



grow. pray. study. | daily devotional readings

September 27, 2020 "The Walk: Listening and Paying Attention"

Five Essential Practices for Living the Christian Life

Psalm 119: 1-2, 11-12, 97-98, 103-105 (NRSV)

¹Happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the Lord.

²Happy are those who keep his decrees,
who seek him with their whole heart.

¹¹I treasure your word in my heart,
so that I may not sin against you.

¹²Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes.

⁹⁷Oh, how I love your law!
It is my meditation all day long.

⁹⁸Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is always with me.

¹⁰³How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

¹⁰⁴Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.

MONDAY 9.28.2020 | Jesus valued all his people growing

Read: [Luke 10:38-42](#)

Reflect: In the New Testament, to "sit at someone's feet" meant becoming that person's disciple. (In [Acts 22:3](#), the apostle Paul described his student days with the literal Greek phrase "at the feet of Gamaliel.") In this story, "Martha did what the culture valued in women: cleaned the house and cooked the food. Mary did what the culture valued in men: became a disciple." * Jesus put no gender or other limits on who he wished to teach. He wanted all his followers to grow spiritually.

- The contrast challenged stereotypes about gender roles: one sister was "preoccupied with getting everything ready for their meal," the other one "sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his message." Which one sounds more like the way you live your life? Jesus said, "Mary has chosen the better part." Are there ways in which you are choosing, day by day, to sit at the Lord's feet and listen to his message?
- Jesus told Martha, who seems to have seen many details of her role as hostess as critically important, that "One thing is necessary" (or, as The Message renders it, "One thing only is

essential.”) What would making Christ the only essential thing in your life look like? How would it affect your priorities, time use, leisure activities and other choices? How might it offer you greater freedom in your life?

Practice: Listen. In our conversations, we can at times find it difficult to listen without interruption, but being attentive to the person in our presence can help us to hear something new. Sit with someone whose faith you admire and ask them how Scripture has shaped their life. Write out here what you learned.

Pray: O Lord, I have a lot to do. It's hard to stop all my doing to listen to you. Help me recognize how important that is to my growth as your follower. Amen.

* John Ortberg, *Who Is This Man? The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012, pp. 54.

TUESDAY 9.29.2020 | “Be fully mature, complete”

Read: [James 1:2-5](#)

Reflect: Every life has challenges—sometimes minor, other times trials that test the very fiber of our being. James urged Christians to meet life's tests as “occasions for joy.” He didn't mean the tests were pleasant, but rather that times that test us, in small or large ways, are chances to grow endurance. God will use that endurance, James went on, to “complete its work so that you may be fully mature, complete, and lacking in nothing.”

- James offered a realistic view of life: there will be hard times. How can our faith shape the way we view these trials? James urged his readers to see the tests as “occasions for joy.” When have you faced a trial in your life and learned from it? How have you seen God use hard times to test and grow your faith toward greater endurance and maturity?
- James did not write through naïve, rose-colored glasses. He knew human nature is not at all inclined to view tests as “occasions for joy.” That's why in verse 5 he wrote that God will freely give wisdom to anyone who asks. In what ways does God's ability to “grow you” through life's challenges help you view hard times differently? When has God given you wisdom to face a tough challenge?

Practice: Endure. Pray this passage of scripture which speaks of the power of endurance and the hope that we can feel. Romans 5:3-5: *We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

Prayer: Lord God, I find it hard to see even a gray, wintry day or a jam-packed parking lot as an occasion for joy. Keep teaching me to view life your way, to value the endurance and trust you can grow in me tough times. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 9.30.2020 | Interpret the message of truth correctly

Read: [2 Timothy 2:14-15, 23-25](#)

Reflect: Paul urged Timothy to value reading and applying the principles of the Bible accurately. As Timothy's spiritual mentor, Paul urged him to “Present yourself to God as...a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” Doing that correctly also involved

embodying its principles in the way he taught and shared. “Be kind toward all people” was an important part of teaching effectively.

- You may have heard the saying that “if you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything.” In what ways are you learning and understanding more of the Bible’s overarching message, and not just snippets here and there? How can an informed, Christ-centered study of the Bible help you discern truth from falsehood among the many religious ideas that clamor for your attention?
- Verse 14 says, “Keep reminding people of these things...” Paul didn’t just call Timothy to study the Bible for himself. He wanted him to accurately share its story with others. How is what you learn in the Bible shaping your life, especially the ways that you interact with others in your family, neighborhood, school or workplace? What spiritual subjects “trigger” in you a desire to argue? How does the Holy Spirit help you deal with those feelings?

Practice: Read. *Lectio Divina* means “divine reading” and is a way for you to open up to what God might be saying to you in Scripture. Practicing this can allow you to let go of your own agenda and connect deeper with what God might be saying. Read today’s scripture passage 4 times by following these steps:

Read – What word or phrase speaks to you?

Meditate – What does your word or phrase mean to you?

Pray – How is God calling you to act in response to this passage?

Contemplate – Silently reflect.

Prayer: Lord of my life, help me to keep growing into a “tried and true worker” for your kingdom. Make me accurate, kind and gentle in sharing what I learn from you. Amen.

THURSDAY 10.01.2020 | Devotedly studying God’s word

Read: [Psalm 119:11-12, 103-105](#)

Reflect: To grow spiritually from Bible reading calls for us to open our heart as well as our mind to what God wants to say to us through the Bible. Sometimes all we know of Psalm 119 is that it is “the longest chapter in the Bible.” But it is so much more than that. Today’s passage offers a lovely prayer model that can prepare us to “hear” and value God’s word on the pages of Scripture.

- “I have hidden your word in my heart,” the psalmist wrote. What does it take to move the word from the printed page (or the screen) into your heart? One effective way to start is to choose a short Bible passage (e.g. [John 3:16-17](#), [Psalm 23](#), or even if you want to start with a really short passage [Psalm 119:11](#) from today’s reading) and commit it to memory this week.
- At the same time, remember this: “The Bible is more than just a big book of inspirational verses and some do’s and don’ts. It’s a story. And like any story, it requires proper context. The Bible we hold in our hands today has been translated across multiple languages and was originally written in a culture much different than ours. This is important to understand because without proper context you will ultimately read the Bible out of context.” * How can you grow in your ability to relate all the “pieces” of the Bible to the big story it tells?

Practice: Memorize. Memorization is a way to implant within our heads and our hearts something that we can turn to in the midst of challenging and joyful times. It offers us an opportunity to center our thoughts on something that connects us deeply to God. Write down your favorite passage of Scripture –

read it at the beginning of every hour today, and by the end of the day you will hopefully be able to recite it.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in the Bible, I find the centuries-old story of how you've dealt with all kinds of people who loved and followed you. Help me learn more about how my walk with you is woven into that same story. Amen.

* Tyler Speegle, "Five Signs You're Reading the Bible All Wrong." *Relevant Magazine*, July 27, 2017, web version ([click here](#) to read the full article).

FRIDAY 10.02.2020 | "Put it into practice"

Read: [James 1:22-25](#)

Reflect: Growing in faith involves study, but it is not simply an intellectual exercise. James the apostle said God seeks "doers of the word," not just "hearers." That idea shaped the life of John Wesley, Methodism's founder. Based on what they studied in Scripture, he and his friends got actively involved in helping prisoners and widows in Oxford. Holding together personal and social holiness has remained important to Wesley's spiritual descendants ever since.

- Have you ever known a person who "talked a good game" about religious devotion, but whose actions and attitudes did not match their words? If so, how did that person affect the other people over whom they had influence? When have you discovered a mismatch between your words about faith and your actions? In what ways has your allegiance to Christ altered your activities, priorities and lifestyle?
- James used a phrase that may startle us at first, writing of "the perfect law, the law of freedom." When have you found in your own life that ignoring God's principles to do whatever you feel like produces, not freedom, but a hurtful kind of slavery? In what ways have you found that living out God's calling increases your freedom rather than limiting or frustrating it?

Practice: Reflect. "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives" – Annie Dillard. Reflect on how you spend your time each day and ask yourself the question, do my days reflect how I want to be spending my life? Specifically, how often are you engaging in the study of Scripture? Read this passage at breakfast, lunch and dinner today. Does doing so change your perspective?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want the true freedom you offer me. Help me use my freedom to serve and bless others, as you did. Amen.

SATURDAY 10.03.2020 | "Let's grow in every way"

Read: [Ephesians 4:11-16](#)

Reflect: "God's goal," Ephesians said, "is for us to become mature adults...fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ." At times when we find that unity with Christ and one another is still hard. But God calls us to become spiritually mature so that nothing can knock us off course. Building this kind of community requires us to speak the truth in love, with our understanding of truth grounded in thoughtful Bible study guided by the Holy Spirit so that we become more like our Savior Jesus Christ. All our different gifts need to work together so that we can strengthen and equip one another.

- Changing the world and building God's kingdom calls us to take our faith beyond our weekend worship service. What are some of the steps you recall that moved you beyond being an "infant" in your faith, and helped you grow toward greater maturity? What are you doing in your day-to-day

life that nurtures spiritual maturity in you and others, building up the body of believers in love?
What one or two items are most clearly on your growth horizon right now?

Practice: Read. One of the most powerful things that we can do is to share our faith with another generation. If you have children, read a passage of Scripture to them today and talk about what it means to them – if they are young children, you can read from a Children’s bible. If you don’t have children, read from a Children’s bible and talk with someone about how you might talk to a child about their faith. How does reading from a children’s Bible change your perspective?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are building me—you are building us—into a community of spiritually mature people, growing in every way into your life of love. Help me to do my part as a faithful builder growing more and more into your image. Amen.

Family Activity: We experience God through Jesus as the Living Word and through the Bible as the written Word. Create a box filled with Bible verses. Obtain a shoebox or photo box. Using colored paper, markers, ribbon, magazine cut-outs, family photos and other fun materials, decorate the box to represent your family and your faith journey. Write some favorite Bible verses on colorful strips of paper and place them in the box. (The book of Psalms is a great place to find many verses of praise and thanksgiving as well as promises from God.) Once a day, possibly at mealtime, pull a strip from the box and share the passage aloud. Ask older children and youth to also find it in the Bible. Thank God for the gifts of Jesus and Scripture.