

Spiritual Starvation

Welcome back to Walking with Purpose! Last time we were challenged to spend consistent time with the Lord in prayer. How are you doing? I trust that having an accountability partner was an encouragement in that area of being a disciple. Prayer is how we communicate with God, and every strong relationship is a product of good communication. But as with marriage or a friendship, it needs to be two-sided. We need to talk to God, but also be ready to listen for His voice when He speaks to us. That's what ***Bible study*** is all about. After all, our goal is to become more like Christ and to follow His instructions...and *that's* only going to happen if we read and obey the instruction manual: *His Word to us!*

When my brother was three years old, he got his first bicycle for Christmas. I stayed awake with our father to put it together on Christmas Eve. As my mother held the instructions, we began putting together pieces that seemed to fit. But after about an hour, we realized we weren't doing it right. Mom kept *trying* to tell us what we were doing wrong, but we didn't listen. Let me tell you, we added hours onto that project, as we then had to disassemble the bike and put it back together properly. Life is like, isn't it? We'll bypass reading the instructions of God's Word and then wonder how we get ourselves into such a mess.



Fellowship

1. Describe a time when instructions were vital to your success.
2. Have wrong directions ever caused you to lose your way?



Discipleship

Three chefs were working in a restaurant one day, when their kitchen supervisor approached them with an order...*and* instructions on how to properly prepare it. The first chef looked at the instructions, and said "You can show a recipe to 100 different people, and each of them will get a different meaning. You can't understand recipes, so why even read them?"

The second chef took a slightly different angle. He said "I don't believe this recipe to be the literal directions of our supervisor. I believe the ingredients all have hidden meanings. I think the meat represents one thing, the spices and other ingredients symbolize something else, and the time and cooking temperature are some sort of mysterious allegory."

While the other two were engaging in their debate, the third chef simply took the recipe and prepared the dish according to instructions. The dish turned out to be delicious, and I'm sure you can guess what happened next. This chef was promoted and the others fired.

While this little story may seem somewhat silly, it sadly illustrates the attitude that many people take toward God and His Word. The Bible is OUR set of instructions. It's the all-important "recipe" for how to live our lives! God didn't leave us alone in this world to muddle our way through the best we can. He gifted us with both the Holy Spirit and His tangible instruction guide to address every issue we will ever face, with infallible instructions that are to be fully trusted.

Turn with me to Psalm chapter 119. We'll start by reading verses 1-18: "Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways. You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me. How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

Now let's go down to verses 65-67. "Do good to your servant according to your word, O Lord. Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word."

This whole chapter is filled with praises of God's Word. It assures us that it's trustworthy, lights our way, and will keep us from sin. It tells the importance of memorizing it, so it will always be with us...and how God *Himself* wants to give us understanding!

A young pilot had just passed the point of no return in his flight when the weather changed for the worse. Visibility dropped to a matter of *feet* as fog descended to the earth. Putting total trust in the cockpit instruments was a new experience to him, for the ink was still wet on his flying certificate.

The landing worried him the most. His destination was a crowded metropolitan airport he wasn't familiar with. In a few minutes he would be in radio contact with the tower. Until then, he was alone with his thoughts. His instructor had practically forced him to memorize the rulebook. He didn't care for it at the time, but now he was thankful.

Finally he heard the voice of the air traffic controller. "I'm going to put you on a holding pattern," the controller radioed. The young pilot was thrilled to hear the voice of the controller, but he knew that his safe landing was in the hands of this person. He had to draw upon his previous instructions and training, while trusting the voice of an air traffic controller he couldn't see. Aware that this was no time for pride, he informed the controller, "This is not a seasoned pro up here. I would appreciate any help you could give me."

"You've got it!" he heard back.

For the next 45 minutes, the controller gently guided the pilot through the blinding fog. As course and altitude corrections came periodically, the young pilot realized the controller was guiding him around obstacles and away from potential collisions. With the words of the rulebook firmly placed in his mind, and with the gentle voice of the controller, he landed safely at last.

Turn with me to some of Jesus' last words to His disciples, as they were preparing to embark on their earthly journey *without* the *physical* comfort of their friend and Master. John chapter 16, verse 7: "But I tell you the truth: it is for your *good* that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." Now let's go down to verses 13 and 14. "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."

The Holy Spirit guides us through the maze of life much like that air traffic controller. The controller assumed that the young pilot understood the instructions of the flight manual; his guidance was based on that. So, too, the Holy Spirit will guide us as we do our part of studying God's Word and committing to follow our Guide.

Anatoli, a dissident Soviet Jew, kissed his wife goodbye as she left Russia for freedom in Israel. His parting words to her were, "I'll see you soon in Jerusalem." But Anatoli was detained and finally imprisoned. Their reunion in Jerusalem would not only be postponed, it might never occur. During long years in Russian prisons and work camps Anatoli was stripped of his personal belongings. His only possession was a miniature copy of the Psalms. Once during his imprisonment, his refusal to release the book to the authorities cost him 130 days in solitary confinement. Finally, twelve years after parting with his wife, he was offered freedom. In February 1986, as the world watched, Anatoli was allowed to walk away from Russian guards toward those who would take him to Jerusalem. But in the final moments of captivity, the guards tried *again* to confiscate his book of Psalms! Anatoli *threw* himself face down in the snow and refused to walk on to freedom without it. Those words had kept him alive during imprisonment. He would not go on to freedom without them.

Like a man starving for physical food, Anatoli received spiritual nourishment from the Word of God. What an incredible gift God has given: His very own message to us!

Yet, how many of us are willingly starving ourselves spiritually? We're guilty of a spiritual anorexia...neglecting the feeding of our souls and refusing to feast on the Word. How hungry are we for God? How jealously do you guard your time of study?

J. Wilbur Chapman once said, "My life is governed by this rule: Anything that dims my vision of Christ, or takes away my taste for Bible study, or cramps my prayer life, or makes Christian work difficult...is *wrong* for me...and I *must*, as a Christian, turn away from it."

Next time we'll look at some practical ways to dig into the richness of the Bible. But in the meantime, remember: God is inviting *you* to a *feast*...no dieting allowed!



Ministry

3. Read Psalm 119:89-112. Name all the benefits you see from feasting on God's Word.
4. Read Deuteronomy 11:18-21. How proactive were the Israelites commanded to be with God's Law? How do you think this affected their daily life?
5. What schedule changes did you make this last week to incorporate more time for prayer in your life?
6. When do you foresee your best time for study will be?
7. What is one distraction you expect to draw you away from your purpose? Brainstorm within your small group on how to guard against it.



Evangelism

8. How will following God's instructions change the way you interact with those who don't know Him?



Worship

9. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for God's Word and how it was a guide and/or instrument of conviction to you this last week.