

Connect with God Daily

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[0 : 00] The book, I don't expect you to read it at all, but the book Hamlet's Blackberry likens our digital age to a gigantic room with more than a billion people in it with everyone in really close proximity.

And in the room, people are constantly coming up to you and tapping you on the shoulder, a text, a hit, a comment, a tweet, a post, a message, an email, a new thread, and the taps never stop. Well, the taps come while you're eating, while you're sleeping, while you're driving, while you're on vacation, and when you're even on the toilet. The digital age is, according to the book, is somewhat like the Eagle Song Hotel California.

You can check out any time, but you can never leave. But what if we actually prefer it that way? We complain about it, but what if we actually prefer the endless noise to the deafening silence of our own hearts?

[1 : 21] What if the trivialities and the distractions and the latest posts and the TV, the rush of our day, are not actually forced upon us by the busyness of our society?

What if, in fact, they were not forced upon us at all? Hence the question of Hamlet's Blackberry. Our age of distracted busyness threatens us with what is known as acedia.

The word acedia had its origins in the 17th century. It's roughly equivalent in meaning to the words sloth or listlessness, purposelessness.

In the 17th century, it was particularly attached to spiritual and mental apathy when it came to relationship with God.

Acedia is purposelessness, slothfulness, listlessness disguised by constant commotion.

[2 : 42] The inability to stop. In fact, a lot of sociologists nowadays are saying that society actually wants to be harried.

It wants to be hassled and busy because it fears the silence, the stillness and the rest. Because we would not know what to do with it.

And particularly, we would not know what to do with ourselves. And to listen to our hearts and see the gaping hole in our lives, the gaping hole of purposelessness, that the constant commotion hides.

Modern society are terrified by the restlessness of the soul. The hyperactivity of today's contemporary society makes the reflective lifestyle a lost art.

And it's one of the biggest roadblocks to personal transformation in any life, but personal transformation in the life of the Christian. All too many Christians, as I've said a few times in this series, know a set of beliefs that float around in the mind, but have not been working those beliefs down into their character and their priorities in life in such a way that they interact with God, with people and society in a different way.

[4 : 25] It requires time and attention and discipline to bring about personal transformation in character and priorities.

And the point of today's message, it takes daily connection with God. If we are going to be transformed into the image of God.

Daily communion and relating with God, daily pondering his excellencies and our own shortcomings and working on the gap. And so there's three points today.

Hopefully it's in your outline. It's on the St. Paul's app if you want to go there with it. So firstly, daily listening to God. I'm not really going to unpack all the stuff that lies behind this.

We did a series on this late last year. You can go back and listen to those messages instead of me repeating everything here. So just briefly, the God of the Christian Bible is quite profoundly a God who speaks.

[5 : 31] He's a God who communicates. He speaks and when he speaks, his words have power in and of themselves. He doesn't need power to accompany his words.

And so when he speaks, the universe is created from non-pre-existing material. More importantly, and certainly more personally, God has consistently spoken to humanity throughout history. That is, he does not leave us in the dark about who he is, what he's like, how to live in relationship with him, what the purpose of life is, how to navigate life well in a world for his glory and for our joy. As Moses reiterated the Ten Commandments to the generation of Israelites that was about to move into the promised land, he said this to them in Deuteronomy 4.

Which is another way to say that what, look at the privileges we have.

[6 : 58] God speaks to us and we get to speak to him and communion and connection and closeness is the result of that.

To have a God you could pray to with confidence and to have a God who speaks to his people with instruction and decree is a remarkable thing.

But as Israel's history unfolded, the people of God got bored with God's word. With disastrous consequences.

The cultural narratives and the norms of the surrounding nations were far more interesting to them. In the face of a God who brought everything into being and speaks, we too can find ourselves yawning.

It is just all too familiar. The headlines flashing in our faces and the cultural norms softly telling and retelling their story in thousands of ways every day.

[8 : 10] And we're constantly tuning into it in everything that we read, everything we see, social media, the rest of the media. Whatever it is, retelling the story.

And it seems more interesting. It seems more urgent. And it is certainly diverting. It seems that the constant noise of our society has in fact more authority.

The apostle Peter reminds us that we have the words of the Old Testament prophets made more certain in 2 Peter 2 verse 19.

Made more certain because Jesus is the one who has fulfilled all of their expectations. Indeed, we have the words of Jesus himself, the greatest prophet of all.

But we prefer to tune into the doomsday predictions of the news. Binge on a whole season of Netflix in two evenings. Or mindlessly, relentlessly, endlessly scroll through social media.

[9 : 24] There is a better story to turn into every day. One in which we are not just mere spectators, but in fact active participants.

It's a story of a God who gave up all of heaven's privileges to live amongst his wayward, restless people in order to bring them rest.

And to bring them rest, he died on a cross in our place. And when we thought that story was over, he burst forth from the grave to inaugurate a kingdom that is not of this world.

A kingdom that he invites us into to participate in. It's such a better story than the chaos, the numbness or the vanity of most of the stories that we digest in our unthinking routines and daily habits.

As the Apostle Peter said, we have the words of the prophets, the word of God, much more certain and confident now in Jesus.

[10 : 48] And in the very next breath, he says, you will do well to pay attention to it. What he's talking about there is he's talking about the story of Scripture, the story of the Bible.

Now packaged very conveniently for us in about a thousand pages. It's a much better story and we would do well to pay attention to it.

And that's what Psalm 1 starts with for us. It was just read out to us. The call of Psalm 1 is to meditate on this more certain word.

Meditate on God, his law, his word, the Bible, God's story. The story that does not interpret history, does not give a view of history. It's a story that in fact creates history.

The rhythm is to so dwell on what God has said, as it says in Psalm 1, day and night.

[11 : 56] That's the rhythm. And it says when we do, God promises three things. There's three things that we are promised when we do that in Psalm 1. The first is stability.

The person experienced in biblical meditation is like a tree rooted so that the wind cannot blow it away.

Those who meditate on the word become people of substance. Who have thought things out and have deep convictions.

Who can explain difficult concepts in simple language. And who have good reasons behind everything they do. Every value and every principle. Notice that this tree is planted by streams of water.

Trees that are by streams of water do so well even when there is little rain. Their roots are so deep. And therefore they keep going.

[12 : 58] They keep growing. Even in hard and dry and difficult times. Times of great adversity. Upheaval.

Grief. Chaos. By contrast in Psalm 1, the chaff, which is the husk around the grain, it's not even a living thing. Anything. Any little puff, a breeze will blow it away.

Anything will move it. And it says here it's meditation on God's word. The word of life. Which is the difference between the blessed person and the cursed person.

That's the difference. We are all told, number two, that meditation also brings the promise of character. Those who meditate on the word have stability in life and character to match that stability, that belief.

Meditation bears fruit. Which in the Bible means character traits. Galatians 5.22. Things like love, joy, peace, patience, humility, self-control.

[14 : 13] Biblical meditation changes our character. Finally, meditation on God's word brings blessedness.

The very first words, blessed is the one, evokes joy. It evokes gratitude as a person lives daily with their God.

Blessedness in the Bible, it's not deserved. Blessedness is itself a gift from God. God declares sinners to be righteous and he freely grants them newness of life in which he protects them from the full effects of the world that's under judgment.

And outside of God's blessing, a person is cursed. And ultimately, it leads to a meaninglessness of life, trying to strive and gain and pursue the whole world.

It's like chasing after the wind. Like a piece of chaff floating around, chasing after the wind with a net. Meditating constantly on God's word results in character growth, stability, no matter the circumstances of life, purpose in life, and delight in life.

[15 : 54] Which brings me to the second point. The word delight there in verse 2 is really important. What this psalm is not calling us to do is just read the Bible.

Just read the Bible and just to know what God has said, but to in fact delight in what God has said. So how do we get to that point where we grow in delight in God's word and therefore enjoy all the blessings that this psalm promises?

The blessed life. The flourishing life. Well, the key word there is meditate on God.

Biblical meditation is the thing that moves us beyond mere duty in reading God's word to delight in God's word.

Joy. The psalms is, if you like, the Bible's prayer book.

[17 : 09] It's the prayer book of the Bible. It is noteworthy, though, that the first psalm, the one we're looking at right in front of us, which is in prime position because it's the introduction to the whole psalms, is not a prayer.

It's not even about prayer. It's a meditation on meditation. That is, the first psalm is a psalm, a meditation to get us ready to pray in the rest of the psalms.

That's what it is. That is, there is a bridge between God's word and a life of prayer that flows out of God speaking to us.

That is, the way to encounter God, to connect with God, to commune with God, to truly hear God is going deeper spiritually into prayer through meditation of what God has said in his word.

The way to encounter God is meditating on what God, in other words, the way to hear God is to meditate on what he has said.

[18 : 38] So I've got a couple of sub points here about meditation. First of all, meditation in the mind. Many modern forms of meditation, a lot of things to do with meditation in Eastern religion, transcendental meditation, that kind of stuff, have the goal of meditation is to sit in silence and with the purpose of emptying the mind of all consciousness.

That's not biblical meditation. Biblical meditation fully engages the mind. When this psalm calls us to meditate, it uses a word that literally means to mutter.

And that's because in ancient times, the Bible was recited aloud for the purpose of memory. You didn't sit there silently reading, you actually spoke it.

And so it's referring there to muttering the word of God. Other words translators meditate in the Psalter, mean to ponder, to question, to think, to linger over.

So the first step of listening to God is to engage the mind and study to understand rightly what God is saying in this passage.

[20 : 05] We cannot reflect on or enjoy what you don't understand. So this is a corrective.

It's not in your notes. Let me just put a corrective in here. Too many Christians nowadays open up the Bible, read a verse, and then meditate. God, what are you saying to me about this verse?

And the verse might say, God told Abraham, go left, not right. Ah, God, okay.

So you, when I come to the top of Fuller Road, you want me to go left, where are you journeying me? You don't want me to go to the city.

You want me to move to Newcastle. Is that where you're leading me, God? Thank you, God, for your message to me in my life. Meditation for too many Christians begins right at the very beginning.

[21 : 08] That's not what's happening here. You must work hard on the text to hear what is God specifically saying. And so there's first things. To understand what the Bible is saying very specifically, what did the original author intend to convey to his readers in its context, in its passage?

Secondly, what does this passage play in the whole Bible? How does it contribute to the gospel message and move along the main narrative arc of the Bible, which climaxes in the salvation of Jesus Christ?

In other words, we must understand Scripture for what it actually is in its context, as God is communicating it through history to a people.

We must understand things like the genres of it, the context of it, all that sort of stuff. Unless we do the hard work of engaging the mind, of answering those questions about a passage, our meditations will not be grounded in what God is actually saying to us in his word.

It's actually not listening to the voice of God. But we are listening instead to our own hearts, our own desires, our own passions, or the spirit of our culture, not to the voice of God.

[22 : 36] Martin Luther said that before he could turn a biblical text into praise, he first needed to understand that that text is instruction.

It is truthful information from God. And therefore, I need to understand what that truthful information is. Biblical meditation is founded on the work of sound biblical interpretation and study.

And there is a whack of resources that I can help you with in that, or we could help you with here at St. Paul's. Secondly, meditation and the heart.

Biblical meditation is, however, more than just deep Bible study. For those of us in the, you know, let me use this technical term here, reformed evangelical camp, we love the first bit I've just said.

The second bit is much harder. Biblical meditation is more than just deep Bible study. The Bible contains information, but it's much more than information.

[23 : 44] When Paul talks about the word of God dwelling richly within us, in Colossians 3 verse 16, he's clearly talking of something much more than just agreeing with what has been said.

He's talking about deep and penetrating contemplation that enables the Bible's truth message, its true message, to have a transforming power at the centre of my being, right down in my heart.

The theologian John Calvin wrote, that for the word of God, for the word of God is not received by faith if it flits about in the top of the brain, but when it takes root in the depths of the heart, the heart's distrust is greater than the mind's blamefulness.

It is harder for the heart to be furnished with assurance of God's love than for the mind to be endowed with the thought of it.

We must never be settled with an informed mind, with an engaged heart.

[24 : 57] If we are, go back to the Gospels and see the encounters that Jesus has with the religious elite, the teachers of the law, the Pharisees.

You see, Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 suggests that Christians have blessings in Christ that we don't experience. Paul prays for his readers that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith, verse

17, and that they would grasp the love of Christ in verses 18 and 19, and finally prays that they would be filled with all the fullness of God in verse 19.

What Paul is talking about there is the difference between having something that is true of you in principle and fully appropriating it, using it and experiencing it, living in it right now.

Paul is praying that by the Spirit's power we may have our hearts and our affections engaged and shaped by the truths of the faith that we hold in the mind.

In a similar way, I've got three daughters. They know that I love them. They know that they are my daughters. I am their father. And that will never change.

[26 : 27] I will always be their father. They will always be my... There's a truth that will never change. But if I was to get off this platform right now and go and find one of them and hug them and tell them, I love you.

I am proud of you. No matter where you are, I will always love you. I will always support you. I will never leave you. I will never abandon you, apart from when I die, because it's not always true. That in that moment, what they know to be true, they experience in their heart and their affections.

That's the difference. And that's what Paul is praying here for the Ephesians. And so how do we do that?

The good place to start, and I say this is a place to start. Use the questions of the German church reformer and theologian Martin Luther. This is how he used to meditate on Scripture.

It was four steps. What does God want me to know from this verse, this word, this passage? What does he want me to know?

[27 : 33] What is the passage actually teaching? What is it that God's commanding me? What does he require of me? In other words, what is the information? What is the instruction? Secondly, in this text, what is it that I can be thankful for?

Where's the praise moment? Where's the moment of gratitude? Thirdly, based on who God is and what he's calling me to, and this is my life, what do I need to confess?

From this, what do I need to confess? Look at the gap between what God wants of me and what I am. What do I need to confess? Where's the gap? What do I need to work on?

And the fourth step, he says, when you do that, you are meditating on God's word, you are listening to the voice of God, and that will be turned into prayer.

You will immediately communicate back to God what you have heard from him. So here's a, this is a, by the way, point for us individually doing our devotional life, but also for you as a community group, in your community group.

[28 : 50] Do you discover that there is a disconnect between the reading of God's word and what, and the content of your prayers? That is, there's no connection between what you're currently praying and what you've just read?

Then the psalmist would say the missing element there is the meditation bit. You're not driving it into your heart. You're not actually listening to God's word.

You're picking up information and you're communicating back to God your desires and passions and will. So these questions are very searching. As you work a truth in, you may be convicted, you may be humbled.

So, you know, there might be comfort, there might be calm, there might be joy. Now, Luther was very realistic. He says that sometimes the Holy Spirit begins immediately to preach the truth of word to you and you can see the gap and gets you to ponder and work on that issue and confess it. Sometimes it doesn't happen. Sometimes it doesn't matter what we do. We simply cannot concentrate. We find our thoughts to, you know, are not big. They're not affecting thoughts.

[30 : 06] We feel we're bored, we're hard, we're distracted and Luther would say that's not a waste of time either. You haven't got it wrong in that moment.

Use that moment there to be reminded of your need for God's help to meditate on his word. That that in itself is a revealing of a disconnect between a God who speaks and the ability to hear. And so take your weakness and your insufficiency back to God in prayer. But the key to it all is meditating on the word made flesh.

See, when we feel that emptiness and that weakness, how do we get the energy and the motivation to do the heart work? Because head work is much easier than heart work. Especially in a season where we feel dry.

Psalm 1 tells us the godly person meditates on the law of the Lord day and night and delights in it. It is clearly slow work, it is intentional work, it is heart work.

[31 : 12] And the answer, where does the energy come from? Where does the motivation come from? Where does the power come from? Meditating on the meditation of God.

The answer is to look to the central figure of the written word, the one that John 1, 14 following calls the word made flesh.

Jesus Christ, the ultimate expression and communication and voice of God and find your delight in him. Him. Jesus is the one who delights in doing God's law.

He's the one who prays day and night. He's the one who when he looks to God experiences the light. He's the one who meditated so profoundly and used scripture so profoundly that he virtually bled scripture.

He's quoting it instinctively in the most extreme and difficult moments of his life. Even in the infinite agony of the cross.

[32 : 22] Jesus is the true strong enduring tree planted by streams of living water. He is that one always bearing fruit.

But Jesus is not simply a good example. If he was then his life would crush us because we can't do what he does. The main message of the Bible is salvation by grace through him.

The Bible is all about him. The written word and its law can be a delight for us because the incarnate word came and died for us.

Securing pardon for our sins and our shortcomings for not living up to all that God has called us to in his word. We can never delight in the law of the Lord with understanding the central part of Jesus in it.

Without him the Bible is nothing but a curse. A condemnation. It is nothing but a witness against us.

[33 : 34] Jesus obeyed the law fully for us so now it's a delight to us not a source of despair so look to him.

Look to him. And then the third stage of all of this and I'll say this very quickly. Daily talk to God about what he has said to you in his word.

Good communication leads to relational closeness. It leads to connection. Communication is the key to intimacy and intimacy is the key to relational delight.

It's essential to all flourishing relationships. One of the exercises that I do in preparing couples for marriage is the exercise of active listening.

Not just hearing, active listening. listening is so crucial. It's a skill that involves listening intently to what has been communicated to me.

[34 : 44] Not just the words that have been spoken but the intent of the word, the feeling, the emotions of those words. And listening to it without interruption, without justification, hearing it, and then restating back to the other person what you have heard, acknowledging to them, not just the words but the content, not just the content but the feelings.

And generally what happens in active listening, there is this to and fro, to and fro of greater pursuing understanding of each other and clarification and then from that there's always, always, always a next step to take the relationship further.

I mean I could have just told you in fact that's how you connect with God daily, isn't it? The process of active listening. having heard God speak through his word, taking it down into our life, then we take it back to him in prayer.

This is what I'm hearing, this is what I'm thankful for, this is what I need to confess, help me to change, help me to see my next step and empower me to do it. Friends, just to swing really back where we were, the ADHD of our contemporary culture makes slow reflective meditation on God's word a lost art.

We are much more content just with information, but information is not godliness and it's not transformation. There is no quick fix, there's no simple formula to connecting with God in his word and prayer.

[36 : 48] It takes time, it takes planning, and it takes constant attention. And so, next slide please, Wendy. What's your next step? It would be a massive mistake for me just to step down right now and say that's it, without giving you the opportunity to meditate on God's word, even really quickly.

Meditating on God's word word, really quickly, what is your next step? If the call of psalm, and you want the blessed life, you want the flourishing life, the call of psalms here is to meditate on God's

