

2023 LENTEN COMMUNITY GUIDE

SHAPED BY THE STORY



WELCOME

We are all living out a story of some kind. We all have a story that we live by; some narrative for how we're going to make it in life, a vision of the true and beautiful that guides us as to how we might find happiness in the world. For better or for worse, some of these stories we welcome into our lives without hesitation. Others are more insidious—they sneak in uninvited and take up residence. Maybe your story is shaped by the economy. So long as there's a paycheck with enough money and security, things will work out. Maybe it's the story of a political tribe. If we can pull the right levers and get the right people in and the wrong people out, we'll be led to the promised land. Then there's always the popular storylines of youth, beauty, sex, and fitness that various social media algorithms lead you toward (whether you follow any of those people or not). All of these narratives promise a sort of salvation and they've earned a kind of resilience regardless of whether they can deliver or not. So the question isn't whether we're living out a story; the question is, is the story we're living true?

The Bible poses an alternative to the many narratives out there. It is a collection of writings that are both divine and human in origin, which tell the true story of God's grace through Jesus. On the one hand, the Bible is God's story. Reading the scriptures allows us to see with clarity the God who revealed himself in the story of Israel and who became incarnate in Jesus. But it is also a deeply human story. We read it to see ourselves more clearly. Finding our story in the strange world of the Bible shapes our imaginations to live humbly and responsively within the world. The question we'll explore over the next several weeks is how do the words in this strange ancient library still answer the deepest questions of our hearts?

As we approach the joy of Easter this Lent, we will explore a variety of scripture-reading practices. As always, it's essential to remember that spiritual practices are a means to an end. The point of reading the Bible isn't to say that you've done it. The point is that through reading the text (and letting it read you) you increasingly become a person of love, marked by an awareness of what God is doing in the world. As theologian, Joel Green writes:

“The practice of reading scripture is not about learning how to mold the biblical message to contemporary lives and modern needs. Rather, the scriptures yearn to reshape how we comprehend our lives and identify our greatest needs. We find in scripture who we are and what we might become, so that we come to share its assessment of our situation, encounter its promise of restoration, and hear its challenge to serve God's good news.”

Reading scripture is a means of opening oneself to the influence of the Holy Spirit to be shaped in the image of Jesus for the sake of others. If the practices described in this guide begin to shape you in any other way, there's no judgment in abandoning them. Just don't mistake temporary discomfort for malformation—if it's hard, that might be a sign it's working. The invitation in all of the disciplines is to engage as you are able. Our hope and trust over the next six weeks is that the Spirit will move in us as a community shaped by the story.

HOW TO USE THIS:

COMMUNITY + PRACTICES GUIDE

This guide is designed with Community Groups in mind as a bridge between the sermon on Sunday, the conversation that takes place in your groups, and the practices you experience both in your groups and as individuals. The Sunday message serves as a teaching point for the week – if your group meets on Sunday, you may want to engage the content first and then discuss after you’ve worked through the guide.

Each week contains four sections. The goal of the first two is to introduce a pattern of discovery. Which words and phrases leap from the page? Which induce feelings or questions? Pay attention to patterns and nuance. The third section invites you to consider the appropriate course of action you hear God calling you toward as a result of what you’ve read and heard. The last step is a spiritual practice for the week.

TIPS ON PRACTICE

There’s no single way to start a spiritual practice, but here are a few tips to bear in mind:

01 Start small: Begin where you are, not where you think you should be. If committing to 30 minutes of “quiet time” reading the Bible is too much, try five.

02 Do less, not more: Formation isn’t about adding one more thing to your over-busy life. What can you cut out? Maybe it’s one less episode of your favorite series, or setting a timer on your social media so you don’t exceed 20 minutes at a time. Formation requires us to slow down. There are five practices in this guide, but there’s certainly no need for you to attempt them all over the next five weeks. Layer them in as you have time.

03 Remember the J-curve: Experts on habit formation tell us that whenever we begin a new practice, it tends to get harder before it gets easier. In an age of digital saturation, our attention span for sitting still with a text has become imperiled, so it may take effort to build the habit. Don’t be surprised if you find your mind wandering or if you just blow through your reading in a rush because that’s how you tend to read documents at work. Be patient.

04 Formation is repetitive: Much of our interior life is being shaped by the Spirit on levels beneath our conscious awareness. A lot of the time practices can feel dry and even boring, but then slowly, over time, we are different and we don’t know how we got there. There’s a neurological reality to being shaped by a repetitive action in addition to the spiritual reality. The two work best in tandem, so don’t measure whether it’s working by how you feel at any given moment. Being shaped in the image of Jesus is a lifelong process.

05 Formation is idiosyncratic: If you find that God is doing something in you through one or more of the practices, don’t feel the need to rush to the next one. Everyone is different and the goal is to find practices of scripture reading that meet you where you are at this point in your apprenticeship to Jesus.

NOTE TO COMMUNITY LEADERS

This (and any) community guide works best when group members work through the questions and practices prior to gathering. We've tried to make the questions accessible to a new participant, but preparation will only enrich your discussion. As a leader, the best preparation you can make in leading a conversation on prayer is to actively pray for each member of your group throughout the week.

As you begin the study, start each session with prayer and reading the scripture passage for the week. After you read, spend a few minutes in silence. Prayer and silence are companions - we live in a noisy world, where all kinds of things are competing for our attention. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear one another, let alone the voice of God. As we gather together in community, we want to hear what the Spirit is saying to and through each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin with a moment of quiet. You may, at times, want to break the group into triads for the reflection questions. Sometimes the quieter voices participate more easily in these smaller groupings.



SCHEDULE

Ash Wednesday

February 22

01 **Entering the Strange World of the Bible**

Week of February 26

02 **Scripture as Formation**

Week of March 5

03 **Scripture as Meditation**

Week of March 12

04 **Scripture as Authority**

Week of March 19

An Evening Apart

March 23

05 **Scripture as Script**

Week of March 26

Palm Sunday

April 2

Good Friday

April 7

Easter Sunday

April 9

WEEK ONE



ENTERING THE STRANGE WORLD OF THE BIBLE



READ

Matthew 5:17–19 and 2 Timothy 3:14–17 and then spend a few moments in silence. As you prepare to engage God in the scriptures, write out (underline, highlight, etc.) the key words and phrases from these passages. As you participate in the group, take a few moments to share what God revealed to you through those words and phrases.

REFLECT

- What does it mean that Jesus says he has not come to abolish, but to fulfill the law and the prophets?
- When he describes how “anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven” how does that challenge, reinforce, or make you wonder about your own practice of scripture reading?
- Of the four aspects that Paul instructs Timothy about scripture’s use, (teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness) which of these four do you naturally gravitate toward? Which do you shy away from?

Matthew 5:17–19

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

2 Timothy 3:14–17

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

RESPOND

- How would you describe your practice of reading scripture?
- When you think about what is difficult when it comes to scripture, what do you notice in your body? Are you tense or fearful? Does your breathing change? Consider prayerfully asking God what that is about.
- What are some of the biggest obstacles you face when reading scripture?
- How might God be inviting you to engage in the practice of reading scripture in this next season of life?

REMAIN: CONTEMPLATIVE READING

Time: 5-30 Min (all times are suggestions, engage as you are able)

Items Needed: Notepad or journal and pen
Bible

Choose a time of the day in which you can commit to reading scripture on a regular basis that affords you some solitude and a reasonable amount of quiet (early morning before others are awake, or just after kids are at school, evening, etc.). Do whatever you can to minimize distractions. Whenever possible, it's better to read a physical copy of the Bible as opposed to reading scripture on a digital device. Basic idea; give yourself permission to be unavailable to others so you can be present to God.

In a quiet space, set a timer for anywhere between 5 and 30 minutes. Read a passage of scripture, slowly. If you don't know where to start, consider one of the gospels (Mark is the shortest) or one of the passages recommended at the end of each section. As you read, take note of any words, phrases, or images that grab your attention.

As you close your time each day, take a few minutes to reflect or journal on these questions:

- How do I feel when I read this?
- Where do I feel resistance?
- Where do I feel delight?
- Where do I most experience God's nearness?
- What is God asking of me through what I read?
- How does this passage challenge or confirm my sense of self?
- Am I willing to look at that in God's presence?
- As you close your time in prayer, ask the Spirit to help you hear.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE READING

Use the following passages to practice Contemplative Reading. You can use the questions above each time you engage with scripture this week. These passages may be well-known to you if you've spent much time with scripture—they are kind of a "highlight reel" of the Bible. See if reading with a more contemplative posture changes your experience with familiar texts.

Psalm 23

Genesis 1

1 Corinthians 13

Philippians 4

Matthew 4

WEEK TWO



SCRIPTURE AS FORMATION



READ

John 15:1-11. Write out the key words and phrases from this passage. Spend some time in your group discussing what those words and phrases mean.

REFLECT

As you come into your group:

- What arose out of your scripture reading over the course of your week? Did you experience familiar passages in a new or different way?
- What kinds of obstacles or barriers to reading scripture did you experience? How can you bring these to God?

Reflecting on John 15:1-11:

- How does Jesus use the image of a vine, branches, fruit, and gardener to describe the quality of relationship he desires in his disciples? What does each element represent?
- Jesus uses the verb “remain” 11 times in 11 verses. What does that word mean here?
- What is the result of “remaining”?

John 15:1-11

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

RESPOND

- What are some of the practices you engage with to remain in Jesus?
- What fruit has this produced in you? If you don't know, this may be a good place to have other members of the group identify what they've seen.
- Though painful, Jesus describes "pruning" as a necessary part of our formation. In which areas of your life have you experienced God's pruning within the last few months? What role has reading and reflecting on scripture played in that process?

REMAIN: INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Time:	30-60 Min
Items Needed:	Notepad or journal and pen Bible Commentary (optional)

The practice for this week is designed to introduce you to the practice of inductive Bible study – a method of reading scripture in which we investigate the meaning of a particular passage through the process of observation, interpretation, and application. It's meant to be done with little to no outside resources. *If you're familiar with Inductive Study or are looking for something more in-depth, refer to the "How to Study the Bible" Resource in the Appendix*

David Bauer and Robert Traina use the term inductive to describe "a commitment to the evidence that is in and around the text so as to allow that evidence to determine our understanding of the meaning of the text, wherever that evidence may lead." This is critical for reading scripture because we always stand outside of the text, so to speak. Believing, as we do, that "all scripture is God-Breathed" (Tim 3:16) does not exclude the reality that the books of the Bible arose within and were shaped by particular historical, linguistic and cultural contexts. There's no such thing as a neutral reading of the text –we all approach the words of scripture with our own frame of reference and our own cultural background.

That said, without careful attention to the world and words of the Bible, we are in danger of reading into it various forms of meaning that can't be there. It is not enough to simply read scripture. We need scripture to read us, allowing it to define our boundaries and shape our horizons. The following section will walk you through how to ask scripture questions (and let it ask questions of you) by paying careful attention to the text of scripture and allowing the meaning to come on its own terms.

But before we turn our attention toward the methodology of inductive study, it might be worth it to answer the question, "Why develop my own questions?" In short, the answer is because your experience of reading will be more rewarding.

In addition to the reasons mentioned above, here are three ways that developing questions through the inductive method will strengthen your study:

- 01 This kind of preparation allows the Spirit to open your eyes to a greater understanding of the passage.
- 02 Provides an opportunity to discover insights into the passage that apply more directly to your needs and experiences.
- 03 Ensures that your understanding is grounded.

THE INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY PROCESS

The three questions of Inductive Bible Study are in the following categories: Observation (who/what is happening in the text?), Interpretation (why is this happening and what does it mean?), and Application (why does this matter or relate to my life?). To describe the process of inductive study, we're going to look at the passage we just read and reverse engineer the questions we used for the **Reflect** and **Respond** portions.

Step One: Observation

In the first step of this study method we are locating the facts. The goal is to understand what is happening and so we ask the six key questions of investigation: who, what, when, where, why and how. The key process for this step is making lists of the salient facts and details of the story.

Observation Questions:

- Who is in the passage (Who is Jesus speaking to)?
- When do the events of this passage occur?
- What does Jesus say will happen to branches that remain (and those that wither)?
- What kinds of repetitions do you notice in this passage (words, phrases, etc)?
- What does Jesus ask his disciples to do?

Step Two: Interpretation

The second step of inductive study involves discerning the meaning of what you've observed. The goal is to determine the significance of the passage. How do the details work together to tell a particular story? The questions here shift to those of intention—what, why, and how—in order to identify patterns from the points of input gained in the first step.

Interpretation Questions:

- In the picture Jesus describes in verses 1-3, what does each element—vine, gardener, branches, fruit—represent?
- What does Jesus mean when he says, "I am the true vine?" What does the vine symbolize in scripture? (hint: read Isaiah 5:1-7 and Psalm 80:8-18).
- What do verses 5-8 passage suggest about the nature of discipleship?

Step Three: Application

The final step of the process is one in which we integrate the world of scripture with our own world. The goal here is to understand how the passage is relevant to the way we understand and practice our faith. This step involves the imaginative exercise of transposing the values and context of scripture into our situation.

Application Questions:

- How do we "remain" in him? What does this look like in practice?
- How have you experienced the pruning work of the Father in your life?
- Which areas do you acknowledge a need for deeper pruning?

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE READING

Use the following passages to practice Inductive Bible Study this week, applying the study methods of observation, interpretation, and application. This kind of reading can be time consuming, and that's okay. Don't feel the need to rush through each category to check off a box. Perhaps you choose one passage to spend a few days with. Pay attention to what works for you, your schedule, and your phase of life.

Matthew 8:1-13

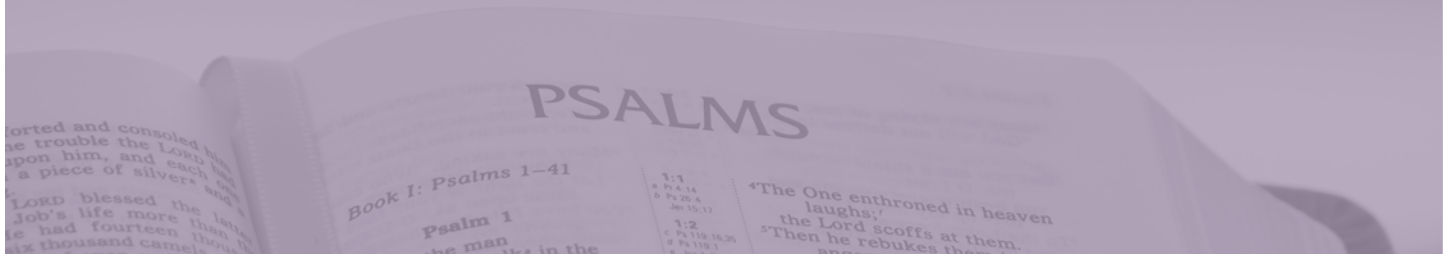
Luke 6:1-11

John 11:1-44

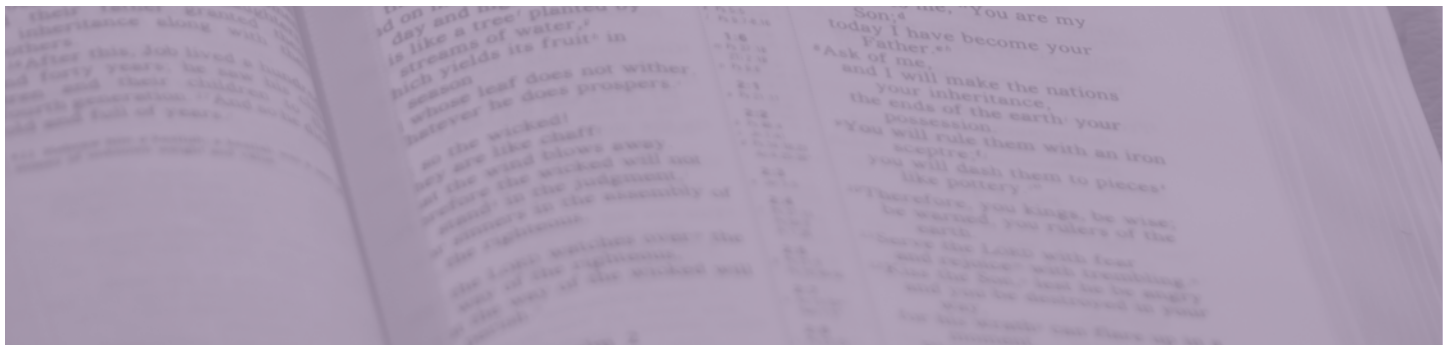
Luke 5:1-11

Mark 8:1-10

WEEK THREE



SCRIPTURE AS MEDITATION



READ

Psalm 19. Write out the key words and phrases from this passage. Spend some time in your group discussing which stood out and had particular meaning.

REFLECT

As you come into your group:

- What was your experience like of using the inductive method to study scripture?
- How did the dynamics of the passage connect with your life experience?

Reflecting on Psalm 19:

- What are some of the ways the sky is used to describe God's glory? What other metaphors does the author use in this Psalm? Why are metaphors so powerful?
- How does the first part of the Psalm (Verses 1-6) connect with the rest of the passage?
- Using the format in Verses 7-8) write your own sentence describing an aspect of God.

The _____ of the Lord is _____,
_____.

Psalm 19

- ¹ The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.*
- ² Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.*
- ³ They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.*
- ⁴ Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.*

God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.

- ⁵ It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding.
It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race.*
- ⁶ The sun rises at one end of the heavens
and follows its course to the other end.
Nothing can hide from its heat.*

- ⁷ The instructions of the Lord are perfect,
reviving the soul.
The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.*
- ⁸ The commandments of the Lord are right,
bringing joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are clear,
giving insight for living.*
- ⁹ Reverence for the Lord is pure,
lasting forever.
The laws of the Lord are true;
each one is fair.*

RESPOND

- When you hear the word meditate, what comes to mind? Have you tried meditating (or centering prayer, or anything similar) before and if so, how has the practice been for you?
- Do you tend to mull over or sit with decisions/life events/experiences, or do you move on fairly quickly?
- The Psalmist asks that the meditations of his heart be pleasing to God. What do you think it would look like for the meditations of your heart to be pleasing to God?

¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold,
even the finest gold.
They are sweeter than honey,
even honey dripping from the comb.
¹¹ They are a warning to your servant,
a great reward for those who obey them.
¹² How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?
Cleanse me from these hidden faults.
¹³ Keep your servant from deliberate sins!
Don't let them control me.
Then I will be free of guilt
and innocent of great sin.
¹⁴ May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

REMAIN: IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

Time: 15-25 Min (or as you are able)
Items Needed: Notepad or journal and pen
Bible

Many of us assume that reading scripture is an intellectual endeavor. We study, we learn, we memorize. But using our imaginations can be a powerful tool to bring us closer to God. Think of Jesus and the stories he told to the crowds, appealing to their imaginations and personal experiences to help them understand deeper truths. So is it with meditating upon scripture.

This kind of reading is more like how one would approach a love letter than a textbook; the way we get lost in a beautifully crafted novel or find ourselves drawn in during a riveting movie. It engages us not as passive observers but as active participants. While practicing imaginative prayer, we seek to experience the passage with all our senses to help us imagine ourselves in the very scenes we're reading about. (Hear the crowd. See the light on the water. Taste the salty fish and fresh bread.)

As always, choose a time and place where you won't be rushed or distracted and where you can focus and enjoy God's word. Begin with this simple reminder: God created us with an imagination and delights when we use it, especially when it allows us to draw closer.

Select a portion of scripture to spend time with. The gospels work well for this type of practice, since they are primarily told in stories, as do the Psalms with their beautiful images and pictures. You can also use the suggested texts below. Read slowly and deliberately. Ponder the words, marinate on the metaphors, or imagine yourself in the scene.

Using the five senses can help ground you in the story. If God's words are described as honey, remember its sweet taste and sticky texture. If the heavens declare the glory of God, recall the last time you witnessed a breathtaking sunset. If the story takes place on the shore, relive a previous visit to the ocean. Summoning these personal experiences can help connect you to the text in a visceral and powerful way.

Allow your mind to expand as you read, and pay attention to what you're drawn to. Is there a particular image that stands out to you? A specific character in the scene you relate to? Is there something new you're discovering about yourself or about God's character as you meditate on the text? Any questions you would ask if you were in the scene?

As Alexander Whyte says, **“With your imagination anointed with holy oil, you again open your New Testament. At one time, you are the publican: at another time, you are the prodigal....at another time, you are Mary Magdalene: at another time, Peter in the porch...Till your whole New Testament is all over autobiographic of you.”**

Close by thanking God for enfleshing himself in our world and using images and experiences to enable us to better understand God’s vast love for us.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE READING

Use the following passages to practice Imaginative Prayer. Engage your senses as you read, or explore the stories from the points of view of different characters for a new perspective. Immerse yourself in the experience.

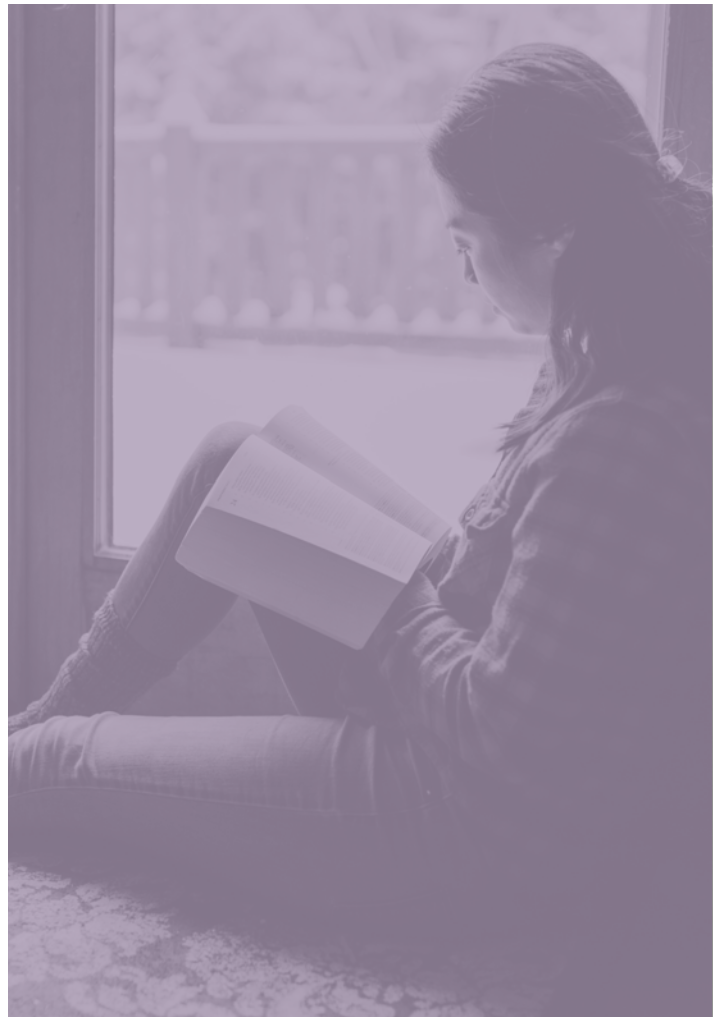
Job 38

John 4:5-30

Luke 7:36-50

Psalms 104

John 20:1-19



WEEK FOUR

SCRIPTURE AS AUTHORITY

READ

Matthew 4:1-11. Write out the key words and phrases from this passage. Which are familiar, which do you hear differently? Spend some time in your group discussing what those words and phrases mean.

REFLECT

As you come into your group:

- Describe your experience of imaginative prayer.
- How did it feel for you to engage the scriptures through your imagination? Was it a challenge or did it come naturally?
- What, if anything, surprised you?

Reflecting on Matthew 4:1-11:

- How does temptation function in this story?
- What stands out to you about how Jesus defeated Satan in this story? What role does scripture serve as a counterpoint to these temptations?
- How might we learn to recognize and defeat the voices that whisper attractive lies to us?

Matthew 4:1-11

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

RESPOND

Engaging with this week's practice:

- When you think about spiritual authority, what comes to mind?
- What does it mean that Jesus trusted the Bible as having authority?
- Is there an area of life in which you struggle to trust the Bible as authoritative? If so, what other sources of authority come to mind, and how do they interact with scripture?

REMAIN: COMMITTING SCRIPTURE TO MEMORY

Time:	15-25 Min
Items Needed:	Notepad or journal and pen Phone (optional) Post It Notes (optional) Bible

One way to keep the words of scripture in our hearts is by committing them to memory and repeating them as we go throughout the day. It has been said that repetition is the mother of pedagogy. Begin by reading the passage aloud several times. Take in the meaning. Begin with small phrases and ruminate upon those for a time.

There's no doubt that Jesus' mind was saturated with the text of the Hebrew Bible. Throughout his life and ministry the scriptures were central to his teaching, to his interaction with the teachers of the law, to his disciples and, as the passage above indicates, even to Satan. Paper was expensive and the scriptures were largely confined to the synagogues, so when Jesus taught, he taught from memory.

As we talk about memorizing scriptures, the temptation is to believe that we are not, or won't be, good at it. And the truth is, this is a journey and it will take time to develop the skill of memorization. But it doesn't mean that we shouldn't do it. Memorizing scripture helps us to learn what the voice of God sounds like. And for the apprentice of Jesus, it is necessary for life in the Kingdom.

You can start with shorter passages you may already be familiar with (e.g John 3:16, Proverbs 4:5-6, or Psalm 23) or longer passages that are meaningful to you (John 15, Galatians 5, or Romans 12). Either way, keep it simple and start small. And if you learn best when you do something with your hands, it can be helpful to knit, shuffle a deck of cards, squeeze a stress ball, etc. while you quote. The repetitive motion will help you concentrate.

Index Card: Write the scripture passage on one side of an index card and the verse reference on the other side. Carry the card around with you so you can work on memorizing in your free time.

Record Yourself: Using the voice memos on your phone, record yourself reading scripture. Listen to the recording while you're going about your daily tasks.

Make It Visible: Tape the verse(s) to the bathroom mirror or to your car dashboard and work on it as you go about your day. You can also put it as your desktop or phone background. You'll honestly be surprised by how much that helps.

Repetitive Writing: Transcribe the verse(s) by hand. Rewrite the verse(s) over and over or use hand-lettering or other creative illustrations or pictures as a way of putting it in your mind.

Repetitive Recitation: Read the verse(s) out loud in 5 minute increments and repeat (while allowing some time for your mind to rest). Worked out as a discipline, this could look like:

- Reading/Reciting it out loud 4 times per day for a week
- Then, read/recite it out loud once a week for a month
- Then read/recite it once every three months for a year
- And then read/recite it once every year

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE READING

You'll be more motivated to memorize a passage that's personal to you and what's going on in your life right now, so follow your gut on what is relevant and inspiring. Pick one of the passages mentioned above, choose one of the texts below, or find something on your own that's compelling. The point of this week is to spend multiple days reading and memorizing the same scripture, not memorizing a different verse each day.

Philippians 4:6-8

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

Galatians 5:4-6

Psalms 127:1-2

Psalms 121



WEEK FIVE

SCRIPTURE AS SCRIPT

READ

Luke 4:16-22. Write out the key words and phrases from this passage. Spend some time in your group discussing what these words and phrases mean.

REFLECT

As you come into your group:

- What was your experience of memorizing scripture like? Is this something you already do? Have you ever done this before?
- Any thoughts, creative ideas, or feedback on this coming week's practice? Is there anything new you want to try? Or something that has been helpful to you in the past that you'd like to share?

Reflecting on Luke 4:16-22:

- What does Jesus use for his first public teaching in the synagogue?
- How do his listeners initially react to his reading of this passage?
- How does Jesus interpret the passage?

Luke 4:16-22

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

RESPOND

Engaging with this week's practice:

- We began this series with the notion that we are all living out a story of some kind. How does the scripture help provide an alternative story by which to read the world?
- As you think about the course of your life, how has scripture shaped your imagination most deeply?
- What specifically has it inspired you to do that you might otherwise not be doing? What might God be calling you to do in this next season of your life?

REMAIN: PRAYING THROUGH SCRIPTURE

Time: 15-25 Min

Items Needed: Notepad or journal and pen
Bible

Scripture not only expresses the range of our emotions toward God, but also provides language that funds our imaginations. In the same way that jazz musicians use the raw elements of melody and time signature to improvise, scripture can provide a way to focus our prayers and draw new insights as we approach God.

Begin your time with the Word by reaffirming that the purpose of this reading is to let God address you through the text. Turn to the passage and begin to read slowly, pausing between phrases and sentences. If a word or phrase seems especially poignant, stay with it. Take notice. Are you discovering something new about yourself in the process of reading?

Allow a prayer to come out of this encounter. This can happen spontaneously, in your own mind, but it can also be helpful to write out your prayer in a journal or on a piece of paper. Consider the following questions as you explore the text:

- How does what you've read give words to your own needs or longings?
- What questions do you have for God as a result of your reading?
- What words or phrases reinforce what you know to be true about God?
- How does this text move you into prayer and/or action for others?

Close by thanking God for meeting you in the text.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE READING

Use the following passages to practice Praying Through Scripture. You can use the questions above each time you engage with scripture this week. Pay attention to what comes up while you're praying. Are there common themes or patterns? Do you find yourself praying differently based on what you're reading? There's no right or wrong answer, just be aware of your experience.

Psalm 16

Matthew 5:1-16

Galatians 5

Micah 6:6-8

Psalm 139



APPENDIX

APPENDIX 01 | HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

(Mark Grapengater)

Why? One of the great things about the Bible is that no matter how many times you return to it, it always speaks in a fresh new way into our lives. As Karl Barth said, “I have read many books, but the Bible reads me.” Scripture speaks into our lives. It reminds us of who we are (sinner and saint), it reminds us of God’s presence in our lives, and it reminds us of how God recklessly pursues us with his love that pours out through the person of Jesus Christ. It is a library of books and includes history, poetry, prophecy, biography, personal letters, and personal accounts with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

But it’s not always easy to grasp its meaning in our lives, or in the lives of the original hearers and readers. It has been misused and abused, twisted and distorted and used to do great harm in the world. So careful study is necessary. Often, when we read a passage at first glance it bristles our modern sensibilities. When this happens, we must not cast the passage out, but we must push further and study closer to discover the deeper meaning sometimes hidden beyond our first peripheral reading. In order to do so we must know how to navigate scripture and have the right tools at our disposal. This, of course, starts with a good translation.

Translations: The Bible most of us hold in our hands is a translation of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek written over the course of 1500 years. For most of us, we cannot read the original languages and therefore need a good translation. There are endless choices with our modern English Bibles. Where do we start? There are three main schools of thought on translating: 1. Formal Equivalence (literal, or word-for-word) 2. Functional Equivalence (dynamic, or thought-for-thought) and 3. Free Translations (paraphrastic, or idea).

Formal/Literal attempt to keep as close to the “form” of the Hebrew or Greek, both words and grammar, as can be conveniently put into understandable English. Functional/Dynamic translations attempt to keep the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek, but to put their words and idioms into what would be the normal way of saying the same thing in English. Free/Paraphrastic attempt to translate the ideas from one language to another, with less concern about using the exact words of the original. Each has their purpose, whether for original language study, devotional, or gaining more commentary on the original text.

Here are some suggestions and where they fall on the translation school-of-thought continuum:

Literal	Dynamic	Paraphrase
N/KJV NASB N/RSV ESV NIV	NAB GNB NLT	The Message

The Kingdom New Testament translation by N.T. Wright is probably in the middle in the dynamic range, while it still preserves a fairly literal rendering of the original Greek.

Do know that translators are not impartial judges of the original languages (“The translator’s a traitor” as a Seminary Prof has said). They each translate according to their theology, for better or worse. If you are trying to find the translation for you, read the Introductions and Preface in the front of the Bibles. These will tell you a lot about the translator’s goals and aims. For studying it is best to have multiple translations in front of you to cross-reference various translations. Biblegateway.com has more translations than one could read.

Finally find a good Study Bible with good study notes, which tells the background of each book, the historical context and authorship, themes, and scriptural cross-references. (I am partial to the ESV Study Bible, which has a lot of great maps and diagrams—in other words, pictures.)

Interpreting a Text. There are two tasks in Biblical Interpretation—exegesis and hermeneutics. In both of these tasks we are constantly asking, “What is the Gospel principle at play in this text?” In other words, how does the Gospel drive this text home? How does the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus shed light onto this passage?

Exegesis: Interpreting scripture begins with exegesis, which is discovering the original intent of the words of the Bible. What was the author originally saying when he or she wrote the text? This begins by reading the whole text before us. Reading through the whole book gives us context with what we are looking to study. We must know how this section of scripture fits within the whole. As a Seminary prof. once said, “Context is King.” Scripture is not a rule book to follow—so we can’t lift certain sections outside of the whole—but rather the story of God’s redemption into which we are invited to participate. So we must pay close attention to the contexts to which passages lie in order to apply them to our lives.

Historical Context: This is usually book specific. Chronology, culture, geography, topography, and politics all factor into how a book is written. Knowing the background—the author, the place where it was written, the people to whom it was written, the main themes, and the OT themes being expounded upon—gives us the historical context to a specific book or text of scripture. Often we must use a Study Bible or Bible Dictionary to find this information out (see biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/ or biblegateway.com/resources/dictionaries/). Furthermore, we must look at the occasion and purpose to which a book is written. “What is happening?” and “Why was this book written?” are questions that we can find the answers to within the book itself, usually within the first chapter.

Literary Context: We also have to look at how the words themselves relate to one another. Words only have meaning when they are in a sentence; sentences have meaning because of the sentences preceding and following it. So on with paragraphs and chapters. The crucial question to ask at this point is “What’s the point?”—what is the author trying to say; why is he or she saying it here; how does this relate to the words around it, the section around it and the book around it.

A Note on Commentaries: Commentaries can be very helpful to discern all of the above, but it is usually suggested that they be one the last things you consult in your Bible study. Thorough examination of a text with a good Study Bible and concordance go a long way in the getting to the original meaning of the text.

Hermeneutics: After spending time exegeting scripture, we then come to hermeneutics, which is asking the question, “What does the Bible mean here and now?” The reason we must first look at the original meaning, rather than starting with the here and now is because the original intent of the passage must be the controlling principle for interpretation. In other words, a text cannot mean what it never meant.

Further, we have two Guiding Principles for Interpretation:

God is the ultimate character or Hero of the story.

God is always telling his story of redemption.

Quick Start Study Questions:

Questions to ask of the text.

What does this passage say about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit?

What does this passage say about me?

Questions to ask of yourself.

What do I struggle to believe in this passage? Why?

How would my life change if I believed this?

APPENDIX 02 READ-PRAY-DO: A DAILY FAMILY GUIDE THROUGHOUT LENT

(Deborah Noble)

We have printed copies of a daily family guide available for those with small children. If you prefer an all-in-one resource, the guide is reprinted here for your convenience.

01 - Ash Wednesday

Read: Then Jesus said to his followers; "If any of you want to be my follower, you must stop thinking about yourself and what you want. You must be willing to carry the cross that is given to you for following me." (Matthew 16:24)

Pray: Lord, help me to follow you today and always. Amen.

02 - Thursday

Learn: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39)

03 - Friday

Pray: Think of someone who lives near you and ask God to bless them today.

04 - Saturday

Do: This weekend fast from something you like to eat (e.g. sweets).

05 - Monday

Learn: Jesus said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. The only way to the Father is through me. (John 14:6)

06 - Tuesday

Pray: Pray for someone who doesn't know Jesus. Pray that they will hear about him and follow Him.

07 - Wednesday

Do: Do you know anyone you could invite to church or tell about Jesus?

08 - Thursday

Read: "I will give thanks as long as I live. I will raise my hands to you in prayer." (Psalm 63:3-4)

09 - Friday

Do: Make a list of things you are grateful for and thank God for them!

10 – *Saturday*

Do: This weekend give up something you like to do. (e.g. like TV or video games).

11 – *Monday*

Read: “Do for other people what you would like them to do for you.” (Luke 6:31)

12 – *Tuesday*

Do: Something kind for someone today.

13 – *Wednesday*

Learn: “God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)

14 – *Thursday*

Pray: Pray for someone you know who is sick. Ask God to be with them and look after them.

15 – *Friday*

Pray: Ask God to bless and help the doctors and nurses who look after the sick.

16 – *Saturday*

Do: This weekend do some things to help around your home.

17 – *Monday*

Read: Jesus said: “Do not let your hearts be troubled, trust God and in me.” (John 14:1)

18 – *Tuesday*

Pray: For someone going through a difficult time. Ask God to be with them.

19 – *Wednesday*

Read: “Be kind and loving one to another and forgiving one another just as God has forgiven you in Christ.” (Ephesians 4:32)

20 – *Thursday*

Do: Is there someone you need to forgive for something they have said or done to you? Pray and ask God to help you.

21 – *Friday*

Learn: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Colossians 3:25)

22 – *Saturday*

Do: This weekend sort out some of your clothes or toys for charity or food for a food bank to help those in need.

23 – *Monday*

Read: “This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalm 118:24)

24 – *Tuesday*

Do: What are you happy about today? Give thanks to God!

25 – *Wednesday*

Do: Thank God for your friends.

26 – *Thursday*

Pray: For one of your friends today and God to look over them and help them.

27 - Friday

Do: Thank God for all those who love you and look after you.

28 - Saturday

Do: This weekend do something kind for someone.

29 - Monday

Pray: For one of your teachers and ask God to help them in their work.

30 - Tuesday

Do: Give thanks for the food you eat today.

31 - Wednesday

Read: Jesus said: "I am the bread of life." (John 6:35)

32 - Thursday

Learn: "God loved the world so much that he gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him may not be lost, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

33 - Friday

Pray: Thank God for giving us everlasting life through Jesus Christ.

34 - Saturday (Before Palm Sunday)

Read: the account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem from Matthew 21:1-11. "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." (Matthew 21:9)

35 - Monday

Pray: for the leaders of your church. Ask God to bless them and help them in their work.

36 - Tuesday

Do: What are you frightened by? Ask God to help you not to fear and to trust in Him.

37 - Wednesday

Learn: "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be frightened, for I am your God. I strengthen you, I help you. (Isaiah 41:10)

38 - Thursday

Learn: Jesus said: "Love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you." (Matthew 5:44)

39 - Good Friday

Read: "No one has greater love than this; that one lays down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

40 - Holy Saturday

Learn: "All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Easter Sunday

Read: The account of the resurrection in Matthew 28:1-10. "He is not here. He has risen from the dead as he said he would." (Matthew 28:6).

APPENDIX 03 | PRACTICE: MEDITATION THROUGH LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is a practice designed to help us meditate slowly on scripture. Whereas study sets its focus on learning about the context, structure, and meaning of the Bible, *lectio divina* is an ancient path designed to help us meet God in and through the words of scripture. In doing so, we allow the Spirit to lead us into further intimacy with God as we move slowly, deliberately, and repeatedly through a particular passage.

Any passage of scripture can be utilized for the practice of lectio divina. Here are a few suggestions with which to start:

Psalm 23

Psalm 103

John 15:1-17

Psalm 145

Before reading, it's essential that you prepare to meet with God: this may mean turning off digital devices or other things that call for your attention. Get comfortable in a quiet, solitary place. Still your body and your mind before God as a means of preparing your heart to receive the grace God has spoken through scripture. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read. After selecting one passage, read and move slowly through each of the movements.

Read (lectio): Read the passage slowly and carefully. Take your time. As you move through the text, pay close attention to whatever words, ideas, and images uniquely draw your attention. When you find a particular word, phrase, or thought captures your imagination, pause momentarily to reflect.

Reflect (mediatio): As you contemplate the passage, return to the beginning and read again. On the second reading, allow the text to connect with you personally. Which words or phrases strike a chord in your heart, in whatever season of life or circumstance you find yourself in. Ask God, who are you calling me to be or become in light of this passage?

Respond (oratio): The third stage of reading is one in which you talk to God about what you are reading. If you don't understand, say so. If you have a clear emotional response, share that with God. If you are angry or upset, tell God what has caused this reaction and listen. Does what you read produce a desire to worship? Sing. If your reading has brought something else to mind, bring it to the Lord in the confidence that he will hear.

Rest (contemplatio): Pause to sit in God's presence before fleeing from the moment. Simply allow yourself to feel. Remember the word or phrase you heard and bring it to the Lord throughout this day or the next.

APPENDIX 04 | FOR FUTHER READING

Literarily: How Understanding Bible Genres Transforms Bible Study

by Kristie Anyabwile

Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth (Specifically the sections on Meditation and Study)

by Richard J. Foster

Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope

by Esau McCaulley

Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation

by Robert Mulholland Jr.

Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God Through Scripture

by Richard Peace

Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading

by Eugene Peterson

Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible

by E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien

Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today

by N. T. Wright

Virtuoso Theology: The Bible and Interpretation

by Frances Young



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