



## Overview

Our purpose in putting together this guide is to assist you in your walk and relationship with Jesus. We encourage you to:

- Listen to each message in this series and take notes on what you are learning
- Participate in the small group discussion with questions that help you “unpack” what you have learned from the weekly message and help you to apply what you are discovering
- Take advantage of the daily scriptures provided and sentences prayers that can serve as a springboard for your own conversations with God.

James 1:22 tells us not just to be “hearers of the Word” but to also be “doers of the Word.” Our hope is that we all would grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ by listening, discussing, learning, and applying the scriptures to our lives. We want to partner with you, others, and God as we seek to grow closer to him.

## How To Have Meaningful Time With God

Reserving time each day to spend alone with God is a helpful spiritual discipline that can help you grow in your relationship with Jesus. But what does such a time look like? What should you do? Consider these four suggestions for spending Time with God:

- Start with the proper attitudes
- Select a specific time
- Choose a special place
- Follow a simple plan

## Start With the Proper Attitude

In God’s eyes, *why* you do something is far more important than *what* you do. On one occasion, God told Samuel, “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”(1 Samuel 16:7, NIV). It is quite possible to do the right thing but with the wrong attitude. So when you meet with God, cultivate these attitudes:

- **Expectancy** - Come before God with anticipation and eagerness. Expect to have a good time of fellowship with him and receive a blessing from your time together. That was what David expected when he wrote, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you" (Psalm 63:1, NIV).
- **Alertness** - The best preparation for spending Time with God begins the night before. Make sure you get adequate sleep so that you will be alert in the morning as you meet with your heavenly father.
- **Willingness to obey** - This attitude is crucial: you don't come to your Time with God to choose what you will do or not do, but with the purpose of doing anything and everything that God wants you to do. Jesus said, "If anyone chooses to do God's will he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (John 7:17, NIV). So come to meet the Lord having already chosen to do his will no matter what.

### Select A Specific Time

The specific time has to do with when you should have your Time with God and how long it should be. The general rule is this: The best time is when you are at your best! Give God the best part of your day - when you are the freshest and most alert. Remember, too, that your best time may be different from someone else's.

For many, however, early in the morning seems to be a good time. It was Jesus' own practice to rise early to pray and meet with the Father: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35, NIV).

Whatever time you set, be consistent. Schedule it on your calendar. Make an appointment with God as you would with anyone else - and then honor that time.

- Don't feel the pressure to go for a two-hour marathon in the beginning
- Begin with five to fifteen minutes and let it grow from there - and resist the urge to watch the clock
- Focus on the quality of your time, not the quantity

### Choose A Special Place

The location where you spend your Time with God is important. The Bible indicates that Abraham had a regular place where he met with God (Genesis 19:27). Jesus had a custom of praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him" (Luke 22:39, NIV).

Your place ought to be a secluded place. This is a place where you can be alone and where you will not be disturbed or interrupted. In today's noisy culture, this may take some ingenuity, but it is necessary. It ought to be a place ...

- where you can pray aloud without disturbing others
- where you have good lighting for reading (a desk, perhaps)

- where you are comfortable
- that is special to you

### **Follow A Simple Plan**

Someone has said, “If you aim at nothing, you are sure to hit it!” To have a meaningful Time with God, you will need a plan or some kind of general outline to follow. The main rule is this: keep your plan simple.

### **Conclusion**

If you miss a day from time-to-time, don’t go on a guilt trip. The goal is not to be legalistic with your Time with God; it is about developing a relationship with him. Just don’t give up. If you miss a meal, it does not mean that you should give up eating because you’re inconsistent. You simply eat a little more at the next meal and go on from there. This same principle is true with your Time with God.

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### **How to Read The Bible**

Can you read the Bible like other literature? Not exactly. The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books that were written over a long period of time. They tell the grand story of how God is working to set things right in our broken world. But these books were written in a different time and culture than ours, and even in different languages. That means you will need to keep some important things in mind as you read.

The key to reading the Bible is to remember two questions: What did it mean then? How does it apply now? So, the first step for reading and understanding a specific passage in the Bible is to discover what the original author was saying to the intended audience. Here are some helpful questions to determine what a passage originally meant:

- ***What kind of literature is being used?*** Is it historical story? Law? Psalm (song)? Letter? Wisdom saying? Parable? Prophetic message? Answering these questions will help you interpret the passage accurately.
- ***Where are you reading in the story?*** When did this event take place? Where did these people live? What kind of unique customs did they practice? What was happening around them? Understanding the historical and cultural setting is essential for discovering the original meaning of a passage.
- ***How does this passage fit into the message of other passages around it?*** It is critical to read the Bible in context. What do the passages before and after say, and what is the general purpose of the book in which this passage is included? As with any story, if you pull isolated sayings out of context, you may change the meaning entirely.

As you move from understanding what a passage meant in its original context into thinking about how its message applies today, remember a few important principles:

- **Use common sense.** God is not trying to trick us or hide secret meanings in the Bible. Some parts of the Bible are difficult, yet in most places the meaning can be discerned clearly. Look for the plain meaning of the text, and then focus on what your response should be.
- **Keep in mind the cultural differences between the Bible times and ours today.** When God is teaching an important principle for living, the way the principle is lived out may look very different in our day than it looked in the ancient world.
- **Remember where you are in the story.** We are living after the death and resurrection of Jesus. God has shown us what he is like by sending Jesus. Everything you read should be considered in that context.

The Bible is the ancient story of God, the world and the people he called. And, this story has a place for you. In fact, the reason this story was saved and written down is so that people like us could read it and find true meaning for our lives. Our prayer is that you will read it and discover “life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:19).

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## Part 1 | Big Faith

Your faith in God matters to God. In fact, God is most honored through your living, active, death-defying, out-of-the-box faith. That being the case, he's committed to growing it. Big. Imagine how different your outlook on life would be if you had absolute confidence that God was with you? Imagine how differently you would respond to difficulties, temptations, and even good things if you knew with certainty that God was in all of it and was planning to leverage it for good. In other words, imagine what it would be like to have explicit faith.

**Bottom Line:** Trusting Jesus leads to a growing relationship with him.

### Discussion Questions

Begin by reading the story of the Centurion with the sick servant in Matthew 8:1-10.

1. Do you know people whose faith in God is so strong that at times you would describe it as amazing? What is it about them that makes you think their confidence in God is so strong?
2. How would you describe the relationship between obedience and trust?
3. As you think back on your childhood, how was the obedience/trust relationship manifested in your home? Did you trust your parents? How did that impact your response to their authority?
4. What is more important in a relationship: trust or obedience? Answer this question within the context of several types of relationships. If you are a parent, how would you answer this question as it relates to your children? What about within the context of marriage?
5. Has there ever been a time in your life when your confidence in God—your faith—hit a really low point? Would you be willing to share that story with your group? If so, describe the events surrounding your loss of faith, as well as what happened that helped you regain it.

6. Based on this discussion, what advice would you give a friend who had lost faith or who would describe his or her faith as weak?
7. Based on your personal experience, if a close friend were to share with you that he was at one time a person with great faith in God, but had lost his faith, what questions would you ask? What advice would you give?
8. What has been the most helpful or encouraging thought/idea from the message this week? How has that thought/idea helped you?

## **Your Time with God**

### **Week 1 - Day 1**

Matthew 8:1-2

The leper in this passage comes to Jesus demonstrating his submission to and dependence on him in three different ways: 1) he first knelt before Jesus; 2) he addressed Jesus as “Lord;” and 3) he said “if you will.” The leper gives us the perfect example of the way in which we should approach God, recognizing who he is and surrendering our will to his. And yet, he still makes his request. How do you approach Jesus when you come to him in need?

Prayer: Father, help me to come to You, recognizing You for who You are.

### **Week 1 - Day 2**

Matthew 8:3-4

Jesus gives the leper exactly what he asked for: full and complete healing from an incurable disease that had ostracized him from society and any religious participation in the temple. We are not told but one would imagine the leper did exactly what Jesus asked him to do, telling no one and presenting himself to the priests. Trust and obedience are inexorably linked. If you have an obedience problem, then you probably have a trust problem. When we truly trust, we will obey.

Prayer: Father, show the areas where I do not trust you fully.

### **Week 1 - Day 3**

Matthew 8:5-8

Like the leper in the previous story, the Centurion gives us a remarkable example of how we should approach Christ with our requests. He recognizes who Christ is and what his own relationship to him should be. He knows that he is unworthy to have Jesus in his home and is certain of his great power to heal his servant. Are we as certain of our own unworthiness and of God’s great power? Or do we sometimes feel God “owes” us? In what ways can you be more like the faithful Centurion?

Prayer: Father, show me how to approach you with faith and humility.

### **Week 1 - Day 4**

Matthew 8:9

The spoken word from one in authority carries with it power and action. The Centurion shows remarkable understanding of the power in the words of Christ, obviously because he too had been in a place of authority. Do we recognize the authority that Jesus should

have in our lives? Do we give him the proper place in our lives based on that authority? Where we place him in our lives will be a testament to our faith in Him.

Prayer: Father, let my faith be marked by my submission to your authority.

## **Week 1 - Day 5**

Matthew 8:10

The Centurion seems to understand what no one in Israel understands: Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus marveled, commending the Centurion for his exemplary faith. The Centurion's "made-Jesus-marvel" faith was not just in what he could do. Soon everyone would be convinced of what he could do because they would see him perform many miracles. The Centurion's great faith was in Who Jesus was. He recognized and believed Jesus to be who he really was, even when those trained to recognize him would miss it.

Prayer: Father, don't let me miss who you really are and should be in my life.