

SESSION 2: SCRIPTURE AS ALTERNATIVE STORY

Main Text:

Luke 4:14-22, 28-30

Take Home Exercise:

Practice SOAP



OPENING EXERCISE (5 Minutes)

Spend a moment in prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together, and then lead your group through the following exercise.

Gather together as a community group in a comfortable setting—around a table, on a couch, on a living room floor, etc. Invite someone in your group to pray and invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

As a way of holding an open posture toward God's Word, spend the next 8-10 minutes engaging with a short passage from Psalm 119 using the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, literally translated "divine reading," which is a prayerful, formative exercise of listening to God through scripture. In this practice, the passage is read three or four times, and there is intentional space for silence between each reading. This enables us to slow down and be attentive to God's presence and direction. The goal of *lectio divina* is not to interpret the text but rather to meet God in it.

Slowly move through the four steps detailed below as you engage with **Psalm 119:33-40** as a group:

1. Quietly Prepare Your Heart (Silencio) 1 Minute: Enter into God's presence, slow down, and take a few deep breaths. Identify and release the thoughts and cares in your mind to him.

2. Read the Passage (Lectio) 1 Minute: Read Psalm 119:1-8 aloud for the group. Invite your group to take note of any word or phrase that catches their attention. Don't analyze it, judge it, or feel the need to do anything with it; just listen and wait.

3. Meditate (Meditatio) 2 Minutes: Slowly reread the passage, and invite your group to listen for any invitation God may be extending to them. Take time to listen, ponder, and explore that further with him.

4. Respond in Prayer (Oratio) 2 Minutes: Read the passage a third time. Dialogue individually with God about your experience of reading this passage, responding truthfully and authentically to the text. Where have you been encouraged? Where might you be resistant to the text and what God has brought to mind?

5. Rest (Contemplatio) 2 Minutes: Rest and wait in the presence of God. Allow some time and space for the Word to sink deeper in. Once again, yield and surrender yourself to God. Consider how you might carry this time in the Word into the rest of your day.

HABIT CHECK-IN (5 Minutes)

Spend some time debriefing the take-home exercise from your last gathering.

In the last gathering, you were encouraged to read through the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) aloud in one sitting. Reflect on your experience together, and share any takeaways from that time. Giving yourselves immense grace, share with the group how this went.

How was this experience for you? Was there anything particularly encouraging, challenging, or surprising to you?

How might this experience have differed from other times you have engaged with scripture?

STUDY THIS TOGETHER (15-20 Minutes)

Lead the study and discussion below for your group. Feel free to read it in its entirety or put it in your own words.

Invite someone in your group to read Luke 4:14-22, 28-30 aloud for the group.

What captures your attention from this passage, and why?

What did Jesus customarily do on the Sabbath (v.16)? What do we learn about Jesus from this?

Re-read verse 21. Why is Jesus' statement so significant? What does this passage reveal about Jesus? What does it reveal about how Jesus viewed his relationship with scripture? (Hint: consider our definition of the Bible from last week. "Scripture is the divinely inspired library of writings, known to us as the Bible, that tell one unified story, leading to Jesus.")

How does the response of the people in the synagogue listening change (see v. 21 and vv. 28-30)? What does their response reveal about God's truth?

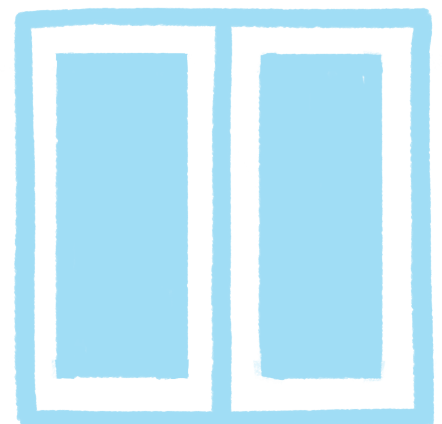
For Jesus, the scriptures were an alternative story that was fulfilled in his very life. Meaning Jesus lived and understood his life in light of the story of scripture. But this was different from the story being told about him and from the story that those in the synagogue were living from. The disruption and anger of those present in this scene indicate that they were not reading the scriptures in the way that led them to Jesus.

DISCUSSION (20 Minutes)

Spend a few moments debriefing this week's sermon together and discuss the following questions as a group.

For Jesus, the scriptures were an alternative story that was fulfilled in his very life. Meaning Jesus lived and understood his life in light of the story of scripture. But this was different from the story being told about him and from the story that those in the synagogue were living from. The disruption and anger of those present in this scene indicate that they were not reading the scriptures in the way that led them to Jesus.

As humans, we make sense of the world through stories. We tell stories about human history, what it means to be human, and how we make our way in this world. These stories, over time,



shape our lives, whether they are true or not. It is really important that we pay attention to the stories we allow to shape our lives. This is the importance of scripture. As followers of Jesus, we know that scripture is the true story of God, creation, humanity, etc. At times, this story will complement the story the world tells, but often it will contradict it. The task of apprentices of Jesus is to saturate our minds in the story of scripture so that we begin to see God, the world, and ourselves through the lens of the story of scripture.

We all, as humans, live from a particular story—a core set of assumptions and guidelines that direct our lives and help us make sense of the world. What stories or narratives have you seen shaping our particular cultural context?

How does the narrative of scripture bump up against and challenge these societal narratives? How have you personally experienced scripture confronting or upsetting the stories, mental maps, or ideologies you have held onto?

What appeals to you about the alternative story of scripture? What challenges you? How has your understanding of scripture shaped the way you see the world?

Read and discuss the following quote from *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* by Craig Batholomew and Michael Goheen:

Many of us have read the Bible as if it were merely a mosaic of little bits—theological bits, moral bits, historical-critical bits, sermon bits, devotional bits. But when we read the Bible in such a fragmented way, we ignore its divine author's intention to shape our lives through its story. All human communities live out of some story that provides a context for understanding the meaning of history and gives shape and direction to their lives. If we allow the Bible to become fragmented, it is in danger of being absorbed into whatever other story is shaping our culture, and it will thus cease to shape our lives as it should.

What stands out to you from this quote? What might we miss if we read scripture as a set of disconnected stories?

What does this reveal about the relevance of scripture for our lives as apprentices of Jesus?

How might reading scripture as a central, comprehensive story help us better understand our identity and purpose?

TAKE HOME EXERCISE (5 Minutes)

Read through the exercise below, adapted from *Practicing the Way*, that each individual will do before your next gathering. Talk through any questions people may have about what they are to do. Again, it is about practice, not perfection. Give yourselves grace.

The exercise for this week is to spend time studying scripture. As we saw in the passage this week, Jesus was a student and a teacher of the scriptures. Scripture played an essential role in Jesus' life and ministry. It was more than just a tool for Jesus; it was a central part of how he viewed and interacted with the Father and the world. It is important for us, then, as apprentices of Jesus, to think carefully about the scriptures and what they mean and to allow God's Word to abide in us.

Keep in mind that the goal of studying scripture is not to solve, master, or perfectly understand a particular passage; the goal is to become better students of scripture. You will likely encounter things as you read that you do not understand and have questions about, which is okay. It is possible to study the Bible for a lifetime and still have questions. Write down the questions and thoughts as they come, but don't allow them to discourage you.

There are many different approaches to studying scripture. One simple approach is the SOAP

method. SOAP (scripture, observation, application, and prayer) helps us closely observe lessons, truths, and principles in scripture and apply them to our daily lives. This week, we will return to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and we'll use the framework of SOAP to study the text. Consider writing notes in a journal or notebook you can designate for your times in scripture. Spend the next week working your way through the Sermon on the Mount, studying small segments each day, and spending the week working your way through the entire sermon.

Scripture:

As you read, highlight and jot down any verses, words, or phrases that jump out to you.

Observation:

Simply make a few notes/observations about the story (who, what, when, where, why, how). What happened? Is there a theme or a lesson that you see drawn out here?

Application:

Invite God to show you how the passage applies to your life. Is there something he wants you to do? Believe? Confess?

Prayer:

End your time in prayer. Simply commune with God. Thank him, praise him, take time to confess, and ask him to help you respond to and align your life with his Word.

For Deeper Study - As we've addressed in the definition of scripture, the Bible is a library of writings that contains a variety of genres written by many different authors. However, there are questions that, when asked of almost any passage of scripture, can help us better understand its meaning. Below are a few questions you can use for further study, in addition to the SOAP method, if you'd like.

- 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 I understand one way as a 21st-century reader that may have been thought of differently by original readers?
- Does this passage make reference to some other passages in scripture?
- How does the context of this passage (verses before and after) shape its meaning?
- What words or ideas are repeated?
- How would I summarize this passage in a few sentences?

CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 Minutes)

Close your time by reading and reflecting on the prayer below. Then take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other during the upcoming week.

"Omniscient Father, You are the fountain of all wisdom and the author of truth. In the quiet moments of study and reflection upon Your Word, we humbly approach you, seeking the understanding that only your Spirit can provide. Our hearts long to comprehend the depths of your teachings, to grasp the breadth of your commandments, and to embody the wisdom that is more precious than rubies. Without your wisdom, the scriptures are like a sealed book; with your guidance, they are a wellspring of life. Let our study be not just an intellectual exercise but communion with you. Infuse each word with your breath of life, and let our minds be transformed by the renewing power of your truth. As we seek to understand your Word, let it resonate within us, shaping our thoughts, guiding our actions, and leading us to the joy found in living according to your divine wisdom." In Jesus name, amen.
Cheryce Rampersad