

WEEK 3

DAY 1: SACRED

Today's Reading: 2 Timothy 3:16-17,
Hebrews 4:12, 2 Peter 1:20-21,
Isaiah 40:8, Isaiah 55:8-11, Ps.
119:9-16

I'm not much of a sit-and-read type. I've often teased, saying I'd sooner write a book than pause to read one. Audiobooks have been a game changer for me. In recent years, I've found myself wading through two or three books a month by listening in my car, while curling my hair, or even at night as I'm trying to clear my head and fall asleep. While I unashamedly extol the virtues of audiobooks, I've secretly wondered if it is "cheating" to listen to the sacred text of Scripture on my phone. Sure, I follow along visually, but I rely heavily on the voiced oration of the passage I'm reading.

In Mark 4, an account is chronicled of Jesus' teaching to a crowd and sharing the Parable of the Sower. Jesus began by admonishing the crowd to "listen." At the conclusion of the parable, Mark records these words of Christ: "he who has ears to hear, let him hear" (4:9). I no longer doubt my sincerity in listening to sacred texts of Scripture. After all, before its completion or replication, most people heard the words of God audibly, from temple leaders reading scrolls or passed down by oral tradition.

That's not to say we shouldn't read, too. Early Jews often wore leather cases containing written Scriptures known as phylacteries, in keeping with texts in Deuteronomy that speak of binding God's words in our hearts and on our hands. In fact, beyond listening or reading, we are called to meditate on Scripture. The sacred nature of the Bible requires we intentionally engage and connect with it differently than other books.

If you've read today's Scripture, then you know the Bible is not just "another book." Its sacred nature, by definition, is connected to God. Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." This verse is comforting to us for many reasons, not the least of which is its eternality. Whether we read it, listen to it, study it, meditate on it, memorize it, bind it to our literal bodies or recite it from a pulpit, God's words remain. Scripture is eternal. It is truth to which we can cling and adhere all of our days.

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, please reveal to me the ways in which I need to grow into a better image bearer of God.

WEEK 3

DAY 2: RHYTHM

Today's Reading: Matthew 4, Job
23:1-12, John 4:1-42

Charles Spurgeon famously said, "Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years." Less famously, and stolen from my sister, I always say, "The Bible is a book for our whole life." Quotations aside, the point is this: As Christians, we should be reading our Bible regularly. In the ministry at Prestonwood, we have a mantra: Bible study isn't a class you take; it's a rhythm you keep. Why should we keep a rhythm in Scripture? And how do we do that? I'm glad you asked.

In the Gospel of Matthew, which chronicles the earthly life of Jesus, we read of a harrowing season of temptation endured by Christ at the hand of Satan. Satan isolates Jesus in the wilderness and takes full advantage of the limitations to which the Son of God, being fully human, was subjected. Two things stand out to me in this account:

- Jesus withstands prolonged temptation of the Devil by quoting Scripture.
- Jesus equates the sustenance of Scripture with the sustenance of bread.

Practically speaking, why should we know and learn Scripture? Because if it was important for Jesus, then it's important for us. Why should we keep a regular rhythm in Scripture? Because it is our spiritual food. Like most of you, I don't go days without eating, for a multitude of reasons - not the least of which is because it affects my decision-making, happiness, clarity and health. Abstaining from spiritual food does the same.

Many affirm the importance of Scripture but struggle to find a rhythm. The Bible gives us some direction, best practices if you will. First Peter 2 acknowledges that our spiritual journey begins like our earthly journey, as a baby sustained by milk. When we seek to establish a rhythm reading the Bible, we might need to begin with light reading. For instance, this foundational series only covers five days each week, and a few minutes' worth of reading. Once you master this rhythm, our hope is that you will keep growing with us into an actual Bible study.

Another way to increase success in your Bible reading is found in 1 Timothy 4:13. "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching." Attending church or Bible study, or consuming Bible-centric media helps increase your appetite for Scripture. I liken it to what I've always heard about water. The more you drink, the more you want! May we be people who flood our lives with the livingwater found in Christ and revealed in Scripture.

PRAYER:

Father, may I hunger and thirst to know You and connect with You on the pages of Scripture. May Your Holy Spirit stir in me a reminder to read my Bible regularly, so I might know and love You more.

WEEK 3

DAY 3: LIGHT

Today's Reading: Psalm 119:97-112,
John 1:1-18

One particularly discouraging side-effect of aging is the loss of clear vision. I am now at the point in life where I keep a pair of reading glasses in all the places I frequent - my favorite chair in the den, my bedside table, kitchen drawer, car, and both of my offices! Alongside fuzzy vision, I've also noticed I need light. Dimly lit restaurants might provide a nice ambiance, but I'm going to need the flashlight on my phone if I have any hope of reading the menu.

Scripture often contrasts light and dark. Jesus is described as the Light of the World. In Psalm 119:105 the Word of God (Bible) is described as a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. John 1:5 affirms that darkness - referring to sin and brokenness - cannot overcome the light. Light is important. It's important in a dark restaurant, and it's important in our walk with the Lord.

Imagine for a moment the last time your home lost power or the last time you went camping and chose to disconnect from modern power sources. Likely, one of your most immediate concerns as night approached was for light - whether through a fire, phone or battery-powered flashlight. As believers, we, too, have a need for the light of Scripture.

Perhaps you feel ill-equipped to know which way to go when plotting your next steps. Maybe you aren't quite sure of God's will in a situation. Or maybe you feel something is just off, and you aren't sure what's going on. Scripture can shed light on all these scenarios by connecting us to the Light of the World - Jesus. Let's stop fumbling through the darkness and dig into God's Word to light our path.

PRAYER:

Father, just as light overcomes darkness, Your Word says that You have overcome this world. May we walk in the lighted, victorious path You have offered to those who abide in you.

WEEK 3

DAY 4: INFALLIBLE

Today's Reading: Matthew 5:17-20,
2 Timothy 4:1-8, Hebrews 6:13-20

I like to write. I've written countless devotionals, columns, articles, letters, poems and even some books ... most of which have been fraught with error, and some of which I would disagree with now. Human nature lends itself to imperfection.

It seems audacious, then, to claim that the Bible is without error, perfect, infallible. But it's true. On day 1, we unpacked the sacred nature of Scripture; sacred is understood to mean "connected to God." It is by virtue of God's personal nature that we can be certain of the Bible's infallibility. All Scripture is given by God, who is perfect, divine, holy, immutable and infallible, among other things. In God's supernatural provision, He gave Scripture to God-ordained authors and preserved this sacred text throughout history. For millennia, Scripture has held up against the most stringent scrutiny and won over the fiercest skeptics.

Apart from human testing, Scripture itself asserts its infallibility. Jesus affirms the veracity of Scripture (often referred to as "the law") by claiming to fulfill it. Matthew 5:18 reads, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." What this means for us is that, if it's in the Bible, we can stake our life on it. In fact, we're called to.

There is a caveat, though. Whereas the Bible is infallible, those of us reading and interpreting it are not. 2 Timothy 4:3 warns of accepting teaching that "tickles our itching ears" toward interpretations we want to be true but aren't. We must be wise and discerning about whom we listen to on matters of biblical interpretation.

Some things in the Bible we cannot know with certainty this side of heaven, and that's OK. Other things of a primary nature, such as the death, burial and Resurrection of Christ, are clearly articulated, and we must resist any variance. Maybe you've heard this Latin proverb: "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."

The Bible is trust-worthy. Read it with confidence, and let it read you with conviction!

PRAYER:

God, I trust You. I trust Your Word. Help me know Your Word well enough that it may be the litmus test of truth in my life.

WEEK 3

DAY 5: LOVE

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Romans 10:5-17, Ephesians 3:14-21, 1 John 5:1-12

When we launched our Women's Ministry podcast, Digging In, there were months of preparation that went into what was finally released. In one of our initial meetings, I met with Chris, who came to be the producer. I knew nothing about Chris, but he seemed to know everything about me. He had done his research. He knew my favorite color, the ages and names of my kids, my loyal commitment to Words-with-Friends, and the plot and characters from the fictional series, The Brazos Collection, that I had written. I teased that Chris knew more about me than my husband! Of course, that wasn't true.

Chris might have known everything that was written and searchable about me from the Internet, but he didn't know me at all.

If we are not careful, we can find ourselves approaching God the same way. The Bible is first and foremost a book about God. But we shouldn't only read and study Scripture to learn about God, we should read and study Scripture to know God, and learn to love Him. James 2 contains one of the most chilling verses in Scripture acknowledging that even the demons believe there is a God. Satan, himself, the great deceiver, knows the Word of God well enough to counterfeit it and lure followers of Christ away from obedience. That's why having knowledge of God is insufficient. We must know and love God.

When Chris spouted all the things he had gleaned from researching me, he never described who I was or how I acted. He didn't know if I were wise or foolish, kind or cold, friendly or aloof. Those things are discovered within relationship. Romans 2:4 tells us that God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. We experience God's kindness in relationship with Him.

First John 4:19 says, "We love God because he first loved us." Have you ever experienced love from typed words on a page? Of course not. Love happens in relationship. For the Bible to help us grow, we must first receive the gift of salvation that God offered through Jesus, His Son.

Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." When we acknowledge our need for a Savior and confess Jesus, our relationship with God begins. He speaks to us through His Word, the Bible, and He gives us His Spirit to help us know Him more. We have everything we need to know Christ and love God!

PRAYER:

God, I trust You. I trust Your Word. Help me know Your Word well enough that it may be the litmus test of truth in my life.