

This morning we are continuing the sermon series we began at the start of 2025, looking at the spiritual practices, or disciplines, of Jesus. So far, we’ve looked at:

1. Sabbath
2. Prayer
3. Fasting
4. Solitude
5. Generosity (Simplicity)

And today is “Scripture.” Going forward, we will look at “Community,” “Service,” and “Witness.”

So, when it comes to Scripture, reading it is probably – along with prayer – the most common spiritual discipline for followers of Jesus. Many of us in the room engage with Scripture on a daily basis. For others, it’s a few times a week. But, like all of the practices we’re looking at, the point of engaging in the regular practice of reading Scripture is not simply for the sake of opening our Bibles, or a Bible app on our phones, and checking a box called, “Read the Bible today.” Maybe we struggle with that sometimes and have that “box checking mentality”. So, let’s turn to God’s word and see if we can’t find some inspiration from Jesus for reading Scripture for reasons other than simply “because it’s what I’m supposed to do.” We are in Matthew 4 today, verses 1-11. It’s a passage that is probably familiar to many of us, and we looked at it briefly at other times in this series as well, when we looked at fasting and solitude. But today we focus on it, and then use it as a springboard to look at the role of reading Scripture in our apprenticeship to Jesus. So, this is God’s word to you and me today: **Matthew 4:1-11**.

So, this is Jesus’ famous 40 day fast in the wilderness, where he’s tempted by the devil three times. As we talked about a couple weeks ago or so, solitude time in the wilderness is not a place of weakness for Jesus, even though we might think so given the devil’s attack of him here. Instead, solitude and time in the wilderness is a holy-spirit led place of strength. It’s where Jesus gets re-centered with his heavenly father.

And we see that: **The centerpiece of Jesus’ strength – the thing that enables him to resist the temptations thrown his way – is his knowledge of Scripture.** On three separate occasions, he quotes from the Old Testament. For a first-century Jew, that was Scripture. As followers of Jesus, we obviously include the New Testament. While the reliance on Scripture is seen in the fact that he quoted Scripture three times in resisting temptation, the first one is especially helpful for us today: **“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).** It’s a quote from Deuteronomy 8, part of a teaching from Moses to the people of Israel to learn lessons from their 40 years of wandering in the desert: God provided to nourish them physically, but it’s the spiritual nourishment from his word that we need at a deeper level. That’s the point of the teaching in Deuteronomy, and it’s the point that Jesus reiterates here in his resistance to temptation as he quotes it, and then quotes two more verses after as well.

The role of Scripture in Jesus’ life is central – not just in this passage, but throughout all four biographical accounts of his life that we have, and we know as the gospels. From Jesus life and relationship to Scripture we gain much insight into the sufficiency of Scripture for knowing God, and also we see from him the discipline of reading, studying, knowing, and applying the truths and principles of Scripture to our own lives. Briefly, here are some of the times Jesus quoted or referenced Scripture, or affirms Scripture, besides the three in today’s passage:

In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus explicitly affirms the importance of the Old Testament, particularly the Law and the Prophets. He says, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).** Here, Jesus demonstrates his reverence for the Scriptures and positions his teaching in continuity with the Law and the Prophets, and positions himself as a fulfillment of them. This doesn’t mean we ignore them now, but we approach them through the lens of Jesus’ fulfillment of them.

Another, that's maybe a bit of an extension to the previous point about his teaching being in continuity with the Law and with Scripture, is one we come to in Matthew 7:24, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus has been teaching on Old Testament principles, and says, **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them in to practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24)**. Here Jesus is equating his teaching with Scripture – it's *his* teaching he implores them to put into practice, not the teaching of what they already called Scripture. In doing this, equating his word with the already established word of God in the Old Testament Scriptures, and making a claim to equality with God. He's saying his word is also the word of God. It's a drop the mic, moment, for sure.

Then, in the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1-2). He reads a passage about the Messiah bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for prisoners, and giving sight to the blind. After reading, Jesus declares, **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21)**, identifying himself as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Later, when asked by a Pharisee to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus responds by quoting from the Old Testament, giving a two-part answer. **He cites Deuteronomy 6:5, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and Leviticus 19:18, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”** He says that all the law is essentially summed up in these two commands. The guy asked for one, but Jesus gives him a bonus...a two-for the price of one answer. In this response, he shows both his knowledge of the Scriptures and his belief in their authority.

As Jesus hangs on the cross, he cries out, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)**. This is a direct quote from Psalm 22:1, a Messianic Psalm. By quoting this passage, Jesus demonstrates his identification with the suffering servant depicted in the Psalms and reinforces the connection between his death and Old Testament prophecy.

Even after his resurrection we see Jesus turning to Scripture. In Luke 24:27, Jesus teaches the disciples on the road to Emmaus, “**And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself**” (Luke 24:27). This reveals that Jesus sees the Old Testament as ultimately pointing to him, not that this hasn’t been made clear elsewhere by him as well.

As if that’s not enough, there are 11 times in Matthew, with several of them repeated in Mark and Luke also, where Jesus teaches, “Have you not read...” or “Have you not heard...” and then references or quotes Scripture. We might wonder about John’s gospel: In John, there are two times where he says, “Is it not written...?” and then quotes the Old Testament. And then there are other references, such as John 5:39-40 – “**You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life**” (John 5:39-40). Here, Jesus directly states that the Old Testament testifies about him, challenging the Jewish leaders’ failure to recognize him as the fulfillment of Scripture.

And then there is John 7:19, “**Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?**” (John 7:19). Here, Jesus gives a scathing rebuke of the religious leaders for their hypocrisy, where he appeals to Moses’ writings as authoritative not just in principal, but in actuality. Like, loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself: you have to actually do that, not just say you do it or act like it’s really how other people should live, but not me, or not us.

Now, at this point you might be thinking to yourself, “*Good night*, pastor Brian! We get it! Jesus knew his Scriptures, and referenced them all the time for his own spiritual journey, as well as for that of others, and to affirm his position as not just a rabbi but as divine, as the savior, the Messiah. We get it. What’s the point?” To that I would say, “That *is* the point.” Because as apprentices of Jesus’ we need to know Jesus. We need to know what he taught, how he lived, what he did – from his birth to his death to his resurrection and beyond, and how this all relates to Scripture – not just the Old Testament, but the New Testament as well, because it is born out of his

life and his teachings. So, let me get to the point of practical application for us.

And actually, there are five points. I'm not sure I've ever preached a five-point sermon, but I guess there's a first for everything – like maybe Kansas City *won't* win the Super Bowl today, as well:

1. **Commit to Knowing and Memorizing Scripture** – Jesus' ability to quote Scripture in temptation as we read today, and throughout his life in other settings, teaches us the importance of having God's Word stored in our hearts. Engagement one day a week, on Sundays, is not enough. And by the way, with Jesus as our model, it's ok not to know the exact chapter and verse address of everything. To the best of my knowledge, Jesus never actually names the book, chapter, and verse of any Scripture quote. He just says, "it is written..." or "you have read..." or something like that.
2. **Interpret Scripture Christologically** – Avoid reading the Old Testament, or the New Testament for that matter, merely as moral lessons but instead to see how it points to Jesus. This is exactly what Jesus did, so why wouldn't we?
3. **Use Scripture as Your Ultimate Authority** – Like Jesus, resist temptation and make decisions based on what God has spoken, not societal pressures. So, test cultural ideas and personal experiences against Scripture. If something lines up with Scripture, then great! If not, we need to lean into Scripture and follow it. It helps to do this if we've done the first two steps.
4. **Reject Misinterpretations and False Teachings** – Jesus corrected the religious leaders of the day, showing the need for theological and Biblical accuracy. In fact, he corrects the devil in today's passage, because he misuses a verse. If you just cherry pick a verse, or part of a verse, you can make the Bible say about whatever you want. So we have to be sure to correct teaching that's off-base. In our *own* hearts and heads at a bare minimum, we need to correct misuses, misinterpretations, and false teachings from others. People will misquote, mis-apply, mis-interpret Scripture all the time. And if we don't know what Scripture *actually* says, it's hard to correct people who misuse it. Part of misusing Scripture, by the way, is using a verse to

justify a way of thinking or behaving, and ignoring what the rest of Scripture has to say on the topic. So, make sure, when you hear someone say, “The Bible says...” or “Jesus said...” or “Christians will be familiar with this....” make sure they’re getting the quote right, or paraphrasing in a way that accurately reflects what Scripture actually says, and that broader context of Scripture is considered as well. Lastly.... (overlap with #2)

5. **See the Old and New Testaments as a Unified Story** – Jesus affirmed the Old Testament as relevant and authoritative, and fulfilled in himself. It’s the same God who’s the God of the Old Testament and of the New Testament. So, read the whole Bible in light of the Gospel rather than viewing the Old Testament as outdated.

In his book, *Practicing the Way*, John Mark Comer writes, **“Scripture is the primary way we are ‘transformed by the renewing of our mind’ [Romans 12:2]. As we think God’s thoughts after him, we begin to develop the “mind of Christ” [1 Corinthians 2:16]. We begin to see the world how he sees it. Think how he thinks. Feel what he feels”** (*Practicing The Way, p. 186*).

You see, reading our Bibles is not just about head knowledge. It’s not about doing it so God will do something for us. That’s the worst kind of relationship with God – like it’s transactional.¹ We read Scripture so we would know Jesus; so we would live more like him; so he might do something in us and through us...not for us...so we’d be transformed and conformed more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. **We want Scripture to sink into our hearts, into the depths of our very being, so we would be close to Jesus and our lives would look like his.** ...So we’d follow his way as the Spirit leads us, and we’d live with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). So we’d be full of grace and truth as Jesus was. All of that is what it means to be a disciple, to be an apprentice, of Jesus.

And that’s the goal of reading Scripture – not just to check a box. There’s a purpose to it that we see in Jesus’ life. And that purpose is to help us move

along the path of apprenticeship to Jesus. To grow. To mature. To become more Christ-like over the course of time. That's our aim. At least, it's mine, for our church. I hope it is for you, too. I think that's what Jesus wants for us, as well. So, take time to read God's Word. A few verses a day. Heck, read the same verses each day for a week if you need to. Maybe it's the passage from Sunday...you're more confused after the sermon than you were before...and so you just sit with that passage each day for a few days, maybe. Or even just one verse. Reflect on His word, let it sink in. Study it. Wrestle with it. Know it – in your head and in your heart. Live by it. As you and I do that, we will begin to think, live, act, and simply *be* more like Jesus...which will not only be good for each of us, but for others as well as we impact the people in our lives much as Jesus did, leading people toward him. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ A great article on this that came out just this week as I prepared this sermon is here:

<https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/tara-leigh-cobble-why-you-should-stop-treating-your-relationship-with-god-as-a-transaction/>