

LORD, I shall seek your face (Psalm 27:8)

*a presentation on growing in a Christ-like attitude
through personal study of the Word*

Keynote Presentation – Prof. Richard Gurgel



Introduction

Part 1: **Why do those leading and encouraging need to seek his face in personal study of his Word?**

Consider the most common argument among the Twelve as they followed Jesus. How hard it is also for our hearts to grasp servant-like love! It is critical that those leading or encouraging understand *why* this is so difficult!

Galatians 5:16-26 explains the challenge we all face if we are going to lead or encourage with a Christ-like attitude.

In verses 16-18 Paul explains the battle raging within us!

In verses 19-21 he catalogs what our hearts produce left to themselves!

In verses 22-23 he shows us the beautiful fruit the Spirit works in us!

In verses 24-26 he urges us to remember (and repeat!) what happened in our baptism so that we can “keep in step with the Spirit.”

If any of us is going to lead and encourage with a Christ-like attitude we need to seek his face for a rich measure of his Holy Spirit! Remember: it is the words God speaks to us that are “[S]pirit and...life” (John 6:63).

But the *attitude* with which we approach time in his Word makes all the difference in the world!

Part 2: With what *attitude* do we approach him to seek his face?

Look at Jeremiah 15:16. Here is the attitude toward the Word that God designed us to have. How is that going for you?

Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 reveals the problem that can develop both in public worship and when we individually spend time in his Word. The sacrifice of fools can appear in all our lives!

Note well: the more the attitude of our hearts seeks God's face from duty or obligation (as if we were doing *him* a favor), the more trouble we will have with the attitude of our hearts!

Luke 2:45-46 and Isaiah 50:4-5 can begin to change how we view our time seeking our Lord's face!

Numbers 6:22-27 gives us a wonderful way of picturing the Lord's face that we are seeking!

In Isaiah 42:1-4 we find another way of picturing the Savior whose face we seek in his Word.

Now, as we ponder the words of Jeremiah 15:16, we realize why our Lord's words are our joy and our hearts delight – and why we would eat them!

But *how* do we go about eating that Word so that it becomes a part of us?

Part 3: How does a child of God eat his Word?

Spend seven minutes reading through the excerpt from *Eat This Book: a conversation in the art of spiritual reading* by Eugene H. Peterson provided with this outline. (This is *not* an endorsement of this whole book!)

When you have finished, spend ten minutes with three or four near you discussing the following three questions:

- In what way may we resemble Hans, Peterson's grandson, when reading Scripture?

- What insight did Peterson find as he watched his dog with a bone and then compared the meaning of several Hebrew words that speak about meditating on the Word?
- Share with your group anything that has helped you, when reading Scripture, to do what we pray for at the close of the Common service: “Blessed Lord, you have given us your Holy Scriptures for our learning. May we so hear them, read, learn, and take them to heart, that being strengthened and comforted by your holy Word, we may cling to the blessed hope of everlasting life....” (*Christian Worship*, 25)

There is no one right way of approaching devotional reading of the Word. Every useful “method” for meditating on the Scriptures tends to have one thing in common: it seeks to slow the reader down long enough to ponder the words being read. Over the years, Luther’s own method of weaving a wreath of four strands has proved useful to many believers. The four strands are a series of four questions to ask of the words we are reading. They help us to “pray through” the Scripture (many who speak about personal devotions simply call it “prayer”). The questions spark conversation between the Lord (through his Word) and us (as we pray). This pondering of the Word gives the Spirit who lives in that Word ample room to work. It seeks to make sure that the Word being read does not become like seed plucked off the hard ground of our hearts without understanding (Matthew 13:18).

Here are the four questions Luther urges us to use to ponder the Word:

1. What is God saying to me here?

In a way, this is simply asking of the portion of God’s Word before us the classic catechism question: “What does this mean?” In *A Simple Way to Pray* Luther phrases this first question this way as he ponders the Ten Commandments, “What does the Lord God expect of me?” (15) If the portion of Scripture before us shares comforting gospel, the question can morph into, “What promise is God giving me here to believe?” No matter how we phrase this first question, it is seeking one thing: an understanding of what God is saying.

2. For what does this lead me to give thanks?

Here Luther is urging us to look for gifts and blessings that God is giving to his world – to us and/or others. We are looking for where God is showing himself as the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace – and the God who in justice refuses to let evil prosper. We are seeking to understand why we can “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4).

3. What sins does this lead me to confess?

Remember the first of Luther's 95 Theses? "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." It is critical that we be constantly on the watch for where our natural hearts are being deceived by the lies of Satan. As we stand before his Word, God is teaching us to abandon hypocrisy, for we are studying "the word of God [that is] living and active." It is "sharper than any two edged sword." As we study that Word we will be reminded powerfully again and again that "nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:12-13). How important to remember that those who know the grace of God have nothing to fear, no matter what evil the Word reveals in our hearts. God already knows the state of your heart and mine. There is no sin his Word reveals for which the blood of Jesus is not sufficient. In Jesus, honesty in confession is possible that the world will never understand!

4. For what does this lead me to pray?

As I ponder the Word, what needs of heart and life for myself and others come to mind? If you have found a promise of God, pray it. You don't even need to ask, "If you will..." since you know what his will is. His own promise reveals it to you. Here especially we pray God's words back to him.

Turn to Philippians 4:4-7. Spend ten minutes with three or four others near you seeking to answer Luther's four questions about this portion of Scripture. Remember, you are reading the words of a prisoner in Rome waiting to find out if Nero will condemn him or release him.

1. What is God saying to me in Philippians 4:4-7?
2. For what does Philippians 4:4-7 lead me to give thanks?
3. What sins does Philippians 4:4-7 lead me to confess?
4. For what does Philippians 4:4-7 lead me to pray?

Conclusion

