

# INTRODUCTION TO IMMANUEL JOURNALING

*Journaling practice to engage in response to Bible reading that helps us to open our hearts to God and hear his loving concern for us.*

## **PART 1 - SPIRITUAL PRACTICES VISION RECAP**

It is our prayer in this season that we would be abiding missionaries – that we would know how dearly beloved we are by the Father and remain (abide) in that love throughout our days. Then, from a place of deep restedness in the Father's love, that we would be motivated to share the good news of his love in word and deed with our friends, neighbors, and coworkers.

Spiritual practices to help us to do that – to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did. As a church and as a community, we are collectively engaging in several spiritual practices this year. This quarter, we are focusing on Bible reading as a practice to help us be with Jesus. After exploring a form of Bible reading in our Citizens Community tonight, we will then be invited to engage the practice on our own this month and reflect on how it's going in our Huddles.

## **PART 2 - BIBLE READING TO BE WITH JESUS**

Have you ever found yourself "scrolling" through the Bible like a social media feed, looking for highlights that jump out to you? Do you sometimes approach the Bible like a DIY or how-to blog, hoping to solve a specific problem? Or, do you ever read Scripture like a news report; scanning the text for interesting facts that may seem salient to your life? Or maybe, if the idea of Bible reading is new to you, you feel unsure where to start with this ancient book?

You're not alone! Shaped by the information age in which we swim, we often approach the Bible as a source of information rather than an opportunity to encounter Jesus. Robert Mulholland, in his book *Invitation to a Journey*, helps us see what this kind of "informational reading" of the Bible looks like. He writes, "When we do information reading, we exercise almost total and complete control over the text. We read the text with our own agenda in place, knowing in advance what we expect to receive, what problems we want the text to solve for us. We read the text analytically, viewing it as an object over which we as subjects exercise our control, to ensure that it conforms more or less comfortably to our desires and purposes. We read the text as rapidly as possible, to amass as much information as we can in as

little time as possible. The final goal of informational reading is our mastery of the text for the fulfillment of our purposes."

Mulholland goes on to say that reading the Bible for information is not necessarily wrong. We do need to study the text, analyze it to understand its meaning, and trust it as historically-accurate news. Yet, because of how we have been shaped by our information-seeking culture, we can easily approach the Bible with an air of authority, deciding what we think we need to hear and what will be helpful for us. In doing so, we miss the opportunity to receive Scripture as God's Holy Word to us, to sit humbly under it, and let God speak to us with His authority. We miss the opportunity to encounter God Himself.

The ancient practice of Biblical meditation can help us fight our tendency to control what we read. As we learn or relearn to engage the Bible with a humble heart and open ears, we can expect to encounter our Holy God in it. Rather than focusing on "informational reading", we must read with the eyes of our heart open to encounter Jesus; to be with Him through His Word. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "...just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all. That is meditation."

As His own death approached, Jesus comforted his disciples by promising that He would send His Spirit, the Helper, who would be with them. Jesus says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:18) He goes on: "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (vs. 25-26)

Knowing that He would no longer be with them in the same way after His death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus promised that His Father would send the Holy Spirit to be with them. The Spirit would remind them of Jesus' words for them. He's promising that in place of His physical presence, He would continue to be with them and form them through the Spirit of God using the Word of God. In other words, the primary way Jesus promises to be with us today is through the Spirit of God. A primary way the Spirit works is through the Bible to remind us of Jesus' word for us. Our hope when we read and meditate on the Bible is that the Spirit would work through it to bring us into the presence of Jesus, to hear His Word for us, and to be changed by Him.

In her book, *Sacred Rhythms*, Ruth Haley Barton writes, "When we engage the Scriptures for spiritual transformation...we engage not only our mind but also our heart, our emotions, our body, our curiosity, our imagination, and our will. We open ourselves to a deeper level of understanding and insight that grows out of and leads us into our personal relationship with the One behind the text. And it is in the context of relational intimacy that real life change takes place." (pg. 50)

This is the ultimate goal of reading the Bible: relational intimacy! To know the love of Jesus for you.

Real transformation takes place in the context of a relationship. Neurotheologian Jim Wilder has written extensively on the way God has designed our character to be formed in relation to our brain. Amazingly, but not surprisingly, brain science and Scripture align perfectly, both revealing that our mind and character are formed primarily by the relational attachments we make. In other words, we become like who we are attached to.

This is why reading Scripture just to analyze it and study it alone will not lead to transformation. God has designed us to be transformed by the Spirit helping us to encounter Jesus *relationally* through His Word. Real transformation will come when we read the Bible as a way of pursuing what Wilder calls a "mutual mind" with God. In other words, when we read Scripture to encounter God relationally and receive His love for us in the intimacy of real relationship, we will be transformed.

If you've been reading Scripture for a long time, but experiencing very little transformation, it may be that you have been reading it primarily for information, rather than as an opportunity to encounter God. Through Bible meditation, God is inviting you into a real relationship to be changed by Him.

### **PART 3 - IMMANUEL JOURNALING**

For this month's practice, continue using the Lectio Divina method of Bible meditation, introduced last month. Remember to slow down, ask the Spirit to help you see Jesus, and enter into the text to encounter God and the Word He has for you.

Next, pick one day after your Bible meditation time to try Immanuel Journaling as a practice that flows out of your Bible reading. Although Immanuel Journaling isn't a

Bible reading technique or strategy, the intent is to do it in response to the Scriptures that you have engaged with through Lectio Divina.

Immanuel (literally, "God with us") Journaling is a method of journaling that helps us to open up our hearts to God and hear his loving concern for us. Essentially, you are writing a letter to God and then writing out His response to you, based on what you know of Him from His Word and the prompting of His Spirit. It's important to engage in Immanuel Journaling in the context of a regular habit of Bible reading and meditation. As you reflect on your current situation and need, the Word of God with you and in you will shape how you think about God's response to you.

1. Set aside about 30 minutes in a quiet space where you can be still and engage in this practice. Turn off your phone (or put it in airplane mode), take a few deep breaths to slow yourself down, and open the pages of a physical Bible.
2. Practice Bible meditation using the Lectio Divina. (15-20 minutes)
3. Practice Immanuel Journaling, detailed below, using a notebook or journal (10-15 minutes).
4. After you do this, it will be important to talk with your Huddle, a friend, or a spouse about what it seems like God is saying through His Word and by His Spirit.

## IMMANUEL JOURNALING<sup>3</sup>

After spending 15-20 mins meditating on God's Word using Lectio Divina, practice Immanuel Journaling using the prompts below. Let the Word of God shape what you write as "God's response."

### *Write Your Prayer*

**Dear Father (or other name for God)** \_\_\_\_\_,

**I need your help with** (briefly describe a specific situation of need)...

**I appreciate that you** (e.g., are emotionally present for me, empowering me, etc.)...

### *Write God's Response*

**Dear** \_\_\_\_\_ **(Your Name)** \_\_\_\_\_,

**I see you in this situation and notice your physical demeanor of** (e.g. being busy, tossing and turning in bed, clenching your jaw, slumping your shoulders, crying)...

**I hear what you are saying** (out loud and/or in your mind)...

**I understand that you're feeling** (e.g. sad, angry, afraid, hurt, lonely, shame, guilt, glad)...

**I realize this is really big for you because you want or long for...**

**I'm glad to be with you and I'm proud of you for your** (e.g. vulnerability, courage, kindness, perseverance, honesty, etc.)...

**I want to encourage you and help you by** (e.g. a Scripture promise)

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from spiritual formation guides written by Ken Flower & Amy Lathrop at Doxa Church.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from the work of Jim Wilder and Sungshim Loppnow by Bill Gaultiere ([www.soulshpherd.org](http://www.soulshpherd.org)). Taught in the book *Joyful Journey* by Jim Wilder, Anna Kang, John Loppnow, and Sunshim Loppnow.