

# Study Guide

## TRANSFORMED BY THE WORD

Listening to God through Scripture



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 **CHRIST  
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*for use by groups or individuals*



*effects of their bad lives. Word got around the entire Roman province of Syria. People brought anybody with an ailment, whether mental, emotional or physical. Jesus healed them one and all.*

**Small Group Activity** (Form groups of three or four people.) Allow 15 – 20 minutes for this activity.

- Using the description of the six traditions on pages 29 and 30, choose one of the traditions and create a spiritual exercise that can help you practice what you learned in the passage. (Use the bullet points in the description of spiritual exercises on page 27 to help you write the exercise.)
- Reconvene as a whole group and share your exercises with each other. Choose one to do in the coming week.

**Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to read pages 32 and 33.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- What do you intend to do now? (What will you take from this study and continue to use?)
- Whose responsibility is it? (How will you stay motivated to follow through?)
- With whom will you share its impact? (Is there a way this group can continue to support your intention to read the Bible for transformation? Or is there a friend or family member who would love to be part of your journey?)

**Read the prayer on page 33 in unison.**

## Introduction

This Study Guide is designed to assist in small group study of the booklet *Listening to God through Scripture: Transformed by the Word*. A leader can be chosen to facilitate the entire study or the leadership can rotate among several different people. The Study Guide can also be helpful for individual study of the booklet.

Each person in the group should have a copy of the *Transformed by the Word* booklet and this Study Guide. Both are available at the Adult Discipleship Kiosk, at the Welcome Desk outside of the Sanctuary, in the Church Library, or at the Southeast Information Desk (near Entrance D). If you cannot find what you need, contact Karen Bables or Lori Baker at 396-2305.

The Study Guide includes eight 60 - 90 minute sessions. These sessions can be held weekly, bi-monthly, or even monthly, depending on the wishes of the group. Each lesson follows the same format. The facilitator should look over the lesson during the week preceding the session.

It is intended that the reading of the booklet will be done out loud by volunteers during each session. The facilitator should always ask for volunteers to read; please DO NOT go around the room in order, expecting everyone to read. Discussion questions about the reading and other activities are provided in the Study Guide.

Spiritual exercises, which are to be worked on between sessions, are also provided. Time is allotted at the

beginning of the next session to discuss the group members' experience with the exercises. It is a good idea for the facilitator of the session to be the first person to share.

The directions provided for each session are for the facilitator of the group or for individuals studying the booklet independently.

## **Session Eight**

### ***Creating Your Own Spiritual Exercises - Part 2***

#### **Getting Started:**

Begin with at least 60 – 90 seconds of silence, followed by a brief prayer asking God's blessing on your time together.

#### **Reporting on Spiritual Exercise from last week:**

Ask group members to describe the spiritual exercises they created and their experience with carrying them out.

#### **Reading Together:**

Ask a volunteer to read the following Scripture passage.

**Matthew 4:18 – 24 (from *The Message*):** *Walking along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers: Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew. They were fishing, throwing their nets into the lake. It was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions, but simply dropped their nets and followed.*

*A short distance down the beach they came upon another pair of brothers, James and John, Zebedee's sons. These two were sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their fishnets. Jesus made the same offer to them, and they were just as quick to follow, abandoning boat and father.*

*From there he went all over Galilee. He used synagogues for meeting places and taught people the truth of God. God's kingdom was his theme – that beginning right now they were under God's government, a good government! He also healed people of their diseases and of the bad*

## Spiritual Exercise

- Choose one of the six traditions and create a simple spiritual exercise for yourself inspired by that tradition. Do that exercise during the week.

### Close with Prayer

## Session 1

### ***Transformed by the Word***

If your group has not yet determined when or how often to meet for this study or who will assume leadership, it is important that you make these decisions at your first session. One person should be designated to lead this session.

Once these decisions have been made or confirmed, group members should read the following covenant together to emphasize that confidentiality must be maintained.

#### **Covenant**

*Everything that is said here is to be held in confidence. Only then can we feel free to share openly. If you would like to repeat something you have heard here, please ask the person's permission.*

#### **Getting Started**

Begin with at least 60 - 90 seconds of silence, followed by a brief prayer asking God's blessing on your time together.

#### **Reading Together**

Ask volunteers to read out loud the three quotes on the first page of the booklet.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- What do you think it means to "eat this book?" (Consider the terms we use when we really want to think thoroughly about something: "I need to **chew**

on this for a while” or “I’ll get back to you when I have **digested** all this.” What do we mean when we say people are “**starved**” for love or attention or information?)

- Why does Peterson suggest that “eat this book” should be an “essential command?”
- Discuss Christopher Webb’s statement that “renewed engagement with Scripture” will lead to a “renewed intimacy” in Christ. How do you think this happens? What would happen in a church where members have “renewed intimacy in Christ?”
- Do you think that you approach reading the Scripture with an attitude of “eating” the book?

**Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to read out loud pages 5 and 6, including the quotations in boxes.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- What other examples of “transformation” come to mind?
- What is your reaction to the statement on page 5, that if we are in Christ, we will be transformed? Do you live daily with the expectation that you are being transformed?
- Look again at the boxed quote on page 5. Have you ever had an experience of being “encountered by the loving presence and radical challenge of the living God” while reading Scripture?

**Individual Activity:** (Allow five-seven minutes for individuals to complete this activity.)

- Read again the six traditions listed on pages 29 and 30.
- List the tradition(s) you are most comfortable with and most likely to practice:

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- List the tradition(s) you are not as familiar with and are least likely to practice:

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- Think about your family and church background. Note how experiences in your family and church have influenced the traditions that you value, as well as those you have not been involved in as often.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- Share what you have learned about yourself and the traditions.
- Encourage each other to become more balanced as you journey to become more like Jesus.

**Session Seven**  
***Creating Your Own***  
***Spiritual Exercises - Part 1***

**Getting Started:**

Begin with at least 60 – 90 seconds of silence, followed by a brief prayer asking God’s blessing on your study.

**Reporting on Spiritual Exercise from last week:**

Ask group members to share their experiences with memorizing Psalm 23. Encourage a few to recite the Psalm (or as much as they have learned).

**Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to read page 27 and 28 to the end of the bullet points.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss this question in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- Discuss the comparison between doing exercises for your physical body and doing exercises for your soul.

**Reading Together:**

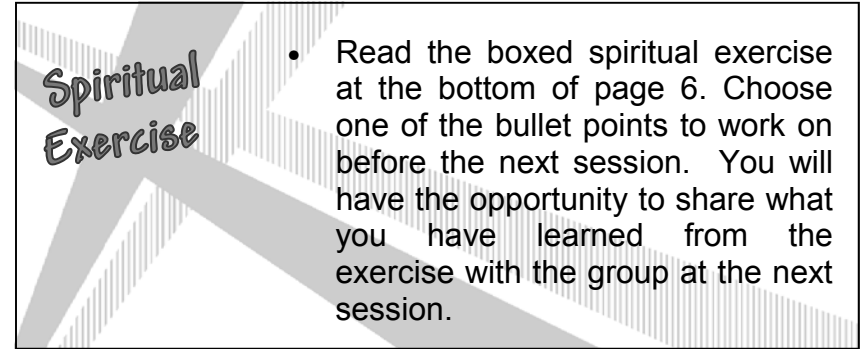
Ask volunteers to read from the middle of page 28 to the middle of page 29.

**Group Activity:** (Do in groups of three or four)

Work with your group to create another exercise to use with the Exodus 3 1-5 Scripture passage.

**Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to read the section on *Using Spiritual Exercises to Create a Balanced Christian Life*, pages 29 – 31.



**Spiritual Exercise**

- Read the boxed spiritual exercise at the bottom of page 6. Choose one of the bullet points to work on before the next session. You will have the opportunity to share what you have learned from the exercise with the group at the next session.

**Close with Prayer**

## Session Two

### ***Why We Read the Bible: For Information and Transformation***

#### **Getting Started:**

Begin with at least 60 – 90 seconds of silence, followed by a brief prayer asking God’s blessing on your time together.

#### **Reporting on Spiritual Exercise from last week:**

Ask people to BRIEFLY share their stories of how God has transformed them or how they are “becoming more of who they already are.”

**Discussion Starter:** (Form small groups of three or four and have each person answer the following question.)

- Why do you read the Bible? (Ask one person to write down the answers. After 5 - 7 minutes reconvene and share the answers. Write unduplicated responses on the white board or on a piece of paper.)

#### **Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to read out loud page 7 and to the end of the quote by Eugene Peterson on page 8.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- What do you think it means that the “message of the Bible is not ours to own or control; nor is the reading of it.”
- What are some examples of how we try to control the message of the Bible?

- Form small groups to each read a “chunk” out loud to the rest of the group.
- Chew up the passage. What does each line mean to you. In what situations can you use this Psalm. Which verses “speak” to them today?

#### ***Spiritual Exercise***

- Use the techniques suggested in the chapter to memorize Psalm 23.

#### **Close with Prayer**

suggestions about memorizing Scripture on pages 24-26. Continue reading until all the suggestions have been read.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss this question in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- Which suggestion would be most helpful to you in memorizing a Scripture passage?

### **Memorizing Psalm 23**

1. Read Psalm 23 together:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me to lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside the still waters.  
He restores my soul.  
He leads me in the paths of righteousness  
for His name's sake.  
Yea, though I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.  
For you are with me.  
Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life.  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

2. Do as many of these activities together as you have time to do:

- Discuss where to break the passage into “chunks” for easy memorization.
- Visualize the passage. What pictures do you see in each sentence?

### **Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to read out loud the rest of page 8 up to the last paragraph on page 10.

### **Activity:**

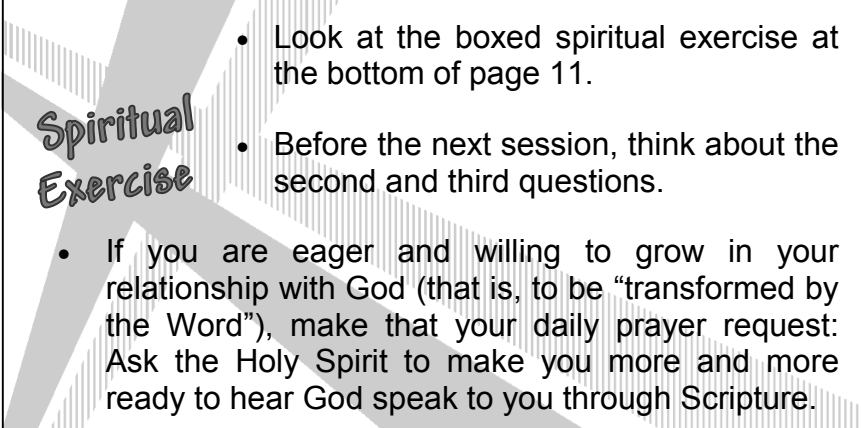
Look at the list of reasons for reading the Bible that you created at the beginning of the session. Which reasons could be categorized under Reading for Information and which could be labeled Reading for Transformation?

### **Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to read out loud the last paragraph on page 10 up to the end of the chapter.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- Talk about the two levels of reading the Bible explained in the quote by Thomas Merton.
- What is the difference between being on the “front porch” of spiritual reading and in the “living room” of spiritual reading?



- Look at the boxed spiritual exercise at the bottom of page 11.
- Before the next session, think about the second and third questions.
- If you are eager and willing to grow in your relationship with God (that is, to be “transformed by the Word”), make that your daily prayer request: Ask the Holy Spirit to make you more and more ready to hear God speak to you through Scripture.

### **Close with Prayer**

## Session Three

### ***Sacred Reading - Part 1***

#### **Getting Started:**

Begin with at least 60 – 90 seconds of silence, followed by a brief prayer asking God’s blessing on your time together.

#### **Reporting on Spiritual Exercise from last week:**

Ask members of the group to BRIEFLY share what they learned from reflecting on whether they read the Bible for information or transformation - or both. Ask anyone who did the daily prayer exercise to share their experience.

#### **Reading Together**

Ask volunteers to read page 12 and up to the end of that section. Stop at the heading *Sacred Reading (lectio divina)*.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- Do you expect to “meet” God while you are reading the Bible? Do you believe that God is waiting to speak to you through the reading? Why or why not?
- Have you ever found yourself skimming over a Bible passage and then realizing that you are barely paying attention?
- Do you usually have an “agenda” when you sit down to read the Bible? What is it?

#### **Reading Together:**

The term *lectio divina* is pronounced *lex–e-o di-vee-nuh*. Ask volunteers to read page 13 and up to the end of that section (“The Steps of Lectio Divina”).

## Session Six

### ***Hide God’s Words in Your Heart: Memorizing Scripture***

#### **Getting Started:**

Begin with at least 60 – 90 seconds of silence, followed by a brief prayer asking God’s blessing on your time together.

#### **Reporting on Spiritual Exercise from last week:**

Ask group members to share their experiences with reading Scripture with imagination. Allow 10-12 minutes.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- What is your experience with memorizing Scripture passages?

#### **Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to read page 23 up to the end of the section on page 24. (Stop at *How to Memorize Scripture*.)

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- Do you agree with the people quoted in this section about the importance of Scripture memorization?
- Of all the reasons listed to memorize Scripture, which one would motivate you to include memorizing Scripture in your devotional life?
- What is stopping you from memorizing Scripture?

#### **Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to each read one of the bullet-point

*and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"*

*"My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."*

Ask another volunteer to read the passage again. As it is read, imagine you are one of the characters of the story: the younger son, the elder son, the father.

Now read the passage to yourselves and reflect on what your imagination brought to mind. What did you see or smell or taste, or feel, or taste? How did your character feel and act? How would you have felt or acted if you were one of the characters?

Allow 5 minutes for this reflection time.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- Did this time of imagination help you see the passage any differently?
- What is God telling you about yourself through this experience?

### Spiritual Exercise

- *Look at the spiritual exercise on page 22. Choose a passage and do the imagination exercises.*

**Close with Prayer**

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- What is the difference between responding to Scripture with your heart and spirit and responding with your intellect?

**Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to read the steps of lectio divina found in pages 14 -17.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group. Choose **at least one** of the following questions for discussion.)

- The song *Before the Word* was written to describe the process of lectio divina. How do the words of the song **prepare** you for the steps of lectio divina?
- Compare the process of **reading** as described on page 15 with the way we usually read the Bible.
- The author describes her experience with **reflecting** on James 1:2-12. What did you learn about the reflection process from this story?
- What suggestion for **responding** to a Scripture passage caught your attention? Have you ever considered closing your time of Scripture reading in any of these ways? Which one would you like to try?
- **Resting** with God is not something we do naturally. How do you feel about just sitting with God and enjoying God's company?

## Spiritual Exercise

- Memorize the five steps of lectio divina and/or to do the spiritual exercise described in the box on page 17.

### Close with Prayer

*was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

*When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'" So he got up and went to his father.*

*But while he was still a long way off his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."*

*But the father said to his servants. "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and his found." So they began to celebrate.*

*Meanwhile the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. Your brother has come," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.*

*The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you*

## Session Five

### *Using Your Imagination to Read Scripture*

#### **Getting Started:**

Begin with at least 60 – 90 seconds of silence, followed by a brief prayer asking God’s blessing on your time together.

#### **Reporting on Spiritual Exercise from last week:**

Ask group members to report on their experience with lectio divina – both the process and what they learned from God. Allow 10 – 12 minutes.

#### **Warming Up Your Imagination:** (Form groups of 3 or 4.)

- Spend a few minutes in individual, quiet reflection. Imagine that you could spend a day with a character from history. Where would you go? What would you do? What would you ask that person? Be as specific as you can.
- Share your imaginary day with your group. (Allow 10 – 12 minutes for this activity.)

#### **Reading Together:**

Ask volunteers to read out loud pages 18 – 21.

#### **Using Your Imagination with Scripture:**

Ask a volunteer to read the following Scripture passage. As it is read, pay special attention to the sounds, sights, smells, touch and taste that the passage evokes.

**Luke 15:11-31:** *There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, “Father, give me my share of the estate.” So he divided his property between them.*

*Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there*

## Session Four

### *Sacred Reading - Part 2*

#### **Getting Started:**

Begin with at least 60 – 90 seconds of silence, followed by a brief prayer asking God’s blessing on your time together.

#### **Reporting on Spiritual Exercise from last week:**

If anyone memorized the steps of lectio divina for his or her exercise, ask them to repeat them. Have the whole group say them several times. Point out that after Prepare, the rest of the steps start with “R”. If anyone did lectio divina during the week, ask them to share how it went and what they learned.

#### **Group Lectio Divina Experience:**

Explain to the group that you are going to lead them in an experience of lectio divina. If you have a white board or chalk board, put the words *Prepare, Read, Reflect, Respond, and Rest* on the board.

**Prepare:** Ask someone to read the words to the song *Before the Word* on page 15. Allow for 60 seconds of silence at the end of the song, so that you can simply rest in God’s presence. The leader should close this time of quietness with the words, “In the name of Jesus, Amen.”

#### **Reading Together:**

Ask a volunteer to read out loud the following Scripture passage.

**Mark 4:35-42:** *That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious*

*squall came up and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.*

*He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*

*They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

**Ask a volunteer to read the passage again.** Ask the group to note any words or phrases that draw their attention.

**Reflect:** (Allow 5 minutes for this sharing time – even if some people look restless.)

- Ask group members to read through the passage silently.
- Ask them to explore any words or phrases that draw their attention.
- Suggest that they ask God, "How are you revealing yourself to me?"

**Respond:** (Form groups of 3 or 4 people. Allow about 8-10 minutes for sharing.)

- Ask group members to share the words that stood out for them, as well as, any thoughts that God may have shared during the reflection time about those words or phrases.

**Rest:** (Allow 2 minutes of silence.)

- After the sharing time, ask members to sit in silence and allow the experience they have just shared to sink into their souls.

**Discussion Question:** (Discuss these questions in small groups of three or four or as a whole group.)

- What was this experience of reading the Bible like for you?
- How is it different from "studying the Bible?"

**Spiritual  
Exercise**

- Set aside time to do for an individual lectio divina experience. Use Psalm 51:1-12 (or a passage of your choice).

**Close with Prayer**