exercise by yourself. After the scripture is read, allow 2-3 minutes of silence, then proceed with the instruction in red.

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1. **READ.** Allow the words to resonate and settle in your heart. As the scripture is read, listen for the word or phrase that stands out to you. In the silence, savor the word, repeating it without trying to figure out what it means. *Each participant says the word or phrase that strikes them. No discussion beyond that.*

Read again.

2. **REFLECT.** Listen for the way this passage connects with your life. What is it in my life right now that needs to hear this word? During the silence, stay present with God with whatever comes. *Each participant says briefly how their life is touched by this word.*

Read again.

3. **RESPOND.** Listen for God's invitation. In the silence, respond with the prayer that comes most naturally in response to what you have heard God say to you. *What do you sense is God's invitation to you? No need to comment on what each other is saying. Just receive it with a prayerful spirit.*

Read again.

4. **REST.** In the silence, release any concerns you may have, and return to a place of rest in God, and enjoy His presence.