

**St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
August 12, 2018**

**Rest for the Stressed:
Refreshed by the Waters**

Psalm 1

Joni took this picture while we were on vacation. It was a rainy day. We just sat on the porch of our cabin, reading books, and looking out over the north fork of the Shenandoah River. We were refreshed by the waters.



King David writes in Psalm 1 that the person who meditates on God's Word is "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither."

That's what we want to experience over the next four weeks. We want to be refreshed by the waters. Our lives are getting more and more stressed and we need rest.

So let's meditate on God's Word so that we be like these trees planted by streams of water, green and full of life.

But how do we find time to be refreshed? I just wanted to review with you what we talked about on Picnic Sunday. Remember that building a relationship with our Father in heaven is in that upper right quadrant: Not Urgent, Important. It is not urgent in the sense that we won't necessarily lose our faith if we don't meditate on God's Word for a day or a week or even a month. But that relationship suffers.



Since it is important, but not urgent, we need to plan to make time to be refreshed. So as part of your planning, I'd like you to decide right now: What is the time and what is the place? When in the day is the time for you to spend with God and say, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening"? Where is the place? Can you envision yourself sitting there? That's the first step. Set a time. Set a place.

Of course, we don't have time. Our activities are like a gas. It immediately expands to fill up that entire space. So how are you going to find some space in our day?

That's the next question. What are you going to give up? What must change in your daily life so that you spend time on the important things. What "not urgent, not important" and/or "urgent, not important" things are you not going to do to free up time in your schedule to sit and be refreshed by the waters of life?

My last question is "Who? Who? Who?" Who are you going to ask, "Please ask me if I'm spending time in God's Word?" If you are trying to start a new habit, having someone who is there to help you is always better. So again, I ask, "Who?"



Now let's start practicing one way to make better use of our time in the Word. The method we are going to practice is Martin Luther's Garland of Four Strands. It is something that he wrote in a pamphlet he wrote to his barber who asked him how to pray. It is a method that Luther used to read through the sections of the catechism, but it can also be used as you read through the Bible. This is what Luther wrote:

"I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer" (*A Simply Way to Pray* by Martin Luther).

Instruction – Thanksgiving – Confession – Prayer

Spend a minute putting those four strands into your own words. Using a question might be best.

- a. Instruction _____
- b. Thanksgiving _____
- c. Confession _____
- d. Prayer _____

What are some of the questions you might ask yourself as you read God's Word?

- a. Instruction: What is God teaching me? What am I learning? What am I reminded of?
- b. Thanksgiving: What has God given me? What promise is God giving me?
- c. Confession: What do I need to admit to God? How have I misused his gift?
- d. Prayer: What do I want to talk to God about? What do I want to ask for?

Remember, when you open up the Bible, you are opening to a personal encounter with God, a conversation. As you open the Bible, pray, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." And then after reading, it is a time to speak back to him. These four questions are just a structure for your conversation with him.

On the outline I also have another key question.

“If I am constantly looking for reasons to thank God and reasons to confess to him, what two teachings of the Bible will I constantly learn and recognize?”

This is probably the most important thing to keep in mind. Every reading of Scripture is ultimately a searching for law... what does this passage teach me that convicts me of sin... and a searching for gospel... what does this passage teach me about God’s love and care, especially as he forgives my sins.

This is how Luther said it:

The law is the Word in which God teaches and tells us what we are to do and not to do, as in the Ten commandments. ...The other word of God is not Law or commandment, nor does it require anything of us; but after the first Word, that of the Law, has done this work and distressful misery and poverty have been produced in the heart, God comes and offers his lovely, living Word, and promises, pledges, and obligates himself to give grace and help, that we may get out of this misery and that all sins not only be forgiven but also blotted out and that love and delight to fulfill the law may be given besides. See, this divine promise of his grace and of the forgiveness of his is properly called Gospel. (<https://heidelberg.net/2016/11/luther-difference-law-gospel/>)

Practice! Psalm 1:1-2

So let’s practice these four strands. Let’s read Psalm 1 together. Then there will be a time of silence for you personally to think through the questions you have written down. And then we’ll talk about them together.

¹ Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

- a. Instruction _____
- b. Thanksgiving _____
- c. Confession _____
- d. Prayer _____

Two minutes of silence.

So let's just step through this passage together.

- a. Instruction: What is God teaching me?

That bad company can lead you astray. That God wants us to delight in the law or teaching of the Lord. That he wants us to think about or meditate on God's word day and night. So what does that mean for you? How can I get God's Word on my mind so that it is always there? Should I read something before bed so that I can think about it at night? Perhaps I can pay more attention when the Bible app pops up a "verse of the day" for me to think about. Or I can have the WELS daily devotions emailed to me.

- b. Thanksgiving: What has God given me? What promise is God giving me?

I want to thank God for His Word. I want to claim his promise that he will bless me as I use his word. I thank him that his Word tells me about Jesus!

- c. Confession: What do I need to admit to God? How have I misused his gift?

This is where I really have a lot to say to God. Where have I walked in the counsel of the wicked? What websites have I gone to that were certainly crafted by the wicked? What have I read or watched that wasn't a place that I wanted Jesus to go with me? I've spent lots of time worrying rather than meditating on God's Word. I haven't always delighted in the Word of the Lord, thinking that I can worship next week, or I'm too busy.

- d. Prayer: What do I want to talk to God about? What do I want to ask for?

I want to ask him to forgive me. I want him to help me find that time to read. I want him to help me focus on his promises rather than worry all the time. I want this blessing for my children, my grandchildren, and for each person I know.

Practice! Psalm 1:3-6

Let's read this section together as well. Then I'll give you just a couple of minutes of silence to meditate on it alone.

³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.

⁴ Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶ For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

- a. Instruction _____
- b. Thanksgiving _____
- c. Confession _____
- d. Prayer _____

Now, rather than go through this as a group, I'd like you to talk with one or two people around you. What did you write down as instruction, thanksgiving, confession, prayer?

About 3 minutes of quiet discussion.

I'd like to close by encouraging you to use the tools that are available today. YouVersion and BibleGateway both are excellent apps for your phone or tablet that have a large variety of reading plans.



A new app was just published this week by the church that produced YouVersion. It is called "Bible Lens." It will go through your photo album and match pictures and Bible passages, so that you can enjoy your past pictures and find a passage to meditate on as you look at those pictures.

Finally, the "Who?" is the critical question. Who will ask you, "Hey, are you reading your Bible? What did God say to you this past week?" Who will help you find new things in God's Word? Who will pray for you? Who will encourage you? Being part of a spiritual family is vital. Some of you are in that kind of spiritual family. But many of us aren't. So I'd encourage you to mark on your Connection Card a desire to attend the next GroupLink sessions where new Life Groups will form.



Let's close by reading again the first three verses of Psalm 1. May it be our prayer that each of us might be blessed by God through a daily use of God's Word.

- ¹ Blessed is the one
 who does not walk in step with the wicked
 or stand in the way that sinners take
 or sit in the company of mockers,
- ² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
- ³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
 and whose leaf does not wither—
 whatever they do prospers. Amen.

My Next Steps in Finding Rest

- Practice at home or in your small group using the four strands on today's other lessons: 1 Peter 2:1-10 & Matthew 7:13-29.
- Begin reading one of the Gospels, a section a day using the four strands.
- Find a Bible reading plan. There are some at the Welcome Center. There are others available on the YouVersion or BibleGateWay apps.
- Join a Life Group to find rest together. Sign up for GroupLink on the Connection Card.