



Study

Overview

The Bible is not a book; it's a library. And it was written thousands of years ago, in three different languages, by dozens of different authors and in multiple genres of literature. As you would expect, it can be very hard to understand at times, and we can easily get lost or turned around as we work through it.

But by reading the teachings of Jesus, it becomes clear that if we *misunderstand* Scripture it can do great damage to our souls and society. Jesus himself spent a lot of time correcting common misreadings of Scripture. But the reverse is also true: If we *understand* what the library of Scripture is saying to us, it can enlarge and enrich our lives in profound ways.

But for that to happen, we need *study*.

Study is the patient application of our mind and heart to the process of learning what the text says, what it meant to the original audience, and what it all means for us today.

Often, study doesn't *feel* as "spiritual" as *Lectio Divina* or other ways of engaging Scripture. It can feel academic and dry. But study is a spiritual discipline when it's done for the proper motivation — to know and love God and be formed to be like him.

In this Session, we explore the discipline of study.

Reflection Questions

When instructed, circle up in triads (smaller groups of 3-5 people) and discuss the following questions:

- 01 What was your experience of engaging with Scripture through *Lectio Divina*?

- 02 Of the four movements of engaging with Scripture through *Lectio*, which movements felt most natural or challenging to you?

- 03 What arose in your heart and imagination as you read, meditated, prayed, and contemplated?

- 04 In the teaching, a fifth movement of “incarnation” was shared. Did you have any opportunities to live out what you were reading this week? If so, how did that deepen the meaning of that Scripture for you?

Teaching

Key Scripture

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

“‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

—Luke 4:1-13

Session summary

- **Look at how steeped in Scripture Jesus was.** His words and actions were saturated in Scripture — so much so that his automatic response to the accuser’s lies is to quote Scripture.
- **Look at how cunning the devil was with Scripture.** This shows us how easily Scripture can be twisted and misinterpreted. When it’s not properly understood, Scripture can be — and sadly has been — weaponized against others, causing great harm to society.
- How do we avoid this? The key is to intentionally incorporate the discipline of study into our ongoing lives with God.
- Study is the patient application of our mind and heart to the process of learning what the text says, what it meant to the original audience, and what it all means for us today.
- The reality is: Scripture is really hard to read because of four challenges:
 - Written in another language.
 - Written in another time and culture.
 - Authored by many writers in various genres.
 - Written over 1,500 years, but part of a unified story that leads to Jesus.
- Here are four study tips we recommend:
 - Place yourself under gifted, trusted teachers.
 - Build a library.
 - Pick an area of study in your season.
 - Don’t go it alone.
- Our motivation for studying Scripture must always be love. The deeper we dive into its truths, the more we come to know, understand, and love the one it’s all about — Jesus.

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about the teaching. Pause the video for a few minutes to discuss in small groups:

- 01 As you listened, what resonated with your heart and mind? Were there moments you experienced resistance or your perspective was challenged?

- 02 What is one word to describe your initial feeling toward the idea of studying Scripture (e.g., duty, curiosity, overwhelm, etc.)? Why did you choose that word?

- 03 Who is an example of someone in your life who has been positively formed through the study of Scripture? What do you want to consider from their example as you approach studying Scripture this week?

- 04 If studying Scripture risks becoming about intellectual curiosity rather than fostering a deeper love for Jesus, what signs can help us recognize when we are leaning toward one or the other?

Closing Prayer

End your time together by praying this liturgy:

Your wisdom, Lord, is deep and vast.
It's beyond our comprehension,
yet you have said, "If anyone has ears, let them hear."^{*}
Give us ears and minds that can listen and understand.
Guide us, keep us from error and discouragement, and show us
the path to everlasting life.
To see and know you, we need you.

Amen.

^{*} Mark 4v23

Exercise

Study

- **First, choose a passage or theme of Scripture**, ideally one that you find your heart drawn to but don't yet understand, or one that you feel an aversion to, either because you don't understand it or you're scared you do.
- **Study it in a thoughtful, loving, and prayerful way.** Here are a few ways you can study your chosen passage:
 - Listen to teaching(s) on the passage.
 - Watch an overview of the passage on BibleProject.com
 - Utilize a study bible. Follow the notes and footnotes connected to that passage.
 - Read through a few commentaries or study resources. We have a helpful list of suggestions in the appendix for you.
 - Attend a Bible study or class through your church or online through "BibleProject Classroom" (link.practictheway.org/scripture-3a)
- **Start your own library.** You may want to begin with the following resources:
 - A Study Bible
 - A Bible dictionary
 - A commentary set
 - A book or two on hermeneutics
 - For a specific list of recommendations see our "Recommended Reading" in the Continue the Journey section of this Guide (p. 97).
- As you study, here are a few tips:
 - 01 Study with your whole heart, not just your left brain.** Pray before, during, and after. Pause when you are moved by an idea or insight and let it seep into you deeply and spill into conversation with God.
 - 02 Take notes.** Write down what you learn.
 - 03 Share what you learn with someone else,** as the act of speaking out what you learn leaves an imprint on your memory.

Reach Exercise

Begin reading a piece of literary fiction.

It might sound strange at first, but remember that Scripture is meditation literature. So with this reach exercise, the idea is that by learning how to read literary art, you'll be better equipped to read Scripture too.

Below are a few of our top recommendations:

- *Island of the World* by Michael O'Brien
- *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson
- *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston
- *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien
- *The Violent Bear It Away* by Flannery O'Connor
- *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Short stories:

- *The Death of Ivan Ilych* by Leo Tolstoy
- *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
- *Leaf by Niggle* by J.R.R. Tolkien

Note that, like the Bible itself, some of these works of literature have episodes of sexuality and violence. Even as we direct our minds to meditate upon “whatever is true, noble and right,”* we find value in exploring the human condition through literature.

* Philippians 4v8

Practice Reflection

Before your next time together with the group for Session 04, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions:

- 01 How do I feel God challenging me to grow through this practice?

- 02 How can I cultivate more joy in my times of study?

- 03 In what ways did I experience God's presence as I studied?

Keep Growing

The following resources were created to enhance your experience of this Practice, but they are entirely optional.

Read

Eat This Book by Eugene Peterson (Chapters 05-06)

Watch

This week, we're continuing the BibleProject's "How to Read the Bible" series with part three, "How to Read Biblical Poetry" (link.practicintheway.org/scripture-3b). Watch these six short episodes to learn how this style is used to communicate ~30% of Scripture.

- *The Art of Biblical Poetry*
- *Metaphor in Biblical Poetry*
- *The Book of Psalms*
- *How to Read the 15 Prophetic Books in the Bible*
- *The Books of Solomon*
- *How to Read the Bible: Apocalyptic Literature*

*Please note: these episodes are only a few minutes long, fun to watch, and very helpful in learning to read Scripture.

Listen

Rule of Life podcast on Scripture (Episode 03)

Join John Mark as he interviews the BibleProject scholar team.

Bonus Conversation

If you would like to slow down this four-week Practice to give your community more time to sit in each week's teaching and spiritual exercise, you can pause and meet for an optional bonus conversation in the Appendix.