

Sermon Transcript from February 7th, 2016 Eat It Pastor John Mark Comer, Bridgetown Church

Hey. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 24 in the New Testament. Luke 24. So, tonight we are wrapping up this kind of mini series on the Bible that we are calling "It Is Written." And, essentially, all we've been doing for the last month is ask questions. First question was "why the Bible?" Why read through it in a year as a community and all that effort and energy. Short answer is because Jesus was a rabbi or a Bible teacher. He was all about what you and I now call the Bible and it's a huge part of how we follow Jesus.

The second question was "what is the Bible?" We said it is a library of writings, that are both divine and human, that together tell a unified story that leads its readers to Jesus. The follow-up question to that was "what is the Bible for?" We said, one, it's to know who God is and who we are and how we relate to each other. That's what most of the Bible is about. Human beings in relationship with God. Two, it's to tell the real true story of human history. And three, it's to shape the people of God into the image of Jesus so that we can participate in what God is up to in the world.

Then last week, the question was "where exactly does the Bible come from?" Tim Mackie was here. How good was that last weekend? Tonight, I want to tie off this mini series with one last question, and that is "how do we read it?" You wake up tomorrow morning, you make your Chemex or whatever and you open to Leviticus 24. Okay? How exactly do you read it in a way where you meet with God and you're shaped by it and all of that? That's what I want to run after tonight.

Now, heads up before we jump in: the first 10 or 15 minutes of this teaching are heady, academic, seminaryish, and then the entire back half is easy, heart and soul stuff. Okay? So, let me nerd out on you right now, if that's okay. Either way, you're stuck here. I will mock you if you stand up. And let me nerd out on you for 10 or 15 minutes and then hopefully we'll all come together for the back end. Alright? Okay.

Luke 24. Let's start off in Luke 24:13. This is a story right after Jesus' resurrection about two disciples on the road. There are rumors that Jesus is back from the dead. And then we read this:

Luke 24:13, "Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came and walked with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

"He asked them, 'What are you discussing as you walk along?'

"They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?'"

By the way, this story is really funny. For example:

"'What things?' Jesus asked.

"'About Jesus of Nazareth,' the replied. 'He was a prophet,' and so on and so forth.

Skip down to 25.

"Jesus said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses... – that's shorthand for "The Torah." Genesis through Deuteronomy, what you're reading right now – "...and all the Prophets," – that's a way of saying "the rest of the Old Testament" – "Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

Now, skip down to 44.

"He said to them, 'This is what I told you when I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'

"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."

If there was ever a podcast that I would give anything to get my hands on, it's right here. Can you imagine you and Jesus on the road, in-depth study of the entire Old Testament and how it's all about Jesus? My gosh. Fascinating. There was a ton I could say about this great story, but all I want you to notice tonight is one thing. It's what Luke calls "the Bible." He calls it "the Scriptures" twice, and then Jesus calls it "the Law of Moses," "the Prophets," and "the Psalms."

Now remember a few weeks ago, if you were here, I made the point that the Bible never calls itself the Bible? Do you remember that? That ironically that's an unbiblical moniker for this library? Also, the other most popular name for the Bible today is "the Word" or "the Word of God," and the Bible, depending on who you talk to, rarely, I would argue never, calls itself the Word. And both are a little bit misleading. "The Bible," because that's a word meaning "book," and this is not a book, it is a library. Well done. And "the Word" because, when you read "the Word" or "the Word of God" anywhere in the New Testament, it means "Jesus" or "the Gospel" or "the good news about Jesus," alright?

So, the Bible usually calls itself either "the Scriptures" or some kind of a variation like the one we see right here. Either "the Law and the Prophets" or "the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms" or "the Law, the Prophets, the Writings." Something like that.

Now, tonight, I want to talk about why that is. This threefold kind of moniker for the Bible, the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms, comes from the way the Hebrew Bible in Jesus' day was organized. Now, here's what you need to know. Just nerd out with me for a minute. The book order in the Bible of Jesus' day, was very different from our own. So, the book order in the Bible that you have open in front of you, if it's a Christian Bible, is a little bit odd. Not bad. You don't need to toss it out. There's nothing wrong with it. But, it's a little bit odd.

For example, in the Old Testament you read Samuel 1 and 2, then you read Kings 1 and 2 and then what comes after that? Anybody remember? Chronicles, which is really weird because it's the exact same story that you just read, but from a very different angle. But, you get to Chronicles and you're like, "Wait, this is *deja vu*. I just read that."

Right? And it's confusing. Nothing wrong with it, but it's a little bit confusing. That said, the original order was very different. There were three major parts to the Hebrew Bible, or what now, a millennia later, we call the Old Testament. The first was the Law or in Hebrew, the word is "Torah." It's the first five books. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. All written by Moses.

Then this next chunk was called "the Prophets" or in Hebrew, "the Nevi'im." You had the former prophets, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, then you had the latter prophets, written much later, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. Then you had what was called "the Book of the Twelve," or what we now call "the Minor Prophets." Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

Don't know that because I went to seminary, I know that because I was homeschooled. You had a Nintendo, I had the Old Testament.

Then the third major chunk of writing is called the "Ketuvim" in Hebrew, and usually it's translated "the Writings." Sometimes, as right here in Luke 24, it's also called "the Psalms," because the Psalms were the first book. And this is kind of a junk drawer. You have the Law, then you have the Prophets. This is kind of a junk drawer. You had the Psalms, you had all the wisdom literature, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs. Then you had a random, you know, you had Ruth, Lamentations – that's a real pick-me-up.

Then you had Ezekiel, you had Esther, you had one prophet, Daniel, because it was written hundreds of years later. Then you had Ezra, Nehemiah and then finally, at the very end, you had Chronicles. And it makes way more sense right here at the end of what we now call the Old Testament because, if you've read Chronicles, you know that it starts with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and it tells the entire story so far all the way up to the exile.

So, you get to the end of the Old Testament, in particular 2 Chronicles is the last thing you read. It's this story in search of an ending. You're at the end of it and you're on pins

and needles and you, in particular, are waiting for the Messiah to come and usher in the Kingdom of God. It's a perfect setup for the Gospel of Matthew. So, the Law, the Prophets, the Writings. Now, this is the order that is still used by Jews today, but they don't call it the Old Testament.

Now, most of the time, they call it "the Tanakh." Anybody recognize that language? Maybe if you have a Jewish friend? The Tanakh. This is an abbreviation. "Ta" is short for "the Torah." "Na" is short for "the Nevi'im", or "the Prophets." And "kh" is short for "the Ketuvim," or "the Writings."

So, the Tanakh. The Law, the Prophets and the Writings. This is the framework that, millennia later, is still used, in particular, in the Hebrew culture. Now, stay with me. I know what you're thinking right now. "Who the heck cares?"

One of you is into this. This is going somewhere, I promise. For years, scholars never really thought much about book order. There's this order in the Hebrew Bible and then a very different one in the Christian Bible. There's actually a very different one in the Catholic Bible, in the Eastern Orthodox Bible, the Septuagint, if you know what that is, was also in a very different order. And most scholars even thought like, "Who really cares?"

But then, over the last few decades, there's been kind of a tectonic shift in scholarship and it's all changed. In fact, there's a whole new field of scholarship called "Canonics," where all scholars do – this is like nerd level through the stratosphere – is study, not even the actually books of the Bible, but the canon as a whole and the shape of the canon and how it was all put together. Now, for a very long time, scholars have said that there are signs all over the Tanakh, or the Old Testament, of an editor or editors at play.

For example, the first five books are also called "the Books of Moses," because Moses is the author. The last two chapters of Deuteronomy – we'll get there in a month or two – are about Moses' death, and there's a grey, kind of famous, iconic line about how Moses was the most humble man who ever lived. Now, you do the math. The odds are that Moses did not write that. For starters, he was dead. It's a little hard to write Bible when you're dead. Secondly, if you write about yourself in the third person and write that "he" was the most humble person who ever lived, that's kind of self-defeating. You know?

So, the last two chapters of Deuteronomy were put there later. We're not sure when and we're not even sure by whom, by an editor or editors. That's one example out of all sorts of example through the Torah, through the Old Testament as a whole. We don't exactly know was there one editor, were there twenty, was it all at once? We don't really know. The leading theory is that it was done by Ezra, if you know that story. After the exile, Ezra and Israel comes back to Jerusalem, back to the temple. Ezra is kind of the beginning of this whole new move towards scholarship and, out of that, hundreds of years later, come the sect of the Pharisees and all of this stuff. That could be. We really don't know.

The point is that all over the Tanakh, or the Old Testament, we see the fingerprints of a brilliant literary mind in how it was all put together. The shape of the canon, everything from book order down to how each story goes together, is really a work of art. Okay? Listen to this. This is from a Canadian scholar whose specialty is canonics, or the study of the canon. This is like crazy nerd stuff. So, just check your email and I'll read it. He writes this:

"The fact that the canon has now been viewed as a work of art rather than a gradual growth of text in a three stage process..." – meaning this was all put together on purpose and it's not just like, "Oh, what book was written next?"

"It suggests a new understanding [a new way to think] about the canon. The possibility of canon-conscious redaction..." – anybody know what the word "redaction" means? It means editing. So, this means "editing of the Bible that is aware of the shape of the canon as a whole. So, when somebody's editing Joshua, that editor is aware of the entire Old Testament. Okay? – "...at critical junctures in the text suggests a hermeneutical influence which has shaped the material in a certain way in order to provide a community [you and me] with interpretive guidance."

Some of you made it through the first sentence and then it was like, "No, I'm not going there after that."

That's fine. Don't feel bad at all. For those of you that don't speak scholar, in English,

what he's saying is that when you look at the shape of the canon, when you look at book order, when you look at what goes where, there is evidence, first off, that there's a brilliant literary mind at work. And what happens is you actually start to get clues about not only how it goes together, but about how you and the community you are a part of is to read it.

Now, I only have time for one example tonight. There's a ton more. Email me and I'll send you a scholarly thing if you want to nerd out. None of you will. But, here's one example. It's what scholars call "the Canonical Seams." You don't need to write that down. Basically, seams are spots in the canon that are transition passages between either one major section and another, or something like that. For example, the seam between the Law and the Prophets is Joshua 1. We'll read it in a minute. And then there's another very similar seam between the Prophets and the Writings, and that's Psalm 1.

Joshua 1 is the first chapter in the Prophets; Psalm 1 is the first chapter in the Writings. Now, for those of you that know the Bible really well, play with that in your mind. Think of Joshua 1 and then think of Psalm 1 and then connect the dots. If you know the Bible really well, you know they are just about exactly the same verbatim. Let's read them really fast.

Joshua 1. Turn there if you have a Bible. Joshua 1. Let's start off in 7. This is God speaking to Joshua and Israel.

Joshua 1:7, **"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the Torah [the law] my servant Moses gave you;"** – he's the writer of that – **"do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Torah..."** – that's a way of saying kind of the first five books. "This Book of the Torah." – **"...always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."**

Notice that in between two major blocks of the Tanakh, between the Law and the Prophets, there's a short little passage for you, the reader, as you kind of read through the Bible – we'll get here in a month or two – for you to know, it's a clue for you to find so that you know how to read this library that's open in front of you.

Now, turn over to Psalm 1. It's very similar.

Psalm 1:1, **"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the Torah of Yahweh [the Law of the Lord,] and who meditates on his law..."** – how often? – **"...day and night. That person is like..."** – or that can be translated "will be like" – **"...a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers."**

Notice that in between the Prophets and the Writings there is a seam, there is a short passage as you read through, that tells you, the reader, it's a clue, how you are to read it. And you see that word "delight" and the word "meditate" and the word "prosper" and that phrase "day and night." How familiar is that language? Very familiar. We just read it 30 seconds ago, people. Both of these passages are saying the exact same thing with, in spots, verbatim language. This is how you read the Bible.

Now, there are number of commands in Joshua 1 and Psalm 1, but for time sake I think we can group them into three major ideas. And, if you're taking notes, write this down. By the way, that was all the "no fun" part. Well done. You're still breathing. Fantastic. You're still here. You're thinking, "And that was horrible."

Well, who cares? First off, is this idea of delight – I love that line in Psalm 1. **"Blessed is the one whose delight is in the Law of the Lord."**

In Hebrew, the word here is "hapes" and it means to take pleasure in or draw joy from something. It can be translated to desire, to really want something. Dallas Willard writes this:

"The Psalm 1 man..." – or woman. This was written in the 80s, so don't hold it against him. – "...delights in the law that God has given. Note he delights in it. He loves it, is thrilled by it, can't keep his mind off of it. He thinks it is beautiful, strong, wise, an incredible gift of God's mercy and grace. He therefore dwells upon it day and night, turning it over and over in his mind and speaking it to himself. He does not do this to please God, but

because the Law pleases him. It is where his whole being is oriented and the result is a flourishing life."

That's the idea. To delight in, to take pleasure in, to draw joy out of, to desire and ache for the Scriptures. Sadly, and I don't mean this in a condescending way at all, not one iota, but that's just not how a lot of you, even in the room tonight, feel about the Bible. A lot of us, even in the room tonight, don't really read the Bible on a regular basis, or a lot of people read it, but it's out of this weird, psychosomatic, kind of religious guilt trip or it's obligation or it's self-discipline or it's a way to manipulate God to answer prayer or whatever. It's people who have yet to develop a palate for the Scriptures.

So, my kids are just now, finally, discovering the joy of salsa. So good. I have three kids and my boys are both picky eaters. My daughter, praise God, is not. And see, parenting, you'll learn this some day. It's essentially like involuntary humility. I remember I swore I would never have a picky eater for a child, and now I have two. The only one that's not is adopted, and so that's just so defeating. I just don't even know what to say there.

So, both my boys are picky eaters, and we're working on that. But for years, literally, I've been saying, "You're missing out." It's like, "Day, night. Male, female. Chips, salsa. You need both, okay? You can't have just chips. Tortilla chips all alone? So horrible."

But they would not listen to me until recently. Now they have started to develop a palate for mild, but salsa. We open a jar of it on Sabbath night and it is gone by the next evening. It is just down. They love it now. And I think, in the same way, a lot of you – and I don't mean this in a condescending way at all – have a childlike immaturity in how you feel about the Bible. That's not a slam. It just means you've yet to develop a palate for it and you're missing out.

You know that feeling when you know how good food is and you're around a kid or you're around a picky eater and they're like, "Nah, I don't want that," and you think, "You're missing out!"

We were having dinner just Monday night and I was sitting next to my first born, Jude, and we had a salmon teriyaki bowl with brown rice and vegetables and my wife made this great brown sugar soy sauce sauce that put it all together. But Jude did not want the sauce on it. He just wanted the fish, the vegetables and the brown rice. That's it.

And I'm like, "Jude, it's so dry. You need it."

And he was adamant. When you're 10 years old, every new flavor is guilty until proven innocent, right? So I was just like, "This has sugar. It's this brown sugar. This is the one part of the meal that's bad for you and you don't want it."

And I was sitting there thinking, "You're missing out."

You know that feeling? You will once you become a parent. You will. Trust me. My point is a lot of you are at that spot where you have just yet to develop a palate for this beautiful library that's right in front of you. And I think part of that is because the Scriptures can be a bit of an acquired taste, in particular in the digital age with film and the internet and video games. I mean, the Bible has to compete with Star Wars and Wii and Halo and the internet and Twitter and all of that.

But the best way to change your palate is to discipline yourself to eat less of one thing and more of another. And over time, your tastes change. I remember when I first started to switch my diet – this was years ago – to a healthy, organic, plant-based kind of diet. I remember that I used to crave Taco Bell, which is so embarrassing now. Now I don't think I've been there in a decade and I would not be caught dead there. But still, I used to crave it. It was always my favorite like late night, coming home from church or whatever.

And I remember at first it was so hard. But then what happened is my tastes changed. Now, that honestly sounds so nasty to me. But, there was a time when that was all I could think about. But, as you start to change the habits of your life, like the gut-level, visceral desires, then your body and your soul start to change with it. And that's what we're after. To get to a spot in your growth and your maturity and your discipleship to Jesus where you delight in this library. You love it, you want it, you ache for it, you can't wait to open your Bible

and read in the morning.

Now, of course, not everybody's going to feel that way about Leviticus. It's a very long library. It's okay if you feel better about the Psalms or Isaiah or the Gospel of John, but the point and the hope is that you get to that spot of delight.

That's the first idea. Secondly is this idea of meditation. So, "Blessed is the one whose delight is in the Law of the Lord and who meditates on his Law day and night."

Meditation is a buzzword right now in our city, and it's a bit controversial in the Church because of all the overtones of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy of life and the yoga thing and all of that. But, keep in mind there's a massive difference between Eastern meditation and Hebrew meditation. Eastern meditation is all about emptying your mind and in it you look inward to yourself. Okay? So, the yoga studio I go to, which is not like a weird spiritual studio, but right when you walk in to the front door there's a giant sign that says, "Everything you need is inside yourself," which is such BS.

But, whatever. Okay. I just want to stretch out my spine, okay? But, that's the idea. Look inside to yourself and you empty your mind. Whereas Hebrew meditation is you look outward of yourself to God and it's all about filling your mind with thoughts of God and thoughts from God as we have them in the Scriptures. This is what it means to meditate on Scripture.

The word "meditate" in Hebrew is "hagah." It's a fascinating word. It can be translated to meditate or to think deeply. It could also be translated to growl over. So, the word is used later on in the Bible by the prophet Isaiah. He writes that as a lion growls – and it's the exact same word in Hebrew, hagah – a great lion over its prey. So, word picture: think of a lion with its prey or, if you've never been on a safari or whatever, think of a dog and its bone. Like, most of you have that imagery in your mind's eye. Okay?

Lion, dog, whatever. The point is he takes hours with it, kind of playing with it in his mouth, chewing on it and ingesting it. This is the idea of meditation. We are to chew on the Bible over and over. To get it inside our system, to draw life and nourishment and strength from it. We are, for lack of a better word, to eat it. Eugene Peterson, who has this great little book on the Bible that we have for sale out at the annex, he writes this:

"Christians feed on Scripture. Holy Scripture nurtures the holy community as food nurtures the human body. Christians don't simply learn or study or use Scripture, we assimilate it, 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 and company with the Son."

How good is that? You know, there's a story in Revelation 10, if you've ever read that, about an angel who has a scroll – and Revelation is an apocalyptic genre of literature. We'll talk about it in December. And we think, as best we can tell, that the scroll is symbolic for the Scriptures. He has this scroll and he hands it to John and he says, "John, eat this."

Not read it, not take notes on it, not study it, not memorize it. Eat it. And then it's such an odd story. John eats it and he writes that it was sweet as honey in my mouth. That's an allusion to Psalm 119. And then he writes "but it was bitter as gall in my stomach."

"It gave me indigestion."

And that's kind of what the Bible is like. You eat it, not read it. You eat it and you come to love it and delight in it and crave it, and sometimes it gives you indigestion. Sometimes you read it and you're like, "Wait, what the heck?"

I was reading Leviticus this morning and I'm like, "Wait, what? How is that?"

Or it does something in you where there's a sense of, "Man, there's a huge gap between how I'm living and this vision of human flourishing at the teachings of Jesus or the writings of the New Testament or whatever it is."

Eugene Peterson writes about that story and writes that we should always read the Bible with Pepto Bismol close by. But the point is that we are to put away our notepad and our pen and pick up our knife and our fork. We are to eat this. To take it into the depth of our body and our soul day and night, we read in Psalm 1, 24/7, all the time.

So a delight, then meditation and the last idea is obedience. Think of that language if your Bible is still open to Joshua 1. "Be careful to obey all the Torah my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night," – there's that language again – "so that you may be careful to do everything written in it."

That's English translation of the exact same Hebrew word. It's translate "obey" in verse 7 and "do" in verse 8. We are to obey, we are to do, meaning we are to live out the teachings of the Bible. And of course, you know, you have to nuance that out and we're in the middle of that all year long. Which part of the Bible? Right now we're reading Leviticus. I'm not expecting you to go like obey that tomorrow morning. So, that's a whole other thing.

My point is that it's not enough to read the Bible, study the Bible, know the Bible and believe the Bible. At some point, you have to actually live the Bible. In fact, that's the best way to learn it. The rabbis used to say that you learn the Torah with your feet more than with your ears. Meaning you learn by doing. I love this quote from Psalm 119, which is the longest poem/chapter in the Bible and it's all about the commands of God that are found in the Torah. King David writes this:

"I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts."

That's a little bit cocky, don't you think? I mean, in today's language, "I know more than all of my professors at University of Portland, because I actually do this stuff."

That's the idea. But, he's on to something. That's intense, but the Bible comes alive when you live it out. In the West we have this bizarre ability to separate belief from practice. It's totally normal in our culture to believe something but not practice it.

I believe in global warming. I don't own a car. I ride my bike to work and all over town. We have a family car, and it's an SUV. They get 16 miles to the gallon.

Exactly. I believe you should eat a plant-based diet, I believe in the ethical treatment of animals, whatever that means, I don't eat chicken except when I go to Pok Pok and they have wings. Have you had the wings at Pok Pok? I am not a vegan at Pok Pok ever. Like, in that moment, I always order wings. And I'm totally okay with that. I believe one thing, I practice – I'm a flexitarian, not a vegetarian. You know? I believe one thing and I practice another, and that's totally normal in our culture.

In Bible college in seminary, I had a number of classes on hermeneutics – and this is not a slam on my professors at all, who were amazing – but, as I recall, I don't remember one time a conversation about obedience. It was all technique and context and text. Great stuff, but I don't remember one conversation about obedience. That's not a slam on my professors, it's just saying I think in our culture we're missing something here.

Once again, Eugene Peterson writes this:

"Obedience is the thing living in active response to the living God. The most important question we ask of this text is not, 'What does this mean,' but 'What can I obey?' A simple act of obedience will open up our lives to this text far more quickly than any number of Bible studies and dictionaries and concordances."

I think that is so good and I love his definition of obedience. Living in active response to the living God. Do you get that? We're not teaching legalism here or guilt or obligation. No. It's living in active response to the living God. So, you come to a passage, whether it's Leviticus or the Gospel of John or Psalm 39 or whatever you read tomorrow morning. You come and you're always thinking, "Okay, what does God want me to think? What does He want me to feel? What does He want me to believe? What does He want me to do or not do? To start or stop? To repent of? To live out? To celebrate? To worship? To praise? To thank God

for? To lament? To mourn? How does He want me to put flesh and blood on this?"

That's the idea of obedience. So, delight is the first one, then meditation, then obedience. Now, some of you are thinking, "Man, why put in all that effort? That sounds like a whole lot of work to read the Bible that way. This thing is ancient, it's archaic at times, we don't live under all of its authority, just kind of the New Testament. Why put in all of that work?"

Well, there are all sorts of reasons but for times sake, let's just look at the one right in front of you if you have your Bible still open to Joshua 1 or Psalm 1.

Joshua 1:8, **"Then you will be prosperous and successful."**

Sweet.

Psalm 1:3, **"That person is like [will be like] a tree planted by rivers of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do..."** – what? – "...prosper."

That sounds good. So, the byproduct of this way of reading the Bible with delight, meditation and obedience is success and prosperity. Now, I'm really scared to go down this road because, if you've been around for any length of time, you know that I am so turned off by the prosperity gospel, which is alive and well in America and young and cool and hip and sexy and all of that stuff. I mean, it is just like everything that's wrong with American culture, but now it's wrecked the Gospel of all things. My goodness.

But, here's the thing that I have to admit: this idea that God, as you read the Scriptures, in particular the Tanakh, God does want success and prosperity for His people. Now, you have to radically redefine success and prosperity around a crucified Messiah in the economy of the Kingdom of God. So, when you read "success," don't imagine a house in the West Hills with a new Range Rover every six months and your spouse is literally a model and you have hundreds of thousands of followers on Twitter and you have a second house in Maui and you never have anything bad happen to you ever and you're always healthy.

That does sound pretty awesome, though. That's pretty much my life. But, don't picture that. Picture Jesus. A life well lived right in the middle of the pain and suffering of this side of resurrection. Life for all of your relationships with God, with other people, with the earth itself are marked by shalom where you thrive and you flourish as a human being under God's rule. That's success. That's prosperity.

Now, here's the thing: this word "success" is a fascinating Hebrew word. It can also be translated "wisdom." Success. Wisdom. In the Hebrew Bible, exact same thing. You notice, if you've ever read the Old Testament, that a theme runs all the way through the Old Testament, in particular right around the middle with Psalms and Proverbs, and the basic idea is that wisdom leads to success.

So, if you've ever read the book of Proverbs, here's the entire book in one summary: the basic idea is that, as a general rule, wise people do well in life and foolish or stupid people kind of crash and burn. As a general rule, that's true. There are exceptions all over the place, and that's the book of Ecclesiastes, but that's a whole other teaching.

But, as a general rule, wise people do well, foolish people crash and burn. But, here's the thing: we think about that a lot in our culture. We have an obsession in America with success and with prosperity. But, the general line of thinking in America is that success and prosperity come from talent. Somebody who's just so good at sports is a great example. Or from intellect. IQ. So and so is a genius. Or from work ethic. I mean that dude just works his or she works her tail off all the time.

Or maybe from blind luck. Like you were just there at the right time and right place. Whatever. Or some combination of the above. And there's truth in all of that, I'm sure. But, in the Hebrew Bible, the idea is that success comes from wisdom. Knowing how to live well. Skill and acumen for human life. And wisdom comes from where? It comes from God, but comes through the Scriptures. The Law, the Prophets, the Writings. And now, for you and me as well, the New Testament.

So, the basic idea is this: if there is a formula – and there's not, but if there was – the basic idea is if you want to do well in life, delight in the Bible, meditate on the Scriptures and actually live it out. Put flesh and blood on it.

Now, are you with me? Are you still alive? Okay. Stay with me. To read the Bible this way means reading slowly, which we're not used to. Beware of hurry in Bible reading. Just beware of hurry in general. As a general rule, it's just not a good thing. Dallas Willard called hurry "the great enemy of spiritual life."

When we come to the Bible, we need to slow down. And that is very hard to do. One because, if you're reading through the Bible with our community, it's four chapters a day. That's a lot. Most of you don't have two hours every morning. And two, because we live in the modern age. Even in Portland, which is laid back, the pace of life is still 90 miles per hour and we live in this non-stop barrage of digital stimuli, email and text message and alerts on your phone and all of this stuff.

And most of us, because we live in the age of digital distraction, are addicted to distraction literally. You know this. I assume you've read whatever study. Every time you refresh the page on your internet browser or you get an email or you get a text message in your pocket, it literally releases dopamine in your brain. Okay? So, your iPhone is far more addictive than heroin. True story. I have no doubt that 10 years from now we'll have AA groups for alcoholics, we'll have NA groups for drug addicts and we'll have, I don't know what they're called, DA groups or whatever for like, "It's been 13 weeks since I've opened my Instagram account," or whatever.

And we laugh, but we kind of know it's true, huh? Like, digital addiction is a thing. Now, the point here is not to slam the digital age. My point here is that the digital age, for better or for worse, has fundamentally changed the way that we read. So, US internet users spend an average of 13 hours online each week browsing 99 domains and 3,123 pages. But, listen to this: time spent on each website is just 56 seconds. As a general rule, 56 seconds.

Most people don't read at all anymore. As I said a few weeks ago, 78% of Americans never read a book all the way to the end after completing their last year of education. In short, our reading experience is a mile wide and an inch deep, and this is how most of us, because of how we are enculturated, come at the Scriptures. Not as a meal that we feast on, but more like a quick snack as we run out the door.

Just a really fast Psalm in the morning before I jump in the shower or that email from so and so or whatever that has a devotional kind of Scripture at the top or that Instagram post with the picture of a train track or something that has absolutely nothing to do with Timothy 3 and then a nice little quote. Or I just listen on my commute really fast in my headphones to whatever. And that's not bad. Like, oh my gosh, better than nothing for sure. Well done. But, I think we need – and hopefully you agree – to relearn how to read at a whole other pace.

Recently there was an article, I don't know if you saw it, on Medium by Hugh McGuire who is a book guy who runs a non-profit that deals with books. And this article was kind of a confessional that last year, and his job is books, he only read four books. Okay? Some of you are thinking, "Well, I only read..."

Yeah, but his job is books. Okay? And his article was about how hard it is to read books in particular in an age of digital distraction. And you all know this. Like, you sit down to read a novel before you go to bed at night or whatever and your phone is there and, if you don't turn it off, this is what happens. You read a sentence and then you get a text message and you respond. Oh, yeah. Five minutes later and then you come back. Second sentence and then you get an alert from social media. "Oh, Joe, that hot guy, liked my photo. That's awesome. He's following me."

And you kind of look at him and you look at his picture again and you're like, "Wow. That's great." And then you put it down and then you read sentence number three and then you have an email pop up and you're like, "Oh, quick!"

And you open it and dopamine goes, "Ahhh," like the happy dopamine feeling. And you read the email really fast and then you respond and then you follow this really weird link and 10 minutes later you're reading a Star Wars plot theory for episode eight and you're like, "Wow, that's fascinating. Could so and so and Boba Fett's going to be in this one? Oh my gosh."

Whatever. And then you come back and it's like 20 minutes later and you're on sentence four. That's why a lot of people don't read books anymore. It takes a very long time to read a book at that pace. And the basic gist of his article was just what we all know.

Digital addiction is a thing and we need to read more books and we need to put away our phone and close our laptop and just read.

All that was for this. I love this quote from the end of his article. He writes this:

"Books," – and think about the Bible – "in ways that are different than visual art, music, the radio or even love, force us to walk through another's thoughts, one word at a time over hours and days. We share our minds for that time with the writers. There is a slowness, a forced reflection required by the medium that is unique. Books recreate someone else's thoughts in our own minds. And maybe it is this one-to-one mapping of someone else's words, on their own, without external stimuli, that give books their power. Books force us to let someone else's thoughts inhabit our minds completely."

This is what happens when we come and read the library that is Scripture. God's thoughts inhabit our minds completely. God's thoughts get in our head and our heart and our life. This is why we have to read the Bible and, I would argue, slowly.

So, before we wrap up, really fast, I just want to walk you through. This is the nuts and bolts part for tomorrow morning when you wake up. I want to walk you through an ancient practice. It goes back millennia. It's called "Lectio Divina." Does that language sound familiar to you? It's okay if it doesn't. It's a Latin phrase, "Lectio Divina." Essentially, it's translated as "Spiritual Reading." This is a way that followers of Jesus have been reading this sacred text that we call Scripture for millennia now.

Now, there are five movements to Lectio Divina, based off five Latin words. *Silencio*, *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*. Alright. You're learning Latin tonight and about canonical seams and redaction. This is fantastic. You could be at the Super Bowl right now but no, you're here. Let's take them one at a time. And really, it's not complex or hard to understand.

"*Silencio*." The basic idea here is that you shut up. You quiet your mind and your body. You turn off your phone or at least put it in airplane mode. You go somewhere private, not to a coffee shop or a living room with the TV on or the music playing. You clear your heart and mind of distractions. Take a little while to just breathe in and out. You open yourself up to God in prayer and you ask God to come and speak to you as you start to read.

Then "*lectio*." That word means "read." You read, and you read slowly. A lot of people suggest out loud or at a whisper if that works for you. And as you read through the passage slowly, you look for – I don't know if this language is helpful – what shimmers. So, you read through and you're just looking. Is there something that kind of jumps off the page that just kind of lights up to you? A word, a phrase, a character, a plot line, an idea? Something where there's just a deep, kind of instant resonance? And as you read through, you just wait for something to connect with you and, when it does, you stop. You don't keep reading. You stop and you read it again. Maybe you read it again. Maybe you read it again. You start to play with it in your mind.

Third is *meditatio*. You meditate on it or you think deeply about it. You think about, "Man, what does this mean?" And then you think about, "What does this mean for me, a millennia later, my life, here?"

Not even for Bridgetown or Portland. What does this mean for me? This isn't Bible study time. You don't have to parse the Greek or the Hebrew or pick up a commentary. This is just time for you to ask God, "Are you saying something to me here? Is there a connection or a point between me and this line or this phrase?"

And you just let your mind and the Holy Spirit together make connections between what's open in front of you on the page and your life.

Then fourth, *oratio*. The basic idea there is you pray. As you become aware of what you sense God is saying to you, you talk to God about it. You pray it back to God. You engage with God. This is not a dry academic kind of read and study. No. You engage with God. Maybe the response is worship or praise or wonder or awe. Maybe it's gratitude. "God, thank You."

Maybe it's like you're just wrecked and so you repent. Maybe it's you pray for something. "God, I need You to lead me. I need You to guide me. I need healing for my

body. I need healing for my soul."

Maybe you vent. It's just doubt, anger, rage, confusion. But, you engage with God in that moment. You don't just read the Bible and then take out your earphones and go into work. You engage with God, you pray back to God.

And then, finally, is contemplatio. It's where we get the word "contemplation," but that's not exactly right in English. The idea here is that you sit in it. You sit in it. As you read the Bible, you let it read you. It's a great time for listening prayer. "God, is there anything else You want to say? Man, I was really moved by that line or that Scripture. God, is there anything else? Is there a word, is there a picture, is there an image? Is there something that You have to say to me?"

Sometimes you just sit there and be with Jesus and just enjoy Him. He is just so fantastic. You go to what Jesus called "the secret place." That place, not to get all hyper-individualistic on you, but where it's just you and God. Holy Spirit, You are just in. Maybe your Bible's open, maybe you're on your knees, maybe you're on a walk. But, it's just you and God in the secret place. And you just savor that moment.

Nine times out of ten, that is the best moment of my day. So, to recap:

Silencio: shut up. Quiet your mind and your body.

Lectio: you read it. You read it slowly. You look for what shimmers.

Meditatio: you think about it.

Oratio: you pray it back to God.

Contemplatio: you sit in it, listen to God and enjoy God's presence.

Now, please understand that this is not a step by step process. This is not linear. This is more like a rhythm that you tap into and it loops back on itself. And after you do this for a while, it all becomes intuitive. Some of you have never read that phrase "Lectio Divina" ever, but you've been reading the Bible for years. You're like, "Yeah, this is exactly kind of how I read the Bible."

You might, if you're new to reading the Bible, you might want to start with the cheat sheet in front of you. And if Latin is not your thing, just paraphrase it. Shut up, read slowly, think about it, pray it back to God, sit in it for a minute. Okay? Have that cheat sheet in front of you. Within, honestly, two weeks easy, it will all become as easy as breathing.

Now, on a practical level – I know some of you are freaking out right now. You're thinking, "Four chapters a day? There goes five hours."

I would argue, when you read as much as we're reading right now, just pick one chapter or one passage or something. So, for me, I set aside an hour every morning. And some of you don't have that much time. That's fine. I do. I set aside an hour every morning. And, out of that hour, I do about 15 or 20 minutes of listening prayer to start. Just Jesus, the secret place, all of that. Then I do 15 or 20 minutes in one Psalm. And then in 15 or 20 minutes, I read all three chapters in the Old Testament and do my Scripture memory. So, you notice, I go really slow and then I pick the pace way up.

So, that's what works for me. You figure out what works for you. What I want you to notice, before we move on, is how conversational this is. You get that? You're there, you're quiet, you open your Bible, you read, you read slowly, you think, you pray it back to God, you circle back around. You're looping it. This is what we're after. For you to develop a conversational relationship with your Father and the Scriptures and your relationship to the Holy Spirit and what God has said in the Bible and what God is saying in the Holy Spirit. What you're after is a conversational relationship with God.

Now, before we end, I just have one last thing I want to clarify. This entire teaching has been about how to read the Bible, not about how to study the Bible. I want to draw a clear line of distinction between the two. Between how you read the Bible and how you study it, or what we call Bible study. Bible study is a whole other conversation. You have to get

into Greek and Hebrew and hermeneutics and the art and science and the technique and context and background and the Roman empire and ancient Sumerian archaeology. And you open up a commentary, you listen to a podcast. It's all great stuff. I absolutely love it. That's a whole other teaching for a whole other time. Frankly, I do most of that for you at the church or whoever is up here teaching.

What I want to do tonight is separate the two out. Because, what happens a lot, in particular in a church like Bridgetown where there's a high value for teaching, for the Bible study, where there is somebody like me who actually gets paid and a huge part of my job is to study the Bible. I mean, I spend, when we're teaching through a book of the Bible, I spend about two days working on each teaching and I spend one of those two days, an entire day, all I do is study that text, which is usually about one paragraph. So, I spend eight hours. It's just Greek or Hebrew or this and I read hundreds – most of you don't have eight hours to study every single paragraph in the Bible as you're reading four chapters a day. Okay? Do the math. You don't have that. That's totally fine.

But, what happens is – and I think a church with a high value for teaching, especially in a church like Bridgetown where we really believe that the Bible is this beautiful, ancient library that we have to read in context, we spend a lot of time on background and history and all this stuff – people come and we hear a teaching on whatever and it's like, "Wow. This Greek word and it's translated this way in your Bible. But, actually, that's not really very good and there's a better translation and blah blah blah and there's this whole Roman Empire background. It's like this implicit critique of Caesar as lord and actually Jesus is really..."

And you're like, "I would never get that from reading Mark 1 with a cup of coffee in the morning. I would just never get that."

So what happens is it backfires and a lot of people just stop reading the Bible. "Well, I'll just come to church. I'll just listen to a podcast. I'll just read a book of somebody else's thoughts on the Bible."

I want to clearly say that you do not need to know Greek or Hebrew, you do not have to go to seminary, you do not have to own a single commentary in order to read the Bible and read it well. Anybody can do that. Whether you have been following Jesus for 50 years or 5 minutes, whether you have a PhD in Bible theology or you're a high school dropout, anybody can read the Bible and read it well. Because the Bible is a place and a time where, as we come to it, we come to meet with God. It is a portal into a whole other world. The Bible, as you open it up, is this overlap of heaven and earth and, as we open it up morning by morning, tomorrow morning, you get up, you make your coffee, you take a sit and you open to Leviticus 24, you step into a whole other reality. And God is there with you in that moment.

And as you read and as you meet with God and as you engage, not only your mind – and we're huge fans of that – but you also engage your soul and even your body. In that moment you are shaped by God Himself.

So, in closing, I just want to remind you of that line we read earlier in Psalm 1 about how the person who's marked by the delight and meditation on and obedience of the Scriptures is like a tree planted by streams of water. Now, that metaphor is lost on us because we live in the Pacific Northwest. So, we have plenty of trees. I went on a run in Forest Park this morning. There were tens of thousands of them. Water, thanks to el-freaky-Nino, we have more than enough water.

Remember: Psalm 1 was written by a poet in the Middle East, in the desert. I've been there. Trees are a rare find. You read about the Cedars of Lebanon all through the Old Testament? Yeah, they're like six feet tall. They're more like what, here in the Northwest, we call a shrub. You know? The Cedars of Lebanon. I was like, "Really, you are a letdown."

But, trees were a rare find. Water was a precious commodity. Half the wars in the Old Testament are over water rights for the most part. So, that just makes the metaphor all the more striking. If you delight in this, if you meditate in this, if you live it out, man, you will be like a tree planted by streams of water. I don't know what that means in Portland. Like sunshine in January, or something. You will stick out like a sore thumb in the best sense of the word.

And the reality is we need more trees in our community. I mean that as in metaphor, not in a literal way. We need more trees. We have plenty of grass, plenty of men and women who come and go, who are up, who are down, who are here and then who are

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gone. What we need are men and women and children and young and old who are rooted in the soil of the Scriptures, who delight in the Scriptures, who meditate on the Scriptures, who live out the Scriptures, who are rooted in the life of the Kingdom of God. We need more trees. Let's stand and pray.

