

Hearing God's Word: Study

Psalm 1
2 Timothy 2:14-19

October 14, 2018
Faith Community

There are four key words in our mission statement that're displayed symbolically in our logo, and then briefly described on the back of the bulletin. The four words are:

Hearing
Trusting
Acting
Sharing

Today marks the second week of a deeper dive into those key words. We're spending two weeks on each one, starting at the top and working our way down, knowing that in reality a lifetime wouldn't be enough.

All this is designed to help you pray for your Pastor Nominating Committee and the eventual arrival of your new pastor. Hopefully he or she will see that you have a firm grasp on who you've been called to be and what you've been called to do.

We began last week with 'Hearing.' Your mission statement says you hear the Word of God primarily through worship and study. We looked at worship last Sunday, and today focus on the academic sounding 'study.'

Study to show thyself approved unto God....
(2 Timothy 4:15)

That's how the King James Version expresses part of today's New Testament lesson. In some ways it is, indeed, a responsibility, which you all take seriously enough to include in your mission statement, but it's so much more.

When it comes to this stuff you don't study to learn facts and figures, or chapters and verses. Instead, you study in order to fall more deeply in love. In this way Scripture becomes more of a source of life than some stuffy old relic. This is what I want you to see, friends.

And so we go back to the Psalms, the very first Psalm, to be specific. It also happens to be the first Psalm I committed to memory a thousand years ago, and to this day I constantly come back to it and want you to learn how to do the same.

While the Psalms are called the prayer book of the Bible, the first one is different. It's more of a teaching Psalm which makes its placement at the head of the pack downright strategic. You'll find it printed on page four of your bulletin, so please track it down now, and as we move ahead maybe you'll be able to catch a bit of its wonderful spirit.

It starts with the word 'blessed,' the same word that Jesus uses in his Sermon on the Mount and especially in the Beatitudes. It's an attention getter, letting us know that something's coming that we won't want to miss. It also suggests that this isn't some rule infested pile of negativity, but rather what's coming will lead to a life unlike anything you've ever tasted.

It immediately moves to a challenge, a series of rapid fire decisions we need to make. They come so quickly, at least in part I think, because life decisions assault us that way.

There are three negatives here. You begin your blessed journey with a series of choices, all of them described in verse one. You do not:

Walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Stand in the way of sinners,
Sit in the seat of mockers.

Walk, stand, and sit. Notice the increasing levels of attention and intention. Most of all, friends, these are volitional. Write that word next to verse one in your bulletin. These are choices we're called to make repeatedly. They're daily activities that lead to healthy living. Or, in other words, be careful little eyes, be careful little ears, be careful little hands.

What's the best way to pull that off? It's where you find your delight, in verse two. And with that we move from volitional to visceral. Write that word next to verse two, please. It becomes personal, penetrating, impactful, and even instinctual.

When I hear the word 'delight,' I think of how I feel when my three year old granddaughter comes running to me. I pick her up, hold her close, and she wraps her arms around my shoulders and pats my back with her three year old hands. That's the kind of delight that this Psalm speaks of, and it's the kind of delight I want you to discover. It's there, friends.

And how do you get there? That's where the rest of verse two comes into play:

Their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.

The law of the Lord. Torah is the word in Hebrew Scripture. It's where you find delight. Really. It truly is a visceral thing.

Then comes the word 'meditate,' and I love how Eugene Peterson puts it:

It's a "bodily action; it involves murmuring and mumbling words, taking a kind of physical pleasure in making the sounds of the words, getting the feel of the meaning.....

"This is not so much an intellectual process, figuring out meanings, as it is a physical process, hearing and rehearsing these words as we sound them again, letting the sounds sink into our muscles and bones."¹

What's helped me greatly has been learning to read the Psalms out loud, slowly, oftentimes in a whisper. That's a visceral thing as well. Try it, friends. It was a game changer for me.

Then comes an image, a mental picture:

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in season, and whose leaves do not wither. Whatever they do prospers. (verse 3)

It takes time for trees to grow, and their fruit comes in season, so you can't hurry the process. Think of it this way:

Refreshment: streams of water.

Results: fruit in season.

Resiliency: leaves don't wither

Prosperity: the kind that leads to emotional and spiritual maturity.

Write those words next to verse three, please.

Refreshment
Results
Resiliency
Prosperity

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer (New York, Harper & Row, 1989), p. 27.

What follows is a description of the consequences of not making the right choices as described in verse one, but today we focus on the first three.

How do you get there? How does all this come to life? This is where we come back to the wonderful "Shema" of Deuteronomy:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

Do you see how it all comes together, friends?

When it comes to this stuff you don't study to learn facts and figures, or chapters and verses. Instead, you study in order to fall more deeply in love. This is what I want you to see, friends.

Let that be the goal of your educational ministries. Support Daphne and her team, come alongside our adult education friends. This is nothing less than training for life.

Let this be known as a community of faith that does the hard work of study that leads to life change, to becoming more like Christ in our character and in our emotional and spiritual maturity, and watch how you change as will the world around you.

Psalm 1

- 1 Blessed are those
 who do not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
 or stand in the way of sinners,
 or sit in the seat of mockers;**
- 2 but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law they meditate day and night.**
- 3 They are like trees planted by streams of water,
 which yield their fruit in season,
 and whose leaves do not wither.
 Whatever they do prospers.**
- 4 Not so the wicked!
 They are like chaff that the wind blows away.**
- 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
 judgment,
 nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.**
- 6 For the LORD watches over the way of the
 righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.**