**INSIGHT FOR LIVING with Chuck Swindoll: Preparing Your Own Meals**

Good nutrition begins with the right foods—prepared the right way. So, how about my encouraging you to cultivate that habit? I know, I know. You're too busy. Furthermore, this is the twenty-first century; very, very few take the time anymore to do their own cooking, right? Wrong.

It may surprise you to know how popular home cooking has become. Each year more people are returning to their kitchens and trying their hand with new (and old) recipes. Smart decision. It's not only a lot healthier and safer to do that, it can be extremely gratifying. When you prepare your own meals, you know exactly what you're eating. So, let me encourage you to join the swelling ranks of home chefs.

But my main concern here is not the food you prepare for your table, it's the food you prepare for your soul—your spiritual "soul food." Since I have mentioned the importance of this several times, it occurs to me that you may be willing to give it a try, but, like returning to your kitchen, you simply may not know how to go about it.

What are some basic steps to take when getting into God's Word on your own? Let me suggest four simple steps . . . taken in this order:

1. *Observation*. Having chosen the verse of Scripture you wish to study, read it through several times—slowly, thoughtfully, and if possible, aloud. Be like a keen-eyed detective as you look at those words. Notice things such as key terms, repeated words, and especially words you may not understand. Take the time to check out their definition in a dictionary. While meditating on the verse, pay close attention to what is written by the author.

2. *Interpretation*. Now you want to get a grasp of what it means. You do this by asking all sorts of questions. Who wrote this? What was he getting at? Why would he write it like that? When did it take place? Where was it written? Your goal here is to figure out the meaning. Take time to answer as much as you can, but don't worry if you can't get every question answered.

3. *Correlation*. Here's where you want to look elsewhere in the [Bible](http://www.crosswalkmail.com/mtnbqscdbwblcpdkltgvzlmzcslpyggpwnczqqknycnpcdn_bqjglfccplbg.html) for a similar verse or a thought that ties in with what your main verse is saying. It's helpful to have a Bible concordance handy—that's a book that lists in alphabetical order each word in the Scriptures. Tracing down related verses can be fascinating!

4. *Application*. Here's where it all comes together, it's the most rewarding part of all. Here you want to address what the verse says to you, personally. Think over what you've uncovered while going through the process of examining the verse—observing, interpreting, and correlating. Next, think about a specific area of your own life where you find encouragement or, perhaps, you feel convicted about something that needs to be changed.

These are the same four steps I take each time I prepare a message that I'm to preach. I've been involved in that process for more than 46 years, and I can tell you, the joy of discovery continues to nourish my soul to this day. Like using a great recipe, the result is wonderfully gratifying!

Many centuries ago, after the Jews had returned to their land and had rebuilt a protective wall around the major city of Jerusalem, Ezra the scribe led them in a time of celebration. Taking the scroll of Scripture, he "opened the book in the sight of all the people" ([Nehemiah 8:5](http://www.crosswalkmail.com/tbbmzjlcmwmklpcgkbfrdksdljkphffpwvldzzgvhlvplcc_bqjglfccplbg.html)), gave God great praise, and then followed a similar plan as I've suggested as he publicly communicated God's truth to all who had gathered together: "They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (8:8).

I urge you to start preparing your own spiritual meals—today.

The joy of discovery in studying God’s Word nourishes my soul to this day.