

goodreads: **THE BIBLE**



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

February 13-27, 2022

Discussion questions for week 1: About This Publication

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Apart from the Bible, what books have made a significant impact on your life and why?
3. How would you describe your relationship with the Bible, and how has it changed over time? Do you read it more now than in the past or less?
4. What motivates you to read the Bible? What puts you off reading the Bible?
5. Have there been times in your life when reading scripture has been especially meaningful? In what ways was it helpful?
6. Are there any specific passages of scripture that have been transformative for you? Share one and explain how and why.
7. How do you personally deal with aspects you find difficult in scripture, such as passages that seem hateful or violent?
8. In what ways would you say the Bible is a human text and in what ways is it a divine text? How might these two views of scripture help with interpreting its meaning?
9. The speaker on Sunday suggested that the Bible is a community text as well as personal. What does this mean to you? What are the benefits of reading and interpreting in community? How might this happen for you? What are the benefits of reading and interpreting on your own?
10. Take some time to do a sacred reading of scripture together outlined below in the prayer practice for the week. Choose a passage together and appoint a reader. After the practice share your experience of it with one another and then spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week – Sacred Reading of Scripture

This is a way of praying with scripture that has been used for centuries by followers of Jesus and is often called *Lectio Divina*, which is Latin for sacred or divine reading. A regular practice of *Lectio Divina* cultivates the ability to listen deeply to scripture and allow God's presence to open our lives. It helps us listen for the still small voice of God speaking to us personally here and now, and to grow in awareness of God's presence with us, in us and around us. We interact with the text of scripture, but unlike Bible study we do not analyze or dissect it. We listen in quiet, and allow the words to settle into us as we quiet our thinking to receive them deeply into our hearts.

Choose a passage of scripture that is not too long. If you're not sure where to begin, choose one of the following:

- Psalm 103:1-14

- Matthew 11:25-30
- Ephesians 3:14-21
- 1 John 4:11-18

There are many ways to engage with *Lectio Divina*, but four steps are commonly used: read, meditate, respond, and rest (you might prefer to listen to the scripture, rather than read it, and there are some great apps and websites for that such as www.biblegateway.com). Before you begin the steps outlined below, sit comfortably in silence with your back straight, feet planted on the floor, arms relaxed, and hands supported in your lap. Close your eyes and relax your shoulders. Listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest, and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air. Continue with regular rhythmic deep breathing. Allow tension to fade away from your body, and your spirit to be at peace.

Read: Read the passage of scripture. This is best done slowly and intentionally with an awareness of God's presence speaking through the text. Simply listen for God's voice in this moment. Don't search or seek out the meaning on your own, but rather wait, and listen for something to emerge. When a word or phrase seems to settle on you, take it in and just sit with it in the silence.

Meditate: Read the text again for the purpose of "hearing" or "seeing" God in it. This is a deep searching of the heart. Ponder it, reflect on it, and ask how is this applicable to your own experience, your own life? How is God reaching you right now, speaking to you in the word or phrase?

Respond: The third reading is for the purpose of responding back to God, expressing honestly whatever is happening in your heart and spirit as a result of listening. There may be joy, tears, awe, reverence, even confusion—give any emotion or thought that arises freely to God at this time. And listen for how God might want you to turn, move or act because of what you've heard.

Rest: Finally, let your mind and emotions settle to rest in silence, and simply seek to love and be loved by God. Any time distracting thoughts arise, just return to the word that stood out in the reading, and repeat it, and allow other thoughts to fade. Allow this "sacred word" to symbolize all your love for God, and your willingness to give God all your attention. Sit in the presence of God and use the word as a window through which to gaze upon God and to allow the love of God to stream into your heart and spirit.

Discussion questions for week 2: Synopsis

1. What was new or helpful to you in the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that made you uneasy or that you disagreed with?
2. In what ways is it helpful to look for a unified "story of the Bible"? In what ways is it unhelpful?
3. What is your favorite Bible story, and why?
4. What question do you wish the Bible provided a clear answer for? What does the Bible say with regards to this question?
5. Why do you think Jesus gave so much of his teaching in parables? Are there any parables that you have found challenging? If so, in what way?
6. The speaker on Sunday suggested that much of scripture is less about the head and more about the heart. When you read the Bible, do you primarily read it for your head or your heart? How does this reflect your personality and experiences?
7. Read Psalm 100 slowly. Then read Psalm 13 slowly. Which of these psalms resonates with you most at this current time?
8. Take some time to share your thoughts on these two psalms, and then spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Sacred Reading of Scripture

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Choose a passage of scripture that is not too long. If you're not sure where to begin, choose one of the following:

- Romans 8:31-39
- Hebrews 4:12-16
- Isaiah 40:27-31
- Philippians 2:5-11

There are many ways to engage with *Lectio Divina*, but four steps are commonly used: read, meditate, respond, and rest (you might prefer to listen to the scripture, rather than read it, and there are some great apps and websites for that such as www.biblegateway.com). Before you begin the steps outlined below, sit comfortably in silence with your back straight, feet planted on the floor, arms relaxed, and

hands supported in your lap. Close your eyes and relax your shoulders. Listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest, and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air. Continue with regular rhythmic deep breathing. Allow tension to fade away from your body, and your spirit to be at peace.

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Meditate: Read the text again for the purpose of "hearing" or "seeing" God in it. This is a deep searching of the heart. Ponder it, reflect on it, and ask how is this applicable to your own experience, your own life? How is God reaching you right now, speaking to you in the word or phrase?

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Rest: Finally, let your mind and emotions settle to rest in silence, and simply seek to love and be loved by God. Any time distracting thoughts arise, just return to the word that stood out in the reading, and repeat it, and allow other thoughts to fade. Allow this "sacred word" to symbolize all your love for God, and your willingness to give God all your attention. Sit in the presence of God and use the word as a window through which to gaze upon God and to allow the love of God to stream into your heart and spirit.

Discussion questions for week 3: Book Endorsements

11. From the panel discussion on Sunday, what resonated with you most and why?
12. How would you describe your journey with the Bible? How has it changed over time?
13. How do you feel when you hear interpretations of scripture with which you disagree? How does it feel to be part of a faith community where people hold different views about scripture? What is positive about this, and what feels uncomfortable?
14. What has impacted you most in this series? How has it affected the way you approach scripture?
15. Briefly review the different ways of reading scripture highlighted below and discuss other approaches you have experienced. What ways have been most helpful to you?
16. Choose one of the practices below and do it together. Then share how you experienced it, and spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Different ways to read scripture

There are many ways to read scripture, and below are just 3 examples of many. Choose one that feel a less common approach for you, and practice it this week. All the passages come from the Gospel of Luke, which we recently experienced in some detail in the series "Good News for Everyone." You might find it easier for some practices to listen to the scripture rather than read it, and there are some great apps and websites for that such as www.biblegateway.com.

Imaginative Reading

Set aside some time to read the story from **Luke 5:17-26** using your imagination. This is a modified form of an ancient method of reading scripture developed by Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century. Read the scripture 3 times. Don't try to think about it or analyze its meaning, but just try to feel it.

In the first reading, let yourself sink into the story, immerse yourself in the scene and become aware of what you see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Who is there, and what are they doing? How does the situation make you feel? Let the story wash over you, and take some moments of silence afterwards. Let yourself become aware of who you identify with in the story. This could be one of the specific characters, or someone just present and observing. Who are you drawn to?

Then read the story again. This time allow yourself to be that person with whom you identified. Experience the story from their perspective, through their eyes, and let your imagination engage with their thoughts and feelings. Again, take some moments of silence after this reading to reflect on the experience.

In the third and final reading, imagine that Jesus is communicating with you in this scene. How does Jesus look at you, what does he say? What do you hear, and how does it make you feel? Sit in silence for a moment after the reading, and invite God to speak to your heart.

Contemplative Reading

“Lectio Divina” (meaning sacred reading) is a way of praying with scripture that has been used for centuries by followers of Jesus and is a practice we’ve included in this series for the past couple of weeks. The aim is to let the scripture “read” us rather than trying to analyze or dissect it. Take a moment to center yourself and quieten your heart and mind. Then read **Luke 9:10-17** following the guidance below.

Read: Read the passage of scripture. This is best done slowly and intentionally with an awareness of God’s presence speaking through the text. Simply listen for God’s voice in this moment. Don’t search or seek out the meaning on your own, but rather wait, and listen for something to emerge. When a word or phrase seems to settle on you, take it in and just sit with it in the silence.

Meditate: Read the text again for the purpose of “hearing” or “seeing” God in it. This is a deep searching of the heart. Ponder it, reflect on it, and ask how this is applicable to your own experience, your own life? How is God reaching you right now, speaking to you in the word or phrase?

Respond: The third reading is for the purpose of responding back to God, expressing honestly whatever is happening in your heart and spirit as a result of listening. There may be joy, tears, awe, reverence, even confusion—give any emotion or thought that arises freely to God at this time. And listen for how God might want you to turn, move or act because of what you’ve heard.

Rest: Finally, let your mind and emotions settle to rest in silence, and simply seek to love and be loved by God. When distracting thoughts arise, just return to your word from the reading, and repeat it, and allow other thoughts to fade. Allow this “sacred word” to symbolize all your love for God, and your willingness to give God all your attention. Sit in the presence of God and use the word as a window through which to gaze upon God and to allow the love of God to stream into your heart and spirit.

Analytical Reading

There are many ways to productively analyze scripture. We can look at it through cultural, literary, grammatical, historical, textual, devotional or countless other lenses. The attached page is an opportunity to compare the preaching of John the Baptist in the three synoptic gospels. In our recent series on Luke, we heard how Mark was most likely written first and used by the authors of Matthew and Luke, who also had access to another source (a document or oral tradition) as well as material unique to each of them. With this in mind, compare the three accounts.

- How are they similar? How are they different?
- What strikes you about the unique aspects of the Luke account?
- Given some of the themes we looked at in Luke, what do you think is the author’s intention with these unique elements?
- How does this challenge you personally?
- Do the other authors emphasize similar or different themes here? What does this suggest about the nature of scripture?

The Preaching of John the Baptist in the Synoptic Gospels

Matthew 3:1-12 (NIV)	Mark 1:2-8 (NIV)	Luke 3:1-18 (NV)
<p>3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea</p> <p>2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." 3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"</p> <p>4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.</p> <p>7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not think you can say to</p>	<p>2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" — 3 "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"</p> <p>4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.</p> <p>5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.</p>	<p>3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracoinitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— 2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.</p> <p>3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. 5 Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. 6 And all people will see God's salvation.'"</p> <p>7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell</p>

<p>yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.</p> <p>11 "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.</p> <p>12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."</p>	<p>7 And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."</p>	<p>you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."</p> <p>10 "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. 11 John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."</p> <p>12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" 13 "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.</p> <p>14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely —be content with your pay."</p> <p>15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.</p> <p>17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."</p> <p>18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.</p>
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