

Series Big Idea: We all need more of God in our lives. Every struggle and every need is best answered by a bit more of God. And that may, in the end, be our biggest problem. How do we make more room for God in our lives? For thousands of years, God's people have learned and practiced ways to allow God to have more influence. In this series we'll look at four vital practices that allow God to transform our characters and guide us in how we approach our circumstances. By practicing any or all of these four spiritual activities, we'll discover that it is possible and thrilling to allow God more say in our lives.

Message Big Idea: The life of a believer experiences ups and downs. During the process of life, we need a strong foundation to ensure our success. Jesus is reason for life change. In order to remain strong in our faith and continue to grow as a believer, we must develop the practice of listening to God's Word. Reading and listening to the Bible allows the Holy Spirit to transform us from where we were to where God wants to take us.

Main Idea: We can't grow with God until we read the words of God.

Main Text: Hebrews 4:12

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. Describe what your Bible reading experience has been in the past. Go around and share what it was like when you first began reading scripture.
2. How has your relationship with God's word changed over the years? Has it? If it has, do you find it difficult to get into a rhythm of reading and reflection? Why do you think that is/isn't?
3. Read Hebrews 4:12 together. God wants us to realize that His word is ALIVE & ACTIVE. It's different than reading or listening to anything else. Describe a time when God's word spoke to you.
4. As a group, I'd like for you to take the Compass. You can visit the site at: <http://mypantano.church/compass>. After you take the assessment, talk about the recommended next steps for you with the group.
5. Everyone reads the Bible in different ways. Brainstorm some ways that you can read and reflect upon the Bible together.

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Screen Information:

Slide: Picture of Nick (Half Screen)

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Slide: Hebrews 4:12

Slide: **We can't grow with God until we read the words of God.**

Slide: Text Pantano to 31996 to get a link

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Message:

Today is Superbowl Sunday and as over a 100 million projected people watch it this year, they'll no doubt be countless kids and adults wishing they could transform into their star athlete. Their stories are much like our own--a desire to be transformed. We're in our Third week of a series called "Making Room" where we're learning how to grow our relationship with God by learning specific practices. So far, we've learned about the practice of slowing down, taking a sabbath day, and today we'll learn about the third practice--Bible Reading & Reflection. All of these practices help transform our relationships with God.

As a kid, I was totally obsessed with transformation. My idea of transformation happened with Superman. I had all of the action figures. I had seen all of the movies. I had a handmade costume and cape. I would spend hours transforming into Superman so that I could face the world and escape my reality. At the time, I was a little kid, sick with a heart condition and in between surgeries to repair the problem. I was anything but Superman in the real world. I was actually very weak and sick. Superman was my escape.

The lure of transformation into something else really resonated with me. It took me away from my weak self and allowed me to pretend that I was healthy, strong, and in control.

Aren't there moments when we wish we could be transformed into Superman, Wonder Woman, or Captain America? Maybe you dream of the day you stand up to that person putting you down, or you finally set boundaries with family. Maybe you long for that addiction to finally be conquered and a thing of the past. Each of us has a longing to go from average to something extraordinary. This is especially true in our pursuit of God. I don't know anyone who decides to follow Jesus and then says, "I don't want to change...I want everything to stay the same." I don't need help with my anxiety, my hangups, my life. I think the exact opposite is true. We yearn for God's promises to become true in our life. We want help dealing with anxiety, anger, reacting to problems in our lives, and most importantly, we want to experience deep joy.

Some of us try to fill this spiritual void by signing up for volunteer opportunities. We go

on mission trips. We hunt and hunger for the latest book on growing in our relationship with God. We can't wait for the next worship song to come out, the next class offered, or the next summer camp/conference. All of these things do help in our transformation for that week or that time period, but we have access to sustained, daily transformation through God's Word.

In fact, we believe these tools help so much, that we gave you a handout as your entered with a link to something we call the Compass. The Compass is a tool we've developed and recently updated that provides an assessment of your spiritual journey and gives you tools to take your next step. I encourage everyone here to take it and if it's been a while, take it again.

All of these things help us grow. But God has so much more for us than periodic transformation. He wants us to pursue daily change.

That daily transformation can't happen without God's word.

I had a professor tell us once in Bible College, "No book can offer insight, change your life, or bring peace like God's book."

God has given us the Bible to know him better and to be able to connect with him daily. We actually have access to what God is thinking, his opinion on life matters, and what he values. In my own journey, the Bible has showed me so much about God's thoughts, his heart, where I need to change, and how I should respond.

But, There have been times in my life where I've sat down to read the Bible but beside my Bible I have the latest best selling book about God. I'd be lying if I didn't say that sometimes I wanted to pick up the book I haven't read yet over the Bible which has become so familiar to me. What's happened here is that the enemy has set a trap. He wants us to sideline the Bible in place of something albeit good but not as revolutionary as God's word. Other resources are designed to compliment, to enhance our spiritual walk, but not replace God's Word.

Why don't these resources replace God's word? Because God's words are special. In fact, **Hebrews 4:12** says it like this:

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Let's look at the first part of this verse. The writer of Hebrews says that God's words are alive and active. What's that mean?

Let me tell you a story.

(STORY OF MEMORIZING JAMES 1 a couple months before losing our second child. Losing our second child, dealing with “consider it pure joy”, and seeing God work in that area. God’s word kept me going. They provided encouragement and support when I needed it most. They were more powerful than any other words that people told us.)

When I memorized James 1, I didn’t know that I was going to need those words later. I didn’t know how our lives would become so painful. I remember repeating these words over and over in tears thinking to myself, “why God!? Why?” and being brought back to “consider it pure joy.” How on earth could I consider what had just happened joy? God used his words to remind me that no matter how hard things were at the time, no matter the pain, that he was never going to leave me. I may not be able to find joy in the action of losing a child (who could?), but I could find joy that he isn’t leaving me to deal with it alone. His purpose was transformation and my transformation happened through a time of tremendous pain.

But, I would have never have known this if I hadn’t turned to his word and read the Bible BEFORE our miscarriage. God’s Word was alive and he planted it in my heart for a future that I didn’t know was coming and a time that I didn’t know would hurt so bad. It was active in reminding me that I wasn’t alone...that even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...he was with me. God’s word is key and in order for us to be transformed...in order for us to experience pure joy, we must spend time with God in his word.

Let’s keep moving forward in this verse. The Hebrew writer mentions a double-edge sword. Double-edge swords are meant to inflict the maximum amount of damage when used. The Bibles says that a DES is being jabbed into us, dividing our soul/spirit/joints/and marrow. This is intense stuff. Who in here wants to sign-up for that? No one. Right? But we often experience the most change during the hardest times.

We can relate this concept of a double edge sword to a surgeon going in to remove cancer. The scalpel is designed to be sharp but also precise. God uses this scalpel, or double edged sword, to remove cancer from our lives so that he can make us healthy again. God’s word is able to get to the secret places of our hearts, our blind spots, our motives. He then cuts out that cancer with his word. It’s painful, but it’s a healing type of pain. The type that feels good after the surgery because you know you’re getting better.

Over the past year, we’ve done multiple series that have been very difficult because they bring to the surface painful parts of our lives. But in each of those, countless people have said that God worked through that pain to remove the dark parts, or the cancer, so they could begin the healing process. That’s exactly what this scripture is talking about. But none of this can happen without God’s word.

Simply put: We can’t grow with God until we read the words of God.

When we spend time with God, we notice that God begins to rewire how our brains

work. Things that use to be ingrained into our minds are progressively removed. A perfect example of this: I work with a lot of guys who are addicted to pornography. They tell me that they can't imagine freedom from that addiction. After working with God's word, finding accountability, and doing the hard work, they finally find freedom. That is direct evidence of how God's word rewires our brains. God changes how we think. He changes our hearts.

So where do we begin? How do we read God's word? How do we begin our transformation?

I realize that opening the Bible can be very overwhelming. Where do I go? What do I read? How much? What time of the day? These are all great questions to ask. But we can't get there if we never move. So we have to begin by opening our Bible.

First, we need to Read the Bible for transformation not information. This happens by reading scripture from a Gospel centered position (in need of saving).

It's not "how much" but "how." The goal is not for us to read as much as we can everyday, but to allow the scriptures to transform us. John Ortberg says it best, "The goal is not for us to get through the Scriptures. The goal is to get the Scriptures through us."

Some of us have been taught that we read the Bible for knowledge. That's partly true, knowledge of God's word is extremely important to a believer, but we can't just approach the Bible as a study guide to passing the entrance exam to heaven. That's missing the point.

Many years ago, Pastor Glen developed a free tool to help us have a starting point in reading the Bible. (**SLIDE: Text Pantano to 31996 to get a link**)

These cards are designed for you to read the Bible 5 days a week. If you fall behind, you can use Saturday to catch up. Sunday, we're together here or online. It's an easy way to know where to go and what to read. The reading plan isn't about how much, but how you read it. Sure we give you a suggested reading for everyday, but it's not a contest. If need to slow down, that's fine.

So, we have a plan, what do we do next?

Second, before you begin, Ask God to meet you in the Scripture. Believe that he will.

Third, Take one thought or verse with you for the day.

Maybe all of this is brand new to you. Maybe you've never really read the Bible like this and you're just getting started. Maybe you've been absent from reading for a while. Sometimes, groups are the best place to get started. In fact, we have groups outside in

the courtyard for you to check out. I can assure you that all of those groups will help you read your Bible more and grow in your connection with God.

I want to end by reading Hebrews 4:12 again, this time from the message version:

¹²⁻¹³ God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it—no matter what.

We can't grow with God until we read the words of God.

Pray