

**Hillcrest Adult Education (Fall 2022): Faith in Action**  
**Walk 2: Listening to God – Prayerfully Reading for Transformation**  
**Romans 12: 1-8**

Many Christians keep a daily practice of reading a portion of scripture while praying conversationally over the passage. The follower comes to the Lord each day honest about what is happening in the inner self, in relationships, and in the cares of life. Reading the passage, the follower finds that certain words or phrases stand out as a message of comfort, conviction, or clarity relevant to personal, current life experiences. Particular words or phrases draw the follower in. These salient words and phrases spark meditation. In quiet contemplation, the follower experiences the loving Lord guiding them toward transformation. As the time of focused prayer ends, the Lord's presence, having bathed the soul in light, remains palpable. The follower remains still, experiencing the quiet loving Presence.

In Walk 2, what happens for many Christians in the practice of private prayerful reading of scripture will be experienced collectively as together the church reads, ponders, prays, and sits with the words of Romans 12:1-8. While Jesus reminds us to not practice acts of righteousness, such as prayer, fasting, and giving to impress others, he also demonstrates the practice of praying with right motives with fellow believers. We see Jesus praying with his disciples that unity and love be in those who believe and who would come to believe in him (John 17). We see Peter and John praying with their friends for boldness to continue to speak the word under persecution (Acts 4:23-31). We see many believers praying together at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. (Acts 12:6-12). In Walk 2, we pray together as the church for the Lord's will in transforming us to live consistent with Romans 12:1-8.

The goal in Walk 2 is to collectively read scripture with a quiet inquisitive spirit, being attentive to the way the scripture connects to the inner being and outer life and to share together in these experiences. We begin by surrendering our will while inviting the Lord's will in our lives. Together we ask, "May the Spirit of the Lord renew our minds as we listen with our hearts." Prayerfully, we adopt the inner attitude of David when he said "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:23-24). We become focused, attentive, and inquisitive as we enter into prayerful reading of scripture for transformation.

This type of spiritual practice is often spoken of through the metaphor of eating food.

- **Reading Scripture** – Taking a bite of food involves reading a short portion of the Bible.
- **Meditating on Scripture** – Chewing the food involves spending time in quiet, sitting with the passage with an open, receptive heart that trusts the Holy Spirit to work through the words of scripture. A word or phrase may resonate as if it jumps off the page. The follower might identify with a place in the Bible scene or a person in the story or might connect the passage to a personal life experience. It is possible that in pondering, at first one might find that nothing resonates. That is okay. Later in the day, a phrase from the reading may suddenly be front and center, demanding attention.

In the meditative portion of the practice, as related to the scripture reading, the key question is “What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on me?”

- **Praying in Conversation with the Lord** – Savoring the taste of the food involves talking with God about the feelings and inner experiences that arise from the reading. One is speaking authentically with God about what comes up in reading the scripture. Some will pray by speaking aloud; some will pray quietly; some will pray by journaling.

In the focused praying part of this practice, the key questions are “What am I feeling?” and “What specific situation in my life today relates?”

- **Contemplating the Presence of the Lord** – Digesting, that is, having the food become a part of the body, involves taking in the experience of the loving presence of the Lord. The experience changes one inside and out. What begins as reading scripture becomes action consistent with the scripture and with the character of the Lord.

The key questions regarding contemplation are “What is Christ’s personal invitation to me from the Scripture?” And, “What am I experiencing of the Lord as I read this Scripture?”

The practice of prayerfully reading for transformation is not intended to replace studying commentaries, lexicons, and scholarly sources for information, but rather adds to the practice of intellectual study an equally valuable practice of tuning into inner experiences and emotions that connect one to the reading and to the Lord. The temptation to only analyze the scripture is strong. To sit in prayer, focused, attentive, and questioning opens one to experiencing the Lord as present and transforming.

In Walk 2, we sit together with Romans 12:1-8 as we would sit and enjoy a good meal. As our class, we come listening together in the presence of the Lord. Our process involves three iterations of the following: the facilitator presenting a question, the reading of Romans 12:1-8, silent meditation with prayer (which can include journaling), and sharing with others. A facilitator guides the process prayerfully. The facilitator begins with prayer and transitions into each next step with more words of prayer. The experience of the Walk is continuous prayer through the following:

- Inquisitiveness—the question prompt from the facilitator;
- Reading—Romans 12:1-8;
- Prayerful silence for about 5-7 minutes allowing meditation and talking with the Lord/journaling—longer silences work with people used to the process;
- Quiet, peaceful attentiveness to the presence of the Lord, who is Love.
- Follow the experience with sharing a word, a sentence, and then, a comment.

#### **Tips for Facilitating a Group’s Prayerful Reading of Scripture for Transformation**

- Ask that all phones be turned off or set on airplane mode if they are to be used for Bible reading.
- Be sure everyone has a pen and paper; people are likely to want to write something down as they listen to the scripture and are in prayer.

- Preempt worries by explaining, “This process may feel new. It is okay. If you have a moment of wondering what to do, just wait silently. Keep listening to my voice. I will be guiding you as we go along.”
- It is important that the facilitator be good at tolerating silence. Discomfort is a natural starting place. Allow time for the experience to shift. In the quiet, most people will move from discomfort to meditation to prayer to contemplation of the presence of the Lord.
- It is best to avoid interrupting the meditative experience with many instructions. Instead help deepen the experience by sincerely praying through transitions aloud in continuity and guidance.
- The Readings of Romans 12:1-8
  - Reading 1: We are using the English Standard Version read aloud by the first half of the class while the second half listens.
  - Reading 2: We are using the Common English Bible read aloud by the second half of the class while the first half listens.
  - Reading 3: We are asking people to read Romans 12:1-8 silently from their own personal favorite version of the Bible.
- Say, “If you need to jot anything down as we read or in the silence that follows a reading, feel free to do so.”
- State the appropriate question prompt before each of the three readings as follows. Do not read them all at once at the beginning.
  - Reading 1: “As we read, ask: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on me?”
  - Reading 2: “As we read, ask: What do I feel? What specific situation in my life today relates?”
  - Reading 3: “As we read, ask: What is Christ’s personal invitation to me from the Scripture?” Or, “What am I experiencing of the Lord as I read this Scripture?”
- The invitation to share after the silence and the allowable length of the response follows. Having people write a word, a sentence, or comments as journaling is an excellent alternative to sharing aloud.
  - **Time 1 = one word:** “In only one word or phrase without further explanation, please share the word or phrase the Holy Spirit is impressing on you with this reading.”
  - **Time 2 = one sentence:** “After this second reading, in only one sentence, please tell the answer to “What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates?”
  - **Time 3 = one full comment:** “What is Christ’s personal invitation to you from the Scripture? And/or, “What are you experiencing of the Lord as you read this Scripture?”
- Keep the process light and joyful. Some people will likely get off track in answering and fall into the comfortable practiced skill of exegesis of scripture. Gently stop them so you don’t run out of time. Move on to the next person’s briefer on-track answer and after class return to the conversation with the person who needed more coaching.

**THEME: FAITH IN ACTION**  
**SERIES: LISTENING TO GOD**  
**Walk 2: Readings of Romans 12:1-8**

In the third reading of the passage, we will each use our own favorite version of the Bible. It may help to get your favorite version opened to Romans 12:1-8 now. You may set your Bible to the side until the third reading. The other versions we are using are printed in our handout.

**Time One**

- Half of the group will read aloud in unison. The reading should be expressive and heartfelt.
- As we read, ask: “What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on me?”
- Let’s pray together: “May the Spirit of the Lord renew our minds as we listen with our hearts.”

Romans 12:1-8 (English Standard Version)

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;

the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

**Silence.**

**Share.** After Time 1, in writing or with the group, **share one word**: “In only one word or phrase without further explanation, please share the word or phrase the Holy Spirit is impressing on you with this reading.”

## Time Two

- The remaining portion of the group who did not read the first time will read the following aloud in unison, with expressiveness. The reading should be expressive and heartfelt.
- As we read, ask: “What do I feel? What specific situation in my life today relates?”
- Let’s pray together: “May the Spirit of the Lord renew our minds as we listen with our hearts.”

Romans 12:1-8 (Common English Bible)

“So, brothers and sisters, because of God’s mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service.

Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you.

We have many parts in one body, but the parts don’t all have the same function.

In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.

We have different gifts that are consistent with God’s grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith.

If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching.

If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.”

### **Silence.**

**Share.** After Time 2, in writing or with the group, **share one sentence:** “What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates?”

### **Time Three**

- We will each silently read the passage in our own favorite version of the Bible. As we read, ask: “What is Christ’s personal invitation to me from the Scripture?” Or, “What am I experiencing of the Lord as I read this Scripture?”
- Let’s pray together: “May the Spirit of the Lord renew our minds as we listen with our hearts.”

Romans 12:1-8 (Each of us reads silently in our own favorite version.)

### **Silence.**

**Share.** After Time 3, in writing or with the group, **share one full comment:** “What is Christ’s personal invitation to you from the Scripture? Or “What are you experiencing of the Lord as you read this Scripture?”