

### Welcome

I grew up in church, so I participated in a few different "read the Bible" challenges. One of my favorites was where we got points based on how many chapters we read. If you want to get the most points, you have to be strategic. Don't just read straight through. You have to find the shortest chapters - like Psalm 117. It's like 3 verse long. Plus, there are a few books that are only 1 chapter each. MEGA points!

The worst chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119: it's 176 verses long! Longer than quite a few whole books. Psalm 119 was kryptonite for us as kids trying to earn points. You could read that chapter for DAYS and not finish it.

Obviously, that's probably not the best way to read the Bible. But I find a lot of us don't really have a better plan. We approach the Bible basically like we approach every other book - read it start to finish, try to learn all the stuff in it. It's like the textbook for heaven.

As I got older, I began to understand the Bible was a way to access God's guidance for me. But again, how? My friends and I came up with an idea: we would pray, then open the Bible and point at a verse. We hoped God would lead us to the right verse.

To be clear, that is 100% magic and if you're thinking, "Wow does that actually work?" the answer is No, no that's also not how the Bible works.

We're going to talk about how to read the Bible today, and the good news is that you don't have to read the Bible like a textbook and you don't have to treat it like a horoscope. The Bible is a pathway for us to know God, to be transformed. And you don't have to be a Bible scholar to meet God in Scripture.

### Message

[Series Master Slide] During the Summer, we're asking one basic question: How do we know God? We began last week with the conviction that, if God is our creator, then God is knowable. God is knowable because God *wants* to be known and, by becoming human in the person of Jesus, made himself knowable.

We have four major sources of knowing God: Scripture, the record of God's interactions with us throughout history; Reason, our ability to think and learn and discover; Tradition, how others on the journey of faith have known God; and Experience, what we learn about God from our own lives.

Throughout the summer, we're going to dive into each of those four sources of knowing God, and ask how we can know God better. We began with Experience, exploring how we can know God better through what happens in our lives - our private practices and acts of service both in relation to others. Next, we explored Tradition. From our local Catalyst experience to the global church, we saw how sharing in the faith experiences of others helps us know God better. We just finished exploring how Reason invites us to know God, from faith and science to learning to think like Jesus to the place that reason meets mystery called faith.

Last week, we began our journey through our final and most basic source of knowing God: Scripture. We saw that the Bible is a collection of books inspired by God, which means both that it's fully a product of human authors and fully the books God wants us to have to shape our faith and ultimately invite us into a deeper relationship with the author of Scripture.

So today, I want to explore how that works. What does it mean to say that the Bible helps us not just know *about* God, but to know God? That's an important distinction because it comes naturally for us to treat the Bible like a textbook, a source of information.

It's easy to see that reading the Bible to earn spiritual brownie points (or earthly brownie points like in my childhood church) isn't exactly spiritually profitable. But we really struggle to read the Bible in such a way that we feel seen by the Spirit.

Have you ever met someone who is just in love with the Bible? Like they read it, study it deeply, can quote it off the top of their heads? Those people don't usually come off as clueless nerds or naïve waifs whose heads are always stuck in books. They seem in many ways to be more deeply rooted, have a stronger foundation. They're less rocked by tragedies, more in tune with their vocations, able to weather doubts. They are more present, as though they see beneath the chaos of daily life to something more stable.

That's what I mean when I suggest that Scripture helps us know God better. People who have *that* sort of faith aren't reading the Bible like a textbook.

A transformed life doesn't correlate with our IQ or our score on a theology exam. A transformed life is what happens when we encounter God through Scripture.

So we're going to go back to my childhood kryptonite - Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible.

[Scripture Slide] The Psalms are the songbook of Israel. And Psalm 119 is a particularly cool kind of song. It's an acrostic - a poem where each verse begins with a different letter of the alphabet. So Psalm 119 is 22 stanzas, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet - which is why it's so long.

And here's the really fun part: the whole song is one long love song... to the Torah, Israel's Law. What we call the Bible. Yup - a giant, elaborate love song all to Scripture. We're going to read a few of the stanzas together. What we're reading is a deep, thoughtful exploration of what a life saturated in Scripture looks like. So as we read, pay attention to how God transforms the life of the songwriter, and we'll consider how we can experience those same kinds of transformation.

In this first bit, notice that the Psalmist acknowledges what we saw back in the series on Reason: that we don't see the world the way God does. When we read Scripture, we're seeing the mind of Christ, wanting to learn to see as God sees. Hear the Psalmist ask for that. Let's begin in verse 17:

Be good to your servant, that I may live and obey your word.  
Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions.  
I am only a foreigner in the land. Don't hide your commands from me!  
I am always overwhelmed with a desire for your regulations.  
You rebuke the arrogant; those who wander from your commands are cursed.  
Don't let them scorn and insult me, for I have obeyed your laws.  
Even princes sit and speak against me, but I will meditate on your decrees.  
Your laws please me; they give me wise advice. -- Psalm 119:17-24

I love that he refers to himself as a foreigner, a refugee to the kingdom of God. The Psalmist insists that it's by meditating on and obeying God's way that he learns to be a citizen of God's kingdom, a child in God's house.

This is the other side of what Josh explored with us in Reason: to learn to see as God sees, we obey and trust that God transforms us. Scripture is our guide in this: Scripture introduces us to the mind of God so that we can begin to make sense out of how God understands the world.

There's a baseline assumption Psalm 119 makes that we are loathe to admit: we *don't* see as God sees, naturally. We have a wrong perspective on our work, on our leisure, on our friends and enemies. Of course we don't know *what* those perspectives are, or how they're wrong, unless we immerse ourselves in God's perspective. That's why the Psalmist is so excited to study Scripture - he knows that the more time he spends with Scripture, the better he is learning to see as God sees, think as God thinks.

That transformation is evident in the next stanza:

I lie in the dust; revive me by your word.  
I told you my plans, and you answered. Now teach me your decrees.  
Help me understand the meaning of your commandments, and I will meditate on your wonderful deeds.  
I weep with sorrow; encourage me by your word.  
Keep me from lying to myself; give me the privilege of knowing your instructions.  
I have chosen to be faithful; I have determined to live by your regulations.  
I cling to your laws. LORD, don't let me be put to shame!  
I will pursue your commands, for you expand my understanding. -- Psalm 119:25-32

The Psalmist sings as though he's dead, brought back to life by God's command. My favorite bit in the middle of this stanza is: Keep me from lying to myself; give me the privilege of knowing your instruction.

We have a massive capacity for self-deception. It's one of the most frustrating things about spiritual transformation. We make progress, but then it feels like we uncover another aspect of ourselves that's twisted away from God, or we fall back into an old habit we thought we'd kicked. Or we find ourselves justifying another sin - self-deception.

The Psalmist knows that meditating on Scripture is like shining a light on himself. He can see where he doesn't measure up to God's way, where he's gotten off the path. No wonder he loves Scripture so much - it's his lifeline, the means by which God shows him the truth about himself and draws him back into the way that leads to life.

And that's really the heart of this Psalm: it's not just that Scripture teaches us about God. Scripture is the tool by which God's Spirit transforms us, brings us from death to life. Scripture connects us to God, helps us know God better. Skip down to the stanza that begins in verse 73:

You made me; you created me. Now give me the sense to follow your commands.  
May all who fear you find in me a cause for joy, for I have put my hope in your word.  
I know, O LORD, that your regulations are fair; you disciplined me because I needed it.  
Now let your unfailing love comfort me, just as you promised me, your servant.  
Surround me with your tender mercies so I may live, for your instructions are my delight.  
Bring disgrace upon the arrogant people who lied about me; meanwhile, I will concentrate on your commandments.  
Let me be united with all who fear you, with those who know your laws.  
May I be blameless in keeping your decrees; then I will never be ashamed. -- Psalm 119:73-80

Reading scripture, spending time in Scripture, is part of the ongoing work of God changing us. And the goal isn't just to know the Bible, to know all God's commands. It's to be wrapped up in God's unfailing love, surrounded by God's mercies.

So how? How do we read scripture such that we're transformed, not just informed? Did you notice that again and again, the Psalmist said that he 'meditated' on Scripture?

[explanation of Sacred Reading]

I have to tell you friends, when I learned about Sacred Reading, it changed how I read scripture. And I was the guy who was really good at the "information" way of reading. I had all the books on the books and could quote a bunch of it. I knew a lot. But reading for transformation is different. I love taking one small passage and spending days in it. I mentioned last week that one of the first times I ever did a sacred reading was with Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount - I read it almost every day for THREE MONTHS. More recently, I've been spending time in various smaller sections of Scripture, and God has been challenging me on my time. I'm a busy person, with fingers in a lot of pots. And God has been challenging me to submit my schedule, my priorities to him. To make some changes, to pay attention to the relationships I'm investing myself in. Knowing God better through the Scriptures is having a real, measurable effect on my day-to-day life.

What would happen if you chose a part of Psalm 119 to use in a sacred reading this week? What if you worked through the whole thing over the course of a few days this week? What might God do in your life as you take time to make yourself available to God?

Can you imagine that, like the Psalmist, you might find comfort in times of pain? Guidance in times of uncertainty? A lens to see through your self-deception?

God wants to bring life, hope and joy for you. And God has given us the Scriptures as an agent of our transformation. Will you be transformed?

### **Communion + Examen**

[Communion Slide] asdf

1. When has Scripture been an agent of change for me in the last week?
2. When have I avoided or ignored scripture?
3. How can I make space in this next week to meet God in Scripture?

### **Assignment + Blessing**

Sacred Reading of Psalm 119