



Approaches to Engaging Scripture

Read Scripture Aloud

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

Identify a 20-30 minute chunk of time, potentially on your Sabbath, when you can read through a larger portion of scripture aloud. You could do this on your own or even invite others to join you (e.g. a friend, spouse, family, roommate, community group, coworker, etc.).

Keep in mind that the *posture* of reading is more important than *technique*. Pay attention to your posture, and if you are able, take note of 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.

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 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 in one sitting aloud. You could also invite someone else to read it aloud, or listen to it being read aloud 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 and thank God for the experience of this practice.

Study Scripture

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. There will likely be things you come across as you read that you do not understand and have questions

about, and that 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 study scripture. One approach for studying scripture 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. Use the framework for SOAP below as you study a particular passage of scripture.

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.

Below are a few questions, adapted from *Practicing the Way*, that 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 that 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 the Scriptures?
- How does the context of this passage (verses before and after) shape its meaning?
- What words or ideas are repeated?
- If I were to summarize this passage in a few sentences, how would I do that?

Memorize Scripture

As apprentices of Jesus, memorization is a practical way for us to heed Paul's exhortation in Romans 12 to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. It 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 are able to more readily recall truth that brings strength, wisdom, encouragement, and hope, especially in times of trials, testing, and stress.

It will likely take time to develop the skill of memorization, so if you find that this is difficult, do not be discouraged and give into the temptation to give up. Keep it simple, and start small. Here are a few practical tips and ideas to help you memorize and keep the verse(s) in front of you throughout the day:

- Write the verse on flashcards
- Write out the verse multiple times in a notebook or journal
- Keep the passage in front of you on your bathroom mirror, bedroom wall, or desk
- Listen to the scripture while walking or driving
- Recite the verse out loud (repetition)
- Set an image with the verse on it as your phone, iPad, or desktop background
- Put the scripture to a song or rhythm
- Do something with your hands that involves repetitive motion (i.e. knitting, squeezing a stress ball) to help with concentration as you recite the verse

Contemplate Scripture

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, with intentional space for silence in 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 your selected passage:

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 the passage aloud. When a word or phrase catches your attention, take note of that. 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 read the passage again, and listen for any invitation God may be extending to you. Take time to listen, to ponder, to 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 to 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.

The One-Thought Method

Another way to approach scripture contemplatively is the one-thought method. This is a process used in time alone with God in which we read a portion of scripture and invite the Holy Spirit to highlight one word, thought, or phrase.

1. Before you read, invite God to guide you and speak to you during this time with Him. Surrender any distracting thoughts, cares, and concerns into His loving hands.
2. Simply read through the passage and select one key thought that strikes you. It could be anything that you feel God is highlighting for you in the passage - a phrase, a theme, a promise.
3. Write the thought down and journal about how it impacts you.
4. Turning it back to God, make that thought into a prayer.

Imaginative Reading (Gospel Imagination)

The imaginative reading approach typically works best when contemplating passages of scripture that are story or narrative. This is a way of prayerfully reading through the passage with our imaginations. We enter into the story, perhaps even identifying with one of the characters, and pay attention to what we notice (see, hear) and feel.

1. Quiet yourself in God's presence. Thank Him for the scripture, the very living Word of God, that you are about to read, and invite Him to lead you into an encounter with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. Read through the passage a couple times - aloud if possible.
3. Allow yourself to enter the story. Imagine yourself as a spectator in each encounter in this particular passage. What do you notice? What do you see? What do you hear?
4. Now, take a moment to identify with one of the characters in the story. As you step into their shoes, what are you thinking or feeling? Bring these reactions before the Lord.
5. Sit in the story for a bit longer, and then close your time in prayer.