



Hear, Love, and Do

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Dr. E. Stanley Ott
Psalm 19:7-14

July 10, 2016

This summer, we are looking at a variety of spiritual practices that are all about igniting our passion for the God who loves us. So far, we have talked about having a prayer life, fasting and generosity. We've talked about the balance of engaging our world with silence and solitude as we have a daily Quiet Time and as we go on retreat. Last week, Glenda spoke to us about the practice of Sabbath. The last week has been a challenging one for our country with some moments of great darkness and great light in Dallas and in other places. We are in a turbulent time in which we know we need a major spiritual renewal. No small impact will do. This reinforces the point that spiritual practices are not simply meant for you to listen to other people talk about them. It is to do them. That's why they are called practices. So this morning, we come to the life-changing practice of the Word—the Word of God—of Reading, Loving and Doing the Word.



First we are to read it. Our Lord said to Joshua, “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night” (Joshua 1:8). The Hebrew word “meditate” has the sense of a cow chewing on her cud. In other words, read the Word of God and then chew on it; chew, chew, chew, chew and think about what it means to you.

When reading the Word, first, read it regularly. Decide when and where it will be a regular part of your life-routine because, with all of the things competing for your attention, if you don't make the reading of the Bible a priority in your life, it's just a nice book your kids will inherit from you.

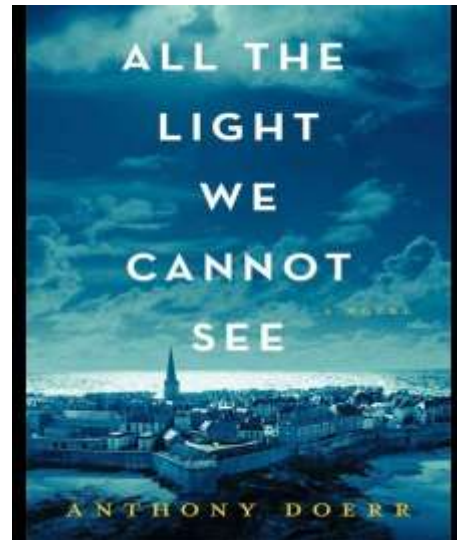
Second, look for a new insight. You may be reading a passage you've read fifty times or heard in church one hundred times. It is easy to be jaded. Oh, I know what that's about. Studying the Bible is like looking for sea shells on the beach. A quick glance shows some shells but a closer look reveals a whole lot more. Look for a

new insight. Something you haven't noticed before. It's a wonderful way to keep Bible study fresh.

Third, allow what you read to speak to your deepest heart, to ignite your passion for God. You have a lot going on in your life. Allow the Word to soothe your soul and to give you wisdom for the life you lead. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105 KJV).

I find the most effective motivation for real Bible study is to join a small group Bible study and VPC has a great many of them. Groups like the Monday night women's and men's groups divide into lots of small groups. We will be launching triad groups this fall, groups of just three so you can fit the meeting into busy schedules. News about them is on the way.

First, we read the Bible and as we read it, we find ourselves loving it. We treasure its words and allow them to transform our lives. My beach reading this summer was Anthony Doerr's, All the Light We Cannot See. It is the kind of book that grips you and when you finish you have a hard time getting over it. In fact, you don't want to get over it, you want to ponder it.



Somehow you know it changes how you see your world and how you will move forward in life. Reading that kind of book leads to the loving of it. The Bible, the Word of our Lord, has this effect. It grips you. You don't want to get over it. You find yourself pondering it and your life being changed by it and so you come to love it.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul" (Psalm 19:7). "The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:9b-10). It's all about loving the Word.

I've shared with you that my own preferred daily pattern is to read a Psalm a day and a chapter of the Old and of the New Testaments, and encourage you to find a pattern that works for you. Last week, we were at the beach with all of our kids and grandkids. I arose early one morning, thinking I'd have my Quiet Time of Bible reading and prayer. When I opened the bedroom door, standing there was our four-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter with arms outstretched. Hmmmmm. Bible-reading or grandchild-hugging. Tough choice. Too bad, Bible! But then the thought came, why not combine them? So we sat down and I told her a story or two and then took out the Bible and said, "Let's read a story about Jesus."

So we read about Jesus going to the home of Jairus, whose daughter was terribly sick and how Jesus took the girl by the hand and said, "Talitha Cum," which means, "Little girl, get up," and the little girl got up and began to walk around. I love that the words *talitha cum* are in our English Bibles. They are not words from the Greek language of the New Testament but of the Aramaic language Jesus actually spoke. In that dramatic moment, just the sound of *talitha cum* burned into the memory of the disciples. They loved to hear those words. I do, too. You could not have more endearing words that embrace the healing power of God than, "Little girl, get up." So my little granddaughter and I spent the rest of the week having fun with *talitha cum*. I love the Word because it stirs my heart and puts hope in my soul.

Our son Lee was born in the spring of a year in which I was scheduled to spend the summer months at Princeton Theological Seminary to study New Testament Greek. Ann Marie brought our Lee here to Arlington and stayed with my parents during those months. I would study at Princeton all week and drive to Arlington to join the family every Friday evening and drive back to Princeton every Sunday evening. One Sunday, after a great weekend with the family, I merged onto the Beltway and began heading north. I had some cassette tapes of my wonderful professor, Cullen Story, that I was supposed to listen to. I wasn't much in the mood but I popped a cassette (remember cassettes?) into the tape recorder and hit play.

He began talking about John 1:1—“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God,” and I thought, oh, man, I know all about this verse. Remember I said when you read the Bible, look for something new. Something new was a-coming!

Dr. Story began to explain the phrase from John 1:1 that is translated in the English, "the Word was with God" that the usual word for “with” was the Greek

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was [pros ton = toward = facing] with God and the Word was God.

preposition *sun*, *s-u-n*,

but that in his Gospel, John uses the Greek phrase *pros ton*, which is literally translated "toward," so instead of the Word was “with God” it’s actually the Word was, “toward the God.” The Word, which is Jesus, was “with God,” yes, however not just “with” each other shoulder to shoulder like you are “with” each other in the pews. Jesus was with God in the sense that he was toward God, facing God—face-to-face. I have this vivid memory of the last dinner with my mother at a restaurant in New Orleans. We argued about who would pay for the meal. She won. We were both happy about that! There were a lot of people at the tables next to us who were in one sense “with us,” yet we had no relationship with them whatsoever and we were not face-to-face with them. Yet, with my Mom, we were “toward” one another, face-to-face, delighting in each other, loving each other, enjoying each other, laughing with each other. I will always treasure that memory.

So the Apostle John was not just saying Jesus was "with" God the Father in the sense of merely co-existing in heaven side-by-side. The Word, Jesus was and is “with God” in the sense of facing toward God, face-to-face with God the Father. Wow. Imagine Jesus, the child of God, the Son of God and God the Father in face-to-face fellowship, face-to-face from eternity past to eternity present to eternity future, facing each other, delighting in each other, loving each other, enjoying each other, laughing with each

other. That insight was so powerful, so overwhelming to me that I forgot I was driving, forgot to watch for my exit to I-95 north and practically drove around the entire Beltway! I love this Word because it stirs and lifts my heart and puts hope in my soul. If you read this book, the Bible, the Word is God, it will warm your heart and you will learn to love it!

READ
LOVE
&
DO
The Word

So we come to “Do!” Read, Love and Do the Word of God. Psalm 19 says, “Your servant is warned; In keeping them [doing the words of God] there is great reward” (Psalm 19:11). Jesus begins one of his most famous

story’s by asking, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord, and do not do what I tell you?’” (Luke 6:56). The issue isn’t your feelings. It’s your doings. He goes on to describe the person who hears the Word—you could say who reads and loves the Word—but does not do it is like a person who builds a house on sand and when the storm came the house fell, and great was the fall. On the other hand, the person who hears and does the Word—we can say who reads it, loves it and does it—is like a person who builds on rock and when the storm comes, the house doesn’t shake. What is interesting is that both people read and love the Word. The difference between them is who reads, loves and *does* the word. As Jesus said elsewhere, “If you know these things, happy are you, if you *do* them!” (John 13:17 KJV).

I shared a story with the Monday night Men’s Bible Study a couple of months ago that I cannot resist sharing with you. A woman was being tailgated by a man who was driving an expensive Lexus on a busy street. Suddenly, the light turns yellow, just in front of her. She stops quickly. The man behind her is furious, leans on the horn and screams at her. As he is still in mid-rant, he hears a tap on his window and looks up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer orders the man out of his car and takes him to the police station where he is fingerprinted and placed in a cell.

After a couple of hours, the policeman approaches the cell and opens the door. He says, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, screaming, and cussing a blue streak at her. I noticed the "Go to church" bumper sticker, the "What Would Jesus Do?" bumper sticker, the "Follow Me to Sunday School" bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. So I thought you had stolen the car." So he read the Word. He may have loved the Word. He did not do the Word!

Jesus is using a Hebrew approach to education that says that knowing and doing are inextricably intertwined and that unless you have both together there has not been real learning. For example, we looked at Joshua 1:8. "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night." In other words, read it and chew on it's meaning. However, if you keep reading it says, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night *so that* you may be careful *to do* according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."

Chuck Miller, a teacher of mine, explained it to me by speaking of the Greek approach to education and the Hebrew approach. The Greek approach says the more you know the more educated you are. So the more you know about history or mathematics or how to balance your bank account or play a game of golf or bake a cake, the more educated you are. On the other hand, in the Hebrew approach you are as educated as you do what you know. So the man honking his car was educated Greek—he knew the Word—but not Hebrew—he did not do the Word. Our Lord wants you and me to read his Word. We are to meditate on it. If we stop there, we are only Greek. The more we know the more educated we are. But Jesus wants us to know and to do Hebrew, to do what we know. To Read it, to love it, and to do it!

Ralph Neighbour tells of a man by the name of Jack who was president of a large corporation when he was diagnosed with a

terrible cancer and his company ruthlessly fired him. Jack went through his insurance, used his life savings, and had practically nothing left. Ralph said, "I visited him with a friend from our church, who said, 'Jack, you speak so openly about the brief life you have left. I wonder if you've prepared for your life after death?' Jack stood up, livid with rage. 'You blankety-blank Christians. All you ever think about is what's going to happen to me after I die. If your God is so great, why doesn't he do something about the real problems of life?' He went on to tell us he was leaving his wife penniless and his daughter without money for college. Then he ordered us out."

Later, my friend asked that we go back. We did. He said, "Jack, I know I offended you and I humbly apologize. But I want you to know I've been working since then. Your first problem is where your family will live after you die. A realtor in our church has agreed to sell your house and give your wife his commission. I guarantee you that, if you'll permit us, some other[s] and I will make the house payments until it's sold. I have also contacted the owner of an apartment house down the street. He's offered your wife a three-bedroom apartment plus free utilities and an \$850-a-month salary in return for her collecting rents and supervising plumbing and electrical repairs. The income from your house should pay for your daughter's college. I just wanted you to know your family will be cared for."

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Jack cried like a baby. He died shortly thereafter, so wrapped in pain he never accepted Christ. But he experienced God's love even while rejecting him. And his widow, touched by the caring Christians, responded to the message about Jesus.¹ Ralph's friend clearly Read the Word and certainly loved it. What changed Jack's family's life is that Ralph's friend moved from Greek to Hebrew. He read the Word. He loved the Word. He did the Word. I urge you to get serious about your own reading of the Word, your loving it and your doing of the Word!

¹ *Death and the Caring Community*, by Larry Richards and Paul Johnson