
THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD: PRAY-READING SCRIPTURE – COREY STARK

I. THE NECESSITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

A. Having a vision to go deep in the Word of God is critical for our maturity, especially as we approach the end of the age. As we spend time in dialogue with God through the Word it imparts *spiritual life* (Jer. 20:9; Jn. 6:63; 7:38), gives *revelation* (Ps. 119:18), stirs *boldness* (Am. 3:8; Acts 18:24-26), equips us to enter into the fullness of our *inheritance* (Josh. 1:8; Acts 20:32) and *transforms* us into God's image (2 Cor. 3:18).

B. In describing John's own calling concerning the end-times, he emphasized the need of *bearing witness* to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus. John's *past faithfulness* to the Word (Rev. 1:2, 9) helped determine his *future increase* of revelation (Rev. 1:1). Daniel's dynamic insight concerning Israel's future was due to his diligence in the Word of God (Dan. 9:2, 20-27). David's love and commitment to the written Word of God directly correlated with his future revelation of it (Ps. 119:148; 1 Chr. 28:11-19). *If we value what God has already said through diligent study with a spirit of dedication, He will reveal more. If not, why would He give us more?* This is a substantial part of the reading, hearing and keeping of Revelation 1:3.

Rev. 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show... John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw...

C. As "*faithful witnesses*" our testimony must be clear and tender with a spirit of meekness, yet bold with confident authority. Speaking the Word of God with *boldness*, like Apollos, is a natural byproduct of being *mighty in the Scriptures*. Peter and John, as untrained men, were found declaring the Word of God with *boldness*, because they had been with Jesus, the "*Living Word*". This is good news, because it means we don't need a PHD to make an impact in the kingdom of God. God isn't looking for hype, talent or volume, but *agreement* with who He is and what He said He'd do! *Boldness is confidence in a hostile environment.*

Acts 18:24 Apollos... an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord... 26 So he began to speak boldly...

Acts 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

D. The Word of God has supernatural power to build us up when it touches our heart. It is not only accurate information, but *living* and *powerful truth* (Heb. 4:12). It changes our thought life and emotional chemistry by imparting spiritual life, causing us to be fiery and alive on the inside (Jer. 20:9; Jn. 6:63). *Why do we see different aspects each time we read the same passage? It is a mirror that reads us as we change (Jas. 1:23).*

Heb. 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful... sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Jer. 20:9 I said, "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore..." But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not (Lk. 24:32).

E. The *word of God* is described as an *Anchor* (Heb. 6:18-19), *Bread* (Matt. 4:4), a *Fire* (Jer. 23:29), *Gold* (Ps. 19:7-10), a *Hammer* (Jer. 23:29), *Honey* (Ps. 19:10), a *Lamp* (Ps. 119:105), *Meat* (Heb. 5:14), *Milk* (1 Peter 2:2), a *Mirror* (James 1:23), a *Nail* (Eccl. 12:11), an *Ox-Goad* (Eccl. 12:11), a *Pearl* (Matt. 7:6), a *Rod* (Rev. 11:1-2), a *Seed* (1 Peter 1:23), a *Star* (2 Peter 1:19), a *Sword* (Heb. 4:12), *Water* (Eph. 5:26).

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F. The Word of God never returns to God without accomplishing the purpose for which He sent it!

Isa. 55:10 For as the rain [now] comes down, and the snow [delay] from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

II. THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD OF GOD

A. Ministering to God through the Word is a part of our priestly ministry before Him (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6) and shouldn't be seen as a mere *discipline*, robbing it of its true grandeur, but rather a divine *invitation* and *privilege* whereby we may *encounter* the Living God in intimate fellowship (Ezek. 44:15).

Ezek. 44:15 “But the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near Me to minister to Me...”

B. The early apostles were forced by necessity, like Moses (Ex. 18:13-26), to learn how to minister to God. As we gaze at the ministry of the twenty-four elders in heaven, we see they also minister to God (Rev. 5:8).

Acts 6:2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Ex. 18:13-26; Rev. 4:4)

C. This includes *singing the Word of God* as well (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). David had 288 full-time singers in the Tabernacle of David who ministered to God night and day as a full-time vocation (1 Chr. 25:1-7).

2 Chr. 29:30 Moreover King Hezekiah and the leaders commanded the Levites to sing praise to the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer [Psalms]. So they sang praises with gladness...

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Eph. 5:19)

Ps. 119:54 Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

D. One dimension of the ministry of the Word is learning to “*eat the scroll*” (Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 3:1-3; Rev. 10:9-11). As we meditate on the Word of God, it fills our mind, satisfies our hearts and builds our faith, giving confident boldness to declare it (Ps. 77:12; 119:148; Jer. 20:9; Amos 3:7-8; Mal. 3:16; Rev. 19:10).

Rev. 10:9 And he said to me, “Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.” 10 Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. 11 And he said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.” (Jer. 15:16)

Ezek. 3:1 He said, “Son of man... eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” 2 So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. 3 So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness.

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III. THE NECESSITY OF AN ACTION PLAN

A. Without having an *action plan* to reach your *goals* in the Word it's very easy to let time "fly by" and simply imagine you've been diligent or *will be* someday. "*If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time.*" It's like giving financially; we imagine that we've given more until we see the numbers at the end of the year.

B. After deciding your *goals* related to the Word, make sure that you have an *action plan* that includes what you will study that translates into real time within your *schedule*. What is your goal concerning the word of God? What will you study first? What days will you study? What time will you begin and end?

C. When deciding *what to study*, here are some "*wish list*" options. You may study *books* (Daniel, Song of Songs, Revelation), *themes* (Sermon on the Mount, Apostolic Prayers, intimacy, intercession, urgency of end times, justice), *people* (David, Mary, Elijah, Anna, John), *passages* (Ps. 27:4; 132; Rev. 4-5; Lk. 18:1-8; Mt. 24-25; Isa. 62) and *words* (worship, justice, beauty, fasting).

IV. ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH THE WORD

A. It is not enough to study the Word of God only, but we must *encounter Him* by using His own language, which is the *language of Scripture*, as we speak to Him. We do this by having intimate dialogue with Him through the Word. The pathway to encountering God is simple and sure. We give ourselves to *long and loving meditation* of the Word of God, while *creating an active dialogue* with Him from our hearts.

Lk. 10:39 Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard [encountered] His word.

B. Scripture is the "*fuel for the fire*" that gives us the *conversational material* in our prayer life. It gives us language for the desires and passion that is already within our hearts. Using the Word of God in our prayer language makes prayer easy and enjoyable (Isa. 56:7). This includes singing the Word as well (Col. 3:16).

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Eph. 5:19)

C. Many of the Pharisees in Jesus' day approached the study of Scripture in a purely academic way using only their minds. They believed that they could find eternal life in God through the study of Scripture alone. However, Jesus said that unless they were willing to come to the One of whom the Scriptures testified, they would never find eternal life, because it is only found in the experiential knowledge of a Person (Jn. 17:3).

Jn. 5:39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. (Jn. 7:38)

D. Not only do we *encounter God* through the Word, but we *experience revelation* of the Word through encountering God. It takes God to know God, because His understanding is unsearchable (Isa. 40:28). The Spirit escorts us into the revelation of God (1 Cor. 2:9-11). The resurrected Christ opened the Scriptures for two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35) and the eleven in Jerusalem (Lk. 24:36-45).

Lk. 24:32 Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us? 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

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V. HOW TO PRACTICALLY PRAY-READ THE SCRIPTURES

A. The following is a practical aid to help give our heart to God and to receive from Him. The purpose of this is to show how to use the Scriptures as a “*springboard of inspiration*” for our heart. The following is a way to express our devotion to the Lord:

1. As we read through the Scriptures, we should pray the actual bible passages back to God.
2. Write down (journal) the things that the Lord puts on your heart. Consider the following suggestions as a method of “*pray-reading*”. The goal is turning Scripture into meaningful conversation with Jesus.

B. There are two broad categories of truth related to pray-reading the word:

1. Scriptures that focus on promises “*to believe*” in God’s word. For example, Scriptures that declare that God loves, forgives, leads, protects or provides for us, etc.
2. Scriptures that focus on commands “*to obey*” God’s Word. For example, Scriptures that exhort us to bridle our tongue, guard our eyes, serve others, bless enemies, give our time, money to God, etc.

C. Category One - *Truths exhorting us to BELIEVE God’s Word*: For example, the Lord declares in John 15:9 that He loves us with the same quality, intensity and depth of love that the Father has for Him.

1. First, respond by thanking Him for a particular truth. The Holy Spirit, on occasions, will tenderize our heart by such simple declarations of thanksgiving for particular truths. Take time to say thank you in a specific way. Don’t get in a hurry. We must be patient and speak slowly in our heart to God.
2. Second, respond by asking Him for a greater heart revelation of this particular truth. Be persistent and specific. Ask Him to open the eyes of your heart like Paul prayed in Eph. 1:17-18. Or David in Ps. 119:18. The Holy Spirit will cause your insight to gradually increase.

D. Category Two - *Truths exhorting us to OBEY God’s Word*: For example, the Lord exhorts the Bride to arise in obedience and follow Him to the mountains of risk, leaving the comfort zone behind (Song 2:8-10).

1. We respond by committing ourselves to obey Jesus in the way described in a particular passage. Specifically speak to Jesus with the intent of your heart to obey the passage. Making “*sweet resolutions*” to obey Him in a specific way strengthens our obedience over time.
2. We respond by asking the Lord to empower our heart to obey a particular truth. Specifically, asking Jesus to empower our hearts with divine enablement to obey the passage will result in the growth of grace over time.

E. Take time to record your thoughts, prayers and meditations as you “*pray-read*” through the Scriptures. The simple exercise of writing your thoughts will help you turn the Scripture into a glorious prayer dialogue with God. We must approach the Scripture as much more than just an intellectual exercise. Informing the intellect is only a starting point, much like studying the menu at a good restaurant. The point of *studying the menu* is to eventually *enjoy the dinner* 😊