

PSALM 1:1-3 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, ² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. ³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.

1. According to Psalm 1, what are some of the subtle influences that can shape our lives if we are not consciously meditating on God's word?
2. What are some of the results we can expect if we meditate on God's word?

JOHN 14:21, 23 Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them... Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

1. According to Jesus, how do we best demonstrate our love for him?
2. What are some of the results we can expect from actively engaging with and applying Scripture to our lives?

COLOSSIANS 3:16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

1. What do you think it means for "the message of Christ to dwell in you richly?"
2. How should the message of Christ impact our life together?
3. According to the passages we've explored in this section, how would you describe the overall attitude and spirit we should bring to God's word?

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Several years ago a leading association of churches sponsored a wide ranging survey of evangelical churches. The project was assisted by a leading research group, extremely well funded, and eventually involved more than 250,000 participants from over a 1000 different churches.

Their aim was to discover which spiritual practices were most helpful in moving people from exploring the faith, to cultivating a growing relationship with Christ, to growing close to Christ, and finally to live Christ-centered lives.

Their results were not at all surprising. The study found that church activity in and of itself was a poor indicator of overall spiritual maturity. Their most decisive conclusion was that the single factor that most impacted spiritual maturity was "reflection on God's word." Here is how the authors describe their findings.

"Reflection on Scripture is, by far, the most influential personal spiritual practice for every segment of the Christian life. When we statistically compare the responses of those who take the survey, of all the personal spiritual practices, we find that Reflection on Scripture is much more influential than any other practice by a significant margin. In fact, for the most advanced segments—those who are Close to Christ and living Christ-Centered lives—it's twice as catalytic as any other factor on the list. This means it has twice the power of any other spiritual practice to accelerate growth in spiritually mature people." (Hawkins, Greg L.; Parkinson, Cally. *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*.)"

"Rhythms of Grace" is the way we describe spiritual practices, spiritual disciplines or means of grace. Last week we talked about the importance of gathering with God's people for "Corporate Worship." In the weeks to come we will consider "Authentic Community," "Biblical Stewardship," and "Missional Living."

For the next few weeks our focus will be on “Private Devotions” or the time you spend cultivating your relationship with Christ through the word and prayer. This week and next week we will talk about the practice of “reflecting on Scripture” in order to know, love and enjoy Christ.

This week we will talk about foundational issues—“The Power of God’s Word” and “Our Posture Toward God’s Word.” Next week we will get intensely practical as we talk about how to read Scripture.

THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD

GENESIS 1:1-3 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

Our God is a speaking God and his words are powerful and effective. In creation he speaks and the heavens and earth take shape. His words bring light into the darkness and transforms chaos into order.

The apostle Paul builds on this idea, when he compares the impact of God’s word on creation with the impact of the gospel in our hearts. “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:6).” He also describes God as the one “who gives life to the dead and calls things into being that were not (Romans 4:17).”

How does the power of God’s word in creation serve as a meaningful pattern for the power of God in our lives?

ISAIAH 55:10-11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Speaking through Isaiah, God compares his word to the “rain and the snow that come down from heaven,” and promises that His word will always “accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he sent it.”

1. Why might we compare “God’s word” to “the rain and the snow?”
2. How would you describe the overall purpose of God’s word?
3. How does God’s word accomplish his purposes?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God ^p may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

1. The breath of God is a significant biblical figure. In the biblical languages the words for spirit, wind and breath are the same word. Biblical writers often capitalize on the interplay between these images. God formed Adam from the dust “from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).” In Ezekiel, it is a “wind from God” or “the breath of God” that animates and gives life to a valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 27:9). In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus compares the Holy Spirit to the wind (John 3:8). When Jesus portrays the coming of the Holy Spirit he “breathed on [his disciples] and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22).’” To say that all Scripture is God breathed is to say that Scripture by its nature, is animated by the life giving breath of God’s Spirit”
 - a. What was the role of the Spirit in the formation of God’s word?
 - b. What is the role of the Spirit in helping us understand and apply God’s word?
 - c. How does the Spirit breathe life into us through God’s word?
2. According to Paul, what are some of the functions the Scripture performs in our lives? Why are these important?

OUR POSTURE TOWARD GOD’S WORD

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-8 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

1. How does the Shema describe the heart posture we should bring to God and his commands?
2. What do you think it means for God’ commands to be on our hearts?
3. How can we best impress them on our children (or for that matter a watching world)?