

Scripture

4 of 7 in *Realign: Practices that Transform You*

Jan. 14, 2021

2 Tim. 3:14-17

We're continuing our *Realign* series, where we're exploring a number of ancient biblical practices, also known as spiritual disciplines.

You can think of such practices as channels of God's transforming grace in your life.

You can't transform yourself to become more like Jesus no matter how hard you try.

But God gives us these biblical practices— things we *can* do— and through them, we connect with God who alone can transform us.

So our part is to practice the disciplines. God's part is to transform us.

If Jesus himself practiced spiritual disciplines like prayer, fasting, and meditating on scripture, surely you and I need to as well. He set an example for us, so that like him, we too may in a way that is receptive to the flow of God's life in and through us.

So far in this series, we've looked at the practices of prayer and fasting. Today, we're going to talk about the practice of scripture—about various ways we can make space in our lives for Bible intake.

One key passage of scripture is going to serve as the jumping-off point for today's message. It's 2 Timothy chapter 3, verses 14-17.

These are the Apostle Paul's words to his protégé—a young pastor named Timothy. Paul writes these words to Timothy from a Roman prison, where he's locked up, facing the death penalty for preaching the gospel of Jesus.

So these were very likely among Paul's *final* words to Timothy. And final words tend to carry extra weight, don't they? Final words tend to be very carefully chosen, and are usually about the things that matter most.

And in our text, Paul urges Timothy to continue to seek God in the scriptures as one of his top priorities. Paul writes:

But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the

holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.¹

Here Paul specifically has in mind the Old Testament scriptures, because at the time, the New Testament was still in the process of coming into being. Nonetheless, everything that this text says about scripture is every bit as true of the New Testament as it is of the Old.

Now if there's any truth to this passage, then you just can't expect to grow as a follower of Jesus without learning, loving, and living the Bible. But how many of us are actually doing that, or at least moving in that direction?

Last year, the American Bible Society released the results of its [10th annual State of the Bible Report](#). The report looks at cultural trends regarding spirituality and scripture engagement. The 2020 report addresses scripture engagement particularly in light of— the COVID-19 outbreak.

Do you think that the overall level of scripture engagement among Christians has increased or decreased during the pandemic? If you're watching live, make a guess, and type either "increased" or "decreased" into the chat.

Now before I give you the answer, I'll tell you that the State of the Bible Report found that people were more likely to read the Bible if they had personally known someone who died from the virus. And they had a greater *desire* to read the Bible if they themselves had been hospitalized or diagnosed with the virus, or personally knew someone who had been.

But back to our question—do you think *overall* scripture engagement among Christians has increased or decreased during the pandemic?

It has... *decreased*. They suspect this has to do with the fact that it's harder to connect with the church in quite the same way when it's not meeting in-person. Christians don't get into the Bible on their own nearly as much.

¹ 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NLT)

But even though actual Bible intake has decreased, the report shows, perhaps ironically, that *interest* in the Bible is growing, not only among Christians, but also among the public at large.

This presents a huge opportunity for churches, according to the report. If a church like Cornerstone can create special opportunities, multiple pathways and practical resources to help people engage with scripture, there will be no shortage of people ready to take advantage of what we have to offer. That's exactly what we're aiming to do at Cornerstone, and I'll tell you more about that later in the message.

But the fact remains, many who claim to follow Jesus aren't particularly committed to learning, loving and living the Bible. What about you?

Someone once joked that the worst dust storm in history would happen if all the church people who neglect their Bibles dusted them off at the same time.

Has your Bible been a little "dusty" lately, metaphorically speaking or perhaps even literally? If you're watching live, you can anonymously respond to that question by clicking the "Me!" button. You'll find it in the chat area.

If your Bible tends to remain "dusty" so to speak, what is it that you miss out on? You miss out on what we just read in 2 Timothy— *everything that is useful to teach us what is true, and correct us when we are wrong, and teach us to do what is right.*

You miss out on God's primary tool for *preparing and equipping his people to do every good work.*

You miss out on this book that's *inspired* by God. And that means so much more than just that the Bible can be inspiring. The original Greek word for inspired literally means *God-breathed*. When you speak, your word is you-breathed—your breath brings forth what is in your mind and heart. Scripture, according to our text, is God-breathed. This book has living breath in it, and it is the breath of God himself.

So you cannot know the mind and heart of God without coming to learn, love and live this book. That's why, when your Bible remains dusty, you miss out on *the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes from trusting in Christ Jesus*, as our text says.

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright explains that:

Scripture can make us wise—can help us think in new patterns, see things we hadn't seen before, understand ourselves and people and God and the world... and ultimately find ourselves rescued, saved, from the downward pull of sin and death, and transformed by God's forgiving grace so that we become a part of his new creation. ²

This is the case because the whole of scripture—both Old and New Testaments—always points us to Jesus, the Saviour of the world. The folks at a wonderful online ministry called *The Bible Project* put it this way:

The Bible is a unified story that points to Jesus.

More importantly, Jesus himself says:

"... the Scriptures point to me!" ³

Salvation and the Christian life are all about knowing Jesus personally and being shaped to become more and more like him. And it's hard to get to know Jesus if you know little of the book that points to Jesus.

We want to help you get to know this book so that you can know Jesus better. With that goal in mind, for the rest of the message, I'd like to share several practical ways you can approach Bible intake.

Now you don't need to do all of these at once. In fact, I encourage you to zero in on just one, maybe two of them. Which one do you feel drawn toward? As we go through these, ask yourself:

What's one thing I can do to improve my intake of God's Word?

The first way you can approach the intake of the Bible is to:

1. Hear it.

Long before the Bible was primarily a book that people read, it was a book that people *heard*. Before the invention of the printing press and the rise of widespread literacy, people listened to the Bible being read aloud. For example, Paul told his protégé Timothy:

² N.T. Wright, *Paul For Everyone: The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 121.

³ John 5:39b (NLT)

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.⁴

Here, in addition to reading scripture aloud when the congregation is gathered, Paul emphasized the priority of preaching and teaching the Bible in the life and ministry of the church.

At Cornerstone, Sunday worship services will always be the central place where you can hear the Bible publicly read, preached and taught. So are you committed to regular Sunday worship attendance? When it's time for the sermon, are you ready to give God your best attention to what he has to say to you through the scriptures? Are you prepared to take notes, perhaps, so you can jot down what stands out to you as the Bible is taught, so you can review and apply it later?

There are other ways to *hear* the Bible, especially nowadays. A number of great scripture listening apps are readily available.

In fact, at the end of this message, I have something special to share with you guys— a link to a free practical guide sheet that will not only list several Bible-hearing tools for you can check out, but also practical resources and how-tos for all the other forms of Bible intake that we'll be covering this morning.

The second way you can approach the intake of the Bible is to:

2. Read it.

Apart from prayer, nothing has shaped me more as a follower of Jesus than daily Bible reading—not even my years of graduate and post-graduate biblical studies. I've used a variety of methods and approaches over the years, but the daily reading of scripture has been the mainstay of my personal spiritual development.

Did you know that in about 15-20 minutes a day, you can read through the entire Bible in one year? If that's too ambitious for you, there are 2 and 3 year Bible reading programs readily available in any number of formats. And yet the majority of Christians never read the Bible all the way through in their whole life.

⁴ 1 Timothy 4:13 (NIV)

That's understandable. The Bible is an ancient collection of books, written in an era and a cultural setting that is so much different than our own. While many biblical passages make for gripping and richly inspiring reading, others can be perplexing or even downright boring—especially if you don't have an appreciation of the historical context of the passage you happen to be reading.

That's why having a resource that includes a little bit of commentary to explain what you're reading can help you get the most out of your Bible reading. A resource that we've recommended for years at Cornerstone is [Meet the Bible](#) by Philip Yancey and Brenda Quinn. In 365 daily readings. You will cover a panorama of key readings from the entire Bible in one year. Each reading takes about 10 minutes, and includes a meaningful devotional reflection by the authors than gives insight into the passage you just read, and how it applies to your life.

The [Read Scripture app](#) by the Bible Project is another one of the very best Bible reading plans you can find, and it includes super helpful animated videos to go along with your readings. The videos will really enhance your understanding and appreciation of what you're reading.

Richard Foster explains that one of the great needs of many Christians today is reading longer portions of scripture.⁵ Many Christians only ever read the Bible in snippets, which isn't all bad, but it makes it easy to miss the forest for the trees. So maybe you'd like to consider taking on a major book of the Bible—like Genesis or Jeremiah—and reading longer chunks at a time. Another way is to take a smaller book of the Bible, like 1 John, and reading it through every day for a week or even a month. This way, you'll come to appreciate and understand and be shaped by various books of the Bible as a whole.

A final tip about Bible reading that I'll mention before I move on is that when you read the Bible, try to read it aloud if you can. This combines reading with hearing, and many people find that reading the Bible aloud helps them avoid mental drift. If you're not in a position to read aloud, you can just silently mouth the words. It's not for everyone, but you can try it, and see if it works for you.

These resources and tips for Bible reading along with a variety of others will be featured in the practical guide sheet that we'll make available to you at the end of this message.

Next, when it comes to the intake of the Bible, you can:

⁵ See Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 71.

3. Study it.

Reading the Bible gives you breadth, but study gives you depth. In study, you dig deeper, seeking to understand how the grammar, history, culture and geography of a biblical text affect its interpretation.

Renowned theologian J.I. Packer, who was once one of Pastor Andrew's professors, said this:

If I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folk from digging into the Bible. ⁶

All too often, Christians today are impatient to understand what a text means for them personally before they seek to understand what the biblical author actually meant by it the first place. Study helps us to "dig in" and appreciate what a passage actually means in its original context.

You might do a book study, a word study, a character study or a topical study. There are various tools that can help you with this, like a Bible dictionary and commentaries. Many good Bible study tools are available online for free or a modest cost. If you ever want any recommendations, just ask one of us pastors. We're resource geeks!

Some helpful Bible study tools and methods will be listed in the reference sheet, but before we move on, I'd like to mention another great way to study the Bible, and that is with others in a small group or a Bible class. If you want to do a deeper dive into Bible study, have we got a great opportunity for you. We're offering a class called *Majoring in the Minors: Understanding Jesus Through the Minor Prophets*.

This online class will take place on Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. beginning February 18, and it's all about the 12 short books in the Old Testament called the Minor Prophets—including Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and so on. The focus of the class will be how the Minor Prophets point us to Jesus—because as I said earlier—the Bible is a unified story that points to Jesus.

If you think this class might be for you, check out the link on the screen to learn more and to sign up. [\[18:30\]](#)

Next, it's important that we memorize scripture.

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4. Memorize it.

In Psalm 119, the psalmist famously prays these words to God:

I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.⁷

When you memorize various verses and portions of scripture, your Bible is *always* with you wherever you go— up here (touch head) and in here (touch heart) — in any and every situation.

When you memorize scripture, the power of God's word is available to recall to your attention when you need it most. Jesus had committed much scripture to memory. When the devil tempted him in the wilderness, Jesus overcame by saying, "It is written," and then quoted scripture in response.⁸

When I feel worried about something, I'll often recite Philippians 4:6-7 from memory:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Because I've memorized this verse, I know exactly what to do whenever I'm faced with a situation that makes me feel anxious. I am to pray and present my requests to God, and from there I can claim his promise to give me peace of heart and mind.

There are some good scripture memorization apps available today, which will be listed in the practical guide sheet. Some of you may find it helpful to simply memorize verses that stand out to you from your daily Bible reading, or in an area of your life where God is working right now— such as overcoming worry.

Do you have a flair for the artistic? Doing calligraphy or word art can be a great way to internalize scripture as well.

Next, when it comes to the intake of scripture, a great practice is to:

5. Meditate on it.

In certain Eastern religions, the goal of meditation is to empty your mind. In biblical meditation, the goal is to fill your mind and heart with the truth of scripture.

⁷ Psalm 119:11 (NLT)

⁸ See Matthew 4:1-11.

If you read your Bible each day, it's like dipping your tea bag into hot water. Meditating on the Bible, however, is like steeping your tea. It's about letting the truth of scripture permeate your being. The psalmist puts it this way:

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 [i.e. scripture],
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.⁹

In his book on the spiritual disciplines, Donald Whitney says that:

Merely hearing or reading the Bible can be like a short rainfall on hard ground. Regardless of the amount or intensity of the rain, most runs off and little sinks in. Meditation opens the soil and lets the water of God's word percolate in deeply. The result over time is extraordinary fruitfulness... Meditation is absorption.¹⁰

One of the best ways to mediate on scripture is to choose a word, phrase or verse that speaks to you most when you encounter scripture.

One method for meditating on scripture is an ancient prayer practice called *Lectio Divina*, a Latin term which means sacred reading. It's a way to slow down and listen intently and deeply to what God is saying to you through scripture.

The practical guide sheet will tell you more about how to practice *Lectio Divina*, as well as other methods and resources for meditating on scripture.

Finally, when it comes to scripture, it's so very important to:

6. Apply it.

The Bible says in James:

⁹ Psalm 1:1-3 (NIV)

¹⁰ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, p. 45-46.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. ¹¹

A great way to be intentional about applying the Bible to your life, whether you're hearing it, reading it, studying it, memorizing it or meditating on it, is to ask application-oriented questions of the text, such as:

- Does this text reveal something I should believe about God?
- Does this text reveal something I should praise or thank God for?
- Does this text reveal something I should pray about for myself or others?
- Does this text reveal something I should have a new attitude about?
- Does this text reveal something I should make a decision about?
- Does this text reveal something I should do for the sake of Christ, others, or myself? ¹²

Now if you're saying, "Steve, wait, I didn't catch all of those application questions!" not to worry. They are listed in the guide sheet, and I'm going to tell you how to access it now. It's called *A Practical Guide for Bible Intake*, and you'll find it at the address you see on your screen as well as in the chat area: <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/realignyourlife>.

I know we covered a lot of ground today, but I hope you remember what I encouraged you to do earlier. You don't have to do everything we covered today at once. But ask God, "What's one thing you would have me do, Lord?" Which of the six Bible intake practices do you feel most drawn to at this time? What resonates with you most? Where might God be challenging you or calling you to stretch?

Find the one thing that God would have you do, check out the guide sheet for some tips and resources in that area, and then do it—put it into practice.

I close by reminding you that the Bible is a unified story that points to Jesus. The whole point of the Bible is to point you to Jesus, so that you can know him personally and follow him.

¹¹ James 1:22-25 (NIV)

¹² As listed in Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, p. 56.

With that in mind, I'd like to share with you now a powerful video that talks about just that. It's called [True and Better](#).