

Psalm 1:1-3 “We Listen to God”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

It was an awesome week of VBS. Anybody in here have fun this week? All right. That sounded like mostly adults. Did the kids have fun too?

Okay, good. I'm glad. But you can still see evidence of the God sightings on the coral reef out in the hallway. Stop by and read some of those.

I think they'll encourage your heart, how our kids are seeing God at work in their lives and around them. It was a special week of diving into friendship with God.

Thanks for all of you who are a part of that. That is actually what we are also talking about in our sermons this summer. How do I walk with God day by day?

[1 : 00] The way that he made me to live in relationship with him. That's what he created me for. The people who taught me most about that at an early age and in many VBSs of my own are here this morning.

My parents are here. I'm very thankful for that and how they taught me of relationship with God. Probably of all the things I learned from them, one of the things that sticks out for me is the value of God's word.

That's what we're going to talk about a bit more this morning. We marveled at that last week.

Remember, if you were here, that God speaks to us.

In his word, he speaks to us. His word is perfect. It's practical for our lives today. It always points us to Jesus.

Before we talk more about our listening to God, our engagement with the Bible, I've been reflecting this week on how Jesus viewed the Bible.

[2 : 05] How he used God's word in his life. It's yet one more encouragement for us to have a high view of God's word. It's that Jesus did.

That's a pretty good encouragement, right? A pretty good reason for us to think highly of God's word. In fact, Jesus said that he came not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill it.

Every jot and tittle was important to him, right? When he spoke to the crowds and the religious leaders and he quoted the scriptures to them, he asserted that they cannot be broken.

They're perfect, right? That was his view. Perhaps most profoundly and helpfully for us, when Jesus is tempted by Satan, he reminds us that man cannot live by bread alone.

We need more than that. Man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God. That's breathed out by God, right? That's essential for life.

[3 : 12] And he lives that. Jesus does in his life as every difficult trial that he faces from the devil, he responds how? By quoting scripture.

Walking faithfully in relationship with God. See, Satan loves twisting God's words, doesn't he? All the way back to the garden.

Did God really say? Satan loves that. He tried it on Jesus too. But Jesus won't allow God's word to be twisted in his life.

He understands the heart of God's word. He shows us how it directs his life day by day, moment by moment. That, friends, is a high view of God's word.

Not putting it high up on a shelf where it can't be reached, but actually bringing it down into your life daily so that it transforms everything that you do and think and say.

[4 : 14] Hey, that's the way Jesus delighted in the Bible. Seems like a good path for us to walk with him. To meet him there.

To grow in his grace, right? We're going to read this morning many different parts of God's word as we think about what this can look like in our lives.

But I'd like us to start with Psalm 1. It's the beginning of the book that shapes our hearts and our lives in relationship with God. Helps us see in this very first Psalm where true blessing is found. Will we believe it? Psalm 1 at verse 1. This is the inerrant, infallible, inspired word of God.

Perfect. Practical. Living today and enduring forever. In other words, it is the one thing you'll read today that you can completely trust.

[5 : 21] That you desperately need. That you will always find life in. The one thing. Psalm 1 verse 1. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers. Let's pray together. God, we are so grateful for your word that you speak to us and that again this morning we hear your voice.

Would you speak so clearly by your spirit to our hearts that it would be your voice we hear. As we open this word, as it sits open before us and we come to be directed by it.

Father, we want to hear from you. Make us long for that more. Transform us by your word and spirit today we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. There are a lot of ways to delight in something, aren't there?

[6 : 44] If you're into art, you can delight in art by painting a beautiful masterpiece, copying it one brush stroke at a time. Or you might put it in a museum so others can see it.

You can delight in college football by putting on a helmet and pads and running onto the field. Or you can delight in college football without leaving your living room and just turning on the TV screen and some tailgate food and delighting.

You can delight in your spouse by merely writing poetry about her. Or you can actually spend time together. The psalmist writes here about the blessed, happy person delighting in God's word.

And what a wonder that we can even do that, right? We contemplated that last week that God, the king and creator of the universe and us, speaks to us.

When he speaks, when we have his word, when we long to delight in what God says, how do we do that?

[8 : 02] How do we listen to it? Is it so precious that we take our copy of the Bible and we put it far away so that we never touch it and make sure the spine doesn't get cracked and that's how we delight in it?

Or do we take it and we so want to delight in God's word that we sleep with it under our pillow every night and hope that by doing that, our relationship with God will grow deeper?

Is that how we delight in God's word? Well, let's be practical today. How does God direct us to listen to him as he speaks so that our lives are transformed so that we live with him the way he made us to, the way we so long to experience in our lives?

I hope not surprisingly, the first part of listening is to engage our ears. We actually need to sit with God's word regularly.

Oh, how I need that. Do you feel that need to listen, to hear what God is saying and how he would shape our lives?

[9 : 18] There's so many other things to listen to. The psalmist says, the blessed one, on his law, he meditates day and night. Friends, to walk in relationship with Jesus means regularly reading his word.

Perhaps in a variety of different ways, not always just reading, maybe listening to it read to you.

Many of us, especially if we're auditory learners, are finding that very helpful these days as you can listen to the scriptures read even as you look at them or even as you drive.

Maybe at different times. Yes, I hope having one time that is just you and God each day that can direct all of your other times throughout the day.

Like I told you about my wife and me having Friday morning coffee dates. It's just the two of us. But relationship, remember, is day and night and in all sorts of different contexts.

In other words, it is throughout the day and all the time that we're to be meditating on God's word.

Likely, when you think about reading God's word, you'll think about different amounts of God's word.

[10 : 33] Sometimes you might read multiple chapters. Maybe in that one time that you have just the two of you with God, you read quite a bit. But probably through the day, you need to pick just maybe a verse that you're going to go back to and think on and ponder throughout the day.

However it plays out for you, the goal is that you're sinking your roots deep into God's life-giving word. Like a tree, right, planted by fertile streams that will yield fruit.

That's where our High Life Youth Ministry logo comes from. That tree because we want young people as well as old people nourished by God's word.

The one place that promises that kind of life-giving nourishment. Many Christians, surveys tell us, don't really know what to do with the Bible. Some of us, if we're honest, read a verse as a magic charm for our day so that hopefully we'll have a good day.

That's not what this is talking about. I think many of us view the Bible as a reference book. When I need to know something about parenting or grief or God's will for me or my finances.

[11 : 58] I'll pull it out and I'll look that up and see what it has to say about that. But Psalm 1 is actually painting a different picture of how we use God's word.

It's of a daily relationship. Listen, I hope you don't treat your spouse or your best friend as a reference book. Yeah, I'll bring you out when I need you. Does that feel like a relationship you want to be a part of?

No, in this relationship there's desperation here and delight, right? Listen, let me encourage you. When you read God's word, this happens, I think, to all of us at times.

Happens to me a lot. You spend time reading God's word and you're not immediately sure what you learned. You're not immediately sure what you should do or how it makes you different.

I just spent 10 minutes reading and I'm not really sure. That's okay. Sometimes spending time listening to the one you love is actually growing the relationship, even if you can't completely explain it.

[13 : 06] Amen, fathers? Especially with God. In that relationship, you can be trusting him to be shaping your heart because that's who he is and what he promises to do.

Listen to how he instructs his people in Colossians chapter 3. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Let it dwell in you, not visit occasionally, not shallow, but richly.

Let it dwell among you richly, all of you in all your conversations as you gather and sing, as you teach and admonish, as you walk through life together.

Father, if that's going to happen in our church family, in our community, in the y'all, God's word must be at home, dwelling richly in more and more of us individually, right?

[14 : 27] More and more of us being shaped by, molded by, directed by what God says to us about us. If you weren't here last week, we have a lot of resources to help with reading God's word.

You can scan this QR code. Even right now, I give you my blessing. You have three seconds. No, you can take a minute. That QR code is also in your bulletin for later, so don't get stressed if it goes away too quickly.

Right now, Southwood is reading a couple chapters a day through a Bible reading plan, doing that together, that we would together be soaking in God's word.

I also wanted to just say to you, young people, kids, or even adults, maybe many of you who have never read the Bible before, where do I start?

You can start anywhere. I'd encourage you to consider starting with the New Testament. You can read right at the beginning, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I think it's a great place to start because you'll read stories, many of which you've heard about before.

[15 : 42] You may have read or you may have heard other people talking about them. There's stories about the life of Jesus that you can understand and that you can get to know Him.

That's a great place for you to start reading. And I just read one story at a time. One little section as you look in your Bible. They'll usually break it up for you.

Just read one section at a time. If you don't have a relationship with God, or you're wondering what that might be like, or you're not even sure what you think about the Bible, I would urge you all the more to read it.

Let the Bible speak for itself. Don't take what you've just heard around about what the Bible says or whether or not you can trust it or whether it'll speak into your life.

Would you let the Bible speak? Would you let God speak and listen to what He actually says? If that's a struggle for you, we would love to read it with you. If you would like, grab any of us and we'll read alongside you and talk with you about it.

[16:48] For all of us, as we read God's Word, to help our roots sink in deep, I like to ask three questions. No matter what part of the Bible I'm reading, you can ask these three simple questions.

What does it teach me about God? I want to know Him more. That's why I'm in His Word. What am I learning about Him? Number two, what does it show me about people, about myself, how He made me to be?

Maybe how I'm not being the way He made me to be. And then the last one, remember the hero. We talked about this last week. How does it point me to Jesus? How much I need Him.

How gracious He is to meet my needs. Wherever you are, you can ask those three questions as you read. As God's Word starts to come in to your ears.

First, we listen to God with our ears. We want to hear Him speaking to us regularly. Next, I want us to think about our minds. Remember, we are called to love the Lord our God with all our minds.

[18:00] Part of that is that we seek to understand His Word. He's spoken to us. We want to know, understand what He's saying.

And I just want to be honest. I suspect many of you like me have gone through seasons of life or parts of God's Word that you read it and you're just confused and frustrated.

Which, for many of us, that can be very demotivating, yes? When you're confused and frustrated, who wants to go do that in the morning? No, I got lots of other ways to get confused and frustrated. And it can demotivate us.

It can turn us away from God's Word. And I'll admit, there are certainly some things in the Bible that our finite minds will never get totally wrapped around, completely understand.

But there's so much we can. We should seek to understand. Why? Because we love the God who is speaking to us. He's given it to us.

[18:59] He wants us to know Him, to understand. I love the picture in Nehemiah chapter 8 of the people of God, listening to the Word of God.

Ezra brings God's Word before the men and women and children of Israel, and he reads it for several hours.

Let's practice. He reads it for several hours, and we're told what? About how they responded. Their ears were attentive.

What a beautiful picture of the people of God gathered longing to be people of the book. They want to know what it says. They want to understand their God. And what's also highlighted in this story in Nehemiah 8 is that the leaders, the teachers, the priests, going around through the crowds.

You know, they're not using microphones, right? So they're going through the crowds of people, helping them understand what's being read. Verse 8, they gave the sense so the people understood the reading.

[20:11] It's important to hear God's Word. It's also important to understand it. We have lots of resources to aid in that these days, from study Bibles to commentaries to online helps.

And especially, God calls the leaders of his people to help them understand his Word. Our confession of faith says God uses the reading of his Word, but especially the preaching of his Word to bring his grace into our lives, to help us walk day by day with Jesus.

Do you remember reading about that last week in 2 Timothy 3, that all Scripture, all God's Word is breathed out by him. It's God's Word so that it is profitable for our lives.

And in light of that, do you know what Paul says to Pastor Timothy? What's the one serious command he gives him in light of how holy and perfect God's Word is? Preach the Word.

That's the result of that reality is, here's what you should do, Timothy. Preach the Word in season and out of season. Teach it whether they like the message of the Bible or not. Teach it whether you like the passage you're getting to next Sunday or not.

[21:35] I didn't ask you whether you liked it, Timothy. Preach it. Preach the Word. Is that what you delight in when you're listening to a sermon? Are you wanting to be entertained, or are you longing to know God more, to hear his voice because his Word is opened, to understand more of what it would look like to walk with him today and this week?

It's important for the Word to be preached because it is vital for us to understand the God who made us and made himself known to us in it. He speaks so that we might listen and find true life in

knowing him.

See, that's exactly what happens in Nehemiah chapter 8. Let's look back there. The people begin to understand God's Word, and as it's explained to them, and they understand it, what do they do?

They weep.

They start weeping because they realize they've not been living with him as they ought. That's what happens as we understand God's Word. We're convicted. They're convicted of idolatry, of their unbelief, of their selfishness, but it doesn't stop there.

As Ezra keeps reading and the leaders keep explaining, they start to tell them that they don't need to weep anymore. Actually, there's great reason to rejoice. That's what they're told.

[22 : 54] There's a faithful God who keeps covenant even when you break it, who even now is calling you back to himself. And the people realized that while weeping was appropriate, now so much more is rejoicing appropriate too.

Do you see how understanding God's Word begins to shape their lives, their emotions, their actions. It's starting to tell them what it looks like to live in relationship with God.

That's the final thing delighting in God's Word looks like here. It goes into our ears, it processes in our minds, and it transforms our hearts.

We don't merely sit with it to listen, seek to understand, but we must soak in it until we're transformed.

Listen, on his law he meditates day and night. Oh, how I love thy law. It is my meditation all the day.

[23 : 58] I have hidden your Word in my heart, listened to it, brought it in, stored it up, understood it. Why? Just for intellectual curiosity?

No, that I might not sin against you. So that like Jesus, when I'm squeezed, God's Word comes out. It directs my life faithfully, meditating, soaking in, marinating, until the flavor goes all the way through the meat, right? And it oozes out in something that's tasty.

Maybe it changes me completely from the inside out. Maybe you keep contemplating that verse you read this morning, just chewing on it over and over.

Maybe you revisit the sermon once you've left this room. You might even use the grace group questions that are provided for you. You might look at all of the extensive notes you've written.

[24 : 58] Someone else was preaching, but you took notes to go back to it, to have a conversation in your grace group about it. Whatever that might look like.

It might be a Bible study that you've been in, and you're going back and pondering it again, and you're asking the Holy Spirit to transform your heart so that you're renewed in relationship with God, and you actually begin to live differently.

Will you slow down for that? We don't slow down for much, do we? Slow down for not just checking a box quickly each morning so you feel like a good Christian today, but really longing to be changed, to be shaped, to be directed by God.

Don't we need that? All the day, day and night, with God's Word. Remember, nothing else in your busy life is perfect. Nothing else you're going to encounter this afternoon is perfect, is life-giving like this.

This is the Bible's power. Hebrews chapter 4, For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

[26 : 16] God's Word will expose you, which is a bit scary, but hang with me. The surgery is for your good.

God wounds in order to heal. It's the grace of this pathway we're talking about. His Word, many of you have experienced this, will expose your heart if you listen to it.

It cuts deep, doesn't it? A sword that pierces to the vitals, unless we avoid it altogether, it's going to cut all the way through. It shows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, what we most deeply feel, what priorities really motivate us, what relationship really shapes our life.

I still remember as a young boy, reading of Moses, and of how he regarded the reproach of God greater than all the treasures of Egypt.

I remember feeling like, that's not exactly the way I'm looking at life. I was convicted about my pursuit of worldly fame and comfort.

[27 : 27] It softened my heart. It changed my priorities. I remember in college, reading of God's Word as the source of true wisdom, and being convicted of how often I was relying on my own

wisdom, even giving really unwise advice, as it sometimes turned out, in light of that.

And God used that to lead me to seminary to learn more about His Word. I said, I don't want to be an unwise advice giver. I remember recently being convicted about exasperating my children when I read that passage in Ephesians.

Happy Father's Day. Have you repented to your children lately? I needed to repent to them about being defensive, impatient, insisting on my own way.

God's Word did that in my heart. It showed me what was going on. Notice, by the way, you don't have to make this exposure of your heart happen. You're the patient here, not the surgeon.

Will you commit to surgery today? Will you pick a time to sit before God and open His Word? He is the best surgeon.

[28 : 45] Just see what He'll do. Sit down before Him with His Word open. You soak deeply, richly, consistently in God's Word.

That's all. It is alive. It is powerful, revealing, eternal life-giving, salvation powerful, that level power. That's what it has.

You don't have it. You open it up and it does that work on your heart. It pierces. It exposes. And this would chase all of us away from it in fear of being exposed.

If it didn't also promise that when we're exposed, we'll also be embraced. This is so wonderful as we walk in relationship with God. Don't miss this or you'll never get close to God's Word.

If you believe everything I said so far but you don't know this, you'll say, keep it away from me. It might really show me what's going on in here and I might be afraid. See, not only does Jesus take us to the Bible, the thing we need to know to walk with Him, but gloriously, let's remember again today, the Bible takes us to Jesus.

[29 : 56] Just this week at General Assembly, the annual gathering of our denomination that is committed to being faithful to the scriptures. I got to sit with brothers and sisters to hear stories of the living Word bearing fruit in the whole world and in us as Paul promised the Colossians.

I saw examples from Texas and South Korea of Christians transformed to live on God's mission by reading His Word. In one lunch, I heard of Muslims in Malaysia, Buddhists in Thailand, and atheists in Bangladesh coming to faith in Jesus Christ and seeing their lives totally altered because they started reading God's Word.

Because they started asking, seeking to understand what it meant, they asked others who were sent to share with them. They started soaking in it until their hearts were exposed and they found the embrace of Jesus for them.

It will happen for you too. It doesn't just happen around the world. It happens here. See, when your heart is exposed, what do you think we'll find?

I'm like you, so I know the things in my own heart. I talked to you. You've told me some of the things in your heart. What are you concerned might be uncovered if something cuts deeply and exposes what's in the depths of our heart?

[31 : 22] What if we find guilt and shame? Is that possible? Oh yes. But God's word doesn't leave you exposed there.

It takes you to Jesus who has made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him, 2 Corinthians 5.

Because God in his great faithfulness forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness, 1 John 1. And as a result of that, the Savior who dies on the cross for us to make that a reality is no longer ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters.

Do you see what happens when it takes us to Jesus? No more guilt, no more shame. He takes both of those on himself. You are his delight. What if we find pride and self-righteousness?

Is that possible? Oh yes. But God's word doesn't leave you exposed there. It takes you to Jesus where we realize with Paul that whatever was to our gain, whatever record we had to commend us, we count as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of one thing, knowing Christ Jesus, Philippians 3.

[32 : 50] The one who humbled himself, Philippians 2. So that we would never boast, never boast, except in the cross of Jesus, Galatians 6.

Exposed in our pride and embraced by his grace. That's what will happen. One last thing we might find.

What if we find fear and anxiety? I know there's plenty in here. That's possible. But God's word doesn't leave you exposed there.

It takes you to Jesus who tells you that no one can snatch you out of his hand. John 10. Who assures you that he is with you by his spirit so that greater is he who is in you than he that is in the world.

1 John 4. And nothing you do and nothing anyone, including Satan himself, can do to you, can separate you from his love ever.

[33 : 56] Romans 8. See, you are exposed as unlovely and rightfully and rightfully you're afraid of what may come to you except that you are embraced by the surgeon, the one who is love and you walk with him so that you are safe and secure always and forever.

indeed blessed is the man or woman or child whose delight is in the law of the Lord on which he meditates day and night.

Let's pray. Jesus, would you so help us to walk with you in this pathway where we find your grace where we find a surgeon who never stops mid-procedure, who starts to work on us as his word exposes our heart and then carries it on to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

You're with us. You speak to us. We can listen to you even today. So give us grace that we would hear your voice and walk with you and we ask it in your name, Jesus.

Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. ■■■■■. Refes chaos Thank you.