Spiritual Disciplines: Study, Meditation, and Memorization

To grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ we must practice the disciplines of studying, meditating on, and memorizing God's Word. But that takes desire. We make time for what we most value. So if we're going to grow in this discipline, we need to grow our desire for God's Word. We need to remember why an hour in His Word is better than an hour with Sports Center, Facebook, our friends, or anything else. And along with desire, we need ability. We need to know how to study, meditate on, and memorize His Word.

Re-intro series
- **spiritual disciplines**: habits of body and mind that allow us to effectively cooperate with God's Spirit in the process of character transformation.
  - Disciplines of engagement: Worship, Prayer, Study, Service, Giving
  - Disciplines of abstinence: Rest, Fasting, Solitude
- = our part in the process of growing as a disciple of Jesus
  - grow as a disciple through discipline
  - see cause and effect relationship in the English words
    ▪ “discipline” derived from “disciple” – English & Latin
    ▪ because discipline = the process that helps you grow as a disciple
- **BUT**, while these disciplines are necessary, they DO NOT in and of themselves make us mature
  - irony: don’t produce spiritual growth
  - just make us receptive & available to Spirit who alone can grow us
  - like lifting weights
    ▪ lifting does not make your muscle bigger – does the opposite!
    ▪ but in response, your body rebuilds bigger
  - spiritual disciplines work the same way
    ▪ they don’t make you holy or mature
    ▪ but they do make you available to the Holy Spirit
  - Richard Foster, “By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done.”

This morning: add another discipline to your tool box
- actually 3 discrete but related disciplines: study, meditation, and memorization
- overall = spending quality time in God’s Word.

No surprise to hear that to grow as a disciple of Jesus, you must spend quality time in God’s Word – been told that all your life

**Problem is: most of us don’t** – at least not as much time as we know we should...  
**...because we’re busy**
- life is busy, no matter your occupation
- another test, meeting, pile of laundry, bill to pay, something to fix...
- phone always chiming with another email / text / voice mail
- so busy – no time to be in the Word
But here’s something I’ve learned: no matter how busy we are, we will always find the time to do the things we value most.

- I really want to do a good job when I preach – sacrifice sleep to prepare!
- I really want to end the day watching a comedy while snuggling with my wife on the couch – how a day’s supposed to end! Sacrifice exercise, cleaning, sleep

No matter how busy I am, I will always make time for what I value most.

So, if I don’t do something, it’s not because I’m too busy (red herring) It’s because I don’t value it as highly as I value other things
- When we don’t spend time in God’s Word
  o not because we’re too busy
  o because we prefer to do other things
  o if I really wanted to be in His Word, I’d make sacrifices

Therefore: only way to grow in this discipline is to grow our desire for God’s Word
- My primary goal this morning
- God doesn’t want to guilt you into the Word – guilt just leaves you cold and depressed
- God wants to grow your desire – infinitely better motivator

Let’s grow our desire by reminding ourselves of what this book has to offer.

In a sense, we need to do some advertising this morning.
- You see and hear advertisements all day long – internet, TV, billboards, magazines
- Promoting the class-leading features and astounding benefits of a product to grow your desire for that thing
- That’s what we want to do for the Bible this morning – grow our desire
- So, let’s put together an advertisement for the Bible
  o Think for a moment: if you wanted to convince someone to spend time in this book, what features would you promote? What benefits would you list?
  o Why should they spend their precious time in this book instead of giving it to Sports Center, or NCIS, or the latest summer blockbuster, or a NYT bestseller, or Facebook?...

Let’s list out the key features and key benefits of the Word of God...

A) Key features: What qualities set the Word of God apart from everything else?

1) Absolutely true
   o Not much in this world that’s absolutely true – even the things that claim to be
     ▪ The news
       • I just want unfiltered, unbiased truth – haven’t found it yet!
       • Just look at how each outlet spun the health care ruling – political bias creeps into every newsroom
     ▪ Science
       • Surely this accurately reveals truth! Not necessarily
       • A human endeavor, so like all we do, prone to human error & bias
New discoveries prove old discoveries wrong, only to be proven wrong themselves a few years later

- If we’re looking for absolute truth in the things of man, we will be disappointed!
- But you will find it in God’s Word...
  - Ps 119:151,160
    You are near, O Lord, and all Your commandments are truth. The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.
  - the absolute truthfulness of scripture is something we call inerrancy...
    - “Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they teach, whether that teaching has to do with doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, or other disciplines or knowledge.”
  - Inerrancy means: not only is the Bible true, it’s free of spin
    - This is an election year – airwaves are full of spin
    - That’s how politics work – but not how the Bible works...
      - Mark, recording Peter’s account... Mk 8:31-33
        And [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things... And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”
      - Rebukes Lord of Universe - folly! Bad day for Peter!
      - Peter’s narrating this book – So why include it?!?!
      - no politician would include something so embarrassing!
    - Consistently the OT & NT unabashedly reveal the greatest falls and most embarrassing mistakes of God’s people
      - no spin, no cover-up! Just absolute, unfiltered truth.

- For those of you who are skeptical...
  - yes, I just used circular reasoning – all I can do this morning
  - if you want more robust proof – email me
  - I’ll also send that article out by Facebook & Twitter

2) Unchanging
- We live in a “Next-Version” culture
  - everything that exists today will soon be made obsolete
  - true of electronics, music, fashion, finance... change is constant.
  - Even if it’s just change for change sake! Skinny jeans!
    - Wasn’t that the 80’s? Then baggy. Now back to skinny.
    - Not because they’re better – but just for the sake of change

- We live in a world of constant change
- In the midst of that change, I desperately need something stable, unchanging, a fixed anchor I can count on...
  - Isa 40:8 – permanence
    The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.
Mt 5:18
“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

- “letter or stroke” = jot & title
  - jot = yôd = smallest Heb letter – looks like an apostrophe
  - tittle = smallest Heb stroke – like line that distinguishes a capital R from a capital P
- Point: not even one stroke of one letter of God’s Word will be changed or annulled until God fulfills all of it.

So, there will never be a version 2.0 of the Bible
- there will never be an update from God
- Never an, “Oops! That’s the old version – not how life works anymore”
- Never be a new version because there will never need to be – it was perfect truth the first time!

3) Proven

- When it comes to electronics, fashion, music, movies – we like new things
  - New trends, new discoveries
  - Band no one’s heard of; phone no one has
  - New is great when we’re talking about trivial stuff...
- But it’s not great when we’re talking about life-and-death stuff!
  - Cancer – would you choose the newest doc in town? Fresh from med school – young, hip?
  - NO! You want the doc with the most experience!
  - My eye – found only guy who had experience
  - Want someone with a proven track record
- That’s why we desperately need God’s Word
  - Proven answers to life-and-death questions
  - Tested and verified for thousands of years in every culture, every scenario
  - If the Bible’s teachings were not reliable, it would have died out
  - But it’s still the most circulated book in human history
    - billions of copies printed
    - translated in whole or part in 2400+ languages
  - Why? because it’s proven true and reliable for all people at all times

- What features set the Bible apart from everything else and makes it worth your time:
  - it’s absolutely true in every detail
  - it’s unchanging
  - and it’s proven
Key benefits: What advantages does it give me? How does it make my life better?

1) Reveals the path to salvation!
   - Most extraordinary benefit!
     - Most books can only entertain you.
     - Some can inform you.
     - The best can make you wiser.
     - But the Bible can save you! Lead you to eternal life!!
   - 2 Tim 3:15
     ...from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
     - reveals the way of “salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”
   - Bible = God’s detailed revelation of the GOSPEL = the good news that...

2) Gives strength to battle sin
   - strength: Ps 119:11
     Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.
     - treasuring, meditating on God’s Word, memorizing it and contemplating it gave the Psalmist strength to resist sin.
   - When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, what did He do? He quoted Scripture.
     - That’s God’s cure for temptation – turn to scripture to find strength

3) Gives peace and security
   - Psalm 1:2-3
     But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.
     - Metaphor – the one who meditates on God’s Word is like a strong oak by a stream that has a constant supply of water.
       - It grows, it flourishes, it prospers.
     - So will we if we meditate on the Word of God.
       - God will give us peace & security in the storms of life
       - God will grow us spiritually
       - Make our lives significant

4) Makes me wise
   - so many people dismiss this book as irrelevant – full of old stories and complicated theology, but no use to everyday life
   - but that couldn’t be further from the truth! Speaks to the most pressing issues of our day...
     - how to avoid shame and guilt
     - how to protect and improve our marriages
     - how to raise children
     - how to build wealth and use it in a godly way
The Bible makes us wise: tells us how to live skillfully in this day
read Ps 119:98-100
Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine.
I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.
I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Your precepts.

People spend billions a year on counselors, consultants, conferences, self-improvement books; but so many neglect this, the single most valuable source of wisdom in human history.
If you will study this book, meditate on it, and memorize it, you will be wiser than your teachers, wiser even than the aged!

Why spend your precious time in this book?
Key features:
• absolutely true
• unchanging
• proven

What it offers:
• path to salvation
• strength over sin
• peace & security
• wisdom
There are many more we could have mentioned.
I think we’re off to a great commercial here!

Let me summarize with this...

"An unknown writer said, “This Book is the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding; its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword, and the Christian’s character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end... It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. Follow its precepts and it will lead you to Calvary, to the empty tomb, to a resurrected life in Christ; yes, to glory itself, for eternity."

Compared to the Bible, nothing else can hold a candle
- more to offer me than anything on TV or internet
- better than anything else in print
- literally nothing better I could do with my time!

Let’s assume that now you have a desire to spend quality time in God’s Word. That’s excellent.

But it leaves us with one last, crucial question... How? How do you actually spend quality time in God’s Word.
- Not exactly the easiest book to read!
- Written thousands of years ago to a world very different than our own
- Stories, prophecies, songs, and theological lectures that can be really hard
- And it’s just thick. Mine is over 1000 pages! It just looks manageable because the pages are so thin and the text so small.
- This is a tough book to work through.

So, let me give you some practical advice about how to spend quality time in God’s Word
   Briefly walk you through these 3 disciplines...

1) Study
   - To study God’s Word means to methodically seek to understand and apply scripture
   - More than just reading God’s Word – it’s a process that involves multiple steps and multiple tools designed to unlock the meaning and relevance of a passage of scripture.
   - I don’t have time this morning to walk you through that process.
   - But I can give you some pointers that will help you learn how to study God’s Word

1) **MOST IMPORTANT:** Join one of our Bible Studies this Fall
   - Men’s & Women’s Bible Study: 1 Peter
   - Home Church: Miracles of Christ in Mark
   - The best way to learn to study the Bible is to do it with a small group
   - Our Bible studies will walk you through the step-by-step
   - I cannot overemphasize the importance of joining a small group

2) A couple GREAT books on Bible study
   - Hands down, the best **Kay Arthur’s How to Study Your Bible**
   - Another great option: **Howard Hendricks Living by the Book**
     - Longer than Arthur’s, but a classic – full of great, practical tips

3) When you’re actually doing Bible study, you’ll find that it’s helpful to have some good resources on hand to help you discover the meaning of a passage and apply it to your life. Here’s a few of my favorite Bible study resources...

   - Great Bible study websites:
     - net.bible.org – online Bible study tool
     - soniclight.org – Tom Constable’s commentaries
   - Great Bible study apps – computer and mobile:
     - Paid:
       - Logos
       - Accordance
     - Free:
       - Blue Letter Bible
   - [See my resource summary](#) on the final page of these notes.
   - [Will send them out via my Twitter and Facebook accounts.](#)
     - twitter.com/GraceBibleBlake
Now for the second discipline...

2) Meditation

- what comes to most people’s minds when we hear the word “meditation” – eastern style meditation?
  - get your body in an exceedingly uncomfortable position and clear your mind of all thoughts
  - that’s not what the Bible means by meditation...

- biblical meaning – 2 words in Hebrew:
  - Siach – “to go over a matter in one’s mind”
    - we do it all the time – in the car, on a walk, in our bed at night – we go over things in our minds – a key decision we have to make, a problem to solve, a relationship to improve.
    - biblical mediation is simply doing that, but focused on scripture
    - Ps 119:97 – biblical meditation = contemplation of God’s Word
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O how I love Your law!
It is my meditation all the day.

  - Hagah – “to read in a low voice” – simply reading scripture quietly to yourself
    - Ps 1:2 – he reads God’s Word to himself multiple times a day
     But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.
     - at that rate it would not take long to read the whole thing
     - so this pictures repeated reading – you read either a passage or a whole book repeatedly until, eventually, it becomes familiar to you.

- That’s biblical meditation

- And the rationale behind meditation is simply that you become what you concentrate on.
  - If you watch a lot of violent TV – that has an affect on you. It makes you more prone to violence, or at least less shocked by it.
  - If you read a lot of fashion magazines – that has an affect on you. It makes you more aware of fashion and increases your desire to be fashionable.
  - Think about something often enough, and that thought begins to shape you. That’s how the human brain is wired. What we concentrate on shapes our worldview – our sense of reality, our values, our passions.

- So, if that’s the case, then meditation on God’s Word is the way you become more like God.
  - If you want to think like God and love like God, then you have concentrate on His Word.
  - It’s about saturation. Meditation saturates your mind with God’s Word so that God’s Word can shape your way of thinking.

- Resources – apps to help you spend more time reading and meditation on Scripture... all free
  - ESV Bible app by Crossway – simple, easy to use
  - Bible by LifeChurch.tv – really good app – multiple translations for free download; reading plans included
  - eBible.com – great Bible reader + reading plans

3) Memorization

- Dt 11:18-20
  “You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates”
Just reading scripture is not sufficient to God. He wants us to “impress [His] words on our hearts and on our souls”

- like “frontals” on your forehead = like writing on your forehead
  - like the Bible was attached to your face
- The moment we have need of a verse it pops into our mind
  - when tempted, attacked; in a conversation; when we face a big decision
- That’s what God wants – for us to know His Word inside and out

- **Not surprisingly, that’s what Jesus, Peter, Paul, James all had**
  - You’d think they Google at their fingertips! – “verse about marriage from Deuteronomy”... they just know it. Don’t have to pull out the Bible – cause it’s up here.

- We may not ever get the whole OT memorized like they did. But we can get started with some of the most important verses in the Bible.

- **Resource: Navigators topical memory system**
  - Top 75 or so Verses in the Bible to memorize – divided up by topic
  - Go to Navigators.org -> tools -> Topical Memory System
  - Tips and instructions at:

I covered a lot of ground, a lot of advice, a lot of resources this morning because I don’t know where you are in your practice of these disciplines. **But I assume that, just like me, you wish you were doing better.**

**And so I encourage you to commit to work this week on one of these disciplines.** Set aside regular time this week even if you have to sacrifice something else.

Then grab one of these resources on the **following page** to help you get started. I promise you, it will be worth the effort if you’ll give it the time.
My Favorite Resources for Bible Study, Meditation, and Memorization

by Blake Jennings
updated July 2012

Great books on Bible study
- Hands down the best: Kay Arthur’s How to Study Your Bible
- Another great option: Howard Hendricks Living by the Book
  o Longer, more techniques, more examples

Great Bible study websites:
- net.bible.org – online Bible study tool
- soniclight.org – Tom Constable’s commentaries on every book of the Bible for free PDF download – an awesome blessing from a gracious Dallas Theological Seminary scholar!

Great Bible study apps – computer and mobile:
- Logos ($150 and up; available at logos.com)
- Accordance ($120 and up; available at accordancebible.com)
- Blue Letter Bible (free; blueletterbible.org)

Free Apps for reading and meditating on scripture
- ESV Bible app by Crossway
  o simple, easy to use, elegant
  o Apple: itunes.apple.com/us/app/esv-bible/id361797273
  o Android: play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.subsplash.esv
- Bible by LifeChurch.tv (YouVersion Bible App)
  o really good app – multiple translations for free download; reading plans included
  o Apple: itunes.apple.com/us/app/bible/id282935706
  o Android: play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.sirma.mobile.bible.android
  o Other mobile versions: www.youversion.com/mobile
- eBible.com
  o great Bible reader + reading plans
  o Apple: itunes.apple.com/us/app/ebible/id476231051
  o Android: play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.osprit.ebible

Navigators’ topical memory system
- Top 75 or so Verses in the Bible to memorize – divided up by topic
- Verse list at www.navigators.org/us/resources/illustrations/items/Topical%20Memory%20System
- Tips and instructions at: www.navigators.org/us/articles/items/How%20to%20Memorize%20Scripture