

As great as it is to have a community relationship with God, there needs to be the personal relationship. (this is the other side of the coin of Tyrone's sermon, he was saying that it is great to have a personal relationship with God, but there needs to be the community relationship as well.)

I have a verse in a frame in my office that I look at before I come out to preach every Sunday, Psalm 22:22 **I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:**

And it is so good to know that we are coming together as a family.

But, it is also important to remember the other psalms,

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

There is that personal thirst.

We cultivate the personal relationship with God through many means, through reading of Scripture, through prayer, through fasting, through our obedience, through the ordering of our lives even down to our finances, all of these are practices of a disciple and part of maintaining and deepening our relationship with God.

Each of those topics are worthy of a sermon on their own (and perhaps they will each get one in the coming year) but this morning I want to talk about private Scripture reading as a means of maintaining and deepening our personal relationship with God.

There are many examples of men and women of God devoting themselves to focused thought and contemplation on God's Word. From Deuteronomy 6, which commands parents to speak of God's words and actions to our Children when we sit and stand when we walk and when we eat...

To Job (23:12) **I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.**

To King David **"How sweet are thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" "My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times."**

“I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.” ([Psalm 119:20, 131](#))

Paul told Timothy: (1 Tim 4:13,15)

¹³ Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

^{1...15} Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

Paul says that there should be a focused reading of God’s word (especially for the minister but for all of God’s people) it shouldn’t be haphazard, but it should be attentive.

Also it shouldn’t be a cursory reading that we quickly forget, but it should be something that we meditate on, think on later. Think deeply and richly about these things. This will inevitably produce “progress” that will be evident to all.

Our supreme example of course is Jesus. If there is anyone who did not need to do this it was Him, but He consistently He taught and encouraged and modeled a private solitary devotional life with the Father. Jesus described private prayer in this way : “When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.” Matthew 6:6

Jesus practiced private prayer as well, we read of him retreating in the early dark hours of the morning. Luke 5:15-16 (read) these would be times of his prayers to the Father, hearing from the Father, and also meditating upon the written words of God, (temptation in the wilderness showed that He was thinking about the scriptures while He was on His own)

He was incredibly oriented towards the scriptures, even from a very young age. When temptation, controversy or conflict reared up around Him He was able to quote a Scripture passage and apply its principles to the current situation.

So we see a long line of the people of God taking advantage of solitary time to meditate on God’s words and works. A time of studious prayer and prayerful reading.

Someone defined this as **“The intentional withdrawal from others and planned availability with God.”**

Christians have sought to obey Jesus' teaching and imitate His example.

Names have been given to this:

Quiet time
Devotions
Spiritual disciplines
Lectio Divina
Means of grace
Morning watch
Appointment with God

Etc

Different ways to read the Bible, theologically, we want to see what the whole of the Bible says about a certain topic (Credo Class etc)

As literature - we want to see the stories and the characters of men and women like us following God, learning from Him and doing great things for and with Him.

We also want to read it for prayer and communion with God

I want to encourage you towards a greater experience of communion with God, intimacy with Him and maturity. And I believe a necessary ingredient in that is private, quiet, thoughtful,, intentional prayerful reading of God's word on a consistent basis.

I want to help you do that by giving you two encouragements and then some practical advice.

1.Pick it up.

a.Many people have spoken highly of the Bible

b.The Bible speaks highly of itself.

i. Psalm 19:7 the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul **(it transforms us)**

1. it really does change people. Over this past year (and over the past years) we have seen God's word change people.

How many people here can say that God's word changes us.

ii. Psalm 19:7 The testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple.

1. (it gives us wisdom).

c.

2. Size it up

a. Know what it is we have in our hands



b. Jeremiah 23:29 God's Word is a hammer and a fire



c. Hebrews 4:12 God's Word is a sword



d. 1 Peter 1:23 God's Word is a seed

i. It appears small, but it imparts life it grows large, it needs good soil and it produces great increase

e. 1 Peter 2:2 God's Word is Milk

i. We desire milk like how a baby needs nursing, not once a day, but throughout the day. It has everything we need for our spiritual growth and health.

f. Hebrews 5:12 God's Word is Meat

i. The Bible isn't just for spiritually immature and then we graduate to other things (traditions of men, the discoveries of academics, etc)

g. James 1:22-25 God's Word is a Mirror

i. If you only come to church and hear what the Word says you are missing out on so much. God speaks so that we obey

h. Psalm 119:105 lamp to my feet and light to my path

i. Each verse makes a value statement about Scripture.

ii. Directs the next step (lamp to feet) and big picture (light to my path).

3. Eat it up

Tyrone encouraged us to intentionally gather together and to make the most of our time together, I want to encourage you to slip away and to make the most of your time alone.

What are some things you should have with you?

A Bible. As much as a tech-y guy as I am, I love my gadgets, I definitely prefer a real tactile Bible in my hand. Maybe some of you feel differently.

A pencil. Be ready to underline something, or jot something down. Expect to see something worth underlining, expect to hear from God.

A notebook. The way that I work, I often process things as I write. I write out my prayers, it makes me slow down and think. I don't tend to come back and read them, but when I do I notice that often times it changes quickly from the second person to first person. I'm writing about God then suddenly I'm writing to Him.

My planner: I tend to plan things out pretty far in advance, or at least the coming day, so I know what is ahead of me, so I use that as my prayer list. I pray for the upcoming meetings, or the tasks of the day.

Prayer list - this can be something physical or a mental list of some needs and people to pray for. I pray for my family, myself, and the church. I pray for unbelievers that I spend time with, I pray for my cycling friends and the guys who make me coffee at my favourite coffee shop.

Devotional help- valley of vision, morning and evening, my utmost for His highest, these are great supplements.

Some Procedures:

Be quiet - the Bible says be still and know that I am God. This is a good opportunity to turn the music off, and sit quietly with as little distractions as possible. Or at the very least turn off music with lyrics.

Get into the word of God.

Read the Bible for quality not quantity. While its good to have a plan about how much of the Bible you want to read, feel free to stop and

meditate and think over something for a long time. Meditate / ruminates on something for a while.

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a promise to claim?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a lesson to learn?
- Is there a new truth to carry with me?

Record what God has given you. Write it out. Doesn't need to be flowery or profound. Your journal is probably not going to be published any time soon so don't worry about how it appears to other people, just put your pen to paper and write down what you learned, saw, heard from the Scripture today.

Then **pray** - Talk back to God about what you read, praying out loud is helpful.

Be ready to share with others what you learned that morning. God makes us conduits not reservoirs. There is a great benefit (both to you and others) if you can say to someone, "you know, I was reading the Word this morning and I came across this verse")

Obey - we aren't here just to be informed, we're here to be transformed. Also, if God is showing us what He is like and what we are like and what we are called to be like, we ought to respond in obedience. Adrian Rogers pictures it like two rails of a train track: revelation and obedience. They correspond with one another. Why would God reveal something to you if you aren't planning on obeying it. Why would you want God to reveal something to you if you aren't planning on obeying it?