



practicing the way scripture

Week 2: What Is The Bible?

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Overview

The Bible is a book (or more accurately, a library) unlike any other. At times it is best read slowly and out loud, savoring each word. At other times, we ought to read it in large portions, so as to encounter its broader story and plotline. In some moments, we need to linger on one simple phrase, allowing it to slowly seep into our heart. And at other times, we need to sit upright, put on our reading glasses, and study it.

Put another way, the Bible is a book that is to be read with both our hearts and our minds. With the practice of *Lectio Divina*, we engaged the Bible with our hearts. For this week's practice, our goal is to engage the Bible with our minds by learning to study the Bible.

But why bother studying the Bible? For followers of Jesus, the answer is simple: Jesus was a student and teacher of the Bible and lived as if the Bible was authoritative. And if that is true, and the Bible is indeed authoritative for us today, then we ought to think carefully about the text and what it means; in other words, we need to study it. Because while the Bible is many things, it is certainly not simple. This means that there is not one clear-cut formula for studying the Bible. Instead, there are a number of approaches to studying and peeling back the multi-layered meanings of the Bible over a lifetime.

This week we'll explore a few different exercises that can help us learn to, like Jesus, become students of the Scriptures.

Spend a few minutes watching "What is the Bible" from BibleProject. If you have extra time and want to watch more, you can watch the rest of the Intro videos from their How to Read the Bible series.

Read Luke 4:14–21, Mark 12:36, 2 Timothy 3:16, 1 Kings 15:23–24

Starting Questions:

1. What stood out to you about this video?
2. What has been your experience of studying the Scriptures in the past? What value do you see in studying the Bible?
3. How do you tend to relate to authority? Is there any area of life that you struggle to trust the Bible as authoritative?

Practice

The Practice for this week is simple: spend some time studying the Bible. Below we have provided a few different approaches for Bible study. Some are exercises for a specific passage, while others could be applied to any

passage in the Bible. You can pick one exercise or work on all of them. Note: These exercises and tools are not meant to help you “solve” a passage, but to help form you into a better student of the Bible.

Translation Study: As you may know, the Biblical writers did not write their narratives, poems, and letters in English. Instead, the Bible has been translated from other ancient languages. Because translation is an art and a science, each translation reflects different subtleties of the text. Reading multiple translations of a given passage can help us gain a broader understanding of that passage. For this study approach, read the verses in three different translations. We recommend trying the NIV, ESV, and NLT translations. There are multiple websites out there that will let you view different translations for free. While you read the passage, take notes and write down any differences that you notice.

Summary Exercise: When reading the Bible, it’s easy to get lost in the weeds. For this reason, it can be helpful to stop and summarize what we’ve read. Read through the passages. Along the way, stop at the end of each chapter (or if you really want to dive in, each paragraph) and write down your summary of what you read in one or two sentences.

Context Exercise: The key to understanding almost any passage of the Bible is to understand it in context. Spend some time reading the verses immediately before and after the passage. Then, ask the following questions: 1) What might this passage seem to mean when only read on its own? 2) How do the verses before and after this passage influence its meaning?

Theme Tracing: To read the Bible as not only scripture, but as literature, we must pay attention to its themes. Biblical authors use repetition of words, images, and ideas to develop themes and illustrate their point. For this exercise, take notes on any repeated words, phrases, images, or ideas you notice:

Study Questions: The Bible is a library full of many genres, written by different authors over nearly 1000 years. Yet, there are some questions that when asked of almost any passage can help us arrive closer at its meaning. Ask the following questions (if you’re stuck, see if BibleProject has a video on the passage):

- 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 any allusion to some other passages in the Scriptures? (See the Biblical Allusions section.)
- 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?

Biblical Allusions: The Biblical authors are constantly building on, interacting with, and alluding to other texts in the scriptures. Jesus himself regularly quoted the Torah, Psalms, and Prophets. These allusions to other passages in the Scriptures provide key insights into the message that the authors were trying to convey. For this exercise, take your time (even over a few days!) reading one of the following texts or a text of your choosing looking for allusions to other passages in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. These allusions can come in the form of a quote, a similar phrase, or simply a familiar image. (Some Bibles will even provide a footnote to help you know which passage is being alluded to). Once you’ve found an allusion, go and read the passage it alludes to and ask how the original passage influences the meaning of the current passage you’re reading.

Closing Questions

1. Which approach to Bible study are you hoping to try this week?
2. How does the idea of studying the Bible strike you? Boring, exciting, tedious, scary, etc.