

## Getting It Right: Session Two

### Reading the Instructions

*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We continue to focus on *getting it right*, the quest to be the people God called/equipped us to be and to do what God has empowered us to do. If we get it right, there will be fewer course correcting times when God has altered the direction of the Kingdom due to operator error. Last week we focused on sin and how to stop living day to day doing sin management. This session is devoted to scripture and how God can use scripture to inform, empower and guide our lives.

Scripture is a “super-sized” set of instructions to deal with life and faith. On the rare occasion my wife places me in charge of putting something together I spend little time with the directions. I’m left-handed and instructions seem to be written for righties, or at least that’s how I explain the 3-4 items left over when I finish the project. Suffice it to say, if I put a chair together it’s smart to not sit in it!

Scripture is different, however, as it instructs, guides and inspires us to follow God through stories, poems, history and basic 1-2-3 principles for living a life of righteousness. It’s hard to argue with the practical wisdom of the Ten Commandments, or James instructions on being quick to listen and slow to speak?

Who isn’t inspired by stories of Jesus healing the sick and bringing the dead back to life? And, who doesn’t find solace when Peter denies Jesus or Thomas demands to see before he believes? Peter makes me feel better about myself every time I read about him, although I’ll admit I would have found a way to deny Jesus five or six times in the span of one night; Dang Peter, anyone can deny him three times!

So, with scripture within reach virtually all the time, why do so few people read it so little of the time? It’s not like we are forced to read it in Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew or Latin any longer. It’s not like we don’t own an average of 3 Bibles each. It’s not like we can’t find it on our phones or tablets.

So, let's attack this issue via questions:

### **How popular is the Bible today?**

It's still the number one selling book of all time. Marketing expert Brandon Gaille reports that over 6 billion Bibles have been sold or distributed to date with 168,000 sold or given away daily. He adds, 20 billion are sold/given in the U.S. annually, with 92% of Americans report owning a Bible. The most read version/translation in the U.S.? The King James Version.

### **Do people really read all those Bibles?**

Yes, sort of, maybe, pretty much sums it up. Statistica reports in 2019, 16% of Americans read scripture daily (up 1% from 2018); 14% read the Bible at least 4 times per week; 9% once per week; 7% once per month; 6% 3 times per year; 10% less than once per year; and, 31% never read scripture. Statistica reports 88% of Americans own a (dusty) Bible (parenthetical additions by this writer).

### **How many versions and language translations exist?**

The American Bible Society reports that approximately 900 separate English versions exist today. There is no one set standard for determining what constitutes a full translation from a partial one, or a correction from a revision. This means that initial language translations are better in certain newer versions than others, so be careful what you buy. The BibleGateway.com site is one of the best options for checking out multiple versions of scripture.

### **What version/translation is the most read?**

Believe it or not the King James Version still rules (rules, see what I did there, Kings rule. Sorry) with 32% readership, followed by New International Version at 16%.

### **Is the Bible Inerrant?**

Serious students of scripture have likely encountered this question. The simple answer is no, scripture, at least the version you and I read, does contain errors. That said, the original writings may not have contained any errors, but they are lost forever so no one really knows. The whole inerrancy debate is less than 200 years old. It began as a way to combat perceived creeping liberalism and the new

ways scholars were critiquing scripture, and it soon became a text of orthodoxy (right belief) and a litmus test for true belief.

There are two main schools of inerrancy. Limited inerrancy was championed by Daniel Fuller who proposed that the author's intention and purpose in writing was the determinant of inerrancy. If the intention was pure, it was O.K. that minor errors existed here and there. He sees the Bible as a means to salvation and as such it reaches that goal, thus it can be inerrant in purpose even with errors in geography, dates and story/narrative details. Full inerrancy teaches that scripture is without errors or fault in all its teaching. While most scholars deem this to be true of the original writings (autographs) many people see the scripture they read as being without error. These same people tend to believe scripture must be read literally as well.

I believe scripture is the infallible Word of God written by humans and over time translated so many times that errors exist here and there. How would they not when most letters were written decades after Jesus and from differing viewpoints. A wrong date or geographic location is not an error of substance. The Bible is God's word to His people. It's all we need. No need to argue.

### **So why do so few people read the Bible regularly?**

It's hard to adequately answer this question. It's possible that people think they already know a lot about the Bible so there's no reason to keep reading. It's also true that many followers of Christ can't name the first five books of the Old Testament and believe John the Baptist was one of the original 12 disciples (American Bible Society). Scholars see the modern church in a state of Biblical illiteracy. Is it due to a fear of tackling scripture? Is it a fear of what we might encounter in scripture, that we may be challenged or found wanting? There are likely more reasons that can be listed so let's leave it as open-ended. The sad part is that without a diet of scripture we will never grow and mature as believers. Scripture allows us to find God and ourselves and teaches us how to live righteously. In short, scripture assists us in *getting it right*.

### **Reading scripture for spiritual growth.**

In theology orthodoxy and orthopraxis are the twin goals for believers. Orthodoxy means right belief and orthopraxis means right practice. A life of right living

comes about through the healthy merging of these two concepts. Of all the spiritual practices that aid growth, progress and maturity, scripture study must be at, or near, the top. We will focus on best practices for personal Bible study.

*Lectio Divina* is Latin for sacred reading. It's also a structure for studying scripture that has been in practice for much of the history of the church. The early church fathers initiated this simple approach. *Lectio Divina* is based on:

Read

Reflect

Pray

Contemplate

Using this approach will bring order and structure to our scripture reading. A simpler structure includes praying for God's blessings and our focus before reading; reading scripture; reflecting on what was read; and praying for the wisdom and wherewithal to apply what we have learned to our daily spiritual lives. This is also an excellent approach to studying scripture.

Obviously, there is no "best" approach, but there are tips for better outcomes.

1. Choose the best version or translation of the Bible for you. King James version has been around since the early 1600's and is written in the British English of that era. With all the *thee's* and *thou's* it's amazing that it is still the most read version. Short of an original Shakespeare play that form of English no longer exists. No slight to the KJV but many better options are readily available. Understanding what we read is paramount. It's difficult enough without obsolete language possibly getting in the way.
2. Read then reflect/ponder, but do so in your own language. Try to personalize what you read. Tell the story to yourself in your own language.
3. Interject yourself into the narrative. Imagine being there.
4. Speed is not a positive. We tend to see how quickly we can accomplish tasks, but in scripture reading that will only inhibit progress. Go slow, dwell on passages, seek to find new things even when reading familiar passages.
5. Practice *formational* reading rather than *informational* reading. Informational reading is a critical approach focusing on understanding the text. This borders

on being a scholastic approach. It's also mind-focused scripture study.

Formational reading focuses on small portions of the text that allows for going deeper with an intent to improve ourselves spiritually. This is a heart/soul focused approach to reading the Bible.

6. If you feel the need to read the entire Bible, do so with caution. It is a long and uneven process. Genesis is great but Numbers and Leviticus will provide challenges. Applicability is hard to find in many parts of the Hebrew Bible. Another option is reading through the New Testament.

Below is a smart plan for reading the New Testament that doesn't require a linear, straight-through Matthew-Revelation outline.

**Takeaway:** Reading scripture is key to spiritual growth and maturity. Scripture reading is a must if we want to "get it right" as followers of Christ. We will be in a better position to follow God's lead for our lives and to progress the Kingdom when we regularly and seriously study God's word.

Jesus often asked the question, "Have you not read?" If he asked us that today what would we say, what could we say? We know what we should say!

Amen and Amen

Michael McCullar  
Formations Pastor  
Johns Creek Baptist Church

## A New Plan for Reading the New Testament

1	Luke 1:1-9:50	1 hour
2	Luke 9:51-19:27	50 minutes
3	Luke 19:28-24:53	40 minutes
4	Acts 1:1-8:3	35 minutes
5	Acts 8:4-14:28	35 minutes
6	Acts 15:1-20:36	30 minutes
7	Acts 21:1-28:31	35 minutes
8	Romans 1-8	35 minutes

9	Romans 9-16	30 minutes
10	James & Galatians	35 minutes
11	1 & 2 Thessalonians	20 minutes
12	1 Corinthians 1-8	25 minutes
13	1 Corinthians 9-16	35 minutes
14	2 Corinthians	40 minutes
15	Mark 1:1-8:26	40 minutes
16	Mark 8:27-16:20	45 minutes
17	Ephesians & Philippians	35 minutes
18	Colossians & Philemon	20 minutes
19	1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy	35 minutes
20	Matthew 1-7	30 minutes
21	Matthew 8-13	35 minutes
22	Matthew 14-20	30 minutes
23	Matthew 21-28	50 minutes
24	Hebrews	45 minutes
25	1 Peter, 2 Peter, Jude	30 minutes
26	1 John, 2 John, 3 John	20 minutes
27	John 1-11	1 hour
28	John 12-21	50 minutes
29	Revelation 1-11	35 minutes
30	Revelation 12:22	40 minutes