

# Bible Reading & Prayer: Introduction

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So first, I just want to introduce myself. I'm Laura Bush, and I, yeah, I didn't write this part out, so, but I live in Cheshire with my husband, and we've been coming to Trinity for about six years, a little over, and I've been a Christian since I was about 13, and did not grow up in a topic. So the basic topic is going to be Bible intake and prayer, okay? So it's pretty basic, right? Like, most of us have been trained in, like, you're supposed to do this every day, right?

So I was, likewise, as a teenager, trained in such a way. I knew what I was supposed to do. I was a brand-new Christian. I read the Bible like crazy, like, I'd never read it before, never, very little exposure to it, if any, and I know I read like nuts. The rest, I don't really, I don't remember for many years what my practice was like on a regular basis. I went off to college, and I was part of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and there, it was, I know, it was very explicit.

We were taught how to do it, and encouraged to do it, and, and I know I had seasons where, that was very fruitful. I also had seasons where it was like, this is kind of boring, and I don't understand what I'm doing, and I don't know how to pray, and like, you know, whole parts of the scriptures were just like opaque, like, I had no idea what's going on. Why am I reading this?

And, and in fact, I was a full-fledged adult in middle age before I actually had read every book of the Bible. Ezekiel was the last one to fall, and, yeah, so, but I've always been a reader, right, so, in many ways, reading the Bible came, you know, if not naturally, it, it, it wasn't too much of a stretch. I tended not to get, like, I tended to do that somewhat, um, even if prayer came harder. Like, I know that I, I know that I would cry out to God when I was, whatever, afraid, confused, um, but oftentimes I would be like that, and I wouldn't cry out to God. It was not my reflex for many years as a Christian, um, so, over the years, um, I've, I've struggled, as many people do.

Different seasons of life are really different. Um, when I had young children, I think, you know, those of you with kids can, can, uh, identify it's, it's really challenging to get 15 minutes alone, um, and for me, I really do best with habits when they're regular, like, same time, same place, same everything every day, and, and that just becomes really hard with, uh, children, um, and other things, obviously, that interfere with our lives and our schedules, changes. Um, I, you know, again, off and on, I had periods of where I was really locked in, and I, and I had maybe a particular method of approaching my time with the Lord, and, and it worked, and it worked, and it worked, and then it started not to work, so to speak, uh, and, and I'm, you know, I'm sure that there were, uh, many periods of, you know, not years, uh, maybe months, uh, where I really didn't read my Bible on my own at all, um, and prayer, you know, has continued to be the harder, the harder part of that, uh, of that duo, um, but in recent years, um, I'm going to say about 15 years ago, but I could be totally wrong, like, I have no sense of, I don't know, you know, it feels to me like 1995 was five years ago, so, you know, uh, you can't trust me on these things, but, um, one of the things I began to do, uh, was read, uh, Puritan authors, and we just had this class on John Owen, um, I started with, uh, authors that were a little more accessible than John Owen, for which I'm grateful, um, and there are, in case any of you are in that class, you're like, oh, I should read John Owen, well, I have a whole list of people you can read who will be easier to start with, get to John Owen, he's excellent, but anyway, that's a, that's just a bonus, um, but what I found in the, in the Puritans was, um, there's a knowledge of scripture that came out in, in every sentence, practically, and they weren't quoting, you know, occasionally, you know, they did quote, but it would be phrases, it would be just thoughts that were clearly drawn from scripture, um, and I'm sure I missed some of them, because I didn't know the Bible as well, but I, but I learned from that, like, wow, the value of that, um, and it really challenged me, like, I don't know the scriptures that well, and, um, I also found in the Puritans that just, uh, such a strong and very real, um, faith that God really was who he says he is, and they took these scriptures really seriously, as, as if they're true, which sounds silly, like, most of us, I'm pretty sure, are convinced that, uh, the Bible is the word of God, and it's true, and it's for us, and it's good, um, but sometimes in our experience, it doesn't feel like that, like, is this really true, and it's easy to kind of, I've found it's easy to, to let some of the, let some of what went on that we read about in scripture, um, just become a little bit like fairy tale, um, like, do we really believe, you know, that God parted the sea, and they walked through on dry land, like, what, were there walls of water, like, we can sort of imagine it, but in my imagination, it looks like a storybook, right, it doesn't seem real, um, so, so, so the Puritans were really, really helpful for me in that way, the other thing I read was a, a biography, uh, no, the autobiography of George Mueller, and George Mueller is famous for answers to prayer, um, he prayed,

[ 6 : 52 ] he prayed about everything, and he relied on God to answer prayers in ways that most of us have probably never experienced, um, he was a builder of orphanages, and he relied for the money to build these orphanages in the 19th century, um, he relied on prayer, I mean, he just relied on God, and he didn't ask for money, didn't, you know, overtly, you know, publicize his needs, or go around, uh, to churches saying, you know, I want to build this orphanage, can you give me some money, like, he didn't do any of that, um, but he prayed, and he prayed in, uh, specific ways, and he saw what, to me, certainly, are remarkable responses, so, so the kids would have nothing to eat at breakfast, and he would be praying, he knew this was true, there was no breakfast for the children, and he would pray, you know, probably before breakfast, um, and there were times when they had sat down, the children were sitting there and ready, and a knock comes on the door, and some guy, you know, from a bakery says, man, I have all this extra stuff, can you use it, you know, and then the children were fed, and this kind of thing happened over and over, um, but I got to thinking, I mean, that, that alone is very challenging, and we can talk about that, um, you know, as we, as we get more into, uh, the prayer part of this class, but, but I got, I, what I realized in the autobiography, um, is how steeped in scripture George Mueller was, and how, there was a line somewhere about how many times he had read through the entire Bible, and it was in the hundreds easily, I, I don't remember the number, but I remember it was like, oh, maybe this is why he could pray like that, maybe this is why he had that faith, that God would really answer prayer, and I, and that was what I saw, um, really clearly, and I was just like, I need to do that, I need to do that, I, you know, I wasn't seeing fruit in my prayer life much, and, and I had never, probably when I read that, I probably, you know, never read the entire Bible in a year, for instance, um, and I decided that's what I wanted to do, um, um, and in that time, uh, you know, since that time, uh, I mean, I decided to read,

I just set apart, I, by this time I didn't have young children, so I had a freer schedule, um, and I was able to read, uh, so my daughter actually stimulated me the first time to read the whole Bible in a year, I'd never done that, she was about 16, and, um, I thought, well, good grief, if Amy can do it, surely I can, like, this is ridiculous, I've been a Christian all this time, and never done that, um, so I said, I, so, you know, she, she was my, uh, uh, catalyst, um, and I did it, and then after that, um, I realized, well, that wasn't all that hard, actually, um, and I started reading more than that, so for several years, I'm going to say maybe five years or something, I read through the Bible multiple times every year, sometimes as much, I think three was the most, but it also, but included some reading plans, have you repeat the New Testament, or repeat the Psalms and Proverbs, or, so it, it always had some of that repetition in it, um, and it was a lot of reading, like, like, no joke, um, but I read morning and evening, and I read, you know, chap chunks at a time, and I read, I'll talk more about that later, but, um, but anyway,

I, I, I followed this fruit, and I began finding other practices along the way that I found really helpful, uh, for my prayer life, and for absorbing the scriptures, so that's where this class really begins, um, and just stuff that I've found that has been really helpful for me, and I've grown, you know, more in these last 15 years than, than I probably had up till that point, um, and I just want to share these things, um, last fall, so I, a year ago, I started taking seminary classes, uh, online at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and this past summer, fall, August, September, I took a class in spiritual disciplines, and my professor, uh, was Donald Whitney, who's written this book, um, which is called Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life. This book, there are several copies, um, in the bookstall, and bookstall books are discounted, so, uh, check them out. Um, he goes through a lot of spiritual disciplines here, um, and, and did, and covered quite a few, not quite all of these, but quite a few in the class. It was an eight-week class, um, so he covers Bible intake, he covers prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, learning, um, and, and he's very practical, um, and in the class, he was just, it was very practical, and very, like, try this, you know, and, uh, later on, we're going to talk about Bible meditation, and he provided, like, 17 ways to do it, and so it was very practical, you know, you could look at it, and you could go, oh, I could try that, um, and I haven't tried them all, um, I've tried a number of them, but, uh, and the other thing that he's really passionate about, and he has a separate book about, is called Praying the Bible, and I think there's a copy of that in the bookstall as well, it's a little, it's a little book, um, yeah, go ahead, this one, Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, yep, if I may give a plug, you can actually find a digital copy of that online for you also, yeah, and Dr. Whitney, um, is passionate about getting this material in the hands of folks, people in churches, uh, he travels around the world giving this material, he does, you know, weekend, like, I don't know, class week workshops or something like that, and he's very generous with his, what he's done here, so as the class goes on, you're going to see some of that, um, that will be actually, like, straight from the pen of, of Donald Whitney, and, um, and he's glad for his students to, to do that, um, very generous and just passionate about these things, so that was really encouraging, and it gave me some more, um, it, but it, it dovetailed so nicely with, with what I'd already found, kind of on my own, and pulling from different sources, so that's where this comes from.

Um, and so we're going to do, it's five, it's five classes, and let me just, just briefly, I, I could have done a handout, I probably should have, but I didn't, uh, so today's just going to be an introduction, uh, you've already heard some of that, um, but we're going to talk about why we do these things, um, basically, that's today, uh, the next class will be focused on Bible intake, and I say that because we're going to talk about hearing as well as reading and studying, um, so there's all different ways we intake the Bible, and, and yeah, anyway, we'll get there, uh, the third class is going to be all about meditating on the Bible, um, then class four, we're going to start with, uh, prayer, and the last, the last class will be some helps, some practical helps in prayer and praying the Bible, um, so that's what's coming, um, I would just like to ask, um, just ask, uh, what comes to mind when you hear phrases like daily devotions, or in my day, in university, quiet time, morning prayers, what kind of, what kind of feelings rise up, does that, is it like spark, does it spark joy, uh, does it feel like, oh, this chore that, well, I'm not very good at this,

I'd just be interested in how, how it hits you, right, where you are right now, and invite you to just, go ahead, Ivor. Um, I like how I've been doing it, uh, pretty much since we got married, every morning, most mornings, I was having a missed occasion, and it's become a, like a part of life, that, uh, we really miss it when it doesn't happen, it seems, you know, a part of, just part of life, yeah, it's great, it's great, yeah, someone else, Mary.

[ 16 : 20 ] I read the Bible every day, and then someone, don't ask me to do that, let's talk about journaling, what stands out to you, what do you feel the Lord is telling you, and journaling really helps.

Yep, yeah, we're going to talk a little bit about that as well, yeah, that's been helpful for me as well, yeah, yeah, any questions or problems that you would like solutions for, not that I, not that I'm making any promises, Ivor.

It gets kind of rude at times, and you do it every day, it falls into a formula, and you try to, it's very difficult not to.

Yeah, yeah, Dr. Whitney talks about this, and he says, like, it's, sometimes we end up, say, in prayer, saying the same old things, in the same old way, and we're praying, I mean, the things before us to pray for, we're praying for our loved ones, well, they don't change day to day, right, I mean, you know, that's, there's a, there's a number of people that we pray for, that we're very close to, we pray for family, and, and we want to do that consistently, but how does it become, but it's easy to become like, yeah, I just did this yesterday, Lord, I said the same things, can you just, whatever.

Can't you just say it? Right, right, exactly. And many other things like that, we might pray for, about our work, we might pray about our witness, we might pray about, you know, our missionaries, we might pray about many different things, but it's easy for it to, it to fall into just the same old things, in the same old way.

[ 17 : 56 ] And, and Dr. Whitney talked about that a lot, like, and that's, that's what I hope, that's what, one of the things I hope that we can look at and find some different ways to approach it so that that doesn't happen.

Yeah. I think something that discourages me from time to time is, sort of this promise, at least among my generation and younger, that if you do all the right things, in your morning devotion, or quiet time, or whatever, you'll have this, like, wonderful spiritual experience, and that if you, if you didn't have that, you did something wrong, Yeah.

or that you're missing out, or that God's favor wasn't with you for some reason. Yeah. And sometimes I'm downright afraid to miss out on that, and either, like, I've disappointed God, or, like, I've done something wrong, He didn't want to talk to me, or something.

And I know, I know that there is, that that's not true, Yeah. and that there's practical value to just, just, in taking the precious scriptures, Yeah.

Um, saying a prayer to God that you feel like is hitting the ceiling because He hears. Yeah. I know that. Yeah. But there's been just strong influences, I think, in, like, mass, like, spirituality movements that have, have gotten under my skin a little bit, like, saying, No, you should, you should feel amazing all the time.

[ 19 : 33 ] Yeah. Yeah. I think most of us have, have heard that, or been influenced by that. Um, and also that feeling of guilt when, when we miss a few days, or, or whatever, you know, guilt when, we find ourselves running our eyes over the words of scripture, but not actually paying any attention, like, I can do that, like, and I go through, I finish a chapter, and I don't remember what I read, because I'm just like, yeah, um, and then I feel guilty, uh, you know, or I feel like, yeah, I did it wrong, um, so yeah, looking for that big reward, um, or feeling guilty about, I must be doing it wrong, or, God doesn't want to hear this again, or, all kinds of things, or being, I don't know, anyone been bored reading, I don't know, Leviticus, uh, parts of numbers, uh, you know, when you get to a genealogy, what do you do with that, do you, it's hard, it's hard, do you make yourself read every word, and feel like, ah, well,

I did, that's a good job, I did that, like it was pointless, it felt pointless, right, um, but, or do we just skim over it, and, and then feel guilty for that, you know, so there's just a lot of, a lot of those things, are really practical, and really, um, challenging, so anything you do every day, is going to be, um, is going to tend to become rote, and while we want that, out of some of our practices, you know, I think of, uh, how many people, think really hard, and work really hard, to brush your teeth every day, like for most of us, that was drilled in from childhood, and you just do it, and you don't think about it, you don't think, oh, should I brush my teeth today, like most of us, aren't doing that, um, and that's fine, and we do it the same way, the same old way, you know, the same thing, in the same old way, and you know, that's fine, for that, um, we don't need a lot of variety, in our tooth brushing habits, but when it comes to the word of God, we feel like, well, this deserves more, and it does, but, yeah, anyway,

Dave had something, yeah, so I was just going to say, it's only quite a bit, but when I think about, the spiritual disciplines, um, I think of, them similar to, um, exercise, or, you know, any of the other, multitude of things, that we all know, we ought to be doing, right, um, and, similar to those things, that we all know, we ought to be doing, and sometimes aren't, uh, because they're a struggle, to develop that new habit, um, they're also, the, the results are, long-term, results, like, you're not going to, you know, read Genesis chapter one, today, and, you know, automatically, have this amazing relationship, with God, because, all of, all of the spiritual disciplines, all of the, life disciplines, that we go through, build upon themselves, so that, you know, when you get to be, you know, 15 years down the road, with the practice, now, you can look back, and go, oh, look how much I've grown, yep, you want to pass that back,

Debbie had something, yeah, I was saying, sometimes it feels like, it's more of a, an intellectual pursuit, or, just, an engagement of my mind, and I long for it to be, an engagement of my emotions, in worship, and joy, yeah, and I do have that, at times, but those times, are much fewer, far between, and that's what I really long for, that feeling of having, met with God, and not just, you know, yep, yeah, yeah, so a lot of those things, you know, I hope to sort of address, I'm not going to fix everything, and I'm, you know, and it's not like, I don't experience, many of these same things, now, it's not, you know, I haven't arrived, but, but I hope we can talk, about those things, and, and I would also like to say, if you have any specific, questions or issues, you hope that, will be covered, if there's something, you thought, oh, maybe, maybe she'll talk about this, feel free to let me know, I have some, three by five cards up here, if you just want to write something down, and give it to me, that would be, totally welcome, so,

I mean, for now, I'll just put these here, if anyone wants to do that, or just, send me an email, or, talk to me in person, whatever, so now, I want to talk a little bit about, just, just to give us a, a foundation, for, why do we do this anyway, and I think most of us have, a pretty good idea, so, yeah, but, I, yeah, I feel like, we need this foundation, for what we're doing, and, and why we're doing it, if you have a Bible, and you want to follow along, I'm going to read, from Deuteronomy chapter 17, so the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is kind of, it's his last sort of speech, before the people of Israel, before they enter the land, he's reviewing, much of the teaching, that he has, been, that they've received, from the Lord, over, over the years, since the Exodus, and he's, a lot of it,

[ 25 : 24 ] I love Deuteronomy, because so much of it is like, remember, remember, remember, teach your children, pass it on, remember, don't do these things, they lead to curses, they lead to judgment, do these things, they lead to blessing, like it's very straightforward, and, and I just, I find I need it, you know, I need these reminders, in Deuteronomy 17, I'm going to start at verse 14, he, he starts addressing, laws about kings, so he recognizes, that in the future, and God recognized this, in the future, that Israel would want a king, so here's some instructions, they don't have a king yet, right, but, as we know, they will, they will begin to get them, so here's, here's what he teaches here, when you come to the land, that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it, and dwell in it, and then say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations, that are around me, you may indeed, set a king, over you, whom the Lord your God, will choose, one from among your brothers, you shall set as king over you, you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother, only he must not acquire, many horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt, in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, you shall never return that way again, and he shall not acquire, many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself, excessive silver and gold, and when he sits on the throne, of his kingdom, he shall write for himself, in a book, a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests, and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it, all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear, the Lord his God, by keeping all the words, of this law, and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart, may not be lifted up, above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside, from the commandment, either to the right hand, or to the left, so that he may continue, long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

So this is specifically, addressing a future king, but I think we can, we can see in this, a pattern that ought to, it ought to apply to all of us, right, if we want to, as it says, learn to fear the Lord our God, keep all his words, do them, not turn aside, from the commandment, to the left, or the right, this is, this is what Moses gives, for this is how you do that, this is how you hang on, to these things, and he's probably talking, mostly about the, the very book of Deuteronomy, when he, when he says a book of, a copy of this law, and we don't act, we don't know, if any kings actually, ever did this, we see a lot of evidence, that they didn't obey it, right, we have kings who, acquired many wives, and many horses, and turned away, and they acquired for themselves, excessive silver and gold, we see a lot of that, as we, as we move through the scriptures, but we don't see a lot of, we don't have really evidence, of a lot of this, really knowing, the instructions that God has given, and that word law, it does really mean, kind of instructions, rather than, it's not like a code of law, it's not like they're, you know, it's not like what we would find at,

I don't know, City Hall, or something, I don't know, who has a law code, but those, you know, you know, the laws, it's not necessarily that, but it's, it's God's instruction, instruction, for life, and for worship, and for, all the things, that are, that's in there, in the book of Deuteronomy, and the previous chapters, previous books as well, so, what is the goal here?

It's that he may not turn aside, from the commandment, it's that he keeps to this path, and throughout the scriptures, we see, Israel failing to keep to that path, why?

Because they turn, to this God over here, like these guys, they have a, they have an interesting God, let's, let's include him, let's pull him in, like he might be able to help us out, Baal was like a rain God, I think, so, you know, it's a, it's a, you know, we're having a drought, maybe we should go to the rain God, you know, and, and, things like that, so they were highly influenced, by the people around them, the pagan peoples around them, and as you read, through, the, books of Moses, you find, all kinds of, you shall be holy, you shall be set apart, you should be different, you should not be like them, and here he says, you know, don't put a foreigner over you, who's not your brother, you know, it, you're supposed to be different, from the world, yeah, so that, so there's a, so there's a basic teaching there, that one of the ways to do that, is, to read the word, to remember it, to keep it, to do it, to read it again, to read it again, writing for yourself, a book of the copy of the law, that's a pretty cool thing to do,

[ 31 : 08 ] I've never done that, but I have, I have written out, scriptures, not for, necessarily a purpose, other than, to engage, my hand, and my eyes, in a different way, I don't think, the detail is like, I don't think we all are required, to write out a book of the law, but it would probably, be a great, great thing to do, at one point, you could buy, books that had, they were basically blank books, but they were, keyed to a book of the bible, and they gave you, they, they gave you the, the verse references, and they had sort of, figured out about, how much space, that might take, in handwriting, and you just filled it in, and you just wrote, and I've done some of that, yeah, so, nothing wrong with that, and it's a, it's a good, it's a good practice, but apart from the specifics, I think we get the message here, Paul, in the book of Romans, many of us will be familiar, with this, verses, chapter 12, verses 1 and 2,

Paul, here in the New Testament, says, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies, as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship, do not be conformed, to this world, but be transformed, by the renewal of your mind, that by testing, you may discern, what is the will of God, what is good, and acceptable, and perfect, do not be conformed, to this world, by nature, we're kind of like chameleons, right, we kind of want to blend in, with the people around us, we don't necessarily, want to stand out, and draw attention to ourselves, especially negative attention, it's our natural, that's just natural, that's human nature, because there's safety, in being part of a group, we want to belong, we want to, and so we're living, even more than Israel, at some times, of their history, we're living, all mixed up, with many people, who do not know the Lord, right, we're working with them, we're rubbing shoulders, with them all the time, and our natural, the natural thing to do, is to just absorb, absorb, absorb, what this culture, is telling us, and become like that, like that's what, if we don't do anything, that's what we'll be like, right, now there's a lot of diversity, in the culture, we might become like this, or like that, or like that, but we're influenced, by what is around us, right, to a high degree, sometimes more than we know, because we're just immersed in it, we don't realize, oh that's a message, that's coming from, the world, not actually, it may, what if it's not true, like there are many things like that, we probably never question, because they're just in the water, right, it's just what we're swimming in, but God calls us, to be different, right, not like a chameleon, you know, whose like skin matches, wherever he is, but, but to be his, and distinctly his, so he says, do not be conformed, to this world, but be transformed, by the renewal, of your mind, and this to me, is just, saying in a, in a more straightforward, propositional way, what Moses was saying, to the future king, you need to be different, and here's how it's going to happen, by the renewal of your mind, we need to be different, from the world, like not in every single way, you know, we're all pretty much dressed, like our neighbors, right, and, you know, it's not, it's not a difference, just for the sake of difference, but if we're following God's way, and,

I love how, God's way is, is often, the metaphors of a path, it's a straight line, right, don't, don't diverge, over and over again, to the, to the left or the right, to the right or the left, whatever, don't turn off it, right, it does, it often doesn't look like a straight line to us, because it's confusing, and we don't see it clearly, but, but we're supposed to hold to that path, ask for the ancient paths, the scripture says, don't, you know, and walk in those, walk in the, in the way that's been handed down to you, from your forefathers, in the Lord, so, from the scripture, we have these things, so, just in order to counteract, the influence of the world, and, you know, I don't need to, like, you know, it's on TV, it's in, on Netflix, it's, in all the social media, it's, you know, it's, it's the news, it's the, everything that we're taking in, we are taking in, so much more, of those influences, than, any king of Israel, had access to, you know, it's just overwhelming, if you think about it,



I mean, they didn't even have, like, a newspaper, for the world news, I mean, they didn't, you know, if, if Ukraine had been invaded, in their day, they, they wouldn't know, for perhaps years, so, we have all this information, pouring into us, all the time, and it's all affecting us, we like to think, it's not really affecting us, or it's just informing us, but it's all affecting us, and our natural tendency, is to, go with the flow, you know, we're, we're, we're in the stream, and we just want to go along, because that's easier, right, so Paul is calling us, don't be conformed, to the world, but be transformed, by the renewal, of your mind, and our minds, are super important, what are we pouring, into our minds, you know, and, and most of us, are pouring, way more, of, the world's messages, into our minds, than, God's messages, I think that's just, I mean, I think that's just axiomatic, like, that's what we're getting, and so we really need, to work at, getting, the scriptures, and God's ways, and his path, ingrained in us, so that it becomes, a part of us, and this is part, of what I saw, in the, in the Puritans, that it was so, ingrained, in these writers, that it was just, this was the, the world, of the scriptures, was the world, they were swimming in, not that they weren't, affected, you know, by, by unbelievers, around them, just as, just as we are, but, but they, they had this, concentration, and focus, on the word of God, and they spent time, in it, and you can see, that just in their words, how their language works, how they, you know, and just how they, think about, the world, and I believe, it's, it's Bible intake, and prayer, as we'll get to, just one, well, a couple more, scriptures,

Psalms 119, you could read, any, eight verses, in a row, and find, you know, a lot of this, so I just picked one, that, that I saw, as I was looking through, Psalm 119, I'm going to begin, in verse 25, my soul clings, to the dust, give me life, according to your word, when I told, of my ways, you answered me, teach me your statutes, make me understand, the way of your precepts, and I will meditate, on your wondrous works, my soul, melts away, for sorrow, strengthen me, according to your word, put false ways, far from me, and graciously, teach me, your law, I have chosen, the way of faithfulness, I set your rules, before me, I cling, to your testimonies, oh Lord, let me not be put, to shame, I will run, in the way, of your commandments, when you enlarge, my heart, so as I say, you could have picked, any chunk, of Psalm 119, and seen a lot, of the same things, but how many ways, he talks about, the word of God, and how many ways, he talks about, the benefits to him, you know, he comes in the, in the beginning of this, my soul clings, to the dust, give me life, according to your word, what more basic, need do we have, than life, and, and he, and he talks about, make me understand,

[ 39 : 54 ] I will meditate, my soul melts away, for sorrow, strengthen me, how many of us, have not felt like, you know, our souls were melting, away from sorrow, and we need, strength, to walk through that, right, especially, if we want to walk through it, in a godly way, I've chosen the way, of faithfulness, I set your rules, before me, you know, this is, and that's, you get the sense, of this deliberateness, like, I'm setting your way, before me, this is the path, I've chosen, this is what, and I'm putting it, in front of me, so I don't forget, right, and, there's been a history, of course, beginning in, in the days of Israel, when they would, when they would attach, scriptures to the, door, the door front, to their, four locks, and, all that, right, that was scripture, and they were setting it, before them, in a very physical way, I'm not really, going to advocate, for putting little boxes, with the scriptures, on your, part of your hairdo, not that it would be, horrible, but it would, make you different, in a way that might not be, the best, but, but I mean,

I, I write down scriptures, and just, I have a sticky note, in the kitchen, in the cupboard, that's been there, I think it's still there, is it still there, that it has a scripture, that I wrote down, for some reason, and I wrote it, on a sticky note, and then I saw it, and I just stuck it up there, it's been up there, and I read it, and it's just helpful, you know, it's just helpful, to sort of refocus your mind, and get it into you, and many of us have, pretty plaques, with scriptures around our houses, or just phrases, on you know, some decor, if we read it, you know, we look at it, that's valuable, and we need to make, these efforts, because of the influence, of the world, on us, so let's set, set the scriptures, before us, and then also, in Psalm 91, I just chose, these couple verses, because, they are, a couple verses, is verse 36, and 37, and, they're verses, that I have used, for many years, in prayer, before I go, to the scriptures, particularly, on days, when I'm just kind of like,

I got things to do, I don't want to do this, like, you know, I, I'm not feeling it Lord, like, do I really have to, like, read your word today, and, the psalmist here says, incline my heart, to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain, turn my eyes, from looking, at worthless things, and give me life, in your ways, that's the practice, we need to be about, right, if we don't want to be, conformed to the world, around us, we need to, ask the Lord, to incline our hearts, to his testimonies, on those days, that's what, I mean, I just pray that, I'm like, Lord, this section, that I'm in, in scriptures, is boring, okay, and I need help, my heart is not inclined, to this, and, he answers prayer, he really does, and it doesn't mean, that that moment, you're going to be, all sparked about, that genealogy, in front of you, but, he does answer these prayers, and he does draw us, and he does bless us, as we seek, to incline our hearts, to his testimonies, and not to selfish gain, like, what does that look like, well, you know, it could look like, a few more minutes of sleep, it could look like,

I want to, I need to start work early, because, you know, I got things to do, and there are times, when those things are fine, like, I don't, I don't want to be, a legalist about these things, and say, well, you must, you must, but I think, we can recognize this, it's not always necessary, we don't always need to, you know, sleep another 10 minutes, if we do, maybe, maybe we need to adjust, bedtime or something, I don't know, or have that time with the Lord, at another time of day, you know, so anyway, we need to turn our eyes, from looking at the worthless things, from hearing the worthless things, from the world, that we hear every day, you know, maybe we don't need to be spending, as much time as we are, on Facebook, or Twitter, and this has just become like, everyone says this, but, it's still true, the last verse, I want to point to, is 1 Timothy 4, 7, now this was a verse, that, Dr. Whitney, in the class, he had us memorize, a couple of verses, and,

I'm not going to recite it to you, although I did memorize it, but I, I wrote down part of it, I'm not sure, if I wrote down the whole thing, 1 Timothy 4, verse 7, have nothing to do, with irreverent, silly myths, rather, train yourself, for godliness, I think another translation, might have, discipline yourself, for the purpose, of godliness, and Dr. Whitney, in his book, has in every single, chapter title, for instance, I just opened to, stewardship, for the purpose, of godliness, every chapter, he reminds his readers, this is the point, it's to be godly, it's to be like Jesus, we want to be like him, we want to grow closer to him, we want to, be imitators of him, and that's what, spiritual disciplines, in general, are to be for, it's not to check something, off a box, you know,

[ 45 : 55 ] I think, and I, I recognize that, most of us, like, we know these things, like Josh was saying, we know them in our heads, right, we know, the point is not, you know, to just get it done, and then God will be pleased, but to get this into our hearts, and to recognize the beauty, of godliness, to really want that, in our hearts, and that's something, I think, I think if we don't want it, we just need to be praying about it, and give me that desire, because, because we need that, that desire, and the Lord, he loves to answer those prayers, he loves to answer prayers like that, so if you find yourself, like, okay, I say, okay, so if I read my Bible, and pray every day, I will become more godly, well, who cares, I mean, you know, in some, in some way, I think that, there's some of that, in all of our hearts, right, like,

I'm good enough, can we just move on, but if we get a grip, of the beauty of godliness, and the beauty of our lord, that we could be like him, even a little more like him, that's a great thing, and that's what we want to keep in mind, that the purpose is not, you know, to check a box, or to earn God's favor, that's not for that, God is no more pleased with you, when you read the scriptures, you know, on a regular basis, than if you don't, he loves us, because we're in Christ, and he's not, irritated at us, when we, doze through our quiet times, or whatever, he, he knows that we are dust, at the same time, don't we want to be more like him, don't we want to, follow that straight path, that he set out for us, yeah, so we're called to pursue, holiness,

Hebrews chapter 12, 14, you don't really need, to turn to this, the writer says, strive for the holiness, without which, no one will see the Lord, and now that could be unpacked, much more, than I'm going to do, but we pursue holiness, not, not so that we will, gain access to God, but because we have, been freely given that access, by the grace of God, in Christ, we want to pursue it, because we've been, given the opportunity, to pursue it, we've been given, by the Holy Spirit, the ability, to strive for holiness, and we want to do that, that takes some action, on our part, Philippians 2, 12, therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation, with fear, and trembling, for it is God, who works in you, so we work out, our salvation, we work out, our discipline, our path, our growing in godliness, because God's at work in us, so we don't, work it out, so that,

God will then, like us better, he loves us, more than we can imagine, when we have, nothing together, he chose us, before the foundation, of the world, when we were, useless, we're always useless, to him, but he, he overlooks that, we were useless, we were rebels, we were self-centered, we were arrogant, we were like, nothing in us, commended us to God, and he chose us, but what a wonder that is, don't we want to, give ourselves to him, know him better, revel in that, don't we want to experience, that joy, as Debbie was saying, the joy of communing, with God, so, that's the, that's the point, and it, it can easily become, a kind of legalistic pursuit, I think we've, you know, all of us are adults, we've probably experienced that, somewhere along the line, unless we're, you know, brand new Christians, at the same time, we do need to, discipline ourselves, it does take work, we need to pursue it, we need to seek it, we need to, work it out, work out your own self, isolation, we need to, discipline ourselves, it's an effort, it's always going to be an effort, some days are going to be, harder than others, and there are ways, to make it more enjoyable, and thus, less of a chore, so that's what I hope, we're going to, we're going to talk about it,

I just, I've done a lot of ad-libbing, I just don't want to, so yeah, I, I, when we, we know that we ought to be reading the scriptures, and praying, we know that we should be doing this regularly, but we don't always, and we don't always enjoy it when we do, sometimes we do, and sometimes we don't, that's been my experience, but God is not calling us to just plug on joylessly, there's a time, there are times, when it's just going to be hard for a season, and God is using that for his purposes, I believe, he's using that in our lives, but, considered, you know, over the course of our lives, it should not be, a chore always, that's, no fun, but just, okay, I got to do this, you get up, you like,

[ 51 : 40 ] I got to do this, or you go to bed, you think, before I go to bed, I need to do this, whatever your pattern is, he does call us to persevere, to plug along, but there are joys to be had, and I think we dishonor him, when we just do it as a chore, expecting no benefit, because he's given it to us, he's given us these means, means of grace, these means to grow closer to him, these means to enjoy him more, so I just leave you with this, sometimes when it's boring, right, or praying the same old things, in the same old way, or whatever, what if it's not a problem, in our hearts, what if it's a problem, in our approach to this, really practically speaking, what if we're, not doing it wrong, but what if there are other ways, to do it, that might freshen it, and might be more effective, in our hearts, and in our lives, so that's what I hope, most of the rest of the class, is going to be, can be really kind of brass tacks practical, hoping to offer, some of those new approaches, they may be new, that they're, most of them are actually ancient, but, but they might be new to us, a whole lot of different, different kinds of things, you could try, when you're in a rut, or when you're, you know, finding it joyless, there are ways, you can, we'll talk briefly, about memorizing scripture, and there are ways, to do that, that are,

I mean, in my experience, I've, I've had great benefit, from actually not, yeah, it doesn't matter, I'll get there, but just absorbing the scriptures, how can we be like the Puritans, who, I'm guessing, they may have, maybe John knows better than I do, but, but did they sit down, you know, with their, with their app on their phone, and like, work at memorizing, this scripture, or did they just, read it so much, and absorb it so much, that it was in their hearts, and in their lives, did it just flow out, I forget which guy, said something like, I want to be such, that when you cut me, I bleed scripture, you know, and that's what, that captured my heart, 15 years ago, like, I was like, that's what I want to be, and the only way to do it, is to read, and read, and read, so, but it doesn't have to be, read, and read, and read, right, and in fact, that's not going to be, that effective, okay, so, that's where we're going, and again, if you have particular things, particular problems, or questions, or, what abouts, you can write them down for me, and again,

I don't promise, I'll address, and certainly don't promise, I'll fix anything, but just, you know, if there's something in particular, that you hoped you would get out, of this class, write it down, and maybe I'll say, it's not really, that's not really going to fit in, but it might be really helpful, because I have not, like, written in stone, the whole, you know, to be honest, I haven't written, the rest of the class, so, you know, feel free, and I would welcome that, so, so, does anyone have questions now, or comments?

I just think, I'm hoping this class, well, with what you're doing, and the books you're saying, you know, that may be helpful, help us grow closer to God, and make our time alone with God, help me.

Yep. Yeah, that's the goal. Absolutely. Yeah. And again, I mean, I don't think these ideas are, going to be gimmicky, you know, and many times, they are ancient practices, some of them are more modern, you know, I think, and I, and I don't think, you know, I, you know, I hope not to make it, you know, it shouldn't be insurmountable, to do this, you know, it should not be, it doesn't need to take, hours and hours, hours of your day, you don't need to, as I said, I did for a season, I don't still do it, but you don't need to read, through the scriptures, with repetition of Psalms, and the New Testament, three times in a year, in order to benefit, from the kinds of things, I'm going to throw out at you, you may decide you want to, and I would encourage it, but, you know, it doesn't need to be, I don't want it to be intimidating, and I hope it's not, yeah, but, well if you're saying anything, oh, go ahead, will you give us homework?

[ 56 : 43 ] So, I kind of will, but the other thing I want to do, is we're going to practice some things, right in class, so rather than just tell you, and say, okay, go home and try that, I want to do it in class, because, because who does their homework, right?

I mean, you know, how often are you actually going to go, oh, I want to try that and do it, and some of you absolutely will, but some of us just wouldn't, and so I want to, I will give some time, actually in class, to try some of these different things, so I hope that's practical and not intimidating, but I'm going to ask for some participation, yeah, good question, yeah, so again, I just want to mention the book again, Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, by Donald Whitney, he has another book called, Praying the Bible, which we'll be covering, also in this class, that's a skinny little book, and, and again, he covers a lot more, than I'm going to touch, in this class, and, you know, I spent eight weeks, listening to lectures by him, and engaging with him, in, in live, Zoom sessions, and things like that, and he just has, he has a heart for this, he is passionate about, regular people in the pew, pursuing godliness, in serious ways, you know, by serious,

I don't mean, you know, way too hard ways, but, let's be purposeful, let's discipline ourselves, and, and there's a lot of encouragement, there's a lot of good stories, I'm not a big storyteller, but, he is, so, there's some fun things in here, it's an easy read, there are a lot of practical things, if you read it, I'll be repeating a lot of the stuff, but, but only in those chapters, that I'm actually, going to cover, so, I do recommend it, and it is in the bookstall, so, let's just close in prayer, shall we?

Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, you have given us, your word, your word, your message for us, your instructions, you have given us, history, and stories, and poems, and prophecies, and visions, and visions of the future, you've given us, the precious accounts, of our Lord Jesus, so we can see him, more clearly, and love him, more dearly, Lord, all this you have given to us, and then, you didn't stop there, you gave us, access to yourself, Lord, that we can pray, and you will hear us, really hear us, even when it just sounds like nonsense, and often is, you hear us, and you draw near, and you desire to hear us, Lord, fill us with the wonder of that, the privilege we have, to seek the scriptures, to seek you in prayer, to be drawn closer to you, oh Father, would you help us, give us that desire for godliness, that will push us forward, in this pursuit, help us as we, move on in this class, to learn some new, approaches to scriptures, and to prayer, that would, that would help us, to benefit even more, from time we set aside for you,

Lord, I just pray that your word, would bear fruit, in our lives, in Jesus name, Amen.