

# SESSION 4: SCRIPTURE AS SPIRITUAL READING

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## Main Text:

Psalm 1

## Take Home Exercise:

One Thought Method



## 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*, literally translated “divine reading,” is a prayerful, formative exercise of listening to God through scripture. In this practice, the passage is read 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 119:97-104** 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.

## **HABIT CHECK-IN (5 Minutes)**

**Spend some time debriefing the take-home exercise from your last gathering.**

In our last gathering, you were encouraged to commit scripture to memory. Reflect on your experience together and share any takeaways from the exercise. Giving yourself immense grace, share with the group how this went.

How was this experience for you? What was particularly encouraging, challenging, or surprising to you?

Was there anything you found helpful (e.g., a particular tool or strategy) as you memorized scripture?

What might it look like for you to incorporate memorization into your rhythms of engaging with scripture? Are there any specific passages of scripture that you want to commit to memory?

## **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.**

Invite someone in your group to read Psalm 1.

This Psalm is considered an introduction to the entire book of Psalms. It presents the Psalms as wisdom literature that presents two paths: the way of those who delight in the word of the Lord and the way of the wicked. Psalm 1 is an invitation to organize your life around meditating on the divine instruction from God. The kind of reading and meditation suggested in this Psalm moves from a mere informational mode of reading to a spiritual (formational) mode of reading.

Take some time to look at the metaphors used in Psalm 1. Spend a few minutes listing what metaphors the Psalmist uses to speak about the person who delights in God's law and the person who does not.

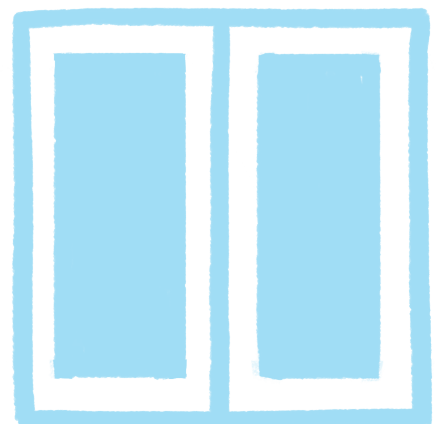
Reread verse 2. What do you think it means and practically looks like to delight in God's law? How might you grow in your delight in God's law?

Can you think of someone in your life in whom you have observed stability and rootedness in God's Word? What stands out about this person and how they engage with scripture? How might you follow their example?

## **DISCUSSION (20 Minutes)**

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

Ultimately, our engagement with scripture is to further our formation into the image of Christ. However, in the modern information-saturated world, we are trained from a young age not to read for our formation but solely to acquire information. Of course, this is not a bad thing, but as apprentices of Jesus, any informational reading of scripture is in service to a greater way of reading, which is formational reading. Formational reading is a way of engaging with the scriptures that move from words on a page to understanding we are meeting God in the text and allowing him to speak to us. This way of reading will require that we continually approach the scripture with humility



and a posture of submission.

How might the way we approach scripture impact our experience with scripture? In other words, why is our posture toward scripture significant?

In his book *Shaped by the Word*, Robert Mulholland compares informational and formational reading of scripture. What stands out to you about these distinctions?

**In informational reading, we:**

- Cover as much as possible
- Have a goal of mastering the text
- Read analytically
- Cover what we need to
- Have a goal of being mastered by the text
- Read receptively

**In formational reading, we:**

- Read line after line.
- Treat the text as an “object”
- Solve problems
- Read for depth, perhaps only a word
- Treat ourselves as the object of the text
- Are open to mystery

Why is it necessary to read scripture both informationally and formationally? What do we miss if we solely read it for information?

How does engaging with scripture formationally deepen our relationship with God?

What makes spiritual or formational reading challenging? What obstacles might you face?

Briefly discuss the following quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

*“The Word of Scripture should never stop sounding in your ears and working in you all day long, just like the words of someone you love. And just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all...Do not ask, “How shall I pass this on?” but “What does it say to me?” Then ponder this word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you.”*

What stands out to you from this quote?

How might we resist the urge to be productive or efficient in our engagement with scripture?

## 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.**

The exercise for this week is to practice spiritual reading by setting aside time to contemplate scripture. When we engage with scripture contemplatively, we take time to slowly chew, savor, and digest God’s Word. We take time to behold, ponder, and simply sit with the Word of God. In his book *Eat This Book*, Eugene Peterson writes that contemplating scripture entails “getting the text into our muscles and bones, our oxygen-breathing lungs and blood-pumping heart.”

There are various methods of approaching scripture contemplatively. For this exercise, we have included two: the one-thought method and *lectio divina*. There is no need to do both of these; simply choose one to help you slowly engage with scripture this week. Feel free to pick any passage or Psalm to use this week during the exercise. You may find it helpful to return to a section of your choosing from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

## The One-Thought Method

Read through the passage and select one key thought that strikes you. It could be anything you feel God is highlighting for you in the passage—perhaps a phrase, theme, or promise. Write the thought down, and then, turning it back to God, make that thought into a prayer.

In the space below, or in a journal or notebook, write down the thought from God (and how it impacts you):

## Lectio Divina

In this approach, you prayerfully read the passage three or four times and listen to God through scripture. Consider reading the passage aloud or listen to it being read to you on the Bible app. Move through each of the following steps at your own pace.

Write out a prayer/response to God based on this thought:

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## CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 Minutes)

**Close your time by praying through Psalm 1:1-3 as a group. Then, take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other during the upcoming week.**

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers. Psalm 1:1-3