

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?

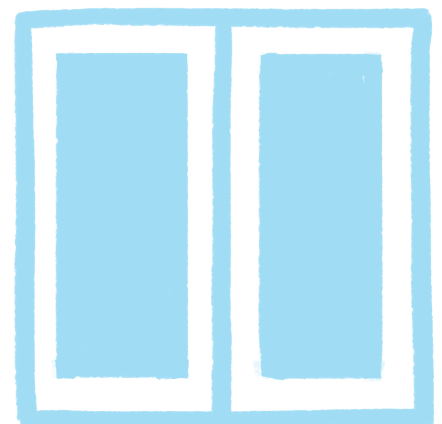
In the Sermon on the Mount, we observe Jesus teaching with authority about the kingdom of God and what it means to live into this kingdom. Jesus reveals that the authority by which he teaches is not in contradiction to the scriptures. After all, he ultimately is the fulfillment of scripture. The particular 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.

SESSION 2: SCRIPTURE AS ALTERNATIVE STORY

Main Text:

Luke 4:14-22, 28-30

Take Home Exercise:

Practice SOAP



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," which 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 119:33-40** 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 the last gathering, you were encouraged to read through the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) aloud in one sitting. Reflect on your experience together, and share any takeaways from that time. Giving yourselves immense grace, share with the group how this went.

How was this experience for you? Was there anything particularly encouraging, challenging, or surprising to you?

How might this experience have differed from other times you have engaged with scripture?

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 Luke 4:14-22, 28-30 aloud for the group.

What captures your attention from this passage, and why?

What did Jesus customarily do on the Sabbath (v.16)? What do we learn about Jesus from this?

Re-read verse 21. Why is Jesus' statement so significant? What does this passage reveal about Jesus? What does it reveal about how Jesus viewed his relationship with scripture? (Hint: consider our definition of the Bible from last week. "Scripture is the divinely inspired library of writings, known to us as the Bible, that tell one unified story, leading to Jesus.")

How does the response of the people in the synagogue listening change (see v. 21 and vv. 28-30)? What does their response reveal about God's truth?

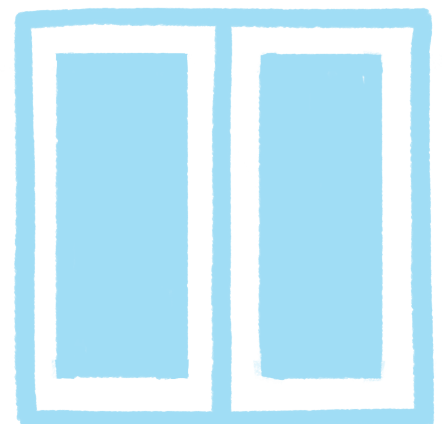
For Jesus, the scriptures were an alternative story that was fulfilled in his very life. Meaning Jesus lived and understood his life in light of the story of scripture. But this was different from the story being told about him and from the story that those in the synagogue were living from. The disruption and anger of those present in this scene indicate that they were not reading the scriptures in the way that led them to Jesus.

DISCUSSION (20 Minutes)

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

For Jesus, the scriptures were an alternative story that was fulfilled in his very life. Meaning Jesus lived and understood his life in light of the story of scripture. But this was different from the story being told about him and from the story that those in the synagogue were living from. The disruption and anger of those present in this scene indicate that they were not reading the scriptures in the way that led them to Jesus.

As humans, we make sense of the world through stories. We tell stories about human history, what it means to be human, and how we make our way in this world. These stories, over time,



shape our lives, whether they are true or not. It is really important that we pay attention to the stories we allow to shape our lives. This is the importance of scripture. As followers of Jesus, we know that scripture is the true story of God, creation, humanity, etc. At times, this story will complement the story the world tells, but often it will contradict it. The task of apprentices of Jesus is to saturate our minds in the story of scripture so that we begin to see God, the world, and ourselves through the lens of the story of scripture.

We all, as humans, live from a particular story—a core set of assumptions and guidelines that direct our lives and help us make sense of the world. What stories or narratives have you seen shaping our particular cultural context?

How does the narrative of scripture bump up against and challenge these societal narratives? How have you personally experienced scripture confronting or upsetting the stories, mental maps, or ideologies you have held onto?

What appeals to you about the alternative story of scripture? What challenges you? How has your understanding of scripture shaped the way you see the world?

Read and discuss the following quote from *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* by Craig Batholomew and Michael Goheen:

Many of us have read the Bible as if it were merely a mosaic of little bits—theological bits, moral bits, historical-critical bits, sermon bits, devotional bits. But when we read the Bible in such a fragmented way, we ignore its divine author's intention to shape our lives through its story. All human communities live out of some story that provides a context for understanding the meaning of history and gives shape and direction to their lives. If we allow the Bible to become fragmented, it is in danger of being absorbed into whatever other story is shaping our culture, and it will thus cease to shape our lives as it should.

What stands out to you from this quote? What might we miss if we read scripture as a set of disconnected stories?

What does this reveal about the relevance of scripture for our lives as apprentices of Jesus?

How might reading scripture as a central, comprehensive story help us better understand our identity and purpose?

TAKE HOME EXERCISE (5 Minutes)

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

The exercise for this week is to spend time studying scripture. As we saw in the passage this week, Jesus was a student and a teacher of the scriptures. Scripture played an essential role in Jesus' life and ministry. It was more than just a tool for Jesus; it was a central part of how he viewed and interacted with the Father and the world. It is important for us, then, as apprentices of Jesus, to think carefully about the scriptures and what they mean and to allow God's Word to abide in us.

Keep in mind that the goal of studying scripture is not to solve, master, or perfectly understand a particular passage; the goal is to become better students of scripture. You will likely encounter things as you read that you do not understand and have questions about, which is okay. It is possible to study the Bible for a lifetime and still have questions. Write down the questions and thoughts as they come, but don't allow them to discourage you.

There are many different approaches to studying scripture. One simple approach is the SOAP

method. SOAP (scripture, observation, application, and prayer) helps us closely observe lessons, truths, and principles in scripture and apply them to our daily lives. This week, we will return to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and we'll use the framework of SOAP to study the text. Consider writing notes in a journal or notebook you can designate for your times in scripture. Spend the next week working your way through the Sermon on the Mount, studying small segments each day, and spending the week working your way through the entire sermon.

Scripture:

As you read, highlight and jot down any verses, words, or phrases that jump out to you.

Observation:

Simply make a few notes/observations about the story (who, what, when, where, why, how). What happened? Is there a theme or a lesson that you see drawn out here?

Application:

Invite God to show you how the passage applies to your life. Is there something he wants you to do? Believe? Confess?

Prayer:

End your time in prayer. Simply commune with God. Thank him, praise him, take time to confess, and ask him to help you respond to and align your life with his Word.

For Deeper Study - As we've addressed in the definition of scripture, the Bible is a library of writings that contains a variety of genres written by many different authors. However, there are questions that, when asked of almost any passage of scripture, can help us better understand its meaning. Below are a few questions you can use for further study, in addition to the SOAP method, if you'd like.

- Who wrote this passage? How might their worldview influence the meaning of this passage?
- To whom were they writing, and what did they intend to communicate to that audience?
- Are there any words or ideas I understand one way as a 21st-century reader that may have been thought of differently by original readers?
- Does this passage make reference to some other passages in scripture?
- How does the context of this passage (verses before and after) shape its meaning?
- What words or ideas are repeated?
- How would I summarize this passage in a few sentences?

CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 Minutes)

Close your time by reading and reflecting on the prayer below. Then take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other during the upcoming week.

"Omniscient Father, You are the fountain of all wisdom and the author of truth. In the quiet moments of study and reflection upon Your Word, we humbly approach you, seeking the understanding that only your Spirit can provide. Our hearts long to comprehend the depths of your teachings, to grasp the breadth of your commandments, and to embody the wisdom that is more precious than rubies. Without your wisdom, the scriptures are like a sealed book; with your guidance, they are a wellspring of life. Let our study be not just an intellectual exercise but communion with you. Infuse each word with your breath of life, and let our minds be transformed by the renewing power of your truth. As we seek to understand your Word, let it resonate within us, shaping our thoughts, guiding our actions, and leading us to the joy found in living according to your divine wisdom." In Jesus name, amen.
Cheryce Rampersad

SESSION 3: SCRIPTURE AS AUTHORITATIVE TEXT

Main Text:

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Take Home Exercise:

Scripture
Memorization



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 119:9-16** 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 together debriefing the take-home exercise from your last gathering.

In the last gathering, you were encouraged to study scripture using the SOAP method. Reflect on your experience together and share any takeaways. Giving yourself immense grace, share with the group how this went.

What was this experience like for you? Was there anything particularly encouraging, challenging, or surprising to you?

Were there any observations, applications, or questions that stuck with you from the passage you studied?

Have you used the SOAP method before? Are there other methods of studying scripture that you have found helpful?

STUDY THIS TOGETHER (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 **2 Timothy 3:10-17** aloud.

What stands out to you from Paul's encouragement to Timothy in this passage?

In the space below, write out words and phrases you see used to describe scripture in verses 14-17. What stands out to you from these words? What role does scripture play in the life of an apprentice of Jesus?

Re-read verse 16. In this verse, we are told that all scripture is God-breathed. What does this mean? How do you understand this statement?

What does this passage reveal about the authority of scripture?

What does this passage reveal about the usefulness of scripture? (v.16-17) How might you have experienced these to be true in your own life?

DISCUSSION (20 Minutes)

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

The modern world is largely allergic to the concept of authority. We are uncomfortable with authority being imposed on others and view it as an intrusion into one's freedom to be themselves. As apprentices to Jesus, we make the claim that scripture is authoritative. In the passage studied above, Paul writes to young Timothy and connects the authority of scripture to how Timothy is to live his life (note specifically 3:16-17). Ultimately, we are called to do more than simply believe the Bible. We are called to become the kind of people who live out its vision of reality.

How has your view of God shaped your approach and response to the Bible? On the other hand, how has your understanding of the Bible shaped the way you view God?

What, if anything, makes it difficult for you to trust the authority and inspiration of the Bible? What

has helped you trust the Bible?

How might submitting to God's Word as authority be freeing? How, or why, might that be challenging for you?

What implications does approaching God's Word as an authority have for your daily living? How would this impact the various dimensions of your life (work, family, friendships, etc.)?

TAKE HOME EXERCISE (5 Minutes)

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

As apprentices of Jesus, memorization is a practical way for us to heed Paul's exhortation in Romans 12, which is to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. What we think about or dwell on shapes the way that we live and, ultimately, who we are becoming. Memorization is an embodied practice of getting the very truth of God's Word into our minds and hearts. Psalm 119:11 points to the importance of internalizing, or hiding away God's Word in our hearts: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." When we memorize scripture, we can more readily recall truth that brings strength, wisdom, encouragement, and hope, especially in times of trials, testing, and stress.

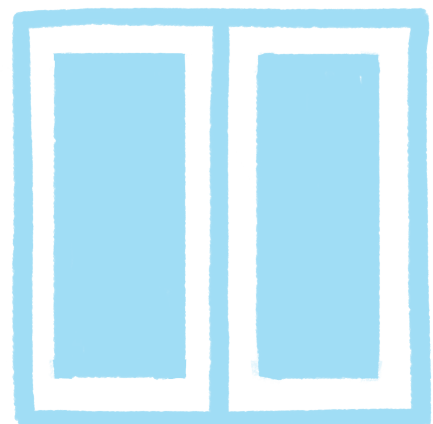
The exercise for this week is to commit to memorizing a short passage of scripture from the Sermon on the Mount. Feel free to select any portion of the text from Matthew 5-7, but a good one to start may be Matthew 5:3-12. Any text will do; just be sure to make it long enough to challenge you but short enough to accomplish its memorization in the next week.

It will likely take time to develop memorization skills, so if you find this difficult, do not be discouraged and give in to the temptation to give up. Keep it simple, and start small. You may find it helpful to use other tools to help you keep the verse(s) in front of you—using flashcards, writing the passage on your bathroom mirror, listening to the scripture while walking or driving, reciting the verse out loud, setting an image with the verse on it as your phone background, or using song or rhythm. Some find that doing something with your hands that involves repetitive motion (i.e., knitting, squeezing a stress ball) can help with concentration.

CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 Minutes)

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

Thank You, loving Father, for the God-breathed scriptures. Teach us, convict us, correct us, and train us through the living, powerful, inspired Word of truth so that we may be equipped to carry out the work that you have ordained for us to do. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.



SESSION 4: SCRIPTURE AS SPIRITUAL READING

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.

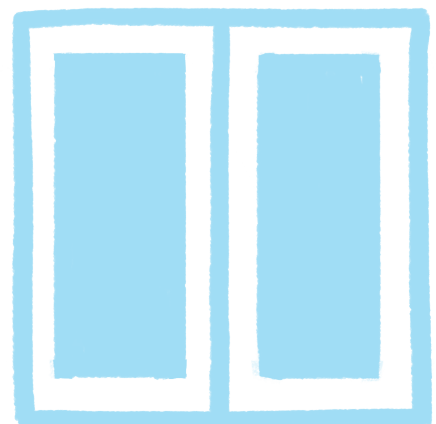
Reread verse 2. What do you think it means and practically looks like to delight in God's law? How might you grow in your delight in God's law?

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:

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.

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