

Empower
Session 7

Essential
Factors for
Spiritual
Growth

Essential Factors for Spiritual Growth

We have come to a point now in our journey where I need to tell you that giving careful attention to your spiritual growth is the most important thing you can do in walking out the Full Life in Christ.

Faithfulness to the opportunities and the factors that promote spiritual growth are essential.

Illustration:

- Mr. Shepherd – “The Baron of Lononderry”
- His wife had passed away a few months earlier; he was not a Christian; he missed her so much that he showed up for worship every Sunday. Powerful man in the community. President of the bank in a nearby town; owned half the land in the county. Went to his house to talk to him about his relationship with Jesus. “Mr. Shepherd, have you ever given your heart to Jesus?” “Would you like to think about doing that?” Knelt by his sofa and invited Jesus into his heart.
- 80 year-old who had lived a lifetime, but came into the Kingdom as a spiritual baby (just as many of us did when we were children).

The stages of kingdom development are the same for us all:

- The Holy spirit invades our life as we receive Jesus on to the throne of our life
- The three bands are formed – repentant faith, water baptism, and the baptism with the Holy Spirit
- We are placed (immersed) into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit
- Now we are in a position to once again reign in life as God had originally intended for us to do

But we enter into the Kingdom as children who need to be cared for, who need nourishment and need to grow up.

It doesn't matter how old we are physically – 6, or 12, or a teenager, or 30, or 40, or even 80 years old. We don't become spiritually mature overnight.

Just because you are 20 years old when you accept Jesus, that doesn't mean you will be a 20 year-old spiritually. You will start out as a child spiritually, and you will have to grow into spiritual adulthood.

ESSENTIAL FACTORS IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH

We all enter the Kingdom of God as spiritual babies regardless of our physical ages. We must all grow, then, from the baby stage into full maturity in Jesus Christ.

Put it down! Each of us is either:

 Growing upward, or **Sliding** backward

“G-R-O-W-T-H” — is the name-of-the-game!

The Growing Christian is one who feeds and nourishes his Christian life by maintaining a constant communion with God through regular habits of public and private worship.

FACTORS NECESSARY FOR GROWTH (either physical or spiritual)

1. Proper Nourishment

Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation — I Peter 2:2(NIV)

2. Proper Exercise

Spend your time and energy in the exercise of keeping spiritually fit. Bodily exercise is all right, but spiritual exercise is much more important and is a tonic for all you do. So exercise yourself spiritually and practice being a better Christian, because that will help you not only now in this life, but in the next life too — I Timothy 4:7, 8

3. “T.L.C.” — (Tender Loving Care)

4. Proper Environment

When you draw close to God, God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and let your hearts be filled with God alone to make them pure and true to Him — James 4:8

I. RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF “SPIRITUAL APPETITE”

Appetite is the key to growth for it determines how much nourishment and fellowship we receive. A constant check on the spiritual appetite is vital to a growing Christian. Jesus said, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness (Christ-likeness), for they shall be filled.”

You can put this down in your notes! Each of us who have given ourselves to Christ will either be **GROWING** upward or **SLIDING** backward.

If you go out on your bicycle in the rainy season and come to a steep place on this muddy road, and you don't keep going forward up that hill, you're going to slip backwards and fall. In the same way, you must keep going forward in your Christian life, or your old sinful nature, and the activities that are going on in the world around you, and even your old friends, will start pulling you back into the world, away from fellowship with God.

In your notes it says, The Growing Christian is one who feeds and nourishes his Christian life by maintaining a constant communion with God through regular habits of public and private worship.

Underline the words "public" and "private". Public worship, where we come together as the Body of Christ is very important for our growth. But also private worship, where we get together with God in our own prayer closet and with the Scriptures is mighty important as well.

There are four factors necessary for growth, either physically or spiritually. The first factor is ...

1. Proper Nourishment

- "As newborn babes crave the pure spiritual milk of the Word ...", Peter wrote in his first letter.
- Mr. Shepherd – after he gave his life to Jesus, began to read his Bible everyday. Even at 80 years, he knew that unless he received nourishment, he wouldn't grow.
- There was a beautiful little baby born several years ago to one of the families in the church. But the baby didn't put on weight like she was supposed to and yet she seemed hungry all the time. The parents and the doctors were concerned. She was taken to the University Hospital where they discovered that she had a deformity in the roof of her mouth. When she was trying to receive nourishment from her mother, she wasn't able to suck sufficiently. The nourishment was there but she couldn't receive it. They did a small operation on the roof of her mouth and then she could receive nourishment. She began to grow and was soon normal size.
- So nourishment is essential. If anything keeps you away from receiving the spiritual food in God's word on a regular basis, you're not going to be a strong person spiritually.

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2. The second factor essential for growth is Proper Exercise.

- Babies need exercise ... they exercise their lungs! They wave their arms and legs. They attempt to stand up, pushing against your body. They exercise their eyesight, watching little things in their crib spin around in circles. Without exercise, they won't grow strong.
- Paul said to Timothy in I Timothy 4:7-8, "Spend your time and energy in the exercise of keeping spiritually fit. Bodily exercise is all right, but spiritual exercise is much more important and is a tonic for all that you do."
- Physical exercise is important and enjoyable, but St. Paul said that spiritual exercise is even more important and vital. But it takes discipline.
- Many in America who want to exercise go to a place where trainers put them on a program to repeat certain exercises daily. We need to repeat spiritual exercises daily in a disciplined manner.
- The Lord does not want any flabby, useless, unhealthy Christians. So we exercise with our Christian witness, as we endure hard things and face trials, and as we venture out to serve the Lord in many ways.

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3. The next thing necessary for spiritual growth is Tender Loving Care

- There was an experiment that took place in a big hospital where there were a number of orphan babies. They divided the babies into two groups. Babies in both group received the same amount of food and medicines when needed, and had their diapers changed regularly. But other than that, the first group had nothing else done to them. With the second group, however, the nurses would come and hold them, rock them, sing to them, and give them loving care. And then they watched the results. The babies who received loving care matured physically and emotionally far more rapidly than the children who just had their physical needs met.
- Tender loving care is to be the role of the church in bringing forth spiritual babies into maturity.
- The church is to be the greenhouse in which these babies will grow.
- It should be the older believer's role to surround these new believers with love, care, acceptance and encouragement.
- And the new believers must be responsible to seek out this care, and eagerly receive it when it's given.
- Full Life in Christ is extremely helpful in stimulating spiritual growth because new Christians not only receive the Word of God which is able to transform them, but they also can receive some of the tender loving care that they need through the small groups.

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4. The fourth factor necessary for growth is a Proper Environment

- “When you draw close to God, God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and let your hearts be filled with God alone to make them pure and true to Him.” James 4:8
- In many areas, there is a huge infant mortality rate – in some places up to 50% - because of the pollution and lack of hygiene. They don't have clean water or sewers. Therefore, there are germs and sickness all around. This may not be true in your country, but it's true in many third world countries.
- Some Christians try to grow up in the same filthy, polluted environment they lived in before. This is often fatal. Christian's need to switch environments – from the world's environment to the Kingdom's environment.
- We are to be “in the world” but we are not to be “of the world”
- Our first loyalty is to King Jesus and His Kingdom. It's not to be to our families, our to employers, or to our political leaders. If we are to grow, then our activities, our interests, our friends, our goals, and our desires, all need to change to those goals and desires and interests that God has established in His kingdom.

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If we're going to grow as Jesus would want us to, there are three things that we need to pay special attention to:

I. Recognize the Importance of our "Spiritual Appetite"

- Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness (Christ-likeness), for they shall be filled." If we're not hungry and thirsty, we won't be filled.
- If any condition develops which interferes with our being hungry or thirsty, we need to immediately give it our attention and deal with it.
- Just as there are "appetite quenchers" which will effect our physical appetite – things that keep us from being hungry or thirsty for proper nourishment – there are also "appetite quenchers" that affect our spiritual appetite. We need to be constantly watching out for these.

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1. **SICKNESS** will quench our appetite

- If we have fever or pain, we're not going to be hungry. So if our appetite goes, this is the first place to look.
- The sickness which befalls the Christian is "sin"
- I John 1:10 ... "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar."
- There will be times when sin will enter into our life and we need to be ready to deal with that. Unconfessed, unrepented of sin will produce a spiritual infection and will take away our appetite for the things of God.
- We need to deal with sin - confess it and apply the blood of Jesus to it - with repentance and receive forgiveness.
- "Either God's word will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from God's word."
- You won't be hungry as long as that sin isn't dealt with
- A repentant spirit that is soft and tender before the Lord, not rebelling and insistent on it's own way, is the key to spiritual growth

THERE ARE “APPETITE QUENCHES” for which we should be constantly watching:

1. **SICKNESS**

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar. — 1 John 1:10

“Either God’s Word will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from God’s Word.”

2. Love of MATERIAL POSSESSIONS and MONEY.

Those who desire to be rich fall into temptations and a snare...for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. —1 Timothy 6:9-10

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. —1 John 2:15.

3. **OVER TIRED**

— Sometimes “going to bed with the chickens” is the most “spiritual” thing we can do.

4. **FAMILY CONCERNS**

“He who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

- Matthew 10:37

II. WATCH THAT APPETITE:

If we begin to neglect daily meditation in God’s Word, to turn away from prayer and omit constantly seeking Christian fellowship, a danger signal should register in our spiritually renewed minds: something is wrong with our spiritual appetite! Immediately steps should be taken to remove the “quencher” no matter what it entails and to restore a keen appetite once again.

2. The next appetite quencher we want to look at is the **LOVE OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS** and **MONEY**

- “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” I Timothy 6:9-10

- In I John 2:15 we read, “Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him.”

- Being worldly isn’t necessarily just external things like how you dress or the activities in which you participate. Worldliness stems from where your heart’s desires lie. If your heart’s desire lies in the love of money, even though you might not be wealthy or have a lot of possessions, that love for money and the things it will buy can take away your spiritual appetite.

- The things of this world are like sweets. If we long after sweets and are constantly eating them, it will take away our appetite for curry and vegetables and mutton.

- We can’t grow on sweets. It’s the vegetables and the curry that will help us grow. So if we seek for the things of this world, we become falsely satisfied, we fill up with things that have no spiritual value at all, and soon our appetite for spiritual food is gone and we fall away.

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3. A third appetite quencher is **EXHAUSTION**

- There are many people who are tired all the time, walking around on the edge of being burned out.
- Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is to go to bed with the chickens (the chickens go to bed as soon as it starts getting dark.) Get a long night's sleep.
- You will not be able to receive spiritual nourishment if you are exhausted.
- Many Christians in the US are addicted to staying up late watching television, so they don't get enough sleep, and it ruins their spiritual life.
- If you find yourself nodding off when you are trying to read God's word or when you are praying, then "go to bed" early for a couple of days until you get properly rested.

4. The fourth appetite quencher we are going to call **FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

- In some cultures where families are not primarily Christian, young believers sometimes come under extreme pressure trying to please their family and to not upset traditions while at the same time trying to follow the Lord. These tensions can keep them from concentrating on the spiritual growth that God wants for them.
- If you are very angry about something and it's eating away at you, you aren't very hungry physically are you? Or if you are terribly worried about something, you often lose your appetite. Even if you eat, your body isn't going to receive that food very well when you are emotionally upset.
- In the same way, our spiritual appetite will also be affected if we are living with emotional upset
- We need to settle these types of things, learn how to deal with them, let the peace of God prevail, so we can be hungry once again for the things of God.

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II. Next, we must Watch That Appetite!

- We need to watch our appetite because it can slip away so easily without us even being aware of it. So if we discover that we are neglecting reading God's word, or if we're turning away from prayer, or we're not constantly seeking Christian fellowship, then a danger signal should register in our spiritually renewed mind.
- Be concerned ... don't just let this lack of appetite continue on and on
- Some Christians go months or years without any real spiritual appetite!
- We must do something about it
 - Find out what is causing it
 - Go seek out a "spiritual doctor" (your pastor or a mature spiritual leader) similar to the way you would visit a medical doctor
 - Get with friends ... ask for help
- Use whatever willpower and discipline that is necessary in order to say, "Look, I'm going to eat, I'm going to nourish myself, or else I'm going to fall by the wayside."
- We must give full attention to our Spiritual Appetite

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- A **HEALTHY** person is a **HUNGRY** person
- “Spiritual hunger is clear evidence of a healthy spiritual life. Every means should be sought to constantly increase and satisfy that hunger with the proper diet.”
- God made us for fellowship with Himself! God is robbed if we don’t spend time with Him. It is His great desire to have fellowship with us. We should never be content without a vital, daily fellowship with God.
- The normal Christian is hungry for:
 - God’s Word ... because it was all “given by the inspiration of God. It is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction.”
 - God’s People ... “Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, stir up good works in your midst.”
 - God Himself ... “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for you, O God.” “My soul thirst for God, the living God.”

A “**Healthy**” person is a “**Hungry**” person

Spiritual hunger is clear evidence of a healthy spiritual life. Every means available should be sought to constantly increase and satisfy that hunger with a proper diet.

God made us for fellowship. We should never be content without vital, daily fellowship. When the Christian is normal, he is hungry for:

God’s Word

The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us to do what is right — II Timothy 3:16

God’s People

In response to all He has done for us, let us out do each other in being helpful and kind to each other and in doing good. Let us not neglect our church duties and meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of His coming back again is drawing near. — Hebrews 10:24-25

God Himself

O God, my God, how I search for you! How I thirst for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. How I long to find you. -Psalms 63:1

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. — Psalms 42:1-2

The **QUALITY** of our Fellowship will depend upon
the **LEVEL** of our Growth and Maturity.

III. DEVELOP REGULAR HABITS OF FEEDING ON GOD’S WORD

Read the Bible every day - the Bible is more than a Holy Book. It is the voice of God and a living guide to the Christian. There must be a place made for a generous portion of this living Word every day. Matthew 4:4

- So the quality of our Fellowship with God will depend on the Level of our Growth and Maturity
 - God wants to be able to fellowship with us a mature people
 - Illustration of a newborn baby ... one's ability to fellowship with a baby is limited. We can hold them, rock them, feed them, help them to crawl or learn to walk. But when they can throw a ball and hold an intelligent conversation with us, that's when we can really begin to have meaningful fellowship with them. That's what God wants – not just babies to burp and toddlers to crawl and chase around. He wants mature sons and daughters with whom He can share the things of the Kingdom, with whom He can partner in the work of the Kingdom.
 - Illustration of Pastor Burt and the deformed son of a family in his church who was unable to grow because of birth defects. How heartbroken the parents were.
 - You won't cause your Heavenly Father to grieve like that, will you?
 - You'll be sons and daughters who grow up to bring praise and honor to the Lord, won't you?
 - If anything begins to take away your appetite, you'll deal with it right away, won't you?
 - You'll avoid spiritual malnutrition because you want to be robust and healthy, be full of all of the life Jesus wants to pour into you, won't you?
 - If that's the desire of your heart, lift your hand up and indicate to God that that's what you want to be – a strong son or daughter working and serving the Lord Jesus Christ! God will see it, and I want to pray for you now (pray).

FL.C. — EMPOWER: Adopting the Lifestyle 38

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Spiritual hunger is clear evidence of a healthy spiritual life. Every means available should be sought to constantly increase and satisfy that hunger with a proper diet.

God made us for fellowship. We should never be content without vital, daily fellowship. When the Christian is normal, he is hungry for:

God’s Word

The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us to do what is right — II Timothy 3:16

God’s People

In response to all He has done for us, let us out do each other in being helpful and kind to each other and in doing good. Let us not neglect our church duties and meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of His coming back again is drawing near. — Hebrews 10:24-25

God Himself

O God, my God, how I search for you! How I thirst for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. How I long to find you. -Psalms 63:1

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. — Psalms 42:1-2

The QUALITY of our Fellowship will depend upon

the LEVEL of our Growth and Maturity.

III. DEVELOP REGULAR HABITS OF FEEDING ON GOD’S WORD

Read the Bible every day - the Bible is more than a Holy Book. It is the voice of God and a living guide to the Christian. There must be a place made for a generous portion of this living Word every day. Matthew 4:4

III. Develop Regular Habits of Feeding on God's Word

- Next, we are going to spend some time learning a way by which you can really begin to get the spiritual nourishment that you need everyday.
- A regular habit of feeding on God's word each day is absolutely essential.
 - Illustration: Deacon Henry Paul ... relatively new Christian who was growing regularly. What's the secret of his growth ... "no bible, no breakfast!"
- As it says in your notes, we not only need to learn how to receive God's word, but we need to learn how to "eat it"; how to prepare and digest spiritual food from God's abundant supply.

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- Many Christians struggle in a weakened condition because they don't know how to prepare a good spiritual meal for themselves on a daily basis. They rely upon pastors and others to teach them.
 - In Africa, there is a condition brought on by malnutrition called "Kwashiokor". It especially strikes children. You've seen pictures of these children:
 - Hair falls out
 - Skin is reddish-brown
 - Joints ache
 - Tummies extended
 - Eyes glazed
 - Soon they just lay there with a blank stare
 - After a while, they can't even be force fed.
 - They have lost the capacity to eat. They will die.
 - Even if their life can be saved, they are affected permanently – stunted physically and mentally from this period of serious malnutrition.
 - Unfortunately, we have Christians in the same condition. They walk around in bodies, but they are just shells – zombies.
 - They have experienced a "spiritual" Kwashiokor!
 - Their spiritual eyes are glazed over
 - They may never catch on to what God has for them because they've gone such a long time spiritually malnourished.
- We have to learn how to prepare and receive food regularly. A large percentage of your spiritual growth will depend upon your ability to prepare, eat and assimilate spiritual food and do it regularly.
- We are going to share with you a way in which you can receive good meals from God's word and make it a permanent part of your life.
 - How many of you have been reading the Bible during the last week?
 - Where have you been reading?
 - What special message did you receive
 - Often, we read God's word, enjoy it, but then forget what it said to us just a short time after.

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- God wants to write the things that are in the Bible into our very hearts. We need to receive the spiritual food, eat it and digest it so that it becomes a part of us.
 - Jeremiah 15:16 ... “Your words were found and I ate them. And your words were the joy and the rejoicing of my heart.”
 - Psalm 19:10 ... “Your words are better than gold; even sweeter than the honey in the honeycomb.”
- We are going to urge you to begin a 60-Day experiment. We guarantee that if you are faithful in this experiment, you will learn a secret for growth in your spiritual life that you’ve never known before.
 - Warning: Some of you may adapt to this experiment easily. Other may have a more difficult time. But be encouraged. Practice makes perfect. Just keep trying.
 - Ask your mother and she will tell you that when you first started to eat food, you made a terrible mess. You grabbed the food in your fist, and you didn’t always get it in the right hole on your face! But after a while, you started hitting the right hole pretty regularly. I’ve watched some of you and now you don’t have any trouble at all. But you did have a hard time when you first started. The same is true of this experiment. It will become easier as you continue to do it.
- At this point, split your groups up into teams of two; have them sit down facing each other with their knees almost touching. You will now conduct a workshop leading them through the seven steps of the experiment one step at a time.

LEARN HOW TO “EAT” THE WORD OF GOD

Every Christian must learn to love God’s Word. He must know how to prepare and digest spiritual food from the abundant supply of the Word in the quiet of His own home each day.

“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight. — Jeremiah 15:16

God’s words are... *“More desirable than gold. They are sweeter than honey dripping from the honeycomb.” — Psalm 19:10*

A “60 DAY” FEEDING EXPERIMENT

Illustration — a baby weaned off the bottle or cup.

1. **WAITING** — Wait a moment in quiet to realize God’s presence and to ask Him to speak to your heart.
2. **READING** — Read the portion for today. Have a definite system and sequence to your reading. Do not use the “lucky dip” method.

PSALM 1 — as an example

- v. 1 Oh, the joys of those who do not follow evil men’s advice, who do not hang around with sinners, scoffing at the things of God.
- v. 2 But they delight in doing everything God wants them to, and day and night are always meditating on His laws and thinking about ways to follow Him more closely.
- v. 3 They are like trees along a river bank bearing luscious fruit each season without fail. Their leaves shall never wither, and all they do shall prosper.
- v. 4 But for sinners, what a different story! They blow away like chaff before the wind.
- v. 5 They are not safe on Judgment Day; they shall not stand among the godly.
- v. 6 For the Lord watches over all the plans and paths of godly men, but the paths of the godless lead to doom.

1. Waiting

- At home, you bless the meal before you eat it.
- As you come to eat God's word, prepare your hearts. Give thanks for His word. Ask Him to speak His Word to you. Ask for cleansing, concentration and illumination.
- We need the Holy Spirit to reveal God's word to us and apply it to our lives. We cannot lean on our own understanding
- Pray together (that God will speak His word into your life)

2. It important that we have a system in coming to the Word of God

- The bible was written in books, chapters, paragraphs and verses. Normally, we should read it that way, starting today where we left off yesterday.
- Some people flip their Bible open and put their finger on a verse, and that's what God is going to say to them today. Occasionally God may do that, but not usually.
- We may want to start with the gospel of Mark, then Luke, ... (follow the suggestion in the "Grow in the New Life" article you read previously)
- Don't make it too large a portion. Just a few paragraphs or 10 to 12 verses would be enough.
- In this experiment, we're not reading it as a literature book, but we are coming to the Bible to let God speak to us through it.
- In this step, as we read through today's portion for the first time, we try to get a "birds-eye view" of what it contains
- Let's experiment with Psalm 1
- One partner can read the first three verses out loud and the second partner will read the last three verses. Look up when you are finished.

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3. Step number 3 is Meditating

- Go over the portion that we just read several time
- It's like a cow who chews it's cud. A cow eats, eats, eats. Then it lays down and burps it out of one stomach and chews it again. It chews it and chews it and chews it until it's got all the good value out of it. That's what meditating is like.
- Work it through until we can distill out of it a message that God has for our heart today.
- This approach is different than studying the Word for it's content or for the un-locking all of it's various meanings. In this experiment, we are listening for God to speak personally to our own heart and life through His word.
- Sometimes God will speak the actual words that are there. Other times, God will speak to us through thoughts which He brings to us as we meditate.
- Illustration: Pastor Joe and parking meters ... Romans 13 ... "God has put the government in place and we need to be obedient to them." God spoke to Joe about using parking meters.
- What you need to receive for the day will not always jump out at you, but something will begin to get your attention.

Intructions for the next step in the workshop:

- Identify one thought which seems likely to be something you can receive from God out of Psalm 1. You may recognize two or three good messages, but only select one of them (the best).
- Then, decide which one of the options listed in your notes comes closest to being what the Lord is speaking to you. Is it a promise to claim, a blessing to enjoy, a command to obey, a sin to avoid, or a new understanding to claim. Check one of those.
- So now, begin to meditate on Psalm 1 and decide what it is that God may want to say to your life. Share the thought with your partner

3.	MEDITATING	—	Read and reread until one thought is impressed upon your heart as a message that you can receive from the Lord that speaks to your heart today. Such meditation, under the control of the Holy Spirit, rarely fails to yield some message to the soul.
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4.	RECORDING	—	Close your Bible, then write down the message from God in your own words in a notebook or on a card which you carry with you. (Write your message from Psalm 1 here)
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Is this thought: (Please select only one)

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| — A promise to claim | — A sin to avoid |
| — A blessing to enjoy | — A new understanding to claim |
| — A command to obey | |

5.	PRAYING	—	Pray the message back to God. Talk to Him about it until you feel that your will has been adjusted to all that the Holy Spirit has newly revealed.
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6.	PLANNING	—	Plan how you will begin to build this message from God into your life in a practical way. Ask the Lord to show you how you are to live it out. How should this truth influence your thoughts, words, and actions during the day? Decide upon at least one specific, definite step you can take immediately today or tomorrow.
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(Write your plan here)

7. SHARING — Share this message of the day with someone else during the day.

4. The fourth step is Recording the message from God

- Cover Psalm 1 up in your manual. Don't look at it as you do step #4.
- What has God impressed upon you as you have been meditating?
- Write that message down in your own words – don't quote from the passage. Use only 1 sentence, 2 at the very most – no long paragraphs.
- Have one or two volunteer to share what God is speaking to them out of this passage.

5. Praying – Pray the message back to God.

- Talk with the Lord about the message you have received. He wants you to communicate with Him about it.
- Allow God to adjust your will to accept His message to you.
- Ask Him for help living out His word to you, to apply it to your life.
- Thank Him for speaking to you.

3. MEDITATING — Read and reread until one thought is impressed upon your heart as a message that you can receive from the Lord that speaks to your heart today. Such meditation, under the control of the Holy Spirit, rarely fails to yield some message to the soul.

4. RECORDING — Close your Bible, then write down the message from God in your own words in a notebook or on a card which you carry with you. (Write your message from Psalm 1 here)

Is this thought: (Please select only one)

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| — A promise to claim | — A sin to avoid |
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6. PLANNING — Plan how you will begin to build this message from God into your life in a practical way. Ask the Lord to show you how you are to live it out. How should this truth influence your thoughts, words, and actions during the day?
Decide upon at least one specific, definite step you can take immediately today or tomorrow.

(Write your plan here)

7. SHARING — Share this message of the day with someone else during the day.

6. Step six is Planning how you will build this message from God into your life in a practical way. How will this truth influence your actions?

- Most of the time when we confront spiritual truth, we are too general and not specific enough.
- Try to develop a very specific response to the message you have received from God. Not something everybody can be doing, but something I am going to do.
- It should not be “plural” (e.g., “we, everybody”), but it should be “singular” (e.g., “I am going to do this, ...”)
- It is not something for the future, but something for today. It’s a positive step I can take within 24 hours.
- If it’s a command to obey or a sin to avoid, it may be easier to identify a plan of action.
- If it’s a promise to receive or a blessing to enjoy, then it may be more difficult to find a practical way to build it into your life ... but you could at least plan to thank God for it three times during the day or plan to share it with several others.
- Sometimes God may give you a project to start working on
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to build this into your life today. Your partner may be able to help you with suggestions.

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4. RECORDING — Close your Bible, then write down the message from God in your own words in a notebook or on a card which you carry with you. (Write your message from Psalm 1 here)

Is this thought:

(Please select only one)

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| — A promise to claim | — A sin to avoid |
| — A blessing to enjoy | — A new understanding to claim |
| — A command to obey | |

5. PRAYING — Pray the message back to God. Talk to Him about it until you feel that your will has been adjusted to all that the Holy Spirit has newly revealed.

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Decide upon at least one specific, definite step you can take immediately today or tomorrow.

(Write your plan here)

7. SHARING — Share this message of the day with someone else during the day.

7. The 7th step is Sharing. This is like the ice cream at the end of the meal.

Find someone with whom to share:

- Your group leader, another group member, a family member, others who cross your path.
- This is one of the greatest ways you can witness. In your normal conversation with people, you share with them what God spoke to you today. They start to think about God speaking to you and about the message that you shared with them.
- Scientist tell us that if we repeat a new thought three times in our own words, then it becomes part of you
 - You wrote it down
 - You prayed it back to God
 - You shared it with someone else
- Now it's yours! 1-2-3 ... so don't neglect sharing what God has given to you.

If you will do this for 60 days, it will change your life and the Word of God will become a living Word, working within you. You will have a new understanding and wisdom from God and a good start on a life-long discipline which will enrich your spiritual journey immensely.

Pray.

F.L.C. — EMPOWER: Adopting the Lifestyle 40

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(Write your plan here)

7. SHARING — Share this message of the day with someone else during the day.

1. What are your reactions to this statement: “One opportunity for worship, study and fellowship a week is not enough, just as one meal a week is not sufficient?”

2. What is most likely to “spoil” your appetite for spiritual food?

3. What have you found to be the best time for you to set aside a daily, personal appointment with the Lord?

4. Carefully apply the seven steps in “feeding” on the Word of God to First John 1:1-10.

Write in your own words the thought God gives you. Only use one or two sentences.

– Which type of a word do you think it is (Select only “one” of the following)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| _____ A promise you can claim | _____ A sin to avoid |
| _____ A blessing to enjoy | _____ A new understanding to grasp |
| _____ A command to obey | |

– What definite, specific, and practical step can you take, today or tomorrow, so that this truth can begin to influence your thoughts, words and actions?

– With whom did you share it? What happened?

THE SIMPLICITY OF PRAYER

(an excerpt from “Dare To Live Now” by Bruce Larson)

Jesus says quite simply, “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it”. How many praying people really believe this? All too many pray with the same faith one has in a slot machine, “It won’t cost too much, and I might even hit the jackpot.”

I am convinced that most of us really want to know how to pray. We want to discover the power of God, which is rightfully ours in Jesus Christ.

Prayer is conversation between two persons. Now conversation in itself is neither good nor bad. We all know what it is like to talk to The Gossip, The Bore, or the Crank. Such conversation is not helpful and at times is really harmful. Then there is the conversation that you have with the man who comes to read your water meter, which is neither helpful nor harmful, but polite routine. Conversation is what you make it. It can be irrelevant, or crucial, as in a midnight phone call to the doctor. It can be dull or stimulating. It can be necessary and business-like or it can lead to deep relationships in friendship or even marriage.

In the same way, prayer can be as meaningless as much of our conversation, or it can be conversation between you and God that is vital, exciting and transforming.

Conversation always implies a relationship between two or more persons. The quality of the conversation depends on the kind of relationship that exists between the two. This can be as impersonal as that between you and the voice that answers the phone when you dial “0,” or it can be as intimate as the relationship between a husband and wife.

As Christians, our prayers should be intimate conversations with God, because through Jesus Christ we become children and God becomes a loving father. And yet, how many sincere people wake up every morning, meet God at the breakfast table, and say some little jingle that rhymes to thank Him for the food. If you spoke that way to your husband or wife every morning, it would be grounds for divorce. It would be an insult to speak that way to an intelligent person.

Yet God, though He is a Spirit, is a Person. Why talk to Him as though He were a statue or a simpleminded child? This is why Jesus warns us, “Do not use vain repetitions (or empty phrases) as the heathen do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words.” You deny that God is your Father when you talk to Him only in memorized prayers or little sing-song jingles. A child’s first words to his earthly parents are not a sing-song jingle, but a meaningful word or two conveying an honest request. Why should this not apply when speaking to one’s heavenly Parent? When a child is old enough to be taught to pray, he is old enough to learn that prayer is merely conversation with a heavenly Father.

What does Jesus mean when He says, “Whatever you ask in my name I will do it..”? He does not mean to pray using His name as a sign-off at the end of a prayer, but rather to pray in His name by experiencing Him as Lord and Saviour and through Him to experience God as Father. Believing Him is to enter into a new relationship with Him Person-to-person and to grow daily in this relationship.

The most important single factor in effective prayer is that the person praying be in the right relationship with God. How does one enter this right relationship? I can put it quite simply in three steps.

- (1) Take an honest look at yourself. Admit that no matter how hard you try, you never do become the person you know God wants you to be.
- (2) Give up the hopeless job of trying to remake your life. Believe that God came into the world in Jesus Christ just to help you become the person you ought to be and, deep down in your heart, would really like to be. In Jesus we not only see God's love for us, but in the living Christ we experience the power to change into what God is making available to us now.
- (3) Put yourself completely in God's hands. Surrender to Him not only your problems but also your most cherished plans for the future. Don't hold back a thing. Believe that by seeking first His Kingdom, all that you really need shall be given to you.

GUIDEPOSTS FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER

Once you are in the right relationship with God, the following guideposts will prove helpful in making your prayer life more effective:

WITH WHOM SHOULD I PRAY? Part of your prayer life should include prayer alone with God. Jesus said, "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret." Part of your prayer life should be with others. Jesus said, "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst with them." Pray as a family. How else will your children learn to pray?

WHEN SHOULD I PRAY? Pray in the morning. Give God your day and your troubles and put yourself at His disposal for service. Pray in the evening. Take an inventory of your day and then ask forgiveness where you failed and thank Him where He gave you power to overcome. Pray all day long—while working or walking or talking with others. Learn to pray short sentences all day long that ask for help or give thanks. Let God know that you know that He is there.

IN WHAT POSITION SHOULD I PRAY? Many people like to pray on their knees in the morning and at night. It reminds them with whom they are talking when they are sleepy and their mind may wander. Others prefer to sit or stand; some even walk as an aid to concentration while praying. There is nothing magical about the position. Let the position be what is natural to you; whatever helps you most to make a vital contact with God.* The main thing is that you pray. The position is not important. I have one friend who talks with God while driving to work in the morning. He imagines that God is sitting on the seat next to him and they talk about plans for the day.

LISTEN WHEN YOU PRAY. At least half of good conversation ought to be listening. Most of us ask God for advice and guidance and then never listen for an answer. Spend half of your prayer time in quiet listening. Learn to expect answers. Believe that God really wants to talk to you.

* revised by Pastor Atkinson

RESPOND IMMEDIATELY TO GUIDANCE. Respond immediately to whatever guidance God gives you in prayer. Until you walk in the light of what you have, you will never get more light. God's guidance is like the light on a miner's hat which throws a beam six feet ahead. Unless you walk those six feet, you will never see more of the path before you. So God's guidance is step by step.

WHEN PRAYING FOR HEALING. When you are praying for someone who is sick, know that God does not send sickness. Believe that God wants to heal the person for whom you are praying. Assume this when you pray! Don't keep saying, "If it be Your will," in your prayers. But pray believing that God loves that person more than you do and wants to make him well.

BE POSITIVE WHEN YOU PRAY. Be positive when you pray, especially when praying for someone who is sick. Have a picture in your mind of that person already made well and whole and ask God to accomplish just that. This is where faith comes in. Faith is not a negative attitude where you cry out to God to prevent the worst from happening (and hence carry a picture of that person at his worst in your mind while you pray). Rather, faith is believing that God will heal and has already healed through the presence and power of Christ, even while you pray.

PRAY BELIEVING. Jesus says, "therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you will receive it and you will." This is what faith is, it is belief in the love and power of God to act. Jesus says in another place, "Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith."

RELAX. Relax, both physically and spiritually, when you pray. One man says, "Don't pray hard. Pray easy. Prayer doesn't do it – God does it." Relaxed prayer takes faith. Faith is demonstrated by our trust. Our trust shows in our relaxation. A good technique to follow is to pray with your palms open and turned up, not with your fingers clenched together. Lift people and situations and yourself to God for help on your open palms.

SURRENDER. Surrender when you pray. Don't merely ask God for help. Give situations and people to God and trust Him. This underlies all prayer and is the most important single guidepost to remember. It is not enough to believe that God loves us and can help us. We must so trust Him that we let go of things and give them to Him.

Believe these three simple facts when you pray and you can expect miracles:

- (1) Believe that Christ loves you even more than you love yourself. The Cross is proof of this. (Read John 15:13)
- (2) Believe that all power is His, physically as well as spiritually. (Read Matthew 28:18)
- (3) Believe that He is right there with you when you pray. (Read Matthew 28:20)

Build your prayers on these facts, and then your Lord says to you, "Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it."

FULL LIFE IN CHRIST, Group Facilitator Suggestions
EMPOWER: Adopting the Lifestyle, Session 7

FIRST

Discuss Question Sheet #6

Let the group share some of their thoughts from meditating on the first portion of last week's question sheet.

THEN

1. Encourage each member to share both positive and negative experiences in trying to establish and maintain their own personal quiet times with the Lord.
2. How would you rate your quiet time experiences in terms of their being regular and effective? Would you rate them as being excellent, good, poor or bad?
3. What "appetite quenchers" do you need most to watch out for in your life? (follow up with further discussion of the teaching given in this session).

NOW

Go around the circle and let each one share what the Lord was saying to them from the passage used during the practice session and how they hope to build this into their life during the next few days.

FINALLY

See if any in the group have questions which grow out of the practice session on "eating" God's Word. Try to encourage the group to give this procedure a good try. Point out that this week's question sheet includes another practice passage which is from "First John," not St. John.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT TIME

1. Complete the worksheet for session 7.
2. Read the printed pamphlet "The Simplicity of Prayer."