



Engaging with the Scriptures



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What if there was a way to have a richer relationship with Christ, initiate deep change in your mind, heart and body, and simply revolutionize your Christian life?

Would you do it?

Good news...there is a way!

Commissioned studies, personal experience, and the Bible itself all tell us that the number one factor in these things is how *often*, how *deeply* and how *communally* we engage the Bible. We need to feast on it *regularly*, *deeply*, and *in community* with others.

Regular,
deep,
communal

en-gage: to participate or become involved in

bible engagement gives the Holy Spirit time and space to change us from the inside out. He'll change the way we think about things. He'll change the way we react internally to things. And He'll change the way we respond externally to people and situations as we think and react differently.

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17, NLT)

The Spirit of God can use the Word of God to change the people of God into the image of God. – Jim Zuber

What Bible engagement isn't...

It is not the same as Bible literacy, which is understanding the content, organization and literary styles of the Bible.

It is not the same as Bible study, which involves the use of various techniques and resources to learn more about a Bible theme, person, book, etc.

These are important and worthwhile ways to *handle* and *appreciate* the Bible, but they may not lead us to *engage* it or be *changed* by it.

Instead, Bible engagement involves...

Meditating. We all do it. When we worry, we think about things over and over again. What if we meditated on Scripture instead?

Dependence. Asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate the passage.

Prayer. Engaging with the Word leads to praying to the author of the Word.

Community. Sharing our thoughts about a passage opens up a whole other level of engagement for us and them.

Action. Committing to act on what we find is key to making the engagement real and lasting.

We hope you will find the practices outlined on the pages that follow to be helpful as you engage with the Scriptures alongside the Holy Spirit. We invite you to experiment with them and adjust them to your unique personality and background. Have fun with them and be open to what the Holy Spirit might do through them.

SOAP

Here is a simple-yet-soulful way to engage with God's Word.

First, be quiet for a minute...prayerfully take a deep breath and quiet down.

Scripture

Open your Bible to today's reading according to whatever plan you are following. Start with a moment of silence and a prayer to hear from God, then take your time reading. Expect God's Word to speak to you. When you are done, look for a verse that particularly spoke to you and write it word-for-word in your notepad.

Observation

What is it that struck you and caught your attention in what you read? What do you think God was saying to the original audience? What might He be saying to you? Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and reveal Jesus to you. Paraphrase the passage in your own words along with your thoughts on why it struck you.

Application

Personalize what you have read, by asking yourself how it applies to your life right now. Perhaps it is an instruction, encouragement, revelation of a new promise, or a correction for a particular area of your life. Write how this scripture can apply to you today.

Prayer

This can be as simple as asking God to help you use this scripture, or it may be a greater insight on what He may be revealing to you. Remember, prayer is a two-way conversation, so be sure to listen to what God has to say! Now, write out your prayer as a note to God.

Reflecting on the Cross of Kingdom Living

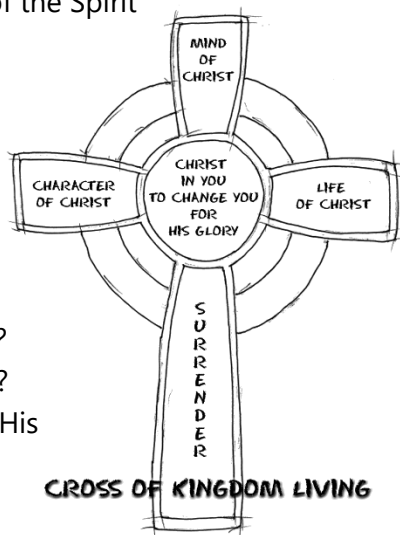
First, be quiet for a minute...prayerfully take a deep breath and quiet down.

Pray, surrendering to the leading of the Spirit of God through the Word of God.

Read the passage and/or listen to it read aloud.

Ask three questions:

1. *What does it say about God?*
 - How He thinks (His mind)?
 - How He reacts internally (His character)?
 - How He responds externally (His life)?
2. *What does this say about people?*
 - How they think (their mind)?
 - How they react internally (their character)?
 - How they respond externally (their life)?
3. *What does it say to you?*
 - How might God desire to change how you think, react, or respond?
 - What might you need to surrender to Him in order to help that happen?



Pray in response to what you've read and discovered in His Word.

Tell someone what you found!

Discovery: Finding Buried Treasure

This is a simple-yet-rich way to read God's Word with a group of friends.

First, be quiet for a minute...prayerfully take a deep breath and quiet down.

Read the passage.

1. Take turns reading portions of the passage in different translations.
2. Have one person read while everyone else listens (with Bibles closed).
3. Have a few people retell the passage (verse, paragraph, sentence). What would others add/change?

Discover what is inside the passage.

- What did you like or find significant about the passage?
- What bothers you or is unclear to you about the passage?
- What does the passage say about God?
- What does the passage say about people?
- What does the passage say about the relationship between God and people?

Apply the passage to your life.

- How does this passage change your view of God?
- How should this passage affect how you view/treat others?
- How should this passage affect how you live life?
- What specifically will you do differently this coming week because of this passage?

Share the passage with someone else.

- With whom can you share what you found/learned today?

Bible Detective

The classic way to “investigate” a passage to see what it said to the original audience, to people in general, and to you in particular.

First, be quiet for a minute...prayerfully take a deep breath and quiet down.

Read the passage...out loud if the situation permits it.

Then, ask several questions about the passage:

- **Who** is represented in the passage? What relationship do they have with each other? Do they have any unique qualities that might affect their perspective on things?
- **Where** and **when** is this event taking place? What happened beforehand that will help explain this passage?
- **What** is happening in the passage? Do you see a theme? A principle? Something to avoid? A truth to believe and live out?
- **Why** do you think this passage is included in the Bible?
- **How** could you apply something in this passage to your life?
- **Who else** in your life might benefit from this passage? How can you best share it with them? When will you do it?

Some of these questions may require some detective work. Here are some reliable online resources to help with that work:

- www.blueletterbible.org: An ever expanding collection of free bible translations, commentaries, dictionaries, etc.
- www.thebibleproject.org: Short, fascinating, helpful videos for every book of the bible and many bible themes.
- www.gotquestions.org: Easy-to-understand answers to some of the most frequently asked bible questions.

Memorizing & Meditating on Scripture

Memorizing Scripture gives it a *place in our mind*. It helps rewrite some of the narratives that need rewritten. It makes it accessible to us anytime, anywhere.

Meditating on Scripture gives it a *place in our*

heart. It helps rewire some of the most significant parts of us. To meditate on Scripture simply means to think about it, ruminate on it, pray over it, wonder about it.

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do. – Psalm 1:1-3

Committing the Scriptures to our *minds* and *hearts* gives the Holy Spirit room to work. It exposes us to Him, creating a space where He can move us and mold us. He can literally take a verse and change the whole direction of a day...or week...or life.

Try memorizing Proverbs 1:7 – The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; foods despise wisdom and instruction.

- Do it one phrase at a time.
- Include the reference so that you can find it later.
- Write it down on a notecard or make a reminder on your phone to practice it.
- Find a friend to work on it with you.

Try meditating on Proverbs 1:7

- Repeat it to yourself in the little spaces of the day.
- Turn it into a short prayer for yourself or someone else.
- Ask God what He wants to show you in it.
- Fall asleep at night considering it and pick it up first thing in the morning.

Spiritual Reading: Letting the Word Read You

Most of us read for pleasure or information. We read to be entertained or to consume and digest more information. Even when we read the Bible, we are often doing informational reading. We read to learn something new. We read to master the text.

Spiritual reading is the exact opposite of informational reading. The purpose of spiritual reading is not primarily informational, but transformational. It is not primarily educational, it is experiential. Spiritual reading is a way to allow the Spirit of God to use the Word of God to speak to us in the ways and places He most wants to speak.

One other difference worth noting: When we do informational reading, we typically choose the text and come at it with our agenda. When we do spiritual reading, it is better to let someone else choose the text for us, or to allow some sort of reading plan choose it. This allows us to yield control, which is itself a valuable soul exercise.

When we do spiritual reading, the goal is not to cover as much ground as possible, but to plumb the depths of the text so the text can plumb the depths of us. The end goal of spiritual reading is to be mastered by God for the fulfillment of God's purposes in us and through us.

Instead of merely reading the Word, we let the Word read us.

As long as we read the Bible simply to acquire knowledge, our reading does not help us in our spiritual lives. We become very knowledgeable about spiritual matters without becoming truly spiritual people. – Henri Nouwen

The Movements of Spiritual Reading

1. **Silence**, a quiet preparation of the heart. Take a few minutes to come into God's presence, slow down, relax, and intentionally release the chaos and noise in your mind.
2. **Read the Word**. Read a passage slowly and out loud, lingering over the words so that they resonate in your heart. Pause after each phrase or sentence. Be on the lookout for a word or phrase that sticks out to you. You may find yourself drawn in or resisting. After this first reading, pause for a minute or so and just be with that word or phrase.
3. **Meditate on the Word**. Read the passage again slowly. Savor the words. Chew on them. Look for that same word or phrase that caught your attention in the first reading. How does it connect to your life right now? What is it about that word or phrase that draws you in or pushes you away? Again, pause for a minute or so and just be with that word or phrase.
4. **Respond to the Word**. Read the passage a third time. Now is the moment to enter a personal dialogue with God. There is no right or wrong way to do this. The important thing is to respond truthfully and authentically. What feelings has the text aroused in you? Name where you are resistant or drawn in. Flow into a natural, honest prayer response.
5. **Rest with the Word**. Read the passage one last time, resting and waiting in the presence of God for a few minutes. Allow some time for the word to sink deeply into your soul. Yield and surrender yourself to God. Don't ask Him for anything or need Him for anything. Just be with Him. Before you leave the text, consider how you might respond to it in your everyday life.

Ignatian Reading: Getting Inside the Word

Children have great imaginations. They have a knack for putting themselves inside stories, a skill that adults often lack. But maybe we can learn something from them...why is the imagination something we must leave behind with childhood? God gave it to us as much as he gave us logic, reason, and practicality. What if there were a way to engage our imaginations by placing ourselves in the Biblical accounts? Is there a way better empathize with the people of the Bible and understand their accounts in a more experiential way?

The *Ignatian* method of Scripture engagement allows us to connect with Scripture personally. The idea is to place yourself in the biblical narrative, becoming a person in the crowd, a disciple or the boy with the loaves and fish. Imagine the sights, sounds, smells, feels, and tastes of this ancient world. You step into the story and let it enter your mind, not just a series of facts, but as a story with actual people who felt and experienced real life. This method is especially helpful for those who tend to connect to Scripture on a purely cognitive level. It involves our emotions, enveloping our whole person. With the Ignatian method, you are no longer just reading a book, you are part of a true story.

A word of caution is needed here. Some would argue that our imagination is fallen and that we should not come to Scripture using our imagination at all, only our intellect. It is true that our imagination is fallen and that it can lead us into sin and deception. Who has not experienced a deceitful imagination? But the truth is that our intellect is also fallen and that it also can lead us into sin and deception. We must be careful with all aspects of our lives (thoughts, feelings, imagination, actions, relationships), measuring all against God's Word.

Getting in the Word is as simple as...

1. **Pray:** Offer God your time and focus. Ask for any grace you need during this time (peace, consolation, hope, focus etc.).
2. **Imagine:** choose a story from the Bible and...
 - a. **Read:** Read and/or listen to the text slowly, truly taking time to understand what is happening in the scene.
 - b. **Get in:** Read and/or listen to it again, using your imagination to place yourself in the scene as one of the people or an independent character who is observing what is going on.
 - c. **Look around:** What is happening around you? Where are you? Think about the sensory experience during this time. What does the place, feel, sound, look, smell like? Try to really imagine it. Also, gain a sense of who these people are. Why are they here, what are they doing, and what does that tell us about them? Remember, ground yourself in the text, but feel free to explore it. This takes practice but becomes easier with time.
 - d. **Look inside:** What is going on inside you? Ask yourself what you're thinking and feeling as you interact with the scene. Are you happy? Joyful? Sad? Angry? Peaceful? Confused? Anxious? Relieved?

Pray: Conclude with a prayer in response to your experience. What did you receive from the Lord? How do you think He might want to use this experience in your life?

Gospel Meditation: Getting to Know Jesus

We get to know people as we spend time with them. Not when we read an article about them or research them. Not when we 'like' their Facebook posts. Not even when we exchange emails or texts. No...it takes an investment of time with someone to really get to know them. This happens most naturally and effectively in the everyday moments of life.

This is the essence of prayer...spending time with God. But often, prayer is more like exchanging information or asking for things. Prayer often involves more talking than listening. It also tends to happen in specific, set aside moments rather than the everyday parts of life.

So how do we spend time with Jesus? How do we develop a real-life, deep relationship with Him? How do we get to *know* Him, not just more *about* Him?

One way is through a Gospel meditation. Spirit-guided meditation on the life of Jesus provides the possibility of being present with Jesus in His everyday moments as described in the Gospels. That's worth repeating: *Spirit-guided meditation on the life of Jesus provides the possibility of being present with Jesus in His everyday moments as described in the Gospels.* Gospel meditation provides an opportunity to enter specific moments in Jesus' life and share the experience with Him. What is He thinking? What is He feeling? How is His true character revealed by His interactions? Who is Jesus really?

Let's spend some time getting to know the One we are trying to be more and more like!

Doing a Gospel Meditation

First, take a moment to quiet yourself in God's presence. Close your eyes and ask God to take the words of Scripture and, by the power of his Spirit, make them God's Word to *you*. Ask for the gift of a few moments of a Spirit-guided encounter with Jesus.

Then slowly read a Gospel account several times—preferably out loud. For example, here is Mark 10:17-22...

[Jesus] was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him, "Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You must not kill; You must not commit adultery; You must not steal; You must not bring false witness; You must not defraud; Honor your father and mother." And he said to him, "Master, I have kept all these from my earliest days." Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, "There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

Now allow yourself 5 minutes to imagine the situation presented in the story. Don't try to analyze the story or learn lessons from it. Just be present with Jesus. Be open to this thoughts, actions and words...even your own reactions. For this passage, you might first picture the man approaching Jesus as he is leaving on a journey. Then, as if you were a spectator, observe the events as they unfold. Watch, listen and stay attentive to Christ. Don't be distracted by the rich young ruler...keep your focus on Christ Himself. What is He thinking as the man approaches? How do His words reflect what He is thinking and how He is reacting internally? How would you describe the Jesus you see?

Praying Scripture

Prayer is an interesting thing. Whether or not they are Christians, most people pray. And most people consider prayer to be a bit of mystery. What is the goal of prayer? Who should I pray for? Does prayer “work”? Is God really hearing me? Can I hear from him? Why does it get to be so boring and repetitive? How should I pray? What should I pray for?

There is a simple, practical way make these questions seem less important: Praying Scripture. This combines the two most powerful ways to develop a deepening relationship with God.

It might mean praying biblical prayers word-for-word. This is a powerful way to take the Word of God and apply it directly to our relationship with God via a conversation with God.

But there is another way to pray scripture: personalizing a portion of scripture into prayers. As we read the Bible, we will resonate with certain passages or phrases. As that happens, we can turn those passages or phrases into prayer for ourselves, our families, our friends, and our world. This allows the Spirit of God to use the Word of God to help the People of God turn to God in a beautiful, conversational way.

When we pray scripture, bible reading becomes a live conversation with God in a cycle of reading and prayer.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you and lead me along the path of everlasting life. – King David (in Psalm 139:23-24)

Examples of Praying Scripture

Read Psalm 141 a couple of times. Then, focus in on verses 1-4. These verses are David's prayers that God would hear him and help him. Prayers of worship. Prayers of protection and guidance.

Try taking these verses and simply praying them yourself. Don't worry about getting the prayers word-perfect. Rephrase the themes into your own words if that is easier and seems more genuine. Consider focusing in on one verse to help guide your words and thoughts. Then do the same thing to pray for your family, friends, and even your enemies.

Or consider Mark 1:16-20 and how quickly Jesus' first disciples left the life they knew to follow Him to unknown places.

Try taking these verses and turning them into a prayer for your own relationship with Jesus. Move onto your family and friends. Ask the Lord to bring to mind others you could pray for. Let this 2,000 year old narrative prompt your modern-day prayers.

Here is one more. Using something like an Ignatian Reading, imagine what it was like for the parents of the children discussed in Mark 10:13-16. Imagine seeing Jesus take your kids in His arms, put His hands on their heads, and bless them. Imagine what that would be like as a parent!

Now, take that same set of thoughts and emotions, and pray the scene over your family and friends...even your enemies. With your eyes closed, imagine scene as you slowly and thoughtfully pray, "Jesus, take _____ into your arms, put your powerful, gentle hands on their heads, and bless them."