

Lesson Five

Engaging Our Hearts and Souls

Throughout this study, we have been focusing primarily on *understanding* the Bible, which is a huge step in hearing from and encountering God on the pages of His written Word. In this lesson, we will turn our attention to some practices that will help us to engage our hearts and souls as we seek to know and love the Lord more through a reading of His Word.

The Lord is always speaking. He delights to reveal Himself to us. He has given us His Holy Spirit as a Counselor and Guide as we read the Bible (and as we live out our days in other ways as well)! This lesson is not about "getting God to speak." Instead, this lesson focuses on positioning our hearts in such a way that we are ready to hear. And like everything else that is important in life, that takes some practice and some intentionality.

1. Before you go any further in your study today, take a moment to thank the Lord for His Holy Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and soul to recognize His voice and respond to His Word as you begin your Bible study today.
2. We talked about preparing our hearts and souls to encounter the Lord as we open His Word. Below you'll find a reminder of those steps. As you begin your Bible study time, take a moment to reflect on each one.
 - Pray first. Be honest about how you are doing. Are you distracted? Tired? Excited about something? Pour out your own heart before the Lord before you seek Him in His Word.
 - Set a place for Jesus. What do you need to do to remind yourself that Jesus is actually with you as You seek Him in His Word?
 - Pray specific prayers. Ask specific questions. What is one question where can ask the Lord for guidance? (ie: "How would You have me walk this out?")

Hearing from the Lord

Before we go further into the practices we discussed that can help train us to recognize God's voice, I want to give you a chance to reflect on God's faithfulness to speak.

3. Do you ever hesitate to seek to hear from God because you are afraid that He either won't speak or won't speak *to you*? What do you think holds you back from believing that He will?
4. Read through Psalm 27:8-14. What did David remind Himself of regarding the Lord's goodness and faithfulness?
5. Revisit James 4:8; John 10:3-4 and 29-20; and Luke 11:9-13. How do these verses together reassure you that God still speaks?

The way God chooses to speak through His Word are many and varied. But anything God says will always be in line with His character as it is revealed in the Bible. And everything He speaks outside of His written Word will always be in line with what is written *in* His Word. He will never contradict Himself or change His mind regarding what He has inspired in the Bible!

Knowing what the Bible says is one way to train our hearts to recognize God's voice. It is on these pages that He speaks most clearly.

Another important way that we safeguard our hearts as we learn to hear and recognize God's voice is to live in community with trusted believers in Christ. We can share what we sense God speaking and allow others to help us decide if it lines up with God's character and with what He has said in the Bible. It takes a measure of humility to allow others to evaluate with you what you sense God saying, but doing so will help to insure that we are walking in the ways that the Lord would have us walk.

6. Is there a time in your life when God has used something in the Bible to answer a specific question you had about your own life or a decision you were facing? Consider sharing this with the group to increase your faith and theirs!

7. Are there any passages that you routinely turn to when you are facing a specific circumstance? (ie: Psalm 37 when you are fearful.) As you begin or continue to become familiar with the Scriptures, make note when you come across a passage that would be beneficial to revisit as you face similar circumstances. I've included a page at the end of this lesson where you can build a reference guide for yourself.

8. How has the same passage of Scripture invited different applications at different times in your life? (ie: Passages about forgiveness might have different applications in different seasons.)

Journaling through the Scriptures

In the teaching this week, we discussed several different practices that help us to position our hearts as we reflect on God's Word and what He may be saying to us through the Bible. If you haven't listened to the teaching, please do. That is where I introduced and explained these practices in greater detail.

There are many different ways to pray through the Scriptures. One way that I have found helpful is to rewrite certain psalms, also journaling my own thoughts with God. This is a helpful way to interact with the Lord in His Word regarding our own lives and circumstances.

This is where asking specific questions can be very helpful. Remember, engaging our hearts is not just about getting what we want from God, it's about recognizing God in the places where we live and walk and work.

9. At the end of this lesson, I've included Psalm 37:1-9 for you to practice journaling with the Lord through His Word.
 - As you read it, consider where you are asking the Lord to move as the Psalmist did. What is your experience with trusting the Lord with the desires of your heart? Where do you need to see the Lord move on your behalf? How would the Lord have you wait? How does that wait feel to you? (Don't just "answer" these questions, engage with the Lord as you read and respond to Him in His Word.)

Meditating on Scripture

One of the formative practices that has helped me to position my heart to hear God's voice is an exercise that guides us in our meditation on (or consideration of) a specific passage of Scripture.

Remember that this practice is not to aid in our *understanding* of Scripture but is a practice where we actively engage our hearts and souls in our reflection on what the Lord is communicating to us through His Word. Sometimes He brings greater understanding through that, but we want to be careful that we don't take something that He intends to teach us *personally* and apply it universally to all people and in all circumstances.

For example, consider Mark 11:25:

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing."

You may meditate or reflect on that verse and sense that the Lord is inviting you to forgive your friend for something she said earlier in the week. He may also invite you to call that friend and address the issue directly. However, someone else may reflect on that verse and sense an invitation to forgive her brother without ever bringing his offense to his attention. The verse itself does not say whether the issue needs to be brought up, so both applications are in line with the Bible's teaching, and we need to be careful to let each other have the freedom to follow the Lord individually and uniquely as long as it does not violate the Bible's clear teaching.

10. As you conclude your time this week, use the steps we discussed in the teaching portion of this lesson to meditate on Ruth 2:10-12. The final page of this lesson includes another copy of the worksheet that we used, which will walk you through each step.

Wrap-Up

11. What would you want to share with your small group or a trusted friend about the ways that you have practiced engaging your heart/soul in Bible study this week?

12. What invitation did you sense from the Lord as you reflected on Ruth 2:10-12 (#10)? Consider sharing that with another in order to allow them to help you discern whether that invitation is in line with the Lord's will and ways as it is revealed throughout the Bible.

REFERENCE GUIDE

Topic	Passage(s)
Fear	Psalm 37, Psalm 56:3

Psalm 37:1-9

Of David.

Journaling:

¹ Do not be agitated by evildoers;
do not envy those who do wrong.

² For they wither quickly like grass
and wilt like tender green plants.

³ Trust in the Lord and do what is good;
dwell in the land and live securely.^[a]

⁴ Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you your heart's
desires.

⁵ Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act,

⁶ making your righteousness shine like
the dawn,
your justice like the noonday.

⁷ Be silent before the Lord and wait
expectantly for him;
do not be agitated by one who
prosperes in his way,
by the person who carries out evil
plans.

⁸ Refrain from anger and give up your
rage;
do not be agitated—it can only bring
harm.

⁹ For evildoers will be destroyed,
but those who put their hope in
the Lord
will inherit the land.

Scripture Meditation

1. Choose a passage of scripture (about 2-3 verses is usually best.) Take some time to carefully consider the words, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you through this verse. Listen to the verse once or read through it slowly.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

2. As you listen or read through the verse a second time, is there a word or phrase that stands out to you?

WORD OR PHRASE:

3. Ask Him for more amplification and insight. As you pray over this verse and wait on the Lord, does a picture, a memory, a feeling, an emotion, or some other impression come to you? Allow Him to lead this time and trust Him to bring clarity even if at first it doesn't make sense to you.

AMPLIFICATION
AND INSIGHT:

4. Is there some action the Lord is calling you to take or some situation to which this word applies? Is there something He is asking you to trust or believe? What is He inviting you to do or be in response to what He has shown?

INVITATION: