



— BACK TO GOD —



WHY JOURNAL?

We believe God made us to continually develop. We are destined for something: to grow into the likeness of Christ. We also know that we're not there just yet (1 John 3:1-3).

A journal is intended to be a tool in your toolbox for your own spiritual formation. It is a way for you to come back to God and focus on your relationship with Him. Dig into God's Word for yourself. We believe God speaks to us through His Word, in the divine service and when we read Scripture, and we need to learn to listen for His voice (John 10:27).



But why use a journal to do this? If you're married, do you still have any notes from your spouse from the days you started dating? Why did you save them? Obviously, you know your spouse loves you, but you saved it as a tangible memory of when that love struck you.

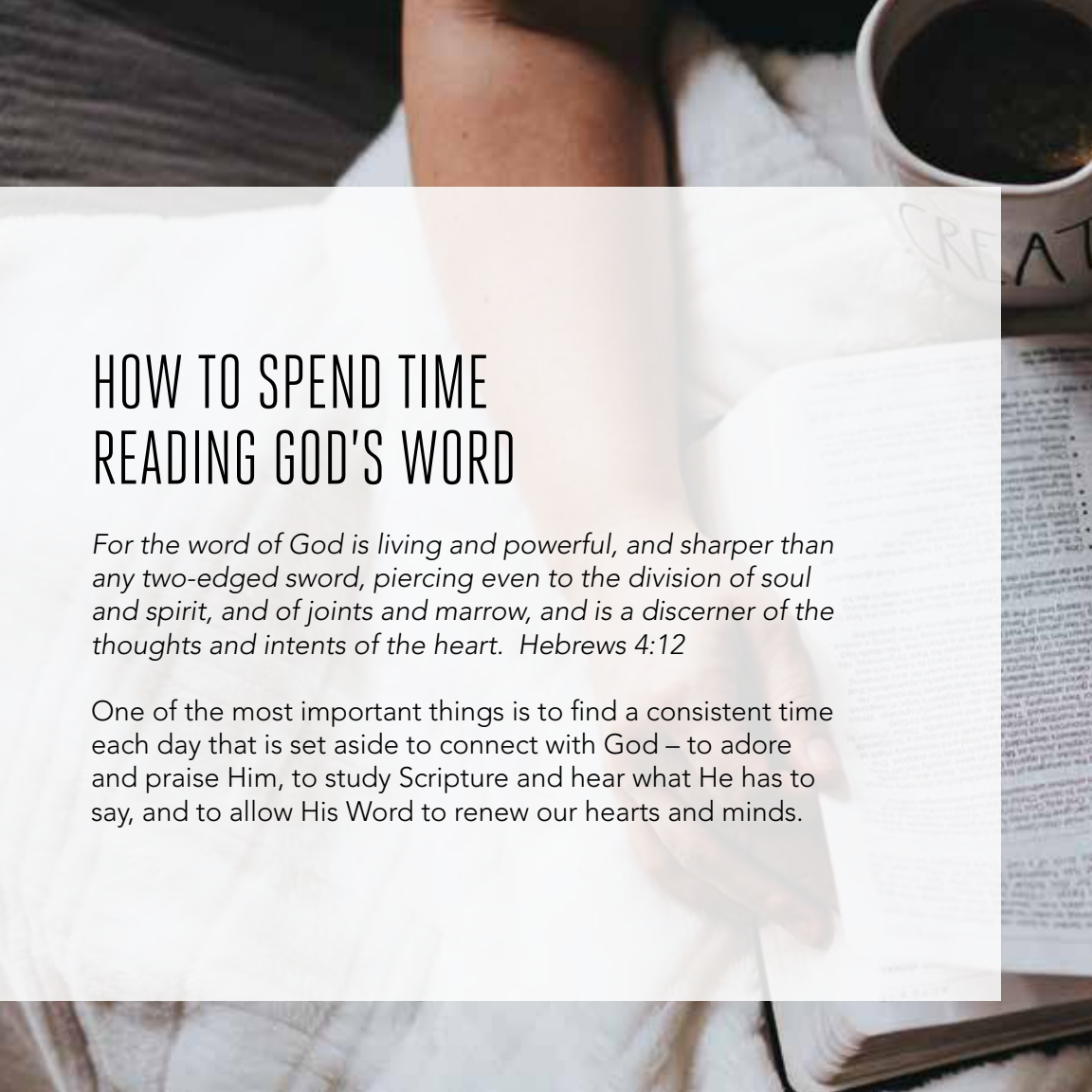
In journaling, we document tangible memories of when and how Christ's love overwhelmed us. Someday you may find yourself discouraged, wondering where God is, or struggling to know where He's leading you. A journal may remind you that God has been faithful to you and that He hasn't forgotten you.





USING THIS JOURNAL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Keeping a journal of your quiet time with God can be very beneficial to your growth as a disciple of Christ. Writing things down while spending time with God can help you slow down and focus. Collecting these writings in a book allows us to look back and reflect on the goodness and faithfulness of God. Use a journal during your time to rewrite verses of Scripture and your response to them. Do not feel compelled to write long paragraphs or even something every day. Do not write for an audience; write for your benefit and as it comes naturally for you.

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a person's arm and hand holding an open Bible. The person is wearing a dark, textured sleeve. To the right, a white cup filled with dark coffee is visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

HOW TO SPEND TIME READING GOD'S WORD

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

One of the most important things is to find a consistent time each day that is set aside to connect with God – to adore and praise Him, to study Scripture and hear what He has to say, and to allow His Word to renew our hearts and minds.



Questions to ask when reading Scripture:

1. What does the Bible passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to the original audience?
3. What does this passage teach me about God and His nature?
4. How can I live this truth out in my life today?
5. What verse can I commit to memory this week?

Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Psalm 119:11

Tips for creating a discipline of reading scripture

Be Intentional

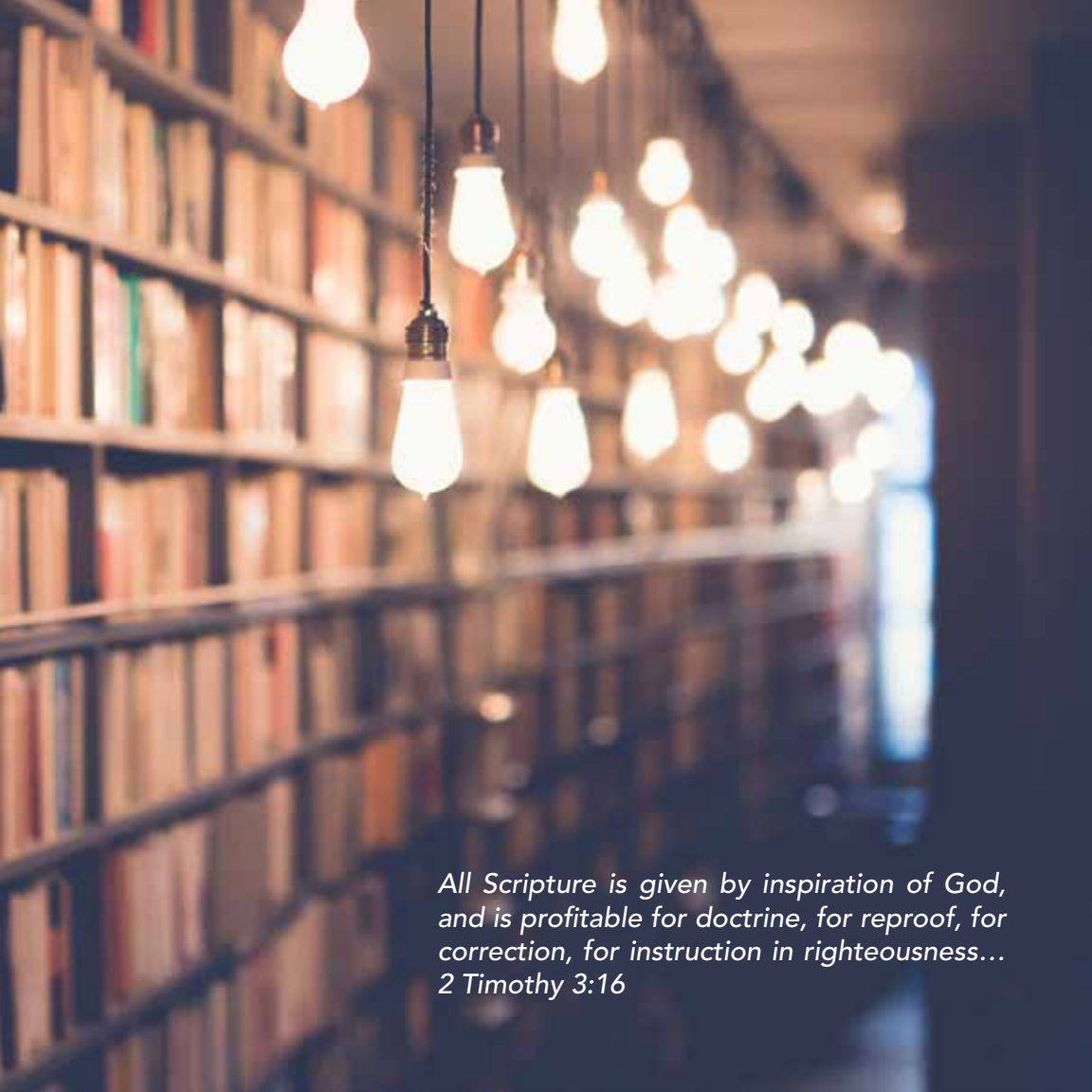
Find a time during the day when you're fully alert and free of distractions. Plan ahead. For example, if you want to spend time with God in the morning, go to bed early; if you're tempted to check any media, turn off your devices; if you find yourself preoccupied with the day ahead, write down your to-dos beforehand and have your list nearby if there is a need to add to it. If necessary, schedule this time in your calendar as you would for any other important appointment.

Be Creative

The quiet stillness of the early morning is ideal, but you may want to experiment with times and places that work well with your temperament and schedule. For example, some might find it easier to concentrate sitting alone in a crowded café, while some others may need to find a quiet, solitary place.

Be Open

While we recommend a combination of worship, Scripture reading, meditation, and prayer, be open to how the Spirit leads you. For example, some days you may spend the bulk of time rejoicing and singing, which may then lead to meditation of a Psalm; other days God's Word may cause you to repent, and be gently restored by His quiet, loving presence.



*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for
correction, for instruction in righteousness...
2 Timothy 3:16*

AN EXAMPLE ON HOW
TO USE A JOURNAL
WHILE READING AND
STUDYING GOD'S WORD

Date _____

Scripture

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. James 1:2-4

My thoughts

James is encouraging me to be in a joyful state at all times, especially in the hard times. This is so hard for me! However, he knows that God is using these circumstances to do a work in me so I can grow and develop into the disciple God has created me to be. This takes perseverance and a continual yes to God and His call on my life. I long to live up to my God-given potential so that who God created me to be becomes reality.

Prayer

God help me to have the proper perspective when tough times come in life. I want to remember that I should view every circumstance in my life as an opportunity to become more and more like Jesus.

HOW TO SPEND TIME IN PRAYER

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God... Philippians 4:6

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving... Colossians 4:2

Prayers should be a practice in every disciple's life. Simply stated, prayer is our means of communicating with God. As with any personal relationship, interaction with God matures as we spend more time with Him. Prayer allows us to worship and praise the Lord. It also allows us to offer confession of our sins, which should lead to our genuine repentance. Moreover, prayer grants us the opportunity to present our request to God. Our God is personal and He wants to commune with us in prayer throughout each day.



Here was the example Jesus gave to us:

Jesus prayed alone and regularly. *So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. Luke 5:16*

Jesus prayed for others. *Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray... Matthew 19:13*

Jesus prayed with others. *Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. Luke 9:28*

Jesus taught persistence in prayer. *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart... Luke 18:1*

Jesus placed God's will above his specific requests. *Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will. Matthew 26:39*



WHAT SHOULD
WE SAY TO GOD?

HOW DOES GOD
WANT US TO PRAY?



Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray..."
Luke 11:1

Open up with honest praise and thanks. Tell Him about all of the things you are thankful for – who He is, all of the things He's given you, and every blessing you can name. Tell God what you love about Him, what He means to you – try reading Psalm 63 or Romans 8:31-39. Pause to listen – what does God want you to hear from Him?

Next, have a time of confession and repentance. Come clean with God about all of the junk in your life that doesn't belong. Get it out in the open – let Him clean you of it. Try reading / praying through Psalm 51 and Psalm 32. Pause to listen – what is God trying to tell you?

Now, lay out any requests that are on your heart – anything in which you desire God's activity for yourself and for others.

Take some time to pause, to be still, and to know that He is God.

AN EXAMPLE OF A WRITTEN PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father,

How wonderful it is to be here with You. Open my eyes and enable my heart to grasp Your greatness. I love to spend time with You. Forgive me for the times in my life when I let lesser things steal my time and attention. Forgive me for the times I fail to reflect the true change that Jesus has done in my heart. I want to possess all the riches I have in Christ.

Father, I lift up my current circumstances and my future to You and place them in Your hands. I want my life to be anchored by a trust in You; with all things and in all things. I pray for my friends and family who do not know Christ. Use me and anything or anyone else to get their attention. I long for them to have hope in Christ. Jesus thank you for your grace and your unfailing love. I love You. I ask for all these things in Your name,

Amen.

HOW TO LISTEN TO SERMONS & TAKE NOTES

Mortimer Adler wrote a book called “How to Read a Book” – which at first glance is quite an amusing title. But Adler’s point is not to address the mechanics of looking at letters on a page and knowing which words they make; rather, his aim is to help people make the most of what they read: to read critically, to increase comprehension, and to improve retention.

An equally valuable resource would be “How to Listen to a Sermon.” It seems like common sense: sit there, pay attention, and don’t doze off. What more could there be? Why over-complicate things?





For most people, though, what we heard on Sunday could be forgotten by Monday (or in some cases, while we are still in the church parking lot). So if we are putting all of this effort into getting to a church building to hear a sermon, what amount of effort should be applied while we are listening to a sermon? How do we make the most of what we hear?

Recognize that it is no accident that you are hearing this message. God wanted you to hear this message. It's easy to think about all of the other people who need to hear that message (and that may be true) but your first priority should be evaluating why God wanted you to hear this truth. In this way, He draws near to you, and in these moments we can feel His presence.

Pray for the minister. Regardless of who the mouthpiece is, when God's Word is opened and taught, God is speaking. Still, we want to pray for the person communicating, that God would give them clarity of mind and heart in proclaiming truth.



Pray for yourself. Ask God to open your ears and your heart to receive whatever truth is preached that day. Say something like this: God, I'm listening for your voice in this time. My whole life is on the table; expose whatever areas in me need the light of the Gospel to shine on them.

Pray for all who are listening. It is more than likely that someone might hear this message today and become a disciple of Jesus as a result. Remember when you surrendered your life to Christ, and thank God for showing you His grace. Ask God to use this time to draw people to Jesus.

Take notes. Some people are note-takers by nature; others feel that they will miss something important if they are busy writing things down. But few can argue with this old adage: the weakest ink is stronger than the sharpest memory. So teach yourself to write something down every time you listen to a sermon. A few things you can start with:

- Scripture passages that are read or referenced – so you can look them up later in context.
- Main ideas from the message – which are usually what the communicator hoped you would take with you after the sermon is over.
- Any phrase or statement that stands out to you as memorable and/or important.
- Any phrase or statement that intersects with your current circumstances. It may just be that God is using this sermon to show you through His Word what He wants you to do next.





New Apostolic Church USA