

**Getting Fit For The Journey With The Proper Diet –  
Reading and Responding to the Word of God!  
Matthew 4:4**

**Intro:** Last week we found that in order for us to strengthen our spiritual person thereby enabling the Holy Spirit to transform us into the image of God's Son that we had to have a balanced diet of God's Word. The first course of that healthy Spiritual diet is the Spiritual Discipline of **Hearing and Heeding** the Word of God and its importance in putting ourselves under the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

Today we are going to look at the second course of a Healthy Spiritual diet that is **Reading and Responding to the Word of God**. Less you think that a message about reading God's Word is not important to real Christians listen to these facts:

According to a 1991 *USA Today* poll 11% of all Americans read the Bible every day. More than half read it less than once a month or never read it. As Christians we may try to make ourselves feel better by saying that the poll includes all Americans not just Christians. Don't rush to that conclusion however, because the numbers among Christians are not that encouraging.

According to Barna in 2006 47% of professing Born Again Christians read their Bible once a week. An earlier Barna poll revealed that when Born Again Christians were pressed regarding their Bible Reading habits the numbers were even more disturbing. Only 18% - less than 2 of every 10 – read the Bible every day. Even more disturbing, 23% - almost 1 in 4 professing, Born Again Christians – say they never read the Word of God.

Consider these facts in light of 1 Timothy 4:7 which says, “...**exercise [discipline] thy self rather unto godliness.**” How on earth can we ever expect to be transformed if we never read our Bible?

7 Times in the Gospels Jesus warns us of the importance of reading the Word when he says “**Have you not read...?**” It was His assumption that godly people; those who claimed to be followers of God, would read God's Word. It can be further argued that when Jesus said these words He was not only expecting godly people to have read God's Word but that they had a familiarity with the entire Word of God.

When Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness after His baptism Satan the tempter came to Him trying to tempt Jesus into sin. The very first ploy Satan tried on Jesus was for Jesus to use His Divine powers to change the stones into bread. Satan did this knowing that Jesus was likely hungry. Jesus had the right response and His response is our anchor verse for today because it highlights the significance of God's Word as being an important part of a balanced and healthy Spiritual Diet.

**[Read Matthew 4:1-4\pray\dismiss Jr. Church]**

In the summer of 1976 I received orders to move to Germany...Received love letters from Sally...

You are taking a class at the university. Your professor gives you a sheet of paper with written instructions for your next assignment. Do you lay it aside and forget to read it? Or do you give it top priority (your best attention and effort)?

God, your Father in Heaven, loves you dearly and has written a letter to you: the Bible. Are you reading it? Your God has given written instructions to you in the Bible. Do you give the Bible top priority?

Since “**All scripture is given by inspiration of God [literally God Breathed], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness**” (2 Tim. 3:16), does it not stand to reason that we should faithfully read it?

Rev 1:3 tells us ***“Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”*** God promises that those who read and respond to His Word will be blessed. But only those who discipline themselves do have a Spiritual diet of God’s Word will receive those blessings.

Since Godliness, being conformed into the image of His Son (Rom 8:29), is our goal, the developing this discipline must be a priority. The most critical of all the Spiritual Disciplines that we will discuss this year is a healthy diet of God’s Word. A 1980 survey by *Christianity Today* and the Gallup Poll supported this when it concluded that no factor is more influential in shaping a person’s moral and social behavior than regular Bible reading. If you want to be transformed, if you want to become more like Christ, then, as Paul would tell Timothy, ***“...exercise [discipline] thy self...”*** to read the Bible. The Bible itself gives us the instructions for reading:

1. First the Bible Tells us what are the Spiritual blessings of reading are

A. General Benefits

- 1) Ps 119:105 ***“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”***
- 2) Pr 2:6 ***“For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding”***
- 3) Ro 15:4 ***“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”***

B. Specific Benefits

- 1) To keep us from Sin - Ps 119:9-11 ***“Wherewithal [by what means] shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word... Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee***
- 2) To make us prosper and successful - Joshua 1:7-8 ***“Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, ... turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest... thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success...”***
- 3) To overcome fear – Joshua 1:9 ***“be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest”***
- 4) To give us the grace and peace needed to face each day - 2 Pe 1:2 ***“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, ”***
- 5) To have access to God’s divine nature – 2 Pet 1:3-4 ***“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness...through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust”***

C. The Most important reason of all...To know that God loves us.

- 1) In Jn 14:21-23 Jesus says ***“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.***
- 2) He is then asked how will he manifest himself and he answer, ***“If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him”***

2. Next, the Bible gives us a hint as to when we should read our Bible?

A. As part of our diet then it tells us how often we should read...

- 1) Matt 4:4 ***“... It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”***
- 2) In Acts 17:11 Luke tells us that the Berean Christians, ***“... were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”***
- 3) 1 Pet 2:2 ***“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby”***

B. As part of our diet it tells us when we should read it...

- 1) Ex 23:19a teaches us that God desires, ***“The first of the firstfruits...”***
- 2) Ps 143:8 ***“Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.”***

3. Finally, it tells How we should read our Bible
- A. We should look to God's Word like the Psalmist did...Ps 42:1-2 ***"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"***
  - B. As David did - Ps 63:1,7-8 ***"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is"*** Verses 7-8 ***"Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me."***
  - C. We should read our Bible as if it were a dialog with God
  - D. We should read our Bible in a systematic way...
    - 1) The Bible was written in coherent units:
      - (a) Each Book was written by God to fit together with the rest of His word
      - (b) Jumping around the Bible tends to be more of a smorgasbord approach
      - (c) Regardless of which book you are reading read it from beginning to end
        - (1) Being where you left of the day before
        - (2) If you read twice per day then you can read one book in the morning and another in the evening (OT in AM – NT PM)
      - (d) If you are deciding to read your Bible daily for the very first time then I suggest you follow this plan:
        - (1) Read the Book of John – He presents Jesus as the Lamb of God or Savior
        - (2) Then begin in Matthew and read the 4 gospels, to include reading John a 2<sup>nd</sup> time
        - (3) Matthew – He presents Jesus as the King
        - (4) Mark – He presents Jesus as a Servant
        - (5) Luke – He presents Jesus as the Son of Man
        - (6) Once you have read the 4 gospels through (John 2 x) then begin again in Matthew and read the entire NT
      - (e) When you finish this you will find that you will have a sound understanding of just who Jesus is both from the gospel writers as well as Paul, Peter, & James' understanding of Him.

**Conclusion:** Some of you are sitting there thinking, "Pastor, I would love to read my Bible but there just isn't enough time in my day."

If this is you consider these facts that average American as about 19 hrs per week of leisure time and of this time TV watching is the second highest leisure activity after reading. The average 30 minute TV show runs about 20 min with 10 min of commercials.

If you were to purchase the Bible on Tape or CD you would find that you can listen to the entire Bible in about 71.5 hours or in 4290 minutes. Therefore if you read your Bible about 15 minutes per day you can read the entire Bible in one year. What dost all this mean? If you were to turn off the TV during all the commercials in two 30 min TV shows per day and read your Bible you could read the entire thing in one year. Now I wouldn't suggest that you read the Bible during TV commercials because you would get little out of it. But I am sure you can find 15 minuets each day to read your Bible.

Therefore my challenge for you today is to take the 15/365 challenge. The 15/365 challenge is this: you agree to spend 15 minutes each day in Bible reading. If you have the courage to take the challenge then when the invitation is given come forward and take one of these challenge cards, fill it out and drop it in the offering plate at the door as you leave. As with our 2,500 challenge given last September there will be an accountability sheet in the bulletin beginning next week where you will be asked to indicate how many minutes you actually read your Bible.