

DAN TERRACCIANO
with Chris Pascarella



Walk Worthy

SEVEN CORE PRACTICES
FOR DISCIPLES OF JESUS

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Walk Worthy: Seven Core Practices for Disciples of Jesus

A Resource of Lincroft Bible Church

790 Newman Springs Road

Lincroft, NJ 07738

lincroftbiblechurch.org

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Authors: Dan Terracciano, Chris Pascarella

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Introduction

If you walk down the hallway of our church you will find these words:

We believe that the good news about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection changes everything about who we are and how we live. More than anything, we want to be a 'gospel people' who are being transformed by Jesus and carrying the transforming power of the gospel to the world.

These words are not only a statement of truth, but also a statement of desire. The gospel changes everything, and more than anything we *want* to be a "gospel people." That is, we want to be a people who are shaped by the good news about Jesus in every aspect of our lives. We long to see the gospel transform every part of our church. That is a big vision for our church. But it is a big vision for your life as well.

The gospel is the good news that in Christ God is making everything new, including you! The gospel boldly declares: "You are forgiven! You are loved. You are secure. You are free!" The gospel's transforming power comes to us, not because we are so good, but because Jesus is. He has done all the work for us. There is nothing we can do to contribute to our salvation (Isaiah 64:6; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet, we are *not* forgiven, loved, secure, and free to do whatever we want (Galatians 5:13). We are *not* free to "live for ourselves" (Romans 14:7). Instead, our salvation leads us to live as redeemed people and glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Believing the gospel brings us new life and sets us on God's path (Ephesians 2:4-10). Receiving salvation is only the beginning of the journey. The gospel should be continually changing us to look, act, and think more like Jesus, every step of the way.

Since the gospel is the central message of the Bible, it must be the central defining reality of our lives (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). We be-

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lieve that if the gospel is believed, embraced, and embodied then it will powerfully transform our lives. But change is hard. When was the last time you wanted to change but could not? Life is full of failed attempts at change. We try to change the way we eat, to start exercising, to become a kinder person, to spend more time with the family, to reign back the increasingly unmanageable schedule, but, things rarely change. So how does the gospel change us in everyday life? How do we see God's power change us in the everyday grind of life?

If we really want to change, we need to think about our whole lives. One way to think about following Jesus is that it is a "long walk home." It is a journey from where we are to where God is. It is a transformational process of becoming more like Jesus. Unfortunately, we too often stop moving or stop growing. We stall out or experience setbacks. Other times, we just feel stuck.

That is what this book is all about. It is written to ground you more deeply in the gospel and help you walk in step with the gospel. It is about getting "unstuck" in your relationship with God. It is about helping you on your journey toward Christ-likeness. It is a book to help you *take the next step* in following Jesus.

Sometimes we get in a rut in our discipleship journey. While the phrase "getting into a rut" is typically used as a way of describing a pattern or a habit that hinders you from where you want to be, if

we reframe the idea we'll find that being in a rut isn't necessarily a bad thing. Let me explain. My family really loves the Olympics. As we watch the cross-country skiing competitions, I have observed that when the race starts there are "ruts" or "grooves" in the snow that the skiers try to get into because it makes the race less difficult than if they were to ski through the deeper snow on the outside of the track. Being in a "rut" provides a path and guidance for completing the course. In a similar way, habits are like grooves in the snow for the Christian life.

Sometimes we find ourselves in grooves that hinder us from walking toward Jesus: mindless streaming of media, overeating, or yelling at our kids. But God has also given us "grooves of grace" that we can walk in. These practices have been called various things throughout Christian history: spiritual disciplines, habits of grace, or foundational practices. Whatever we call them, the result is the same: if we are intentional about the grooves we choose to walk in then we will find that our hearts are directed more toward Jesus.

To be clear, this book is not a "self-help" book. As if we can *merely* change by giving ourselves over to the right habits. Rather, this book is a tool to help you think through the implications of the gospel, rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, and engage with God in His process of transformation. It is a book to help you become more like Jesus. This is the foundation of what it means to *walk worthy*.

The Power of Habit

Because of the formational power of habits, we believe that developing habits of grace is the way forward in the Christian life. We believe that an emphasis on habits helps to balance out an emphasis in much Christian teaching which focuses solely on the mind or the thought life. Incorporating the mind is vital in Christian discipleship because our thoughts influence our feelings and actions (Philippians

4:8; Romans 12:2). Yet the fact remains, we cannot think ourselves out of a habit that we did not think ourselves into. No one thinks, “You know, I am going to eat chips every night before I go to bed.” We just kind of started doing it. And then it became a habit, automatic.

Our eating habits cause us to crave certain kinds of foods. The same dynamic is at play with the path of sin or the path of following Christ. We often will “present” ourselves to sin by making a conscious choice to sin at the beginning (Romans 6:13a). Eventually such conscious choices get ingrained and become a habit so that our sins are no longer choices but habits. The apostle Paul demonstrates that the way out of such a problem is to “present” ourselves to God: “Present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (6:13b). What Paul means is that we must allow the Holy Spirit to short-circuit the sinful habit and replace it with a godly one. Over time, the Spirit begins to change our desires and we begin to want godliness. We want to obey.

What if we could unleash the power of habit to form us in a healthy direction? What if we could leverage the power of habit to help form us into the image of Christ? What if our habits actually helped us follow Jesus instead of hindering us from following Him? While we are rational creatures, we are not *solely* rational. We are not as Christian philosopher Jamie Smith says, “Brains on a stick.” Instead, we are “fundamentally lovers.”¹ Our habits show us what we love. They show us what we truly value.

For example, if I say I value showing up on time but I am habitually late, my actions reveal that I actually value my time more than others. Habits reveal what we love, but they also have the power to shape what we love. If I consistently spend time with my wife ev-

¹James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

ery evening, I will come to delight in conversing and communicating with her. I will come to love her deeper. If I habitually workout, something that was previously drudgery like going to the gym becomes a source of delight.

Walk Worthy

The apostle Paul calls disciples of Jesus to “walk worthy of the calling to which you were called” (Ephesians 4:1). In another book, he tells the Colossians to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” (Colossians 1:10). He exhorts the Philippians to conduct themselves “worthy of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). Clearly, Paul wants Christians to be who they are: forgiven; new creations in Christ. So, Paul wants them to live like it. How will we do that? How will we walk worthy of the gospel? We walk worthy through habits of grace, or what we call, “core practices.”

Walk Worthy is a book about spiritual formation. It is a book which seeks to lay down “grooves of grace” for us to walk in that will help us to follow Jesus. We use the language of “core practices” because these foundational habits help express our core identities of who we are in Christ.² These core identities—disciples, family, servants, and ambassadors—are given to us because of our connection with Christ by faith. We *are* disciples. We *are* family. We *are* servants. We *are* ambassadors. The call of Christ is to live out these identities in everyday life. We do this through our “core practices.” Cultivating these habits is the path toward spiritual health and flourishing. It is how we “walk worthy.”

Some people may object to the idea that we need to do something in the Christian life. The fear is that focusing on our effort is re-

²For more information on Lincroft Bible Church’s core identities, see Dan Terracciano and Chris Pascarella, *Strengthen Your Core*, 2020.

packaged legalism or a backhanded attempt to earn God’s approval through our performance. It is true that habits can become legalistic if they drift from the gospel. If developing habits is reduced to an exercise in human will power, then, yes, it will devolve into legalism. But grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning.³ In fact, Scripture is clear that once we have been declared righteous in Christ (justification), we are new creations who live differently and seek to grow (sanctification). The apostle Peter says that remembering that we are cleansed from our past sin (the gospel) gives us the power to “make every effort to add to your faith...” (2 Peter 1:5-9). The apostle Paul also shows that grace is not opposed to hard work, but is actually the source of it: “I worked even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). While our habits will not make *God* love *us* anymore, they help *us* love *God* more.⁴ Godly habits do not earn God’s favor, they are God’s favor!

Some object to the idea of habits to avoid so-called legalism, but others may object, claiming that forming new godly habits is simply too hard. But anything good in life is difficult. Many beneficial things are hard. Cleaning up your eating is hard. Running a 5K or half marathon is hard. Becoming successful in your career is hard. Building a marriage and family is hard. Yet people do those things all the time! As human beings, we are far more capable than we often think. We should not focus on the difficulty of the task, but on the potential benefit. Sadly, often we want growth without effort. We want gains without grit. We want godliness without gusto. No great gains in Christian character will ever be accomplished without great disci-

³Dallas Willard, “Live Life to the Full,” Christian Herald (UK), 14 April 2001. <https://dwillard.org/articles/live-life-to-the-full>

⁴Justin Earley, *Habits of the Household: Practicing the Story of God in Everyday Life Rhythms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021).

pline. The problem is not that it is too hard. Often, we just want other things more. Neither is the issue that change is too hard to come by. Instead, we must learn to rely on God's power rather than the power of our own effort.

To tackle the difficulty of Christian growth, we need a mindset shift. We need to remember that these core practices developed in this book are *not* a burden. Scripture is clear: following God's commands is not burdensome (1 John 5:3). Sin is burdensome. We are already burdened with habits of sin that distract us, disorient us, discourage us, and disappoint us. Instead, we must see these core practices as means to finding true joy and satisfaction in becoming who God has called us to be. We hope that you will take the next steps with us in following Jesus.

How to Use this Book

This book lays out *seven core practices* to help you follow Jesus. Each chapter covers a foundational practice of a healthy disciple. Each of these core practices is then broken down into smaller "micro-habits" to help each disciple on their journey of living a gospel-centered life. We recognize that every disciple is at a different point along the path in his or her growth journey. Some are new disciples, some are growing disciples, some are mature disciples. We have tried to make the habits relevant or accessible to people in each stage of their discipleship. The mindset you ought to keep throughout the book is "*What is the next step for me?*"

To make the book as useful as possible, it is written in such a way that you can mark it up, underline it, and come back to it time and again. It is written so that you can work through it as an individual, but it is also designed to be able to work through it with a group or in a discipling relationship (whether peer or mentor-based).

You certainly *can* read through the entire book at once (and that might not be a bad idea). It is really designed for you to digest a chapter at a time and begin to try to implement that habit in your life. Each chapter ends with a “Getting Started” and a “Cultivate and Commit” section to help you take the next step. If you do this each step of the way, you will have a robust plan in place by the time you make it to the end of this journey. Take your time through this book. Consider along the way how *you* can take the next step of faithfulness in following Jesus. There will be some things that you read and think, “I cannot do *that!*” That is okay. Do what you can. Do not try to do what you cannot do. Just take the next step. God will honor that.



Chapter 2

Read



The habit of Scripture
intake for the experience
of knowing God.

Some epiphanies occur in the most ordinary moments. One of those moments took place on a public bus in China when Emily and I were visiting my aunt and uncle. As we were navigating the city, I realized something—I could not read any of the signs. If I did not have my uncle to guide the way, I would have been totally lost in a foreign city. It was my first real appreciation for what it would be like to be illiterate.

Illiteracy may not mean that you are unable to survive in life, but it can mean you will not thrive. Reading is one of the most basic skills in life. Rates of literacy often determine whether communities or societies will flourish. While the literacy rate in America is quite high compared to some other parts of the world, our culture does suffer from a different kind of illiteracy—biblical illiteracy.

Many people in our country lack an understanding of the Bible. Could it be that the reason why so many within younger generations are walking away from the church is because they are rejecting a God that is not actually found in the Scriptures? They might *think* they know what the God revealed in the Bible is like, but they do not. They may believe that the God of the Bible is cruel, capricious, and unfair. But, without knowing the Scriptures, they will reject a God they are ignorant of.

Even worse, biblical ignorance can afflict those who attend church. Christians have more access to the Bible than ever before, yet many Christians know less of the Bible than previous generations of believers. We have the Bible always with us on our phones. We have audio Bibles and access to endless online Bible resources. Still, many Christians remain ignorant of the Bible's contents. Why?

Perhaps the greatest factor contributing to biblical illiteracy and ignorance is distraction. When the Bible becomes one more website to visit, an app to download, or a resource to consume, its message gets drowned out in the sea of content. Therefore, if we are going to

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flourish as followers of Jesus, we must move from distraction to desperation when it comes to the Scriptures. We must desperately long for the Scriptures, delighting in them as the Psalmist describes the blessed person: “His delight is in the law of the Lord” (Psalm 1:2).

Moving from distraction to desperate delight in the Scriptures is a process. It requires discipline: consistent habitual reading. But the goal is not to acquire mere knowledge of the Bible. The goal is to know the God of the Bible.

The Practice in Scripture

The Scriptures commend to us the core practice of Scripture reading for the Christian life. The story of Scripture, the testimony of Scripture, and the reality of Scripture as the revelation of Christ provide compelling motivation for the habit of reading Scripture.

The importance of reading Scripture is highlighted in the apostle Paul’s instruction to his protegee, Timothy. Timothy was a young pastor tasked with leading a church. To aid him, Paul wrote letters teaching him how to lead the church through difficult times. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul reminded Timothy that devotion to learning from the Scriptures is essential for a life of faithfulness to Jesus, a life shaped by the very Word of God.

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

While Timothy had taken in the Scriptures from his earliest days, Paul urged him to stay faithful in this habit because the Scriptures could make him “wise for salvation” (3:15). The Scriptures would strengthen him to continue following Christ because they are the very words of God; they are “breathed out by God” (3:16) Just as breath is left behind on a mirror when it is breathed on, so the words of Scripture were “breathed out” by God himself on the pages of Scripture. No wonder the Bible is profitable “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (3:16)! The power of the Scriptures was not just available to Timothy, it remains available for every believer in Jesus.

If we take time to reflect on the nature of the Scripture—it is the very Word of God—then the question we should ask ourselves is not really *should* I read the Bible more, but why would I not?

To emphasize the importance of reading God’s Word, we can scan through the story of the Bible to see how the Scriptures are described and the way biblical authors valued the Word of God. From the very beginning of time, God’s Word has been central. Creation begins with God speaking all things into existence. Ten times God says, “let there be . . .” and there was (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15, 20, 22, 24, 26). God’s Word has the power to bring into existence things that

did not exist. Later, God reveals himself to his people through another ten words, commonly known as the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1).¹⁰ Consider Moses' words about the uniqueness of knowing and relating to a God who reveals himself with words:

And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom.¹² Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.¹³ And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments [Lit. "Ten Words"], and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.¹⁴ And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess (Deuteronomy 4:11-14).

Unlike the pagan nations, which attempted to quantify their gods through stone statues, the Israelites heard only words: "The Lord spoke to you . . . you heard the sound of words . . . there was only a voice."

How incredible to hear the very voice of God. God is still a God who speaks to His people. So, are we listening? God is serious about his people knowing and depending on his word as if for their very survival. He tested Israel with hunger, providing manna every day so that they could learn this lesson, "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3).

¹⁰What we call the "Ten Commandments" are literally called the "Ten Words" in the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13).

Since God sustained Israel through his Word, God desired for knowledge of his word to permeate all facets of Israelite society. Parents were to teach God's word to their children throughout the day (Deuteronomy 6:7). Even the kings of Israel were to depend on God's Word for their leadership; they were instructed to write their own copies of the entire Torah (the first five books of the Bible, also known as the Books of the Law) (Deuteronomy 17:18). God intended for his Word to be the foundation of Israelite society.

Often, God's Word was neglected or ignored. At one point in Israel's history, the copies of God's word were entirely lost! Due to the disappearance of God's Word, Israelite society was marked by moral degradation and decay. It was only until Josiah discovered a copy of the Law and had it read to all the people that renewal came to Israel (2 Kings 22:8-23:25).

Later when Israelites returned from exile, Ezra had the people stand all day to hear the Law of God read (Nehemiah 8:1-12). God's Word was sacred and when it was read (and received with obedience) it led to blessing for the people. The book of Psalms described the person who was devoted to the Word of God as being blessed:

“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 in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, whose leaf does not wither, which yields its fruit in its season, whatever he does he prospers.”

The Psalmist likened the devoted student of God's Word to a flourishing tree, always drawing nourishment from life-giving streams of water.

Those who take in God’s Word continually will be blessed. They may not be blessed in worldly terms with wealth, possessions, and a life of ease. But those who delight in God’s Word will be blessed with what is most important: coming to know God as revealed in the Scriptures. True happiness comes when God’s Word is the foundational source of life. In other words, the point of revelation is relationship. God made Himself known to us with words so that we can understand, know, and love Him. We engage the Scriptures not so that we may know about God, but so that we might know and love Him. In this way, Scripture is the path to the blessed life because it leads us to God: the source of all blessing and life.

If this were not enough motivation, consider some of the ways Scripture speaks of itself:

- “As worth more than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.” (Psalm 119:72)
- “As a lamp to our feet and a light to our path” (Psalm 119:105).
- Like a burning fire in our bones that cannot be contained” (Jeremiah 20:9).
- “Living and active, sharper than any two edged sword . . . piercing soul and spirit . . . judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12).
- “As profitable . . .” (2 Timothy 3:16).
- “As living and abiding . . . and enduring forever.” (1 Peter 1:23-25).

The Scriptures are endlessly rich and they embody all of these qualities. The pages of the Bible contain the heart of God, the wisdom of God, and are themselves the very Word of God. If all those descriptions are true, why would we not make Scripture intake a daily core habit in our lives? If God really speaks through his Word, and if God’s Word is what brings life, and if it is the one thing that will last forev-

er, then why would we not devote ourselves to reading it and dwelling on it every day?

Allow God's words of instruction to Joshua to instruct us.

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 good success (Joshua 1:8).

Perhaps the most significant reason of all to read Scripture is the fact that within its pages, we encounter a living person, Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27; 44; John 5:39). In the Scriptures, we discover the Son of God, the Eternal Word who took on human flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14). Through reading the Bible, we are transformed by the Spirit as we behold the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians. 3:18). So let's get started!

Take a Step

Recently, I heard of a small Christian community in Iraq facing intense religious persecution. In their culture, it was rare for Christians to have their own Bible. In fact, it was dangerous to be found with one! Yet these Christians were so desperate to know the Word of God that they hid a Bible in a cave and would sneak out at night to bring it back to their gatherings to be read together. They considered reading the Bible sacred and were willing to risk their lives to do so. I find their mindset to be a striking contrast to my own tepid attitude toward the Scriptures. If they are willing to risk their lives to read God's Word, what am I missing if I am not willing to wake up a little earlier or turn off the TV to read?

As I look around my room right now, I can count at least five Bibles, not to mention that on my smartphone I can access any translation of the Scriptures that I want. So what's the problem? My desire.

As noted in the Introduction, people give themselves to what they love. So if I want to love God's Word, I must cultivate the habit of Bible reading. The more I actively read the Bible the more I will come to enjoy the Bible. The more I meditate on the Scriptures the more I will delight in them. The more Scripture fills my mind, the more I will think with a biblical mindset (Romans 12:2). While every one of us is in a different place in our experience and knowledge of the Bible, all of us need it for spiritual survival. Every one of us can take a next step when it comes to the habit of Scripture intake.

Habit 1: Read the Bible Daily

Growing up, my mom impressed upon me the importance of reading God's Word by gifting me a Bible and providing me with a little resource called *Our Daily Bread*. I remember as a nine year old turning on my reading light every night in my bed to read the Bible. While I read my Bible at night, every morning I would wake up and see my mom at the kitchen table reading her Bible. These practices helped reinforce in my mind the daily necessity of spending time in God's Word.

I am absolutely convinced that one of the main reasons I navigated the difficulties of high school and college was the core practice of daily Scripture reading. During difficult times, the Scriptures were a lifeline of encouragement and hope. During good times they were a source of great joy and pleasure. Admittedly, there were also many days when reading the Bible was un-exciting, dry, or merely routine. But the habit was inescapable and I could not be more grateful that it was cultivated and cemented in my life at a young age.

Today, I try to model the same practice for my children. My day starts early with time alone with God, reading and meditating on the Scriptures. Sometimes I follow a reading plan. Sometimes I work through a book of the Bible. Sometimes I read a devotional. Whatever plan I am using, I am always reading the Bible.

Some object to the idea of reading the Bible daily. “I don’t want it to become a checklist item,” they might think, or “I don’t want to be legalistic.” But no one ever thinks brushing their teeth or eating dinner every day is legalistic! We do those things because they are good, healthy, and nourishing. If I’m afraid to read the Bible daily out of fear of being legalistic, my heart may not be in the right place.

Jesus reinforced the priority of knowing the Bible when he was tempted by the Evil One. When faced with an offer to turn stones into bread, Jesus pointed out where real sustenance comes from, “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). If we are going to endure in our faith all the days of our lives, we need the Bible every day of our lives.

Perhaps before you read this book any further, you need to take your Bible and start reading. Resolve today to start the habit of reading the Bible daily. There are many Bible reading plans online to guide you, or you can begin by reading a chapter a day through a book of the Bible.

Habit 2: Meditate on the Word of God throughout the day

Have you ever read your Bible in the morning and by the time work starts you have totally forgotten what you read? Reading is great. And we need to read the Bible for *width*, to know the Bible’s big story. But we also need to meditate on the Scriptures for depth, to think deeply about the message of the Bible.

Unlike Eastern religious practices which seek for adherents to empty their minds, biblical mediation is concerned with filling the

mind with God's truth. God told Joshua to meditate on the Scriptures day and night (Joshua 1:8). Reflecting on God's instruction to Joshua, the Psalmist describes the blessed person as someone who "meditates day and night" on God's Word (Psalm 1:2). In the New Testament, Paul tells the Christians in Rome, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Elsewhere, Paul guides Christians to avoid temptation by "setting your mind on the things above," that is, God's truth (Colossians 3:2) and to "let the Word of God dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16).

Perhaps the idea of filling your mind with God's truth sounds great, but you wonder how to do that in a world filled with so many distractions. How do we cut through the noise of our world and focus our minds on the Scriptures? How do we keep the Bible readily at hand when we do not have a copy of the Scriptures in our hands? The answer to those questions lies in the practice of memorization.

Memorization fuels meditation, a deep thoughtfulness about God's Word and how it applies in your life. In my own life, I have seen the powerful effects of memorization. I can not tell you the amount of times that I have been anxious and the words of Scripture like "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" has helped calm me down (1 Peter 5:7). Or times when I was tempted to lash out at my children that the words of Ephesians 6:4 calmed my heart, "Fathers do not provoke your children to anger."

Even more than in dealing with temptation, meditating on Scripture functions as a way to get God's Word downtown from my head to my heart. Meditation functions the way a skillful commuter takes time to map out the best route from their office uptown to their downtown home. It takes careful consideration, experience, and time to do this well. Similarly, it takes thought, experience, and skill to learn how to apply the truths of Scripture in a way that moves it

from the cerebral uptown of Scripture engagement to the downtown experience of Scripture enjoyment.

There are numerous ways to develop the habit of Scripture meditation. Different personalities, preferences, and seasons will allow for different methods for meditation. Maybe you write a verse on a card that you look at throughout the day. Or maybe you journal, writing out a Scripture verse and your thoughts on it. In this season of my family's life, we spend part of our bedtime routine memorizing different passages with our kids. Each night we spend some time reviewing the verses we have learned and adding in one new verse a night. Over time, we are able to cover quite a bit of ground. One benefit of this nightly habit has been that my kids are not the only ones learning Scripture; I am too!

Maybe a next step for you is to start the practice of meditating on the Scripture. As the Puritan pastor Thomas Watson has said, "The reason that we often leave our Bible reading unchanged is because we have failed to warm our hearts at the fire of meditation." Meditation takes thoughtfulness. It takes focus. It takes deep consideration. It also takes time and mental discipline as our thoughts are easily prone to wander. In a world of perpetual distraction meditation is difficult, but it is the way of life and blessing.

Habit 3: Study the Bible Regularly

Kenny Barret scared me. Kenny was the most intimidating football player I ever faced, and as a college freshman, I had to face him every day in practice. Kenny was a 26-year-old married man and a monster on the football field. He would throw me around like a rag doll in practice. But one day he grabbed me before practice and he said, "DT, let's do a Bible study." He was not talking about attending one. He was talking about studying the Bible one-on-one in the locker room. Kenny taught me something that day. He taught me the prin-

principle and the importance of the habit of Bible study. He told me what a mentor had shared with him. “Read the Bible every day. Study the Bible once a week.” As we began to study in the locker room together, I realized Kenny was not an intimidating monster—he was a good and godly friend.

Maybe Bible study can sound as intimidating for you as facing Kenny Barret in practice was for me. It does not have to be. Even though Kenny looked intimidating, he was a good friend. So studying the Bible may sound daunting, but it will reap great rewards. It doesn’t matter where you are in your spiritual maturity, you can study the Bible. Studying the Bible is not easy, but it can be simple. You can do it! At its core you only need a few things: a few good questions, a few good tools, a little bit of time, and (ideally) a few good friends.

When I study the Bible I follow a simple method: SOIA. It stands for Survey, Observe, Interpret, Apply. This process guides all my Bible study—from personal Bible study to studying for preaching.

- **Survey** asks the big question: What is the overall context of this book of the Bible? Who was it written to? When? Why? What is it all about?
- **Observation** asks: What does it say?
- **Interpretation** asks: What does it mean?
- **Application** asks: What does it mean for my life?

One practice that I find incredibly useful is to print a copy of the text on a piece of paper so that I can mark it up and make notes in the margin. I take note of repeated words, write down attributes of God I observe, or note questions I might have along the way. Interacting with the text of Scripture this way makes the Word of God come alive in new and fresh ways.

You will also need some tools. One helpful tool is a Study Bible. A Study Bible is a special version of the Bible filled with explanatory notes to help you understand what you're reading. Two Study Bibles we recommend are the *ESV Study Bible* and the *Grace and Truth Study Bible*. You may also find using commentaries to be very helpful as well. Commentaries are books written by Christian scholars and pastors which provide in-depth study on a particular book of the Bible.

Here is perhaps the most difficult part of Bible study—and yet arguably the best part: you need time. You cannot rush studying. If you want the benefit of learning, you need to do the hard work of study. It is like sifting for gold. It takes time, but there are few joys like discovering gold for yourself in the pages of the Bible.

While individual Bible study is great, there is nothing like sharing that Bible study with others. We learn even more in community as we share what we've learned with others. Maybe a next step for you is to ask a few friends to join you in studying the Bible. For example, you could start up a discipleship group where you study the book of Philippians together. Or maybe you join an existing Bible study at the church. Either way, studying with others will amplify your learning and it will increase your enjoyment of the Scriptures.

Grounded in the Gospel

The Bible is a story and a message of good news (1 Peter 2:25). Too often, we can read our Bibles as a means of trying to secure more of God's favor, rather than as a way of experiencing the favor of God we already possess in Christ. If we base how we feel about our relationship with God on our performance of our habits, we will be sorely disappointed, especially when our life does not go the way we planned it.

I realized the importance of being gospel-centered in how I thought about my habits when my son was born. For the first time,

my routine of Bible reading was disrupted in a major way. Sometimes, I would wake up early and as soon as I opened my Bible, he would cry out and wake up needing care. At other times, I could not summon the strength to get out of bed due to the toll of sleep deprivation. What I realized is that my Bible reading habit did not grant me favor with God. God loved me no more or no less whether I got to read or not. Nonetheless, while it was incredibly freeing to rest in the grace of Jesus if I did not read, I found that prolonged seasons without the word left me feeling spiritually dry. I felt like David who prayed, “As the deer pants for water, so my soul longs for you O God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psalm 42:1-2). Thankfully, as with most things in life, the newborn stage is just that, a stage. With continued effort to “get in the word” combined with children growing older, it has become much easier to reestablish a morning reading habit.

So maybe for you, you need to hear the good news that God sees and knows about your season of life. Your efforts to read the word are

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valuable because Bible reading *is* God's favor; it is the way of hearing from and enjoying God. Sometimes life circumstances make it very difficult to engage God's Word consistently. But you must also realize that the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places will throw disruptions and distractions your way in an attempt to destroy your faith (Ephesians 6:10). It is easy to make excuses or just hope for a change of life's seasons. Yet, Satan would like nothing more than to separate you from the Scriptures for extended stretches. If you are failing in your Bible reading, do not despair. Do not give up. Fight against the power of darkness with the sword of the Spirit, God's Word (Ephesians 6:17). Every bit of investment in God's Word is worth it. Resolve to read! Resolve to meditate! Resolve to study! Take a step today!

Getting Started

Reading Scripture is an indispensable habit in the Christian life. As we follow Jesus on our journey we need to faithfully take next steps to “take in” God’s Word so that we can know and love God deeply. Here are some tips and ideas to get you started.

Next Step Ideas

- Prepare the night before. The battle for reading your Bible starts with getting to bed on time. Many good times with God are wasted streaming late into the night.
- Choose a place. Have a consistent place where you meet with God.
- Have a plan. A Scripture reading plan to follow is incredibly useful so that you’re not wondering what you’re going to read.
- Find a partner. Reading the Bible along with someone in a discipleship group, a learning group, or just a friend can be really helpful.
- Listen to the Bible. The ESV Bible app has an audio option where you can listen to the Bible being read. The Daily Audio Bible is another great tool. Listening to Scripture is a great option for car rides and commutes.
- Take up a Scripture memory plan. Use the “Core Verse” memory plan that we use at LBC. Request a set from the church office. You can also get the Fighter Verse Cards from Truth 78 or download the app. You could also memorize whole passages or Awana verses with your children.
- Read before you watch. Sometimes the reward of relaxing to watch TV can be leveraged to cultivate the habit of reading. For example, commit to reading for 20 minutes before turning on the TV at night.

Discussion Questions

1. Which aspect of this chapter did you find most encouraging or challenging? Why?
2. What particular temptations, challenges, or attitudes keep you from engaging the Scriptures?
3. Which of the three micro-habits do you most need to cultivate? How specifically will you commit to this practice?
4. How can I/we help encourage you in taking that step?
5. How does the gospel motivate your efforts to pray? How does the good news of the gospel assure where you see patterns of sin, weakness, or failure?

Cultivate and Commit

Cultivating a new way of life through these core practices begins with self-examination. Take some time to evaluate where you currently are in the implementation and development of these habits. Then begin to make commitments which will help you cultivate a life that follows Jesus.

Evaluate:

- How often do I read the Bible?
- Do I regularly meditate on the Word of God and think about it throughout the day?
- Have I committed to regular study of God's Word?

After prayerful reflection, consider which habit from the chapter you are going to develop as a keystone habit.

My Keystone Habit:

Each habit has three basic components: reminder, routine, and reward. Use the habits framework from the “How Habits Work” section to develop your keystone habit.

Reminder:

Routine:

Reward:

SAMPLE PLAN

My Keystone Habit: Daily Bible Reading

Reminder: Wake up, make coffee, and sit in comfy recliner.

Routine: Use Bible reading plan in back of Bible. Read chapter(s).

Reward: Text my good friend something I learned this morning.

Our habits show us what we love. They show us what we truly value.

Life is full of failed attempts to change. We might try to eat better, start exercising, become a kinder person, or spend more time with the family. But then we realize that things rarely change. Our change efforts experience setbacks. At times, we feel completely stuck, even in our relationship with God. *Walk Worthy* is about getting “unstuck” in your relationship with God. It is a book to help you *take the next step* in following Jesus.

Walk Worthy is a book about habits, exploring seven core practices for disciples of Jesus. This is a practical book about practical habits. It is an invitation to take the next step in your journey with Jesus. *Walk Worthy* is not about earning God’s favor; it is about walking in it. Wherever you are in your journey, you can take a next step in following Jesus.



Gather

Scripture

Prayer

Rest

Share

Serve

Fast

DAN TERRACCIANO is a pastor at Lincroft Bible Church in Lincroft, New Jersey. Dan and his wife, Emily have four children. His passion is to help people follow Jesus. He has the privilege of serving alongside his lifelong best friend with whom he co-authored this book.



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