



**All is Calm
Practices Guide**

Week One:

Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Practice: Scripture

In the Bible, God gives us revelations of himself which lead us to worship, promises of salvation which stimulate our faith and commandments expressing his will which demand our obedience. This is the meaning of Christian discipleship.

-John R. W. Stott

The month of December is filled with excitement, nostalgia, family, and beauty. It is also characterized by relationship wounds and disputes, busyness, debt, and anxiety. Often the pace of life, and even the pace of the church, can feel frenetic and hurried.

This month we desire as a church to offer a counter story and different experience of what often characterizes Christmas. We will do this as we focus on the theme: *All is Calm*.

All is Calm are lyrics from the famous Christmas carol *Silent Night*. Originating in Austria in the early nineteenth century, and moving through many iterations and revisions, has become one of the most prominent and beautiful Christmas carols. The enduring legacy of the carol is to reflect on the peaceful entrance of Jesus Christ into a weary and burdened world.

It is not hard to see the connections and parallels from Jesus' first coming and our current moment.

How can we experience the peace, tranquility, and calm of Jesus in a hurried, burdened, polarized, and chaotic season like Christmas?

All is Calm series will serve as a guide for you this Christmas as we focus on the good news of Jesus' coming through the promises and whispers found in the Old Testament prophets. This series will follow, and preach through, the Old Testament readings from a lectionary, which is a guide for church traditions through the church calendar.

To help, we will focus on one practice each week through Advent that will ground you in the story and coming of Jesus Christ. These practices are spiritual rhythms and tools to bring you into places of encounter with Jesus.

This week, this guide will lead you through a brief devotional on Jeremiah 33:14-16 and offer some helpful and practical next steps to implement the practice of Scripture reading in your life.

Additionally, Pastor Carleen will have a guide for families and children to participate.

Scripture as a Spiritual Practice

What is it?

This practice is grounded on the theological reality that God is a “God of communication and words.”¹ God has revealed Himself to us through the Scriptures, and it is a gift to read it and encounter the living Author of these words and books.

How to practice it?

There are many ways and approaches to Scripture reading and study, but here is a simple template that has been used.

Scripture - 5-7 minutes

Start by reading a passage of Scripture slowly and intentionally. Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the text in front of you.

Observation – 5-7 minutes

Highlight certain phrases, ideas, or words that stand out to you. What is the author saying? Meditate (the idea here is to chew on) the text in front of you.

“There is a place in Bible reading for “raking” and gathering up the leaves at a swift pace, but when we “dig” in Bible study, we unearth the diamonds. In meditation, we marvel at the jewels.”²

Application – 5-7 minutes

Make connections from the Biblical text to your life. How can this be applied to your life right now? What is God trying to teach you through this text?

Prayer – 5-7 minutes

Take this to God in prayer. Claim a promise in the text, petition God for his care and resources, think through areas of need and fragility in your life.

What happens if I start to make this a regular practice in my life?

God promises himself in the Bible, so the more you time you spend in the Scriptures, the more you will encounter him. Start by doing this for 20 minutes every day, and watch your heart, mind, and life mold around the teachings of the Scriptures.

Reflect on this illustration that Dallas Willard shares in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*:

¹ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 182.

² David Mathias, *Habits of Grace* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 46.

Here is David Watson's comment on the days before his operation for the cancer that ultimately took his life:

As I spent time chewing over the endless assurances and promises to be found in the Bible, so my faith in the living God grew stronger and held me safe in his hands. God's word to us, especially his word spoken by his Spirit through the Bible, is the very ingredient that feeds our faith. If we feed our souls regularly on God's word, several times each day, we should become robust spiritually just as we feed on ordinary food several times each day, and become robust physically. Nothing is more important than hearing and obeying the word of God."³

With this background in mind, let's put this into practice by looking at the prophecy of Jeremiah:

Putting this into Practice – A look at the Book

¹⁴ *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.*

¹⁵ *"In those days and at that time*

I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land.

¹⁶ *In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.*

This is the name by which it^[c] will be called:

The Lord Our Righteous Savior.'

With our SOAP acronym above, let's walk through this passage:

Scripture – With your Bible open, or using the Scripture above, spend some time reading Jeremiah 33:14-16. Hint: it may be helpful to read the whole chapter to get a better sense of the context and tone of the passage.

You can reflect on these questions:

- What stands out to you? Why?
- What questions does this bring up for you?

Observation – to help with your study, below is a few bullet points to help you understand the wider context and ground some of your meditation and study.

Here are some key insights to help us understand what Jeremiah is saying:

³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 176-177.

- The stage is set in Jeremiah 32 where Jeremiah is incarcerated in the courtyard of King Zedekiah. Zedekiah is furious at what Jeremiah is saying against the nation and so imprisons and therefore silences him. Verse one of chapter 33 references that Jeremiah is still there. This is doom and gloom, desolation and destitution.
- The nation of Israel is on the brink of national disaster, full of shame and tragedy.
- Chapter 33 is full of promises and prophecy. It is about the restoring of the fortunes of Israel where God will fulfill promises. It is when Jeremiah is suffering, silenced, and isolated, where he writes about a better and future day.
- It is when Israel is wayward and lost, where God through Jeremiah sends a glimpse of a future that is full of flourishing.
- So, in the middle of calamity and disaster, Jeremiah sends a word of hope of future blessing and prosperity. Jeremiah 33:14-16 reminds us that in life's worst times, in a time of collapsing security, God speaks.
- God's promises are true and good in the middle of the desolation of Israel, and with us.

With the scene set, read Jeremiah 33:14-16 again and think or journal through these questions

- How do these insights help make this more relevant or poignant for you?
- What is Jeremiah saying to Israel?
- What is he saying about Jesus?

Application – Now it is time to answer the “so what?” for you. How does this ancient passage bring current meaning to you? Where is the intersection between this text and your current life circumstances for you, your friends, co-workers, neighbours?

Use this space to journal 8-12 sentences about these connections.

Prayer – What are you wanting to express back to God? Thankfulness for his promises, petitioning him for your friends or children, or expressing lament at your current hardship? All these prayers are welcomed and part of a robust prayer life with God. Be honest, reflective, and reverent as we approach God in prayer. Often, it is helpful to write out your prayers.

Out of her vast experiences with prayer in the harrowing life of a missionary wife and mother, Rosalind Goforth explains: ‘Perhaps the most blessed element in this asking and getting from

*God lies in the strengthening of faith which comes when a definite request has been granted.
What is more helpful and inspiring than a ringing testimony of what God has done?"*⁴

Use this space to write full sentences, or bullet point some prayer based on Jeremiah.

As you bring your Scripture practice to a close, set your alarm for tomorrow to do the same.

Remember: "Scripture before screens" is one of the most powerful ways you can experience a different sort of Christmas, free from anxiety, worry, frenetic pace, and stress!

For further study:

The Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard – a book about Spiritual Practices/Disciplines

Mere Christian Hermeneutics by Kevin J. Vanhoozer – an academic book on how to read the Bible well

Preparing for Jesus – Walter Wangerin – a great Advent devotional to guide you through this season

The Bible app – a great app to download on your phone with the Bible and other resources

⁴ Willard, 185.