

Responds to Encounter Life with God's Truth

What we are doing is more than Bible study.

Certainly, we will make Scripture the foundation of what we do because in it we find God's mind and heart. God's Word is foundational to all six great pathways of discipleship (see *Embeds a Big-Pix Framework into our Brain*). These six define our calling in life. But to study the Bible and leave it in our minds distorts truth. James, Jesus' half-brother, frankly states:

Do not **merely listen** to the word, and so **deceive** yourselves. Do what it says (James 1:22, **emphasis**).

With the following quote, one Bible practitioner may have been thinking of how easily we deceive ourselves when we only study God's Love-Letter.

What do you think he meant?

"Interpretation without application is abortion."

If you don't respond to the Word in some way, you kill the life-giving power resident in God's Word. It's a poor reflection of a person as an image-bearer of God who is content to *ONLY* be spoon-fed knowledge that has been filtered through others.

Following Jesus' direct talk to Nicodemus (John 3:1-15), the Apostle John testifies about Jesus, also without mincing words. Jesus' mission provides a way through faith in Him for those walking in condemnation to find relationship with Him. Notice that the tipping point is *obedience* evidenced by a deliberate choice to believe in 3:18-21. Light *has* come into the world. Each of us now has a free choice. Either love Light and embrace the needed change that Jesus light exposes. Or love darkness for fear that Jesus' Light will expose their evil deeds. What a difference a radical choice of obedience to follow the Light makes!

Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God (John 3:21).

If *doing* Scripture is so crucial for growth, how do we take a hold on God's truth so we can grow and serve others? Jesus describes how to mine truth from Scripture to create experience as truth encounters life. Carefully read Jesus' words below. *All* aspects of the process are crucial under the ministering hand of the Spirit.

"Whoever **has** my commands and **obeys** them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will **be loved** by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him" (John 14:21, **emphasis**).

1. Engage God's Word ("has my commands"): It's crucial to actively engage God's Word, and best when we use every possible avenue. To engage is inherently active. Prepare *before* gathering together to maximize your learning. I designed my "*DiscipleMaking Companion*" series to support this active process. Read it. Listen to it. Tell others about it. Memorize it. Soak in it (the Bible uses the word "*meditation*" to describe this aspect of soaking and reflecting). Are we open to invest time in Scripture? How high is our desire? Without motivation to grow through God's Love-Letter, we will not push through when the Word cuts across our self-focused flesh-life. Can you carve out ten minutes a day for the Bible for now?

2. Debrief God's Word (“the Holy Spirit will...remind you of everything I have said to you,” John 14:26): As we mull truth over in the inner conversations in our mind, we “debrief” with ourselves. We call this reflecting or meditating. When we debrief with others in a natural learning community, such interaction deepens our understanding and broadens our response to God’s Love-Letter. As we reflect on how truth encounters our everyday lives, the Spirit partners to release insight for lasting LifeChange. Our divine Partner comes alongside to aid. Don’t think of this as a tightly linear process. John goes *directly* to obedience. Both Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2 place obey *after* meditate. The key to LifeChange is quick response to change at the point of need.



3. Practice God's Word (“obeys them...loves Me”): Scripture places its weight on putting truth into deliberate practice. Don’t read as a spectator but put yourself into the text as an active learner. From start to finish, we are encouraged to be do-ers of the Word. The Spirit uses our transforming responses (John 14:16-17) to change us since we add active faith to divine revelation (2 Peter 1:5). “Revelation demands response.” This is certainly not the death-march of performance-to-please-others. God is already ravished by His Bride. So, how could our Groom ever love us any more than He now does? However, we demonstrate our love for Him when we obey. A transforming response are our faith-response to God’s grace-initiative. This is the indispensable ingredient for growth. God designed us in the Garden for this kind of partnering.

“The Counselor, the Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).

4. Experience God's Word (“will be loved...I will love...show myself to him”): We like to jump directly to the experience of intimate love offered us by the Father and Son...and it is wonderful. We leap to the promise of knowing Jesus more deeply. Yes, this is the ultimate purpose of Bible study, as the Spirit comes alongside so we “know God better” (Ephesians 1:17). The Trinity yearns for us to experience His Reality. Carefully read John 14:23 describing this mutual love relationship we have with our Family-of-Three. This intimacy of coming home to Him stirs our heart. *Head*-knowledge is metabolized into *heart*-experience through our actions as we reflect on them. This is Biblical knowing. This brings *relevance* to Bible study, one of the four motivations for adult learners.

Insight and change may come quickly. Or perhaps no more insight comes now. Then throw the difficulty you are wrestling with into your “Deuteronomy 29:29 bucket” where possibilities are stored until God gives more insight. This helps me not choke on the bones (focusing on what I do not understand) while leaving clear and crucial truth dormant. We then wait since the Spirit of God reveals (2 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Knowledge is designed by God to be personal. “Adam knew Eve...” (Genesis 4:1 NASB) and they conceived. This particular “knowing” was an intensely personal *act*, birthing life! True knowing is open, expressive, uncovered intimacy, nothing hidden before God. The sin in Genesis 3 was not in knowing. Adam and Eve gathered knowledge *separate from an interdependent* relationship with God.

Our age has traded in this healthy relational knowledge for a very impersonal knowledge acquisition. For instance, as we rely primarily on lecture in large university classes and churches,

internet info highway, chat rooms, Zoom, Twitter and Face Book without face-to-face exchange. These are not wrong, just limited and incomplete to generate very much heart-to-heart connection with their directive focus to “*put in.*” However, the highest act of teaching is to “*draw out*” of others what God has already put in, like a midwife “*drawing out*” the life God formed in the womb.

Wise learners find the maximum “*leverage point*” for change, that point where effort is rewarded with maximum return. We must rethink how God designed us to learn responsibly, especially in our information overloaded society. Activating your inner motivation to be a learner is a vital part of this, focusing on high-leverage learning with up to 70% or **90% retention**.

All genuine knowing demands a response.

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

They embraced God’s Word with joy in the midst of trials because of the Spirit within (1 Thessalonians 1:6b). What is the **one**, *single* difference between the wise and foolish builder in Matthew 7:24-27? *Responsiveness!* One practices God’s Word and thus builds upon the solid rock, not on shifting sand. When life assaults us, the one who **does** the Word is the one who stands.

If we obey Jesus’ commands, we will remain in His love (John 15:9-10). Jesus knows our actions. He tells the church at Laodicea that they are lukewarm, neither ice cold against Him or on fire for Him. Jesus graphically calls us to a choice, stating to lukewarm Christians...

“So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 2:16).

Jesus calls you and I to a choice!

At my core I’m an empowered evangelical Christian. The Word of God reveals the God of the Word. His Love-Letter shows us the heart and mind of God. The counsel of Scripture, especially the Gospels and NT, is my plumb line, shaping my approach to life and ministry. Scripture is our authority over heritage, upbringing, opinions, dreams, visions, prophetic words, experience and all secondary authoritative sources. A “*naturally supernatural*” life aligns with God’s original design and puts truth into action. It feels *merely* natural yet taps into His supernatural partnership.

The Bible is our ultimate authority in life, God’s words to us. So, what one issue in your life is the Bible speaking to this week? The Bible is more up-to-date than our newspapers because it deals with many trans-cultural issues. How does this passage help? Practice a “**I+I**” response each week; **one** choice to do personally plus **one** choice to pass a nugget on to one other person. One Spirit-empowered and led change per week leads to significant change in a year.

Are we self-aware enough to sense our blind spots?

What a difference between a person (1) who engages Scripture to **fit** the Bible into *his/her* life and (2) one who responds to God’s Word by **changing** his/her life to align with God’s heart revealed in the Bible. Pay particular attention when Scripture cuts across the fiber of our self-absorbed life. Take ownership to cultivate such a natural learning culture. This is your group. Develop a group where every member is more than a passive stenographer of an expert teacher’s store of knowledge.

A *listening* heart prepares an *understanding* mind! The only time we cannot learn is when we forfeit our *listening hearts* as lifelong *life*-learners. Be quick in learning, but don't hurry. Normally we learn in layers, one layer after another. What is crucial is *not* how much we learn, but that we actively respond to what we are learning.

I want to encourage each of you to join a host of others as lifelong life-learners, turning truth into experience. Such a process will lead us to carve out necessary space in our lives for "*deliberate practice*." This provides the ideal culture for spiritual growth in each of the six great pathways of discipleship to develop a personal life-style. Incremental changes over time lead to transformation. Stay consistent. Push through. Work hard to turn *knowledge* into *experience*.

What do I mean?

In the past, learning has primarily targeted *head* knowledge in the classroom. The head works by "*knowledge gathering*," by observing, thinking, problem solving and correlating new information. This is important preparation. God is now on the move to change how we learn. A genuine learning community begins to strip off the thick filters many possess regarding learning.

Jesus points us to a more natural learning that is community-based, pushing through to *heart* knowledge. Our *heart* is the core of our being, including our *will* and its choices, our *mind* and its reasoning and our *affections* and its feelings. Our heart is holistic and learns differently. *The heart works by "experience gathering."* Knowledge put into practice however metabolizes truth into *heart-experience*.

We experience the Reality of Scripture through connectedness with our Community-God and with the Body of Christ and as we personally act on what we know. Experience can only be gained by putting knowledge into practice. In other words, we experience little transformation until our hearts are impacted.

Both *knowledge* and *experience* gathering are crucial, although it's too easy for us settle in storing up knowledge. Paul puts it succinctly.

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1b).

A respond to God's grace of love builds up us and others. God's grace however must be experienced, or else simply knowing Bible verses about grace puffs us up as windbags. Translate the knowledge of God's grace into experience through transforming responses of active love. Growth comes from experiences where hearts are open toward God and toward each other. Without doing, even the greatest Scriptural truth will remain dormant. Pass along what you are learning to at least one other person each week.

Like digesting food, we digest experience. We walk through an event, take in what is usable and eliminate the waste. God's plan is for other mature people to help us to process good and bad experience. They come alongside so we can discern the healthy from the unhealthy, the life releasing from the life stifling.

To know Him well, practice the complete process, *engaging, debriefing/reflecting, practicing* and *experiencing*. Don't circumvent the process or we emasculate the results.

Often my response is simply a short prayer to God that I weave into my everyday life. I praise Him because He is so awesome (at times I write it out). Or I may thank Him for what He has done in my life. Please learn to respond actively, whether studying or listening to a sermon or tape on Christian truth.

How can we respond?

Take incremental “ant-steps” with Psalms 119:33-35 in mind.

Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end.

Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight (Psalm 119:33-35).

Have you ever seen one of those glass ant farms that come in the mail? Throw the dirt and ants in, close it up and all becomes chaos. After a few days order is restored out of chaos as little tunnels form under the surface.

How does change occur?

One ant takes one grain of sand and carries it one ant-step after another to the far end of the ant farm. The ant then comes back for one more grain of sand. One ant taking one “ant-step” hardly seems significant. But change begins.

So, when change is needed, grab onto one grain of the problem and take one “*ant-step*” in the right direction on our journey. Change occurs over time, one “*ant-step*” after another. In the change process, we often overstate the conspicuous and understate the continuous. When change is needed, grab onto one grain of the solution. Then take one “*ant-step*” in the right direction. Action learning is crucial to develop an authentic learning culture.

God’s best from the get-go is for knowledge to be passed on relationally. From fathers and mothers to children, from older men and women to younger, from the wise to the less wise, from those who have been Christians a bit longer to their peers, from peer to peer. And from **you** to those with whom you have influence, like in Proverbs 2.

In this generation, God is recovering this personal DiscipleMaking or mentoring in temporarily closed, same-gender groups as small as 2-5. This is how Jesus trained up His Twelve. Since the Industrial Revolution, this aspect of Christianity has often been a missing ingredient among God’s people. We talk about Jesus as our ministry model yet make our large gatherings our priority instead of this life-on-life relationship centered on Scripture.

Moses mentored Joshua. Elijah had Elisha. Jesus had His Twelve who passed it on to others (Matthew 28:20). Barnabas disciplined Paul. Paul mentored Timothy, calling him his own son, and over 30 others also journeyed with Paul.

“All men are more delighted and more moved by what they find out for themselves”
(Ignatius of Loyola).

*Who is the spiritual mentor in **your** life today? And who is God highlighting for **you** to pass it along to?*

Jesus commissioned His disciples, all His followers, to pass on what He taught to others, on to three generations in an interactive way that puts truth into action (Matthew 28:20).

What if you were to take three others and spend time with them for one year? They in turn could do the same for three others after one year (although keep the time and number flexible, adapting to circumstances). After three spiritual generations (3 short years), you would have influenced **sixty-four** people, almost the size of the average American church. Paul mentions four generations in 2 Timothy 2:2, which would move the figure to 256 in eight years.

Where do you think Jesus and Paul learned this personal process of coming alongside others to help others flourish spiritually?

The book of Proverbs, and in particular chapter 2, describes this personal process the Hebrews used to develop spiritual passion as a father passes on wisdom to his son. “*Each one, teach one*”

by being both a learner and an influencer. Dive into Proverbs 2:1-16, focusing on the conditional “*if*” in 2:1-4 that releases the promised “*then*” in 2:5-8 and 2:9-16. What a powerful passage to stir in us spiritual passion to reproduce.

Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

In the cattle country of the Western US, the cattlemen began to build barbed wire fences to keep their cattle in. Which do you think was more necessary to build a strong fence? Solid fence posts” Or wire strung between the posts?

Of course, both!

With the Spirit of God at the center, our times together as a learning community drive the fence posts in deeply and secure, while you each string wire between the posts during the week.

Both/And. Do you believe it? Scripture is...

...more precious than gold, than much pure gold (Psalm 19:10).

Enjoy the journey!

Next Steps

1. Print out the ***PDF of this page***, mark it up and make this your own.
2. Print out one of the free PDF’s to deepen understanding: ***Meditation, 90% Learning, Deliberate Practice.***
3. Continue to the *seventh* of the *fifth* essentials, ***Flips Engagement to Accelerate Learning***