

Growing Deep

Psalm 1
Ephesians 5:1-20

May 13, 2018
Faith Community

The big day had arrived: the long awaited Sunday school play. Everyone had practiced and dressed up, and proud parents and grandparents had amassed in the pews.

All was going well until one little guy came forward for his part and, for the life of him, couldn't get off the ground. His mother, knowing this might happen, had positioned herself in the front row and did her best to help.

She pointed to the cue cards but they were in the wrong order. She tried hand gestures, but that didn't help. Finally she bent close and whispered his line: "I am the light of the world." At that her boy got a big smile on his face and proclaimed with great clarity and conviction, "My mommy is the light of the world!" There's a Mother's Day gift for you.

A group of 4 to 8 year-olds was asked, "What does love mean?" Here are some of their answers:

"Love is when you kiss all the time. Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together. My Mommy and Daddy are like that. They look gross when they kiss." Emily - age 8

"Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other." Karl - age 5

"When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth." Billy - age 4

"When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore, so my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis, too. That's love." Rebecca - age 8.¹

When we fall in love and then when those small creatures invade our lives, we know there'll be costs involved, enormous costs. We know there'll be broken hearts. We know there'll be endless visits to urgent care, countless kisses to make it better, and then the times when we wish that was all it took.

¹ Preaching.com, accessed 3-9-10

But for all the costs, the inconvenience, the heartache, you know you'd do it all again.

The very first Psalm that I memorized was the very first Psalm: Psalm 1. It's thought of as a 'didactic', or a teaching Psalm.

Friends, memorize Scripture. It'll keep you mentally sharp, spiritually rooted and culturally engaged.

Psalm 1 is about the choices we make in life. It starts out with what we choose not to do in order to live a blessed life:

- We don't walk in step with the wicked.
- We don't stand in the way that sinners take.
- We don't sit in the company of mockers.

All that in the very first verse!

Step
Stand
Sit

Those are volitional words, matters of the will. It takes discernment and constant clarification to do it right.

Then come a couple words that don't seem to fit: 'delight' and 'meditate' in the next verse, verse 2. In its Hebrew form 'delight' refers to pleasure or desire, as you might imagine, but it can also refer to something that's longed for or of great value.

'Meditate' simply means to ponder, imagine, study, or even talk about.

They delight in the law of the Lord, and meditate on that law day and night.

It's all about where your focus is, about how you order your private world, as a hero of mine once said.

This is brilliant stuff, friends, a complete package: what to avoid and what to focus in on, essentials in learning how to live a blessed life.

Friends, I challenge you, I dare you to memorize Scripture. Start small with just one verse:

Bless the Lord, O my soul. All that is within me, bless God's holy name. (Psalm 103:1) You'll discover as you go that you're not just reciting words, you're praying. You're becoming wise. You're learning how to live a blessed life.

Today's New Testament reading is almost a sequel to Psalm 1.

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.... (Ephesians 5:1-2, TNIV)

That passage alone will keep you up at night, with its fierce description of love, but I hope, whether you're a parent or not, there's at least one person in your life you'd do that for. That's becoming like Jesus, friends, who did it for all who come to him.

In this section of Ephesians we get an idea of how important this is when it's spoken of three times.

Verse one says,

Follow God's example.

Then in verse 10 we read,

Find out what pleases the Lord.

Finally, in verse 17, we're told to,

Understand what the Lord's will is.

Altogether, there are nine imperatives in this passage:

Follow
Find out
Be careful
Understand
Be filled
Speak
Sing
Give thanks
Submit

“Like children who learn proper behavior from hanging around their parents, be imitators of God, keep company with God. Read the stories of Abraham, Moses, Joshua and Caleb, Deborah and Ruth, David and Jonathan....[Paul and Timothy]....And Jesus. Most of all Jesus: Jesus and his mother, Jesus and Herod, Jesus and Zacchaeus, Jesus and Peter, Jesus and Judas, Jesus and Mary Magdalene....We

marinate our prayers and our behavior in these stories that reveal God and his ways to us.”²

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (vv. 15-16)

“A group of well to do Americans were on a ‘round the world’ tour. In Korea, they saw a field by the side of the road, and in the field, a boy pulled a crude plow, while an old man held the handles and directed it through the rice paddy. One of the tourists was amused and took a picture of the scene. ‘That’s a curious sight,’ he said to the missionary, who was the interpreter and guide. ‘Yes,’ was the reply. When the church building was built, they wanted to give something, but they had no money, so they sold the only ox they had and gave the money to the church. This spring, they are pulling the plow themselves.’

“At that, the entire group was silent for a few moments, and then one of them said, ‘That must have been a real sacrifice.’

‘They did not call it that,’ said the missionary. ‘They thought it was fortunate they had an ox to sell.’

“No one had much to say after that, but when they returned home, the one who had taken the picture gave it to his minister and told him of the incident. ‘I want to double my offering to the church,’ he said, ‘and give me some plow work to do. I have never known what sacrifice for the Lord really means. I am ashamed to say that I have never given anything to the Lord that really cost me something.’”³

Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.... (Ephesians 5:1-2, TNIV)

“An old rabbi was once asked why so few people were finding God. He wisely replied that people are not willing to look that low.”⁴

So friends, however old or young you may be, whether you’ve been fulfilled or broken as parents, or you hope to

² Eugene Peterson, Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010) p. 205

³ Rick Ezell, as cited in PreachingNow - December 11, 2007

⁴ Liberation of Life by Harvey and Lois Seifert, as cited in A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, p. 181

have children some day, or if despite your best efforts you're unable to do so.

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (vv. 15-16)