

Pursuing Intimacy with Christ

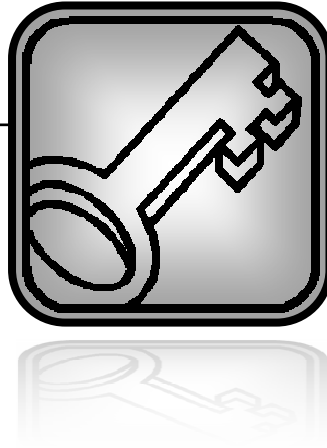


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
How to Use this Study.....	3
Week 1: Intimacy with God Begins with the Word.....	4
Week 2: Pursuing Christ in the Scriptures	8
Week 3: Adding Faith to the Word	11
Week 4: Giving God Time and Space	14
5 Keys to Intimacy with Christ.....	17

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Purpose and layout

This study is designed to help you establish a basic, healthy approach to the Scriptures that God can use to reveal Himself to you in His word. Intimacy with Christ involves you, God, and His word, the Bible.

The journey is divided into four weeks. Each week's lesson provides a focus for your own time in the Scriptures for the rest of that week. The plan is for you to go through a lesson at the beginning of each week. The rest of the week is for you to spend reading your Bible, applying what you learn from the lesson.

As you begin this journey, it is important that you set aside regular time to spend reading the Scriptures. You will not be able to apply what you learn if you do not have regular time in the word of God. In general, it is healthy to spend time in the word of God each day.

If someone is discipling or mentoring with you, plan on sharing what you are learning from God's word with them.

Five keys



This study is built around five keys for intimacy with Christ in the Scriptures. Each key is marked with an icon like this. If you remember the five keys, you will have a good overview of what this study is about.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

2 Peter 3:18

INTIMACY WITH GOD BEGINS WITH THE WORD.

Pursuing Intimacy with Christ • week 1

This study will focus primarily on developing intimacy with Christ based on regular time in the word of God, the Bible.

WHAT ABOUT PRAYER?

Have you ever heard someone say, "I have a great prayer life, but I'm not very consistent in the word."? This statement brings up an important question about intimacy with Christ...

Which is more important, time in the word or prayer? The word and prayer are both important for intimacy with Christ. Prayer is how we speak to God. His written word, the Bible, is how God speaks to us.

What is often missed, however, is that one is more foundational than the other. Healthy time in the word is a prerequisite for a healthy prayer life. In fact, healthy time in the word is the key to a healthy prayer life.

Read the following statement Jesus makes in John 15:7.

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

In Jesus' own words receiving what we ask in prayer depends on what two things?

- 1) "If ye _____, _____, _____,"
- 2) "and my _____ abide in you,"

Jesus says receiving what we ask for in prayer depends on whether or not His words are abiding in us. For Christ's words to abide in you, you must be abiding in His word. You cannot have a healthy prayer life without healthy time in the word. Regular time in the word is the place to begin to have a healthy prayer life, and intimacy with God.

There is no use asking for intimacy with God in prayer if we are not pursuing Him regularly in His word.

SURRENDER

If you are going to pursue God in His word you must be surrendered to obey what His word says. Intimacy with God must be based on obedience. Read what God says in 1 John 1:6.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

According to this verse, what two things does God say can not exist together? _____

Fellowship with God can not coexist with walking in darkness. Walking in darkness is what God calls living in willful disobedience to Him and His word. This is the first key to intimacy with Christ.



KEY 1: Intimacy with Christ cannot happen outside of *surrender* to God.

If you are aware of a specific area in which you are not obeying God, ask God what He wants you to do to be obedient to Him and His word.

Of the following things, are there any that you believe God wants you to do? Mark only the things you believe God wants you to do. If there is something else, write it in the lines below.

- Change a specific attitude or behavior.
- Forgive someone.
- Ask for someone's forgiveness.
- Repay something or make something right.
- Ask one or two people to hold me accountable in an area.
- Get biblical counseling from a pastor or other experienced counselor.
- _____
- _____

Doubts and fears aside, are you willing to obey God? Yes No

If there are steps you need to take to be obedient, begin taking them as soon as possible. As you do the things you checked, go back over the list and put a second mark by them after you've done them.

God says it is a lie to choose to live in disobedience to Him and say we are pursuing intimacy with Christ. If you are willing to do what it takes to be obedient to God's word, you are placing yourself on the path toward intimacy with God!

NUTS AND BOLTS

In your relationship with God, He is the initiator and you are the responder. He speaks through His word, our job is to listen and respond. In general, there should be three parts to a time with God in the word...

- Read.**
- Meditate.**
- Respond.**

Read: Because God has given us His word in written form, reading is the first step in interacting with it.

Meditate: Meditating means to chew or dwell on some part of what you read. There are many ways a person can meditate on Scripture.

Take time to read the following verses about meditating on God's word. As you're reading, write in the space below anything that stands out to you about meditating on God's word.

Joshua 1:8. Psalm 1:1-2. Psalm 63:5-6. Psalm 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148.

Respond: When God speaks through His word, it is important to respond to what He is saying. Responding to God can mean talking with Him about what you read, doing something you know He wants you to do, changing your attitude about something, or all of the above.

Intimacy with God hinges on a pursuit of God in His word that involves reading, meditating, and responding to God. In general, it is healthy to be in God's word doing these three things each day.



KEY 2: Intimacy with Christ is based on *regular time* in the word of God.

OBJECTIONS

Sincere people often have fears and frustrations when they think about pursuing intimacy with Christ in the Scriptures. Read the following objections from some honest people. On the lines below write what holds you back from intimacy with Christ.

"I don't hear God speaking to me when I read the word."

"I don't understand what I read."

"I've tried this so many times before and nothing has happened."

"God does not expect me to pursue intimacy with Him at this point in my life."

"I have too many responsibilities and too little time to pursue intimacy with Christ right now."

"I'm not sure there really is such a thing as intimacy with Christ. Isn't it just about knowing the Bible and doing what you know?"

"I'm too weak or undisciplined to maintain intimacy with Christ."

What holds you back from pursuing intimacy with Christ in the word? _____

These are common objections from sincere, honest people who want to serve and please God. There are some common misconceptions that cloud and confuse the issue of intimacy with God. Overcoming them is the topic of the rest of this study.

You were designed for intimacy with Christ. If you're not willing to start with the nuts and bolts however, and try (or try again), you will never experience what God intended for you to experience with Him.

Will you allow yourself to be held accountable to spend regular time reading, meditating, and responding to the word of God? Yes No

THIS WEEK

God has given us the Scriptures so we can know Him. For that reason, intimacy with Jesus must begin with the written word of God, the Bible. You can know the Scriptures without knowing Jesus, but you can not know Jesus without knowing Him through the Scriptures. This is true for salvation, but it is just as true for intimacy with Christ.

The nuts and bolts of a time with God include *reading* the word, *meditating* on it, and *responding* to God.

For the next four weeks, commit to spend time in the word of God each day with this nuts and bolts process...

- 1. Begin by reading a few chapters of Scripture.** As you read, be noticing specific parts that you understand. (Read.)
- 2. Get a notebook and write out one or more verses that you understood.** As you write, think about each word and phrase you are writing. (Meditate.)
- 3. Next, write out your honest response in the form of a written prayer to God.** Keep it honest and short, unless you have more time to spend. (Respond.)

If you miss a day, don't get frustrated. Meditate on what you read and wrote the day before, and start again the next day. Determine not to miss more than 1 or 2 days in a row.

If someone is mentoring or discipling you, plan on sharing with them about your time in the word the next time you get together.

If there's something you need to do be obedient to God, do it as soon as possible.

PURSUING CHRIST IN THE SCRIPTURES.

Pursuing Intimacy with Christ • week 2

PURSUING JESUS

Bible reading alone can not meet your spiritual needs. Jesus Christ is the only one who can fill your spiritual need. The Bible is given so that you can know and experience Christ more intimately. Time in the word is only of value if it is a pursuit of Jesus Christ Himself.

God has designed your life so that everything hinges on an ongoing relationship with Jesus. Read what God says about knowing Jesus in 2 Peter 1:3. (The “him” in the verse is Jesus.)

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

In the words of this verse, what does God say He has given to us through the knowledge of Jesus?

Everything for life and godliness is found through knowing Jesus. Knowing biblical information is good, but it is not what opens up the Christian life. Knowing Christ opens up the Christian life. You do not need to know more, you need to know *Christ* more. That needs to be your motivation for reading the Bible—to pursue Him.

Jesus is not just for salvation—He is for every day life. Read the following verses. Allow God to use them to dwell on who Christ is to you. Focus on what these Scriptures say about knowing and experiencing Jesus. Write anything that stands out to you in the space below.

Colossians 2:3. Colossians 2:10. John 15:5. Philippians 4:13. Philippians 3:8,10.

Since knowing Jesus is the key that unlocks everything else in life, to know Him must be our motivation for reading the Bible. As a matter of fact, that is exactly what the Bible is for...

CHANGING WHY WE READ THE BIBLE

Why we choose to read the Bible makes a big difference in what happens when we read it. We must approach God’s word from a desire to pursue Christ.

The Bible is specially designed by God to deepen you in your relationship with Jesus Christ. Read Colossians 3:16. What does God call the Scriptures in this verse?

“the _____ of _____”

The Bible is the word of Christ. The Scriptures are given to us so that we can intimately know Jesus Christ Himself.

In John 5:39 Jesus is talking to the Pharisees. Notice what Jesus says to them about the purpose of the Scriptures...

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

In the last part of this verse, what does Jesus say is the purpose of the Scriptures? _____

Jesus told the Pharisees to search the Scriptures. What did He want them to be looking for as they searched the Scriptures? _____

The purpose of the Scriptures is to testify of Christ. The Pharisees knew the Bible well, but they missed the point of it. They thought eternal life was about knowing the Scriptures. Jesus tells them to go back and search them with a different perspective. He told them to search them looking for Him.

The eternal, abundant life that God has for you does not come from knowing the Scriptures, it comes from knowing *Jesus* through the Scriptures.

Think about your own Bible reading. Has your mindset been to pursue Jesus? What have been your main reasons for reading the Bible? _____



KEY 3: Intimacy with Christ involves searching the Scriptures *pursuing Jesus*.

EXAMPLE

In Psalm 119 the psalmist has a very different approach toward the word of God than the Pharisees. The psalmist approaches the Scriptures as his pursuit of God Himself. God's word is also called God's testimonies and His commandments. As you read each verse, underline the phrase about pursuing God that expresses why the psalmist spent time seeking the word of God.

Psalms 119:2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

Psalms 119:10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.

Psalms 119:57 Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words.

Psalms 119:114 Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.

The psalmist approached the Scriptures pursuing God Himself. This approach to the Scriptures allowed the psalmist to experience intimacy with God in the word.

YOU'VE GOT HELP!

When you approach the Scriptures pursuing Christ, you are not on your own! God has given you His Holy Spirit to help you to know Jesus as you read His word.

Remember that Jesus told the Pharisees in John 5:39 that the purpose of the Scriptures is, "to testify of me." Compare that to what Jesus said the purpose of the Holy Spirit is in John 15:26. Look up the verse in your Bible and write in the last few words.

John 15:26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, _____:

The Holy Spirit has the same purpose as the Scriptures—they both testify of Christ! When you make pursuing Christ your purpose in the Scriptures, you instantly have the help of the Holy Spirit. That's His specialty!

The Bible is called "the sword of the Spirit" in Ephesians 6:17. When you approach the Bible in pursuit of Jesus Christ, you are placing the Holy Spirit's sword into His hands, and He will use it to testify of Christ in your life. He knows how to handle His sword! Just give the Holy Spirit His sword, and give Him time. As you pursue Jesus in the word, the Holy Spirit will use the word to help you know Jesus more and more intimately.

THIS WEEK

Have you ever heard anyone say, "I'm tired of reading the Bible with the wrong motives, so I'm going to stop until I feel a love or a longing for it."?

Many people confuse pursuing Jesus with a feeling. It is important to notice that God never says we should wait to read the Bible until we feel a certain emotion or yearning. Pursuing Jesus is not something you wait to feel, it is a choice you make. Feelings come and go—a choice to pursue Jesus is something you do regardless of how you feel. In fact, when you feel it the least is when it is most important to pursue Jesus in the word. That's when you need Him the most!

Continue the process that you started last week of reading, writing out a Scripture, and writing out your response to God. As you go through the process this week, focus on *pursuing Christ* in the Scriptures.

-Before you read, express to God why you are about to spend time in His word. Express to Him in your own words that you are searching the Scriptures in pursuit of Christ.

-As you are reading, be looking for the connection between what you are reading and your relationship with Jesus. Remember that the purpose of the Scriptures is to testify of Him.

-After you read, when you are writing out your response to God, make sure you are focusing on some aspect of your relationship with Jesus.

Make every aspect of your time in the word about pursuing Jesus.

ADDING FAITH TO THE WORD

Pursuing Intimacy with Christ • week 3

HOW TO NOT PROFIT FROM THE WORD

Did you know it is possible to interact with the word of God and not profit from it? That is exactly what God says in Hebrews 4:2.

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

According to this verse, why did the word of God not profit these people? _____

The word of God did not profit them because it was not mixed with faith. The word of God must be mixed with faith in those that hear it (or read it) in order for it to be of any benefit. If it is not mixed with faith, the word of God will not accomplish its purpose in your life.

Have you ever felt like you are just spinning your wheels when you spend time in the word? A faithless approach to the Scriptures will keep a person from profiting from the word of God. Learn to mix it with faith, and your time in the word of God will transform your life.

CONFIDENT DEPENDENCE

God has made faith the key to knowing, pleasing, and serving Him. Read these verses about faith and write anything that stands out to you in the space below.

Hebrews 11:6. 1 John 5:4. Romans 14:23.

Faith is extremely important to God. Other words for faith are: relying on, trusting in, counting on, being confident in, believing in, and depending on God. According to the first verse, we cannot please God if we are not confidently relying on Him. In the second verse, there is no victory without being expectantly dependant on Him. In the last verse, anything done outside of confident dependence on God is sin. It is an insult to God when we have no confidence that He can or will handle a situation. He will not respond to our efforts done outside of faith in Him.

Faith is a key ingredient to intimacy with God in the word. Many people approach the Bible with the attitude that God is good, but He is incompetent, inadequate, and unreliable to speak to them through His word. Because they do not mix the word with faith, the word of God will not profit them.

There is a big difference between approaching God's word with a doubtful, cynical attitude and approaching the word *confidently dependent* on God to reveal Himself to you in it. What would it look like for you to mix the word with faith in your regular time in the Scriptures?

MAKING MUCH OF WHAT GOD GIVES YOU IN THE WORD

It is important to make much of what God gives you in the word. Read these verses and write what they have in common below.

Numbers 16:9. Deuteronomy 32:15. Job 15:11.

Each of these verses is about making “small”, or “lightly esteeming”, something God has done. Often this is what we do with our time in the Scriptures. We approach the Bible with low expectations. We are not expectant for the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ to us in the Scriptures. We make very little of whatever we read in the word. It is small in our eyes. We esteem it lightly.

The opposite of lightly esteeming the word is to highly esteem it. Read these two verses about esteeming God’s word. Underline how Job and the psalmist each esteemed God’s word.

Job 23:12 Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.

Psalms 119:128 Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.

To esteem something is to place a high value on it, or to make much of it. When you are, 1) surrendered in obedience to God’s word, 2) spending time in the word, and, 3) focusing on pursuing Christ in the word, you can be confident that God *is* speaking to you in His word. Based on that foundation you can and should make much of what He gives you in the word. It is more than old information. It is what the Holy Spirit is using to help you know Christ more intimately! When you make much of what God sees fit to give you from His word on a given day, you are choosing to believe God. You are mixing the word with faith!

Instead of being skeptical about whether or not God is speaking to you in His word, be skeptical of the thought that maybe He isn’t! If you are approaching God’s word surrendered and seeking Christ, God *is* speaking to you. Take whatever you get from the word that day as what God has seen fit to give you. Make much of it.



KEY 4: Intimacy with Christ requires mixing the word with *faith*.

EXAMPLE

The Thessalonians are an example of what happens when human beings dare to mix the word with faith.

The Thessalonian believers had a special reputation for how mightily God worked in them. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 God reveals why they had this reputation. It was not whether or not they received the word, but *how* they received the word, that made the difference. Use the verse on the right to answer these questions.

How *didn't* they receive the word of God?

"...when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men,

How did they receive the word of God?

...but as it is in truth, the word of God,

Because of how they received the word, what was the result?

...which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

The Thessalonians believed. They believed God Himself was speaking to them through the word. Because they chose to believe that God was actively speaking through His word, it effectually worked in them. It changed their lives. God's word effectually works in those who choose to mix it with faith.

THIS WEEK

Continue reading, meditating, and responding to God in the word. Focus on mixing the word with faith.

Before you read, pray. Express to God that you believe He speaks through His word. Prepare your heart to hear from God in His word.

As you read, be on the lookout for verses that God may want to use to speak to you personally. Trust God that He is guiding the process regardless of how you feel. Choose a verse or two to write out, meditating on each word and what God wants to share with you personally.

After you read, as you respond, assume that what you are getting out of the word is directly from God. Write out a prayer responding to what God has shared with you from His word.

Regardless of how it seems to you, do not be unthankful for what God sees fit to give you from the word, and do not belittle it. Make as much of it as you possibly can.

GIVING GOD TIME AND SPACE

Pursuing Intimacy with Christ • week 4

ONLY GOD

A deeper knowledge of Christ is something only God can give. It is not a human accomplishment. Read how Paul prays for the Ephesians in Ephesians 1:15-18. Circle the words “him” and “his” in verses 17 and 18. They are referring to Jesus.

¹⁵ Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, ¹⁶ Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

¹⁷ That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: ¹⁸ The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

In the words of verse 17, as Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians, *what* does he want them to receive?

“the spirit of _____ and _____ in the knowledge of _____.”

According to the first part of verse 17, *who* is the one who gives what Paul is asking for?

Knowing Christ more deeply is a matter of receiving “wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” that only comes from God. It is not achieved, it is received. It is not discovered, it is revealed. As you pursue Christ in the word, it is God who enlightens the eyes of your understanding to know Him more.

Greater intimacy with Christ does not come on demand, and it does not come all at once. It is a gift that only God gives, as you pursue Christ in His word.

GROWING

You must give God time to reveal Christ to you more as you grow in Him. In 2 Peter 3:18 God says to, “...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Knowing Jesus is a process of spiritual growth and maturity. You can not skip to the end of the process.

Knowing Jesus begins with salvation, but your knowledge of Him is designed to grow deeper as you grow in the Lord. God describes three stages of spiritual growth in 1 John 2:12-14. He refers to *little children*, *young men*, and spiritual *fathers*.

¹² I write unto you, LITTLE CHILDREN, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

¹³ I write unto you, FATHERS, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.

I write unto you, YOUNG MEN, because ye have overcome the wicked one.

I write unto you, LITTLE CHILDREN, because ye have known the Father.

¹⁴ I have written unto you, FATHERS, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.

I have written unto you, YOUNG MEN, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

God calls those in the first stage of spiritual growth *little children*. How does verse 13 describe little children's knowledge of God?

Those in the last stage of spiritual growth are called *fathers*. According to these verses, what is the mark of a spiritual father?

Little children know God as their Father, but the defining trait of spiritual fathers is that they know God in a deeper way. Your intimacy with God begins when you get saved, and becomes deeper and fuller as you mature in Christ.

As little children grow to know God more like fathers, there is a middle stage called *young men*. According to verse 14 what role does the word of God have in young men?

The word of God abides in young men. They are strong in the word and able to overcome the devil. With the word abiding in them, and applying it in their lives, young men grow to know God more and more. Over time, young men grow into spiritual fathers who know Him in a deep and intimate way.

Intimacy with God is a growing process. The word is what God uses to bring you into greater intimacy with Himself. As you are pursuing Christ in the word, give God time to grow you closer to Himself. No child ever grew any faster by stressing about how to make himself grow up. Set yourself to seek the Lord in His word, relax, and leave the rest to Him. He will reveal Himself to you in His word in perfect time.

GIVING GOD SPACE

As you pursue intimacy with Christ in the word, you will need to give God room to work outside of your understanding. God will allow your faith in Him and His word to be tested. Your choice to continue in the word of God and give God room to work outside your understanding will prepare you for greater intimacy with Christ.

In John 6 Jesus' ministry seemed to be taking a terrible turn for the worse. Jesus chose this difficult time to settle an important question in the lives of His twelve disciples in John 6:66-68.

⁶⁶ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. ⁶⁷ Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? ⁶⁸ Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

Many of Jesus' earthly disciples went back from following Him. Because they didn't understand what Jesus was doing, they walked no more with Him. In verse 67 Jesus asked the twelve disciples, "Will ye also go away?"

According to Peter, why did he and the twelve keep following Jesus when many other disciples left?

When other disciples left, Peter and the twelve continued walking with Jesus because they believed He alone had the words of eternal life. None of the disciples understood what Jesus was accomplishing. Peter was willing to give Jesus room to work where he did not understand because he had settled the issue of his need for the words of life.

When God is doing things you don't understand, do not go back from the words of life. His ways are above our ways. He rarely takes us on what we think is the most direct path to intimacy with Him. Only Jesus has the words of life. Like Peter, settle this issue in your mind and heart. Continue pursuing Christ in the Scriptures regardless of the outcome, giving Him space to work outside of your understanding.



KEY 5: Intimacy with Christ grows as we give God *time and space* to reveal Himself to us.

THIS WEEK AND BEYOND

It is a person's attitude toward the word of God that determines how God will use it to reveal Himself to them. The principles you have learned in this study will help you establish a basic, healthy approach to the Scriptures that God can use to reveal Himself to you in His word.

Pursue Christ in His word exercising these basic keys and give glory to God as you "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18)

5 KEYS TO INTIMACY WITH CHRIST



KEY 1: Intimacy with Christ cannot happen outside of *surrender* to God.



KEY 2: Intimacy with Christ is based on *regular time* in the word of God.



KEY 3: Intimacy with Christ involves searching the Scriptures *pursuing Jesus*.



KEY 4: Intimacy with Christ requires mixing the word with *faith*.



KEY 5: Intimacy with Christ grows as we give God *time and space* to reveal Himself to us.

You can remember these five principles with these key words: 1) Surrender, 2) Consistency, 3) Pursuit, 4) Faith, and 5) Time.