



SCRIPTURE

Trusting the Spirit-inspired Words of God as our guide, wisdom, and strength for life

What Is Scripture?

When we talk about Scripture, we're referring to the 66 books of the Christian Bible, split into the Old and New Testaments. But most people in the West know what Scripture is, even if they've never read it.

In America, especially the Midwest, our culture is full of references to creation, heaven, hell, angels, demons, prayer, sacrifice, and sin. Even if the Bible feels foreign to you, some of its most famous stories — the creation, the flood, the exodus, the good Samaritan, the crucifixion, the resurrection — likely aren't.

The question isn't really, "What is Scripture?" What most people want to know is, "What is Scripture about, and what does it mean for my life?"

Our Story in Scripture

The Bible is a collection of books written and assembled by and for the people of Israel over a thousand years. Christians believe that these stories, written and assembled through the power of the Holy Spirit, reveal something about God and his heart, not just for the ancient Israelites, but for all of humanity through all time and space.

Through the individual stories of Scripture and the overarching narrative of the Bible as a whole, we see our own story reflected back to us.

It's in the Old Testament that we learn that God created us by, through, and for loving relationship. It's in the stories of Israel that we are confronted with our own human tendencies (i.e., our sins) that ultimately break our relationship with God and with others.

It's in the New Testament that we learn what a life with God looks like through the life of Jesus Christ. It's through Jesus' death and resurrection that we discover that our sins have been forgiven and that we have been invited into a new life with God and with his people.

Ultimately, **the story of Scripture shapes our story**. By reading Scripture, we learn to view our reality not through the lens of power, security, or success, but instead through the story of God and his heart for his people. The invitation is not to sit down with an ancient, irrelevant text; it's to encounter the living God through his Word.

Community of Practice

Significant and sustainable change requires a community of support. We highly recommend that you work through this guide with your missional community (MC), discipleship group, family, roommates, or coworkers.

Ideally, this “community of practice” should gather weekly or biweekly at a set time (approximately an hour) with some delicious food or drinks to set the right atmosphere. The goal isn't to rigidly follow the guide, but rather to stimulate healthy conversations, reflection, experiments, and accountability.

WEEK ONE: STUDYING SCRIPTURE

Read This Overview

Many Christians spend at least some part of their week reading some form of Scripture — but what are you supposed to get out of it?

Much of the Bible is confusing or seemingly out of touch by today's standards. Outside of a well-known story from the Gospels or a comforting psalm, you can leave your reading time with more questions than answers. Even if you do happen to draw conclusions from what you read, how can you be sure that your conclusions are what God and the biblical authors intended?

The Bible is written for us, but it is not written to us. Through the Holy Spirit, the Bible was written by and to ancient people in the Near East.

These ancient people had a different culture, different ways of conceptualizing the world, and different languages (ancient Hebrew, ancient Greek, and Aramaic) with different nuances and figures of speech that are difficult to translate into our own languages, concepts, and cultures. We will continually misread Scripture through our Western, modern (or post-modern), rationally-thinking lens if we don't find ways to see through the original authors' and audiences' eyes.

Responsible study of Scripture, then, should start with learning the context of the text. One way to better understand a piece of Scripture is to consider the author's original intent. That means asking the question, "What did this author mean to communicate when writing this passage?"

Remember, you don't need a degree from seminary to study Scripture. **All Christians are equipped to practice humble, Spirit-filled interpretation.** Everyone can engage with Scripture in a meaningful, helpful, and responsible way.

Choose one of the following practices to do together as a group. (You'll need access to a computer or smart device for the second practice.)

1. Seeking the Author's Intent

All writers choose specific words, phrases, and literary devices to deliver their intended messages to readers and hearers. However, words and phrases can mean different things to various listeners across space and time.

The biblical authors had intended messages for their specific audiences and, through the Spirit, for all people. Seeking an author's intent in the Bible involves looking for clues like genre, repetition, and allusion.

Practice Right Now: Literary Interpretation (25 minutes)

Open your Bible to the Gospel of John. Pray for the Holy Spirit to illuminate his intended purpose with this text. Then, read John 1:1-18 out loud at least three times. Give 10 minutes for people to study the passage silently.

While you listen and while you silently study, be sure to look for, mark, and note the following indicators of authorial intent. At the end, discuss what conclusions the Spirit has brought to people's minds.

GENRE

Biblical authors can switch genres throughout a book (e.g., using a moment of poetry in the midst of a biography). Try to discern the genre of both the book you're reading and the specific passage of text. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who wrote this book?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What kinds of words or phrases are being used?
- Should these words be taken literally, or do they seem more poetic or abstract?

Examples of genres found in the Bible include (but aren't limited to):

- Poetry
- History
- Law
- Prophecy
- Biography
- Wisdom literature

REPETITION

Biblical authors use repetition as a way to emphasize a thought or concept. The more a word or phrase is repeated, the more connected it is to their intended message.

- Mark repeated words or phrases as you read the text. Use different markings for each different word or phrase that is repeated.
- Count up the number of times each word or phrase is repeated.
- What is the author trying to emphasize by repeating each word or phrase?

ALLUSION

Allusion means using words, phrases, or metaphors that bring other ideas or passages to mind. Think of it as a kind of cultural or literary reference. While we may need to look deeper to catch an author's ancient Near Eastern cultural allusions, you should be able to find allusions to other parts of Scripture.

- Read the passage. Do you see any words or phrases that remind you of other parts of Scripture? Does your Bible include footnotes pointing to other Bible verses?

- Go back and read any parts of Scripture referenced in this passage. What could be the author’s intent in making these references?

To end this time of Scripture reading, share any questions the Spirit raised in your mind with a partner or in a group. If your discussion leaves you with any unresolved questions, write them down and consider looking for Bible commentaries or other resources that may help answer these questions.

2. Considering Different Translations

Scripture was originally written in ancient Hebrew, ancient Greek, and Aramaic. While our English translations are reliable and trustworthy for spiritual formation, there always exists a level of interpretation when translating across a language.

This is because context is needed to fully understand a word or phrase. The literal meaning usually isn’t enough to grasp the intended message.

For example, the French phrase, “l’esprit de l’escalier,” literally translates to “[stairwell wit](#).” If you’re an English speaker, how would you define “stairwell wit”? It would be hard to guess the phrase’s true meaning: a too-late retort or response thought of only after you’ve left an argument.

Even just one word can have multiple meanings. Consider the English word, “key.” Are you referring to a door-opening device or the foundational idea of a book or speech? Perhaps you mean it as the pitch in which you sing a song, or maybe it’s entirely metaphorical (e.g., the key to one’s heart). You only know which meaning of “key” is being used when you look at context clues available in the phrase, sentence, or passage of text.

This is why so many English translations of the Bible exist, each with areas of text that are more accurate or inaccurate than others. Because metaphors often intend multiple meanings, it is possible for multiple translations to be simultaneously different and still accurate.

Practice Right Now: Translation (35 minutes)

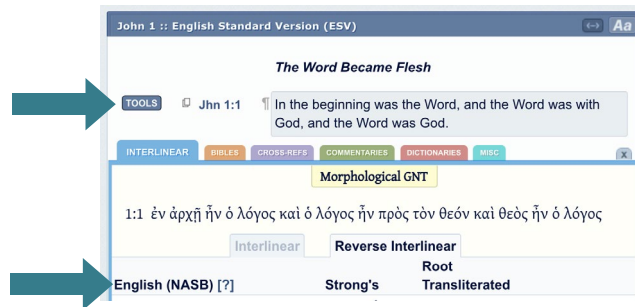
John 1:1 uses the Greek word *logos*, commonly translated as “the Word.” Let’s spend some time looking at what *logos* fully means using the [Blue Letter Bible](#).

1. At the top of the homepage, type “John 1:1” into the search bar. Choose your preferred translation, then hit the green magnifying glass.

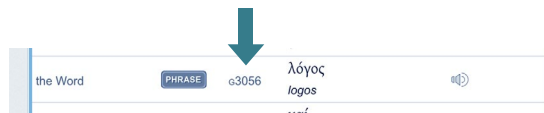
Search the Bible
[Help](#) [QuickNav](#) [Advanced Options](#)

 Examples: [John 3:16](#) [Jesus faith love](#) ["God of my salvation"](#)

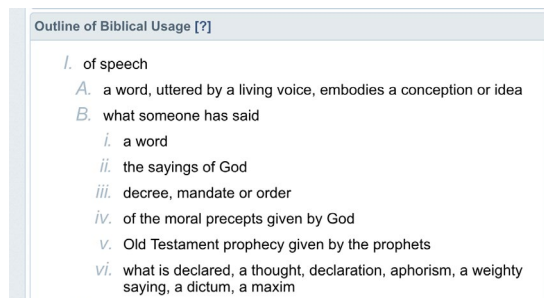
- Click on the “Tools” box to the left of the first verse. It should open below into three columns: English, Strong’s, and Root Transliterated.



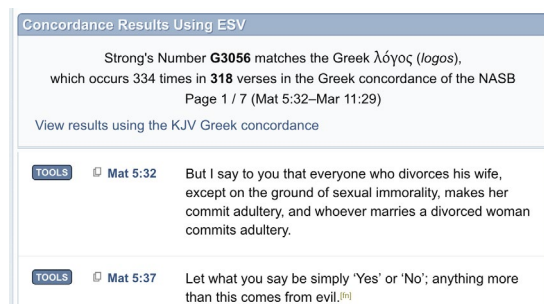
- Focus on the English column to find “the Word.” You’ll see in Strong’s column a location number device: g3056. This number is assigned to the Greek word *logos*. (Every Hebrew and Greek word in the entire Bible has an assigned number for location purposes.)



- Click on the Strong’s locator number g3056. It will take you to the *logos* information page.
- Scroll down to the Outline of Biblical Usage. Take some time to read through all the ways *logos* is used in Scripture. This helps you understand the interpretive range of this word. It could mean any of these things (or have multiple meanings) when used.



- Keep scrolling until you get to the Concordance Results. This is a list of every verse in the New Testament where this Greek word is used. Pick a few of the verses and look them up to see how *logos* is used in context. Try picking verses from a few different genres of books (e.g., John, Acts, and Revelation).



7. Now, go back to John 1:1-18. Read the passage again, and mark every appearance of *logos*, “the Word.” Take some time to write what you think *logos* was intended to mean. You may have multiple layers of what you interpret the meaning to be.
8. Discuss your findings with a partner or in a group.

Practice This Week (10–30 minutes each day)

Complete these practices on a passage of your choosing. You may choose a chapter or a collection of verses under a subheading, or you may decide to work through a small book over the course of a few days or weeks.

Walk through your text and look for genre, repetition, and allusion. Each time you work through a section, choose a word or two to look up on Blue Letter Bible. Study the Outline of Biblical Usage and the Concordance Results for your chosen words. Write a few sentences or paragraphs on what you think the intended meaning of the word is.

After you finish the passage or book, check out [The Bible Project’s](#) videos and find one that covers your selected text from their [Old Testament and New Testament series](#). (For example, here is their [first video](#) on the Gospel of John.)

These short, animated videos attempt to give you the historical, cultural context you may be missing as you read Scripture. This too is colored by human interpretation (as is every expression of Scripture), but it can give you a scholarly view of the context of your book or passage. After watching the video, write for a few minutes about what you learned.

Practice for Families with Kids

- Read Ephesians 1:3-14 aloud with your kids.
- Tell them to note every time they hear “in him.” For young children, you can ask them to touch their nose every time they hear this phrase.
- Discuss: Who is the “him” of this passage? (Jesus.) What does this passage mean by saying that we need to be “in him”? Why do you think it says it so many times?

WEEK TWO: SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION

Begin with Silence, Reflection, & Prayer (5 minutes)

Create a space to meet where your community can be comfortable yet alert. Open your time with a few minutes for silent reflection on your day. Choose a prayer phrase to silently repeat that expresses your openness and desire to welcome God's presence into this moment. Examples may include, "Be still and know that I am God," or, "Come, Holy Spirit."

If you want a guide for your time of silence, consider using this Prayer of Examen:

Holy Spirit, we welcome you into our community, and we feel your love for us. Guide us as we think about our day today. Help us to remember all the moments, both big and small. (Pause.)

Help us to remember moments of kindness and generosity and how to be thankful for them. (Pause.)

Help us to remember moments where we did not listen to your voice. Holy Spirit, what should we ask for forgiveness for today, and what behavior should we turn away from? (Pause.)

Help us to look toward tomorrow with the confidence that you will guide and take care of us. May we see you at work once again.

Have someone close this time with prayer for discernment and guidance.

Discuss the Sunday Teaching (10–15 minutes)

Break into smaller groups, and discuss the following questions:

- What resonated with you from Sunday's teaching?
- How familiar are you with God's story? Which parts are easier/harder for you?
- Where would you like to grow in your practice of Scripture?

Debrief Last Week's Practice (10 minutes)

Stay in your smaller groups and debrief using these questions:

- How was your practice of Scripture last week? What was easy/hard? What impact did it have on your week?
- What was encouraging? What was discouraging?
- What did this experiment reveal about God, yourself, and others?
- Based on last week's experience, how are you feeling about this week's practice?

Read This Overview

If Scripture is the True Story of the World, then we must create rhythms for allowing it to capture our imagination and reshape our default patterns, habits, feelings, and beliefs. One way to do this is through the ancient practice of Scripture memorization.

We see the power of memorization and internalization in the life of Jesus. In Luke 4, Satan engages a vulnerable Jesus in the wilderness with a series of reality-distorting temptations. Jesus counters these false narratives by quoting the true reality of Scripture. **The result was the silencing of Satan and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit** as Jesus left the wilderness for public ministry.

In the same way, Scripture memorization can be a powerful tool for disrupting the demonic influence of false stories in our lives and recalibrating our hearts to the Holy Spirit's work of renewing our minds with gospel truth. As we meditate and ruminate on God's story of what is good, true, and beautiful, we increasingly strengthen our instincts to embody these realities in our relationships with God, others, and ourselves.

Practice This Week (10 minutes each day)

CHOOSE A PASSAGE

Make it meaningful. Start with a passage that intersects with a desire, a promise you need to claim, a struggle you're experiencing, or a particular aspect of God's character that you need to remember. If you don't know where to begin, try some classic verses/passages like Psalm 1, Psalm 23, Proverbs 4:5-6, or Philippians 4:6-7.

CREATE A DAILY RHYTHM

Try to block out 10 minutes a day for Scripture memorization. Many people find that a few minutes right out of bed, during lunch, or right before bed helps reinforce memorization.

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNING STYLE

Each person learns differently, so make sure to lean into whatever has worked best for you in the past, such as:

- Repetitive writing
- Listening to audio Bibles while commuting
- Posting index cards on your mirror or dashboard
- Recording and listening to yourself throughout the day

REPEAT

Formation requires repetition. Repeat the verse to yourself at least three or four times a day during the first week. Then, scale back to once a week. After that, switch to once a month for the next six to 12 months until it's internalized.

FIND A PARTNER

New habits are best formed with the support of others. Invite a roommate, spouse, child, or discipleship group member to memorize the Scripture with you. Text them throughout the day to rehearse your passage together. Feel free to incentivize the process with a treat or reward to increase your motivation.

Prepare Together

Either in a large group or smaller groups of three or four, scheme together to help one another experiment with the practice of Scripture memorization.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following:

- What hopes and fears do you have around trying this experiment?
- What role does Scripture memory currently have in your apprenticeship to Jesus? Where might God be inviting you to grow?
- What preparations, considerations, or changes need to occur to make this happen?
- What “best practices” have others experimented with that could help us?

PRAYER

End your time with a few moments of silence to reflect on and be grateful to God for all that he has done in your community during this meeting. Listen for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your heart to take with you this week. Consider slowly praying the Lord’s Prayer together:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Practice for Families with Kids

Scripture memorization can be a fun habit to cultivate in your family. Younger kids have a surprising capacity to memorize and recite Scripture if you can find ways to bring it to life. Here are a few suggestions for different age groups:

- **Elementary and younger:** Keep the passages short and incorporate lots of singing, dancing, and repetition. Use meals, bath time, and bedtime as opportunities to rehearse Scripture together. A great song resource is [Seeds Worship](#).
- **Older kids and teenagers:** Follow their interests, energy, and struggles. For example, your teenage son may want to try memorizing short Proverbs since they were written from a father to his son during critical years of development. Feel free to incentivize Scripture memorization by rewarding it with an ice cream date, an overnight trip, or a gift.

WEEK THREE: LISTENING TOGETHER TO SCRIPTURE

Debrief Last Week's Practice (10 minutes)

Break into smaller groups and debrief using these questions:

- How was your practice of Scripture last week? What was easy/hard? What impact did it have on your week?
- What was encouraging? What was discouraging?
- What did this experiment reveal about God, yourself, and others?
- Based on last week's experience, how are you feeling about this week's practice?

Read This Overview

In uncertain times, God's people have always come together to remember who they are through the public reading of Scripture. Historically, reading the Bible aloud helped the gathered people of God to form a unique identity as a minority group living by a different story among the nations. **This is identity formation.**

Truly following Jesus is hard when our family and friends may not share the same set of values. As we gather to listen to the Bible read aloud, **we remember where we've come from and how to keep living as the people of God.** Our imagination — how we see God, ourselves, and the world — is formed as we listen to these stories in community with one another.

Practice Right Now (30–45 minutes)

Listening together to Scripture read aloud is simple. No one has to prepare. No one has to teach. No one has to come with the “right” answers. Just follow these steps:

- **Select a passage of Scripture:** Choose from Matthew 5-7, John 13-17, the letter to the Philippians, or, if you're ambitious, Exodus 1-14. Regardless of what you pick, try to choose more than just one section or chapter.
- **Read Scripture aloud together:** If possible, read from the same translation to make it easier to follow along. (The NIV or the NLT are great translations for reading out loud.) Choose one or two people to read the selection, or divide it up and go around the room.
- **Take your time:** Don't feel pressured to just “get through” your section of text. Take your time when reading out loud. This creates an environment that allows everyone to process the text and feel comfortable volunteering to read. Be sure to include any older kids among your group who can read in this practice.

When you are finished reading, invite people to share:

- What did the Spirit bring to mind as you listened?
- What words or phrases stuck out to you?
- What questions came to your mind?
- How was this experience different than if you read this same passage by yourself?

Close in prayer.

Practice This Week (30 minutes)

Make space this week to practice listening to Scripture with your family, friends, discipleship group, or your roommates. Follow the steps above to guide your reading and discussion.

WEEK FOUR: ENGAGING WITH GOD THROUGH SCRIPTURE

Debrief Last Week's Practice (10 minutes)

Break into smaller groups and debrief using these questions:

- How was your practice of Scripture last week? What was easy/hard? What impact did it have on your week?
- What was encouraging? What was discouraging?
- What did this experiment reveal about God, yourself, and others?
- Based on last week's experience, how are you feeling about this week's practice?

Read This Overview

Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). That is why God gave us the Bible: so we might know him and hear his voice, and so that he might speak to us as a loving father speaks to his children.

Jesus is the Living Word of God (John 1:1-14). He is the perfect communication of God. When we come to the written word of God (the Bible), our goal is not simply to know more information. **Our goal is to encounter Jesus.**

And yet, it is all too possible to read the Bible and still miss Jesus (John 5:39-40). How do we read the Bible in a way that helps us encounter Jesus?

What we are going to practice is not a magic bullet. There is no one-size-fits-all technique for encountering God through Scripture. **Only the Spirit of God can bring us into an encounter with Jesus.**

However, this is a general pattern that the Spirit has used in the lives of many throughout the history of the church. Feel free to experiment with this pattern and adapt it in ways that are helpful to you.

Practice Right Now (30 minutes)

Reading the Bible ought to be a rhythm of revelation and response. God reveals himself to us in his Word. We respond to him with confession, prayer, praise, trust, love, and obedience.

The pattern laid out on the next page attempts to foster this rhythm. Spend some time working through this process on your own.

1. ASK FOR HELP

Read these portions of Scripture, and ask for God’s help as you approach his word. The responses outlined below are simply suggestions — feel free to respond in a way that feels authentic to you.

Read: *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.* (Matthew 4:4)

Respond: Father, I am hungry. I am starving. I need you to feed me with your Word.

Read: *For God, who said, “Let the light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Respond: Father, I am blind. Open my eyes to see the beauty of Jesus.

Read: *Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation — if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.* (1 Peter 2:2-3)

Respond: Father, give me spiritual taste buds to taste and see that you are good.

2. READ THE TEXT

Read Psalm 139 slowly and carefully. Were you drawn to any particular verses or phrases? Why?

3. MEDITATE ON THE TEXT

Spend some time thinking about the words and phrases that landed on you. Read them a few times. Chew on them. Pay attention to the imagery and metaphors used in the text. What picture is God painting for you in these words? What is your Father saying to you?

For example, consider Psalm 139:16:

*Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.*

Close your eyes and think over the course of your life. Think about the highs and the lows. What are your regrets? What are you anxious about?

Now, consider what it means that God wrote every one of your days — your best day and your worst day — in his book, long before you were born. How does that change the way you deal with your past? How does that change the way you face the future?

In this example, I hear my Father telling me that:

- He sees me, knows me, and cares for me better than I see, know, or care for myself.
- I am not a mistake, and my story is not an accident.
- I can trust him even when I don’t understand what he is doing.
- He is not disappointed with me, nor is he surprised by my struggles.

Perhaps a different phrase or verse landed on you. Spend some time meditating on it. What do you hear your Father saying to you?

4. PRAY THE TEXT

You've listened to God's voice. Now, it's time to speak back to him in prayer. That could look like confessing sin, asking for help, or simply praising him for his goodness.

Whatever God has spoken to you through his Word, try to turn it back around into prayer. For example:

- Father, thank you that I can't hide from you, and I don't have to hide from you. I want to be honest with you about _____.
- Father, thank you that you know me and love me better than I know and love myself.
- Father, I am really anxious about _____. Help me to trust that you know what I'm facing today. All my days were written in your book before I was even born.
- Father, I am hurting because of _____. I'm struggling to understand why you allowed this in my life. Help me to trust you, even when I don't understand. Thank you that I am not a mistake, and my story is not an accident.

Practice This Week (30 minutes)

Choose a passage of Scripture, and walk through this process three times in the next week. The Psalms work great for this, but feel free to choose another favorite passage. You might choose to meditate on the same phrase each day, or you might find that God draws your attention to another phrase or verse. Consider keeping a journal to record your insights.

Practice for Families with Kids

Try following these steps to engage with this practice in your family:

READ THE TEXT

Read a short passage of scripture with your kids. Try Genesis 1. You might want to use a children's Bible like the [Jesus Storybook Bible](#).

MEDITATE ON THE TEXT

Ask your children questions about the text. If reading Genesis 1, ask questions like:

- Who made the world?
- How did God make the world?
- What else did God make?
- What is your favorite animal? Who made it?

PRAY THE TEXT

Lead your children in a simple prayer based on your discussion of the text. For Genesis 1, a good prayer might be, "God, thank you for making _____."

RESOURCES FOR THE JOURNEY

- “How to Read the Bible” series by [The Bible Project](#) (available in [videos](#) and [podcasts](#))
- [Blue Letter Bible](#)
- *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero
- *The Gift of Being Yourself* by David Benner
- *The Truth about Lies and Lies about Truth* by David Takle
- *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* by E. Randolph Richards & Brandon J. O’Brien
- *Africa Bible Commentary*, edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo
- *Taking God at His Word* by Kevin DeYoung
- [Enneagram Spiritual Formation Plan](#)
- [Soma’s Spiritual Formation Guide](#)