

Session 2: Bible Intake (Part 1) ... for the Purpose of Godliness

CENTRAL IDEA

No other Spiritual Discipline rivals the importance of the intake of God's Word. No other Spiritual Discipline can compensate for the lack of it. Without feasting on the food of Scripture, no one will enjoy a growing, healthy Christlike life. Bible intake is not only the most important Spiritual Discipline, it is also the most broad. It actually consists of several subdisciplines. 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. The first three "colleges" of Bible intake are hearing, reading, and studying God's Word.

WARM-UP

1. Describe the Bible intake that took place—or didn't take place—in your home and church as you were growing up. Has that affected your view of Bible intake today? If so, how?

2. Have you—and your family, if you are married—developed a consistent pattern of Bible intake? If so, describe the difference it has made in your life. If not, what keeps you from developing such a pattern?

The Importance of Bible Intake

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. There 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 God wants us to live, and what brings the most joy and satisfaction in life. None of this eternally essential information can be found anywhere else except in the Bible. Therefore if we would know God and be godly, we must know the Word of God—intimately. My pastoral experience bears witness to the validity of surveys that frequently reveal that great numbers of professing Christians know little more about the Bible than poor Christians in remote parts of the world who possess not even a shred of Scripture. 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.

Hearing God's Word

The easiest of the Disciplines related to the intake of God's Word is simply hearing it. Why consider this a Discipline? Because if we don't discipline ourselves to hear God's Word regularly, we may only hear it accidentally, just when we feel like it, or never hear it at all. For most of us, disciplining ourselves to hear God's Word means primarily developing the practice of attending a Bible-believing church where the Word of God is faithfully preached.

Jesus once said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28). Merely listening to God-inspired words is not the point. The purpose of all methods of Bible intake is to "keep it," that is, to do what God says and thereby develop in Christlikeness.

One of the English Puritans, Jeremiah Burroughs, wrote before his death in 1646 the following words of counsel regarding preparation for the discipline of hearing God's Word: "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 what you are going to hear is the Word of God." So hearing the Word of God is not merely passive listening; it is a Discipline to be cultivated.

Reading God's Word

USA Today reported a poll that showed only 11 percent of all Americans—Christian and non-Christian—read the Bible every day. More than half read it less than once a month or never at all. A survey taken less than a year earlier by the Barna Research Group among those claiming to be "born-again Christians" disclosed these disheartening numbers: Only 18 percent—less than two of every ten—read the Bible every day. Worst of all, 23 percent—almost one in four professing Christians—say they *never* read the Word of God.

Because "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16), shouldn't we read it?

Jesus often asked questions about people's understanding of the Scriptures, sometimes beginning with the words, "Have you not read ...?" (Matthew 19:4; Mark 12:10). He assumed that those claiming to be the people of God would have read the Word of God. When He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4), surely He intended at the very least for us to read "every word."

Here are the three most practical suggestions for consistent success in Bible reading.

First, find the time. Discipline yourself to find the time. Try to make it the same time every day.

Second, find a Bible-reading plan. It's no wonder that those who simply open the Bible at random each day soon drop the discipline. Bible-reading plans abound on the Internet. Many study Bibles contain a reading schedule somewhere within the pages. Most local churches can provide you with a daily reading guide also.

Third, find at least one word, phrase, or verse to meditate on each time you read. (We'll look at meditation more closely in the next lesson.) 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.

Studying God's Word

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.

Why do so many Christians neglect the study of God's Word? R. C. Sproul said it painfully well:

Here then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy.

The basic difference between Bible reading and Bible study is simply a pen and paper (or some other means of preserving your thoughts). Books, thick and thin, abound on how to study the Bible.

So discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness by committing to at least one way of improving your intake of the Holy Word of God—by hearing, by reading, or by studying. For those who use their Bibles little are really not much better off than those who have no Bibles at all. (Taken from chapter 2 of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.)

The Importance of Bible Intake

3. Do you agree that “there simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture”? Why or why not?

4. How might your beliefs be different if you did not have a Bible? If you never received Bible intake?

5. Why is knowing the Bible intimately such a vital part of knowing God and being godly?

6. The text states that we often honor God's Word only with our lips. In what practical ways might you add to that honor with your heart, hands, ears, eyes, and mind?

7. In our busy lives, it's easy to become preoccupied with “Christian” activities and not spend enough time in God's Word. What “Christian” activities are you involved in? In what ways is or is not Bible intake a part of these activities?

Hearing God's Word

8. Read Luke 11:28. Why do you think Jesus emphasizes this point?

9. If we aren't disciplined in hearing God's Word, which negative consequences will occur? Be specific.

10. What do the following verses say about hearing God's Word?

Romans 10:17

1 Timothy 4:13

11. What other ways, besides in a local church ministry, can you hear God's Word?

12. Why is it important not to be a passive listener to God's Word? How can you cultivate the ability to be an intent listener? Be specific.

Reading God's Word

13. Read 1 Timothy 4:7 and 2 Timothy 3:16. How much time, on the average, do you spend reading the Bible each day? Be honest.

14. What happens to a person who reads the Bible? (See Revelation 1:3.)

15. In the past, have you seen a connection between the time you spend in Bible intake and your knowledge of God and His power? Describe your experiences.

16. Why can Bible intake become a chore instead of a Discipline of joy? In what ways might meditating on Scripture deepen your appreciation of God's Word?

Studying God's Word

17. a. Consider Ezra 7:10. To which three key areas of study did Ezra devote himself?

b. What did he do before he began teaching God's Word to the people?

18. In 2 Timothy 4:13, Paul asked Timothy to bring several items. What does Paul's request communicate to us about the importance of studying God's Word?

19. Do you agree with R. C. Sproul that laziness is the real reason Christians don't study God's Word enough? Why or why not?

20. What, in your mind, are the differences between hearing, reading, and studying God's Word?

CLOSING PRAYER

Focus on thanking God for sharing His Word with you. Ask Him to help you develop the Discipline of regular Bible intake so you can get to know Him better. Express your need for Him and His truths in your daily life.

GOING DEEPER

(Extra questions for further study)

21. If your growth in godliness were measured by the quality of your Bible intake, how would you measure up?

22. What do you think Jesus meant when He prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17)?

23. How does the emphasis of Philippians 3:13 apply to the failure many of us have experienced in daily Bible intake?

24. What can you do today to improve your intake of God's Word in the areas of hearing, reading, and studying?

25. Why is it important to continually receive Bible intake if such intake doesn't emotionally uplift you or give you a sense of peace each time?

26. How do you think you'll feel when you finally see the Word of God in the flesh, in heaven? How can this perspective encourage you in your commitment to know God more deeply today?

27. Consider how the following might enhance your study of Scripture:

- Writing down observations and questions about what you read
- Looking up cross-references
- Finding key words and seeing how they're used in other Scripture portions
- Outlining chapters, one paragraph at a time
- Doing book studies, character studies, topical studies, and/or word studies¹

¹ Donald S. Whitney, [*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life \(Study Guide\)*](#), Revised and Updated (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 15–26.