



The summer of 2009 was a time in my Christian walk where I felt spiritually stalled; it was like my relationship with God hit a wall. Looking back, it shouldn't shock me I was feeling like this. There was so much that had changed in my life and it all impacted my relationship with God.

For example, my work situation had changed. The church I was serving in had just announced the resignation of our Lead Pastor due to moral failure. Being one of the longest tenured staff members I was put on a team of five men who helped lead the church during the transition. This meant preaching on a regular basis on Sunday mornings while still leading my regular ministries: High School Ministry and Missions. Our family dynamic had changed. Our beautiful little Sophie Marie was born just nine months earlier and it was taking time getting adjusted to being parents. Being a dad was like being hit in the face with my selfishness and it was tough to bear. Did I mention Charity was pregnant also?

In addition to work and family I was currently enrolled in seminary. I was at this place in my graduate work where I was too far in to quit but the light at the end of the tunnel was extremely dim. To be completely honest, I was at a point in my life where I wanted to quit seminary, leave our local church and move to Hawaii with my family. I didn't know how to manage the new responsibilities in my life and therefore my spiritual growth was quickly shoved to the back-burner.

Have you ever felt how I felt that summer? Have you ever felt like with all the responsibilities of life you've shoved your spiritual growth to the back-burner only to forget about God? Maybe the time you once set aside for morning prayer became stale so you quit waking up to spend time with God. Maybe you were 27 days behind in the Bible reading plan you committed to so you stopped reading God's word. Maybe you once clearly heard the voice of God but your life situation has changed and you're struggling to hear your Savior's voice.

We just finished a great year here at CPC. We went through the first half of the Gospel of John, we spent the summer studying the Psalms, and we ended with solid doctrine in John's letters. To add a cherry to the top we just celebrated Christmas! Now before we go home and put baby Jesus in a tupperware box on the third shelf of the garage let's talk about growing spiritually. I'm not going to ask you to make a New Year's resolution, but a commitment to growing spiritually.

Regular Times of Prayer

The first way we can be growing spiritually this year is by committing ourselves to a life of prayer. As I look back on the summer of 2009, one of the main things I neglected in my spiritual growth was a regular time of prayer. In our Songs of the Summer series we studied Psalm 5 and I've always loved what David wrote in Psalm 5:3: *"In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly."* You may be able to relate to David; you currently have a time of regular pray where you connect with God. My prayer life was far from what David wrote here.

When we get overwhelmed we neglect time with God, we get busy and our prayer life becomes scattered. Now I understand everyone of us is at a different place in our spiritual walk and I want to be sensitive to that. I'm going to do my best to address all the different spiritual walks represented at our campuses. Some of you can totally relate to Vince Vaughn from the movie *The Dilemma* where he has no clue how to approach God in prayer; I'm so glad you're with us this morning. Next, there are those of you who have recently given your life to Christ. You haven't been following Christ for long and you're not sure what a regular time of prayer would look like in your life. Maybe when you think of prayer you naturally go back to your childhood where you were taught to recite The Lord's Prayer. Finally we come to those of you who've been following Christ for a long time. You have gone through wonderful times where you've spent regular time with God and encountered times where you've struggled to figure out how to connect with God.

It's easy to talk about regular times of prayer when you're sitting in a church service; it can be more difficult to implement regular times of prayer in our daily life. While reading Psalm 5:3 you saw "the morning" and immediately started thinking of 27 reasons why you could never wake up in the morning to pray. The coolest part about this verse is that before David even opens his mouth God has already heard his request. Don't get hung up on the morning part; you may be a night person and the night time might work best for a regular time of prayer. If you look back to the end of Psalm 4 in your Bible you'll actually see David make mention of night time.

I like to think about prayer like spiritual food. Most of us eat three meals a day to keep our body sustained, but are we caring for our soul three times a day? The great thing about prayer is

we can always return to God throughout the day and it doesn't have to be hour blocks in the morning; it may look like text messages with God throughout the day. It could be a quick prayer after lunch or on the drive home to refresh your soul once again. What it comes down to is you finding what works for you. The main thing is to make sure your regular time of prayer isn't motivated by guilt, but a love for the Father. It can become very easy to turn Christianity into legalism; a self-imposed check list used to validate ourselves based on what we do or what we don't do.

You can probably think about more than enough to pray about but just in case you need some help to get your regular prayer time going start with the list of things you've been worrying about lately. Paul wrote to the church at Philippi and encouraged them to *"Not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God"* (Phil 4:6). So instead of worrying about how you're going to send your kids to college pray for God to provide. If you're having a hard time in school ask God to help you out. If your marriage is struggling ask God to help you love your spouse. If you don't have a spouse, and you'd like one, ask God if this is His will for your life. If you're struggling with your work situation pray for God to give you contentment and show you how to serve your boss or ask for a new job. The list could go on and on. You could pray for our church. You could pray for our High School Pastor search here for our Foster City Campus. You could pray for the Gondai family and how God will use them in India; there is so much we can pray for and God wants us to bring these requests to Him.

Daily Scripture Reading

The value of daily Scripture reading in our lives is not to be overlooked; there is a reason the Psalmist wrote: *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you"* (Psalm 119:11) and *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path"* (Psalm 119:105). The only way you can hide God's word in your heart is through reading Scripture. The Psalmist is telling us when we hide God's word in our heart it becomes a safeguard in our life. When we become tempted with sin our heart reminds us of the truth of God and helps us to avoid sin. When we avoid sin God's word becomes a light for our path. For the kids in service this morning I want you to think of God's word like a bright flashlight you can use on a dark night. A flashlight doesn't show you everything around you but it lights your path so you can safely get where you want. I love how our Children's and Student Ministries are dedicated to teaching God's word. Our kids and students are encouraged to bring their Bible, learning the power of God's word in their lives.

Maybe when I mentioned daily Scripture reading you remembered the time you tried to read through the entire Bible in one year and how ashamed you felt quitting in March. Statistics

tell us at least 90% of all households in America own a Bible but only 20% of those who own a Bible will ever read through it, in its entirety, in their lifetime. It's staggering to think only 20% of Christians will ever read through their Bible in their life. Once again, growing spiritually never works when motivated by guilt. You may never read through the entire Bible but how does Scripture reading become a priority in your life at this stage?

Beginning January 13 we're starting a church-wide Bible reading plan that we think will impact people who are seeking Jesus all the way to those who've been Christ-followers for years. It's a Bible reading plan that doesn't have any dates attached so you won't feel bad if you miss a day (not guilt-based Bible reading). It's a Bible reading program built around 100 carefully selected short Bible passages—50 from the Old Testament and 50 from the New Testament. It's going to enable you to get the big picture of God's Word and in the process of a daily Bible reading habit. It's called the Essential 100 but for short it's called E100.

The E100 Bible passages are usually one to two chapters in length and can easily be read in 10 minutes or less. The E100 Challenge will take us through all of the major types of biblical writing including Historical books, Poetry, Wisdom Literature, the Prophets, the Gospels, Acts, the Epistles and Revelation. My hope, this morning, is to whet your appetite for daily Scripture reading and I think this is just the way. You can read the E100 in your Bible or if you have the YouVersion App on your phone or tablet you can access the E100 plan there also. We're also going to link the reading plan to our church website.

Imagine everyone at CPC, from all three of our campuses, reading the same chapters of Scripture every day. Imagine running into someone from another campus and talking with them about what you both read in the Bible today. Imagine reading the same chapters of Scripture as your high school student and talking about it over dinner. Imagine reading the same chapters of Scripture as those in your community group, your WBS table and your Men's Fraternity table. What a great way to encourage each other with God's word by all of us taking the E100 challenge. Next Sunday we're going to have E100 resources available after our services so come prepared to stop by the Connection Center to grab a reading plan or bring \$5 and buy the book that has questions to help you grow more through the readings.

Before you convince yourself there's no way you could possibly commit to 100 days of Scripture reading you need to know the value this will have for your life. Our Campus Pastors and Elders just finished reading a book titled *Move*. *Move* was a study done by Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago to measure spiritual growth. Over a six-year time period data was collected from over a quarter million people in well over a thousand churches of every size, denomination, and geographic area in the U.S. Of all the data presented in this survey, the thing that stuck out most

to me was daily Scripture reading was one of the major catalysts for spiritual growth. To say this differently—if you're going to grow spiritually it has to involve daily Scripture reading.

Intentional Listening to God

So far this morning we've talked about having a regular time of prayer and daily Scripture reading. Another way we can grow spiritually this year is through intentional listening to the voice of God. This may be the most difficult spiritual practice I've ever implemented in my life but it's also been one of the most refreshing. In Psalm 46:10 we see the Psalmist write about how listening to God changes us: *"He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.'"* This is an interesting verse. Scholars think the entirety of Psalm 46 is a reference to Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. We see no time period mentioned in the Psalm or it being written to a specific group of people. It doesn't follow the typical structure of a Psalm; the focus is more on trusting God.

The Psalmist explains God as a refuge for us to run to and an ever-present help in our time of need. He makes mention of the sea raging and its waters foaming. Can you relate to that this morning? Does your life seem like the waters are raging around you, sometimes too much to bear? The response to a crazy busy life is just the opposite as we would think. The response is to slow down, to be intentional to listen to God. There is something special that happens when we stop what we're doing and take the time to listen to God. Notice I said "take the time." We can't make time; only God can make time, but we can take the time we have.

One morning in seminary in the summer of 2009, our professor took our class to the church he lead. Behind his church was a prayer trail into the forest. After a 15 minute walk we found a small stream. Our professor had us spread out in the forest where we spent two hours, alone, with God. It was one of the most refreshing times I enjoyed as God was growing me spiritually. Most of you aren't currently enrolled in Seminary but the thought of getting an entire morning to spend with God excites your soul.

Here are some ways I think we can be intentional to listen to God in our context. First, you may want to shut the radio off in your car. If you have a long commute this could be your opportunity to be alone and listen to God. You can stop listening to KNBR and start listening to your Maker who calms the raging seas in your life. If you don't have a long commute you may want to turn the TV off at night and get some extended time with God in your home. Another option would be to head over to the beach or walk the bay trail with the expectation God will meet you there. You know yourself best and you're going to know the best time and way for you to be still and know God.

Be creative with this time and trust God will show up and meet you there. Spiritual growth happens in many ways; let it be motivated by a love for God.

Lectio Divina

Earlier I talked about the different places we're all at in life. Understanding we're in different places, let me share the practice of prayer I learned the summer of 2009. It's actually a monastic practice that Christians have been using for hundreds of years called Lectio Divina. The art of Lectio Divina is broken down into four different sections of drawing closer to God. The best part is we can all use Lectio Divina as we grow spiritually; it's really a combination of everything we talked about this morning.

This first section of Lectio Divina is **Lectio**. Translated from Latin to English it means "to read." The first practice of Lectio Divina is to read God's word. You can use Lectio no matter where you're reading in the Bible; it works in all areas of Scripture. While you're reading you're anticipating God will point out a Scripture that is applicable to what's going on in your life.

Once you have a word you're going to take some time to just mediate on that word: **Meditatio**. Another word for meditate is "to think about." You're going to focus on this particular Scripture. This will probably be tough at first. You want to clear your mind of all distractions and focus on God. You have to fight the list of things you need to accomplish and think about God.

After you've slowed down and mediated on God's word it's time for **Oratio**. Now that you've prepared yourself it's time to pray. You pray through the Scripture you were reading or pray specifically about what God is speaking to your soul. Through meditating on God's word He might reveal something and this opens time for praying about it. It also helps to keep Scripture in our mind throughout the day.

Once you've finished praying you come to **Contemplatio**. Finally you're going to conclude your time and contemplate the Scripture. Another way to explain this part is to abide in God. Relax and spend time with God; abiding in His love, abiding in His truth and abiding in the plans He has for your life. Use this time to increase your trust in God and rely on the promises He has for your life. This is where you get to be intentional to really spend time with God and listen.

The great part about Lectio Divina is anyone can use it to connect with God. You can take one minute for each section if you're in a hurry or five minutes depending on how much time you've set aside. It's a great practice you can apply to your life on a daily basis and something you can return to throughout the day to help refocus back on God. Lectio Divina might become a staple for prayer, or it may be a catalyst for spiritual growth at this time. Lectio Divina isn't the only way you can experience regular times of prayer but a way to draw closer to God without feeling guilty about how much time you can offer.

I started out my message sharing about my spiritual brokenness that came to a head in the summer of 2009. I stayed in full-time ministry, we had another kid and continued to see students' lives change in ministry. As much as I wanted to quit seminary, I'm thankful to share I continued with my commitment and graduated April 2012 with my Masters of Divinity.

What I've shared this morning is not an all-inclusive list or a manual for growing spiritually. What I shared with you are some life-tested practices for growing spiritually. These practices have been passed on from other Christians throughout generations to help those who are struggling grow spiritually. I invite you this morning to take some, or all, of the lessons I shared and implement them into your life. Growing spiritually takes time. The worst thing ever would be for you to leave here unchanged;

to remain in the same spiritual rut again or feel guilty for what you're not doing to grow spiritually.

The words Peter Scazzero wrote in his book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* impacted me deeply. He says: "Jay, one of our church members, recently shared with me: I was a Christian for twenty-two years. But instead of being a twenty-two-year-old Christian, I was a one-year-old Christian twenty-two times! I just kept doing the same things over and over again."

Let's be Christians who are growing spiritually!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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