

# A CONTEMPLATIVE BIBLE STUDY FOCUSED ON PERSONAL SOUL-CARE, SPIRITUAL FORMATION, AND SHARING HIS WORD WITH OTHERS!

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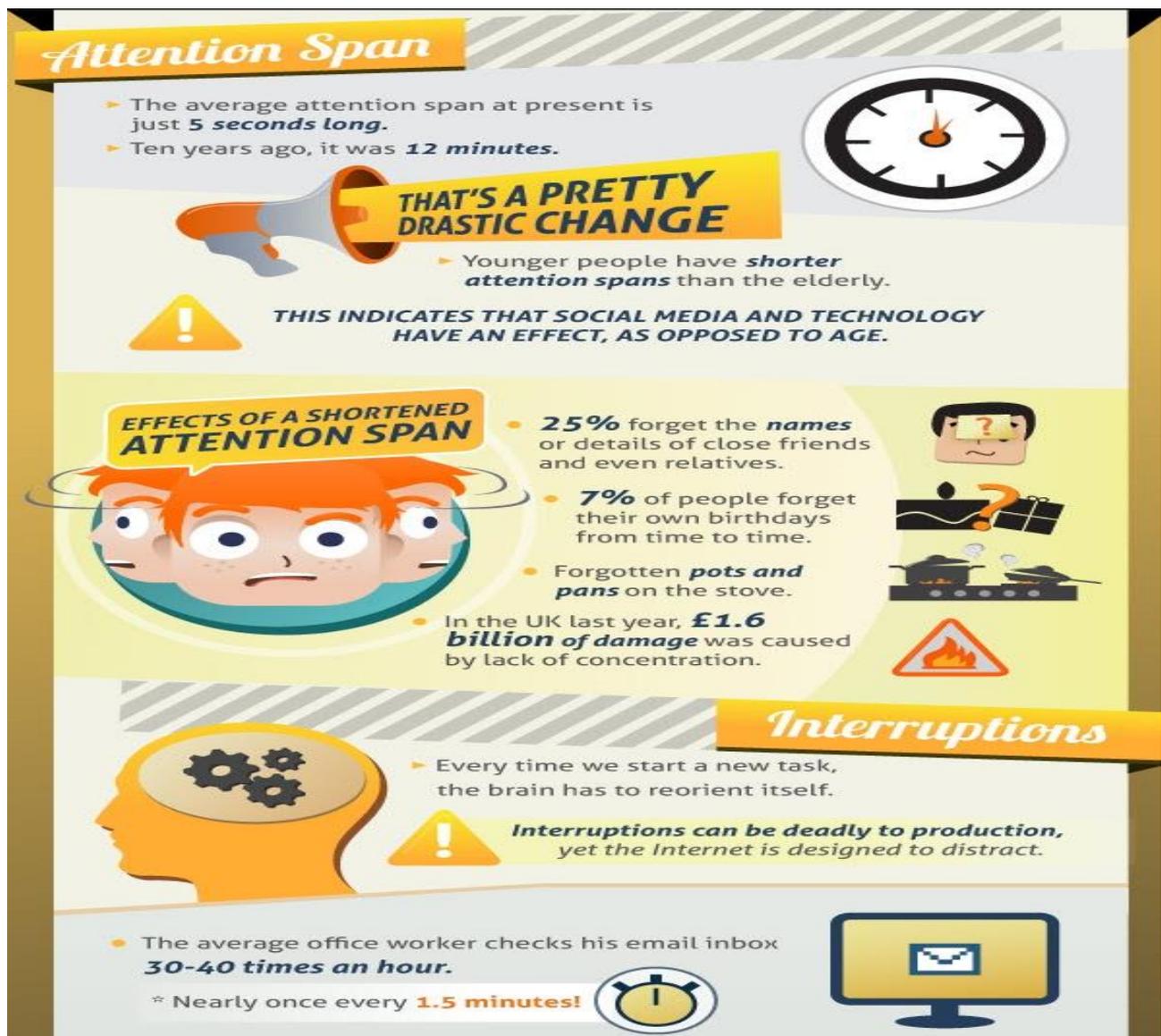
## WHY DO WE NEED CONTEMPLATIVE BIBLE STUDY?

Our culture is, perhaps, the most distracted and disengaged culture in human history. As such, we've lost the art of hearing and being, which are close to the heart of God. This is just as true in the church as it is in the culture at large. There is a growing need within Christian congregations – and desire among faithful believers – for a slower, more contemplative or meditative approach to the Word and each other.

Theologian, John Jefferson Davis, affirms a contemplative approach or “way of life” in his wonderful book, Meditation and Communion with God, when he says,

“The historic Christian practice of meditating on Scripture as an example of ‘slow reading.’ In the face of today’s rushed lives and information overload, such slow reading of the Word of God seems more important than ever. Some texts we may skim for information, other texts we may browse for entertainment, but in our meditation on Scripture, we are seeking communion and friendship with God for its own sake and for the sake of our souls.”

The following info-graphic demonstrates our current need for a way of life and reading that’s slow, contemplative, and intentionally focused and engaged:



A *contemplative* approach to studying the Bible forms one in such a way that one becomes more attentive to the Spirit's presence in the text and in life. ***It's an approach that recognizes the importance of the traditional study methods, yet incorporates them within a framework in which 'being' in Christ's presence is the goal and 'doing' ministry for Christ in His world is the outcome.***

### WHAT IS A CONTEMPLATIVE BIBLE STUDY?

A contemplative Bible Study is built on a process of hearing the Word for the sake of personal soul-care and spiritual formation. This process of hearing the Word integrates traditional Bible study methods within a contemplative framework in a way that *prizes hearing over doing and values formation over information.*

This process is designed to equip and encourage anyone who desires to achieve God's goal, which is, as Ephesians 4 states, for believers 'to become mature adults – to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ.' While this approach includes the basics of a traditional text study, it begins and ends with a practice of *listening* that is based on the ancient discipline of Lectio Divina, or contemplative reading!

### Select Your Text

For this portion of the practice, you'll want to select a passage of Scripture that's no more than eight to twelve verses long (it will help to pay attention to paragraphing). The reason for selecting a smaller passage is connected to the listening phase of the rhythm. The smaller the passage, the more focus and reflection you'll be able to give.

You will have the option of broadening the selected passage (which may be necessary) as you transition to Bible Study portion of this rhythm.

### **1. BEGIN BY HEARING THE WORD. SLOWLY READ THE TEXT IN THREE OR FOUR DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS.**

With your notes from your time of contemplative reading in hand, begin now to transition to a traditional study of the text. Such a study helps assure us of God's voice as we seek to experience His truth and share with others.

#### **a. Suggested translations:**

- New American Standard.
  - New Living Translation.
  - Common English Bible
  - English Standard Version.
  - New King James Version.
  - Tree of Live Version.
- b. Highlight the similarities and differences between translations.
- Every translation is a commentary of sorts so it's helpful to notice differences and highlight those portions where words are translated differently.
- c. Circle words that are repeated.
- d. Jot down questions that arise as you read.



## 2. WORD STUDY

- a. Study a few of the key terms you have discovered.
- While there are many tools for this, I recommend <https://www.studylight.org/>, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/>, or, <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.
  - These sites will also provide original language tools, bible dictionaries, and encyclopedias that will be quite helpful.

- b. Develop working definitions of each term.
- Select one term that stands out and develop your own ‘as you go’ definition. An ‘as you go’ definition is a way I try to take the Word with me throughout my day.

### 3. OVERVIEW STUDY

- a. After developing several ideas or considering several topics/issues that the Lord has impressed on your heart, take some time and read what other authors are saying about the text. You’ll want a couple of the following resources:
- Bible study notes – my personal favorite is the English Standard Version Study Bible (<https://www.crossway.org/bibles/esv-study-bible-none-case/>).
  - A solid one – volume commentary. There are numerous options in this category but my personal favorite is the New Bible Commentary, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition (<http://www.ivpress.com/cgi-ivpress/book.pl/code=1442>).

### 4. DEVELOPING THE MAINS.

- a. Reflect on and prayerfully craft a Main Idea.

Now that you’ve spent some time observing and gathering notes and ideas, it’s time to simplify this into one powerful statement that you can take with you on your way. I call this an ‘as you go’ statement that will stay with you through the day or week.

You can do this by asking the following questions:

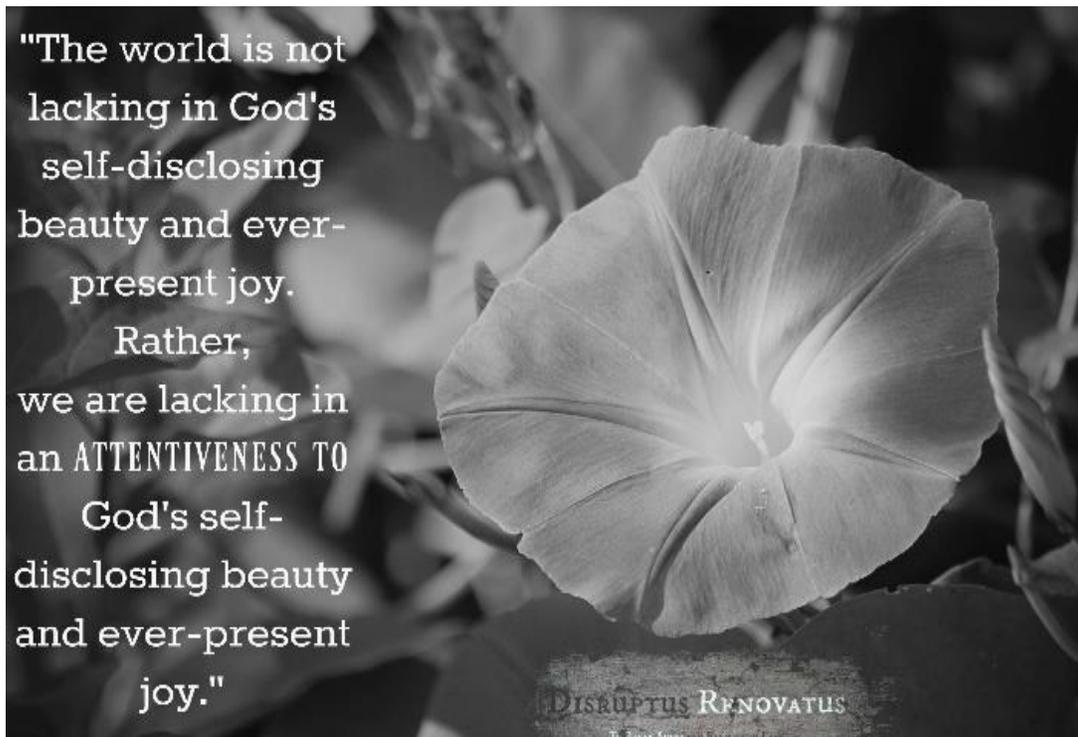
- What’s the author saying?
- What’s the author saying about what He is talking about?

*Example of a main idea: **Surrender is imperative for the disciple.***

- b. Reflect on and prayerfully craft a Main Purpose for this text in your life.
- Why is this in the Bible and why does it matter?

- What actions will I take in response to the text?
  - Is the purpose designed to solidify belief, call me to action, make a specific change in my life, reframe how I view God, etc.?
- c. Reflect on and prayerfully craft a Main Metaphor or image. I love this part of the process.
- Does an image come to mind to help convey what you are hearing/learning?
  - An image for surrender might be someone with their hands raised high, or someone waving a white flag.

I encourage you to leave this time with **one** central image or picture to take with you. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words!



5. **DEPEND UPON CHRIST AS YOU CONTEMPLATIVELY REFLECT ON AND RESPOND TO HIS WORD!** Begin this final phase by simply reading your text and sitting quietly before the Lord for a few minutes – without any distractions.
- a. [Read the selected text slowly and contemplatively.](#)
  - b. Listen for the Spirit and His stirring as you read. Listen for answers to the following questions:

*“What portion of this text captivates you?”*  
*“Is there a word or phrase that stands out or grabs you?”*  
*“What do you **hear** the Lord saying to you through this text today?”*

- Pause for a moment (I suggest one – five minutes) in silent/meditative prayer.

- c. **Read the text a second time.** As you do, ask the following questions of the Spirit:

*“Why am I drawn to this word/phrase?”*  
*“How do you want me to hold this phrase today?”*

- Pause for a moment (I suggest one – five minutes) in silent/meditative prayer.

- d. **Read the text a third time.** As you do, ask the following questions of the Spirit:

*“What actions would you have me take in response to your leading?”*  
*“How would you like me to carry this text with me as I go?”*

- Pause for a moment (I suggest one – five minutes) in silent/meditative prayer.

- e. At the end of your final reading, jot down your responses and/or reflections God has given you during this time.

*\*\*Bring your final thoughts to the Lord and ask Him to spend some time with you as you prepare your heart enter the day or week. Go forth in the confidence that you’ve not only been informed but that you’ve been transformed by the Spirit of Christ revealed in His Word!\*\**

