**Ways of Faith 4 - Bible Study**

Unity Church August 3, 2025

Psalm 119:9-16 2nd Timothy 3:14-17

Over the last two weeks we have looked at how gratitude is one of the foundations if not drivers toward a desire for a strong, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We have looked at how relationships like this don’t just happen - it is the result of choices and actions: what Eugene Peterson called, “A long obedience in the same direction.” We talked about Jane’s musical talent and how it is the result of a gift, but also years and years of daily work and practice.

It is easy, though, for a preacher to stand up on Sunday and lay out various platitudes on how others should live. To my mind this falls under the “Be warm and well fed!” idea of faith. In other words, don’t just tell me what I should do, help me understand how to do it. Over the next three Sundays, I’d like to take a look at how we can go about gaining a deeper faith, a stronger belief. I’d like to look at the 3 aspects of our personal faith walk that directly affect our relation with God through the Holy Spirit. These are: scripture reading, prayer and meditation.

Any relationship, whether it is a friendship, marriage, business partnership, or with God, is built on communication. If we think back to when we were dating our spouse - whether it was a letter from overseas during the war, going bowling on Friday night, taking a drive together, simply sitting on the front porch swing, or a phone conversation - it really didn’t matter what you were doing as long as you were doing it together. Communicating could be as formal as a letter or as simple as driving in the car without saying a word.

To a teenager’s mind, each word on that page, each word spoken had deep significance, just ripe with meaning and emotion. A look from across a room could make you melt. Come on, it wasn’t that long ago, you remember. Over the years, communication between the two of you changed. It’s inevitable, people spend time together, they mature as people, there are kids to fuss with, careers, etc.

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I’ve heard women say that their husband can say more with a look than a lot of people say in a conversation. But the reason he can speak through a look is that the two of them understand each other’s signals. They’ve learned these signals or developed this second language, if you will, through being together, living together, arguing, making up, basically communicating over a period of years. You can’t fake this, it is one of the signs that a couple has been together for a long time. As I said earlier, doing something until it becomes second nature.

Let’s turn this back to our relationship with God. How do we communicate with Him? How does He communicate with us? The first part of that question we will look at next week, the second part, how does He communicate with us, is two fold, through scripture and through that still small voice of the Holy Spirit. Our primary focus today is the scripture part.

When I hold up the Bible after the scripture lessons each Sunday and say, “This is the Word of the Lord!” it may seem that I’m stating the obvious. This phrase is a statement of our shared belief, a restatement of the teaching of the Apostle Paul from this morning’s NT reading. **“**All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,so that the servants of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

This is one of the foundational teachings that we hold as believers. As far as I’m concerned, it is a verse that we should memorize, not only for the statement of God-breathed, but it has within it the basics of all Bible reading and study: “(Scripture) is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” In other words, Paul has given us a framework through which we can look at any scripture.

Granted, two of these words are a little uncomfortable, rebuke and correcting, but

let’s turn these four points into questions, which should be applied to about any scripture one reads. 1) What is God teaching me here? or what am I learning about God in this scripture? 2) How does this scripture point me toward a deeper truth about God? 3) How does this Scripture bring me back to the way I should be going or doing? and 4) What is it encouraging me to do or pushing me towards as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?

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The first one: teaching. There are two ways that we as believers learn more about God - what the Bible says about Him and what we experience in our day to day relationship with Him. If, as we believe, the Bible is Spirit-breathed, it is what God says about Himself. Another way of looking at this, is that in scripture the all powerful creator of the universe is exposing, showing himself to each of us, His creation. It is through these Spirit-inspired, God-breathed writings over thousands of years, from Moses to the Revelation of John, that we learn the attributes of this creator God, the who, what, why and how of our heavenly Father. The scriptures help us understand that which the heavens are telling. They confirm that God-shaped void that we’ve notice about ourselves and others. These writings help us to make sense of the idea that our existence has purpose beyond eating, living and procreating.

The second word used by Paul, rebuke, is one of those words with negative connotations. In other words, is scripture going to be used to beat me over the head? What the New International Version translates as rebuke, the King James translates as reproof, and the Message says, exposing our rebellion. Now I’m not a Greek scholar, but the word that all of this comes from is, “El eng khos” which loosely means, proof, evidence, or reproof. Which, I think, means that scripture can be used to argue against wrong thinking, bad theology. A case in point is the world’s view that there are all manner of paths to salvation. We would say that Jesus Christ is the only way, and sight the scripture of John 14:6, where Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.”

The third word also carries some negative weight: correction. If we think about it though, it is necessary and beneficial. Each week, together we pray a prayer of confession. Every Sunday, we admit to ourselves, each other and more importantly to God, that we have “sinned.” That word, “sinned,” basically means missed the mark. We wouldn’t say that an archer sinned when his arrow missed a deer, but actually, that’s what it means. Now granted, one can take the word correction and make it mean everything from turning the steering wheel a little bit to a term in prison. I think that it is a father, namely our heavenly Father saying, “Look here, try it this way, you’ll find that it’s easier.” I think that the “correcting,” is more teaching, showing, as opposed to punishing.

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This leads to the last of these words, training, which goes along with the third one. The King James uses the word “instruction.” If correction is adjusting the path that we are on, I think training and instruction goes to where we are ultimately headed. The former talks about how we have missed what we shot at, this one is about what we should be shooting at.

These four words give us the framework through which we can or should look at scripture: 1) What am I learning about God in this scripture? 2) How does this scripture point me toward deeper truth about God? 3) How does this Scripture bring me back to the way I should be going? and 4) What is it encouraging me to do or pushing me towards as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?

If we think about these statements, we realize that they are not independent, they feed into each other, and give us the basis of meditating on the scriptures. In other words, if I start by looking at what this piece of scripture tells me about God, I soon get to a place where I’m looking at what it doesn’t tell me about God, (rebuke or reproof), which leads to searching myself, with the Holy Spirit and being shown where I need a course adjustment (correction). After being corrected, it follows that God would show us what comes next (training or instruction), which starts the whole process over again.

We continue on this walk because we want to know more about God. In learning more about God, we can gently and lovingly help someone else see the error of their thinking. Lovingly is the key word here. As we get closer to God and learn more about him, He gently and lovingly shows us where we need to work on our own lives and points us toward whatever comes next.

This process that Paul lays out, is the foundation of our individual relationships with our heavenly Father. Reading scripture and asking these questions will bring about meditation; it will facilitate prayer. Ultimately each of us will realize that these three things: Bible study, prayer and meditation are not mutually exclusive, they are the basics, the foundation of our relationship. It is spiritual communication. I would bet that some of you have been doing this for years and never really thought about it this way.

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In closing, I would like to offer some practical advise or thoughts about the act of Bible study, reading. I have cited the King James Version today, along with the New International Version and the Message. Bible Gateway, an online concordance and research tool lists 46 English language translations of the Bible. Most people are familiar with about 5, The KJV, the RSV, the NIV, the NKJV, and either the Message or the Living Bible. I grew up reading and memorizing the KJV. When I recite the 23rd Psalm, that is the version that I’m saying.

This may sound hypocritical, but if you read the KJV as your daily Bible, I would recommend that you put either the Message or the NIV beside it. I love Shakespeare as much as the next person, but none of us talks or writes in Elizabethan English. We can spend hours arguing over which version is the most accurate translation and not solve anything. Personally I use the English Standard Version as my daily Bible. The next Bible I buy will probably be The Message. Initially I didn’t like it, but the more I read it, the more I think it brings the Word of God closer to home. It will take some getting used to because like the Living Bible, it is in modern, current English.

Now, as to where or how to start reading the Bible. There are numerous ways, but realizing that we are trying to establish a habit here, it should be methodical and logical. Logic would point to either starting with the first chapter of Matthew or the first chapter of Genesis. Personally before I read either of them, I would start with the first chapter of Psalms. At some later date, we will look in depth at this book, but just suffice it to say that this is the songbook of the Bible. Quite a bit of it was written by David, who was an adulterer, a murderer, one of the most human of all the people of the Bible and a man who loved the Lord. I think that Psalms puts us in a right perspective of both, us to God and God to us.

I would read a chapter a day, possibly less to start, although the first few Psalms are quite short. This is not a race, it is not a marathon, it is a journey. When you have read all of it, you will begin again and realize that there are things that you missed not only the first time, but the fourth, fifth or sixth time. Stop for a moment before you open your Bible, simply say out loud, quietly, “Father, thank you for your word, may the Holy Spirit bring it off the page, show me what you want me to see! Amen.” 5

It is said that anything that we do daily for two weeks becomes a habit. I am hoping and praying that you try me on this. You will find a loving, caring, providing, all powerful God who will stop long enough to sit with you, talk with you and hear you. By setting aside a place and time for Him, you will not only see a side of Him that you didn’t know, you will develop a relationship that goes way beyond anything you’ve ever felt in church.

What we do individually, daily, with our connection to the scriptures, and through that connection, our relationship with God, directly affects our personal lives and ultimately the life of this church. Oh Taste and see that the Lord is Good. 6

Psalm 119: 9-16

How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.

I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Praise be to you, Lord; teach me your decrees.

With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

2nd Timothy 3: 14-17

But as for you, (Timothy) continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.