



Part 2: Lesson 8

Cultivating the Good Soil: God's Word and You

Fertile Soil: Starting Your New Life with Jesus

The spiritual life is a relationship. It is a personal relationship between you and our God who loves you very deeply and demonstrated that love by sacrificing His life on the cross. **The spiritual life is also a continuous process.** It is for the rest of your life, and it is something that you live every day. **The spiritual life is dynamic.** It is life-changing as the Holy Spirit transforms you to become like Jesus.

All relationships take a lot of time and effort. Your spiritual growth requires time and effort too. How can you build this personal relationship with God? What are some things that you should do to grow day after day? And how can you experience His life-changing transformation? The answers to these questions and more are discovered through the practice of “**spiritual disciplines.**” Spiritual disciplines are what you do to cultivate your soil for growth. Like the Haitian proverb, “**Little by little, the bird builds its nest.**” These are regular practices that are essential for deepening your inner relationship, nurturing your relationships with others, and transforming your life. By them, God draws you closer to Him. Without spiritual disciplines, your spiritual growth would wander without direction and lack power.

Reading Scripture and **prayer** are the two most important spiritual disciplines to develop your inner relationship with God. Like the vertical growth of a tree that sinks its roots down deeper as its branches reach higher, these disciplines will deepen your spiritual life.

YOUR GROWTH GOAL



In this lesson will learn how to practice the spiritual discipline of reading God's Word. You will discover:

- 1) **The importance of hearing and living the Word of God**
- 2) **The uniqueness of God's Word**
- 3) **The usefulness of God's Word**
- 4) **The helpfulness of God's Word and**
- 5) **How you can study God's Word.**



Before you go any further, stop and ask God to help you understand His Word, to help you experience His presence, and to become the person He wants you to be.

AN ILLUSTRATION ABOUT GOD'S WORD: The Wise and Foolish Builders (Matthew 7:24-29)



Jesus told this story about the importance of hearing and doing God's Word.

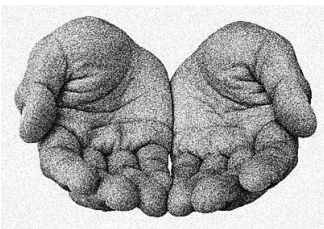
“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law (Matthew 7:24-29).

What is the main purpose of this story about the builders?

What do you think the rains and winds represent?

According to Jesus, what two responses to His Word are necessary to be considered wise?

How does this story help you understand what you need to do to live your spiritual life?



Reflection Exercise: Later, when you have time, find some sand and hold it in your hand. Also, find a rock and hold it in your other hand. Examine their strengths and weaknesses. Why would one make a weak foundation and the other a strong one? Think about the storms, difficulties, that you have faced in your life. How might your life have been different if you had depended on Jesus and followed His teachings?

DIGGING DEEPER: READING GOD'S WORD



When Jesus finished His story, the Scripture recorded, “[the people] were amazed at his teaching.” Jesus’ words were powerful and transforming. That same transforming power is available to every Christian today. God has given us a special gift—His written Word, often called the Bible or the Holy Scriptures. The God of the Bible is a God who reveals Himself. God wants you to know Him, and His Word shows you what He is like and what you need to know to live in a relationship with Him. Scripture has the power to transform you, to guide you on the paths through life, to encourage you when you are troubled, and to strengthen you when you are afraid. Every Christian who desires to become “good soil” must develop a discipline of reading God’s Word.

The Scriptures are a record of the interactions between God and His people. There are two parts, the **Old Testament**, written before Jesus’ birth, and the **New Testament**, which records the life and teachings of Jesus and His followers. The Old Testament contains 39 books in four sections: (1) the Law, (2) History, (3) Wisdom Literature, and (4) the Prophets. The New Testament contains 27 books in four sections: (1) the Gospels, (2) the Acts of the Apostles, (3) the Letters of the Apostles, and (4) Revelation.



UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

I. THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE

Why is the Bible special? What makes it different from other books? Read the following verses to understand where the Bible came from and why it is unique.

- ❖ *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).*
- ❖ *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words (1 Corinthians 2:13).*
- ❖ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

According to these verses, where did Scripture not come from?

What is the origin of Scripture?

What do you think the words “God-breathed” means?

The Bible is different from other books written by men. God is the source of the Scriptures; He originated it, and Jesus is the central message. His Holy Spirit influenced the human writers and actively supervised them as they wrote to ensure the Bible's truthfulness. This is called **inspiration**, and that is what the Scripture means by the word "God-breathed."

Knowing that the Bible is inspired by God, how does that make you feel about reading it?

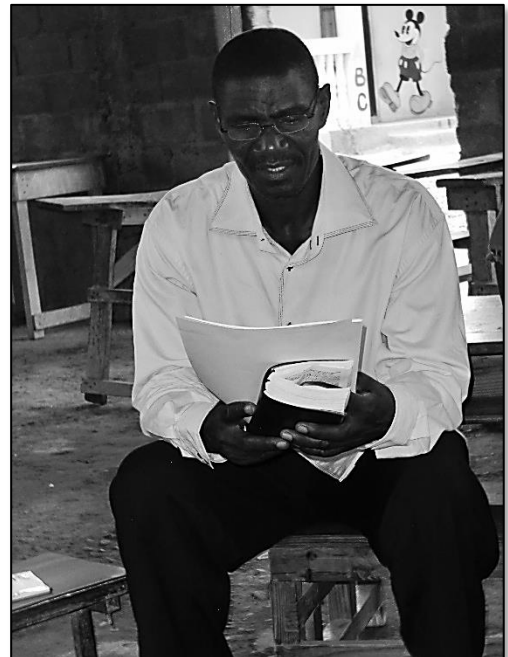
2. THE BIBLE IS USEFUL

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 again: "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" Scripture is **useful** in four ways:

- 1) **Teaching**- it delivers truth; it provides God's fundamental principles and practices for life.
- 2) **Rebuking**- it convicts us of our wrongs through the Holy Spirit working through Scripture. Like a light on a dark night, the Bible reveals the various ways that we violate God's plan and principles so we can turn back towards God.
- 3) **Correcting**- it restores us and sets our feet back on the right path.
- 4) **Training in righteousness**- it provides instruction to develop a godly character as it gives us strength and skills for living.

These four benefits are essential for **equipping us for God's good work**. The Bible helps you become capable and competent for spiritual growth and service.

How do you think the Bible can be most helpful to you?



3. THE BIBLE HELPS US

Psalm 119 praises God for wonderful His Word. The following chart lists seven benefits for your life from the Bible. Read these verses and write the benefits that you observe about God's Word in the spaces provided.

PSALM 119	BENEFITS
⁹ How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.	
²⁸ My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.	
⁵⁰ My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.	
⁵² I remember, Lord, your ancient laws, and I find comfort in them.	
¹³⁰ The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.	
¹³⁸ The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy.	
¹⁴³ Trouble and distress have come upon me, but your commands give me delight.	

* **Special Note-** in Haiti, many people do not have access to a personal Bible, and others have never learned to read. If these are problems for you, we are sensitive to your needs, and so is God. Many early Christians did not have personal Bibles and were unable to read also. Even today, many believers around the world cannot read, but **they are growing in their relationship with Jesus**. They grow because they participate in the life of the Church where they hear God's Word taught.

If you do not own a Bible, ask God and your church to help you get one. Until you can obtain one, it is very important that you participate in your church and a Bible study where the Word of God is faithfully read, preached, and taught. If reading is impossible or difficult, you also must find places where you can hear the Word of God and get your questions answered by talking with other Christians.

GROWING INWARD: HOW TO READ GOD'S WORD



When you make reading God's Word a regular part of your daily life, you will experience His life-changing power. Beginning a new habit takes patience and practice. In this section, you will learn some practical steps to help you start reading the Bible. There are several ways to study the Bible. For centuries, Christians around the world have developed these practices and taught them to others. This is one of those methods.

I. BEFORE YOU READ GOD'S WORD

- ❖ **Prepare to Meet with God-** before you begin to read the Bible, come to it with the awareness that you are going to meet with God and that you will allow Him to speak to you. One ancient Christian leader said, "Whenever you read the Gospel, Christ Himself is speaking to you, and while you read, you are praying and talking to Him" (Bishop Tikhon of Zadonsk). The Bible promises, "*Come near to God and he will come near to you*" (James 4:7).
- ❖ **Create a Time and Place-** set aside a special time and a place to meet with God. You can read the Bible at any time and in any location. But having a consistent time and a private, familiar place will help support your encounter with God. Some like the morning hours before others are awake when it is quiet and before the day gets busy. Others prefer nighttime before going to bed when their bodies and minds are at rest. Whatever time you prefer, most Christians find it useful to do it at the same time and place every day to help develop a regular discipline.
- ❖ **Develop a Plan-** many new Christians do not know where to begin when reading the Bible. A good starting place is in the New Testament with the Gospel of John. As you read more, then study the other books in the Old and New Testaments. Read small portions at a time. You do not need to rush. Your purpose is to hear from God.

2. READING GOD'S WORD

- ❖ **Pray-** before you start reading, quiet your spirit and open your heart and head to God by offering a simple prayer. Ask God to speak to you and to give you the ability to hear Him. Ask Him for the strength to do what He says. Be open to allowing the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Word to inspire your heart.
- ❖ **Read-** select a small portion of Scripture, a chapter or less will be sufficient. Read it slowly, meditatively, prayerfully. This is not a race to see how much you can read. It is a private, sacred time to carefully hear from God and to respond to His message to you. Read the passage more than once, sensing words and phrases that speak to you or promises that hold special meaning. Remember, "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*" (2 Timothy 3:16).

- ❖ **Reflect**- silently spend some time and allow the Word to penetrate your heart. Scripture says, *“Blessed is the one . . . whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.” (Psalm 1:1-2)*. You might want to ask yourself these questions: (1) What does this say about God’s nature? (2) What does it say about human nature? (3) What does it say about how God relates to people? (4) What does it suggest about how I might pray? (5) What does it say about what I must do?
- ❖ **Respond**- now that you have opened your heart to God’s Word, make it your intention to do God’s will. Be open to what God wants to do in every area of your life: your **outer life**, your activities and relationship with others, and your **inner life**, your attitudes, intentions, and commitments. Respond with a personal prayer. Convert the words of Scripture into a prayer resolving to do God’s will with the help of the Holy Spirit. William Law said, *“When in reading Scripture you meet with a passage that seems to give your heart a new motion toward God, turn it into a petition, and give it a place in your prayers.”*

3. PRACTICE READING THE WORD

Try practicing this method of reading with I Corinthians 13. Carefully follow each step.

- ❖ **Pray**- sit quietly for a moment. Silently open yourself to God with a simple prayer. Ask God to speak to you and to give you the ability to hear Him.
- ❖ **Read**- read I Corinthians 13:4-8 slowly and prayerfully. Read it again; carefully listen and notice special words, phrases, and promises. If you do not know what a word means, do not worry. Focus on the words God is showing you.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

- ❖ **Reflect**- sit in silence and carefully consider what God is saying to you. Consider what “love” means. How is God speaking to you about:
 - *patience*
 - *kindness*
 - *not envying*
 - *not boasting*
 - *not being proud*
 - *not dishonoring others*
 - *not being self-seeking*
 - *not being easily angered*
 - *not keeping a record of wrongs*
 - *rejoicing in truth and not evil*
 - *protection*
 - *trust*

- *hope*
- *perseverance*
- *never failing*

❖ **Pray and Respond-** say a personal prayer. Use the words that you read to help you. Commit yourself to living these truths.

4. COMMITTING TO THESE TRUTHS

Take some time with your mentor to discuss how you will start a discipline of regularly reading the Bible. **Write down these thoughts and commitments.**



With your mentor and other followers, **pray together**, asking God to guide your steps, to strengthen and protect you, and to provide for your daily needs.

Every day this week, read Psalm 119: 105, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”

