

# Keeping the *Holy* in the *Holidays*

An ancient way of hearing God speak through the Bible

Trips often require a guide. Many of us look for maps or driving directions to help us get where we're going. Spiritual journeys can require direction, too.

How do we allow the Bible to be our guide? Reading the Bible and praying the Bible are two very different undertakings. Praying the Bible requires listening and silence to the Word of God in order to hear God speak.

The ancient Hebrews believed writing had sacred power. Words and letters connected them to something beyond their own circumstances. They found it miraculous that simple lines of ink could become sources of knowledge. They knew that Scripture could open doors to a direct relationship with God.

Today, we generally have lost this sacred understanding of reading. We read in a mechanical, consumer-oriented manner. We read to acquire information, to get what we want out of a book, and then move on.

Even the Bible has fallen prey to our carnivorous reading habits. We read the Bible to get religious information, to get "right answers," to confirm our own ideas about God, to supply us with weapons in our petty wars over doctrine and institutional law, to find support for our arguments with friends or foes. We force the Bible to conform to our own views rather than allowing the Bible to form us into God's people. But that is not the only way to read Scripture.

## Saint Benedict and Sacred Reading

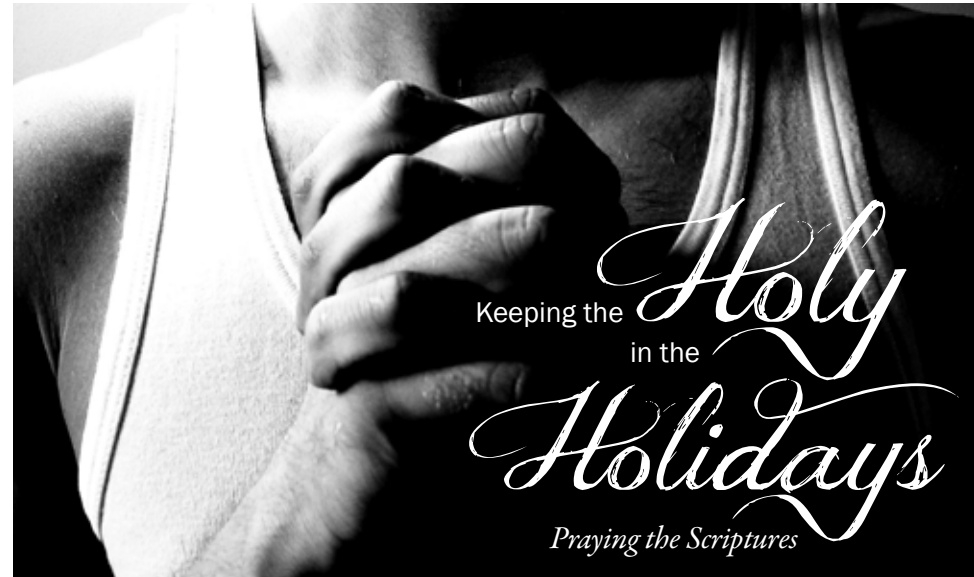
In sixth-century Italy, Saint Benedict understood that a life of solitary prayer would not work for most people; we need a stable spiritual community in order to advance in the life of faith. Benedict prescribed a prayer practice designed to cultivate contemplative listening. He believed that it's through this practice that we become aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds.

Benedict's monks did not own even one book; most of them were illiterate. They would listen to the words of Scripture, memorize them, and then "read" them back to themselves, for up to six hours a day.

This process takes seriously the notion that the Bible is the living Word of God. Through the Bible, God can speak directly to us in real time. If we learn to "incline the ear of our heart," we can learn to hear God's voice. To do this, we must to ruminate on – literally to "chew" or "digest" – the Word of God, much as a cow would chew its cud. This practice became a staple of monastic life for 1,500 years, and is a gift to us from the distant past.

*Text paraphrased from "Creating a Life with God" by Daniel Wolpert. Used with the author's permission. This book is highly recommended for further exploration of this simple, yet powerful, way to deepen your connection with God through prayer.*

  
Prince of Peace  
Lutheran Church



### Week 1 Gratitude

Nov 21 Psalm 92  
Nov 22 Luke 17:11-19  
Nov 23 Deut. 8:7-18  
Nov 24 Psalm 65  
Nov 25 1 Timothy 2:1-7  
Nov 26 Matthew 6:25-33  
Nov 27 Philippians 4:4-9

### Week 2 Hope

Nov 28 Isaiah 40:1-5  
Nov 29 Psalm 42  
Nov 30 Romans 8:18-27  
Dec 1 Isaiah 11:1-10  
Dec 2 Hebrews 6:13-20  
Dec 3 Psalm 33  
Dec 4 Isaiah 35

### Week 3 Peace

Dec 5 Isaiah 40:9-11  
Dec 6 Philippians 4:4-7  
Dec 7 Jeremiah 33:7-16  
Dec 8 Isaiah 42:1-9  
Dec 9 Zechariah 9:9-17  
Dec 10 2 Corinth. 1:2-5  
Dec 11 Isaiah 52:7-10

### Week 4 Joy

Dec 12 Habakkuk 3  
Dec 13 John 16:5-28  
Dec 14 Isaiah 55:9-13  
Dec 15 Psalm 66  
Dec 16 1 Peter 1:3-9  
Dec 17 Psalm 96  
Dec 18 Isaiah 12

### Week 5 Love

Dec 19 Zephaniah 3:14-20  
Dec 20 Psalm 89:1-4  
Dec 21 Ephesians 2:1-10  
Dec 22 Isaiah 9:6-7  
Dec 23 Romans 8:28-39  
Dec 24 John 3:1-21  
Dec 25 1 John 4:13-21

### Week 6 Promise

Dec 26 Revelation 21  
Dec 27 John 14:1-7  
Dec 28 Romans 3:21-26  
Dec 29 2 Corinth. 1:18-22  
Dec 30 Revelation 22

**Praying Through the Holidays** - Join Pastor Claire to experience four types of prayer practices at one of these classes:

Wed, Nov 30; 1:00 - 2:30 p.m.; Community Room;  
Wed, Dec 7; 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.; Room 200 (CLC);  
Sun, Dec 11; 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.; Room 200

# What you hold in your hands is an invitation

It's an invitation to practice what we learned in the *Making Sense of Scripture* sermon series. It's an invitation to hear the voice of the One who speaks out of every page. It's an invitation to grow in your love for God by reading and praying the Bible.

Here you'll find a 40 day reading plan divided into weekly themes. The plan begins on November 21, but jump in whenever you're able. And if you miss a day, no worries! Just pick up the next day.

You'll find a way to read and pray the Bible. You'll be amazed at how this simple, but powerful, ancient practice allows us to hear God speak through the Bible. Most new practices feel a little awkward at first, but I urge you to stick with it. It won't be long before you reap the rich rewards of this ancient practice.

It is my prayer that these 40 days will fan the flames of your faith, igniting in you a new passion for reading the Bible in a way that challenges, comforts, stimulates and grows you. I'll be on the journey with you, so let's share what we're hearing as we read together.

*Moving upward, inward and outward together,*  
Pastor Jeff

## Steps in a Living Conversation

This is a living conversation between you and God, with the same rhythms as a conversation with another person. If we are talking with a friend and we constantly interrupt, or never say anything, then the conversation has little value. A rich, lively conversation includes times of listening and times of responding, times of speech and times of silence.

**Step 1: Listening/Reading** Choose a passage from Scripture. Although any passage will do, a psalm, a story about Jesus, or one of the poetic passages from a prophet works very well. For example, try Mark 1:14-20 or Isaiah 40:1-5. Read the passage twice. Don't get caught up in the literal meaning of the Scripture; God might use the passage to speak to you about something completely unrelated to its literal content.

Listen instead for the word or phrase that catches your attention. Listen for a word that tugs at you. Silently focus on that word or phrase. Repeat it a few times, and let it sift through your heart and mind. God is calling to you through the text; which words is God using? Repeat those words to yourself. Allow them to resonate within you and draw you into the next phase of the prayer.

**Step 2: Meditation/Pondering** As you focus on your word or phrase, pay attention to the thoughts and feelings it evokes. What images, thoughts, or memories come to mind? You have left the confines of the original passage and are floating freely. God can take you anywhere. Perhaps a memory is stirred, or an unresolved situation is revealed. As you encounter these images, thoughts, and feelings, savor them.

Repeat your word, and allow yourself to listen. God has something to say to you. This is the heart of this prayer: Jesus hears you, and speaks exactly what you need through the word that resonates with you. Allow your mind to seek the voice of God. You may want to speak to God, signaling the next step.

**Step 3: Prayer/Responding** After listening to God in the stillness, we are moved to respond. But don't be too quick or impulsive. Wait for the words to arise from deep within. Let yourself be aware of what you want to say to God. If your mind has wandered into a long-forgotten memory, you might need to ask why God has shown this to you. If you have recalled some pain you've caused another, you might seek forgiveness. Maybe God has shown you a time of great joy, and you simply want to express your gratitude. Allow your voice to be clear and use few words.

Any good conversation consists of both speaking and listening. After you speak to God, listen. Go back to your images and allow God to answer you again. What has your prayer awakened in you? Maybe you've found an area of your life that needs work. Maybe you are grateful for something, and wish to express that gratitude. Maybe you feel called to a new course of action. Whatever you sense, don't rush the prayer. Continue to wait and listen as God forms your prayer in your heart. Give God the room to speak, to become real and active and alive in you.

**Step 4: Contemplation/Resting** Every conversation eventually comes to an end. Perhaps your allotted time for prayer is over, or maybe you just notice that the prayer has come to a close. You have enough new information, you need to rest in the stillness and examine your new view of the world, or God knows that you can absorb no more. You have nothing left to say, and God, too, has fallen silent.

This is the moment of rest, a time to look back over the prayer experience. Look at your new view of the world, of yourself, and of God. Maybe this new view contains answers, a new direction, or something concrete to respond to. Maybe you are left with new questions. Either way, God has spoken to you, and this is something to be grateful for. Acknowledge this gratitude with a simple "thank you." If God has called you to a specific action, ask for God's blessing as you commit yourself to it.

Or perhaps you have heard nothing. You feel frustrated and angry because all you thought about during your prayer time was your shopping list or your job, or something else seemingly unrelated to God.

In our society that places so much value on accomplishment and getting things done, this experience is maddening. But such "failure" is normal. Prayer is not a product, it is a relationship. Even if you did not experience the wonderful event you imagined, God knows your intention. You wanted to spend time with God, and you did, even though the experience is still a mystery to you. Express your frustration to God, ask for help and for the strength to try again. God does not require that we're successful, just faithful.