

READING SCRIPTURE

The Bible is a collection of poems, legal codes, histories, sayings and visions that chronicle God's work in human history. It was written over thousands of years, in three languages and by dozens of people who lived in different ancient cultures. But because God has invited us into God's work in the world, the story of the Bible becomes our story. We learn who God is, how God works and what God wants for us in part from engaging the Scriptures, by making its Story our story.

Getting Started: A Lectio Divina

1. **Choose a Scripture passage.** It can be anything you choose, but many find 10-30 verses a good starting length. You can use a devotional book to find passages or use the lectionary to find daily readings. (The lectionary is a three-year cycle of Scriptures the Church developed to help Christians read through the whole Bible. You can find the schedule of scriptures easily by googling 'lectionary'). You can also use BibleGateway.com to find different versions of the Bible for free, which can be good to use when you're reading the passage.
2. **Read the passage through once, slowly.** Don't rush. You're just taking in the words of the Scripture.
3. **Read the passage through again.** This time, use your imagination to pay attention to your five senses. What are you seeing? Hearing? Any smells or tastes? Can you touch anything? Some passages will lend themselves to this better than others, but make notes about your insights, even if they seem silly.
4. **Read the passage a final time.** Now, pay attention to any words or phrases that stand out to you. Write them down as you move through the passage.
5. **Meditate silently on those words or phrases.** Ask God to reveal to you why those particular words stood out.
6. **Close with prayer.** Review the passage and what you gleaned from it. Write down any insights and what they lead you to – a new idea about God, an action to take today, a person to remember prayerfully.

Resources

These books will help you enjoy the world of the Scriptures; they're a great guide to getting more out of reading the Bible.

Blue Parakeet by Scott McKnight
How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth by Gordon Fee
Scripture and the Authority of God by N. T. Wright

PRAYER

Prayer is intentionally setting aside time to hear from and talk to God. Just as all our relationships with people are different, so each person's relationship with God is unique. As such, prayer should be experimental until you figure out how you best connect. Don't be afraid to try new settings, techniques or formats.

Getting Started: A Prayer of Examine

1. Find a setting where you won't be disturbed – a den or study, some place outside, etc. You might light a candle, play some instrumental music or burn some incense to help engage your senses. Consider having a journal you can use to make notes. **Get comfortable and ask God to speak to you.**
2. **Think about your day.** (if it's morning, think about yesterday. If it's evening, review today). Relive your day step-by-step. Ask yourself questions like What was my attitude like today? How did I act or react, what did I say to others? Be as specific as possible.
3. **Walk through your day again.** This time, look for where God may have been working – through an experience you had, another person you encountered, in your own actions. Ask Did I join God, was I a hindrance or did I just observe? Did I notice at the time, or am I just now realizing it?
4. **Take one last moment to be silent before God.** Ask if you missed anything in your examine.
5. **Finally, walk through your day once more.** Make a list of everything you're thankful for, and what you need to confess.
6. **Close your time with open, honest prayer to God.** Express your gratitude, frustrations and repentance. Offer prayers for those you encountered.

Resources

These books introduce you to the world of prayer. They offer excellent practical steps to develop habitual prayer.

Mystically Wired by Ken Wilson
Transforming Prayer by Daniel Henderson
Partners in Prayer by John Maxwell
In Constant Prayer by R. Benson
Common Prayer for Ordinary Radicals by Shane Claiborne

FASTING

Fasting teaches us that we are not in control of our lives, that everything we have is a gift from God, not something we earned. Fasting reminds us to be grateful and generous with what we have.

Getting Started

1. **Choose something from which to fast.** Traditionally Christians have mostly chosen to fast from meals – early Christians fasted every Wednesday and Friday. But you can choose to fast from almost anything that seems to control you – social media, television, working overtime, etc. The fast is not from 'bad' things; we recognize that everything we have is a gift from God, but that these things can come to control us.
2. **Decide how long your fast will last.** The most common food fast lasts 24 hours. Lenten fasts, which prepare us for celebrating the Resurrection last from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, but exclude Sundays. Many Christians have done extended food fasts – 21 days and 40 days are not uncommon!
3. **Use your time to its fullest.** During your fast, you'll have extra time since you're abstaining from something – a meal or checking Facebook at work. Think of a way to use that extra time to connect with God. Pray or serve someone else, read Scripture or a devotional book, etc. Be creative!
4. **Find some accountability.** If you fast correctly, it's challenging. We're breaking ourselves of our dependence on everything that's not God. Having a friend or mentor hold you accountable can go a long way towards helping you succeed!

Resources

These books give you some help training your body to fast (and your mind, too!).

Fasting: The Ancient Practices by Scott McKnight and Phyllis Tickle
Fasting by Jentezen Franklin

The Scriptural description of creation is a six-day work week followed by a seventh day of rest – not of cessation of activity, but of intentionally enjoying the goodness of creation with God and our community. Especially in our over-worked world where we're measured by our productivity, Sabbath-keeping is radically counter-cultural.

Getting Started: A Lecito Divina

1. **Make a list of activities that energize you.** Finish the statement, I feel most alive when I...
2. **With your family and/or friends, choose a day of the week that will be your Sabbath.** The traditional Sabbath is Saturday, but you should choose a day that works for your whole family or friend group if possible.
3. **Prepare for your Sabbath.** Set plans ahead of time so you can leave your phone off. Fill your day with 'play' activities – those things that energize you. What meals will you eat? What will your day look like?
4. **On the day of your Sabbath, whatever you're doing, focus on being fully present in the moment.** Don't let technologies distract you (phone calls, emails, social media). Remember that human civilization survived several thousand years without those things, so you can probably make it a day.
5. **Measure your progress.** Have conversations with your family and friends. What's working? What's not? Don't be afraid to experiment and try new things. Don't be afraid to jettison what's not working.

Resources

Don't know where to start? These fantastic resources give you some good places to jump into Sabbath-keeping.

Sabbath: The Ancient Practices by Dan Allender
Living the Sabbath by Norman Wirzba

Great General Resources on Spiritual Practices

If you want to know more about the world of Spiritual Practices, here are some great resources:

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster
The Life You Always Wanted by John Ortberg
Spiritual Formation by Henry Nouwen

God is endlessly generous to us, the source of every good gift. As his followers, we are called to imitate God, which means we should be generous givers too. Practicing the art of giving sacrificially teaches us to rely on God for protection and provision and helps us to know God more fully.

Getting Started: A Prayer of Examine

1. **Set a goal.** The traditional Christian gift is the tithe, or 10% of our income. For many who are just beginning to explore the practice of generosity, this can be an overwhelming figure. So don't worry about it right away. Start somewhere realistic.
2. **Make sure it's sacrificial.** If you're only giving what you don't need, you're not emulating God. Remember – God gave his own life for us; nothing is too precious for him. So when you decide how much to give, make it hurt a little. Yes, it means you'll have to go without something. Just like fasting, this will help you disconnect from stuff and connect with God more deeply.
3. **Choose a recipient.** Choose a person or organization you believe in and love to receive your gift. All of Catalyst's ministries and missions are funded fully by your gifts, and many people have friends or family who serve God in some organization locally or nationally. Let your gift be an act of love and a vote of confidence for those to whom you choose to give it.
4. **Get a little crazy.** In addition to your usual giving, try doing something random once a month or so. Pay for the person behind you in the drive-thru. Way over-tip a server. Pay for a babysitter so your friends can have a night out. Be creative! (And try not to get caught – be a secret ninja giver.)

Resources

Giving sacrificially can be hard; here are some great resources that help you become generous with the resources God has given you.

Tithing: Test Me in This by Douglas Leblanc and Phyllis Tickle

Free of Charge by Miroslav Volf

Financial Peace Revisited by Dave Ramsey

Guide to
Spiritual
Practices
for  catalyst
COMMUNITY CHURCH