



The Seven: Scripture

November 12 | Weekly Devotionals

DAY 1

At The Creek, we believe that the Holy Scriptures—in their entirety—are inspired by God and wholly true and trustworthy in all they affirm. We also believe that all the teachings of the Bible, when properly interpreted, are to be believed and obeyed. This is because the Bible is our supreme authority in every matter of belief and conduct. So, let's talk about the Bible.

To get started, take a moment to scan this QR code and watch this 5-minute video from our friends at Bible Project who will walk us through what that Bible is (*just open up your smartphone's camera and scan the code!*):



A search for “holy books” on Google will result in more than 300 titles, all claiming to be holy. Have you ever wondered what makes the Bible unique among so many others? What makes the Bible special? What makes it holy?

The Bible is not a single book; it's more like a library. It actually consists of 66 books, written over roughly 2,000 years by 40 different authors from three continents, who wrote in three different languages. It is the best-selling book of all time, with over five billion copies in print.

The Bible, because it is God's Word, is authoritative for our lives, is without error in all it affirms, and *the* key way in which we hear from God and are formed into the image of Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible you have on your coffee table contains the same Old Testament that Jesus read and taught from in the synagogues. The New Testament you hear read in our church is the same that was circulated among the first churches soon after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. These facts certainly make the Bible unique, but uniqueness isn't the same thing as holy. What makes the Bible holy? The answer can be summed up with one verse, "*All Scripture is God-breathed*" (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Greek word used for the phrase "God-breathed" is *theopneustos*. "Theo" means "God," and "pneustos" means "to breathe." Consider the power and uniqueness of the breath of God. We see it in **Genesis 2:7** when God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living being. The Bible is the living, breathing Word of God and that's what makes it holy.

There's no other book like it. No other book contains the very words of God. Throughout the pages of the Bible, God reveals himself as the God who sees, hears, knows, and rescues. The God who sees and hears you is the same God who wants you to see and hear him! How can you and I see and hear God?

The answer may not be as complicated as you think. We see and hear God when we read our Bible. Good news! It is possible to grow in your love for God's word. It is possible to enjoy reading Scripture, and the best news is this: God will reveal himself and speak to you through his Word.

The number one way God reveals himself is through his written Word—the Bible.

- If we want to know God, we must **know** our Bible.
- If we want to love God more, we must **love** our Bible.
- If we want to hear God speak, we must **hear** our Bible.

Be encouraged today, friend—if we ask God to give us eyes to see him, he will! If we ask God to give us ears to hear him, he will!

Questions for reflection:

1. How did you view the Bible growing up? How has your view of the Bible changed over time (if at all)?
2. What does your rhythm of being in the Bible look like currently? Are you satisfied? Why or why not?
3. What are the biggest obstacles preventing you from reading the Bible as much as you would like?
4. When it comes to the Bible, what other questions do you have that you wish you had better answers for?

DAY 2

So we want to acknowledge that the Bible is special amongst other “holy books.” It’s unique. It’s the Word of God. It’s not just one book, but it’s a compilation of 66 different books. It’s more like a library with poetry, narrative, and discourse as the main genres.

But we also want to be a place where we not only affirm what Christians have been saying about the Bible for 2000 years, we also want to be a people *who delight in God’s word and live it out on a daily basis.*

In Dan’s message, he talked about this. And in talking about delighting in God’s Word, he gave us four different metaphors to consider Scripture as. He said the Word of God is like a compass (**Psalm 119:105**), he said it’s like food (**Psalm 119:103; Jeremiah 15:16**), he said it’s like a filter that gives us truth (John 17:17), and he said that it’s like pure gold (**Psalm 19:9-10**).

Those are all great reasons to delight in something. If you find something to be useful like a compass, nourishing like food, helpful like a filter, and valuable like gold, then odds are you’ll delight in that something!

Think with me now about the nature of “delight.” The Psalmist says in **Psalm 1:1**, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers but *His delight* is in the law of the Lord...”

Why is it that the *blessed* person is the one who *delights* in God’s law? Could it be because the psalmist knows that what you delight in determines the rest of your life? Think about that.

What you delight in will determine where you walk, it will determine where you stand, and it will determine where you sit. Delight is a function of the heart. And your heart determines everything about you. For example...

- If you delight in a hobby (take photography, for example), you will be moved to buy the equipment, buy a nice camera, spend time taking photos, spend time editing photos, download certain programs, talk about and share your photos, and so on.
- If you delight in a sports team, you’ll be moved to watch every game, see them in person, buy their gear, and teach your kids about supporting them!

- If you delight in your kids, your life will revolve around them (getting them to practice, taking them on trips, buying them the latest and greatest, etc.).

You get the point. Delight is a function of the heart. And your heart determines everything about you.

That's why the Psalmist says that the "blessed" or "happy" person is he or she who delights in God's "law" or "word." The "not-blessed" person actually ends up, in the Psalmist's point of view, walking, standing, and sitting in places he or she doesn't actually want to be. That person winds up listening to the counsel of the wicked, standing with sinners, and sitting with scoffers.

Our world is full of what the Psalmist calls the "counsel of the wicked."

When I was growing up, I would have known *exactly* what the counsel of the wicked meant. The counsel of the wicked was basically anyone who told me to have sex before marriage, go out and get drunk, or be an atheist. And there may be truth to that, but I think it's more subtle in our culture.

All around us (online, on TV, through advertisements, in people's conversations, etc.) we hear our culture telling us to acquire more, be more successful, look younger or sexier, and get even with those who hurt you and by sheer inundation, the world has a way of convincing us of what a blessed and flourishing life looks like.

John Ortberg once gave examples of what the counsel of the wicked would be like in our day. Here's what he said: "The counsel of the wicked tells you..."

- To live as if it were not true that you are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's universe.
- To believe as if God is not real or present, active in your life.
- To live as if the outcomes of my life are on my shoulders and I control them and so I must have that constant pressure on my life.
- To live as if satisfying my desires and appetites is central to my well-being...and a wise strategy for living."

These are the kinds of things that the writer of this psalm is warning us against. And to avoid going down a path we ultimately do not want to go down, we need to heed his advice and delight in God's Word. Why? Because God's Word reveals reality. It tells us what is truly true about life, faith, meaning, existence, purpose, God, mankind, evil, suffering, and salvation.

Questions for reflection:

1. What is something or who is someone you delight in? How has your delight in that something or someone moved you to rearrange your life in practical ways?
2. How would you describe how you view God's Word right now? Would you say that you delight in it? Why or why not? If you delight in it, what helped to get you there? If you don't delight in it, what's making delight hard?
3. Which of the different examples of "counsel of the wicked" resonates with you the most? Why?

DAY 3

This week, we began thinking about our priority of Scripture by talking about what's special about God's Word. On Day 2, we talked about delighting in God's Word. Today, let's talk about what happens when the Scriptures that we are supposed to delight in don't *feel* very delightful.

Yesterday, in one of your reflection questions, you had a moment to consider if you experience delight in the Scriptures or not. And you also had some space to reflect on and why or why not.

Whatever your answer was, oftentimes delight is found missing in someone's time reading or studying the Bible for a couple reasons:

1. Faulty expectations of the Bible
2. Uncertainty with how to engage the Bible

Today, we'll look at the expectations we bring to the Bible and what expectations are appropriate to have. Tomorrow, we'll look a little closer at how we can engage with the Scriptures.

Many times in life, feelings of frustration or defeat can surge up within us when we have an expectation of something but that expectation is not met.

If you've ever grown frustrated with a person, it's probably because that person didn't meet some spoken or unspoken expectation you held. If you've ever grown frustrated with an object (say your car not starting), it's probably because you had an expectation that it would start when you turned the key over in the ignition.

So, think for a moment...what are your expectations of the Bible? When you come to do your study or devotional time, what are you expecting out of that time? Jot down some of your thoughts in the provided space.

Many times, we can get frustrated with the Bible when we view **what it is** and **what its purpose is** incorrectly.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, “*The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know WHAT it is—what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used. The first thing is to understand the object before you.*”

And he’s so right. We will delight in our corkscrews when we come to them knowing precisely what they are and what their purpose is. We probably won’t find them very delightful if we expect that corkscrew to hold a painting to the wall like a nail or regular screw. If we come to a cathedral thinking that it’s there for our entertainment, then we will be left wanting. It was built to facilitate worship, not amusement.

So, if you had to think about what the Bible *is*, how would you answer that? Note your response in the provided space. **What is the Bible?**

Now, if you had to say what the purpose of the Bible is, what would you say? Note your response in the provided space. **What is the purpose of the Bible?**

Sometimes people think that...

- The Bible’s primary purpose is FOR changing our behavior, so it IS a divine rule book.
- The Bible’s primary purpose is FOR teaching theology, so it IS a theology answer book.
- The Bible’s primary purpose is FOR teaching us a kind of mathematical, scientific truth, so it IS a science textbook.

The list could go on. The hard thing is that there are semblances of truth in these visions of what the Bible is FOR. We absolutely learn God’s rules for living, we absolutely encounter good theology, and we most certainly come to God’s Word to hear God’s voice.

But the Bible isn’t *primarily* a divine rule book, a theology answer book, a divine love letter, or a science textbook.

Rather, the Bible is a story. Just like on Day 1, take a moment to scan the QR code with your phone’s camera to watch another video from The Bible Project to teach us about the story of the Bible.



So, the Bible is a story. And, specifically, the Bible is a story that points us to Jesus. Jesus, in fact, says about as much in **John 5:39**. He says to the Pharisees, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; but it is they that testify about me!”

When we search the Scriptures looking primarily for anything other than Jesus, we’re bound to run into some problems. Like John the Baptist, the Bible points us to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (**John 1:29**).

Questions for reflection:

1. How is this way of looking at the Bible’s primary purpose different from what you had thought previously or had thought growing up?
2. How is that the same or different from the video you watched from the Bible Project above?

DAY 4

For today's devotional time, we're going to talk about a few different ways you can engage with Scripture. Like a piece of good music or art, you don't need to know the ins and outs of its background to enjoy it and allow it to move you. Similarly, you don't necessarily need to know the language, the history, or the culture that surrounds whatever Bible passage you happen to be reading in order to get something from it or to allow it to challenge you.

You have to allow God's Spirit to move in you as you read. There are multiple ways you can do this.

Followers of Jesus throughout history have been reading, meditating on, and re-reading the Scriptures, and have found several ways to meet God in his Word. Below are several ways you can engage with the Bible individually, as a family, or even as a community.

The goal for today is to read through some of the different ways to engage with the Bible and pick one to do that is less familiar to you. Then, when you go to your life group next week, you can share which one you chose and what that was like!

Without further ado, here are six ways that you can engage Scripture:

1. READ SCRIPTURE ALOUD AS COMMUNITY

Many different people engage with Scripture in many different ways today – some people read it first thing in the morning, other people read it at their favorite local coffee shop, and still others listen to it on an app. When the early church first started engaging with the Scriptures, they didn't even have their copies of the Bible. In postures of humility and surrender, they would listen to large portions of it being read aloud in community. To practice this way of engaging the text...

GET COMFORTABLE

You'll be reading for the next 20 or so minutes, so make sure that you're in a place, position, and posture to be still, attentive, and open to God.

ESTABLISH THE READER(S)

Decide who will read it. One person can read the whole thing, a few of you can split it, or (what we would recommend) each person can read some of it until the whole passage is read. Spend a moment to decide how you will break up the text and who will read.

INVITE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Take a deep breath and settle in. Have one person invite the Holy Spirit to help you all to listen in a posture of surrender and to form you by what is read.

READ

Spend time reading the entire text in one sitting aloud together.

SILENCE & PRAYER

After the last verse is read, don't rush onto the next part. Take a moment in silence and stillness, letting the words reverberate inside your mind and soul. After a bit, have someone pray to thank God for the experience of this practice.

DEBRIEF

When you have finished in prayer, discuss what stood out, what your experience was like, what new thoughts and insights you have from this practice. *Some good Scriptures to read aloud are Ruth, Esther, Isaiah 40, Psalm 139, Matthew 5-7, Philipians, 1 John, James.*

2. LECTIO DIVINA

Psalm 1 says, "Blessed is the man...whose delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night." Meditating on Scripture is different than studying Scripture. In studying, we are coming to the text to learn. In meditating, we are coming to meet with Jesus.

To do this, followers of Jesus have been practicing a discipline called Lectio Divina (which just means "Divine Reading" for many years. In Lectio Divina, Jesus' followers allow the Scriptures (in cooperation with the Spirit) to lead them into further intimacy with God as they move slowly, carefully, and repeatedly through the same text. Here's how to do it:

PREPARE

Before beginning, be sure to turn your phone off and leave it another room. Situate yourself comfortably in a quiet, solitary place. Calm your body and quiet your mind before God as you work to prepare your heart to receive what God has spoken through the text, and to respond accordingly. Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read.

LISTEN

Read the passage. Sit quietly for a moment before you begin. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak and show you what the Lord wants for you in this passage. Mark words or phrases that stand out as you read.

LINGER

Read the passage again out loud. Are the same words or phrases you marked the first time still standing out? Write them down. How do these words or phrases apply to your life right now?

LEARN

As you read the text for a third time, ask yourself, "How is God inviting me to respond? What does he want me to learn from this?" Write out what comes to mind.

LEARN MORE

Read the passage one last time and answer these questions:

- *Why is God showing me this now?*
- *What does this mean for my life?*
- *What needs to change in my life?*
- *How do I need to live differently?*

*Some good passages to begin with Lectio Divina are Scriptures like **Exodus 32, 1 Kings 1-2, Daniel 6, John 4, John 9, Acts 3-4, et al.***

3. IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

Another way Jesus followers have been engaging with the Scriptures is through a practice called Imaginative Prayer. In this discipline, readers of the text actually imagine themselves in its story, encountering what is being written through their senses and creativity. Here's how to engage with the Bible in this way:

Read a portion of the Bible.

Visualize what is happening in the story. Take some time to imagine what the scene was like. Listen to the words spoken in the text again as if you were one of the first hearers of them.

Now begin to imagine the scene as if you were right in the middle of it.

- *Who are you in the story?*
- *What do you see?*
- *What do you hear?*
- *What do you smell?*
- *What's your position?*
- *Who else is there with you?*
- *What are you feeling?*
- *What's the mood of the crowd?*
- *What is your response to all you experience?*
- *What questions do you have?*
- *What fears do you have?*

Don't worry about historical accuracy. Just allow God to bring the story to life. The people we read about in Scripture were real people who walked the earth and had feelings and thoughts much like ours.

Once finished imagining, ask yourself: "What am I noticing from my responses?"

As you listen, notice how you sense God inviting you to respond. Ask, "What are God's invitations from this story for me today?"

*Some good passages to begin with Imaginative Prayer are Scriptures like **Genesis 16, Joshua 2-4, 1 Samuel 17, Mark 5, Luke 7, Acts 17:22-34, et al.***

4. PRAYING SCRIPTURE

A fourth way that you can engage with the Bible is by praying it. To engage with the Scriptures this way, slowly read a text multiple times. Then, after finishing that section of Scripture, write out a prayer that expresses what that portion of Scripture prompted within you.

For example, if you were to read **Mark 10:13-16**, where Jesus says "*Let the children come to me...*" you might wind up writing a prayer like the following:

Father, you are indeed father to all the children of the world. Your kingdom was made for people such as these. Help me to become like a child—trusting, surrendered, and dependent on you, O God. For you are my Provider, my Deliverer, my Help, and my Refuge.

Your prayer could be longer than that or shorter. There is no right or wrong way to go about it! The key is to slowly and prayerfully engage the text and to be real and honest before God.

5. MEMORIZATION

One of the best ways to engage with Scripture is by memorizing it. Christian philosopher Dallas Willard writes that,

*“Our concentration on Jesus will be strengthened by memorization of great passages (not just verses) from Scripture. Passages such as **Matthew 7, John 14-17, 1 Corinthians 13, and Colossians 3** are terrific “soul growing” selections. This practice of memorizing the Scriptures is more important than a daily quiet time, for as we fill our minds with these great passages and have them available for our meditation, “quiet time” takes over the entirety of our lives.”*

God once spoke to Joshua and told him, *“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success” (Joshua 1:8, NASB).* One of the ways we can follow in Joshua’s footsteps is by memorizing God’s Word.

6. STUDY

Another way that you can engage with the Bible is through the practice of study. This is the practice where we primarily like to land as Westerners, which has both positives and negatives. But this practice is intended to help the learner engage their mind and focus their attention on the Scriptures so as to help them understand and apply biblical truth to the entirety of their lives. There are three main steps to Bible study:

OBSERVATION

In this step of study we are asking, *“What do I see in this text?”* This might involve asking questions like:

- Who is involved in this text?
- What is actually happening in this text?
- What places or buildings are present in this text?
- What time period is this text?

- What metaphors, analogies, or commands are present in this text?

INTERPRETATION

In this step of study we are asking, “*What does this mean?*” This might involve asking questions like:

- What is the author who wrote this text trying to convey?
- What would the hearers of this text have thought upon reading this text?
- What does the historical/cultural background of this text have to do with it’s interpretation?
- What kind of literature is this text? How does that shape how this text should be read?
- What does this text mean in its literary context?
- What do these individual words or phrases mean?

APPLICATION

In this step of study we are asking, “*What do I do?*” This might involve asking questions like:

- Is there an example to follow?
- Or *not* to follow?
- Is there a command to adhere to?
- How does this shape my current reality practically? What do I do as a result of this story?

SUGGESTED RESOURCES TO HELP STUDY THE BIBLE:

- Check out the Bible Project at thebibleproject.com!
- Another helpful online tool is blueletterbible.org.
- N.T. Wright’s *For Everyone* Commentary Series: Choose a book of the New Testament and pick up one of NT Wright’s short *For Everyone* commentaries on that book. These commentaries are short, accessible, and could be read in small sections each day.
- Find a good study Bible. A couple good ones are the *ESV Study Bible* and the *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Commentary*.
- You could also buy a Bible Dictionary, other Bible commentaries, or other Bible background books such as (*The New Testament in It’s World* by N.T. Wright and Michael Bird).

Be sure to pick one of these ways to engage with the Scriptures to later share with your group!

DAY 5

In Trevin Wax's book *This Is Our Time*, he shares the story of the Romanian people at the closing of World War 2. He shares how at the end of WW2, the Communist party of Romania seized power. They ended up rigging their election and then they moved quickly to ensure that no one could stop them from being the ones large and in charge.

In order to consolidate their power, the Communist party did two things: (1) the new regime enacted a new security force that led to unbelievable repression; and (2) they changed the history books.

The revolutionaries knew that the way to consolidate and maintain their power was to control the way the Romanian story was told. It wasn't enough to flex their political muscle; if they were to succeed long-term, they would need to capture the Romanian imagination. And so they decided to retell Romania's story and rewire the Romanian people, to make clear that the Communists were the heroes, not the bad guys.

By the mid-1980s, electricity and gasoline were rationed and food was scarce. The government has stepped up their surveillance by hiring more secret police.

At the same time, all across the country of Romania secret gatherings began to take place: "video nights" they were called. The power in these "video nights" wasn't in that they provided the Romanian people an escape from their harsh lives for two hours every so often. Rather, the power was in what these movies revealed about life outside of Romania. An uncensored, foreign film punctured holes in the Iron Curtain and allowed Romanians to peer into another world. Women saw western fashions for the first time. Men saw new kinds of cars on the street. Everyone who saw the films were astounded at what life looked like on the "outside." As one Romanian noted, "The films changed your perspective on life...they changed what you were looking for, what you wanted. You developed through the films." Just a few years after these video nights became common in Romania, the Iron Curtain fell and the Romanians deposed their dictator. On the streets, a different vision of the world won. A different future took hold.

As Christians, we need to realize that the Scriptures are to us what those "video nights" were to the Romanians. For us, the Scriptures peel back the curtain of the counsel of the wicked and reveal reality. God's Word isn't just fun to read because, like a good

history book, it contains interesting stories or good historical information. God uses his Word to mold us to look, live, and love like Jesus.

For Christians, one of the ways we pursue formation unto Jesus is by engaging in God's Word. We allow the authority of God to enter our lives through the living and active Word of God.

Before we ever think about going off to thump someone in the head with our Bible verses, the Bible is something we allow to challenge us. We read Scripture not to arm ourselves with Bible-verse-bullets in case we ever feel threatened by "culture," but to have our own lives reordered with God's wisdom (see **Romans 12:1-2; Psalm 1; Psalm 19; Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4**).

Eugene Peterson once said, *"Christians don't simply learn or study or use Scripture; we assimilate it. We take it into our lives in such a way that it gets metabolized into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus' name, hands raised in adoration of the Father, feet washed in company with the Son."*

If it weren't for the video nights in Communist Romania, those people would have never known what life looked like "on the outside." But because of those video nights, the Romanians had a picture of **reality** and that picture of reality prompted them to live and think differently.

As Christians, we come to the Scriptures to meet with God and to have our worldview and lives shaped by them so that we might become a transformed people who love God, love people, make disciples, and connect people to Jesus.

Questions for reflection:

1. How have the Scriptures been influential in your discipleship to Jesus?
2. In what ways have you seen the culture around you trying to mold you into its story? How has steeping yourself in the Scriptures shone a light "from the outside" on your situation? What was that experience like? How did you wrestle with that tension?
3. How often would you say you intentionally "audit" your life to make sure your worldview and habits are aligned with God's vision for your life according to the Bible? In what ways can you be more intentional in doing so?

4. Which of the different ways of “engaging with Scripture” are you going to use to help shape and mold you to look, live, and love like Jesus? What is your plan to put that into practice?