

# Personal Spiritual Growth Lesson 4A

## The Word (Part 1)

We will begin Lesson 4 of the personal spiritual growth course. The first three lessons focused on our identity in Christ and God's purpose for our life with Jesus. Every believer will be transformed or conformed into the likeness of Christ.

These next sets of lessons will focus on our vertical relationship with God through the disciplines of the Word of God and prayer. Lesson 5 will focus on our horizontal relationships with others through our fellowship with other believers and our relationship with those who don't know Jesus yet through witnessing and evangelism.

This lesson will focus on the Word of God. Part B will focus on prayer.

This lesson continues on page 19 of the handout. The picture for this lesson is a hand grasping a Bible. Each finger of the hand represents a different way that we take in the Word of God.

We can hear the word, read the word, study the word of God, memorize the word of God, and meditate on the word of God. When we utilize all five of these methods or approaches for taking in the Word of God, we have a firm grasp on the Bible.

We start with the pinky finger. We can hear the Word of God from godly pastors and teachers. They provide insight into the study of the scriptures.

As we take in the word by hearing it, it stimulates our appetite for the truth of the Bible. Romans 10:17 says that faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ. So even if someone cannot read or write in their own heart language. They can hear the Word and understand what God is communicating.

In Senegal, people have a wonderful ability to hear and listen to the Bible. Hearing is the first way we can access the Word of God.

Next, if we are able to read, we can read the word of God. Reading the Bible gives an overall picture of God's word. Many find it helpful to use a daily reading program, which guides you systematically through the Bible. We believe all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

Beyond hearing and reading the Bible, we can study the Word of God. Notice that each of these different approaches takes us deeper into understanding the Scriptures. There is more investment in our time and effort with studying the Bible. This leads to personal discoveries of God's truth. Writing down these discoveries helps us to organize them and remember them. We are to be like the Bereans when they heard the apostle Paul preaching from the Old Testament. They went back and they examined the Scriptures. They studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul was saying lined up with what God said through the prophets and the other writers in the Old Testament.

So we can hear, read and study the Bible. Next, we can memorize the Word of God. This enables us to use the sword of the Spirit to overcome Satan and temptations.

We have God's Word readily available for witnessing. We can help others with just the right word in season, with the right word of encouragement, the right word of rebuke, the right word of conviction. These are not our words. These are God's words. There are times when we may not have the Bible with us but we have hidden his word in our heart so we're able to speak to one another in Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The word of God even says in Psalm 119:9 - 11, "how can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I've hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

This is just another way of saying we have memorized God's word and this will help us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling that we have received.

The fifth way of taking in the Word of God is to meditate on the Bible

This is represented by the thumb in our Word/Hand picture. Meditating on the Word of God used in conjunction with all the other methods. As we meditate on God's word, thinking of its meaning and application in our life that we experience the transforming power of God at work within us.

In review, we can hear the Word, read the Word, study the Word, memorize the Word, and meditate on the Word of God.

A true disciple, a student of the Word of God, will employ each of these techniques. There is a personal exercise at the bottom of 19.

There's a circle or a bowl. You may divide this circle or bowl into five sections. If you spend more time hearing or reading the Bible, make those slices of the circle bigger than the others.

If memorizing takes less of your time, that would be a smaller piece of the pie. On your own, assess your intake of the Word of God and see where you are strong, where you spend most of your time. Where would you like to grow in taking in the Bible? Throughout this program we will talk briefly about each aspect of the Word/Hand picture. More time in this lesson will be dedicated to studying the word of God.

Turn to page 20. We have included a few verses that remind us of the importance of hearing the Word of God.

Luke 11:28 Jesus said "blessed are those who hear the word not just hear but then also put it into practice."

Romans 10:17 says "faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ." So hearing the word of God is a huge part of us coming to faith in Christ.

1 Timothy 4:13 this was Paul's charge to this young pastor Timothy said "be devoted to the public reading of scripture."

We are encouraged in the Bible to stay focused on hearing the Word. And we can practice this in many ways. We can hear it on a Sunday morning. We can listen to podcasts. There is so much access through the internet, through the bible on your phone. You can listen through the Bible, verse by verse, chapter by chapter.

Reading the word of God: We know how important it is to feed on the Bible every day. In Matthew 4 when Satan came to tempt Jesus and what was his response? He said, "It is written!" Jesus knew the word of God. We need to know what God's word says.

How will we be able to determine what false teaching is if we don't first know what the word of God says? How much time do you spend each day reading the Word of God? You might read the Bible devotionally to start or end your day.

Do you have a plan for reading the bible in a systematic way? With minimal effort you can read through the Bible in a year. My wife and I have been doing this together for the past 10 years. We read three chapters in the Old Testament and one chapter in the New Testament each day. We also read five psalms each day. This helps us to maintain the big picture understanding of the entire bible.

There's a very helpful quote in the middle of page 20. How often should we read the word of God?

John Blanchard was a British preacher and he wrote this ...

"Surely we only have to be realistic and honest with ourselves to know how regularly we need to turn to the bible. How often do we face problems, temptations and pressure every day? How often do we need instruction, guidance and greater encouragement? How often do we need to seek God's face, hear his voice, feel his touch, know his power? The answer to all these questions is the same - every day! As the American evangelist D.L. Moody put it, 'a man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough for the next six months or take sufficient air into his lungs at one time to sustain life for a week.' You must draw upon God's goodness and boundless store of grace from day to day as we need it."

This is a great reminder how often we need to be in the Word. We need to be in the Word on a daily basis. There are helpful suggestions at the bottom of page 20. We need to make it a priority. We need to set aside time to read God's word each day.

You can listen to the entire bible straight through in 71 hours. That is less than three days. If you read the bible 15 minutes a day you can read through the bible in one year. It is helpful to find a bible reading plan that works for you. You can find these online as well as in written form. Some Bibles include reading plans as well.

As you read the Bible on a daily bible reading you might use the acronym "S.O.A.P." to help guide your time in the Bible. Each letter stands for a different part of the process.

Start with the letter “S”. S stands for Scripture.

Read a passage of scripture.

The next letter is “O” which stands for Observations. Write down what you observe from the passage you just read. What encouraged or challenged you? What were the main themes that were being talked about in the passage.

The next letter of SOAP is “A” which stands for Application. Based on what you read, what you can do. How can you respond to the passage that impacts your life?

The final letter is “P” which stands for prayer. Take time to pray through the passage.

There is a shaded box on the right with some helpful reminder related to reading the Bible.

- read repeatedly, read a passage a few times, maybe in different translations.
- read thoughtfully, think about what you read and meditate on it.
- read patiently, continue engaging with the Word of God until you hear from God.
- read believing that God wants to communicate with you.
- read selectively, asking questions like a detective looking for the who, what, where, when, and why in the passage.
- read prayerfully, asking God to give you understanding.
- read reflectively, getting into the details but also looking for the big picture. What are the themes? How does this passage fit into the rest of the book and the overall Bible.
- read purposely, this comes from 2 Timothy 3:16-17. All scripture is God breathed and is useful for doctrine, for rebuking - showing us where we've gone off course, for correcting - getting us back walking in step with the Spirit of God, and for training in righteousness. We are called to be training ourselves, to be growing and maturing in our faith. There is a purpose, so that the man or woman of God is thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Here are a few thoughts relative to the Study of God’s Word.

Let’s spend a bit more time on the third finger of the Word/Hand picture that represents the study of the Bible. This begins on page 21.

There is a quote at the top of the page from Jerry Bridges it says “reading gives us breadth, studying gives us depth.”

Many of us may be an inch deep but we are a mile wide in our knowledge of the Bible. It is good to have a breadth or width of knowledge but maturity is developed as we go deeper. Our faith is nurtured through the study of the Word of God. We need to periodically remind ourselves to slow down and go deep when studying the Bible. Much like an athlete, there is no substitute for getting on the field and into the game, You can talk about it only for so long. The only way to improve is to actually practice and play the game.

As a Bible student, listening to gifted pastors and teachers is helpful for spiritual growth. Using good reference tools are also important but there's simply nothing better than studying the bible on our own. The goal must be to equip every believer to be able to feed themselves on the Word of God and not be reliant on other people feeding us. When we depend on others to feed us, it is like we are eating food that has already been chewed. We are getting the leftovers from them. We do not receive all of the nutrients compared with eating the meal ourselves.

We are nourishing ourselves through our personal study.

Three points why we should study the bible.

**1. Bible study is essential for growth.**

1 Peter 2:2

“Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

Three important principles come from this verse.

We need to have the right attitude, like a baby, to have a craving, a hunger for the Word of God.

We must have the right kind of appetite – for pure spiritual milk. This is an appetite is for the Bible.

And we must have an aim or purpose for studying the Bible - so that we can grow spiritually. Spiritual maturity is the desired outcome of having this craving for this pure spiritual milk.

Bible study is essential for growth.

**2. Bible study is essential for spiritual maturity.**

Hebrews 5:11-14

“We have much to say about this but it's hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact though by this time you ought to be teachers you need someone else to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk being still an infant is not acquainted with the teachings about righteousness but solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

The author of Hebrews is saying to a group of believers, by this point you should be teaching others. You should be leading a group. You should be helping others grow in their walk. Instead you are still like infants. You are still baby Christians.

As you invest time into working out your salvation, you are training yourself for godliness. As you train, you will begin to mature. You will be able to discern good from evil right, from wrong. You will become a teacher who will not just be talking about theoretical ideas but you will be able to teach based on how the Bible has impacted your life from personal experience.

There's a quote in the shaded box that says the opposite of ignorance is not knowledge but rather obedience.

Knowing the truth is important but what moves us beyond ignorance is not just knowing things but rather putting them into practice. This aspect of study and training produces spiritual maturity.

### 3. **Bible study is essential for spiritual effectiveness**

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“All scripture is god breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the servant of god may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Teaching doctrine informs us of the truth. Rebuke means to confront sin when you wander from the path. To correct means providing guidance to get back on the right path. Training is practical application for godly living.

Bible study essential for growth.

Bible study is essential for spiritual maturity.

Bible study is essential to spiritual effectiveness.

We don't want to just sit in the pews. We just don't want to have people feeding us. We need to engage with the Word of God so we can make disciples. So we can be teachers of others and live the life that God has called us to live.

We can learn from Ezra, In Ezra 7:10, we can see all these principles related to the study of the Bible.

“He devoted himself to the study and observance of the law of the lord and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.”

Ezra had the right attitude - he **devoted himself** to the **study of the law**, the study of the Word.

He did not just study but he **observed the Law**. He obeyed it he put it into practice in his life.

Next he **taught others**. This is the principle from 2 Timothy 2:2. Whatever we learn, we must practice in our lives and teach others.

Let's take a short break in the middle of this lesson. When we return we will continue on page 22. We will introduce a simple three-step process for studying the Bible. The three steps are Observation, Interpretation and Application.