

AGAPE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
Institute for Christian Discipleship

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Discipline 1- Session 1

The Intake of God's Word

Working with rural churches in Africa as I do, I was unprepared for some of my encounters with professing Christians. Lying, stealing, and immorality were common and generally accepted, even among leadership in the church. Theological understanding was as scarce as water, the disease of doctrinal error as common as malaria.

The source of this is not difficult to discern when one realizes that often NO ONE HAS A BIBLE. Not the pastor, not a deacon, no one. Often the “pastor” will have a half-dozen sermons, all half-baked over the coals of a few Bible story recollections. Every sixth week comes the same sermon. The only real contact with the scriptures happens with the occasional visit from a missionary (sometimes the nearest one can be a hundred miles away). For almost everyone in the church infrequent, vicarious brushes with the Bible are all they've ever known.

Many of us make shake our heads in pity at such a sad condition. It's hard to imagine that many of us have more Bibles in our own homes that entire churches have in some remote situations. But, its one thing to be unfamiliar with Scripture because you don't own a Bible; it's another thing when you have a bookshelf full.

No spiritual discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture. The reasons for this are obvious. In the Bible God tells us about himself, and especially about Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. The Bible unfolds the Law of God to us and shows us how we've all broken it. It is in the Bible that we learn how Christ died as a sinless, willing substitute for breakers of God's Law and how we must repent and believe in Him to be right with God. In the Bible we learn the ways and will of the Lord. We find in Scripture how to live in a way that is pleasing to God as well as best and most fulfilling for ourselves. None of this eternally essential information can be found anywhere except in the Bible. Therefore if we would know God and be Godly, we must know the Word of God – intimately.

However, many who yawn with familiarity and nod in agreement to these statements spend no more time in God's Word in an average day than those with no Bible at all. Great numbers of Christians know little more about the Bible than Third-World Christians who possess not even a shred of the written Word. Someone once remarked: “The worst dust storm in history would occur in all church members who were neglecting their Bibles were to dust them off simultaneously.”

So, even though we honor God's Word with our lips, we must confess that our hearts—as well as our

hands, ears, eyes, and minds--are often far from it. Regardless of how busy we become with all things Christian, we must remember that the most transforming practice available to us is the disciplined intake of Scripture.

Bible intake is not only the most important Spiritual Discipline, it is also the most broad. It actually consist of several sub disciplines. It's much like a university comprised of many colleges, each specializing in a different discipline, yet all united under the general name of the university. Int today's lesson we are going to examine the “colleges” or sub disciplines, of Bible intake, proceeding from the least to the most difficult.

A. HEARING GOD'S WORD

1. PURPOSING TO HEAR GOD'S WORD

(Scriptures to Read: Luke 11:28; Romans 10:17)

- a. Based upon Luke 11:28 – *what is the purpose of “hearing God's Word?”*

- b. Based upon Romans 10:17 – *what is the greatest benefit of hearing God's Word?”*

2. DISCIPLINING MY SELF TO HEAR GOD'S WORD

(Scripture to Read 1 Timothy 4:13)

- a. In addition to hearing God's Word Preached, what some other ways I can discipline my self to “hear” God's Word?

3. PREPARING MY SELF TO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD **(Scripture to Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:13)**

Jeremiah Burroughs, an English Puritan wrote in 1648:

First, when you come to hear the Word, if you would sanctify God's name, you must possess your souls with what it is you are going to hear. That is, what you are going to hear is the Word of God...Therefore yo find that the apostle, writing to the Thessalonians, gives them the reason why the Word did them so much good as it did; it was because they did hear it AS THE WORD OF GOD. “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you herd fro us, you accepted it not as the word of a man, but as what it really is, the Word of God.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Hearing the Word of God is not passive listening, it is a discipline which must be cultivated.

Discuss ways we can prepare ourselves to hear the Word of God.

B. READING GOD'S WORD

(Scriptures to read: Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 1:3)

If you still doubt that Christians need to be exhorted to discipline themselves to read the Bible, consider the USA Today reported a poll that showed only **11% of Americans read the Bible everyday**. More than half read it less than once a month or never at all. (This is among all Americans)

When the Barna Group polled professing Christians only 18% read the Bible every day and almost 23% (one in four Christians) NEVER read the Bible. Consider these statistics in light of our theme verse; 1 Timothy 4:7 - “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”

- a. In Matthew 4:4, what implied command from Jesus is contained in this verse?
- b. Let's talk about 2 Timothy 3:16. What does this verse tell us about the importance of reading God's Word?

Three practical suggestions for consistent success in Bible Reading:

1. **Find Time:** We must discipline ourselves to find time to read the Word of God. Try to make it the same time every day.
2. **Find a Bible-Reading Plan** (You have been supplied a very workable one with this class. If you have a plan it will be easier to discipline yourself than if you are just randomly reading.

- 3. Find at least one word, phrase, or verse to meditate on each time you read.** Take at least one thing you've read and think deeply about it for a few moments. Your insight into Scripture will deepen and you'll better understand how it applies to your life. And the more you apply the truth of Scripture to your life, the more you'll become like Jesus.

(For those of you not accustomed to the discipline of Journaling, which we will take up in more detail later, this is a good place to start your journal. Each day when you read your Bible reading, meditate on one word, phrase or verse – and write down your thoughts and/or application in your journal.)

STUDYING GOD'S WORD

(Scriptures to read: Ezra 7:10; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 4:13)

If reading the Bible can be compared to cruising the width of a clear sparkling lake in a motorboat, studying the Bible is like slowly crossing that same lake in a glass-bottomed boat. The motorboat crossing provides an overview of the lake and a swift, passing view of its depths. The glass-bottomed boat of study however, takes you beneath the surface of Scripture for an unhurried look of clarity and detail that's normally missed by those who simply read the text. Reading gives us breadth, but study gives us depth. We're going to look at three examples of a heart to study God's Word.

1. Ezra (Ezra 7:10)
 1. (1) Ezra devoted himself
 2. (2) “to study”
 3. (3) “and observance of the Law of the Lord
 4. (4) “and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel

Ezra disciplined himself to study God's Word.

2. Bereans (Acts 17:11)
 1. The Bereans received the message of God with eagerness
 2. The Bereans examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.
3. Paul (2 Timothy 4:13)
 1. In his cold and miserable confinement, the apostle asked for two things:
 1. a cloak to wear so his body could be warmed
 2. and God's word to study so his mind and heart could be warmed.

Application Questions: *(These are also great journaling material)*

1. If your growth in Godliness were measured by the quality of your Bible intake, what would be the result?
2. What is **one thing** you can do to improve your intake of God's Word?