



The Basics of Life in Christ



Week Six:

Hearing God's Word—Practices
that form the Mind of Christ in
Us



Introduction: “Take up, and Read!”

By now, you probably have guessed that I’m a fan of the early church pastor Augustin (who lived in the 4th century after Christ). One of the most amazing things he ever wrote was his *Confessions*, a long reflection on how he came to know Christ out of the world of paganism and immorality in which he lived. As the truth about Jesus became known to him, he began to see his own wickedness and sin, and he was overwhelmed with it for long periods of time. His distress was rooted in this: he didn’t know the way out of his immorality and sinful mind. Christ was so holy, but Augustin was unable to rid himself of his sin.

So, in this passage of the *Confessions*, we find Augustin weeping in a garden over his deep sinfulness:

So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighboring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, “Take up and read; Take up and read!” Instantly, my countenance altered, I began to think most intently whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose;

interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. ...Eagerly then I returned to the place where [my friend] was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle [the book of Romans] when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence” [Romans 13:13b-14]. No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away. (Confessions, Chapter XII)

In this story Augustin is brought from weeping to peace by a divine encounter with the Word of God. This encounter transformed him, directed him, and assured him of the cleansing love of Christ. That’s what the Bible does.

What is the Bible?

Q: Have you ever had a transforming experience with Scripture? What was that like?

How the Bible describes itself:

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.

1 Thessalonians 2:13— And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

2 Timothy 3:16— 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 Bible describes itself as **the authoritative and error-free communication from God to humans by humans**. As God's Word, it is the primary means that God uses to communicate with his people.

Q: Why is it important to remember that the Word of God is the primary way he communicates with his people?

Hearing God's Word: Practices that lead us to hear what God is saying to us in his Holy Word (Psalm 119:33-40).

Question for Reflection: *When you think of your daily life, how does God's Word fit in? What kinds of challenges do you face when reading the Bible?*

Desires that Lead us to Hear God's Word

As we've said before, the beginning of pursuing the spiritual life is simply taking the time to recognize what we desire, and following that desire to God's throne.

I want...

...to know what the Bible says and how it intersects with my life (the discipline of Bible Study)

...to prayerfully encounter and surrender to the living God through attending to Scripture (the discipline of Devotional Reading)

...to gaze more deeply on God through the written Word and the created order (the discipline of Meditation)

...to carry the life-shaping words of God in me at all times and in all places (The discipline of Memorization)

Q: Do you resonate with these desires? Do they spark any memories, thoughts, or reminders for you?

Spiritual Disciplines For Sharing our Lives

Bible Study	Involves engaging the mind and focusing the attention on Scripture in an attempt to understand apply truth to every part of my life.
<i>Lectio Divina</i> / Devotional Reading	<i>Lectio Divina</i> or hearing of Scripture requires an open, reflective, listening posture alert to the voice of God. This type of reading is aimed more at growing a relationship with God than gathering information about God.
Meditation	A long, ardent gaze at God, his work and his world. Slowing down and giving one's undivided attention to God lives at the core of Christian meditation.

Memorization	The process of continually remembering the words, truths and images God uses to shape us. Memorization provides us with a store of learning, which can be accessed anywhere and anytime.
(Added by Pastor Casey)	
Listening	The task of sitting under in-person, local preaching of God's Word in and with other believers.
Adorning My Life	The creative work of filling our homes, digital spaces, and relationships with the words of Scripture.

Question for reflection: *Which of these practices inspires you as you think of the desires above? Which could you try this week?*

An Example: *Lectio Divina*/Devotional Reading

Desire: to prayerfully encounter and surrender to the living God through attending to Scripture.

Definition: *Lectio Divina* or hearing of Scripture requires an open, reflective, listening posture alert to the voice of God. This type of reading is aimed more at growing a relationship with God than gathering information about God.

“The first 1500 years of church history were characterized by the practice of lectio divina. Since many people were illiterate and many that could read didn’t have Bibles, lectio divina offered a way of attending to Scripture as it was read in church, with an ear to hearing a word from God. A brief and memorable word or phrase because bread for the soul through the week...Lectio Divina invites us into God’s presence to listen for his particular, loving word to me at this particular moment in time.”(SDH 188).

The practice of *lectio divina* includes five parts (from Calhoun):

- 1.** *Silencio*—quiet contemplation of the heart. Come into God’s presence, slow down, relax, and

intentionally release the chaos and noise in your own mind to him.

- 2.** *Lectio*—read the word. Read a Scripture passage slowly and out loud, lingering over the words so that they resonate in your heart. When a word or phrase catches your attention, don't keep reading. Stop and attend to what God is saying to you. Be open to the word. Don't analyze it or judge it. Listen and wait.
- 3.** *Meditatio*—meditate. Read the Scripture a second time out loud. Savor the words. Listen for any invitation that God is extending to you in this world. Reflect on the importance of the words that light up to you. Like Mary, who pondered the word in her heart, gently explore the ramification of God's invitation.
- 4.** *Oratio*—respond, pray. Read the Scripture a third time. Now is the moment to enter into a personal dialogue with God...what feelings has the text aroused in you? Name where you are resistant or want to push back. Become aware of where you feel invited into a deeper way of being with God. Talk to God about these feelings.
- 5.** *Contemplatio*—contemplate, rest and wait in the presence of God. Allow some time for the word to sink deeply into your soul. Yield and surrender yourself to God. Before you leave, you might consider

a reminder that can help you dwell on or incarnate this word throughout the day.

Questions for Reflection: *In practicing this, which of these steps is the hardest for you? How is this different from how we were taught to read the Bible?*

Q: How could you incorporate the Word into your life more this next week? What areas of your life are wordless? Which of the above disciplines can help you in this?

Schedule (From Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*):

Week Seven (2/28): “**I**ncarnating” Jesus—practices that let us be Jesus to the world.

Week Eight (3/14): “**P**raying” my life—practices that lead me to pray without ceasing.