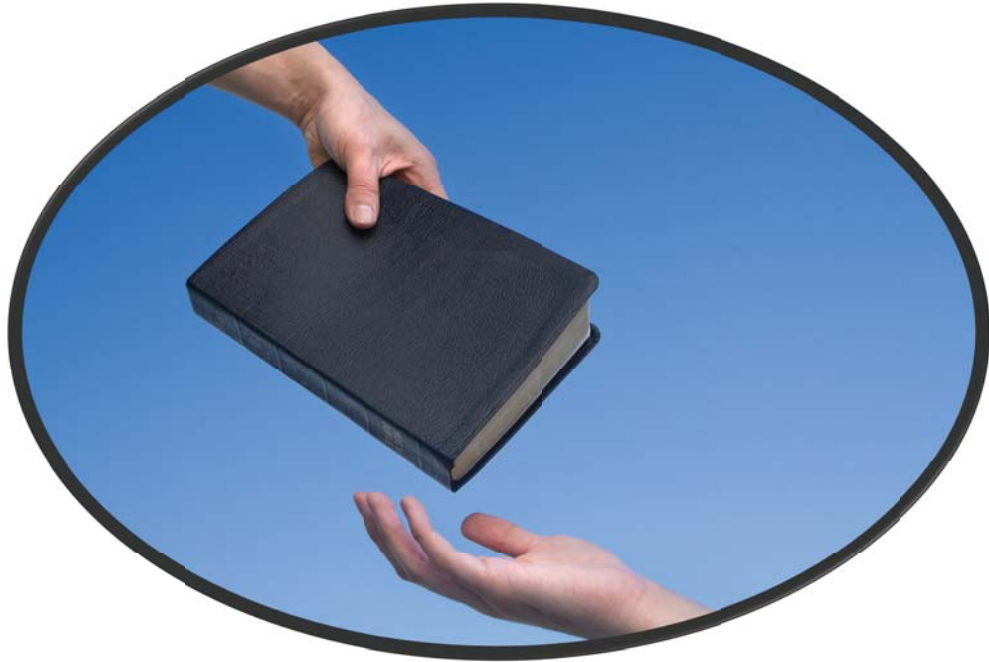


# RECEIVE THE WORD



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Receive the Word  
T. M. Moore  
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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## Welcome to *Receive the Word*

Before we can wield the Sword of the Spirit, we need to receive it, to allow the Word of God to become firmly planted in our souls, and to begin dwelling there richly.

This involves a life-long process of reading, meditating on, and studying the Bible. We must receive the Word of God every day if we are to know the promised benefits of feeding on it, and if the Word is to be truly the joy and rejoicing of our heart.

In this study, we'll begin to look at an outline of how to approach the Bible so that we can receive it as God intends, and the Bible can release its living power in our souls and through our lives.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

# 1 The Indwelling Word

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...* Colossians 3.16

## *The living Word*

The Bible explains that it is a living thing: “For the word of God is living and powerful...” (Heb. 4.12). The words of Jesus are Spirit and life (Jn. 6.63). Of course, the Bible does not live or is not life in a *physical* but a *spiritual* manner, which is more important at any rate.

The Bible, which is the Word of God, is alive with spiritual prospects, promises, possibilities, and power. And the Apostle Paul calls us to let that living Word live within us richly.

Can this really happen? Can the very Fount of spiritual life, the Word of God, live within us? Live within us *richly*? So that its power and life pervade and transform every aspect of our lives? How can this be so? What can we do to realize this indwelling presence? And what should we expect as a result?

These are the questions I intend for us to explore in this series on receiving the Word of God.

## *Where the Word must dwell*

As a thing of spiritual life and vitality, the Word of God must take root in *spiritual* soil, that is, in our soul. The human soul consists of three overlapping, fully integrated, and wholly cooperative entities, each of which is spiritual and not material in nature. God intends that His Word should dwell richly in every aspect of our soul, and throughout our soul in its entirety.

The first component of the soul is the *mind*. The mind is that sector of the soul that manages information, thinking, logic, ideas, imagination, and the like. The mind receives input in the form of words, ideas, thoughts, analogies, images, and so forth. With our minds we analyze, categorize, compare, sort, store, assemble, and recall information of all kinds. The Bible, consisting of words, teachings, doctrines, stories, and images, is perfectly suited for establishing residence within our minds. We should expect, therefore, that one aspect of the Word’s coming to dwell within us will involve the ways it impacts and shapes our minds, and the extent to which it provides the template and parameters by which the mind does its work.

God intends for His living and powerful Word to dwell richly in our *mind*.

The second component of soul, and in many ways, the most important, is the heart. “Heart,” in Biblical parlance, refers not to the fleshly pump which moves the blood about in our bodies, but to a spiritual sector of the soul which is the seat of our affections. “Affections” include attitudes, loves, emotions, hopes, desires, and aspirations. The heart is the commanding facet of the soul; as Solomon insisted, from the heart – what we feel, love, long for, fear, desire, and so forth – flow all the issues of life (Prov. 4.23). The Word of God exerts spiritual power on our heart, shaping, improving, nurturing, and deploying our affections so that, over time, we grow to have what God described David as possessing, a heart for God (1 Sam. 13.14).

God calls us to let His Word dwell richly in our *heart*.

The final component of the soul is the conscience. This is where the will resides, where our values and default priorities are lodged. The conscience coordinates thinking and affections into decisions, choices, and plans for action. When our conscience is *good* (1 Tim. 1.5), that is, when our priorities and choices line up with God’s living and powerful Word, our actions follow suit. When the Word of God dwells in our consciences, then we know how to will what God would will, so that we may walk as Jesus walked.

*Receive the Word*

God teaches us to sink the pillars of our *conscience* into the solid Rock of His Word, so that it may dwell richly there.

*The living Word alive in our soul*

God intends that His Word should dwell richly within our soul, constantly reviewing, impacting, nurturing, affecting, improving, and transforming our thoughts, feelings, and priorities. And to help ensure the firm planting and full flourishing of that Word in our souls, God has sent His Spirit also to dwell within us, to make us willing and able to receive the Word of God (Phil. 2.13), to teach it to us, and to bring it to bear with living spiritual power on every aspect of our life.

As we let the Word of Christ dwell richly within us, the Spirit of God works with that Word to transform us into the image of Jesus, bringing forth fruit, gifts, and power, in words and deeds that allow us to live as witnesses to Christ for the glory of God (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Acts 1.8; 1 Cor. 10.31).

God has done His part to ensure that the Word of Christ can dwell in us richly. It remains for us to “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jms. 1.21)

*For reflection*

1. The Word of God is a living spiritual power. But is this real power? Explain:
2. How can we tell when the Word of God is beginning to “take root” in our soul?
3. Is it possible to “guard” our soul, so that the Word can take better root there? Explain:

*Next steps – Preparation: How grows the garden of your soul? What are you presently doing to plant the Word of God in each aspect of your soul? Can you see any areas where you might improve in this? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.*

## 2 Read the Word

*Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.* 1 Timothy 4.13

### *God's Word for all*

From the beginning, God intended His Word to be heard and understood by all His people. Especially after their deliverance from Egypt, the people of Israel were commanded to let the Word of God dwell richly within them, as individuals and as a people. Parents were commanded to teach their children. Judges were to use the Word to encourage justice and neighbor-love in all their communities. The nation of Israel was to gather every seven years for a mass public reading of the Law of God. In the New Testament, the Berean Christians were commended because they searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17.11), thus reflecting what had become the practice among faithful Jews in every age.

Paul exhorted the young Timothy to make public reading of God's Word a high priority, and not just on Sunday. Following Paul's own example (cf. Acts 20), the Word would be read every day, in large gatherings and small, in public places and private homes. It would be discussed and talked about by Christians as often as they came together to encourage one another in love and good works (Heb. 10.24).

And if there had been printed copies of the Word available for every person in Paul's day, I'm sure he would have exhorted Timothy to make sure every believer had his own Bible, knew how to read it, and read it faithfully, day after day.

The living Word of God will not begin to dwell in us richly until we make daily reading of Scripture an indispensable discipline for our everyday lives.

### *Reading right*

But we need to do this in a careful and informed manner. I want to suggest ten brief guidelines for developing and maintaining a daily regimen of reading God's Word. Follow these, and they will help in having that Word become implanted in your mind, heart, and conscience.

First, *read regularly*. Read something every day. Set up a reading schedule and reserve the time in your daily calendar to make sure reading God's Word becomes a central part of your everyday life.

Next, *read it all*. Don't hunt and peck your way through Scripture. Set up a plan to read the Bible through, cover to cover, then follow that plan for the rest of your life. You don't have to read it all in one sitting or even one year, but you should have a plan that you follow which takes you repeatedly through the Bible as part of your daily reading regimen. Remember, *all* Scripture is inspired and profitable (2 Tim. 3.15-17).

As you are reading, *read for the glory of God*. That is read slowly, reflectively, prayerfully, eagerly waiting for and asking God to show you His glory, in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ, from within the pages of His Word (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 2 Cor. 4.6). Seek to encounter the living God in His living Word, every time you read it.

Also, *read for the larger story*. Don't get bogged down in or distracted by Biblical minutiae. Keep in mind the overarching Biblical narrative of creation, fall, restoration, and consummation, and the central Biblical theme of Christ's redemptive work for God's people and His glory.

*Read for the present*. That is, try to listen for what God is speaking in His Word about your own life and the times in which we live. Think about the day ahead. Let the Word speak into your daily life, and commit yourself in prayer to actions suggested by your reading.

### *Receive the Word*

Be sure to *read with the right spirit*, hungering for God's Word and glory, and not begrudging Him a few minutes of your valuable time. Learn to delight in your time reading God's Word.

*Read Scripture into every aspect of your soul* – how you think, what you feel, what you value. Let the Word of Christ dwell richly in every sector of your soul, as you wait on the Spirit to search you (Ps. 139-23, 24).

When you can, *read the Scriptures with other believers*. Join a Bible study group, or get together with some friends to read and discuss the Word. Part of the reason we want the Word to dwell richly in us is so that we may teach and encourage one another in it (Col. 3.16).

*Read the Word to learn something* every day. Wrestle with the Lord, like Jacob, until He blesses you with some specific insight or instruction that you can use that day.

Finally, *read to run* (Hab. 2.2) – to bring the living Word to life through your own words and deeds as you run the race set before you each day (Heb. 12.1, 2). Identify specific actions from your reading which you can implement as part of your daily walk with and work for the Lord.

#### *The starting point*

Reading the Word of God daily is the starting point for having the Word dwell within you richly. If you won't do this, you won't be able to gain the benefit God intends for you from His powerful, indwelling Word.

Make sure daily reading of the Word, and *right* reading of that Word, is an indispensable part of every day of your life.

#### *For reflection*

1. Using a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest rating, evaluate your own reading of Scripture according to each of the ten guidelines given in this lesson. Why did you choose that number?
2. Where do you most need to begin improving your reading of Scripture? What can you begin to do right away?
3. Why is it so important that reading the Word of God should be a *daily* discipline?

*Next step – Conversation, Transformation: Review each of the points made in this article about "right reading." Share them and your personal assessment with a Christian friend. Commit to praying for one another, that you might know the power of God's indwelling Word more fully and consistently.*



### 3 Meditate on the Word

*Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."* Exodus 3.3

#### *Keep looking*

The place to begin in letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly is in daily reading of all the Word of God. Job declared that the words of God's mouth were more important to him than his necessary food (Job 23.12). Since we can assume that Job ate daily, we may also safely assume that he spent daily time in God's Word, however much of it he may have possessed. Jeremiah also delighted to *feed* on the words of the Lord each day (Jer. 15.16). Peter counseled his readers to hunger for the Word like newborn babes, eager to be fed (1 Pet. 2.1-3). Anyone who has had children knows how much time they spend feeding. So should we feed daily on the Word of God.

Once we've begun to establish this discipline of reading the Word of God each day, we'll be ready to work a bit more on some of the ways of reading Scripture *right* which we mentioned. Among these, reading reflectively – or *meditating* on the Word – is surely an important discipline to master. As we meditate on Scripture, we slow down and look deep into the Word, so that all the ways of right reading can get traction.

The encounter between God and Moses can provide an outline for us to think about what meditating in God's Word requires. In this story from Exodus 3, Moses, looking upon the revelation of God, is drawn more deeply into communion with the Lord, where he discovers more of God's good and perfect will for his life. Let's take a closer look, and see what we can learn from this encounter about meditating in the Word of God.

#### *Turn aside and draw near*

First, we must be willing, like Moses, to turn aside from our normal occupations and preoccupations so that we can draw near and examine closely the Word of God (v. 3). This takes time, and we must be willing to make the time necessary for exploring the Word of God deeply.

As we are reading the Word, we may find that our mind is drawn to all the other things before us that day. We may still be reading, but our thoughts are focused more on work, chores, errands, and so forth. We will not be able to invest time in meditation unless we put these matters on the back burner and take up the task of drawing nearer and nearer to God in His Word.

We have to turn aside from our normal path and draw nearer to God in His Word. The time we take for this will be richly repaid once we resume our daily race.

#### *Engage in a dialog*

When Moses made that commitment to draw near, God saw it, and God responded (v. 4). He initiated a word with Moses that drew him more deeply into communion with God, and they began a dialog concerning God's plan for Israel and Moses' place in it.

If we are faithful in devoting the time and effort to turn aside and draw near to the Lord in His Word, we can be sure that He will see those gestures of faith and respond to us in powerful ways. Now we need to look closely at the Word, and listen carefully for any prompts or cues from the Spirit. We must be ready to engage in a dialog with God, in which we ask questions – all kinds of questions – and listen carefully as the Lord responds.

We'll want to introduce other Scriptures into the conversation, as we allow the Spirit to compare spiritual

### *Receive the Word*

things from one section of the Word with spiritual things from another (1 Cor. 2.12, 13). Pay attention to cross references indicated in your Bible. Or ask the Lord to bring other passages to mind, which might shed light on the one you're considering. We may even want to have something to write with, so that we can quickly jot down impressions and insights, or write out the questions we want to explore more fully.

#### *Focus on the large narrative and promises of God*

As we're meditating, it's a good idea to have before our minds the larger story of what the Bible is all about – God's covenant, and His redemptive work in Jesus Christ – and to keep in mind the precious and very great promises that God has made to us His people (Ex. 3.7-9). God did not speak personally to Moses about his own life until He had first rehearsed to him His larger plan to bring the blessings of redemption and the promises of life to His chosen people.

Our meditation may become too narrowly focused unless we are always remembering the overarching narrative of Scripture and the precious and very great promises whereby God brings us to partake of His own nature and presence (2 Pet. 1.4). You might even use these ideas as an outline for the questions you want to ask or the notes you take.

#### *Seek your place in that narrative*

Finally, listen carefully for the Lord to speak to you about your place in that narrative, which of the promises He is holding out to you, what He is calling you to do for this day, based on this particular part of His Word.

Let your mind, heart, and conscience become fully engaged with God's will, until you can embrace it gladly and eagerly, and go forth ready to serve the Lord. Think about the day of head – the people you'll seek, work you'll do, and places you'll go. Wait on the Lord to show you how His goodness can come to light through you, following the teaching of His Word (Ps. 27.13, 14).

Take the time to meditate, so that your reading of God's Word will plant it deeply in your soul, and bear lasting fruit in your everyday life.

#### *For reflection*

1. What's the difference between *reading* the Scriptures and *meditating* on the Scriptures?
2. Why do we need some of each in our daily time in God's Word?
3. How can you begin to incorporate more meditation on Scripture into your daily reading of the Word?

*Next steps – Transformation: How might you improve your daily meditation in God's Word? Ask a friend or prayer partner for advice. Try keeping a journal during your times of meditation, and see if this helps you focus more intently on God's word for you each day.*

## 4 Study the Word

*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*  
Ezra 7.10

### *Deeper still*

The word, “study”, is, for most of us I wager, a rather worn out term. Maybe even something that has completely lost its appeal.

*Study* is what we did when we were in school, and the mere mention of *study* brings to mind late nights poring over books, reviewing notes, and getting ready for an exam. Been there, done that.

The Hebrew word for *study* is more helpful. It means something like “to tread or frequent” or even “to follow” or “to pursue.” The image that comes to mind is more like a hunter, traipsing through the woods, or some guy with a metal detector walking through a newly plowed field, looking for Civil War memorabilia. There’s a lot of following leads, tracing and retracing one’s steps, watching, listening, and staying alert.

When Ezra prepared his heart to study the Law of God, we know that he wasn’t just looking for information to help him pass some test. And he wasn’t simply checking something off his daily To Do list. He wanted to learn how to *live*, and he intended to *teach others* how to live as well. Thus his *study* of God’s Word would have involved an active, lively, and highly curious pursuit of God’s will, and it would have been focused on improving every aspect of his soul and life.

And Ezra’s study would have taken a good deal of time and effort.

### *Approaches to Scripture study*

If we want to learn the Scriptures so that the living Word dwells in and lives through us, and so that we can help others live this way, we’ll need to commit to a course of study. Daily reading of the Word, coupled with regular meditation, will lay and reinforce a solid foundation for *studying* the Scriptures. We should not presume to embark on this course until those other two disciplines are firmly in place in our lives.

The *study* of Scripture requires more time and some new disciplines. God gives us the time we need to study His Word. Our duty is to devote enough of our time each week so that we can pursue discovering the will of God in His Word through more careful study.

We may approach the study of God’s Word from a variety of perspectives. We may want to trace some primary Biblical *theme* as it develops throughout the Scriptures – like, for example, the covenant and promises of God. Or we may want to pursue a better understanding of a *book* of the Bible, or perhaps a *section* (such as the Ten Commandments, the Psalms of Ascent, or the Sermon on the Mount), or even just a single *passage* of the Scriptures. We might do a *character* study, and compare what we can learn from the saints and scoundrels of Scripture. Or we may focus our study on a particular *genre* of the Word, such as poetry, prophecy, or historical narrative. Studying the Bible for how it can help us think through *contemporary issues or concerns* is yet another approach.

What all these types of study have in common is that they engage us with the Word of God at two levels simultaneously. The first is the level of our *focus* – a theme, book, doctrine, issue, character, and so forth. And the second is the larger, overarching *narrative* of Scripture and how the focus of our study fits into the grand scheme of the whole. We must not lose sight of the unfolding covenant of God, no matter the subject of focus of our study, but always seek to grow deeper into that covenant and its precious and very great promises, fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

*Studying the Word of God*

The key components of effective Bible study are four: persistent reading and review; comparison of Scripture; consultation with other authorities; statement and application. Let me briefly review each of these.

Good students of the Bible are not in a hurry. They are willing to read, meditate, mull, and otherwise pore over the focus of their studies again and again and again. They jot down thoughts, make outlines, create diagrams, and read and re-read texts to make sure they've covered the ground of their topic from every imaginable perspective. Imagine yourself persisting in your reading and review like someone with a metal detector, combing a beach or historic battlefield. Stay at it until you hear a "ping"!

At the same time, our study will find us looking for other Scriptures to shed light on our focus. A good study Bible can help here, as can a concordance, a Bible dictionary, and a good memory. Because the Spirit speaks throughout the Word, we would expect Him to return to the same ideas again and again, and we'll want to hear His views on our chosen focus from as many places in the Word as possible. Make note of Scriptures that have a bearing on your study, and plan to meditate on these at some point.

You'll want to see how others have thought about the topic of your study. Commentaries can help here, but keep in mind there are different kinds, and make sure you have chosen some by scholars writing from within the tradition of orthodox theology. You might also find some help on the Internet, if you know reliable teachers whose writings you can consult. Studying with a group of friends, to get their input, is also a good idea (Col. 3.16).

Finally, you need to state the conclusions of your study in your own words – an outline, a journal entry, or a summary you can talk through with others. And you should determine specific applications from your study that will aid your own growth in the Lord.

Studying the Scriptures is an important aspect of how we must receive the living Word and let it dwell richly within us. Make some room in your week for this important spiritual discipline.

*For reflection*

1. Are there aspects or topics of Scripture which you would like to study more closely? Jot down a few:
2. How can you see that regular reading and meditation will make studying the Scriptures easier and more fruitful?
3. What are some of the advantages of being part of a study group? What makes for a really good study group?

*Next steps - Preparation: Make a list of things you might like to study from the Word of God. Share your list with some friends, and see if any of them would like to join you in one or more of these investigations. Keep your list handy as you read your Bible daily, and jot down thoughts or references that seem to have a bearing on your areas of interest.*

## 5 Read to Run

*Then the LORD answered me and said:*

*“Write the vision*

*And make it plain on tablets,*

*That he may run who reads it.” Habakkuk 2.2*

*The purpose of Scripture*

The Bible has two related purposes as God’s Word.

First, it is the primary resource which the Spirit of God uses to transform us, day by day, into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). As this occurs, we do not lose our individual identities; rather the light of the indwelling Word of Christ is refracted through our unique personalities, experiences, and opportunities, such that, as Jesus increases in us, we become more the unique individuals *in Christ* we have been created to be.

Related to this is the second purpose: God has given us His Word to prepare us for lives of good works, works like Jesus did while He was here on earth, and like what He’s doing now as He reigns at the Father’s right hand (Eph. 2.10; 2 Tim. 3.15-17). It makes sense that as we read, meditate on, and study the living Word of God, it should begin to reshape our souls – mind, heart, and conscience – so that what comes out in our life is going to look increasingly like the image of Christ which is taking shape in our souls.

In our reading, meditation on, and study of the Scriptures, therefore, we always need to be paying attention to the specific ways God is instructing and equipping us to *live* the *living and powerful Word* in our everyday experience. How can we do this more effectively?

*A guidebook for the journey*

Scripture is like a guidebook for the journey of life. Imagine yourself on a journey in some new and exciting country. You’re traveling through interesting but unfamiliar terrain, but you have a reliable guidebook which knows everything about where you are and where you’re headed. As you consult your guidebook, your purpose is not just to understand what’s in it. You’re trying to discover *which way to go*, to *observe the most exciting places on your journey*, and to *get to your destination*.

Scripture is like that. Scripture is the Guidebook for life in the Kingdom of God. We read the Scriptures so that we can run the race God has set before us (Heb. 12.1, 2), taking in as much as we can of *promises* this journey holds out, and experiencing increasingly the *righteousness, peace, and joy of the Spirit* which awaits us at every point along the way.

This involves two things: a clear fix on where you’re headed, and the ability to discern every next step.

*A twofold focus*

To apply the Scriptures in meaningful and transforming ways – to *read to run* – we need to make sure we understand where we’re headed, what we’re supposed to become.

We are seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and we are being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ (Matt. 6.33; 2 Cor. 3.12-18). Is it clear to us what that means? Is your vision of the Kingdom clear and compelling? Do you love Jesus, even though you don’t see Him, so much that you long and hope, read, meditate, and study, so as to become more like Him every day? (1 Pet. 1.8, 9)

Nothing is more important in the life of faith than “seeing” Jesus, exalted in glory, and advancing His

Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. This is a work of faith (Eph. 1.15-23), by which, through searching the Scriptures, talking with others, and consulting other sources – such as books, hymns, works of art, and so forth – we are able to gather an increasingly clear sense of the beauty, majesty, goodness, power, glory, truth, and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And seeing Him, we train our *thoughts* to grow into His mind, our *heart* to increase in His love, and our *conscience* to approve every aspect of His will. We must always pursue reading, meditation, and study of Scripture, mindful of the fact that Jesus is the central theme of the Bible, and we should seek Him throughout the pages of God’s Word.

At the same time, we want to discover the good works of Kingdom living which, as we do them this day, will help us to make progress toward Christlikeness. We need to envision what the unfolding of Christ’s Kingdom will look like as we continue our journey in Him. How can righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, love for God and neighbor, and beauty, goodness, and truth increase through me today? We must keep in mind, as we are reading and meditating, the events and people we will be involved with each day. We should listen to the Word to instruct us in specific ways we might show Jesus to, and advance His Kingdom among, the people around us. How would God have us speak to them? What gesture or work of love can we perform? How can we improve our personal demeanor in every area of our lives, so that the glory of Christ can shine through us?

This is what it means to “read to run.” I can’t emphasize enough that the Word of God is given not simply to *inform* us but to *transform* us, from glory to glory, into the image of Jesus Christ. As you read the Bible each day, remember that you are preparing for the journey that is ahead of you. Let your Guidebook point the way and teach you what to expect. Read to run, and you’ll know the wisdom of God leading you on your journey, and the power of God carrying you throughout your day.

*For reflection*

1. Jot down as many places as you can think of in Scripture – outside the gospels – to which you could turn to improve your vision of Jesus and your understanding of His Kingdom:
2. Meditate on Hebrews 12.1, 2, Colossians 3.1-13, and Matthew 6.33. How do these passages reinforce the importance of focusing on Jesus and His Kingdom?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 5.15-17 and Psalm 90.12, 16, 17. Think about these passages as outlining the day ahead of you. How might this help you during your time of Bible reading to prepare to “read to run”?

*Next steps – Preparation: What does it mean for you to “read to run” today? Jot down some thoughts, then commit them to the Lord in prayer. At the end of the day, in prayer, review your “journey” for the day, and give thanks to the Lord for His grace and help.*

## 6 Share the Word

*My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness  
And Your salvation all the day,  
For I do not know their limits.* Psalm 71.15

### *Antidote to spiritual depression*

An old saw has it that “Impression without expression results in depression.” If you ever find yourself suffering from spiritual depression, where you just don’t feel like your walk with the Lord is going anywhere, you might want to take a look at the *impressions* which are guiding you each day, and the kinds of *expressions* those are yielding in your life.

Our focus in this series has been on how to increase the *impressions* God’s Word is making on our souls, redirecting our thinking, improving our affections, solidifying right values and priorities. We’ve seen that daily reading, prayerful meditation, diligent study, and seeking specific life applications are important disciplines for having the Word of God dwell in us richly. So we might want to make sure there is enough of each of these indispensable disciplines in our lives to allow the Word ample opportunity to make the transforming impressions we need on our souls.

As important as the *impressions* we receive, however, is the consistency with which we *express* what God is doing in our souls. Impression without expression won’t help us escape the spiritual doldrums that can keep us from soaring with Christ throughout the day. We need to make faith *expression* of what God is teaching us a part of our daily journey with the Lord.

### *Kinds of expression*

Expression is an intentional act. We must resolve to do it, like the psalmist: “My mouth *shall* tell...” Expression is not something you simply wait to have happen. It’s something you *do*. Something you *envision* yourself doing, and that you *plan* for each day.

We’re familiar with the image of the anguished poet, sitting silently before his computer, waiting for expression to begin, or the frustrated artist, waiting before her canvas for some inspiration to paint. Quaint and peculiar, to be sure; but that’s *not* the way expression occurs in the life of an artist. Artists are forever making notes, trying out ideas, creating sketches, and so forth. They know that the more they *force* themselves to express what’s going on in their heart and mind, the greater is the likelihood that some worthwhile and perhaps lasting form of *expression* will come to light.

That’s what we need to do more of if we’re going to have the living Word of God live not only *in* us, but *through* us as well.

Expression can begin in your time of reading and study. Make some notes. Keep a journal. Pray your reading back to the Lord, together with what you think He’s calling you to do with that reading. Such forms of expression can be both clarifying and confirming. They help us in thinking through what we’re learning, and they enable us to make some convictions about the next steps we need to take.

Then, plan for opportunities to express what you’re learning throughout the day. Will you see some other believers today? Be ready to share a word of encouragement from the Scriptures, and to ask them to do the same for you. Will you have an opportunity to talk with an unbeliever today? How can you engage a conversation with him, focusing on his concerns and needs, that might lead to your being able to share something from God’s Word?



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Moses prayed that God would help him to “number his days” – to make an advance accounting of how he would use his time – because this is the way of wisdom (Ps. 90.12). Thinking and planning like this can help wise expressions come to light in our lives as well.

*Write it down*

And don't neglect the many opportunities available each day for expressing what God is teaching you through the written word. A brief email to some friends, a blog at a website, or a note of encouragement and appreciation to a loved one – all these can be useful ways of expressing what God is teaching you in His Word, and of ministering His Word to others.

The Word of God is living, active, and life-changing. That's really good news. So let's not keep it to ourselves! Ask God to show you ways, every day, that you can *express* what He's teaching you from His Word, and you'll find that spiritual depression is about the last thing you'll have to worry about.

*For reflection*

1. Why do you suppose Christians don't talk to one another all that much about what they're learning from the Word of God?
2. How can talking with other Christians about what you're learning from Scripture help to prepare you for bearing witness to non-believers?
3. Suppose you had a plan to share something from Scripture with someone every day. Whose names would you include in that plan? How would you try to share with each one?

*Next steps – Demonstration: How will you express what God is teaching you today? With whom will you share the Word? Make a plan, commit it to the Lord in prayer, work it through. This is the way to “number your days” every day of your life.*



## 7 The Community of the Word

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.* Colossians 3.16, 17

### *Paul's vision for the church*

We cannot read the epistles of Paul without realizing he held a clear vision of the local church. He considered that Christ had raised and called him to lay out the blueprint for His Church-building agenda (cf. Matt. 16.18; Eph. 3.8-10, 4.11-16). Paul saw the church as a community in which the Word of God is firmly planted, has taken deep root, and is bearing fruit for the Kingdom of God (Rom. 14.17, 18).

Since we are all members of the Body of Christ, it is our duty and calling to contribute to this community of the Word of God. As the living Word of God dwells richly in us, we must contribute to the enrichment of our local church by bearing the fruit of the living Word with our fellow church members.

What forms should we expect that to take?

### *Teaching and admonishing*

First, Paul commands us to *express* to one another what God is *impressing* on our souls from His Word.

The words “teaching and admonishing” cover a wide range of activities, both formal teaching and informal conversations, simple exposition and earnest warnings, individual and corporate settings. Christian learning is *active* learning, and everyone has a role to play as student and teacher. We have a duty to one another, in encouraging one another for wisdom, and for love and good works (Heb. 10.24), to take an active part in the instruction and discipleship of those who are fellow members with us in the Body of Christ. We must insist that the educational opportunities in our church be structured to allow, and even insist on, discussion, interaction, accountability, planning, and prayer, under the oversight and direction of skilled teachers and shepherds.

The Lord has placed pastors and teachers in each congregation, and the greater burden of instruction falls on them (Jms. 3.1) But each member in whom the Word of Christ dwells richly must also take responsibility for teaching and admonishing others, so that together the Body of Christ can realize more of the unity of the Spirit and attain increasingly to the maturity of Christ (Eph. 4.3, 13-16).

### *Worship*

A second way the indwelling Word leads us to contribute to our local church is by our active and lively participation in the worship of God.

Worship is not a spectator sport. And worship is not about us – what we expect, enjoy, or want. God insists on being the *focus* of our worship, as well as our *worship leader*. We are worshiping God as He prescribes when we are *actively* adoring Him, attending to Him, and assisting our fellow worshipers to do the same. We should sing robustly the praises of the Lord, pray earnestly with thanksgiving and confession, and make sure we do not distract our fellow worshipers in any way from seeking the Lord. Paul says the fruit of the indwelling Word will be manifest as we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to the Lord, as we give Him heartfelt thanks together for all His abundant goodness, and as we submit to one another before Him (Eph. 5.18-21).

Such worship begins in our heart, where we daily respond to the Lord's kindness, and it continues as an ongoing celebration of the Lord whenever we are together with His people as the Body of Christ. Worship that does not draw us together into the very presence of Jesus Christ, and through Him, to the Father of

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glory, may be fun and exciting and something we want to do more and more, but it will be little more than worship of ourselves, and what we will and want (Col. 2.16-19; Ps. 50). Such worship will not contribute to letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly.

*Everything in Jesus' name*

Finally, the members of Christ's Body will represent Him to the watching world as they go out from their times of instruction and worship to live for Christ in every area of life.

Local churches should have a vision for how they can impact their communities for the Lord, to bring the beauty, joy, and presence of the Lord into every nook and cranny of their community (Ps. 48). Pastors and teachers must equip their members to receive the indwelling Word, and to let it live through them in lives of service, witness, and social and cultural engagement for the glory of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4.11, 12).

When Jesus came into a community, everything changed. People rushed to Him expectantly, wept at His good works, marveled at His teaching, and longed to be near and touch Him. This should be the same wherever His Body is living out the living Word together. A community of the Word of God will make a Kingdom impact on the larger community as it follows the example of Christ and the vision of Paul to turn the world upside down for Jesus Christ (Acts 17.1-9).

Each of us in whom the Word is beginning to dwell richly must make every effort to contribute to the health and growth of our local church, for it is as a community, where the Word of God dwells in all its richness, that the church becomes a true sign of and outpost for the Kingdom of God, spreading righteousness, peace, and joy throughout its community in the name and for the glory of Jesus Christ.

*For reflection*

1. What opportunities for teaching and admonishing are available for you? Are you making the most of them?
2. How would you evaluate your own active participation in worship? Do you see any areas of your worship where you might improve?
3. What do you think would be the hallmarks of a true community of the Word of God? In what way are you seeking to contribute to realizing this objective?

*Next steps – Transformation: How might you begin to make a more consistent contribution to your church becoming a community of the Word? Talk with a pastor or church leader about this question.*

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*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What does it mean to “receive the implanted Word”? What is your approach to doing this?
2. What are some things you can do to make sure the Word of Christ is dwelling richly in you?
3. Summarize the way you expect the Word of God to get from the pages of Scripture, through your soul and into your daily life.
4. How can you help your church become more a community in which the Word of Christ dwells richly?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you working to incorporate that lesson into your daily walk with and work for the Lord?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.