

DEVOTIONS

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Take a minute to pray for God to guide you as you study...

When is the last time you remember being hungry? For us in America, it's a very rare experience for you to have hunger and crave food. We are almost always eating! Whether it is breakfast, lunch and dinner, or it's snacks that you eat in between, we are hardly ever hungry because we eat all the time! When it comes to being a growing disciple of Jesus, it is important that you are constantly feeding and eating the right things in order to grow and develop.

One of the greatest privileges anyone can have is to be called a disciple of Jesus. It is an honor to be called a follower of Christ! Being a disciple is really about being **with** Jesus to become **like** Jesus. In fact, the whole point of being a disciple is to know Jesus better and allow Him to change you to become more like Him. One of the best ways to be with Jesus is by spending time each day reading about Him in the Bible. John, one of Jesus' disciples while He was here on earth, put it this way:

John 1:1-2, 14: "In the beginning was the _____, and the Word was with _____, and the Word _____ God... And the _____ became flesh, and dwelt among us."

So Who is the Word of God? Jesus. When we read the Bible we encounter Jesus, Who is the Word of God, and therefore we are able to be with Him through listening to His words and actions. Spending time in the Word, getting to know the Word, listening to the Word, is one of the greatest, most-important, parts of being a disciple! It is what helps us know Jesus better.

In John 14:32, Jesus says some incredible words about His desire to connect with us and to spend time with us. He says:

John 14:31: "Anyone who loves me will obey my _____. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

How cool is it that God gave us His "teachings" (a.k.a. the Bible) as a way for us to connect with Him? Even more, how beautiful is it that as we spend time in the Bible, we are inviting God to make a home in us. We are inviting God to live in our hearts JUST because we spent time reading the Bible and following what it says. Jesus tells us that those who love Him, that want to know Him better, will not only read His words, but will keep them and obey them!

Right after Jesus is baptized, He goes out into the wilderness for 40 days. While He is there, Satan comes to tempt him. Well, Jesus has been fasting and praying the whole time, and He most definitely is hungry at this point. Satan says to Him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But Jesus responds, "It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Jesus, although He was hungry, was living on the Word of God. Even though He was weak from hunger, He was strong because of the scripture that was buried in His heart. He was living on the Word!

If we are to be good disciples of Jesus, then we too must learn to live on the Word of God. It is something that must be buried inside us that is easy to draw on and bring to mind. Here's what David writes as he too wanted to live on the Word of God.

Psalms 119:11: "Your word I have _____ in my heart, that I may not _____ against You."

In order to be a disciple, it's imperative to constantly be "eating" the Word of God and burying it in your heart. And, one of the best ways to do that is to get into a habit of spending time reading your Bible every day! Daily Bible reading is something that takes being intentional and making it a priority in your life. And while there are many different ways to help you spend time in the Word, this lesson will help you learn a simple process that you can use each day to hide God's Word in your heart.

One last thing before you get to learn this process, I just want to encourage you to get a Bible that you can really enjoy using. There are many translations, print sizes, covers, layouts and bindings. Pick one that you will really love and will WANT to pick up each day. If you have to go buy a new one, do it! It may be the best way to keep you digging in the WORD.

HEAD, HEART, HAND

As you pick up your Bible, there are three areas to be listening through as God speaks to you through the Word. They are Head, Heart and Hand.

HEAD (Discovery):

One of the first connections that you'll make when reading the Word is through your head. Seek to understand what the text is saying in its historical and grammatical context. What issues, needs, or concerns are being addressed? If you see some words that you don't know or understand, look them up in a Bible dictionary or do a mini word study using a concordance. One of my favorite tools is to use Biblos.com, which is a website with many tools to help you better understand what God is trying to say to you. If you are a Greek or Hebrew buff, you can also use an interlinear, analytical lexicon, lexicon, and theological wordbook to dig in deeper. As you are reading, ask what thought, truth, principle, insight, or "Aha" is God trying to get across to the original audience. In this piece, you are really just trying to understand what the message is to the original audience. It's head knowledge.

BASIC POINT

Spending time with Jesus is at the heart of being a disciple of Jesus.

HEART (Application):

Here's where your time with Jesus gets really powerful, because this is where you are listening for God to speak to YOU! One author puts it this way as they describe time with God through reading His Word:

"The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe we would open God's Word and with what earnestness we would search its precepts. The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One."

- My Life Today, p. 283

And in another book, they put it this way:

“We should carefully study the Bible, asking God for the aid of the Holy Spirit, that we may understand His word. We should take one verse, and concentrate the mind on the task of ascertaining the thought which God has put in that verse for us. We should dwell [meditate] upon the thought until it becomes our own, and we know ‘what saith the Lord.’”

- The Desire of Ages, p.390

So after you have read the passage and understood it from a “head” perspective, begin to ask questions like these to understand it from a “heart” perspective.

- *“Lord? What are you trying to say to me through this passage?”*
- *What does this passage reveal about who God is and what He’s like?*
- *Is there any promise, instruction, counsel, warning, or rebuke that is for me?*
- *How does this passage relate to my hurts, needs, struggles, and challenges?*

This is looking for the key thought, truth, principle, insight or “Aha” that will apply to your life. As you reflect, meditate and ponder, God will whisper to you through His Word. Record these thoughts, impressions, and insights in a journal or process them in some way that will be memorable. As God reveals Himself to you, don’t be afraid to open up to Him. Express your joys, fears, needs, and concerns. Tell Him how you feel. Confess your faults and failures. Thank Him for His goodness. Ask for strength to carry out His revealed will. Always sign off by committing yourself completely to Him. During this exercise, keep the focus on God’s Word not your own inner thoughts or consciousness. The monks and mystics emphasize a “god within”—a “spark of divine” or “inner light” that resides in each soul. They believe that in order to find truth, one has only to look within. But the Bible teaches that all truth comes from the objective Word of God. Spending time in the Word is where a full connecting with God comes from.

HAND (Response/Action):

Now that you’ve heard God’s voice, go and carry out His commands. It is only as we ACT on God’s Word that it will take on real meaning in our lives. This is where the rubber meets the road.

The “hand” part of your experience with Jesus is where your life is truly changed and different. This is where you make decisions and choices as you hear God speak and show you where you need to change. This is where God makes a major impact in your life!

So, in order to give you practice, let’s try the “Head, Heart, Hand” method together as we look at Luke 24:13-27. Jot down any questions, thoughts, insights or application that God gives you and then share them.

HEAD (Discovery):

HEART (Application):

HAND (Response/Action):

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

1. Does the “Head, Heart, Hand” method make sense?
 2. When is the best time for you to spend time with Jesus each day?
 3. Do you have a Bible that you really enjoy?
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LESSON 2: DEVOTIONAL LIFE

