RESOURCED

Engaging with Scripture for everyday faith



Resourced: Engaging with Scripture

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A note on the quotations

All quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Each box gives a longer passage for context; the verse or verses referred to in the answer beside it are shown in bold.

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How Scripture resources everyday faith

The Bible is not just a book of rules, and it is not simply a book of answers to be looked up when we get stuck; it is where a relationship happens. In it God speaks to us – in story and psalm, argument and letter – and we answer back with our lives. Read that way, scripture is like a chisel in the hands of a woodworker. Wood cannot be rushed or forced: the carver studies the grain, works with it rather than against it, and slowly a shape emerges that was there all along. That is what scripture does in us. It helps us find the beauty in the grain of our own lives, and it carves out new ways of experiencing God – not by forcing us into a shape, but by working patiently with what is already there.

It is also a tool for making sense of the world. Scripture teaches us a way of seeing: to ask who is being overlooked, where mercy is needed, what things look like from God's point of view. And people who read it regularly find they start carrying it around with them. A phrase surfaces in a hospital waiting room. A psalm sits like an earworm in our mind becoming a soundtrack to the day. A story quietly changes how we see an argument. The words are stored up long before the moment comes when we need them.

That is exactly what happens in the wilderness when Jesus is tempted. Three times Jesus draws from the treasure trove and answers with the scripture he learned long before: 'It is written...' The passage below shows him doing it. This booklet asks where our own 'it is written' comes from. Where do we turn when we are sad? Where do we turn when we are angry? And which passage is core to who we are?

[1]Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. [2]He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. [3]The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." [4]**But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"**

...

[10]Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! **for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"** [11]Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Matthew 4:1-4, 10-11 (NRSV)

1. Where do you turn in Scripture when you are sad?

We often feel that we cannot or should not feel Sadness. People can be well meaning when they 'cheer up, it is all part of God's plan,' but often that causes us to feel worse! However, it is one of the subjects that the Bible is most honest about. The psalmists were not embarrassed by grief: they brought it to God in full, and their anguished prayers have become scripture. So it should not surprise us that when readers reach for the Bible in low moments, they reach for different things. The three below use it in three different ways - one for a promise, one for company in the dark, one for permission to cry - and none of them reads the Bible to be talked out of being sad.

The lifelong Psalm

[1] **I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where will my help come?** [2]**My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.** [3]He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. [4]He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. [5]The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. [6]The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. [7]The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. [8]The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.

Psalm 121 (NRSV)



Psalm 121 - 'I lift up my eyes to the hills.' My mother taught it to me as a child, one verse a night at bedtime, and I have never unlearned it. I have said it in hospital corridors, at gravesides, in the middle of the night when sleep would not come. What I love is that it does not pretend the hills are not frightening: it looks straight at them and asks where help will come from - and then answers its own question. The sadness is still there when I finish, but it has been re-arranged. I know where I am looking now.

The honest one

[1]Lord God of my salvation, when, at night, I cry out in your presence, [2]let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry. [3]For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol...

[13]But I, O Lord, cry out to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you. [14]O Lord, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your face from me?...

[18]You have caused friend and neighbour to shun me; **my companions are in darkness.**

Psalm 88:1-3, 13-14, 18 (NRSV)



Psalm 88. Most people do not know it is in there, because it is the one psalm that never brightens up - no happy ending, no 'but God', it just finishes in the dark. A friend showed it to me during a really bad patch, and it was the first time the Bible sounded like my actual head. I cried the first time I read it, which surprised me. I do not read it to feel better; I read it because it proves God can handle me being exactly where I am. Somebody prayed this prayer, and the church has kept it in the book for three thousand years - so there is room in the faith for my worst nights too.

The two-word answer

[32]When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." [33]When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. [34]He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." [35]**Jesus began to weep.** [36]So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

John 11:32-36 (NRSV)



John 11:35 - 'Jesus wept.' Two words in most Bibles. When Dad died I could not manage anything longer than that; I had tried the big comfort passages and they just felt like noise. This one is different, because it is set at a funeral: Jesus stands at the graveside of someone he loves, watches the sisters crying, and cries too. He does not tell them to be strong and he does not explain anything - he weeps first, and raises Lazarus afterwards. So when I am missing Dad, at a funeral or just at home on an ordinary afternoon, I remember that tears are not a failure of faith. If Jesus wept, then weeping must be allowed.

YOUR TURN

Do any of these reflections chime with your own experience?

Did you find anything in these reflections challenging?

What passage is your go to when you are sad?

2. Where do you turn in Scripture when you are angry?

Anger is the emotion Christians are most often taught to suppress. We are very good at pretending we are fine! But scripture is full of anger, and God is not frightened of it. What the Bible does is give anger somewhere to go – into prayer, into argument, into prophecy – so that it burns rather than scalds. The three readers below handle it in three different ways: one pauses, one complains, one aims. None of them pretends the anger away, because buried anger does far more damage than prayed anger.

The pause before speaking

[3]But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him. [4]**When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent.** [5]Offer right sacrifices, and trust the Lord.

Psalm 4:3-5 (NRSV)



Psalm 4:4 - 'When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent.' It has become a check on me. Notice it does not say 'do not be angry' - God is not frightened of our anger - it says do not let the anger do the talking. So when something has got my back up, I read it, then I stay quiet and let it sit overnight, and by morning the email I was going to send, or the thing I was going to say, usually looks different. Half the time I still need to say something - but something measured, not the 2am version. The psalm does not put the fire out; it stops me waving it around.

The complaint that is prayer

[2]**O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?**
[3]Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. [4]So the law becomes slack, and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous; therefore judgment comes perverted.

Habakkuk 1:2-4 (NRSV)



Habakkuk 1 - 'O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?' I love that the Bible does not tidy anger up. Habakkuk stands there and says, in effect: God, this is unjust, and you are doing nothing about it. And God does not zap him for it - he answers, and the argument carries on for three whole chapters. That did something to me. It taught me that anger at unfairness can itself be a form of prayer, that God would rather have my fury than my polite silence. I still end up where Habakkuk ends up - trusting - but I get there out loud, on my own terms.

The anger that aims true

[21]I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. [22]Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them, and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. [23]Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. [24]**But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.**

Amos 5:21-24 (NRSV)



Amos 5 - 'Let justice roll down like waters.' When I am angry about something I think God should be angry about too, this is my passage. It is a fierce one: God rejects the worship of people whose lives are unjust - the festivals, the offerings, the songs, all of it refused. That reminds me that anger is not automatically unspiritual; the prophets were furious, and it was God's fury before it was theirs. But the passage also does a health check on my anger. Amos aims it at the injustice itself, which makes me ask whether mine is aimed there too - or just at the person in the next pew who annoyed me.

YOUR TURN

Do any of these reflections chime with your own experience?

Did you find anything in these reflections challenging?

What passage is your go to when you are angry?

3. What passage is core to who you are?

Most of us do not choose our core passage; we discover, somewhere along the way, that it has chosen us. It is the one we heard at the right moment, and it quietly becomes load bearing – shaping how we pray, how we decide, how we see ourselves. The three passages below have outlasted decades: confirmation, bereavement, ordinary Tuesday mornings and, in one case, a funeral that has not happened yet. They are very different – one about being held, one about being made new, one about being known – but each reader can tell you exactly when it became theirs.

The confirmation choice

[35]Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [36]As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." [37]No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38]**For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, [39]nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Romans 8:35-39 (NRSV)



Romans 8:38-39 - 'Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God.' I chose it at my confirmation, aged sixteen, mostly because a youth leader had said it was hers - and it has never let go of me since. Whatever a year has thrown at us, that list near the start seems to cover it: death, life, things present, things to come, height, depth, anything else in all creation. It has been read out at every family crisis since, and it is the passage I have asked to be read at my funeral. Somewhere along the way it stopped being something I chose and became something that chose me.

The morning mercy

[21]But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: [22]**The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; [23]they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.** [24]"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." [25]The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. [26]It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Lamentations 3:21-26 (NRSV)



Lamentations 3:22-23 - 'His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.' It is a strange place to find comfort, right in the middle of a book of grief - and I think that is exactly why it works. The writer finds these words in the rubble, not despite it. I say it while I sip my first cup of tea most mornings; some days it feels true, and some days I say it anyway and let it catch up with me. Either way it reframes the day before it starts: whatever yesterday was - the words I got wrong, the things that went badly - this morning starts fresh.

The named and known

[1]But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; **I have called you by name, you are mine.** [2]When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. [3]For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

Isaiah 43:1-3 (NRSV)



Isaiah 43:1 - 'I have called you by name, you are mine.' The bit that gets me is 'called you by name'. Not 'the faithful' in general, not 'whoever happens to be listening' - me, by name. It matters that these words were first spoken to people in exile: they are addressed to people whose world has fallen apart and who have begun to wonder whether they have been forgotten. On the days I feel like I am just going through the motions - filling a seat, saying the words - that is the verse that says otherwise. I am known here, by name, and I am not going anywhere.

YOUR TURN

Do any of these reflections chime with your own experience?

Did you find anything in these reflections challenging?

What passage is core to who you are?

Why these questions?

Because behind all three sits the question Jesus was asked in Matthew's Gospel: which is the greatest commandment? His answer – love God, and love your neighbour – is what all this reading is finally for. Not knowledge for its own sake, but love: of God, and of the people we meet.

> [37]He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' [38]This is the greatest and first commandment. [39]And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' [40]**On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."**
>
> **Matthew 22:37-40 (NRSV)**

Where to look - some passages to try

This list is not a test, and it is far from complete – it is simply somewhere to start. If one reference catches your eye, read the whole passage, not just one verse: context is where these words come alive. And if the passage that is core to you is not on this list, wonderful – that is exactly the kind of answer we are hoping for.

When you are sad

Psalm 6 - a prayer from a sickbed - honest exhaustion

Psalm 23 - the Lord is my shepherd, through the darkest valley

Psalm 34:18 - the Lord is near to the brokenhearted

Psalm 42-43 - as the deer longs for streams of water - twice-told sadness

Psalm 56:8 - you have kept count of my tossings; my tears in your bottle

Psalm 88 - the dark psalm - no happy ending, and still a prayer

Psalm 121 - I lift up my eyes to the hills

Psalm 130 - out of the depths I cry to you

Isaiah 41:10 - do not fear, for I am with you

Lamentations 3:22-23 - mercies new every morning

Matthew 11:28-30 - come to me, all who are weary

John 11:35 - Jesus began to weep

Revelation 21:1-4 - he will wipe away every tear

When you are angry

Psalm 4:4 - be angry, but ponder it on your beds, and be silent

Psalm 13 - how long, O Lord? - the classic complaint

Psalm 37:8-9 - refrain from anger, and forsake wrath

Psalm 55 - anger at betrayal - and casting the burden on the Lord

Psalm 137 - by the waters of Babylon - the rawest anger in the Bible

Proverbs 15:1 - a soft answer turns away wrath

Proverbs 29:11 - a fool gives full vent to anger; the wise hold it back

Ecclesiastes 7:9 - do not be quickly provoked - anger lodges in fools

Habakkuk 1:2-4 - how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?

Jonah 4 - Jonah's fury under the bush - and God's gentle question

Amos 5:24 - let justice roll down like waters

Ephesians 4:26-27 - be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down

James 1:19-20 - quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger

Who you are

Genesis 1:26-27 - made in the image of God

Psalm 139:1-18 - searched and known - fearfully and wonderfully made

Isaiah 43:1 - I have called you by name, you are mine

Jeremiah 1:5 - before I formed you in the womb I knew you

Jeremiah 29:11 - surely I know the plans I have for you

Matthew 5:13-16 - you are the salt of the earth, the light of the world

John 1:12 - power to become children of God

John 15:5 - I am the vine, you are the branches

Romans 8:14-17 - children and heirs of God

2 Corinthians 5:17 - if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation

Galatians 2:20 - it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me

Ephesians 2:10 - we are what he has made us - his workmanship

1 Peter 2:9 - a chosen race, a royal priesthood, God's own people