

Week 4 Devotions: Learning the Spirit's Language of Symbols

There are many layers of interpretation of scripture because God doesn't waste anything. The way he does things always contains revelation for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Jesus says in Mark 4:23-25, *"Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."* ²⁴ Then he added, *'Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given —and you will receive even more.* ²⁵ *To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them."*

Just as Jesus often spoke in parables, the Holy Spirit speaks through the language of symbols. We can train our minds to receive revelation by learning to think in symbolic language. Studying dream interpretation is a quick onramp to receiving revelation because the meaning of dreams is unlocked by understanding the symbols contained in the dream. A person in a dream may be there because of what their name represents as a clue to the theme of the dream (like when someone with the last name Justice showed up in a dream about justice or two people named Esther in a dream were to emphasize the urgency of the assignment given in the dream "for such a time as this"). A person may be there because of a group or relationship they represent (like a person from church representing the church or your father representing God the Father).

Scripture contains many symbols that the Lord has already decoded for us, so when God is sending a message, he may use symbols from scripture like fish to represent people brought into the kingdom (because Jesus commissioned Peter to be a "fisher of men"). Bread in a dream could represent provision ("give us this day our daily bread"), the Word of God (because "man does not live on bread alone but from every word that comes from the mouth of God"), or the body and presence of Jesus, the "Bread from Heaven" who is also the living Word. Deciphering the meaning when there are multiple options requires us to also pay attention to context clues and the overall emotion of the dream. For instance, smelling fish in the spirit can mean something is "fishy," so paying attention to what you were thinking about and otherwise sensing from the Lord at the time of the smell is important.

Today, let's practice applying the clues above to the miracle of the feeding of the multitude for deeper insight. In Mark 6:35-44, Jesus took 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, then blessed them, broke them, and distributed them to feed over 5000 people with 12 basketfuls leftover. What is Jesus saying about his ministry and what he's about to do through this miracle? (Stop and reflect on the symbols before you continue reading.)

Bread represents Jesus' body broken for us, his teaching, and his presence through his body, the church. Five is the number of the fivefold ministry God has given to spread the gospel around the world. Fish are those who are brought into the kingdom. Two represents God's two witnesses on the earth – first Adam and Eve (men and women), then Israel and the Church (God's two covenant groups of witnesses). What is Jesus saying by blessing the broken bread and fish to feed a multitude with 12 basketfuls leftover? God blessed Jesus' broken body to go out through the church to carry Jesus' presence to feed the world with God's truth. God blessed the fish – believers – to multiply, just like he blessed Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. At the end of the age of the church, God's grace will overflow to the 12 original tribes of Israel and all Israel will be saved (see Romans 11 and Revelation 7). The elements of the story could be coincidence or point to more revelation!

Prayer and journal prompt: Ask the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your heart to see hidden revelation in the scriptures and give you more understanding of who he is and how he acts. Now read Luke 11:11-13, applying the above symbolic interpretations of bread and fish, and also recognizing the snake as a symbol of the devil. What is Jesus saying in this parable in regard to asking the Lord for the gift (and spiritual giftings) of the Holy Spirit? When we ask for the Holy Spirit, what is it we're asking God for, according to the symbols Jesus used?

Day 2: Receiving Revelation Through Dreams

One of the ways the Counselor leads us through inner healing is by revealing what's in our heart through dreams. Sometimes God is showing you what's in your heart and subconscious mind so you can process it with him. He speaks through symbols and mysteries because he honors your free will. He won't force you into healing, but when you're ready to receive insight, you can ask the Holy Spirit for interpretation of your dream. Sometimes God is showing you what's in your heart, like unhealed wounds and roots of strongholds. Sometimes he's showing what's in his heart, like prophetic dreams related to your inheritance or his plans for your family. Sometimes he's warning you of something the enemy has planned so you can talk to him and get heaven's strategies to overcome. Dreams are always revealing something, and the Holy Spirit has the key that will unlock the meaning of your dreams.

Write down or record an audio message of your dream on your phone as soon as you wake up, while it's fresh. Record details but look for the main point as you pray for interpretation. Your dreams are usually about you, so the Lord will use imagery that's familiar to you. Your initial interpretation of a symbol is usually the right one, so go with your gut over a dream encyclopedia. Start by underlining the key symbols and ask the Lord what each symbol represents. Consider if you are an active participant in the dream, indicating your involvement, or if you are observing events, which may be a sign the Lord is simply showing you something.

Time doesn't exist in dreams, so you may jump from the past to the present or future. Look for the theme connecting the events. If you're in college with college friends during one part of the dream, then at your current job, the Lord could be speaking of ongoing education or growing in knowledge of your role in the kingdom. Times on clocks are often scripture references. For instance, I saw the time 8:36 on an alarm clock in a recent dream and felt the Spirit say it pointed to John 8:36, "If the Son sets you free, you are truly free." It was a warning dream of an attack, so the Holy Spirit was giving me the "sword of the Spirit" I needed that day.

Going down to the basement indicates getting to the root of something – if it's your basement or the basement of your childhood home, it could mean getting to the bottom of family issues. Likewise, going to outer space indicates the realm of revelation, while an attic or upstairs room can mean your thought life. Going to the bathroom often shows up in dreams because we're needing to relieve burdens or get rid of unneeded waste. Warzone dreams usually point to spiritual warfare.

As we discovered in day 1, a person in a dream could be there because of what their name represents, which is a key to the theme of the dream, or they could represent a relationship with the Father or others. Animals are usually symbolic (snakes point to the enemy, spiders and webs indicate demonic traps, while pets can point to companionship). Pay attention to the time of day (day vs. night) and the feeling of the dream (joy, fear, confusion). These elements help guide your interpretation.

Ask the Holy Spirit for a key word to unlock the overall meaning of a dream, such as "inheritance" or "generational strongholds." He may bring a song to your mind that holds the key to interpreting the dream. For example, I once woke up from a dream with the song, "Unforgettable," in my head. The dream was about retracing my steps while repeating what I heard at the end of the dream. The Lord was showing me in the dream how to recall dreams so I wouldn't forget them! Remember, dreams are a tool the Lord uses to help us uncover mysteries, but only if we bring them to him and invite him to speak to us about them.

Prayer and journal prompt: If you have had a dream you know the Lord wants to talk to you about, ask the Lord to help you recall it, then work through the symbols with him and ask him what he wants you to know. If you don't remember dreams, ask the Lord to give you dreams and try to wake up slowly so you can recall them. Remember to write down even tiny fragments of dreams and pray for revelation. Seek and you will find!

Day 3: Receiving Revelation Through Your Physical Senses

While the Bible mostly records prophetic visions and utterances, we can receive revelation through all our physical senses, not just our eyes and ears. Hebrews 5:14 tells us that *“solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained their senses to distinguish good from evil” (BSB)*. Discernment is a skill that mature believers develop by receiving revelation and chewing on it with the Holy Spirit until it’s fully digested. Because the language of the Spirit is symbolic, often painting pictures with many layers of meaning, the realm of revelation is a slow process of receiving and meditating. All interpretation of revelation will align with scripture, which is what anchors us in truth, and with God’s nature of love and holiness. Revelation is a 4-step process. Ask: 1) what is God showing me, 2) what do the symbols mean, 3) what do I do with this information – prayer is most often the answer, 4) what is the timing of this word/event (is this a now word or for later)?

Eyes: You can receive visions with your eyes (open or closed) or mental pictures that pop into your mind. Apply the same principles from dream interpretation when interpreting visions and mental pictures while listening to the Holy Spirit to give the key. The Lord has given me visions revealing hidden health problems. A hot thermometer and bodily organs pointed to inflammation on the body. The vision also held another clue, a book with the word “keto” on the front. I then began researching connections between the keto diet and inflammation, ultimately choosing to do a healthy keto diet to reduce inflammation, which worked!

Ears: First thing in the morning, pay attention to anything you hear. The Lord will often wake us up with a word for that day because our mind has been at rest, so it’s easier for us to hear. Ask the Lord to teach your spirit while you sleep and wake you up with revelation. Write down what you hear and pray over it. Likewise, pay attention to a song that’s on your mind when you wake up. The Lord is giving you a word of knowledge for your day, the key to interpreting a dream, or just singing over you because he’s a good Father.

Nose: Yes, you can smell in the spirit! Smell is the language of emotion, so the Lord communicates directly to our emotions through smell. The Lord uses smell to reveal the spirit behind a message, give words of knowledge, and help us make decisions because he wants us to know his thoughts. If you think you’re smelling in the spirit, pay attention to what you just heard or thought, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you make the connection. Smells can be symbols – watermelon symbolizes fruit that bears seeds, meat is revelation, fire can be the fire of the Holy Spirit, wine is new wine, rain is the rain of the Spirit, etc. Smells can be connected to the name of the smell – witch hazel can indicate witchcraft, Chex cereal can be a warning to check something, Thanksgiving turkey is thanksgiving, root beer is the spiritual root that is flavoring a thought. Smells can be connected to a familiar phrase, like when I wondered how much to share and smelled enchiladas because the Lord wanted me to share “the whole enchilada.” Smells can trigger a memory because it’s a personal parable that has meaning to you. For instance, I smell chocolate chip cookies when the Lord wants me to know something is good. Whenever I baked chocolate chip cookies for my dad, he would go on and on about how good they are. So when I smell chocolate chip cookies as I’m scrolling through Amazon, looking for which supplement to order, I know my heavenly Father is saying, “That one is good.”

Body: You can receive words of knowledge in your physical body as revelation of the Holy Spirit in you (like feeling fire, seeing oil come out of your skin indicating the Spirit’s anointing, feeling electricity as a sign of the Spirit’s power, etc.). Your angel may poke you or apply gentle pressure to part of your body as a word of knowledge for healing. (The feeling goes away after you pray.) You may feel God’s presence resting on you in worship or oil being poured out on your head. If you feel oppression, take authority over it in Jesus’ name and command it to leave. When the Spirit rests on your body, thank him and ask him what he wants you to know.

Prayer and journal prompt: Ask the Lord to make you aware of his presence through your physical senses. Pay attention to what you see, hear, smell, and feel. Receive with joy, not anxiety and doubt. He loves you!

Day 4: Seeing and Hearing the Lord in Nature

Today, ask the Holy Spirit to take you on an adventure. The goal for today is to practice quieting your mind, opening the eyes of your heart, and tuning your ears to pick up the frequency of heaven. This is much easier to do in nature because there are fewer distractions competing for your attention. Cast all your cares on Jesus and simply show up to receive whatever he wants to give you. Listen with all your senses open to the Lord, ready to receive revelation through sight, sound, smell, feelings in your body, and impressions in your spirit.

Ask the Lord to drop into your spirit an impression of a place he would like to go with you. (Do this activity on a day when you can spend at least 30 minutes with the Lord.) Whatever the first place is that pops into your mind, go with it! If the Lord wants to go on a walk with you, then go on a walk. As you walk, give thanks to God for anything beautiful that catches your eye. (You're training your mind to look for things to be thankful for.) Begin to worship God as Creator and let the majesty and wonder of creation unlock your imagination. Then simply ask the Holy Spirit to highlight something he wants to show you. When you feel drawn to look at something, ask the Lord, "What do you want me to know about that object? How does it relate to my life?" Flying birds may have to do with you taking off in some area of your life. Sun shining through clouds may be Jesus shining light into a dark season. Just receive revelation, whether it comes through dialog or impressions, and give thanks to the Lord for loving you as his child.

If you can't go somewhere because of small children at home, go out to your backyard during naptime or to a park with your kids and take your Bible with you (but leave your phone). As you sit with the Lord, go through the same process above. If you have your Bible with you, you can ask the Lord to drop a scripture reference into your spirit. This is fun because it's a little scripture treasure hunt and will build your faith that you are hearing from the Lord when you look up the verse and receive a word from him. (If you get numbers mixed up or feel like you got it "wrong," laugh it off and remember that God the Father sees you as a little toddler who's still learning his language. Keep listening!)

Remember, God's voice is always kind. Your time with the Lord should align to the 1 Corinthians 13 definition of love (love is patient, love is kind...). If you hear something that makes you feel shame and condemnation, that may be a religious spirit or a wound in your heart speaking. Bring it before the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to wash off of you all fear and striving. Worship the Lord for being a good Father. Worship Jesus for redeeming you with his blood and covering you with his righteousness as you approach the throne of grace. Worship the Holy Spirit for giving you life as a new creation and guiding you into truth. Abide in Jesus' love and refuse to entertain any thoughts that don't originate from God's perfect, unfailing love for you. When you feel secure in God's love for you, ask the Spirit for revelation of how God is loving you today, then notice anything around you that catches your eye. Listen and receive love until your mind is renewed. (This doesn't mean we don't receive correction, but the Spirit's correction will always draw us closer to the Lord, not cause us to shrink back in shame.)

Prayer and journal prompt: Write down whatever the Lord shows you. Thank him for it and ask for more. Pray over any revelation you receive from a place of worship and thanksgiving.

Day 5: Guided by the Holy Spirit through Media

Today's activity may feel like a stretch if you're not used to the idea that the Lord can speak to you through media – which can include secular media. Media can be a wonderful tool the Lord uses to teach us and equip us with knowledge we need. If you have not made a covenant with your eyes and surrendered your media viewing to the Holy Spirit, do that now. Ask him to be the filter through which you view and hear everything. Ask him to give you his thoughts about whatever you hear and help you discern the spirit behind every message. There's no condemnation in this exercise when we choose to receive revelation with joy. It's fun to take the Holy Spirit to the movies with you! He pulls back the curtain to reveal the wizard behind the scenes who's really the one speaking. And sometimes, he's the one speaking through that scene! Ask the Holy Spirit to choose one of the exercises below, then do whichever one you feel drawn to. Don't overthink it!

Music: Today, we're going to invite the Holy Spirit to pick the music we listen to. If you have Pandora or Spotify, pull up a worship station. (I ask Alexa to "play Bethel music on Pandora" or on Amazon through my Echo speaker.) If you have a favorite worship playlist on your ipod, hit shuffle and see what pops up. I recommend Bethel playlists because they have a lot of music that the Father is singing over you, which often seems to be what the Lord wants to do with me when I invite him to pick a song. Ask him what song he wants you to hear and then expect him to choose the music. Listen closely to the first few songs you hear. Do they relate to your life? How is the Spirit leading you in worship? Notice how you feel as you respond and sing along. Do you feel lighter, more connected to the Lord? Enjoy his presence and receive his joy as he sings over you and through you. Invite the Lord to put songs in your mind and pay attention to songs in your head.

YouTube: Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you into truth today through media. In Psalm 32:8 God promises, *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you"* (NIV). Whether you need spiritual encouragement, wisdom for your health, or practical instruction (like gardening advice), ask the Holy Spirit to teach you today. Then pull up your YouTube home page, if you have one. Don't read the labels on the video, but simply scroll through, hovering over each video, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to a video the way he drew your attention to an object (through a pull in your spirit, not your flesh) when you went on a walk with him.

If you don't have the kind of media that the Lord can speak through showing up in your watchlist – no judgment! – do a YouTube search for godly media to get it into your mix. Search YouTube for Bill Johnson's Official site. If you want to grow in your understanding of prophetic symbols, pull up videos from Jonathan Cahn, a messianic Jewish rabbi who delves deep into the symbols of scripture. Likewise, if you need health insight, do a search for videos from Dr. Berg who understands how the body systems work together and recommends nutrition and supplements as healthy alternatives to pharmaceuticals. (The Holy Spirit led me to many of Dr. Berg's videos when we were seeking understanding of my husband's health issues.) Videos by Dr. Caroline Leaf will give additional insight into freedom from captivity to negative thoughts.

Whatever page you pull up, the focus of the activity is to listen to the Holy Spirit and allow him to lead you to what he wants to show you. As you watch the video, tune your ears to receive from the Holy Spirit. Ask him, "What do you want me to know today? How does this relate to me?" If you don't seem to get any clear direction, it may be for a later date. Simply tuck it away and ask the Lord to bring it up when it's relevant. The point isn't to get earth-shattering revelation, but to practice yielding to the Spirit and expecting him to guide you into truth. Remember, *"The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives"* (Psalm 37:23, NLT). *"Ask and it will be given to you"* (Matthew 7:7).

Prayer and journal prompt: Write down whatever you listened to, impressions from the Lord, and applications that come to your mind. Thank the Holy Spirit for being your teacher and caring about every detail of your life.