

The Practicing the Way Primer

If you have not been through the Practicing the Way Course, we invite you to set aside 15 minutes before Session 01 to watch a primer on spiritual formation. This will give you a brief overview of the “why” behind spiritual practices and key insights to guard and guide your coming practice.

Log in to your online Dashboard or sign up to watch the primer at launch.practicingtheway.org.

The Spiritual Health Reflection

One final note: Before you begin Session 01, please set aside 20-30 minutes and take the Spiritual Health Reflection. This is a self-assessment we developed in partnership with pastors and leading experts in spiritual formation. It's designed to help you reflect on the health of your soul in order to better name Jesus' invitations to you as you follow the Way.

You can come back to the Spiritual Health Reflection as often as you'd like (we recommend one to two times a year) to chart your growth and continue to move forward on your spiritual journey.

To access the Spiritual Health Reflection, visit practicingtheway.org/reflection and create an account. Answer the prompt questions slowly and prayerfully.

A screenshot of the "Spiritual Health Reflection" interface. At the top, it says "Spiritual Health Reflection". Below that, a progress bar indicates "Part 2: Reflection (14 / 40)". The main text prompt is "I am becoming more honest and transparent with myself, God, and others". Below the prompt is a horizontal slider with "DISAGREE" on the left and "AGREE" on the right. A blue dot is positioned in the middle of the slider. At the bottom, there are buttons for "CANCEL", "PAUSE", "SHOW NOTEPAD", "PREVIOUS", and "NEXT".

PART 02

The Sessions



Read

Overview

Jesus was a rabbi, or a teacher, of the Torah — the Bible of his day. His mind and imagination were saturated in Scripture. Listen to his teachings! They are *full* of quotes, allusions, metaphors, and hyperlinks back to the Hebrew Bible.

Our goal is to read Scripture *as apprentices of Jesus*. This means we don't read it the way we read an online article or textbook chapter or even a literary novel. Unlike other works of literature, *the author is with us in the room*.

Our goal isn't just to *read* Scripture, but also to meet Jesus on the page. To be *with* him, to become *like* him, and to be formed into the people who live out what we read. Or as Jesus put it, “to obey everything I have commanded you.”*

That's why our posture is even more important than our *technique*. We must come to Scripture with the heart of a disciple — sitting at Jesus' feet and listening for his word.

* Matthew 28v20

Opening Questions

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

- 01 What brought you to this Practice? What are you hoping to see God do in your life through it?
- 02 Growing up, how did your family regard the Bible?
- 03 What is your primary feeling about Scripture? Fear? Desire for more? Shame? Ambivalence?
- 04 How do you see Scripture as a part of your apprenticeship to Jesus?

Teaching

Key Scripture

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

—Matthew 5:17-19

Session summary

- Jesus was clear: His mission was not to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them. He embodied and realized the promises of the Old Testament in every way.
- There is a reciprocal relationship between the role of Scripture in our lives and the depth of our formation as Kingdom people. A key part of our apprenticeship to Jesus is allowing Scripture to constantly shape our imagination, emotions, words, and actions.
- As apprentices, our goal is to be with Jesus, become like him, and do as he did — and each goal requires us to regularly immerse our minds and hearts in Scripture.
- Reading Scripture as apprentices of Jesus requires us to read *formationally*, not just *informationally*.
- As we read, it's important to remember that Jesus himself is in the room with us. Our goal is to meet him on every page.

Teaching Notes

As you watch Session 01 together, feel free to use this page to take notes.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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 What was one insight from the teaching you want to carry with you this coming week?
- 02 Do you resonate more with reading Scripture for information or formation? Why?
- 03 Would you consider yourself more of a left-brain person (analytical, rational) or right-brain person (intuitive, symbolic)? How has that impacted the way you read Scripture?
- 04 What's the primary obstacle you face to the regular reading of Scripture (e.g., time, your sleep habits, parenting, work schedule, intellectual questions, emotional triggers)?

Practice Notes

As you continue to watch Session 01 together, feel free to use this page to take notes.

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Closing Prayer

Take a few deep breaths, become aware of God's presence, and pray this prayer slowly, leaving short silence between each line.

Jesus,

May we receive you personally through your holy Scriptures.
May we read not only with our minds, but also with our hearts.
May we seek relationship more than information.
May we allow ourselves to be wholly shaped by every word.
May we discover the joy and beauty, of meeting you here.

Amen.

Exercise

The daily reading of Scripture

- **Find a good *place* that is quiet and distraction-free.** Ideally, choose a spot that makes you happy to be in and that is free of things that might pull at your attention.
- **Find a good *time*.** Choose an unhurried time that feels right for you, allowing space for intentional connection with God.
- **Make a plan for what to read.** Consider what passage to read. Will you explore a gripping narrative from the Old Testament, such as Exodus, Esther, or Jonah? Perhaps you'll reflect on a chapter from the Psalms or Proverbs each day this week. Or maybe you'll begin with one of the New Testament Gospels or one of Paul's letters. See the four recommendations on page 32 and 33.
- **Begin by settling your body in God's presence.** Focus your attention on the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit within you. As Jesus said, "I in you and you in me."
- **Open in prayer:** "As I open the Scriptures now, I pause

to be still; to breath slowly; to reset my scattered senses upon the presence of God." Remember the author is in the room with you.

- **Read:** Take in the words slowly. Notice phrases that catch your attention or connect emotionally. God may be highlighting these for your life or the day ahead.

While the Practice of reading Scripture will look unique from person to person, here are a few helpful notes to keep in mind as you shape your practice for the week ahead.

- Consider reaching for a hard copy of the Bible so you can leave your phone in another room to minimize distractions.
- As you read, be mindful not to judge your experience. You may find it deeply meaningful, or perhaps it won't resonate at all. You might feel close to God, or you might not. Simply offer your practice to God in love, allowing it to unfold as it will.

Reach Exercise

We recognize that we're all at different places in our stage of discipleship and season of life. To that end, we've added a Reach Exercise to each of the four weeks for those of you who have the time, energy, and desire to go further in the Scripture Practice.

Read an entire biblical book in one sitting, whether alone or with others from your community.

- Consider selecting a letter from the New Testament — Ephesians, Philippians, or James are great options — but feel free to choose whatever resonates with you.
- If you prefer to experience this in community — following the tradition of God's people throughout church history — gather a few friends in a quiet space. Enjoy a meal or a cup of coffee, then settle into a comfortable spot, invite the Holy Spirit, and read aloud together.
- Afterward, take time to share what stood out to you and pray together.

Four ways of reading Scripture from the best of church history:

There are all sorts of different ways to read Scripture; here are four of the most beloved from the global, historic church:

01 *Lectio Divina*

This is a slow, prayerful, intuitive way of reading Scripture that has long been the hallmark of monastic communities. We'll devote Session 02 to learning more about this way of reading Scripture that the biblical writers call "meditation."

02 The lectionary

This is the most common approach to the daily reading of Scripture in the Catholic and Anglican traditions, as well as many Protestant streams, like those from the Presbyterian and Lutheran traditions. In this model, you read a daily curation of short verses or passages from the Psalms, the Gospels, the New Testament writings, and key parts of the Old Testament. Over the course of the year, the lectionary is designed to expose you to the major themes of Scripture and to

immerse your mind and imagination in the broad sweep of the story of God. If you're interested in following a lectionary, we recommend you explore the Common Lectionary (link.practicingtheway.org/scripture-1a) from Bible Gateway, or BREAD (link.practicingtheway.org/scripture-1b) from Bridgetown Church in Portland. For pastors and church leaders, we recommend *A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants* by Norman Shawchuck.

03 Read through the Bible

This approach comes from the evangelical stream of the church. In it, you read a chapter (or a few chapters) every day in a regular quiet time, making your way through the entire Bible from cover to cover. Most versions recommend you do this over a year, but you can amend the timeline to two years, or two months, depending on your capacity. This can be a very helpful model for new Christians who are still learning the broad sweep of the Bible. If you choose this option, we recommend you use this reading plan (link.practicingtheway.org/scripture-1c) and follow along with the videos from BibleProject.

04 Hearing Scripture read out loud in community

Finally, there is an approach that is very uncommon today but was the default mode in the early church: hearing longer portions of Scripture read out loud to your community in one sitting.

Take Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus; if you were one of the first followers of Jesus, you would not have pulled out your Bible and read a chapter of Ephesians each day for a week; that was not possible until over a thousand years later with the invention of the printing press. You would have gone to your house church on a Sunday night, and after the meal, you would have sat around the home's courtyard, and one of the elders would have read the whole letter to your community; you would likely then talk about it, ask questions of the elders, and pray together. And while we are no longer an oral culture, this way of engaging with Scripture can be deeply formational both for you and your community. You can also augment this approach and read longer portions or entire books of the Bible in one sitting by yourself.

None of these four ways of reading Scripture are the "right" way; you may choose one based on your church tradition, or you may experiment with all four, or make up your own method.

We recommend you follow your joy.

Practice Reflection

Reflection is a key component in our spiritual formation.

Millenia ago, King David prayed in Psalm 139v:23-24:

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

South African writer Trevor Hudson has quoted one of his pastoral supervisors as saying,
“We do not learn from experience; we learn from reflection upon experience.”*

If you want to get the most out of this Practice, you need to do it and then reflect on it.

* Trevor Hudson, *A Mile in My Shoes: Cultivating Compassion* (Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room Books, 2005), 57.

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

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel joy?

03 Where did I most experience God’s nearness?

Reflection Notes

Note: As you write, be as specific as possible. While bullet points are just fine, if you write it out in narrative form, your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.

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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 01-02)



Watch

The BibleProject has crafted an incredible series titled “How to Read the Bible.” This week, we invite you to explore the first part, “Intro to the Bible” (link.practicingtheway.org/scripture-1d) which includes four short episodes:

- *What is the Bible?*
- *The Story of the Bible*
- *Writing Styles of the Bible & Why They’re Important to Understand*
- *How the Bible Is Unique as 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 01)

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.