

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...”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <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.<sup>2</sup>

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*."<sup>3</sup>

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.**”<sup>4</sup>

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

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<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup>

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:

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<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup>***

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.”<sup>7</sup>

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

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<sup>6</sup> Buechner, pg. 6

<sup>7</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> grade learning position,  
feet flat on the floor,  
back straight,  
eyes, and ears ready to learn.

So, everyone assumes 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.