

Strongholds of the Holy Spirit

Victory Life Church – Pastor Jacob Sheriff

Part 4 “Scripture” — Sunday, June 26, 2022

Introduction

Our discipleship to Jesus Christ is a serious matter, not an optional addition. We are in spiritual warfare and our discipleship is learning how to wage war against the enemy and destroy the strongholds he has in our minds (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Our discipleship to Jesus is equal to being trained as a soldier. We are waging war and must be trained in the necessary weapons that have divine power.

1 Timothy 4:7 (ESV) Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather **train yourself for godliness;**

Spiritual Disciplines: “available, concrete activities designed to render bodily beings such as we ever more sensitive and receptive to the Kingdom of Heaven brought to us in Christ.”¹ ~ Dallas Willard

Inputs — Desires — Thoughts — Beliefs — Actions — Habits — Character

Spiritual Disciplines reinforce our desire to *become someone*, not a desire to *acquire something*. Spiritual disciplines are not for righteousness, they are wisdom.² They are for anchoring and orienting our lives around Jesus, transforming our desires and thoughts to the truth in Him.

Scripture as Disciplines

Matthew 4:1-4 (ESV) Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Our hunger is more than our hunger for food. Building on the discipline of fasting, by combining it with the disciplines of engaging in Scripture, we don’t just abstain from food to temper our hungers and impulses, we simultaneously redirect our hunger toward God who is the One who ultimately sustains and satisfies us.

Fasting and Scripture retrain our desires to be satisfied in God.

Inputs — Desires — Thoughts — Beliefs — Actions — Habits — Character

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, pg. 252

² Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, pg. 115

“In experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. Fasting is feasting!”³ ~ Richard Foster

Philippians 4:8-9 (ESV) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things**. What you have learned and received and **heard** and **seen** in me—**practice** these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Inputs — Desires — Thoughts — Beliefs — Actions — Habits — Character

John 8:31-32 (ESV) So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you **abide in my word**, you are truly my disciples, and you will **know the truth**, and **the truth will set you free**.”

John 17:15-17 (ESV) “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

Disciplines of engaging in Scripture are for allowing the Truth to have His way in us. They enable us to keep the Word as the primary input in our life, by which we become able to filter all other inputs through as well.

Forms of Disciplines Engaging in Scripture

How do we “practice”?

Reading

Studying/Memorizing

Meditating

Reading

Studying

Meditating

Psalms 119:9-11 (ESV) How can a young man **keep his way pure**? By **guarding it according to your word**. With my **whole heart I seek you**; let me not wander from your commandments! I have **stored up your word in my heart**, that I might **not sin** against you.

Inputs — Desires — Thoughts — Beliefs — Actions — Habits — Character

A discipline of reading Scripture is just that, make reading our Bibles a habit. If reading is a challenge, combine it with listening to Scripture. Reading plans or devotional stuff are a good start. Don't feel pressured to understand everything you ever read. We are in this for a lifetime, you won't understand it deeply immediately. Nor should you try to “force” God speaking to you every time you open your Bible. He can and He does, but you cannot make him. When that happens, enjoy in it and listen well, but don't assume it has to happen every time.

The purpose of reading our Bibles as a discipline is to familiarize ourselves with it, and in time, with the Author. The Bible takes time to get familiar with how it is written, the books, the

³ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, pg. 55

genres, the styles, the collections. Be patient with it and yourself. Start small and work your way up to trying to read the whole thing in time.

Reading
Studying
Meditating

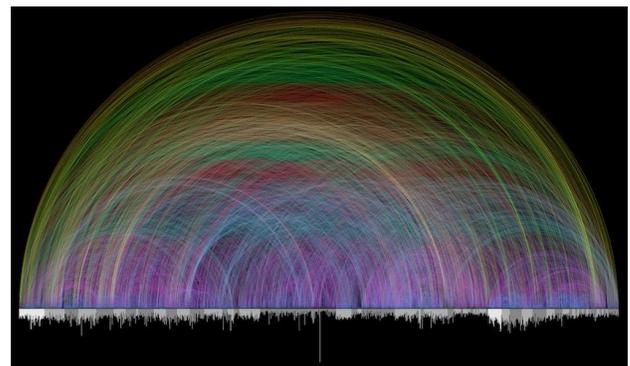
What we believe about the Scriptures is that it is not just a human word, but a divine Word as well. We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16) and communicates the Truth of who God is, who we are, our purpose in life, what it means to be human and live well, how is God active and present in the world. This is not an easy book where its meaning lays on the surface. You must dive deep to understand just how deep the Scriptures are.

2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV) Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a **workman** that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**

We are in this for a lifetime of reading and learning. The discipline of study is for us to understand by revelation the meaning of Scripture, not just the words of the text. We study in order to know God more, to know the depths of His character and activity through Christ Jesus. We study because what we learn does not just give us information in our minds, but works revelation of the truth into the transformation of our minds. Study gives us a more accurate knowledge of God, making our experiences and intimacy with Him deeper.

“Mystics without study are only spiritual romantics who want relationship without effort.”⁴ ~ Calvin Miller

The Scriptures are of infinite depth. They come from a beautiful divine mind who has inspired creative and brilliant human minds to write works of art. The discipline of study is worth the effort to know God deeper. There are 63,779 cross-references in Scripture.⁵ It is worth studying out words, themes, literary designs, books, sections, concepts, doctrine, etc. Studying enables you to be acquainted with truth in such a way that you are less susceptible to lies. Studying should not make us knowledgeable Pharisees (though that is a temptation), but more humble worshippers, more intelligent apprentices of Jesus.



John 5:39-40 (ESV) “ You search the Scriptures because you think that **in them** you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness **about me**, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have **life.**”

Our study of Scripture cannot replace our relationship with Jesus, but should facilitate it. The Scriptures bring us to Jesus, the Living Word, and we have life in Him, not in Scriptures themselves. But in order to know the Living Word, we need to know and deepen our understanding of the written Word.

⁴ Calvin Miller, *A Hunger for the Holy*, pg. 133, quoted in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard, pg. 176

⁵ <https://www.chrisharrison.net/index.php/Visualizations/BibleViz>

Reading
Studying
Meditating

Meditation⁶: (Heb) *hagav*, moan, growl, utter, speak, muse; meditate, ponder, give serious thought and consideration to selected information, with a possible implication of speaking in low tones reviewing the material

Psalm 1:1-3 (ESV) Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his **delight** is in the **law** of the Lord, and **on his law he meditates day and night**. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Inputs — Desires — Thoughts — Beliefs — Actions — Habits — Character

Joshua 1:8 (ESV) “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your **mouth**, but you shall **meditate** on it day and night, so that you may be **careful to do** according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

Psalm 19:14 (ESV) Let the words of my mouth and the **meditation of my heart** be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

You can call this “devotion” if you want. It’s being with Scripture continually in order have our minds flooded with it. Meditation does not require memorization, but is exponentially beneficial with it. Like a dog on a bone (a lion over a kill), we “chew” on every word in order to be nourished fully by it. You may even compare “meditation” with “obsession.” We are not pursuing Bible knowledge, we want transformation. Scripture meditation and memorization draw our thoughts and attention to be consumed by the Word of God.

Inputs — Desires — **Thoughts** — Beliefs — Actions — Habits — Character

Meditation Ideas: read the same passage over and over for a few minutes, read aloud, memorize passages (not just individual refrigerator verses), hand write the Scriptures, post Scriptures in places you will interact with throughout the day.

The entire goal of disciplines that engage us in Scripture, as well as the disciplines of Fasting and Abstaining, is to guard and protect what comes into our mind and heart and the impact those inputs have on who we are becoming.

“If we allow everything access to our mind, we are simply asking to be kept in a state of mental torture or bondage. For nothing enters the mind without having an effect for good or evil.”⁷ ~ Dallas Willard

⁶ James A. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, entry 2047

⁷ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, pg. 111

Conclusion

Strongholds of the Holy Spirit: where once there were disordered desires and negative and sinful thought patterns that became strongholds of the enemy, we destroy them and replace them with transformed desires and yielded thought patterns for the Holy Spirit to have increased access to our lives. Where once sin engrained itself into the fabric of our lives, now the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is ingrained into our lives enabling us to live in and from the Kingdom of God with the character of Christ.

“Christianity can only succeed as a guide for current humanity if it does two things. First, it must take the **need** for **human transformation** as seriously as do modern revolutionary movements....Second, it needs to clarify and exemplify **realistic methods** of human **transformation**. It must show how the ordinary individuals who make up the human race today can become, through the grace of Christ, a love-filled, effective, and powerful community.”⁸ ~ Dallas Willard

⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (Preface / ix)