

PART 4: THE COMFORTER

READ THIS OVERVIEW

“BUT THE COUNSELOR, THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM THE FATHER WILL SEND IN MY NAME WILL TEACH YOU ALL THE THINGS AND REMIND YOU OF EVERYTHING I HAVE SAID TO YOU.” JOHN 14:26

This was what Jesus told His disciples as He planned to return to His heavenly home. He wanted to make sure that they knew they would never be alone again. That His spirit would be a guide for them and help them to remember all the truths that He had taught them. Isn't that a beautiful parting gift? The gift of His never-ending presence. The gift of being able to continually learn and draw wisdom from the God of heaven and earth. The gift of being able to be gently reminded of the truths of our God, when we are tempted to believe the lies of our enemy. And this is so important because the longer we live down here on this earth, the louder the voice of the enemy tends to grow. And our defense against his voice is God's voice.

One of the main ways the Holy Spirit teaches us and reminds us of God's ways is through His word. That is where our wisdom and learning come from, and yet many of us rarely make time to sit in it. I know this may sound cliché, but sitting in God's word really is the ballgame. It's where the Holy Spirit will illuminate truths that pierce the heart and soul. It's where God will confirm answers that your mind has been searching for. It's where He will seal in and remind you of who you are and all that He has for you. Or at least it's a starting point. You see, the Holy Spirit is with us to teach and remind. But He can't remind us of something we don't know.

You see, Jesus told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would remind them of what they were already taught. We have to place ourselves in positions to be taught so that the Holy Spirit can remind us of those very things when we need them the most. One pastor I love says, “We have to give the Holy Spirit something to work with.” Meaning, we want the Holy Spirit to remind us of things, but the reality is that one can only be reminded of something that was once known. This is why we have to get into the word. Because as we soak up God's word we allow it to penetrate our very souls. This serves us in that as we are going through our daily life and the enemy's voice is getting louder, the Holy Spirit can bring back to our remembrance the things that He deposited in our spirits and taught us through His word.

Friends, this is how we fight. This is how we thrive down here in a culture that is determined to breed lies into the very fabric of our identities. We arm ourselves with the truth of His word and submit ourselves to the voice of His Holy Spirit, trusting that He will speak and remind us exactly as we need Him to.

So how do we actually arm ourselves with truth? Well, let's talk about some practical steps we can take this week!

PREPARE WITH SOLITUDE, SILENCE, AND PRAYER

5-10 MINS

To prepare our hearts for what the Holy Spirit wants to do in us during this time, we'll need to be intentional about 3 postures that we'll revisit each week throughout this series. Solitude, silence, and restful prayer. Let's unpack that really quick.

Henry Nouwen says, "Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude, we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self." So the idea here is that the spiritual life can't grow without normalizing "aloneness." So each week, set apart a time and a place, away from people and things, to be with the Holy Spirit and Him alone.

Next is silence as a posture. Nouwen says that silence completes and intensifies solitude. Why? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of words. In order for our spiritual lives to emerge in the midst of the chaos, we need to normalize "listening." So each week, insert a 3-5 minute pause before you move to the next step, and normalize stillness in your solitude. "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." Ecclesiastes 5:2

Lastly, rest as a prayer posture. The literal translation of Paul's command to "pray always" is "come to rest". The Greek word behind this term carries the idea of someone resting in God amid a very intense daily struggle. So the prayer of rest, in the context of solitude and silence, is about bringing our heart's activity to a complete stop so it can simply receive whatever the Spirit wants to surface.

Here's a simple prayer that you can recite 2-3 times to tie all these together before you engage in this week's practice. Spirit of the living God, I am here before You, I am listening to You, and I am resting in You.

ENGAGE THE PRACTICE

15-20 MINS

Ok, so we've given you a posture of the heart, now we'll provide you with a practice for your learning style! Capturing truth can feel like an overwhelming undertaking, right? I mean there are so many things to know, and everyone sees it differently. But for followers of Jesus, it has always been God's intention that we'd build truth and reality directly from the scripture.

This week Pastor and author John Mark Comer and Bridgetown Church will help us with practices they've built around engaging scripture. Below you'll find 4 unique ways to engage scripture using a different learning style. Select one of them and take the time to work through the practical steps. Determine what you need to do ahead of time to be successful in your commitment. This is the nuts and bolts of the Holy Spirit reminding you of something you know!

READ IT OUT LOUD

AUDITORY

Before the printing press and Bible apps, the people of God would crowd together in a room with a single copy (or usually just parts) of the Scriptures, and one person would read aloud whole books or large chunks from it as everyone listened intently. In fact, there are places in the world today in which followers of Jesus still do this by necessity. You can easily join others in this age-old tradition by reading Scriptures aloud in one sitting, or even put a technological twist on it by using the YouVersion app to have the scripture read to you!

1. Set aside the Time

You'll be reading for the next 20 or so minutes, so make sure that you're in a place, position, and posture to be still, attentive, and open to God

2. Pick a Passage

There are so many passages and books of the Bible with which to try this, so pick one and go for it!

3. Invite the Holy Spirit

Take a deep breath and settle in. Invite the Holy Spirit to help you to surrender to and be formed by what you read.

4. Read

Read the entire text in one sitting aloud.

4. Silence & Prayer

After the last verse is read, don't rush to the next part. Take a moment in silence and stillness, letting the words reverberate inside your mind and soul. After a bit, pray to thank God for the experience of this practice.

MEMORIZE IT

MENTAL

For the disciple of Jesus, some of the greatest transformation we will experience takes place amongst the thoughts in our minds. What you think about will shape what you believe and, ultimately, that will shape what you live into. This is why, in the New Testament, Paul continually tells us to renew our minds – because a renewed mind leads to a transformed life.

1. Index Card

Write the verse(s) on one side of an index card and the verse reference on the other side. Carry the card around with you so you can work on memorizing in your free time.

2. Record Yourself

Try recording yourself on your phone reading the verse(s). Listen back to the recording while you're driving, working out, cleaning your house, grocery shopping, etc.

3. Make It Visible

Tape the verse(s) to the bathroom mirror or to your car dashboard and work on it as you go about your day. You can also put it as your desktop or phone background. You'll honestly be surprised by how much that helps.

4. Repetitive Writing

Transcribe the verse(s) by hand. Rewrite the verse(s) over and over or use hand-lettering or other creative illustrations or pictures as a way of putting it in your mind.

5. Repetitive Recitation

Read the verse(s) out loud in 5-minute increments and repeat (while allowing some time for your mind to rest). Worked out as a discipline, this could look like: Reading/Reciting it out loud 4 times per day for a week. Then, read/recite it out loud once a week for a month. Then read/recite it once every three months for a year. And then read/recite it once every year.

STUDY IT IN-DEPTH

ACADEMIC

The Bible is a book (or more accurately, a library) unlike any other. At times it is good to read slowly and out loud, savoring each word. Other times, we ought to read it in large portions, so we can encounter its broader story and plotline. In some moments, we need to linger on one simple phrase, allowing it to slowly seep into our heart. And at other times, we need to sit upright, put on our reading glasses, and study it.

1. Summary Exercise

When reading the Bible, it's easy to get lost in the weeds. For this reason, it can be helpful to stop and summarize what we've read. Read through one of the following passages or a passage of your choosing. Along the way, stop at the end of each chapter (or even each paragraph) and write down your summary of what you read in one or two sentences. Try 1 Thessalonians, James, 1 John, Matthew 5-7, or Ephesians.

2. Context Exercise

The key to understanding almost any passage of the Bible is to understand it in context. We've selected a few commonly misunderstood Bible passages. Pick a passage and spend some time reading the verses immediately before and after this passage. Then, ask the following questions: 1) What might this passage seem to mean when only read on its own? 2) How do the verses before and after this passage influence its meaning? Try Philippians 4:13, Matthew 18:20, Jeremiah 29:11, or Romans 8:28.

3. Commentaries & Reference Materials

One of the great benefits of living in our time is that we have more resources for Biblical studies than any other time in civilization. Scholars have written commentaries on books of the Bible and created easily accessible materials to increase our understanding of the Bible. One way to step into a deeper study of the Bible is to use commentaries or reference materials to assist our study of any given book, passage, or theme. Consider giving one of these study tools a try – Tony Evans Bible Study Bible & Commentary, N.T. Wright's For Everyone Series, or The Bible Project podcasts and animated films.

4. Study Questions

The Bible is a library full of many genres, written by different authors over nearly 1000 years. Yet, there are some questions that, when asked of almost any passage, can help us arrive closer at its meaning. Pick a passage of your choice and ask the following questions.

- Who wrote this passage? How might their worldview influence the meaning of this passage?
- To whom were they writing, and what did they intend to communicate to that audience?
- Are there any words or ideas that I understand one way as a 21st century reader that may have been thought of differently by original readers?
- Does this passage make any allusion to some other passages in the Scriptures?
- What words or ideas are repeated?
- If I were to summarize this passage in a few sentences, how would I do that?

ENCOUNTER IT

EXPERIENTIAL

We could easily get frustrated with the Bible if we approach it as an encyclopedia, reference manual, or textbook. But what if instead we approached it as a library designed for a lifetime of ongoing meditation? Lectio Divina helps with that because it doesn't set the focus on learning, it sets the focus on meeting God in the Scriptures. The Scriptures lead the reader into further intimacy with God as they move slowly, carefully, and repeatedly through the text. The practice consists of five distinct movements:

1. Prepare to meet with God

Turn your phone off and leave it in another room. Situate yourself comfortably in a quiet, solitary place. Calm your body and quiet your mind before God as you work to prepare your heart to receive what God has spoken through the text and to respond accordingly. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.

2. Read (lectio)

Read the passage slowly and carefully. Take your time. As you move through the text, pay close attention to what words and ideas draw your attention in unique ways. When your focus is drawn to a particular word or thought, pause momentarily to reflect on them.

3. Reflect (mediatio)

Upon completing the passage, return to the beginning and read again. On your second journey through the text, allow the text to connect with you personally. Which words or phrases assume a particular resonance in your heart, your season of life, your person in this moment? Ask, "What do I need to know, or be, or do in light of the text? What does this mean for my life today?"

4. Respond (oratio)

Talk to God about your experience. If you're confused, say that. Moved? Express gratitude to God. Upset? Tell him about it. Compelled to worship? Worship. If the text has brought something else to mind, talk to God about that.

5. Rest (contemplatio)

Pause to sit in God's presence before fleeing from the moment. You might express wonder, awe, gratitude, or praise through words, or you might allow yourself to feel and experience these things quietly before God.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

5 MINS

Wrap up your time by writing a prayer of gratitude for God's word. As you engage scripture, what do you want to say to God about what He has written for you? I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:11. How can you use the truth that you know this week to bring comfort to your own situation?