

Practices for Engaging Scripture

A method for study or preparing for Sunday Worship.

1. Begin in Prayer: Pray for discernment and wisdom. Pray to know the Father's will and give thanks for His word.
2. Read a few passages or portion before and after the selected reading for context. What is the situation? When and where is it taking place and who is it directed to? What do you think is the key phrase or phrases?
3. Search on the web or in the study Bibles you may have for commentary or sermons and read a couple. Are things and circumstances being presented to you that deal with the readings? Note them. If so, pray for further discernment and bring a hunger for His word.

Suggestions for using a study bible.

A good study bible should have:

- Footnotes to explain words and context.
- References to show other areas of parallel scripture.
- Book introductions that give an overview of the book, including author, time of writing, themes, and an outline.

Studying a passage or preparing for Sunday Service when you know the readings ahead of time. This could be over several days more reflection on each step:

1. Do a first reading: Notice any areas that are inspiring, confusing, challenging. What have you never noticed before? Who is doing what? Who is speaking and who is there?
2. Skim the book introduction and read again adding a few verses before and after the cited reading. Look at the footnotes and references.
3. Read through again with the question: what is God doing in this passage (what is the purpose of this passage)?
4. Reflect on the purpose and ask: where does this challenge me? Where does this inspire me? How can I apply this to my daily life?
5. Slowly and prayerfully pray the passage. Thank God for the insight and pray that God will give you the grace to apply what you were given.

Praying the scriptures:

Lectio Divina (sacred Reading) is a method of praying the scriptures that has been done since before the middle ages and is still a recommended method by most denominations today. I have modified this for beginners. If the Holy Spirit leads you away from the process, go with the Spirit. Be mindful of distractions though that are not the Spirit.

1. After putting yourself in a posture of prayer (posture is mentally opening your mind to God by finding a calm place and physically being in an area that will help you pray), read through the chosen passage. Read slow and deliberately.
2. Read through a second time listening to what the Holy Spirit wants you to hear from the reading.
3. Pray. Reflect with the Holy Spirit on what you have heard and ask for inspiration and grace.
4. Read the passage through a last time and give yourself a few moments of silence to soak in the message.
5. Say a prayer of thanksgiving (as simple as: thank you God for this time.)

Things to consider when studying the Bible:

- Read in context. We are looking at the texts with 21st century eyes. The texts were written in the first hundred years of Christianity. Know enough about both so you can dig deeper for the message and not just the story.
- Try not to proof text. That is looking for what you want it to say. Proof texting is the practice of using the Bible (in and out of context) to prove your point. Study should be about discovering who God is and not what we want God to be.
- Hard passages are worth the time to struggle with. A chronology can show us how God has been faithful through generations of people. A listing of Kings can show a decline and how they got farther away from God. These things can give us context for what God is doing. A hard saying may challenge how we interact with our world and may cause us to realign values. They may also make us go deeper to find a message we may not see at first glance. Some passages are like a geode. They are plain and ugly on the outside but when you break it open, we find the beautiful crystal center.
- Application of what is learned takes time but mostly God's grace. Remember God is in control. We do not have faith because we worked to get it. Faith and understanding are completely gifts from God. When we open ourselves up to the process, God will re-form us over time.

A couple places for online for commentary. There are many more - - go explore:

Working Preacher from Luther Seminary <https://www.workingpreacher.org/bible-index>

BibleGateway <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/?source=1>