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Session 20 -- Spiritual Disciplines I: Baptism

Core Idea:

Baptism not only marks a transition point in the life of a disciple but illustrates the kind of lives disciples are called to lead.

Memory Verse:

Acts 2:38

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Thus far, our focus has been on a number of the core beliefs associated with faith in Jesus Christ. All of these beliefs have implications for how we view our lives and the world around us, and thus, they affect how we live in the day to day movement of our lives.

However, we need to be honest with ourselves. It is entirely possible to believe something in our heads without letting that belief make any real difference in our lives. For example, I believe that I need to lose weight. I *know* that I will be healthier and have a better quality of life if I were to lose weight. However, this knowledge alone does not always spur me to action. Even the *desire* to lose weight is not always enough to overcome decades worth of my current habits. In order to follow through on my knowledge and desire, I need to incorporate into my life *disciplines* that help me rewrite old habits and form new ones that will help me meet my goal.

All of this is true for our spiritual lives. In order to live out our new lives as disciples of Jesus Christ, as those who have been adopted as children of God, made holy, and set free from sin and shame, we must do the hard work of replacing old habits with new ones. Through the centuries, followers of King Jesus have used various practices and exercises called *spiritual disciplines* to achieve this goal. For this next session, I hope to introduce you to some of the most important ones.

What has been your experience, if any, with spiritual disciplines?

Different churches have different views about how and when baptism should be done. Some churches baptize infant children. Others wait until the person is old enough to be able to express their own desire to follow Jesus. Some churches practice baptism by either sprinkling or pouring water on the person’s head. Others practice full immersion in water.

It is not my intent to rehash centuries of differences and arguments about baptism. I have no problem, however, stating that I teach baptism by immersion wherever possible of those who can make a conscious decision to follow Jesus as King. Not that other practices of baptism are “wrong” or “sinful.” However, this is what the practice appears to be in the early Bible and in the early life of the church.

What has been your experience with baptism?

Baptism is modeled and commanded by Jesus

The four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all testify that before Jesus began His ministry, His cousin John the Baptist, prepared the way by calling people to repentance. This repentance from their old ways of living in rebellion against God was marked by the act of baptism. The symbolism is pretty clear. As their bodies were being washed physically, their hearts were being washed spiritually. The outer discipline of baptism mirrored an inner commitment to God.

At this time, Jesus shows up to be baptized as well. Now this is odd because Jesus was without sin. Why would Jesus need to repent? Read what happens in Matthew 3:13-17.

Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

While Jesus does not need to repent, He is still baptized for two reasons. First, He models for His followers what He later calls them to do. Like a good leader, He does not call us somewhere that He has not gone first. Second, and more important, Jesus in His baptism is committing Himself to the Father's will. In other words, Jesus is committing Himself to the path that is going to take Him to the cross. It is this commitment that Satan will test when Jesus goes into the wilderness to fast and pray, and it is this commitment that the Father affirms when He sends the Spirit and speaks over Jesus the words, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

How does Jesus' commitment to the Father's will in baptism mirror the commitment we make in baptism?

Further, Jesus commissions His disciples to continue baptizing others, calling men and women to the same repentance from sin and commitment to Jesus as King.

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Acts 2:37-41 Emphasis added

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Read Acts 2:37-41. According to Peter here, what happens at baptism?

Baptism is a covenant ceremony

If simple obedience to Jesus were the only reason for baptism, it would be enough. However, we would be remiss if we did not point out the beauty inherent in the act of baptism. While it does symbolize washing our consciences from the stains and shame of sin, the symbolism goes even deeper.

Throughout the history of the Jewish people, God has made covenants and enacted these covenants through *covenant ceremonies*. For example, with Abraham, God enacted His covenant through a ceremony that involved God passing between two halves of animals (Genesis 15:1-21). With Moses and the people of Israel, the covenant was enacted through a sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood followed by a feast before God (Exodus 24:1-14). These ceremonies are actions that mark the change in relationship between the covenant parties.

Today, we see similar covenant ceremonies during weddings. While the couple have a relationship with each other before the ceremony--they know and love each other--the wedding ceremony marks a change in their relationship. They go into the ceremony as two individuals, and they come out of the ceremony as one family. During the wedding ceremony, they pledge vows to each other and unite themselves together in a marriage covenant.

With this in mind, read these words of Paul in Romans 6:1-11.

Romans 6:1-11

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Read Romans 6:1-11. How does baptism symbolize the death and resurrection of Jesus?

In what ways are we united with Jesus during baptism? What does this mean for our relationship to sin?

How is baptism similar to a wedding ceremony? How is it different?

Baptism is a lifestyle

Now, you might ask, "What does baptism have to do with spiritual disciplines? Isn't baptism a one-time thing?"

Yes. Baptism is a one-time commitment to follow Jesus as King and be united with Him in His death and resurrection. However, this one-time commitment ought to make a daily impact on our lives. Just like a person's life changes when he or she is married, so our lives change when we make a commitment to Christ.

Also, just like husbands and wives celebrate the anniversary of their wedding on a regular basis, so should we as followers of Jesus regularly recall the commitment we have made. Some do this on an annual basis, remembering their baptism anniversary the way they do their birthday. Others make a habit of remembering their baptism when they take the Lord's Supper. Still others recall their commitment as they witness others make a similar commitment and are baptized.

As we grow as disciples of Jesus, we begin to live the reality of our baptism every day. It becomes *who we are*. This is what Jesus means when He talks about being *born again* (John 3:1-21). We have died to our old, rebellious life. We are raised into a new creation, someone who follows Jesus as King. Baptism so beautifully captures this powerful reality.

If you have been baptized, what can you do to remember and celebrate that moment on a regular basis?

In your own words, what does a baptism lifestyle look like?

Action Points

Take some time to reflect on your baptism experience. In a journal, record your reflections. Why did you decide to get baptized? What made it the right time for your decision? Who baptized you? What did you feel and think at that time?

Spend some time with Jesus celebrating your baptism anniversary. Even if it is not the actual date, reflect on how your relationship with Jesus has progressed since that moment. Prayerfully ask Him to show you areas where your relationship needs to grow.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

What has been your experience, if any, with spiritual disciplines?

What has been your experience with baptism?

How does Jesus' commitment to the Father's will in baptism mirror the commitment we make in baptism?

Read Acts 2:37-41. According to Peter here, what happens at baptism?

Read Romans 6:1-11. How does baptism symbolize the death and resurrection of Jesus?

In what ways are we united with Jesus during baptism? What does this mean for our relationship to sin?

How is baptism similar to a wedding ceremony? How is it different?

If you have been baptized, what can you do to remember and celebrate that moment on a regular basis?

In your own words, what does a baptism lifestyle look like?
If you have not been baptized by immersion, do you want to be?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Wade in the Water: Following the Sacred Stream of Baptism by Eric E. Peterson

Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus Through the Spiritual Disciplines by David Mathis and John Piper

Understanding Four Views on Baptism

Session 21 -- Spiritual Disciplines II: Communion

Core Idea:

Taking Communion together serves as a regular reminder of the Gospel of King Jesus.

Memory Verse:

1 Corinthians 11:26

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Often paired with baptism, the practice of Communion (also referred to as the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist) is a communal discipline initiated by Jesus and passed on through His early disciples to the Church today. It is practiced in different ways by different church traditions. For example, some churches partake of Communion once a week, while others partake once a month or even twice a year. Some churches drink out of a common cup, yet others give each person his or her own cup. Regardless of the differences in *how* they take communion, there is a key element that most agree with. Communion serves as a regular, physical reminder of Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf.

What has been your experience with Communion in the churches you have visited or have been part of?

Luke 22:14-23 Emphasis added

And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. *Do this in remembrance of me.*" And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

On the night before Jesus was arrested, He spent the evening with His disciples celebrating the Passover. The Passover was an annual meal that in many ways reenacted the story of the Exodus, how God rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. (We touched on this in Session 10.) The different foods and elements of the meal symbolized elements of the Exodus. It is within this Passover meal that Jesus institutes a new tradition, reframing elements of the Passover meal to serve as a reminder of His death and of the new covenant He is bringing about.

The two elements of Communion are the **bread** and the **cup**. The bread Jesus used would have been a single loaf of unleavened bread (bread without yeast) in keeping with the Passover tradition. It is not hard to see the symbolism of bread being broken just as Jesus' body was broken through the beatings, torture, and ultimately the execution He endured.

The cup would have been one of the cups of wine associated with the Passover meal. As we discussed in Session 20, often covenants were enacted with covenant ceremonies, sometimes involving the sprinkling of blood. The new covenant Jesus is referring to is enacted through His shed blood, and the wine (or grape juice in many churches) reminds us of this fact.

Communion serves as an important reminder in our often far too easily distracted lives. But what, exactly, are we to remember? It is not enough to remember bare historical facts. Yes, Jesus died for us. But what does that *mean*? And how does that affect how we live?

A Reminder of Brokenness

Isn't it interesting that Jesus asks them to remember His body broken and His blood shed? In our memory verse for this session, Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 11:26 Emphasis added

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, *you proclaim the Lord's death* until he comes.

This is not a reminder of victory, triumph, and conquest, even though Jesus' death does accomplish that. Rather, Communion serves as a reminder that King Jesus becomes King by being broken. The cross comes before the crown. So often in the Gospels, Jesus' disciples are found arguing over who will be great and who will rule. They viewed the Kingdom of God through an earthly lens, as though it were just one of so many other human nations. Time and time again, Jesus had to remind them that in His Kingdom the first will be last and the last will be first.

Mark 9:33-37

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

Mark 10:42-45

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

King Jesus disciples are not called to grasp for worldly power. Rather, we follow the example of our King and lay ourselves down in service and love for others. The cross always comes before the crown, brokenness before exaltation.

What are some examples from history of when the Church failed to follow Jesus' example and pursued glory and power instead of brokenness and service?

What are some examples from your own life of you pursuing glory instead of brokenness?

A Reminder of Dependence

I will be honest with you. Of all the Gospels, John's description of Communion is the most difficult to understand and the most jarring to read. However, when we understand the context of Jesus' words here, we can begin to grasp why He uses such graphic imagery.

Let's set the scene, shall we? Jesus miraculously feeds thousands of people by multiplying a few loaves of bread and some fish. Obviously, the people love this! I mean, who doesn't love free food, right? So the people are determined to make Jesus a king. Again, they were looking for an earthly king. Jesus would be king, and he would miraculously give them food, and they would be happy.

However, Jesus' mission is bigger than feeding a few stomachs. His Kingdom is bigger than they can possibly imagine, and to get there requires Him to die in order to deal with our sin and shame and restore us to God. Thus, Jesus needed to help the people see that His mission was different from theirs and that they needed to reframe their expectations. So instead of giving them more physical bread, He tells them in John 6:35:

John 6:35

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

He goes on to explain a few verses later:

John 6:51

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

As you can imagine, this led to some confusion among the people.

John 6:52-58 Emphasis added

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.* As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

While the language Jesus uses is provocative, the message is simple. “You need Me,” Jesus says to the crowd. Just as we cannot live without physical food; neither can we live without spiritual food, namely a relationship with Jesus. The Lord’s Supper reminds us of our dependence on Him.

How do you react to the idea of depending on or needing Jesus? What thoughts or feelings come to mind?

A Reminder of Community

Within the early community of disciples, the Lord’s Supper (the bread and the cup) were celebrated in the context of a community meal. However, many churches have gotten away from this practice. Nevertheless, there is a clear communal element to Communion.

In his letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul addresses issues of disunity regarding the taking of the Lord’s Supper. Apparently, those who were well off had ample food for themselves and their families, while those who were less well off went away hungry. What was meant to be a reminder that united everyone’s focus on King Jesus became divisive.

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that the Lord’s Supper is about Jesus. The remembrance of His sacrifice ought to be an occasion for unity, and there is not place for a self-centered attitude.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

How were the Christians in Corinth NOT honoring King Jesus with their practice of Communion?

What can you do to prepare your heart for taking communion?

Whatever the mode or frequency with which your church community celebrates Communion, it remains an important practice instituted by Jesus to keep us grounded in the meaning of His death, and ultimately, His resurrection.

Action Points

Take some time to reflect on your Communion experience. In a journal, record your reflections. How does your church practice communion? How do you approach taking communion? Are you bored? Reflective? Grateful?

For a week, include a private time of communion with your daily time of prayer and Bible reading. Imagine Jesus with you as you take the bread and the cup. Do not rush through the experience, but spend time in prayer and meditation as you eat the bread and drink of the cup.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

What has been your experience with Communion in the churches you have visited or have been part of?

What are some examples from history of when the Church failed to follow Jesus' example and pursued glory and power instead of brokenness and service?

What are some examples from your own life of you pursuing glory instead of brokenness?

How do you react to the idea of depending on or needing Jesus? What thoughts or feelings come to mind?

How were the Christians in Corinth NOT honoring King Jesus with their practice of Communion?

What can you do to prepare your heart for taking communion?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Baptism and the Lord's Supper by Thabiti M. Anyabwile and Ligon Duncan

Understanding the Lord's Supper by Bobby Jamieson

The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ Until He Comes by Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford

Session 22 -- Spiritual Disciplines III: Prayer

Core Idea:

A Disciple regularly engages in a relationship with King Jesus through the act of prayer.

Memory Verse:

Philippians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

In addition to baptism and communion, disciples of King Jesus, both men and women, have engaged in various practices that help them focus on and connect with God. Of all the spiritual disciplines, none is more essential than prayer. In prayer, we foster and develop a direct connection with our King. We do not need someone to stand between us and the Triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit. We can have a personal and present relationship anywhere, anytime.

To begin, I want to be perfectly clear. Prayer is simply communication. It does not need to be fancy communication. We do not need Shakespearean English when addressing God (i.e. using “thou” and “thine,” etc.). Just talk with Him as you would a dear friend who you respect and admire. One of my favorite prayers in the Bible is found in Luke 18:13. Here Jesus commends the simple prayer of a tax collector:

Luke 18:13

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

What has been your experience with prayer? Do you find prayer comes easily, or do you struggle with it?

Do you often use formal or memorized prayers? Or do you pray informally whatever comes to mind?

Speaking in Prayer

Once again, prayer is simply communication. When you speak with a friend, you spend part of the time talking, and part of the time listening to what your friend has to say. One of the keys to growing in our relationship with Jesus is learning when to speak and when to listen.

When it comes to speaking to God in prayer, it is important to remember that *God wants to hear from you*. God is not bothered by your prayers. You are not intruding on His otherwise busy schedule. Rather, like a loving parent, God is eager for His children to call home. Even if He already knows what you will say, He still likes to hear you say it.

Luke 11:1-13

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And he said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation."

And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Reflect on this passage. What does Jesus tell us about prayer? How does the Father respond to our requests?

It is important to remember that while God invites us to pray boldly like the man willing to ask his neighbor for bread in the middle of the night, He is not obligated to say "Yes" to all our requests. Any parent can tell you that that is a poor way to raise a child. As a loving Father, God will give us good things, which means He will lovingly say "No" when we ask for things that He knows will hurt us.

Some might ask, "What should I say to God? Or what should I pray for?" I can confess that at times my prayers can end up being repetitive and rather selfish. At times, it feels like I am just asking God to give me a bunch of stuff or to do something for me. I do not think I am alone in this. To overcome our tendencies to selfishness and to inspire us to pray beyond what is immediately in front of us, here are some helpful outlines for our prayers.

T-A-C-O-S

I like this outline because I am a huge fan of Mexican cuisine which makes this one easy to remember. The key is not conformity to an outline, but a reminder to put God and others first in our prayers.

Thanksgiving -- We express our gratitude to God for all He has done in our lives.

Adoration -- We express our love for God because of who He is.

Confession -- We admit our sins and acts of rebellion against God's ways.

Others -- We ask for help on behalf of others we know.

Self -- Finally, we ask for help in our present and upcoming circumstances.

B-L-E-S-S

This outline is helpful when we are praying for others. Sometimes it is obvious what a person needs. Jane is going in for surgery. Obviously, we want to pray for that. However, John has no obvious needs. How can I pray for him?

Body -- Pray for the person's health and wholeness.

Labor -- Pray for the person's job, career, or education goals.

Emotions -- Pray for the person's inner life including traumas or stressors.

Social -- Pray for the person's relationships.

Spiritual -- Pray for the person's relationship with God.

Another benefit of this outline is that it trains us to have these areas in mind as we speak with others rather than settling for superficial conversations.

What do you think about using outlines like these in your prayer time? Would this be a help or a hindrance? Why?

Who do you need to be praying for regularly?

Listening in Prayer

While God certainly invites us to bring our requests, concerns, fears, and hopes to Him in prayer, it is vital to remember that we are in a *relationship* with God. In all relationships, there is a time for speaking and a time for listening. So how does one listen to God in prayer?

Take a moment to read 1 Kings 19:9-18. What experiences did Elijah have? How did God's voice come to Him?

The first thing to remember is that contrary to popular movies or televisions shows that show God speaking with a loud and booming voice, often God speaks with a whisper. This is part of God's way of working in the world. Instead of forcing everyone to acknowledge His presence, He reveals Himself in a way that those who seek will find, but those who choose to ignore Him will not. So in order to listen to God, we need to become accustomed to silence.

In the next session, we will tackle the idea of silence in more depth. For now, I want you to understand just how much of your day is filled with noise both externally and internally. **External noise** comes from outside of us, and I am not just talking about sounds. We are also bombarded by information and visual stimuli everywhere we go. Whether through our ears or our eyes, this noise distracts us from God's voice. **Internal noise** comes from within, from our thoughts and emotions. When we do manage to escape from the external noise, we face an onslaught of thoughts and emotions, often the very thoughts and emotions we were using noise to escape. Again, we will talk about how to overcome this in the next session.

Why do you think our society is so noisy?

The next challenge to listening to God's voice is figuring out if it is God speaking or simply one of the many voices in our own minds. Is God speaking to me or am I just telling myself what I want to hear? Remember, first of all, that **God does not contradict Himself**. He will not tell you something that contradicts what He has already revealed through the Bible, His written Word. In my experience, God often speaks by bringing to mind scripture.

John 10:1-5 Emphasis added

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. *The sheep hear his voice*, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for *they do not know the voice of strangers*."

The more we come to know the Triune God, the more we are able to discern His voice from all others.

It is also important to remember that **you are not alone**. Through King Jesus we have a community of fellow disciples who can help us along the way. When we have big decisions to make and we are asking God for guidance, we ought to ask our brothers and sisters to pray for us as well. Then we check what we are hearing from God with what they are hearing from God. By looking out for each other in this way, we have a better chance of not being deceived by the enemy.

How can using the Bible and the community of disciples help us figure out God's voice from any other voices?

Being in Prayer

In close, intimate relationships, sometimes you spend time talking and sometimes you spend time listening. Then, there are other moments when you just spend time being with the other person -- no words being said, just resting in each other's presence. There is a form of prayer that Christians have used over centuries that has this kind of relationship with God in mind. It is called **contemplative prayer**.

As I mentioned earlier, we are surrounded by internal and external noise. The hard part of contemplative prayer is tuning out the noise and focusing your attention on God's presence. Sometimes, when people talk about spiritual exercises like meditation, they mention "emptying your mind." This is really inaccurate, because you can never empty your mind, you can only focus it. In contemplative prayer, we are letting go of any thought that distracts us, and continually bringing our attention back to God.

To help us do this, we use what some call a **sacred word**. Don't let that scare you. It is not sacred as in magic. Rather, it is sacred as in it is special to you and to God. Let me give you an example from my marriage. Over the years, my wife, Jessie, and I have started using the word "You" in place of "I love you." This one simple word shared between Jessie and me means a whole lot more than just the three letters "y-o-u." Decades of life together and feelings for each other are all packed into that word. In fact, if I tried to unpack it all and write out everything I mean when I say that to her, words would fail me AND would not mean the same.

In the same way, a sacred word is a special word that captures your relationship with God. When your mind wanders to your to-do list, gently bring your focus back to your sacred word. Budget issues distracting you? Come back to the sacred word. Dog barking outside? Come back to the sacred word. Let that word be the anchor for your attention as you sit in God's presence and enjoy His company.

Think through what word you might use in contemplative prayer.

Action Points

Start a prayer journal. You can either write down complete prayers or simply keep track of prayer requests. When prayers have been answered, make sure to note how and express gratitude to God.

Practice sitting in silence. After a few minutes, journal about the experience. What internal and external noises did you encounter? How did you feel during the silence?

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

What has been your experience with prayer? Do you find prayer comes easily, or do you struggle with it?

Do you often use formal or memorized prayers? Or do you pray informally whatever comes to mind?

Reflect on Luke 11:1-13. What does Jesus tell us about prayer? How does the Father respond to our requests?

What do you think about using outlines like these in your prayer time? Would this be a help or a hindrance? Why?

Who do you need to be praying for regularly?

Take a moment to read 1 Kings 19:9-18. What experiences did Elijah have? How did God's voice come to Him?

Why do you think our society is so noisy?

How can using the Bible and the community of disciples help us figure out God's voice from any other voices?

Think through what word you might use in contemplative prayer.

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World by Paul E. Miller

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard J. Foster

When the Soul Listens: Finding Rest and Direction in Contemplative Prayer by Jan Johnson

Session 23 -- Spiritual Disciplines IV: Sabbath, Solitude, and Silence

Core Idea:

The practices of Sabbath, solitude, and silence put the Disciple in a position to hear from King Jesus.

Memory Verse:

Psalms 46:10

Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

If I were asked to define modern American culture in just two words, I would have to go with *busyness* and *noise*. Our children are disciplined into this culture at a very young age. Just consider most toys for infants and toddlers. Most of them consist of blinking lights and sounds (visual and audible noise) and a multitude of switches, buttons, etc. to keep children busy. Then as they grow, we fill their schedules with a myriad of sports and extracurricular activities while the world bombards them with noise from their phones and other electronic devices.

The problem does not go away as we age. As adults, we are often busy to the point of exhaustion. Cell phones, while convenient, mean we are constantly reachable. Shuttling children to and from all of their activities takes up a large portion of otherwise free time. Even when we have time to sit down and rest, the stress of unfinished work leaves us tense and unable to be fully present in the moment. I could go on, but I am sure I do not have to. After all, you are as aware and as much a part of this modern culture as I am.

On a scale of 1-10, how busy are you? What causes your busyness? (i.e. work, school, family, etc.)

On a scale of 1-10, how noisy is your world? In other words, how much media do you watch, listen to, or engage with on a daily basis?

In the Gospels, the story of Mary and Martha often serves as the quintessential illustration of the dangers of busyness. This story, found in Luke 10:38-42, introduces us to the two sisters. Jesus is staying at the house, and Martha is getting frustrated by the task of hosting and preparing a meal for Jesus and His disciples. Meanwhile, her sister Mary, sat at the feet of Jesus listening to His teaching and soaking in every word. Finally, Martha snaps and confronts Jesus.

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Read this encounter between Jesus, Mary, and Martha. What was Martha's motivation? What was Mary's? How did Jesus respond?

Have you ever felt like Martha? How often do seemingly good activities distract us from what is most important?

In this session, I want to introduce you to three important disciplines to battle the culture of busyness and noise. They are *sabbath*, *solitude*, and *silence*. However, I feel I must point out that these disciplines are meant to be rhythms of grace, not burdens of shame. In other words, be gentle with yourself regarding your practice of these disciplines. If you are like me, *you will not get them perfect immediately*. You will, like so many others, struggle as you exchange years of habits for new ones. That is ok. God still loves you. Get back up and try again. Do not listen to the voice of the enemy that tries to shame us and call us failures.

Sabbath

The discipline of the sabbath dates back to the creation of the universe. In Genesis, God describes His work of creation through six days. On the seventh day, God rested.

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

This established a rhythm of work and rest that God desires His people to follow. For the people of Israel, the keeping of the sabbath was enshrined in their Law.

Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Note that this rhythm of work and rest was for everyone, not just the upper-class and the elites of society. Everyone, even the livestock, was to rest. God set this rhythm in motion because He knows that we need periods to rest from our labor. Running 24/7 is not healthy: physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

This rhythm also reminds us *that we do not keep the world spinning*. Life goes on whether you work 60 hours a week or only 40 hours a week. The world will not spin out of control because you take a break. Do you know why? Because King Jesus is in charge and because He is good. While we sabbath and rest, we can trust Him to hold everything together.

What are some of the excuses people use to stay busy and not rest?

So **how do we practice a discipline of sabbath?** It starts with *intentionality*. Nature abhors a vacuum. This is true in science as well as in our schedules. Unless we deliberately set aside time to sabbath and protect it in our calendars, we will easily find ourselves wrapped up in the world's culture of busyness.

Now, in Christ there is freedom. We are not locked into any specific day as our sabbath. In fact, some of us have job schedules that vary too much to allow us to commit to the same day for sabbath every week. However, as you look at your calendar, whether you plan a week at a time or a month at a time, carve out time for regular periods of sabbath.

Next, **what do we do during the sabbath?** The Jewish leaders had all kinds of rules about what *not* to do on the sabbath. In fact, they loaded people down with so many rules, they missed the whole point of the practice! When we sabbath we *rest* and we *worship*. In other words, we do that which is soul-filling and God-pleasing. For some, tending a garden comforts their soul and the act reminds them of the loving care of God as the Creator. Others like to hike or bike. Others like to read or even nap. The goal is to recharge your soul with God and with gratitude to God.

What activities do you enjoy that you find to be soul-filling?

Solitude

Have you ever noticed that we tend to take on different personas depending on the company we are around? For instance, at work, we tend to speak and relate to others in our capacity as a professional. Often this work persona is very different from how we act around friends. Still again, our friend persona is different from our family persona. Sometimes the differences are vast, but sometimes they are subtle. Still, they are there. And sometimes our worlds collide and our co-workers, friends, and family members all meet causing us to readjust our personas on the fly.

But who are we away from everyone else? Who are we when we are not trying to live up to the expectations of others?

What are some of the various personas you use throughout the week? How are these personas different from each other?

In the discipline of solitude, we intentionally withdraw from others to spend time alone *with God*. Spend time in prayer and get to know the One who created you, and let Him shape your true identity. This need not be a retreat to a monastery in the middle of nowhere. Consider how Richard Foster describes it:

What are some steps into solitude? The first thing we can do is to take advantage of the “little solitudes” that fill our day. Consider the solitude of those early morning moments in bed before the family awakens. Think of the solitude of a morning cup of coffee before beginning the work of the day. There is the solitude of bumper to bumper traffic during the freeway rush hour. There can be little moments of rest and refreshment when we turn a corner and see a flower or a tree.¹

Foster goes on to encourage us to find or develop a “quiet place” into which we can regularly retreat for solitude. Communicate with your family or roommates that this space is sacred to you so they know not to disturb you except in emergencies.

Silence

Silence and solitude often go together, though not always. Though difficult, it is possible to find inner quiet even while surrounded by others, and it is quite easy to be overwhelmed by noise even when alone. There are two elements to silence that we would be wise to practice: calming our internal noise and choosing not to speak.

Calming Internal Noise

Imagine you are sitting on a dock beside a large, flowing river. As you sit there, you watch all sorts of boats and barges travel up and down the river. Each of these boats invite you aboard to travel with them. Yet, you remain steadfast on the dock, waving goodbye, and letting the boats float on past.

Many practitioners of mindfulness meditation use this illustration to teach about quieting the mind. The boats and barges are your thoughts. They are always there. You cannot NOT THINK. You cannot “empty your mind.” What you can do, however, is choose to not be carried off by every thought that floats through your conscious mind. You find an anchor, a focal point for your attention, and you *gently* acknowledge and let go of the intruding thoughts.

Gentleness is an important key to this practice. First, if you shame yourself every time you lose focus, you won't be very motivated to keep practicing and improving. Second, shaming yourself is just one more distraction. I get distracted, so I kick myself, which means I am more distracted, so I kick myself again. It is an endless cycle. Forgive yourself for being distracted, refocus and continue.

¹ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 93.

On what do you anchor or focus your attention? Honestly, that can be whatever you want it to be. Focusing on your breathing is pretty common--long, slow breaths. However, as disciples of Jesus, I encourage Christians to focus on a verse of scripture (Deuteronomy 6:4 for example). You may want to focus on one of the names of God, or maybe a short prayer like the one the tax collector prays in Luke 18:13. In the last session, we mentioned the use of a sacred word that has special meaning between you and God. Any of these can be helpful anchors.

This discipline can be practiced at any time and for any length of time. Sometimes, I will set a timer with a gentle alarm so I am not constantly distracted by the time. As I practice, I increase the time spent in silent prayer as I grow in my ability to focus. Start with five minutes and slowly work your way up. Sometimes, I need to spend a minute in silence when I am feeling anxious or stressed out. A moment of silence and prayer can stop us from lashing out at a family member or getting into a road rage incident on the freeway.

As you think about the discipline of silence, what thoughts or feelings come to mind? Does this practice excite you? Does it scare you? Why?

Choosing Not to Speak

The flip side to internal silence is external silence. In a world where everyone has a platform to spout off opinions and ideas, sometimes it is better to refrain from adding to the noise.

James 1:19-20 Emphasis added

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, *slow to speak*, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

There is certainly a time for speaking up, especially for the oppressed. However, not every controversy needs our two cents. Nor do we need to always have the last word in every argument. Learning to listen to God's voice will help us discern when and how to speak.

Have you ever gotten in trouble because you said something carelessly? How might the practice of silence help you avoid future trouble?

Action Points

Schedule your first Sabbath. What do you plan to do that day to feed your soul? What steps can you take to make sure you are not disturbed? Journal about the experience afterwards.

Set aside some time to practice the discipline of not speaking for an hour (no texting either). Journal about the experience.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

On a scale of 1-10, how busy are you? What causes your busyness? (i.e. work, school, family, etc.)

On a scale of 1-10, how noisy is your world? In other words, how much media do you watch, listen to, or engage with on a daily basis?

Read this encounter between Jesus, Mary, and Martha. What was Martha's motivation? What was Mary's? How did Jesus respond?

Have you ever felt like Martha? How often do seemingly good activities distract us from what is most important?

What are some of the excuses people use to stay busy and not rest?

What activities do you enjoy that you find to be soul-filling?

What are some of the various personas you use throughout the week? How are these personas different from each other?

As you think about the discipline of silence, what thoughts or feelings come to mind? Does this practice excite you? Does it scare you? Why?

Have you ever gotten in trouble because you said something carelessly? How might the practice of silence help you avoid future trouble?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry by John Mark Comer

Celebration of Discipline by Richard J. Foster

The Deeply Formed Life by Rich Villodas

Session 24 -- God's Word I: Bible Basics

Core Idea:

A Christian Disciple regularly engages with God's Word in order to learn about and follow King Jesus.

Memory Verse:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Of all the various spiritual disciplines practiced by Jesus' disciples over the centuries, the most important three are prayer, Bible engagement, and living in community. In the previous sessions, we have covered prayer along with a few related disciplines like silence and solitude. Now, we turn to the second major discipline of Bible engagement.

On a scale of 1-10, how familiar are you with the Bible? What confuses you most about the Bible?

What is your biggest obstacle to reading the Bible regularly? Why?

What the Bible is NOT

Let's start by clearing up a few misconceptions about the Bible. First, **the Bible is not a history, science, nor math textbook**. History, science, and math textbooks are concerned with *facts*. For example, $2+2=4$, the American Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell. These are all factual claims that are true. As products of Western culture, we have a tendency to think of truth *solely* in terms of facts.

However, most of the Bible was written from an Eastern mindset which is far more comfortable with truth shared via story and metaphor. For example, in John 10, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. This is a metaphor that speaks truth, even if Jesus does not own actual sheep. Does the Bible contain facts? Absolutely! Is the Bible true? I stake my life on it! But the Bible also contains poetry, imagery, and metaphor, and any honest engagement with scripture must acknowledge this.

Read Psalm 23. What truth does the author convey? How does the author use metaphor and imagery to communicate this truth?

Second, **the Bible is not a magical book**. We see people treat the Bible like magic in a couple of ways. One, when we try to flip open the Bible to a random page and a random verse hoping it will magically be the answer to our questions. The Bible does not work like that. Also, we see people who try to “name and claim” promises from the Bible as though that act obligates God to grant their wish. The main issue with this treatment of the Bible is that people disconnect God’s Word from God Himself. The point of the Bible is to point us towards the triune God, not serve as some magical talisman.

Third, **the Bible is not a book of rules**. “But,” you say, “what about Leviticus and all those laws in the Old Testament?” Yes, there are rules and laws in the Bible, but that is not the whole Bible. Besides, the major opponents of Jesus in the Gospels were men who fixated on outward conformity to the rules. They were so focused on obeying the letter of the law, that they missed the spirit of the law altogether. Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 22.

Matthew 22:34-40 Emphasis added

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. *On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.*”

Rather than focus on the rules, Jesus calls us to focus on love.

How does rule-focused obedience differ from love-focused obedience?

What the Bible IS

Now that we have addressed what the Bible is not, let’s turn our attention to what the Bible is. In short, the Bible is the **ancient, inspired, and authoritative story of God**. Let’s unpack that a bit.

Ancient

Saying the Bible is ancient is not just a statement on its age, although it is old. Rather, it is important to remember that the Bible was first written to and by people who were different from us. As mentioned earlier, a large portion of the Bible was written from an Eastern mindset versus a Western one. The Bible is made up of sixty-six different books, composed by different human authors, using different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). The Bible addresses events and cultures in three continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe).

What does this mean for us? It means that we need to do a little bit of homework if we want to truly grasp the words of scripture. For example, Matthew's Gospel tells us that when Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant, he had in mind to divorce her quietly (Matthew 1:18-19). The marriage customs of that culture were different from ours. Mary and Joseph were not married, but their betrothal carried far more weight than a modern American engagement. A public divorce would have brought great shame on Mary. Understanding this little bit of cultural context helps us appreciate Mary's obedience to God even more.

What are some cultural issues or customs in the Bible that confuse you?

In the next session, we will look at practical ways to study the Bible in order to understand it better. Though it may take some work, it is not an impossible task.

Inspired

The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, were written by humans in a particular place and time and for humans in a particular place and time. However, God also used these particular writings to reveal truth and to communicate His story to all peoples. How exactly God does this remains a much debated mystery. Did God dictate each word to His writers? Or did God impress upon the human authors the ideas He wanted them to communicate? No matter the mechanics involved, we believe that God's hand is ultimately behind the writing of the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:21

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Because the Bible was inspired by an all-knowing God who is living and active in our lives, we can trust that the Bible speaks to our lives today. The Bible is **relevant** even though it is ancient. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we can understand both what the Bible said *then* and what God is saying to us *now*.

John 16:13-14 Emphasis added

When the Spirit of truth comes, *he will guide you into all the truth*, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

In your own words, how is the Bible both ancient and relevant for today?

According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, why is scripture useful? What is the end goal?

Authoritative

In addition to being both ancient and inspired, it is important to remember that the Bible is also authoritative. In other words, the Bible as God's Word, stands as a check and a balance against our own ideas and opinions.

To use an absurd example, suppose I said, "God wants me to be happy, and a new Ford Mustang convertible will make me happy, so God must be ok if I steal one." Well, the Bible clearly tells us that God does not condone stealing. The Bible also tells us that happiness is not found in material possessions. Thus, the Bible checks my sinful desires.

During his missionary journeys recorded in the Book of Acts, the Apostle Paul shared the good news about Jesus with a group of Jews from the town of Berea. Listen to how the author describes the encounter.

Acts 17:11

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

For these Jews at Berea, scripture was authoritative. They checked Paul's words about Jesus with what they knew from the Hebrew scriptures. As disciples, let us follow their example.

In your own words, what does it mean that the Bible is authoritative?

Which Bible?

Before we close out this session, I want to address the issue of which Bible translation one should use. On one Bible study website, I counted over 50 English translations of the Bible. So which one is the *correct translation*? Well that answer can be complicated.

There are three major approaches to translation work. The first approach is a *word-for-word* or *formal equivalence* approach. The goal here is to translate each Greek or Hebrew word with its closest English equivalent. However, this method can make for some rather clunky English sentences as Greek and Hebrew use different sentence structures. The second approach is the *thought-for-thought* or *dynamic equivalence* approach. The goal here is to translate the meaning of the Greek or Hebrew sentence accurately while also making it easier to read in English. The third approach is to *paraphrase* the meaning of the text in order to explain the intent of the author.

Of the three approaches, which one do you prefer when reading the Bible? Why?

In addition to the translation method, you also need to consider readability. Some English translations are harder to read than others. For example, the King James Version uses a lot of Shakespearean language that many people find difficult to understand. The general rule is that

word-for-word translations tend to be more difficult, while thought-for-thought translations and paraphrases tend to be easier to read.

Take these issues into consideration when deciding which Bible you want to use.

Why is readability so important in Bible translation?

Action Points

Take three different Bible translations (for example, the KJV, the NIV, and the NLT). Read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. What differences do you notice? How do the differences impact your understanding of the text? (You can find many different Bible translations online or through mobile apps.)

Read Psalm 119. Write down some of the author's descriptions of God's Word or God's Law. Which images resonate with you the most?

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

On a scale of 1-10, how familiar are you with the Bible? What confuses you most about the Bible?

What is your biggest obstacle to reading the Bible regularly? Why?

Read Psalm 23. What truth does the author convey? How does the author use metaphor and imagery to communicate this truth?

How does rule-focused obedience differ from love-focused obedience?

What are some cultural issues or customs in the Bible that confuse you?

In your own words, how is the Bible both ancient and relevant for today?

According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, why is scripture useful? What is the end goal?

In your own words, what does it mean that the Bible is authoritative?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

The Blue Parakeet by Scot McKnight

From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible by Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix

How to Read the Bible Book by Book by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart

Session 25 -- God's Word II: Understanding the Bible

Core Idea:

A Christian Disciple engages the Bible with an ear for what God has said in the past.

Memory Verse:

Acts 17:11

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

As I sit down to write this session, I cannot help but be struck by the irony of trying to condense how to study the Bible into one short chapter. Frankly, understanding the Bible is the work of a lifetime. A work, you will quickly discover, should you undertake it, that is both art and science. It is a science in that there are tried and true methods and resources for studying the Bible. However, the art is learning what questions to ask in order to gain a better understanding of what the Bible says.

At the end of each session, I have included extra resources for continued study. This chapter, perhaps more than any others, I strongly encourage you to check out those resources.

The focus of this session is on the general topic of *Bible study*. The goal here is to uncover the *author's intended meaning*. In other words, we want to know what the original author was trying to communicate to the original audience. We do NOT want to simply read our own assumptions or biases into scripture. If you read further into this topic, you will come across terms like *hermeneutics* or *exegesis*. Both of these are related to the act of interpreting or coming to understand someone's written word.

Why is it important to uncover the author's intended meaning and not just read our assumptions into a text?

Reading for Familiarity

The first step of studying the Bible is to read for familiarity. Let's imagine that we want to do a study on Philippians 2:5-11. Before we start to do a deep dive on these passages, we should first read the entire book of Philippians, preferably in one sitting. In fact, read it two or three times. This goes for any passage in any book of the Bible. We start by surveying the entire book before we start digging into our passage for study.

Reading for comprehension is probably the most common way that people engage the Bible. If you have ever done a reading plan to get through the Bible in a year, you have read for

comprehension. This is a surface level reading. Maybe you highlight or underline a few key verses. However, you are mainly interested in gaining a basic understanding of the text.

Historical Context

Reading the Bible is a lot like listening to one side of a telephone call. Every book of the Bible was written to someone in particular. That someone might be an individual like Timothy or Titus, or they might be a group of people like the Christians in Rome or the nation of Israel. We have in the Bible the author's side of the conversation. However, to truly understand what the author is saying *and why*, we need to piece together the historical context of whichever book of the Bible we are studying.

How do we uncover the historical context of the Bible? First, we look at clues from the text itself.

- Does the author mention any people or places?
- Does the author mention any key events?
- What issues does the author discuss?

These and other questions can point to clues about the situation of the original audience.

Read through the Book of Philippians. Take note of any clues you find about the original audience. Who were they, and what issues or challenges were they facing?

In addition to finding clues from the text, we can also learn from sources outside the text. Archaeologists have spent decades looking for clues about how ancient people lived. Their findings inform our understanding of the world in which David or Jesus or Paul lived.

I suggest investing in a good study Bible. These Bibles will often have notes before each book of the Bible discussing the historical context and background of the book as well as notes under key sections of scripture.

You can also find helpful information in various *Bible dictionaries*. My personal favorite is the IVP Bible Dictionary Set; however, this set can be costly. You might check if your church library has a reference section with this or other Bible dictionaries. If not, you may ask your pastor, who should be willing to share his or her personal library with you.

Commentaries are another helpful tool. Think of commentaries like Cliffs Notes or SparkNotes. Someone who has already done an extensive study of the Bible or of a single book of the Bible wrote down their observations and interpretations. Commentaries are no substitute for our own study, but they can give us an alternative perspective to complement our study.

Use a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or commentary and read about the historical context of Philippians. What did you learn that was new?

In your own words, how does knowing the historical context of a passage add to our understanding?

Literary Context

Another key step in studying the Bible is to understand each passage in its literary context. Do you remember doing connect-the-dot puzzles as a child? One dot leads to another until a full picture emerges. In the same way, the verses of the Bible are like dots, and they connect with their surrounding verses in order to form the story, argument, or point the author is making.

One of the most common errors people make with the Bible is taking verses *out of context*. This happens when we ignore the literary context and surrounding verses. One of the classic examples is Philippians 4:13.

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Out of context, this is a very encouraging verse, and many find comfort in it and think to themselves, “Through Christ I can get that promotion” or “through Christ I can master the guitar.” However, when we consider this verse in context, the meaning changes.

Philippians 4:10-13 Emphasis added

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

You see, Paul is not talking about climbing the corporate ladder or mastering our goals. Rather, this passage is about being content and thriving even in difficult circumstances.

How have you witnessed others take verses of the Bible out of context?

In your own words, what are the dangers of ignoring the literary context of a passage?

Also important for understanding the literary context is being aware of the *literary genre* of the passage in question. A genre of literature is a style of writing, and each genre is governed by its own rules. For example, a news article reporting an event is expected to give factual information. However, an Op-Ed covering the same event gives the author’s opinion. A love letter to a spouse reads differently than a business memo (at least, it should).

In the same way, the different books of the Bible reflect different genres. In the Old Testament, you have books of history with lots of genealogies, books of law with rules for social conduct, and books of poetry and prophecy with lots of metaphor and imagery. In the New Testament, you have the Gospels and Acts which share the life of Jesus and the early Church. You also have the various letters from Paul and others written to churches and individuals. Then you have Revelation, which is a special genre called apocalyptic literature. Again, a Bible dictionary or study Bible can help with clues as to what to expect from each genre.

Application

The ultimate goal of Bible study is application. Information without transformation is a waste. As we grow as disciples, we also grow in our ability to live out the way of King Jesus from scripture.

The hard part of applying scripture is discerning which commands are for today and which commands were for the original audience. For example, in Leviticus, there are rules about not eating certain foods because they are unclean. However, in the Book of Acts, the early Church, led by the Holy Spirit, made clear that that rule does not apply to non-Jews. So some rules are *time-bound* (meaning only for the time of the original audience) and some rules are *timeless* (meaning they apply today).

Good, honest followers of King Jesus disagree about which rules are which!

This is why we do not do all our Bible study alone. We enter into conversation with other disciples of Jesus to help us discern. We learn from others. We allow others to challenge our assumptions and ideas. We learn to ask better questions together. However, even in disagreement, we show love for one another.

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

What are some examples of commands from God that are timeless? Can you think of any that are time bound?

Here are some general questions that I find helpful no matter what passage of scripture I am studying.

- What does this passage tell me about God?
- What does this passage tell me about Jesus?
- What does this passage tell me about human nature?
- What have I learned that is new?
- What should I do differently because of this passage?

Be gentle with yourself. Remember, you have a lifetime of learning to know and learning to live God's Word.

Action Points

If you have not already done so, read the Book of Philippians in one setting and look up information on the historical context of this book. Then study Philippians 2:5-11. What is the literary context of this passage? How does it relate to the rest of Philippians? How does it advance Paul's main message?

Again look at Philippians 2:5-11 and reflect on the five questions presented under the discussion of Application:

- *What does this passage tell me about God?*
- *What does this passage tell me about Jesus?*
- *What does this passage tell me about human nature?*
- *What have I learned that is new?*
- *What should I do differently because of this passage?*

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

Why is it important to uncover the author's intended meaning and not just read our assumptions into a text?

Read through the Book of Philippians. Take note of any clues you find about the original audience. Who were they, and what issues or challenges were they facing?

Use a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or commentary and read about the historical context of Philippians. What did you learn that was new?

In your own words, how does knowing the historical context of a passage add to our understanding?

How have you witnessed others take verses of the Bible out of context?

In your own words, what are the dangers of ignoring the literary context of a passage?

What are some examples of commands from God that are timeless? Can you think of any that are time bound?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Living By the Book by Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks

Grasping God's Word by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart

Session 26 -- God's Word III: Listening to the Bible

Core Idea:

A Christian Disciple engages the Bible with an ear for what God is saying in the present.

Memory Verse:

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Take a moment and reflect on the memory verse for this session. Hebrews 4:12 says that the word of God, aka the Bible, is *living and active*. How could the words of an ancient text be alive? After all, as we have said, the Bible was written to a particular audience at a particular time.

However, the divine Author of the Bible is still alive and well. Remember the memory verse from Session 24?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 Emphasis added

All Scripture is *breathed out by God* and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The same God who brought the world into being by His spoken word, the same God who breathed life into our mortal bodies, this same God is the one who breathed out the words of scripture through His human writers. This same God is *still speaking* through His Word, the collected writings of the Old and New Testaments that together we call the Bible. So the question now is "How do we engage the Bible so as to not just study it but to listen to God through it?"

What are your initial thoughts on the idea that God speaks to us through the Bible?

Have you ever had an experience in which it felt as though God were speaking directly to you? What happened?

In this session, I want to introduce you to an ancient practice known as *lectio divina* or "divine reading." Some branches of the Christian family tree have kept this practice alive over the centuries, so maybe this will be familiar to you. Other branches like mine are relearning this practice after long neglect.

Read (*Lectio*)

The first step in *lectio divina* is to read the Bible. However, this is a different kind of reading than what we discussed in the last session. There, we talked about reading for familiarity with a passage. Thus, we would read an entire book of the Bible in one sitting in order to understand the major themes and outline of the text.

With *lectio*, our goal is to read a small portion of scripture, very slowly. Our goal is read for depth, not breadth. We want to go deep, not wide.

In many cases, we will choose one verse or one paragraph of scripture. We will read this verse or paragraph slowly, two or even three times. Oftentimes when we read, we are in a hurry to skip to the end. In our rush, we end up skipping or ignoring words or ideas that may be important. In this form of reading, we want to let each word receive our full attention.

Take the time and practice this kind of slow reading with Philippians 2:5-11. Then reflect on the experience. Was it difficult to read slowly? Why or why not? Did you notice anything you had not paid attention to before?

If it helps, consider reading the passage out loud. In the ages before the modern printing press, scripture was often read aloud to groups. Engaging our sense of hearing while reading may clue us in to elements of the text we had not previously considered.

Read Philippians 2:5-11 out loud. How does reading aloud change how you encounter the text?

Reflect (*Meditatio*)

After slowly reading the text multiple times, the next step is to reflect or meditate on the passage of scripture. As we mentioned earlier in the session on prayer, meditation is not an emptying of one's mind. Instead, the goal is to focus the mind on just one thing. In the case of *lectio divina*, we are focusing our attention on the words of the passage we have been reading. There are a couple of ways to do this.

First, we may focus our attention on **a single word or phrase** in the passage before us. In our example of Philippians 2:5-11, the word "humbled" in verse 8 stands out to me. As I reflect on this word, I think about the different ways that Jesus humbled Himself by taking on human nature, by serving others, and by dying on our behalf. Then I think about how we strive to do the opposite. We want to break free of our human limitations. We want to be served by others. We want to advance our lives, even at the expense of others. I could go on, but I think you get the point.

What word or phrase from Philippians 2:5-11 stands out the most to you? Spend a few minutes meditating on this word or phrase. Write down whatever comes to mind.

Second, instead of focusing on a word or phrase, maybe we focus on **a question** stirred by the passage. For example, what does it mean that Jesus “emptied Himself”? What does it mean for us to empty ourselves when we follow Him?

Third, maybe we focus on **imagining the action**. Can you picture in your mind what is happening in the text? Consider the Gospels. When the writers describe Jesus walking on water, can you visualize the scene in your mind? Can you put yourself in the place of the disciples on the boat? Can you understand their reactions and emotions at that moment?

Fourth, some passages of scripture may stir up some strong **emotions** in you. Does something in the passage make you feel sorrow or anger? Does a passage stir up guilt or gratitude? Instead of shoving those emotions aside, it may be helpful to reflect on why they are there. What about this passage triggered those feelings? What could God be saying to you about those feelings?

A quick note before we continue, journaling can be a helpful tool in meditation. At times, our thoughts can be so conflicted and noisy that meditation seems impossible. The very act of writing down our thoughts helps us to organize them. Consider using a small notebook to write in the next time you sit down for meditation.

Respond (*Oratio*)

After reading and reflecting on the verse or paragraph before us, the next step is to respond to God in prayer. Whatever is being stirred within you as you meditate on the passage, bring that before God. If you are filled with questions, ask them. If you are moved to confess and repent, do so. Even if you are moved to anger, bring that feeling before God and ask His help in dealing with that emotion in a healthy way.

This is ultimately what sets *lectio divina* apart from Bible study. We can study the Bible the way a biologist dissects a frog--cold and detached. There are many scholars who research and study the Bible in depth in order to know what the Bible says. However, that does not mean that they have a personal relationship with the God of the Bible. They know what the Bible says *about* Jesus, but they do not know King Jesus.

In your own words, what is the difference between knowing about God and knowing God?

Write out a prayer to God based on your meditation over Philippians 2:5-11.

Rest (Contemplatio)

Again, remember back in Session 22, we discussed different kinds of prayer -- speaking prayer, listening prayer, and being prayer. In *lectio divina*, we practice speaking and listening prayer when we respond to God from our meditation. In this fourth stage, we practice contemplative prayer in which we focus on simply resting in God’s presence.

Remember, scripture is living and active because God is living and active. He is not a far off and distant deity, immune to our cries for help. Instead, the Bible says that He is present with us. As we leave our time with His Word, it is important that we remember that we are not leaving His presence. He is always with us.

How does your daily life change when you remember that God is always present with you?

React (*Actio*)

Some authors add a fifth stage to the traditional four stages of *lectio divina*. This is the stage where we react to what we have read, reflected on, and prayed about. In other words, we go forth in obedience to whatever God has called us to do. Keep in mind the words of James, the brother of Jesus.

James 1:22-25

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

In light of your experience with Philippians 2:5-11, how is God calling you to live?

Bible study and *lectio divina* are two sides of the same coin. We study the Bible to understand what was said to the original audience. We practice *lectio divina* in order to listen to what God is saying to us today. Both are necessary if we are to grow as disciples of King Jesus.

Action Points

Use Matthew 5-7 and practice lectio divina at least four times using different sections of the Sermon on the Mount. Journal about your experience.

Walk through the practice of lectio divina with another person or group (NOT your disciple partner). Journal about your experience.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

What are your initial thoughts on the idea that God speaks to us through the Bible?

Have you ever had an experience in which it felt as though God were speaking directly to you? What happened?

When you practiced reading slowly, how was the experience? Was it difficult to read slowly? Why or why not? Did you notice anything you had not paid attention to before?

How does reading aloud change how you encounter the text?

What word or phrase from Philippians 2:5-11 stood out the most to you? How was your experience with meditation?

In your own words, what is the difference between knowing about God and knowing God?

How does your daily life change when you remember that God is always present with you?

In light of your experience with Philippians 2:5-11, how is God calling you to live?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Eat This Book by Eugene H. Peterson

Discovering Lectio Divina by James C. Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard

Contemplative Bible Reading by Richard Peace

Session 27 -- Holy Spirit I: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

Core Idea:

True followers of Jesus are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who leads to truth, bestows gifts and empowers the daily lives of Christians.

Memory Verse:

John 14:16-17

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

As we consider what it means to live out our faith as disciples of King Jesus, it is important to take a moment and reflect on the person whose help is absolutely essential, but who often gets ignored in many circles of the Christian faith. I am referring to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity along with God the Father and God the Son. Who is this Spirit and what does He do?

We must remember, first of all, the Holy Spirit is a *person*, not a force. He is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. He is active in all aspects of God's story: creation, fall, rescue, and restoration. Above all, He is present and available to help us in our daily lives as we follow King Jesus. So let us not look at some of the key passages about the Spirit and the role He plays in our lives.

Before we go further, what are some of your initial thoughts about the Holy Spirit? What are some questions you have about who He is and what He does?

Holy Spirit in Creation

Genesis tells us that the Holy Spirit was present and involved during the act of creation, both the creation of the universe and the formation of the first humans.

Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for spirit is the same word as wind or breath. Thus, we see God's Spirit giving life or breath to the first man, Adam, in Genesis 2:7.

Genesis 2:7

. . . then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Not only is the Holy Spirit involved in creation, but He is also at work in our *re-creation* as followers of King Jesus.

John 3:3-8 Emphasis added

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, *unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.* That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Emphasis added

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

How have you begun to change since you started following Christ? How has the Holy Spirit rebirthed you into a different person?

Holy Spirit in Conversion

The process we take of faith accepting Jesus as King and Savior is called being born again or *conversion*. We go from being apart from Christ to united with Him. At that time, the Holy Spirit seals us, saves us, and bears witness to us that we belong to God.

Ephesians 1:13-14

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

In the ancient world, royal documents would be sealed by a king's signet ring. The ring would be pressed into a puddle of melted wax leaving an impression. This seal marked the document as belonging to or being sent from the king.

In the same way, Paul says that the Holy Spirit seals us, marking us as belonging to the King of the Universe. This seal testifies to the world and to us, that we belong to King Jesus, and all the promises made to the people of God are guaranteed to us.

Reflect on the idea of being sealed with the Holy Spirit. What comes to mind as you meditate on this passage?

Titus 3:3-7

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

From this passage, how are all three of the Persons of the Trinity involved in salvation?

Romans 8:14-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

How does the Holy Spirit bear witness that you are an adopted child of God? Why do we need this assurance?

Holy Spirit in Sanctification

Our journey with King Jesus does not stop at conversion. Rather, that is merely one milestone in a long path of becoming more like Jesus. This path we have been calling discipleship. Other traditions refer to this path as sanctification, the process of being set apart for God in all areas of our lives. As with creation and conversion, the Holy Spirit is an essential part of this process.

One way that the Holy Spirit aids in our growth towards Christlikeness is by leading us to the truth. He does this by *inspiration* and *illumination*. The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of scripture to write down for their original audience and for us what God wanted revealed. As we engage in scripture through both study (Session 25) and meditation (Session 26), the Spirit aids us by illuminating our minds. In other words, He helps to shine a light on what the Bible says so we can understand it.

John 14:26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

In your own words, what is the difference between inspiration and illumination?

In addition to showing us the truth, the Spirit also empowers us to live it out. First, He helps us to put to death our sinful habits and ways of thinking. Then, He helps us rebuild new habits and new ways of thinking that are in line with God's kingdom.

Romans 8:12-13

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Galatians 5:16-24

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

In the next session, we will look at the Fruit of the Spirit more closely. For now, notice the connection between death and life in these two passages.

In Romans 8:12-13 and Galatians 5:16-24, what is to be put to death? What is brought to life?

Why is it so important that we put to death our sinful habits and attitudes?

Holy Spirit on Mission

Following Jesus is not just about earning rewards or getting blessings from God. Rather, as we follow Jesus, we become like Him. This includes taking on His sacrificial love for others and His mission of spreading the good news about the Kingdom of God available to everyone because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. His mission becomes our mission. It also happens to be the Holy Spirit's mission as well. Thus, the Holy Spirit empowers us to serve and to share the good news.

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

On the Day of Pentecost, the early disciples were meeting for prayer and the Holy Spirit came upon them all in power (Acts 2). They then went out to Jerusalem sharing the good news about King Jesus. Now there were a lot of people in Jerusalem that day who grew up in other

countries. Yet, all of these people were able to hear and understand the preaching of the disciples in their native languages.

Throughout the history of the Church, the Holy Spirit has equipped and empowered God's people with the tools they need to serve the mission. These tools are called *spiritual gifts* and we will cover them more in depth in a later session. Not all of the spiritual gifts are as dramatic as what the disciples experience on Pentecost. However, they all have a place in the mission of God's people.

1 Corinthians 12:7

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

In your own words, what is the mission of the Church?

What spiritual gifts do you think you have been given? How are you using your gifts to serve God's Kingdom?

Ultimately, the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to speak to others about King Jesus. Even in the most trying circumstances, we can trust in Him to help us find our voice and speak boldly about the Kingdom of God.

Luke 12:11-12

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

Action Points

Read Romans Chapter 8 and take note of all the mentions of the word "spirit." Summarize in your own words what the Holy Spirit does in this chapter.

Take a risk and open up a conversation about Jesus with someone else. Think about someone who may not have a relationship with Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to provide you the opportunity and the words to speak about your faith with gentleness and respect for the other person.

Disciple-Partner Discussion Questions

Reread the Core Statement and the Memory Verse of this chapter. How would you summarize each of them in your own words?

What are some of your initial thoughts about the Holy Spirit? What are some questions you have about who He is and what He does?

How have you begun to change since you started following Christ? How has the Holy Spirit rebirthed you into a different person?

Reflect on the idea of being sealed with the Holy Spirit. What came to mind as you meditated on Ephesians 1:13-14?

From Titus 3:3-7, how are all three of the Persons of the Trinity involved in salvation?

How does the Holy Spirit bear witness that you are an adopted child of God? Why do we need this assurance?

In your own words, what is the difference between inspiration and illumination?

In Romans 8:12-13 and Galatians 5:16-24, what is to be put to death? What is brought to life?

Why is it so important that we put to death our sinful habits and attitudes?

In your own words, what is the mission of the Church?

What spiritual gifts do you think you have been given? How are you using your gifts to serve God's Kingdom?

What did you learn from doing the Action Points?

Extra Resources

Forgotten God by Francis Chan

The God I Never Knew by Robert Morris

Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit by Charles Stanley