

“Prayer comes through chewing on Scriptures Day and Night”

Psalm 1

Now before I start, I’m going to make a disclaimer. I am a Psalms’ fan! I love the Psalms-the range of emotions, the honesty, the beautiful imagery. I love the Psalms!

For me, they are not just some prayer book stuck in the Old Testament part of our Bible. They really do open our eyes to what it means to be a child of God in a real authentic relationship with God and with one another. I’ll admit it. I have no shame in admitting it. I am a Psalms’ fan.

I also know that not everyone is like me in my love for the Psalms. We all have our favorite parts of the bible. I respect that. But, I’ll be honest, for me; there is just something about the Psalms. Maybe it is because they are prayers but not like the prayers we were all taught to say. You know, how we were taught that there is a proper way to pray, and how all good prayers start out with “Dear God, thank you forfill in the blank and then after we thank God, we can ask for anything we want, whether it be for better health for aging bodies or to pass the history test we forgot to study for that day. We were taught there was a certain way to pray. We were taught that there was a certain outline for a good prayer. Maybe I like that the Psalms don’t fall in those categories at all.

In the Psalms, we get everything from “The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want to “ Lord, you are not being the God you are supposed to be, while even going as far as to say to God, “There are certain things you promised and now hold to that promise.” It’s all right there and certainly not shared in the “proper” way of prayer.

I can remember when I was first truly exposed to the Psalms and how eye opening that experience was for me. They showed me that I didn’t have to fit into a certain mold to be a child of God. They showed me that God wants to be in relationship with me and for that to really happen, I can’t hold anything back. I need to tell God what I am feeling, even if that feeling is-God, I don’t like you very much right now.” The Psalms gave me permission to truly be myself with God and I have been so grateful for that gift ever since.

Maybe that’s why I really love the Psalms. They tell it like it is, the good, the bad, and yes even the ugly parts of life, they discuss them all. They don’t hide a thing or pretend things don’t happen. The Psalms tell it like it is. They show us how to have an open and honest conversation with God, something I don’t know if we are ever really told that we can do as people of faith, or told that we should do as part of our prayer lives.

Maybe that's really it., maybe that's why I love the Psalms so much. They tell it like it is. They share all parts of life: the good, the bad, and the ugly, but we'll get to all that later.

What we are going to do today is take a look at Psalm 1 and its call for us to become rooted in the word of God.

I invite you to turn in your pew bibles to Psalm 1. I'll be reading from the Message version.

(Read text)

Gives us something to think about, doesn't it? Gives us some great images to really wrap our mind around as people of faith. We can almost see the tree growing beside the stream, lush with green leaves, always in blossom. We are told that we could be just like that tree: fruitful, at peace, happy. All we have to do is grow in our faith. All we have to do is grow in our relationship with God. All we have to do is chew on the Scriptures day and night.

Now, I'm not going to give a sermon that says we need to read our Bibles every day and night so that we can be better people. That is not what the Psalm says at all. What the Psalm says is that if we do that, if we chew on the Scriptures, if we let the word of God in our hearts, that we will be blessed. We will be happy.

We have to understand that the Psalmist isn't trying to make us feel bad about ourselves. Sure it is saying that there is one way, the wicked way, and then there is another way, the righteous way. I don't deny that at all.

But the words wicked and righteous don't mean what we think they mean in this context.

When we hear the words "righteous" and "wicked", we immediately think of good verses bad, right and wrong. And that is not what is going on here at all.

What the Psalm is saying is that as we read our Scriptures, as we chew on them and allow them to feed our hungry souls, our starving spirits, we discover a connection to God, a connection that is more than we could ever imagine, a connection that tells us that God never created us to be alone. God created us to be in community with one another. As we chew on the Scriptures, we discover connection that frees us from thinking that we can do it all on our own, a connection that tells we don't just have to rely on ourselves. We can rely on God. We can rely on each other as brothers and sisters in faith.

As we truly begin to chew on the Scriptures, we begin our relationship with God. We begin our relationship with God's creation. We begin our relationship with all of God's children. We begin a relationship based on grace, based on love, based on life.

And that relationship deepens each and every time we support one another as brothers and sisters in faith. And one of the ways that we support one another is through prayer.

Now as I have said before, the Psalms are not the typical prayers. We are not talking about heads bowed, hands folded together, Dear God type of prayer. When we look at this psalm, we are talking about prayers that involve the very essence of life. It shows us that prayer really can be anything that opens our hearts to God's instructions, to God's word. The psalm tells us that we should be like a tree deeply rooted in the rich soil, gaining nourishment from God's word, thriving by responding to God's word of love and grace. And we get that nourishment by prayerfully chewing on the Scriptures day and night. We get that nourishment by sitting quietly while waiting for answer. We get that nourishment through Scripture and tradition. We get that nourishment by reading modern day prophets. We get that nourishment through laughing and crying with one another. We get that nourishment by writing in our journals. We get that nourishment which sustains us on our faith journeys through anything and everything that opens us to God's presence in our lives. The psalm tells us to get that nourishment anyway we know how to because all that matters is that we do open ourselves up to God's presence in our lives. And we simply call all those things prayer.

That is the purpose of prayer for us as people of faith. To open our eyes, to open our hearts, to open our ears to the word of God in our lives—a word of peace, a word of grace, a word of love; Prayer becomes the avenue through which we do all these things. And prayer can be just about anything we need it to be, as long as it helps us become aware of God's presence in our lives, as long as it helps us make a connection to God, as long as it reminds us of God's love, of God's grace, as long as it gives us life.

That's what this Psalm is talking about. When he writes Happy are those, blessed are those, what he is really saying is happy are those who find ways to be connected with God; blessed are those who are connected with all their brothers and sisters in faith. Happy are those who found a way that works for them and helps them stay nourished in their spiritual lives; blessed are those who found a way, any way, that works for them and feeds their spirits, that feeds their souls. They will blossom and experience this amazing life transforming gift that is a deeper connection with God and with others.

All the Psalmist is telling us is that it is up to us as people of faith to find some way, any way, to know God and be known by God. It is up to us to find some way, any way to draw in the gift of life. It is up to us to find some way, any way to become rooted in the rich soil of God's word so that we can thrive and be a blessing to and for others.

I'll be honest, for me, this concept of prayer being more than hands folded, heads bowed was unusual to me. It was so new. It was so different. I had never heard anything like that before my seminary days. I always thought there was one right way to pray. And I would continue to beat myself up for not praying enough each day, for not finding the time to say "Dear God, thank you for..." I felt like I was failing miserably in my faith because I wasn't praying the proper way.

Until one of my professors said, "An hour of study is like an hour of prayer" and my world was opened up. Everything changed for me. I soon discovered how enriching life really is when we look at our actions as prayer. Reading the morning newspaper and sharing people's stories-prayer. Working in the garden-prayer. Serving at the local homeless shelter-prayer. Cleaning out the clutter in our closet-prayer. All of our activities can become ways that open our eyes to God's word and help us become more aware of our calling as the Body of Christ here on earth. Because that's what it is all about! That's why we are here; to grow in our faith; to grow in our relationship with God; to find some meaning beyond ourselves. This psalm gives us a promise and tells us that we can do something about it. We aren't just pawns moving along in the game of life. We can and should take responsibility for our faith journeys, for nourishing our souls, for feeding our spirits. We just need to discover some way, any way for us to know God and be known by God.

God's not going to do it for us. Sure God may try, but if we are not open to God's presence in our lives, we will miss it.

Remember happy are those who chew on the Scriptures day and night. They are like trees, planted by streams of water, fruitful and in blossom all the time. That's what we all want. So today, as we begin our journey with the Psalms, an invitation is being extended to us and we have a choice. We have the choice to continue thinking we can get by all on our own, that we don't need any help from anyone, that it is our way or not way or we can chose to follow God's way, a way that sustains us, that invites us to thrive, a way that shows us how to be a blessing to others. Today we have a choice. We can continue to beat ourselves up because we don't pray enough or we can realize that our roots are planted by the stream and they are just looking for a little nourishment. And that nourishment can come through reading Scripture, writing in our journals, meditating, working in our gardens, serving at the local shelter or any other way that opens our hearts to God's word, opens our spirits to God's presence in our midst. It is up to us to discover some way, any way to find the nourishment we so crave for our spirits. So today, we have a choice. We have an invitation. We can find some way, any way to know God and be known by God or keep thinking we can go through life, depending only on ourselves. It's up to us which path we take.

May God's word always be a light upon our path. Amen.

