

RENEWING THE MIND

Scripture



SESSION 1: A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE WORD

Main Text:

Matthew 5:17-20

Take Home Exercise:

Read through
Matthew 5-7



OPENING EXERCISE (5 Minutes)

Spend a moment in prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together, and then lead your group through the following exercise.

Gather together as a community group in a comfortable setting—around a table, on a couch, on a living room floor, etc. Invite someone in your group to pray and invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

As a way of holding an open posture toward God’s Word, spend the next 8-10 minutes engaging with a short passage from Psalm 119 using the ancient practice of lectio divina. Lectio divina, literally translated “divine reading,” is a prayerful, formative exercise of listening to God through scripture. In this practice, the passage is read a total of three or four times, and there is intentional space for silence between each reading. This enables us to slow down and be attentive to God’s presence and direction. The goal of lectio divina is not to interpret the text but rather to meet God in it.

Slowly move through the four steps detailed below as you engage with **Psalm 119:1-8** as a group:

1. Quietly Prepare Your Heart (Silencio) 1 Minute: Enter into God’s presence, slow down, and take a few deep breaths. Identify and release the thoughts and cares in your mind to him.

2. Read the Passage (Lectio) 1 Minute: Read Psalm 119:1-8 aloud for the group. Invite your group to take note of any word or phrase that catches their attention. Don’t analyze it, judge it, or feel the need to do anything with it; just listen and wait.

3. Meditate (Meditatio) 2 Minutes: Slowly reread the passage, and invite your group to listen for any invitation God may be extending to them. Take time to listen, ponder, and explore that further with him.

4. Respond in Prayer (Oratio) 2 Minutes: Read the passage a third time. Dialogue individually with God about your experience of reading this passage, responding truthfully and authentically to the text. Where have you been encouraged? Where might you be resistant to the text and what God has brought to mind?

5. Rest (Contemplatio) 2 Minutes: Rest and wait in the presence of God. Allow some time and space for the Word to sink deeper in. Once again, yield and surrender yourself to God. Consider how you might carry this time in the Word into the rest of your day.

STUDY THIS TOGETHER (15-20 Minutes)

Lead the study and discussion below for your group. Feel free to read it in its entirety or put it in your own words.

We all come to the scripture with questions, doubts, good experiences, concerning experiences, baggage, etc. Some of us have a great relationship with the Bible, others a troubled one. And that is okay. The Bible is strange, wild, confusing, beautiful, complex, inspiring, profound, truth, all of it! But regardless of how we come to the Bible, as followers of Jesus, we want to continually learn how to view scripture the same way as Jesus. Spend some time discussing your relationship with the Bible as a group using the questions below.

What initial thoughts, feelings, or questions come up for you when you think about scripture? What are some of the things from your past experience that you bring to the Bible?

Scripture is the divinely inspired library of writings known to us as the Bible. It tells one unified story, leading to Jesus.

Briefly discuss the definition of scripture above. What stands out to you from this definition, and why?

Over the next four gatherings as a group, you will explore the role of scripture in our spiritual formation and the various ways to incorporate the habit of scripture into your daily rhythms. The habit of scripture is the consistent integration of the Word of God through the rhythms of approach, encounter, and response:

Approach - Cultivating an attitude of prayer and humility toward the scriptures.

Encounter - Opening our lives to meet God in and through the scriptures.

Response - The integration of our encounter with God into the daily contours of our life.

Why do you think our approach to scripture is significant? How might our approach or posture toward scripture impact the way we engage with it?

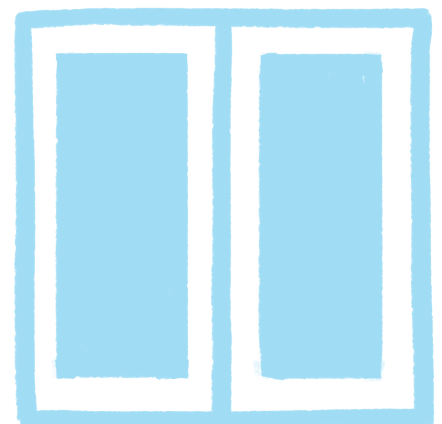
In the Sermon on the Mount, we observe Jesus teaching with authority about the kingdom of God and what it means to live into this kingdom. Jesus reveals that the authority by which he teaches is not in contradiction to the scriptures. After all, he ultimately is the fulfillment of scripture. The particular passage we are about to study reveals Jesus' view of scripture and the proper posture and response to those seeking to live into the kingdom of God. Author John Mark Comer puts it this way: "For Jesus, there is a reciprocal relationship between how we approach the Bible and the level of our experience in the Kingdom of God."

Spend some time now revisiting the text from the first week's sermon. Invite someone to read **Matthew 5:17-20** aloud for the group.

What is Jesus referring to when he talks about the "Law and Prophets"? (see Luke 24:26-27, Acts 10:34-43) Why is this significant?

Why is it significant that Jesus came "not to abolish the law but to fulfill it" (v.17)? What does this reveal about Jesus' view of scripture and its importance?

The Pharisees were zealous about God's law, but Jesus says our righteousness must surpass theirs. What do you think he means by



this? How is the heart posture of God-pleasing righteousness different from that of the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law?

The Pharisees were devoted to the scriptures but ultimately refused to come to Jesus to have life. They loved scripture but had not come to accept and love the One in whom all scripture is fulfilled. Jesus reveals in this passage that it is not simply enough to love scripture—especially if our engagement with scripture does not ultimately lead us to love God and love others. This reminds us again that the ultimate aim of our engagement with scripture is to allow the Spirit of God to do the internal work of transformation.

Briefly discuss the following quote from *The Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard:

“Actions do not emerge from nothing. They faithfully reveal what is in the heart, and we can know what is in the heart that they depend upon...We must aim to transform the inner life of the soul, and then behavior will naturally and easily follow. But not the reverse.”

What stands out to you from this quote and why?

What would it look like for us to allow the scriptures to shape and transform our “inner life of the soul”?

DISCUSSION (20 Minutes)

Spend a few moments debriefing the sermon from this week together and discuss the following questions as a group.

Based on individual and communal experiences in the past, we all have some form of relationship to the scriptures. We each hold a particular view of the Bible and its origin, importance, authority, and relevance. Take some time now to reflect on and honestly acknowledge before God and others in our group what you truly think and feel about the scriptures. Hold space for wherever you and others may personally be in your journey of faith.

Is engaging with scripture already part of your apprenticeship to Jesus? If so, what does that look like? What (or who) has influenced the way you currently read scripture? What does your journey with scripture look like?

What challenges do you face when it comes to the Bible? What internal resistance (i.e., fear, confusion, boredom, skepticism) or external resistance (i.e., time, distractions) have you experienced when engaging with scripture?

What might Jesus be inviting you into through this habit of scripture? Is there anything about your current view of or posture toward scripture that he may be graciously revealing or challenging?

What role has community (i.e., church, family, small group, mentors) played in your relationship with scripture? What would it look like for this group to be a safe and welcoming space to explore and engage with scripture together?

TAKE HOME EXERCISE (5 Minutes)

Read through the below exercise, adapted from *Practicing the Way*, that each individual will do before your next gathering. Talk through any questions people may have on what they are to do. Again, it is about practice, not perfection. Give yourselves grace.

However we may read the Bible, one practice that many of us don't often consider but that was fundamental to followers of Jesus for centuries is reading large portions of the Bible out loud in one sitting. This week, we want to practice this tradition.

Identify a 20-30 minute chunk of time this week, potentially on your Sabbath, when you can read through the Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 5-7) aloud. You could do this on your own or even **invite**

others to join you.

Keep in mind that your approach to reading is more important than technique. Pay attention to your posture, and if you can, note what happens as you listen to the scripture. Open yourself to God's voice and let the words you hear challenge, shape, and bless you.

Below are a few suggestions for how you might spend this time:

1. Get Comfortable.

You'll be reading for the next 20 or so minutes, so make sure that you're in a place, position, and posture that allows you to be still, attentive, and open to God.

2. Invite the Holy Spirit.

Take a deep breath and settle in. Invite the Holy Spirit to help you listen in a posture of surrender and to form you by what is read.

3. Read.

Spend time reading the entire text (Matthew 5-7) aloud in one sitting. You could also invite someone else to read it aloud or listen to it being read on the Bible App.

4. Take Time for Silence and Prayer.

After the last verse is read, don't rush onto the next part. Take a moment in silence and stillness, letting the words reverberate inside your mind and soul. After a bit, pray, or if doing this with others, invite someone else to pray to thank God for the experience of this practice.

CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 Minutes)

Close your time by reading and reflecting on a portion of the Prayer for Illumination. Then take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other's upcoming week.

Living God, help us so to hear your holy Word that we may truly understand; that, understanding, we may believe, and, believing, we may follow in all faithfulness and obedience, seeking your honor and glory in all that we do; through Christ our Lord. Amen.