

21 HEARING THE HOLY SPIRIT



Receive

2 Peter 1:12-21

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:20-21, NIV)



Reflect

Am I allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to me through Scripture?

When I read the Bible, am I actively listening for God’s special message for me?

How do I know that it’s God speaking to me and not me wanting to hear a particular message?

Sometimes we doubt that the Bible actually has a particular, individualized message for us. After all, it’s pretty antiquated—we wonder how something that was written thousands of years ago, in a completely different place and time, can still apply to and impact those of us living in the 21st century. What we forget, though, is that God cannot be boxed into our definition and understanding of time. The God-breathed words that were written by the prophets and disciples of yesterday transcend all time and are still relevant today. God’s personal message waits for us within the pages of the Bible. The question is: are we willing to hear it?



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, open my ears. Help me hear the message You intend just for me.*

Consider What’s Real: Dozens of translations of the Bible exist, from the formal King James Version to more modern translations like The New Living Translation and The Message. If you find the Bible difficult to read and understand, take a few minutes to page through a few different translations at your local bookstore. You may find one that speaks your language.

Additional Verses to Consider: Psalm 119:105, John 1:1

22 ENGAGING GOD'S WORD



Receive

Hebrews 4:12

“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.”
(Hebrews 4:12, NIV)



Reflect

*Am I chewing on God's Word—allowing it to penetrate my heart and search out my motivations?
Am I read the Bible simply to get through it and check it off my to-do list?
Am I satisfied with simply reading the Word, or am I willing to go one step further and act on it?*

It's easy to close the Bible after our morning quiet time or at night before we turn off the bedside lamp and feel good about ourselves. “Hey,” we rationalize, “I'm reading the Bible, right? Isn't that good enough?” Reading the Bible is a great start, for sure. But God wants us to take another step: He wants us to live His Word: to ponder it, meditate on it, carry it with us and act on it. He wants His Word to guide our everyday decisions, serving as a lamp that shines along our daily path and a sounding board against which we can weigh our choices. God's Word *can* indeed seep into our body and spirit, into our heart, mind, and soul. It's our choice: Will we allow God's Word to transform us?



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, help me enjoy the full benefit of your Word by slowing down and really thinking about what You are trying to communicate to me. Guide me toward a deeper understanding of how You use the Holy Scriptures to transform my life.*

Consider What's Real: Sometimes we try to bite off a bit too much during our Bible reading. We focus on getting through as many verses as possible, instead of really delving deeply into just a few. This week, try reading just four or five verses at a time, especially if you typically read more in one sitting. Read the verses to yourself quietly and then aloud once or twice again, concentrating on the words or phrases that seem to leap off the page or resonate with you in some way. If a particular verse seems to be speaking to you, ask God for direction and guidance, and then listen for an answer in your heart.

Additional Verses to Consider: Hebrews 3:7-8, Romans 10:17

23 MEDITATING ON GOD'S WORD



Receive

Psalm 119:89-104

“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.” (Psalm 119:97-98, NIV)



Reflect

Am I pondering God's Word—meditating on it and committing it to memory?

What is holding me back from memorizing Scripture? Fear? Laziness? Intimidation?

What's one step I can take today that will help me keep God's Word top-of-mind throughout the day?

It's one thing to commit to reading the Bible several times a week, and it's another thing to read it slowly and thoughtfully to discern what message God might intend for us. The writer of this psalm takes Scripture reading a step further, suggesting that we “meditate on it all day long.” Yet repeating a verse or Biblical phrase throughout the day doesn't necessarily need to be a daunting task. In fact it can serve as a tool that helps to keep us calm and level-headed as we face crises, navigate problems, or make tough decisions. God's Word makes us wise, but true wisdom goes beyond simply absorbing facts and information; true wisdom means living and acting on what we read.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, I admit, I've been reluctant to carry your Word with me in my heart and mind throughout the day. I read the Bible, and then I tend to leave what I've read behind as I go about the rest of my day. Please help me keep Your Word with me always.*

Consider What's Real: If “meditating on God's Word all day long” sounds a bit monk-like, don't despair; it doesn't need to be that difficult. Try choosing one short verse that speaks to you personally, and then write that verse on a handful of index cards. Place the cards in various spots—on your car dashboard, next to your computer, taped to the bathroom mirror, propped against the coffee maker—and as you go about your day, glance at the cards and repeat the verse to yourself. Before long you'll have it memorized, and you'll be amazed at how relevant that single verse is in your everyday life.

Additional Verses to Consider: Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2-3

24 LIVING GOD'S WORD



Receive

John 5:36-40

“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” (John 5:39-40, NIV)



Reflect

Am I responding to God's Word—learning how to live it daily—in loving Jesus, laying down my life for others, and moving into abundant life one step at a time?

When I read the Bible, do I ever feel like that's enough?

How often do I read the Bible, close the cover and then not think about God's Word again for the rest of my day?

Sometimes we forget the fact that the Scriptures aren't God Himself, but God's Word. There's a subtle but important difference between the two. God doesn't want us simply to read a few verses each morning, close the Bible, consider ourselves “covered,” and then proceed through our day without a second thought of what we read. Reading and studying the Scriptures isn't enough, Jesus tells us in these verses. Sure, the Scriptures are about Jesus' life—they “testify” *about* him—but the real key is to take those teachings and apply them to our own lives, to live out Jesus' Word, instead of just reading about it. Jesus's Word doesn't provide eternal life; only Jesus *Himself* can offer us that.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, help me understand that subtle but important distinction between Your Word and You. Help me take Your Word – Your lessons and teachings – and apply them to my life in a real and concrete way.*

Consider What's Real: It's easy to say we're going to carry Jesus' Word into our daily life, but it's another thing entirely to figure out how exactly we're going to do that. In his book *The Power of a Whisper*, Bill Hybels outlines a useful and concrete way to practice this, a formula he uses each morning during his quiet time. He chooses a few verses and then reads through them slowly at least twice, jotting notes about what the verses mean to him personally and how he might apply them to his life. Then he writes out a simple prayer of commitment to living based on those verses, and prays those words back to God, often several times throughout the day, as a reminder of how he can bring Jesus' teachings into his own daily life.

Additional Verses to Consider: James 3:14-17, John 3:16-21

25 A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS



Receive

John 1:1-5

“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” (John 1:3-5, NIV)



Reflect

How does God’s Word expose darkness?

Do I really live my life entirely in Jesus?

Do I believe that God always overcomes darkness?

If you’ve ever weathered a period of grief, illness, loss, anxiety, or despair, you probably know what it’s like to doubt, to question if God really does have the power to overcome evil. Sometimes we are so lost in ourselves, in our own misery and grief, that it’s difficult to see and feel God’s ever-present goodness and love. We wonder where He is, why He has allowed such circumstances to occur, why He hasn’t protected us from such misery. It’s perfectly normal to feel this way from time to time, especially during periods of great strife. But throughout those periods, it’s important to remember, as John so eloquently reminds us here, that God’s light always overcomes darkness, even when it doesn’t feel quite possible.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, be with me today, guide me on Your path and shine Your light of goodness, love and life onto me. Help me know in my heart that You are with me always and keep me from stumbling in darkness.*

Consider What’s Real: God’s love and His light are bigger and brighter than any problems or darkness we may face, yet sometimes, especially in times of hardship, we forget this. If you’re in such a place, perhaps creating a symbol of His light in your home will help serve as a reminder of His always-burning Light. Try lighting a candle in the evening and saying a simple prayer as it burns brightly and steadily on your kitchen counter or on the coffee table. Or perhaps keep a small table lamp lit as a symbolic reminder of the Light that surpasses all darkness.

Additional Verses to Consider: Isaiah 9:2, Micah 7:8