

Write These Words Upon Your Heart



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Introduction

I wrestled with God for a long time about the writing of this study. I believed I was unworthy to fulfill the calling He had put on my heart. I felt very presumptuous putting to pen what God wanted people to know. I finally submitted to God's will for me after studying biblical leaders. That's when I really understood that God uses people like me to reach people like me. Through His timeless Word, God gently reminded me that if I wanted to be perfect before writing this study, it would never get written.

I am sharing this with you by way of disclaimer, really. I want you to know that no one, including me, has a more "direct line" to God than you do. I encourage you, throughout this study (and *any* Bible study), to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to a personal understanding of His word. The Bible has a supernatural ability to meet us all where we are. It is as personal and individual as you will allow it to be. I have no doubt that God will bless you through this study, not because of who I am, but because of who He is.

Throughout these pages, you will find opportunities to formulate your own answers, interpretations, and thoughts. These occasions for inquiry and reflection are included in the study so we can build meaning and understanding together, and also to make sure you're paying

attention!! Most of all, these sections are intended to help maximize your learning. You will notice that these tools are varied in format: multiple-choice, fill in the blanks, matching activities, etc. Often, I will ask that you write a passage word for word. Understanding and remembering scripture is at the heart of this study. Statistics show that we retain 80 percent more of what we write than what we only read. When you come across these writing tasks, please don't skip them. They will contribute greatly to your overall understanding and retention.

You will notice that I repeat the same two questions after each lesson: (1) How did God speak directly to you today? (2) What is your response to Him? These two questions are included to remind you that God wants you to take His Word very seriously. Answering these questions after each section will train you to look for God's personal message to you each time you open the Bible.

May God bless the time you spend between these pages, and thanks for taking me along on this portion of your journey.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God—Philippians 1:9-11

**all scripture is quoted from the NIV unless otherwise noted.*

What does it mean to know the Bible?

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. –Acts 17:11

The early church, under Paul's direction, studied scripture for the confirmation of Jesus as the Christ: "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,' he said" (Acts 17:2-3). Discerning early Christians were able to see the Messiah, because they knew and understood the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. For these believers, knowing the Bible was critical, because many of them were persecuted for following Christ. Understanding that their beliefs were well-founded was fundamental to the beliefs themselves. They were not "handed-down" their faith from family or pastors, they had to make a choice based on the information they had on hand.

Acts 17:11 describes how the Bereans knew scripture. In your own words, please describe the difference implied in this verse between the Bereans and others who heard Paul's message.

Please read Luke 4:16-21. Why would it have been important for those hearing this reading to know God's Word?

Let's look at another group of people who studied scripture. B.C. 145, the Jews divided into three sects. One of these sects took knowing the scriptures very seriously. In fact, they were considered experts in the law of the Jews, the Old Testament scriptures. Perhaps you have heard of them- they were called Pharisees. Before you judge the group as a whole, let's get a little perspective from F.B. Meyer's words: "...In those old Jewish days the Pharisee represented some of the noblest traditions of the Hebrew people. Amid the prevailing indifference the Pharisees stood for a strict religious life...Amid the lax morals of the time, which infected Jerusalem almost as much as Rome, the Pharisee was austere in his ideals, and holy in life."¹

In the Pharisee community, a child of five years would be able to read Scriptures. By six, he would begin his education at the school of a rabbi. Shortly after his sixth birthday, he would have memorized Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Please read that passage and write your understanding of it:

Even more impressively, a child in the community of Pharisees would have also memorized Psalms 113-118. I know you will be blessed by reading these Psalms.

How would you characterize the tone of these Psalms, and why do you think they were given such importance in the Jewish home?

By the time a child was thirteen, he was considered a son of the law. He started wearing phylacteries, called *tefillin*, during weekday morning prayers. Phylacteries were made up of two black leather cubes with long leather straps. Each cube held certain passages from the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) written on strips of parchment. He wore one of the cubes on his left arm facing his heart. The other cube was placed in the center of his forehead. The *Code of Jewish Law* prescribed that a Jewish man thirteen years or older was to put on the tefillin at the first moment in the

morning when enough daylight existed to recognize a neighbor at a distance of four cubits.²

Based on this behavior, how would you describe the Pharisees interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9? _____

As you can see, the Pharisees thought it was very important to know God's Word. Let's use their example to understand the key question for this week.

Please read the following verses and write a brief description of each:

Matthew 15:1-9 _____

Matthew 23:1-7 _____

Consider these verses in context with the information above on the community of Pharisees. Do you find a conflict? If so, what?

Knowing God's Word means more than just reading it, or even memorizing it. Knowing God's Word is an important step in knowing God Himself, and it requires that we engage our heart, not just our brains. It takes more than "learning," it takes faith.

Consider for a moment what it means to know a person. Think of someone who you have recently met-let's call her Tammy. You like this person very much and are looking forward to getting to know her better. If you are asked in passing, "Do you know Tammy?" You answer, "Yes, I know her." Now think of your best friend. Perhaps she is someone you have known for many years. When asked in passing whether you know her, your heart smiles, and you nod "Yes, I know her." You know both of these women, but in very different ways. God wants us to know Him as we know our best friends. He reaches out to us from inside the pages of the Bible and invites us into the greatest of all knowledge-that of His love and His Son. Let's know God's word.

How did God speak directly to you through this week's lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write Jeremiah 33:3 and commit it to memory:

Group Discussion:

1. Based on this week's readings, what do you believe it means to know the Bible?
2. Read Matthew 23 in its entirety and discuss its application to us today.
3. The phylacteries contained the following passages. Read and discuss the importance of each in the life of the early Jewish believer and in our lives today.
 - a. Exodus 13:1-10
 - b. Exodus 13:11-16
 - c. Deuteronomy 6:4-9
 - d. Deuteronomy 11:13-21
4. What has it meant for the following groups through history to know God's Word?
 - Jews/Israelites before Jesus' time
 - Early Christians
 - Christians during the reformation of the Church
 - Present day Christians

Why is it important to know the Bible?

...man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. –Deuteronomy 8:3b

There are many answers that we can give to the above question. Let's explore a few.

1. *To know what everyone's talking about.* John Hayes might agree with this answer. In *Introduction to the Bible*, he reminds us that "(t)he influence of the Bible permeates almost every aspect of life in the western world—laws, literature, art, music, architecture, morals, and of course religion. Many of the Bible's words and phrases are part of our current speech, and allusions to its stories are widely understood. It is a vital part of our total cultural heritage; indeed, many people would claim that it is, for a variety of reasons, the most important and influential collection of writings ever brought together and bound in a single volume."⁵ So, one might argue that it is culturally important to know the Bible.
2. *To be a good Christian.* Many of us were introduced to reading or studying the Bible when we became believers in Jesus Christ. Often, we are encouraged to read the Gospels first, to really get a feel for Jesus and His ministry. Many new believers are enthusiastic about beginning to read the Bible, as well they should be—it is the story of our faith.
3. *To be able to defend it.* Many believers dive into the Bible on a deeper level to defend it in their social or familial circles where it may be under attack. Coming from a family full of extremely well-educated atheists, I can relate to this reason. I want to intelligently defend my faith, and I need to know the Bible to do that.
4. *To find answers.* Let's face it, we are all looking for some answers when life hits us hard. The Bible assures us that our troubles are not haphazard: "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold" (Psalm 119:71-72).

5. *To have my own faith.* Some of us were raised in the church, learned our Sunday school songs, went to Vacation Bible School, Youth Group, retreats, were baptized, confirmed, and married in the church. But there comes a time when we want to make our faith our own truth, not someone else's. The Bible is the place to find your own truth, learn your own walk, and discover what God has to offer you on a personal level. This is how your faith becomes your own. Not your mom's faith, not your sister's faith, not your college roommate's faith-yours! As a parent, I cherish the time of influence I have now in my children's lives-they are very young. But I think often of God's promise, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). God is working in the lives of believers from start to finish.

These answers are all good reasons to know the Bible, and perhaps you can come up with even more. But what does the Bible have to say about knowing the Bible? Please read the following passages and describe the feeling each has on knowing scripture.

Matthew 4:3-4 _____

Job 23:12 _____

Psalms 19:8 _____

Psalms 119:105 _____

Proverbs 6:23 _____

2 Peter 1:19 _____

There are certainly many roads that lead us to the Bible and many valid reasons for why it is important to know God's Word. I'm sure you have found that the more you read your Bible, the more you want to read. Perhaps the most important reason for studying the Bible is discovered in 1 Samuel 3:21.

In this passage, what is revealed to Samuel through God's Word?

- The meaning of life Samuel's heritage God Himself

For a New Testament perspective on knowing scripture, please read 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and write the two main purposes Paul writes to advise his friend Timothy on why we should know scripture.

(verse 15) _____

(verse 17) _____

As we grow our relationship with God into a more personal one, the Bible becomes very personal too. God's Word becomes bread for our soul and light for our path.

How did God speak directly to you through this week's lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write Psalm 119:105 and commit it to memory:

Group Discussion:

1. Before you began this study, you had a personal reason that motivated you. Why is it important for *you* to know God's Word?
2. As a group, please read the following passages and discuss how they apply to our key question for this week:
 - a. Psalm 40:8
 - b. Psalm 119:1-16
 - c. Jeremiah 23:25-32
 - d. Titus 1:9
 - e. Revelation 22:18-19

3. As a group, please read John 17:15-17 (a portion of Jesus' prayer for His disciples) and discuss its application to your life today.

4. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 again, and discuss whether you believe all scripture is from God and why. How could different interpretations of this verse impact one's everyday life?

Week Three

How do we know the Bible?

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him—but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit.—1 Corinthians 2:9-10

Truly knowing the Bible is a lifelong process. Once we have asked Jesus into our lives, He promises the gift of the Holy Spirit, which will bring us to a new level of understanding of Him and the Bible: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). This gift is absolutely the first step in understanding the Bible and in deepening your relationship with the Author. For this reason, every time you open the pages of your Bible, the best way to be sure you understand what you are reading is to pray first. Ask God to show you what you need for your “daily bread.”

Additionally, there are some other practical ways to know the Bible. Despite the fact that God used 40 inspired writers to pen the Scriptures over the course of 1500 years, the text amazingly offers a cohesive, timeless message from start to finish. As Jim George so eloquently says in his *Bare Bones Bible Handbook*, “God sovereignly moves history in a definite direction toward the consummation of all things in the new heavens and the new earth, where His name will be honored for all eternity and His voice obeyed by all the people of the earth.”⁴ One of the key ways to really understand the Bible is to know it is one big story, not 66 disconnected ones. Seeing the “big picture” of the Bible offers a level of understanding that makes reading it much less intimidating.

Quite simply, the Old Testament is the story of man’s need for the Messiah, and the New Testament is the story of the coming of that Messiah and how we should respond. More specifically the Old Testament contains the old agreement between God and the Hebrews, as well as stories about how this agreement worked out. The New Testament contains stories and teachings about a new agreement between God and people based on the wisdom and life of Jesus. It’s just that simple.

Please read the following passages and frame your understanding of them in the above context.

Isaiah 9:1-2 _____

Matthew 4:15-16 _____

Malachi 4:2 _____

Ephesians 5:8 _____

Micah 7:8 _____

Notice that these verses are pulled from all over the Bible, but the message is cogent. Open your Bible randomly and find three passages. Write the passages you chose and whether you were able to frame them inside the “big picture” message of the Bible.

_____ : _____

_____ : _____

_____ : _____

Another practical approach to understanding the Bible involves three simple steps: Observation, Interpretation, Application.¹ Let’s look at each:

1. **Observation** is where you ask the “w” questions: who, what, where, when, and why of the passage. For example, who wrote the passage or who is the main focus of it? What does the emphasis of the passage seem to be? Where and when did the writing or story take place, and how is that important to the context? Why was the original text written—as instruction, admonition, information, etc.? Perhaps there are terms you struggle with that this passage can shed light on, such as justification, righteousness, grace, sanctification, etc. If there is repetition of a term, make note of its importance.

¹ Observation/Interpretation/Application method adapted from *The Bare Bones Bible Handbook*, Jim George, Harvest House 2006

2. **Interpretation** involves discovering the meaning of the passage—the author’s main thought or idea. Answering the observation questions will lead you directly into the process of interpretation. Here we ask the “c” questions:
 - a. What was the **context** of the passage—the verses or paragraphs immediately before and after?
 - b. Are there **cross-references** for this passage? Because God is the greatest Author, scripture will interpret scripture. Let other passages in the Bible shed light on the passage you are examining. Many “study” Bibles offer exhaustive cross-referencing systems to help you in this area. These are the tiny letters dropped into each verse that refer to information often found between columns or at the end of the page.
 - c. What was the **culture**? Since the Bible was written long ago, it is important to weave some cultural understanding into our interpretation.
 - d. What is your **conclusion**? By this point in the process you are ready to draw your own understanding of the passage.
3. **Application** is why we study the Bible. We want to experience God, His promises, His instructions, His counsel. After observing and interpreting a passage, you may want to ask these questions to help you apply it’s truth to your life:
 - a. How does this truth impact my relationship with God?
 - b. How does this truth affect my relationship with others?
 - c. How does this truth affect me?
 - d. How does this truth inform my response to the enemy Satan?

Answering these questions is only the first step in applying the Bible to your life, because putting the understanding into practice is the tough part. But God will bless your time and attention to His Word by increasing its presence in you and your everyday life.

Please choose one of the passages you randomly selected for the “big picture” activity and apply the Observation/Interpretation/Application approach.

Passage _____

Observation:

Interpretation:

Application:

You've worked hard this week! Here's a Bible trivia activity just for fun:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| ___ 1. Number of authors used by God to pen scripture | A. 4 |
| ___ 2. Number of years spanned in the writing of the Bible | B. 5 |
| ___ 3. Number of books in the Bible | C. 14 |
| ___ 4. Number of Psalms | D. 40 |
| ___ 5. Number of books written by Moses | E. 66 |
| ___ 6. Number of books written by Paul | F. 150 |
| ___ 7. Number of Gospels | G. 1500 |

How did God speak directly to you through this week's lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 and commit it to memory:

Group Workshop:

As a group, find three more passages and interpret them using the methods we learned this week.

Passage: _____

Big Picture

Observation

Interpretation

Application

Passage: _____

Big Picture

Observation

Interpretation

Application

Passage: _____

Big Picture

Observation

Interpretation

Application

Week Four

The Power of Our Words

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. –Romans 10:10

Let's shift gears for a moment, because we are moving into the portion of this study where the "rubber meets the road." I praise God when I think of how He has shown my stubborn heart the principles in these pages, and it is my prayer that you will be as blessed as I was, and continue to be, by the unveiling of His Word. If you haven't already made it a habit, please take a few moments to pray before each of the following weeks of study, as they become more and more saturated in God's revealing grace. I can't help but indulge in a moment of thankfulness that God has brought us together for this journey.

Please read the text surrounding this week's key scripture, Romans 10:5-12. In this tenth chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul is explaining the difference between the "old way" of obtaining righteousness (verse 5) and the new righteousness which comes by faith (verses 6-9). It is by no mistake that verse ten is couched in this lesson on righteousness. It emphasizes the power of the spoken word. Beth Moore reminds us in *Believing God*, "For reasons ultimately known to God alone, He has ordained that spoken words carry a power, authority, and effectiveness that exceed words we simply think."⁵ Upon further examination in your own life, you will find this principle bears meaning. Consider a time you made a New Year's Resolution. If you only thought it to yourself, it was easier to break. If you shared it with a friend, or further, asked a friend to help keep you accountable, it became a more powerful promise. On the flip side of this matter, perhaps you have thought unkind things about someone you know. Saying them out loud, whether to that person or a third party, is much more potent. Again, you find yourself much more accountable for the spoken words than you ever would have for your thoughts alone.

Let's not for a moment dismiss what Jesus taught in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), which is that God knows our hearts, and He wants our thoughts, actions, and words to align with our faith. As we take up this great commission, let's consider further the power of the spoken word.

Please read the following scriptures and write a brief interpretation of each:

Deuteronomy 30:14 _____

1 Corinthians 12:3 _____

2 Corinthians 4:13 _____

In these verses, God reinforces the power of the spoken word. The power of our words can bring positive or negative results, in our lives and the lives of those who hear us. Let's look together at what James had to say on this subject. You will find it to be a little more frankly worded.

Please read James 3:1-12 and write verse 6:

When I was young, my mother used to admonish me about my "sharp tongue." I can't count how many fistfights I got myself into (and mostly lost) because of my big mouth. Later in my life, having still not learned the lesson, I would say what came to mind rather quickly without "filtering" what might be interpreted by my words. I was lucky enough to have a few friends and a patient husband who helped me to see the negative power of my words. Just the other day a dear friend praised my ability to speak the truth without fear of the consequences, but I reminded her that a bold tongue has two sides. In fact, I asked her to pray for my ongoing struggle with taming the negative side of mine.

I often find myself referring back to the above mentioned portion of James. What exactly does he mean to communicate in this passage? The key is found in verses 9-10.

Please write those verses here:

In a society where God's name is regularly used in vain, where cursing is part of the culture, and where gossip is a multi-million dollar industry, perhaps it's time to consider our stand on matters of the spoken word. Furthermore, perhaps it's time to consider how our misuse of the tongue might diffuse its spiritual effectiveness. Let's look at an example of this in scripture.

Please read Numbers 13:26-14:4 and sum up these passages here:

The power of these spoken words created a complete frenzy among God's people. Remember that this report was received after God had delivered the people from Egypt through great miracles, had shown His presence to them daily in clouds and fire, and had shown His care for them with manna and quail. He had parted the seas, brought water from rock, and He had already shown His support in battle through the defeat of the Amalekites. And still, as a result of a "bad report," the Israelites faith was completely derailed. They were ready to return to slavery!

Many concepts in the Old Testament that were written in a literal sense can be translated into our lives in a spiritual sense. We see in these passages that the report on the exploration almost kept the Israelites from entering their promised land. How often have we kept ourselves from our "promised land" by misuse of our tongue? How often have we kept others from theirs?

Please share a time when you have spoken words that created something very good or something very bad:

You may choose to share this story during group time, you may not. But please note it as your own testimony to the power of your spoken words.

On a final note, let's remember Jesus' promise: "...I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20-21) Friend, Jesus promises that our faith can move mountains—nothing will be impossible for us! But He calls us to speak to the mountain, not just think at it.

How did God speak directly to you through this week's lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write Job 27:3-4 and commit it to memory:

Group Discussion:

1. How can the power of the spoken word impact the following groups positively and negatively:
 - a. An individual believer
 - b. A church congregation
 - c. A neighborhood or social circle
 - d. A Bible Study group

2. Share a time when you have seen the spoken word have a greater impact than you anticipated.

3. Read together the following verses and discuss their relevance to this week's lesson:

a. Genesis 37:4	d. Job 19:2-3
b. Exodus 4:10-12	e. Psalm 12:1-4
c. Job 15:2-6	

Week Five

The Power of God's Word

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.-Hebrews 4:12

This week's topic is really exciting. Let's not waste any time.

Please read the following scriptures: Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26 and record the common element in each:

Now read the following scriptures: Matthew 8:3, Mark 1:25-26, Mark 2:11, Mark 4:39, Mark 5:41, Mark 7:34-35 and record the common element in each:

With the power of His spoken word, our God created the universe and all things in it. He spoke life into the creatures of our planet and the first human beings. As God in the flesh, Jesus had the full power and authority of heaven. His mere presence could have produced healing. By only a thought, He could have revived a lifeless body~instead He spoke.

These are some examples of when our omnipotent God and Savior spoke in an audible voice and the power that was unleashed as a result. Let's return to a passage we visited earlier in our study, and focus even more directly on this week's message for us.

Please write 2 Timothy 3:16:

The Bible is God's Word. He used many people throughout history to put it to pen, but the words are His. He is present between the pages and lives in each word. We call the Bible the "Living Word," because it is organic and multi-faceted. It carries a blessing from the one true God that translates directly to our hearts each time we read it.

If I could, I would share with you the hundreds of times that I have seen God's Word in scripture change hearts, change attitudes, change lives. How many times it has changed me! Instead, make the message your own. Take a few quiet moments and ask God to remind you of places in your life where He has shown up specifically through His Word. Perhaps you have been in an inspired Bible study group or heard a clear message from scripture through a sermon at your church. Maybe you have been blessed with a friend whom God used as a vessel to share just the right scripture at just the right time.

Please record a time when you felt the power of God's Word displayed in your life:

I am so thankful to God, because I know how He works. Whether you are a new or seasoned believer, whether you have been walking with Him or drifted away, through this activity, He just showed you He has been with you all along. I am blessed looking at those blank lines above, because I know God filled them in your life long before I put them on the page. What a loving and persistent God we have. All glory to His name!

If we didn't before, we now know the personal power of God's Word, which is more than sufficient for all of us. Let's tap into the power even more.

Please write the following passages. In the margin record your interpretation of God's message for each one:

Joshua 1:8:

Isaiah 51:16:

Jeremiah 5:14:

Jeremiah 23:28-29:

John 15:7:

What do these passages reveal about the power of God's Word in the mouths of those who follow Him? Is it possible that we, as present day believers, can unleash the same power that we see in the prophets and the apostles? Or, are these portions of the Bible simply historical and not practical for our lives today? If you don't already know the answers to these questions, buckle your seatbelt. In the following weeks, we are going to answer them in a *power-filled* way!!

How did God speak directly to you through this week's lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 and commit it to memory:

Group Discussion:

1. Using 1 Samuel 3:1-10, discuss the difference between hearing people with our ears and hearing God with our heart.
2. It's important to know the difference between God speaking to our heart and Satan speaking to our heart. Please read Galatians 5:19-25 and discuss it's usefulness in differentiating between the two.
3. Please read Proverbs 3:5 together, and discuss the impact of this verse on our ability to listen with our hearts.
4. Read the familiar words of Matthew 6:9-13. Inside this prayer is God's intention for how we should hear Him and His Word. Discuss the components of this prayer that relate to our hearing God's personal words for us, "spoken" to our hearts.

Using God's Word in Everyday Life

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. –Ephesians 6:10-11

God asks us to know His Word for many reasons. He wants to lead us in His perfect plan for our lives so that we can live our lives to the fullest. Through His Word he provides us with revelation, conviction, guidance, wisdom, strength, power, confidence, courage, and comfort. We have spent some time getting familiar with the benefits of knowing God's Word. We have explored the power of His Word. We have also looked at the power of our words and how they could impact our lives and the lives of those around us. We've come a long way together! I am blessed to know that God has been working in your life through the study of His Word.

Now it's time for all this information to come together in our everyday lives. This is where many believers get stuck. The precepts in the Bible are noble and desirable, but how do we convert what we read into how we live? As Donald Alexander noted in *Christian Spirituality*, "(t)he practical dilemma is obvious. Sin seems to reign with unconquerable power, and yet we are commanded to put off the old self with its sinful practices (Eph 4:22) and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). But are we being commanded to do something that we are unable to do in actuality?" He goes on to remind us that, "(t)he continuing struggle against sin, the flesh and the devil cannot minimize the triumph of Christ's death and resurrection. At the cross sinners are set free—free to live! We must keep this liberating dimension of the gospel in mind as we attempt to resolve the tension in our call to practical holiness."⁶

We can rest assured of our ability to accomplish this "practical holiness" by the words from Jesus' own mouth: "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:8).

With realistic intentions and abilities in mind, there are some practical ways to move the Bible into our everyday lives. We will spend time in each over the next few weeks. One way has already been infused into this study (I was a

little sneaky about this one!) Over each of the last five weeks, your “homework” has included memorization of a scripture passage.

For review, let’s write those passages here (from memory I hope!):

Jeremiah 33:3

Psalms 119:105

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

Job 27:3-4

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

We have spent a considerable amount of time together understanding why and how to know God’s Word. The need for our understanding and dependence on scripture is one of the most heavily repeated themes in the Bible. Deuteronomy 11:18-21 assures us that to “fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds” is the biblical prescription for success. Joshua 1:8 affirms this promise: “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth;

meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

There's only one way that we can be sure to have God's word on hand in any circumstance: memorize it. This may seem like a daunting task, but you can be assured of two things. First, God will honor your effort to join so completely to His Word, and the process of memorization will be easier than usual. Second, you will find yourself using your memory verses several times through any given day, which will build a desire to equip yourself with more.

Just to get you started I will share with you one of my favorite memorization tips: Since we all have a library of passwords to access our electronic lives, I use this as an opportunity to memorize scripture. For example, I might change my email password periodically to the “address” of the scripture verse I am attempting to memorize at the time. I find it more difficult to remember the location of the scripture than the verse itself, but I know it's equally as important. So, I use the location to remind me of the verse. As I log into my email with “Exodus916,” I recite out loud, “But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” I have found this to be a useful memorization tool. Here are some others I use:

Writing the verse over and over. Remember when your teacher (or your mom!) would make you write something 100 times to be sure you didn't forget it? Maybe I am dating myself, but I can remember doing this many times. Employ this method in scripture memorization. Keep a pile of 3x5 cards in or near your bible. When you find a verse you want to memorize, write it several times, once on each card. Keep one for yourself and give the extras to friends, your spouse, or put it in your kid's lunch box.

Visual memorization. Write a verse (perhaps on one of those 3x5 cards), and put it on the treadmill while running or on the dashboard of your car for the day. Maybe even tape it to the steering wheel or the bathroom mirror. Use it to mark your place in your day planner or a book you are reading. Seeing it over and over again helps commit it to memory

Reciting. How did you learn the alphabet? Same as the rest of us, I bet. We all know that song. You probably know the lyrics to hundreds of songs that you have enjoyed over your lifetime. For some reason, when we put words to song, they are easier to remember. Try this with bible verses-pick a tune, pick a verse, and have some fun!

After you have started the process, you will find more (and better) ways to get the job done, but these might be helpful to start.

The primary reason for memorizing scripture is to have it on hand, so, in the day to day living of our lives, we can be “strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.” This is a huge component in moving the power of God’s word into our practical lives. Ephesians 6:10 tells us to “put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” Paul goes on to remind us that our daily “struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Paul describes this armor in the following verses.

Please fill in the blanks to uncover the “full armor of God.”

Belt of _____ (v 14)

Breastplate of _____ (v 14)

[Sandals] of _____ (v 15)

Shield of _____ (v 16)

Helmet of _____ (v 17)

Sword of _____ which is the _____ (v 17)

You will notice that there are five articles of armor that could be classified as defensive and only one that would be classified as offensive, or useful in an aggressive rather than protective way.

Which article of armor would be used in offense, or proactively?

Paul is purposeful in this distinction. There is no more powerful weapon at our spiritual disposal than the word of God. When we wield it appropriately, with instruments (mouths) that are sanctified, we can move mountains.

During the course of the day, there are plenty of traps set by the enemy of our soul to derail and distract us from a God focus. As we face these challenges, big and small, we can be sure that there is a scripture verse to get us through. If we have memorized enough of the Bible's "staples," we can call upon scripture in an audible voice (remember the power of the spoken word over those kept in thought) and combat those elements that try to take us out of our game. Wouldn't it be nice to have more control over the ups and downs of the day? Wouldn't it be comforting to have the joy the Bible talks about, even in hard times? When we learn to wield the power of God's word, we can.

How did God speak directly to you through this week's lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please read Psalm 139 in its entirety and choose a passage to commit to memory:

Group Discussion:

1. As a group, review the concepts from week four which dealt with the power of the spoken word over thoughts we keep to ourselves. Apply that understanding to this week's lesson.
2. As a group, please read 1 Corinthians 2:13 and discuss its relevance to this week's lesson.

Group Workshop:

1. As a group, share some of the things you are struggling with in your lives right now, big or small, and write some of your group members' struggles in this space:

2. Have group members look up the following verses. These are some of the biblical "staples" discussed in this weeks lesson:

Psalm 101:3

Jeremiah 33:3

Luke 9:23

Psalm 139:16

Matthew 7:11

Jeremiah 29:11

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

2 Timothy 1:7

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

Jeremiah 32:17

Philippians 1:6

Romans 8:31

Philippians 4:6-7

Philippians 2:3

As you read these verses aloud together, see if you can apply a verse to each of the struggles previously shared by group members.

Using God's Word in Prayer: Listening

I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. -Galatians 1:12

Weaving the principles of the Bible into our everyday lives is a challenge we all face as Christians. It's easy to have good thoughts on Sunday as the pastor preaches an inspired message or as we read through a particularly moving passage of scripture. Working these ideas into practice requires a conscious, disciplined effort, but more than that, it requires the Holy Spirit. We learned early in this study the difference between a faith driven by "law" and faith inspired by the Holy Spirit. As we struggle through the difficulties of understanding and applying scripture, we are reminded again of Jesus' words in John 15, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." Throughout scripture, God promises us all that it is His desire for our lives to be spiritually fruitful. When God makes a promise, He is faithful to it, and this promise is no different.

Please read Galatians 5:22-23 and Colossians 3:12-15 and list some of the fruits of the Holy Spirit:

Now choose three of these characteristics that you would like to increase in your own life:

As we read these passages, they beg the question...How do I get from point A to point B? How do I get from wanting these characteristics to allowing God to grow them in me? First is our assurance of the Holy Spirit.

Please read Luke 24:49 and paraphrase it here:

What had the Father promised? Please read Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:14-21 for the answer:

In week five, we talked about hearing God with our heart. That “hearing” is sometimes called the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of God lives in us as a result of our relationship with Jesus Christ. That living spirit speaks to us in ways sometimes referred to as our “gut feeling” or a “hunch.” Another way God speaks to us is through scripture.

Please read 1 John 2:20-27. With a special focus on verses 20 and 27, please sum up this passage:

If we are assured of the Holy Spirit living in us, and we know that He will speak directly to us, with no “middle man,” then how can we invite that to happen? This week we will explore the practice of Lectio Divina to help us find answers to this question. Lectio Divina is latin for divine reading, spiritual reading, or holy reading. This practice has been dated as far back as 220AD and later became one of the foundations for life in monasteries. In her book *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*, Thelma Hall explains “Despite many centuries of fruitful practice, Lectio Divina...gradually fell into disuse (except in monastic practice) toward the end of the Middle Ages [and was] relegated to a category not for ‘ordinary’ people.”⁷ Hall goes on to describe the process used in Lectio Divina as spontaneous and uncomplicated. For a practice with such a fancy name, many have found it to be a startlingly simple way to invite God to speak to them on any number of issues.

Lectio Divina encourages meditation on specific pieces of scripture to filter out God’s personal message in the very moment of the reading. Don’t be put off by the word meditation. It’s not the legs folded, humming kind of

meditation we sometimes picture. In this context it just means sitting quietly and listening for the voice of God.

There are three steps to the process of Lectio Divina: Read (*lectio*), Listen (*meditatio*), Respond (*oratio*).² The process is as follows:

1. **Settle:** Spend a few minutes settling down and pray that your heart may be opened and receptive to the gift God knows you need today. Only the Breath, the Spirit of God, can bring the word to life. Let your breathing become deep, slow, and steady as you invite the Spirit to speak to you.
2. **Read (*Lectio*):** Begin reading at a place you have previously chosen, and read on very slowly with an open mind. Don't study the text, just read it slowly, aloud if you find that helpful. It is useful to read the text several times. This is the "*lectio*," or reading. When a particular sentence, phrase, or single word "lights up," or "rings a bell," or seems striking or inviting put the Bible down. Resist the temptation to go on, and do not start thinking up reasons why the phrase has claimed your attention. Here the reading stops and the "*meditatio*" begins; the absorption through repetition. So, for example, you might be reading the tenth chapter of John's gospel where Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. As you come to verse 14, these words seem to have a special allure, "I know my own, and my own know me." This is the verse you now meditate with.
3. **Listen (*Meditatio*):** Gently repeat this phrase or word again and again within your heart. Let the repetition be gentle and not mechanical. There is no need to conjure up any mental picture to accompany the words or to try to make yourself feel any particular emotion as you speak them. Resist the temptation to force particular lessons or meanings from the words. You know what the words mean well enough; the repetition is to allow you to savor them at another level. After some time you may find that a longer sentence or phrase has shortened itself to a single word. Gradually absorb that word. So, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you," might be distilled into the single word "peace" (John 20:21). In time you will become aware of an impression the words have made on you, a feeling or attitude. When you have become aware of this, move to the next step.

² This version of the Lectio Divina process is adapted from *The Word Is Very Near You*, Martin L. Smith, Cowley 1989

4. **Respond (Oratio):** Now is the time for “oratio,” the praying of your response. Express to God, in the simplest way possible, the impression the words have made on you. You may want to thank God for the gift they convey, ask the questions they have stirred in you, or put into words the longings or needs they have brought up. Keep it simple, pray spontaneously. You may want to respond by remaining in silence in the presence of God, appreciating the grace or attitude the words of scripture have instilled.
5. **Close:** After some time you will not be able to sustain your spontaneous praying or state of awareness. Distractions set in. You may bring the time to a close with thanksgiving or the Lord’s Prayer.

This process can bring peace, answers, and a fresh understanding of scripture. I have met with God inside this process many times and have begun using it to get my “daily bread” in my prayer time. As you become familiar with the process, it becomes more effortless to move through it.

Are you ready to hear God in your life? Make some time this week to practice these steps and deepen your listening skills. No matter what your troubles or trials, when you dedicate this kind of time and attention to scripture, God will absolutely speak to you through His Word.

How did God speak directly to you through this week’s lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write Psalm 46:10 and commit it to memory:

Group Workshop:

Using the workshop pages in the back of this study, practice Lectio Divina with the following scriptures: Psalm 139, Ephesians 3:14-19, John 17:9-19

Week Eight

Using God's Word in Prayer: Speaking

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge.—Psalm 62:8

I hope you noticed how weeks seven and eight were prioritized. It was purposeful that we practiced listening before speaking. When it comes to our conversations with God, remember the old saying, “God wants us to listen more than we speak, that’s why He gave us two ears and only one mouth.” Unfortunately, many of us either don’t know or don’t practice this in our prayer lives. We offer our long lists of what we need (or think we need) from God and then hang up the phone. We become frustrated when it seems God is not answering our petitions in a timely fashion. We repeat our prayers again and again, as if God may have forgotten or didn’t have time to get to them yet. These can be dangerous prayer practices, because they put us in a position that minimizes the benefits we can gain from our relationship with God. Don’t misunderstand, God does not change and what He has to offer us does not change, but how we approach Him in prayer and in our daily lives can minimize or maximize the growth of spiritual “fruit.”

Two significant times in scripture, God tells us *specifically* how He wants us to approach Him in prayer and worship. The first is in the details of construction of the Tabernacle, the first “house of worship” for God’s people. Looking through Exodus, you will find several chapters devoted entirely to God’s instructions on how to build the tabernacle. If your Bible contains a drawing of the tabernacle, it might be helpful for you to review it.

Picture yourself entering the tabernacle as you begin your prayer and worship time with the Lord.

Please read Exodus 25:1-9 and describe the purpose of the tabernacle:

According to Exodus 40:6, what is the first item you encounter as you enter the tabernacle?

According to Leviticus 4:14-20, 23-24, 28-29, 33, what was the purpose of the altar of burnt offering?

According to Exodus 40:7, what is the next item you encounter as you approach the Most Holy Place, the tent within the tent, to meet with God?

According to Exodus 30:17-21, what is the purpose of the basin?

As we enter the Most Holy Place, what three items do we find?

Exodus 25:31 _____

Exodus 25:23 _____

Exodus 30:1 _____

What is the purpose of these three items?

As we look closely at the construction of the tabernacle, the details so carefully laid out by God Himself, we see the manner in which we are to approach Him in prayer and worship. The first order of business as we enter into our time of prayer and worship is atonement for our sins. Under the New Testament, or new agreement, we no longer have to offer a living sacrifice. Jesus paid that price for us. So our time of atonement is simply confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness. As the blood ran down the altar of burnt offering, so does the blood run down from the cross to cover our sins. The next step is the washing, or becoming clean before the Lord. Again, Jesus has done

this work for us, and we pause at the basin to cleans ourselves in forgiveness and thank Him for it. As we enter the Most Holy Place, we offer our prayers as sweet incense to God. Because we are covered in the righteousness of Christ, we can meet with Him in His holiness. It is here that we have free communication with the Lord and can be justified in our prayers.

The second place in scripture where God tells us specifically how to approach Him is found in Matthew 6:9-13. Here again, we see a time of praise/submission (Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven) and confession (forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors) before we petition God with our needs (lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one), finishing with our submission again to His will, even over those things we just prayed about (for yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever, Amen.)

So, a scriptural framework for prayer might look like this: Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield. This prayer framework is easy to remember using the acronym P.R.A.Y. Some people also like to use A.C.T.S. which stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Either framework offers an appropriate order that puts praise and confession before petitions. Approaching God in a way that recalls His instruction in scripture is pleasing to Him.

After we have settled into our prayer time, many of us still struggle with how to pray for our needs and the needs of our loved ones. Again, use of scripture is a sure bet. Before we explore this, let me be clear. *God does not require fancy language or carefully constructed prayers to hear us and know our needs.* Your prayer time does NOT have to contain scripture prayer to be heard by God. I beg the Lord to move in your heart so that you know His accessibility has been made perfect in the sacrifice of Jesus. Don't let Satan lie to your heart and make you feel like any prayer you offer is not good enough.

Having said that, we return to the purpose of this study. That is, to increase our experience of God's word in our daily lives. Many have found there is a unique communion when we honor God's Word in our prayers to Him. In my own experiences, using scripture prayer is one of the quickest ways to invite the presence of the Holy Spirit to increase over me and my time with Him.

Don't be intimidated by scripture prayer. There are a few very simple ways to compose scripture based prayers. Again, there are surely more and better ways, but perhaps these will get you started:

1. **Petition.** Find a scripture that fits what you need to pray for (we will work on how to do this during our group time this week). Offer the scripture as a petition to God, as one would make a request of another in authority. For example, if you struggle with anxiety, in general or over a particular situation, an appropriate verse might be 2 Timothy 1:7. You can petition the Lord to fulfill this promise in your life and heart by saying, "God, please show me that you did not give me a spirit of fear but a spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind. Help me to see how you would have me live this promise in my life."
2. **Drop in a name.** In some cases, you may want to take a scripture and just drop in the name of the one you are praying for. For example, I often use Ephesians 3:14-21 to pray for a friend or loved one, and often for myself. "For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches he may strengthen [me] with power through His spirit in [my] inner being, so that Christ may dwell in [my] heart through faith. And I pray that [I], being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that [I] may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Another example of this might be Philippians 1:6, "[I am] confident of this, that he who began a good work in [Amy] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
3. **Claim.** Chose a scripture that speaks in some way to the prayer you wish to offer. Take the passage word-for-word and repeat it out loud (remember the power of our spoken words!) in an authoritative way. One of my favorites in times of struggle is 2 Corinthians 4:8, and I claim it as a promise from God to me personally, knowing that He will keep it. "[I am] hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." In those times when I feel like I might be spiritually crushed, in despair, abandoned, or destroyed, I claim the victory that Jesus has already won for me. There is an immediate sense of empowerment in praying with expectation, before I see it played out

completely in my life. As I claim this scripture aloud, the victory is palpable.

Many scriptures lend themselves to all three prayer interpretations, and the choice of which to use is based on your own personal needs or preference. For example, returning to 2 Timothy 1:7, we can claim that promise word-for-word, we can petition as showed in the example, and we can drop in a name, saying, "For God did not give [Jen] a spirit of fear but a spirit of power, of love and of a sound mind."

In week six we discussed the importance of memorizing scripture. Having God's Word available from memory is a great way to arm ourselves for life's battles. As events come upon us, we can call up appropriate verses and turn them into scripture prayer or simply speak them out loud over the situation.

Whenever you have the opportunity, practice these scripture prayer styles aloud. We spent an entire week understanding the power of our spoken words. Now is the time to use that power. One of my favorite teachers once said, "When we speak scripture out loud, it sounds like our own voice to us. But to Satan, it sounds like the voice of God." God invites us to use His own words to unleash His power over our lives. Let's take Him up on it!

How did God speak directly to you through this week's lesson?

What is your response to Him?

Please write Jeremiah 23:28-29 and commit it to memory:

Group Workshop:

Using the workshop pages in the back of this study, practice finding and writing scripture prayers.

Suggested Resources:

- Bible Concordance found in the back of most Bible translations
- *Where to Find it in the Bible: The Ultimate A to Z Resource*, Ken Anderson, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996

Dear Friend,

I can't tell you how thankful I am that you have journeyed this path with me. I am humbled by it.

It is my prayer that you will continue to use the information God has given you here to grow your relationship with Him. Journal pages were included in the back of the study guide for your use after each of the workshops. This study offers an open-ended invitation to continue the work of bringing God's word into your daily life. You may find it useful to utilize the journal pages even after the group classes are completed.

I pray that you will live joyfully in the promises of scripture. Please pray for me too, as we all struggle on to finish the race.

God's peace to you,

Holly

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Appendix

Prayer Workshop-Week Seven

Psalm 139 (Lectio)

Key sentence/phrase/word (Meditatio)

My Response (Oratio)

Ephesians 3:14-19

Key sentence/phrase/word

My Response

John 17:9-19

Key sentence/phrase/word

My Response

Prayer Journal-Lectio

Date/Scripture (Lectio)	God's Word (Meditatio)	My Response (Oratio)

Date/Scripture (Lectio)	God's Word (Meditatio)	My Response (Oratio)

Date:

Prayer Workshop-Week Eight

Prayer Concern:

Appropriate Scripture:

Prayer:

Prayer Concern:

Appropriate Scripture:

Prayer:

Prayer Concern:

Appropriate Scripture:

Prayer:

Prayer Concern:

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Prayer:

Prayer Concern:

Appropriate Scripture:

Prayer:

Prayer Concern:

Appropriate Scripture:

Prayer:

Prayer Journal-Supplication

Date/Prayer Concern	Appropriate Scripture	Date/God's Movement

Date/Prayer Concern	Appropriate Scripture	Date/God's Movement

Suggestions for Further Reading

Jim George, *The Bare Bones Bible Handbook*, Harvest House 2006

Rick Warren, *Bible Study Methods*, Zondervan 1981

Martin L. Smith, *The Word Is Very Near You, A Guide to Praying With Scripture*, Cowley Publications 1989

Ken Anderson, *Where To Find It In The Bible, The Ultimate A to Z Resource*, Thomas Nelson 1996

¹ F.B. Meyer, *Paul, A Servant of Jesus Christ* (Fort Washington, Penn.:Christian Literature Crusade, 1995), 17

² *Ibid.*, I, 27.

³ John H. Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible* (Westminster Press, 1971), 3

⁴ Jim George, *The Bare Bones Bible Handbook* (Harvest House, 2006), 5

⁵ Beth Moore, *Believing God (Workbook)* (Lifeway Press, 2002), 115

⁶ Donald L. Alexander, *Christian Spirituality, Five views of Sanctification* (InterVarsity Press, 1988), 8

⁷ Thelma Hall, R.C., *Too Deep For Words:Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (Paulist Press, 1988), 1