

THE S.O.A.P. BIBLE STUDY METHOD

One simple but effective model for studying the Bible is called S.O.A.P. The acrostic S.O.A.P. stands for Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer. As you prepare for this week's Life Group, we encourage you to begin practicing this method on the passage. Here is a brief breakdown of the steps below.

- **Scripture-** Read the Scripture passage above slowly and ask the Lord to give you insight into His Word for yourself and for your group.
- **Observation-** Begin walking through the passage by making observations about the text. What are some things that stand out to you as you read it? What questions come to your mind as you read the passage? What words or phrases seem like they are important to understanding the meaning of the passage? Are there any words that are repeated more than once? What does this passage say about God? Are there any lists in the passage? Is this passage telling us how to do something or is it something happening to you?
- **Application-** Write down a few ways that this passage applies to us as Christians. How has God spoken to your heart through your time in His word? Are there any principles discovered in the observation section that can be applied for your group? Take a few moments and write down a few things that God wants you to focus on for this week's discussion.
- **Prayer-** Pray over the things that God has shown you. Ask God to first work in your heart through what you've learned. Pray for your group and for your upcoming meeting. Ask God to lead your group and give you wisdom as you discuss this week's content.

THIS WEEK'S TOPIC

This sermon discusses spiritual practices of engagement inspired by John 15, specifically prayer, meditation, and Bible memorization.

For more insights relating to this week's sermon, see <https://newbreak.church/blog/>. We post a new blog every Sunday which coincides with the sermon passage or theme from that day.

ICEBREAKER

- 1) Have you ever tried gardening? What was your favorite part? What was the hardest part?
- 2) If you had to live off of the land to survive, do you think you could do it? Why or why not?

DIGGING DEEPER INTO THE SERMON

Read: John 15:1–8

As you read through these verses keep these questions in mind:

- What value does this chapter add to what we understand about God?
- What are some of the things that stand out to you when you read the passage?

—DISCUSSION POINTS—

Point 1 – Consistently communicate with Jesus

Read: John 15:4

Did you notice how many times the word “remain” appears in the passage? The word “remain” (or other English equivalents in the various translations) come from the Greek word *menō*, which in various forms appears 7x in the John 15:4 – 7. That should draw our attention to it! What does it mean? It's the basic Greek verb meaning “to stay.” Jesus will stay with us but the onus falls on us to stay with Him. This is where the contingency of the latter part of the verse comes in “Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (John 15:4b). The act of remaining is “a call to consistency.” So the question is, how do I *stay* with Jesus? One of the ways we do this is by keeping *consistent* communication with Jesus, which is one facet of prayer.

It has become common knowledge that many marriages drift apart (and sometimes end in divorce) due to a lack of communication. While the reasons are complex, at the heart of it is simply that making a practice of consistent communication helps breed understanding, concern, and even intimacy. The same goes to our relationship with our Lord. Communication (yes, which includes listening—it’s a dialogue not a monologue) is a fundamental part of the relationship. It’s choosing to stay engaged with Him and navigating the journey of faith in a communicative manner.

(DISCUSS):

- How does viewing prayer like a dialogue help us “remain” with Jesus? What would be different about prayer if we saw it only as a monologue?

Notice that abiding in Christ leads to practical “fruit” (John 15:5).

- Reflect on the times of your life that have been spiritually fruitful. Did your prayer life have a major role in the “fruitfulness” of that season? Explain the connection.

Prayer is a multifaceted spiritual discipline. **Richard Foster’s book entitled *Prayer* covers 21 different kinds of prayer.** For example, there are prayers of praise, where we are passionately thanking God for who He is to what He has done. There is contemplative prayer where the goal isn’t to talk, but to feel, basking in the silence. There are prayers of repentance and prayers of intercession, etc. Prayer is far too rich to nail down to simply one form to the neglect of others.

- How would you label the kinds of prayers that you have been praying most frequently? Are they reflective? Are they for the sake of others? Are they about your own worries? Are they times of calm, communing with God? What kind of prayer life has your soul gravitated toward lately and why?

—Additional Insight—

Matthew 6:7–8 records Jesus saying something surprising about prayer:

⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

The Graeco-Roman pagan religions taught that you could pester the gods until they would give you what you want. And if the particular god you were praying to didn’t seem interested, then you could start hollering out to another god. After all, there were *many* gods you could pray to! But the catch is that they didn’t really care about you.

From a pagan perspective, the gods created people to do the dirty work of feeding them and serving them. They would be fed through sacrifices and adored through people's service. But people didn't have much inherent worth other than the utility they provided. The gods didn't care about *you*, they cared about what you could do for them. They would answer your prayer if they felt like you entertained them enough or if you would do something in return for them. This isn't love... this is manipulation. This is a transactional relationship where neither person actually cares about the other except what they can get from them. This is not the way to pray, as Jesus comes fervently against!

There is a place for persistence in prayer. But we are not persistent to manipulate God's will toward us or persistent to be heard by God. Our prayers are heard by God—even *before we pray* them—however, through our persistence we find a deepening of relational trust in God.

In what way does Jesus's instruction on prayer in Matthew 6:7–8 challenge us to pray differently?

Point 2 – Meditate on Scripture so I can be aligned with God's will

Read: John 15:7

Jesus challenges his followers to allow his words to remain in them.

Using the gardening analogy, we can see that meditating on Scripture is one way in which it prunes our soul, for the better. Our soul can be likened to a rose bush. A rose bush, left to itself, will get straggly and tangled, and even grow in on itself. It's production of roses will decrease significantly. In essence, it needs help to grow in the right directions and to the right ends. You prune a rose bush to stop it wasting its energy and being unproductive. By trimming and pruning it, you are encouraging the shoots that are growing outwards, toward the light. In other words, you prune the rose to help it to be its true and best self. Meditating on Scripture is like that, because when we meditate on Scripture we allow it to redirect our hearts toward God.

Meditation, from a Christian perspective, is *NOT* like meditation from an Eastern perspective where the goal is to empty your mind. The Christian concept of meditation traces back to the Hebraic concept found in the Old Testament (Psalm 1:2; Psalm 63:6; Psalm 119:15-16, etc.). **While Eastern forms of meditation are about emptying your mind; Christian mediation is about filling your mind with God's promises.** That difference is key.

(DISCUSS):

- How has this message shaped your view of biblical mediation? Did you have a positive view of it prior? Or were you hesitant?

Psalm 119:15-16 says: *I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.*

- What are some of the characteristics of God that you think about the most? Why those ones?
- What would be a good passage of Scripture to try meditating on? Why?

—Activity— HOW TO MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

Take a moment as an individual or as a group to practice meditating on Scripture. First, pick a passage or verse and follow the steps below. (If you want an idea, you can try Romans 12:2.)

Meditating on Scripture can be done in a variety of ways. One way to do so is through these three steps: Take your time; Take it in; Take it with you.

Step 1) Take your time.

Settle into Scripture and savor every word so as to not miss a thing.

Get your imagination involved in what you are reading! If you are reading a narrative, imagine yourself there. What are the sights and smells? What would you be feeling to be witnessing what you are reading? If you are reading a letter imagine being one of the original recipients. How would this have been immensely helpful or encouraging to the situation at the time?

Step 2) Take it in.

The purpose here is to let it be impressed upon you.

Study is where we engage the text analytically; here we take it in devotionally. We move from an objective reading of Scripture to a subjective, personal experience of it. It is as if the passage becomes personally written for your benefit.

Step 3) Take it with you.

Let the Scripture become incarnate through you so that you are a living expression of the word! We breathe in God's transformational truth during Scriptural meditation and then we breathe it out the rest of our day toward those we interact with.

Point 3 – Memorize Scripture to see God's fruit produced in our lives

Read: John 15:5

While this passage is not explicitly about Scripture memorization, the thought certainly corresponds. After all, how are we going to have God's word abiding in us if it is not internalized?

For more on the spiritual discipline of Scripture memorization, tips of how to memorize Scripture, and suggestions of what to memorize [read our blog by following the link HERE.](#)

(DISCUSS):

- Why is it important to commit certain passages to memory? Is this something that excites you or is it daunting?
- When is the last time that you memorized a Scripture? What was it? What led you to memorize that passage?
- Turn to Luke 4:1–13. How does the example of Jesus reciting Scripture from memory encourage you of its value?
- What is a realistic challenge for you in terms of Scripture memory? Maybe it is choosing one passage a month. Find the right frequency and always make sure the motivation is *not* out of obligation.

—**Summary**—

The three practices discussed this week are what Newbreak calls “practices of activity.” Here we summarize the spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation, and Scriptural meditation through our three points:

Point 1 – Consistently communicate with Jesus

Point 2 – Meditate on Scripture so I can be aligned with God’s will

Point 3 – Memorize Scripture to see God’s fruit produced in our lives

For more on the spiritual disciplines, including ones not covered here, we highly recommend Richard Foster’s classic book *Celebration of Discipline*.

—**FINAL CHALLENGE QUESTIONS**—

- 1) How are you going to think differently in light of what you have read, heard, and discussed this week?
- 2) What is one thing you are walking away with from this discussion?
- 3) BONUS: For those of with kids or around kids: What is one truth from this message that you can share with your kids?