

I think I have heard God speak,
once in my life.

Like actually speak to me;
at least I think it was God's voice
in my head and heart.

I was 23.

It was very specific,
and it was so particular for that moment
I was having
and yet it still rings in my memory
—I remember what was said,
where I was,
and what I felt.

I used to beg God for signs and wonders;
I would will God to do another miracle
—just roll those clouds back like a scroll,
I promise I'll pay attention
and watch for it!

I felt like I was devout enough
and I was willing to listen
and be on the lookout.

I would hear to that 90's song,
by Joan Osborn, What If God Was One of Us
—just a slob like one of us, just a stranger on the bus—
there's good stuff there
but that's for another sermon—
but that song made me stop and stare at people
as if could see the God in them.

But it turns out those promises
and conditions and wishes I had for God,
they all have something in common
—they were all on my terms.

And if life and faith
have taught me anything
it's that, hardly anything

comes to me on my terms.

In insisting that God

would and could

do what God had done in the past,

I missed whatever God was doing
right then and there.

Waiting for the clouds to roll back
meant I disregarded
that God made the clouds
beautiful against a blue sky.

Begging for miracles
meant I missed the miracle it is
to wake up and watch the sunrise
through all the trees in my backyard.

Can you relate?

Paying attention is hard.

We are busy, busy people.

We know how hard it is to stop and pay attention.

A friend who I play tennis with,
is reading through the Bible
and said to me a few days ago
that his spirit was willing to learn
but his will often got in the way.

Can't we all relate?

Wanting to be better people,

better Christians—

the spirit is willing,
but the flesh is weak,
we say.

That's where spiritual disciplines or practices
are designed to help us.

As a discipline and practice,
scripture reading and study,

offers a framework and accountability
to develop growth in our spiritual lives.

Most of us are good
at keeping up our physical health.

We run 3 miles a day
or we swim laps in the pool,
or we only eat organic food,
or we've been watching
that Netflix documentary with Zach Efron
and now only will drink water from the Swiss Alps.
Or is that just my husband?

We are very aware
of the benefit
of keeping up with our physical health.

But when it comes to spiritual health
...well...

even I am better
about going to a daily workout
than I am about daily prayer.

That hard thing
that Adam Hamilton taught us,
about praying 5 times a day was excellent.

Spiritual health,
I think I could use some help.
How about you?

In an online, article
on an introduction to Spiritual Disciplines,
I found blog a website called, and I'm not kidding,
on a website called *Art of Manliness*
—quotes Richard Foster,
“[Spiritual] Disciplines allow us
to place ourselves before God
so that [God] can transform us...”¹

¹ <https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/introduction-spiritual-disciplines/>

A few years ago,
one of my religion professors at Appalachian
decided to do a year-long daily-scripture blog
and she told a few of her former
(and dare I say favorite) students
about her blog to read through scripture
with lots of different people.

We ended up sharing this
with the congregation.

Many of us participated
in the spiritual discipline
of reading scripture together that year
—it was such a gift.

But that
was back in 2015.

And since then,
I haven't made it a practice
to read through the entirety of scripture.

The truth is that reading scripture daily
and studying scripture alone or in small groups,
takes dedication, practice, discipline.

You've heard that to become a master
or an expert at something
requires 10,000 hours of practice
—its formula quoted by Malcolm Gladwell
in his book, *Outliers*.

He claims that 20 hours a week
for 10 years will get you there.

So, 20 hours a week
ends up being about 2-3 hrs. a day.

I am not sure all of us can devote
that kind of time to scripture reading.

So, let's be generous with ourselves
and say we take it down
to one hour a week;

you'd have to spend about 27.5 years
of reading one hour every day
to get to 10,000 hours.

No wonder we don't consider ourselves
experts on Scripture!

In fact, we've come to believe
that people with fancy letters
in front of their names, like REV. or even REV. DR.,
well they are the experts.

I can almost guarantee that Whit and I
have not put in 27.5 years of reading scripture
every single day for an hour!

Though Whit technically has more hours
than I do because he is older-
and this of course, makes him more of an expert!

The truth is we could all stand
to be better students of our scriptures.

In our Adam Hamilton study, *The Walk*,
he says that a recent study
found that 87% of Americans
own a Bible but a majority

have read little of none of it.

And another poll found that only 35% of Christians
read their Bible weekly.²

There's a reason it's hard to read the Bible.

Frederick Buechner says,

"It not only looks awfully dull,
but some of it is.

The prophets are wildly repetitious
and almost never know when to stop.

Then there are all the *begats*."³

Timothy Beal, a college professor of Bible
and a Sunday school teacher for over 20 years,

² Adam Hamilton, *The Walk* (Abingdon Press, Nashville 2019) pg. 49

³ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*. HarperOne, San Francisco, 1973

says that what all those years have
shown [him] is “that the most common source
of frustration stems not from the Bible itself
but from **the expectations that come with it.**”⁴

How many of us can relate to
feeling as though
when we try to read and study the Bible
we aren’t getting the right answer
—or we are afraid we aren’t doing it correctly.

Which again is where
practice and disciplines come into play.

Jesus, grew up as a Jew
learning, reading, and studying
the Hebrew Bible.

So of course, he read scripture
but he also memorized it.

Many of us have memorized a favorite verse
If I asked some of you
to tell me your favorite verse
or one you have memorized,
many of you could do it.

Yet it isn’t just the memorizing
and repeating it that is important.

It is the action of memorizing those words
so that they become
written on our hearts
and meaningfully guide us.

In memorizing, studying and taking in the Bible
we won’t find a step-by-step,
how to manual on raising children,
but we might find
that the more we pour ourselves into it
that in parenting that child
with say a temper
well by studying scripture

⁴ Timothy Beal, *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book*. Mariner Publishing, 2012

we might remember Proverbs 15:1,
(who has that one memorized?)
“A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.”
(though you probably have heard it before).

Havin scripture written on our hearts,
which is what Proverbs 3:3 implies,
let loyalty and faithfulness never leave you
...write them on the tablet of your heart,
is a form of studying scripture
that engages the text as developmental
and formative to our lives.

Eugene Peterson, writes,
“...in this business of living the Christian life,
ranking high among the most neglected aspects
is one having to do
with the reading of the Christian Scriptures.”⁵

In Peterson’s estimation,
it’s not that Christians don’t read their Bibles
—it’s just that we don’t read them ***formatively***
as a way to live.

Our Bible is not a hands off,
holier than thou,
only gets used on a Sunday morning
kind of book.

The scriptures are to equip us
for every good work
—that’s 2 Timothy—remember?

These are stories meant to enlighten,
invite, challenge and transform.

I quoted Buechner
earlier talking about scripture having dull parts
—which it does—well the rest of his quote
about scripture says this:

⁵ Eugene Peterson, [Eat This Book](#), William B. Eerdmans Publishers 2006. Pg. xi

***“and yet just because it is a book
about both the sublime
and the unspeakable,
it is a book also
about life the way it really is.”⁶***

We should remember
that we are allowed to bring our questions
and our disagreements to scripture.
We are allowed to bring doubt,
we are allowed to wrestle with it
and to be uncomfortable
with parts of it.

If Jesus is our model,
then we see “him
challenging prevailing interpretations of scripture,
debating the meaning of scripture,
and at times even setting aside scripture.”⁷

Which shows such intimacy God’s word,
it shows careful and thoughtful study
and knowledge of the Bible
that we ought to be encouraged
to do the same.

So. Let’s do it.
Let’s dig a little deeper right now.
Let’s study scripture.

One of the ways we can approach scripture
is called Lectio Divina.

For some of you,
this will be very woo woo.

It’s totally okay to be anxious.
But I’m looking past all of the nervous

⁶ Buechner, pg. 6

⁷ Adam Hamilton, *The Walk* (Abingdon Press, Nashville 2019) pg. 51

—is she really going to do this—looks
that you all are giving me.

I'm going to explain all this before we do it together.

You should have had a little paper
on your chair with a scripture passage on it.
Take that out and the little pencil
or use your own.

For those of you at home,
I want you to do this with us!

Okay.

First things first.

Get comfortable.

At least as comfortable as you can in these chairs.

When Arlie does her morning Zoom with her class,
her teacher asks for 2nd grade learning position,
feet flat on the floor,
back straight,
eyes, and ears ready to learn.

So, everyone assumes 2nd grade learning position
—which is also our Lectio Davina position.

Lectio Divina is Latin for divine reading.



There are four steps.

First is *lectio*, which means reading.

So, I will read a passage

and I want us to listen for a word
or idea or phrase
that speaks to you.

There will be space for silence

(or maybe meditative music in the background).

I will read the passage a second time.
This step is the *mediatio*,
or mediative step.

So, this time,
as the passage is read,
concentrate on each phrase.
Underline or mark or make a little note
by something that has meaning for you.

Next is the *contemplatio* or contemplation
of the text.

How does this passage or phrase
or idea relate to me?

And finally, we read the passage one more time
and this final step is the *oratio*
which is from the Latin word for prayer.

So that after all that reading and meditating, contemplating
—think about having a conversation with God
about what is stirring in you from doing this.

(Matt. 5:13-16)

Now, we've only spent a little time we should have on this.
It should take about 10-15 minutes
and sometimes it can end up being longer.

I know there are those of you in here
and at home that didn't get
what you thought you should out of that.

But here's the thing.
The first time you rode a bike
without training wheels,
were you ready for the Tour de France?

No.

You had to practice.
And this is just one

of the several ways to read scripture
as a spiritual practice.

So be patient.

Pay attention.

Read.

Study.

And remember practice doesn't make you perfect,
but it will make you proficient.

And you 27.5 years.