

- *Stress Inspiration over Intellectual Insight or Emotional Impressions:* When we read intellectually, we can become overly critical or analytical. When we read emotionally, we often accept only those ideas that “feel right.” Read from a place of receptivity that allows you to let go over your cherished beliefs and set opinions.
- *Be Patient and Trusting:* Stay with the passage even if you don’t get any great ideas or insights, and even if you don’t understand it. Trust that God is speaking through the words you are reading. Sometimes God speaks in very subtle ways. Patience gives subtle messages space to grow.
- *Wait for God to Disclose God’s Mysteries:* God always works and speaks in mysterious ways because God inhabits the realm of the eternal. God is more patient and gentle than we are. So while you may get “aha!” moments, more often you’ll get “hmmm” moments.
- *Remember that Spiritual Reading is Reflective Reading:* To read spiritually means to read in a way that keeps going back over insights to gain even more inspirations. God won’t just speak once, but God will speak many times through the same sentences or ideas. Great spiritual books can be read numerous times, with new discoveries being made each time.

# A Guide TO SPIRITUAL READING



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### What is Spiritual Reading?

Whether you actively sense it or not, God continually calls you to deepen your faith through prayer. God's Spirit constantly nudges you to open your heart to God's wisdom, love, and grace. God regularly speaks, telling you how to live a deeper and better life. Unfortunately, life is so noisy that it's hard to distinguish God's voice from everything else. The practice of reading *spiritually* the Bible and the writings of great spiritual writers will help you discern God's voice more fully and clearly in your life.

### How Do We Read Spiritually & Prayerfully?

When we think of prayer, we normally think that it's something we do in quiet as we tell God about our concerns. That is one form of prayer, but our reading and thinking can also become prayer. Typically we don't think of reading as prayer because we are used to analytical, critical, or recreational reading, not *spiritual* reading. Those kinds of reading lead us to read fast so that we can get what the book and the author says quickly. Spiritual reading is prayerful reading in which we read slowly, reflectively, and prayerfully, trying to listen for what God is saying to us through the book. This requires that we take our time and listen while we read.

We've been trained to read with our heads in order to "figure out" what we've read. We spend so much time trying to understand it intellectually that we generally miss what God may be saying to us through the words as they speak to our heads *and* hearts. Spiritual reading asks us to read with our heads and our hearts, asking "What is God saying to me about my life? About God? About my calling?" Through spiritual reading, God slowly answers these questions. The following steps can help turn your reading into a prayer discipline:

- *Set aside a certain time (20 to 30 minutes), in a quiet place, free of distractions for prayer and reading.*
- *Center yourself in a minute of silence.*

- *Ask God to speak to you and guide you through the reading.*
- *Read slowly and reflectively, ready to grapple with the reading with both your head and heart.*
- *Pause, reflect, and pray as you read. At times you may have to put the book down to ponder what God is saying to you.*
- *If you disagree or don't understand something, ask God to help you. Resist the urge to be critical of the reading, which is how we are normally trained to read.*
- *At the end of each period of reading, offer your concerns to God in prayer, close in silence, and thank God for guiding you.*

### Elements of Spiritual Reading

The following are other helpful tips to help you grow spiritually through your readings.

- *Read Humbly:* Put aside your ego, biases, and expectations. Put aside your set theology so that you can be open to how God may be challenging you. Let go of the need to agree or disagree with what you've read. Remember that at first we often resist the truths that God wants to reveal to us. There will be times when you won't like what you've read. Attend to what you sense God is saying rather than to what bothers you.
- *Read and Reread:* Spiritual reading involves dwelling, reflecting, and praying so that we can discover deeper messages. Be willing to keep going over the same material.
- *Stress Quality Instead of Quantity:* Don't read material just to "get it done." Dwell on it, asking:
  - *What is the basic message of God in this passage?*
  - *How does this message impact my life?*
  - *How do I apply what I am hearing into my life?*