

I. Video Set Up: Introduction and Review

A. Ever have a day like that? I bet you have! Well, do not give up. Keep working to find the time to read and reflect, to pray and open yourself up to God.

B. This is the fourth week of Deep. The premise is, there is a lot of noise out there. It distracts and dilutes us. It makes us shallow. We end up knowing a bit about everything from the Kardashians and the stock market in China to and a shooting in Oregon and the weather in Texas – but little about other things, like our neighbors or even the state of our own heart. And that is not ideal. So, we need to be proactive – in particular, we need to cultivate our relationship with God. If we do not make this a priority, we will grow no deeper than our culture.

C. In week one I laid a lot of this out, arguing that: God is for you and He wants to be a bigger part of your life. In week two we explored wisdom – which is one of the big themes in Proverbs. If we want to go deep we need to be wise – that is, we need Godly-character. Last week the focus was on discipline. I said:

1. This is where life breaks down today – we often know what to do but fail to do it. When we embrace discipline we multiply our life, but it’s hard, especially at first. It does get easier over time. But it’s hard at first. We have to pay in advance.

2. I ended by arguing that we need to use what will power we do have to get the right habits in place. To be more specific – the habits we find in Jesus. Solitude, prayer, fasting and Scripture memory.

D. Today’s topic is insight. And to that end we begin in Psalm 1. The Book of Psalms is the Bible’s collection of prayers. But Psalm 1 is not a prayer it is a meditation on meditating – which suggests that we can’t just jump into prayer from a cold start.¹

II. Psalm 1

A. 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,

¹ In Timothy Keller’s great book on prayer, he talks about this, citing Eugene Peterson, who points out that the Psalms are an edited book and Psalm 1 is the entrance to the rest. “The text [of the Psalms] that teaches us to pray doesn’t begin with prayer. We are not ready. We are wrapped up in ourselves. We are knocked around by the world.” Psalm 1 is “pre-prayer, getting us ready.” (Keller, *Prayer*, p. 146.)

1. Remember, a mocker is one of the four characters in Proverbs – there is the naïve, the fool, the hardened fool – called a mocker – and the wise.

2. The point is, the ones who avoid trouble and troublemakers – like the mocker – ends up with a life more likely to work. And this is worth pointing out because we are oddly attracted to wickedness. It has a particular draw because we are broken. Now, it does not deliver. As Simone Weil wrote: “Imaginary evil is romantic and varied; real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring. Imaginary good is boring; real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating.”

3. But the Psalmist opens by pointing out that we are wise to avoid known trouble.

B. Vs.1-2: 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, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD.²

1. The “Law of the Lord” is the way a pious, first century Jew might refer to their Bible. The Law has a more specific meaning – it referred to the first five books, called The Torah. But the gist is, life works best when we avoid trouble and turn our attention to what God has to say.

C. Vs. 2: Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.

1. To meditate is “to rehearse, to bathe in, to mutter.” The Hebrew word (*hagah*) is sometimes translated “to murmur, sigh or moan.” It is also occasionally used to describe a cow chewing it’s cud – ruminating on something. Clearly there is a lot of repetition and pondering going on – such as when we are memorizing a passage.

2. Now there are several important points to be made about meditation.

² See also Psalm 119:16: I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your Word.

a) First, it is a legitimate, necessary, Christian practice. For a number of years some Christians have been scared of meditation because it strikes them as Eastern, not Christian. I say “meditation,” and you think of someone in Lulu Lemon stretch pants doing the Downward Dog or sitting in a Lotus position, saying a mantra and contemplating their navel or ‘one hand clapping’ or something like that. Now, that’s not a fair representation of Eastern meditation. But my point is, we need to think Hebrew not Hindu. Christian meditation is not about emptying our mind³ but about focusing it on God or some aspect of His character, or filling it with Scripture or truth or beauty. This kind of meditation is very Christian. Indeed, the Bible commands us to meditate.⁴

b) Secondly, we are losing our ability to meditate because we are losing our ability to slow down our thoughts and actually think. SPECTRUM HERE. Many people live on the left side of the spectrum, seldom crossing over the half way point.

c) Third, meditation is a practice with upsides. In Psalm 1 we are given three: we gain stability (like a tree that is firmly rooted); we gain value – we are not like chaff; and we are blessed in the process.

D. V3: 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. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

1. Chaff refers to the dry, scaly protective casings of the seeds of cereal grain, or to finely chopped straw. It has no value.

E. V5: Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

III. So, we clearly want the “way of the righteous,” not the path of destruction. We need more of God and His Law. To that end I want to share a few insights on Spiritual Insight.

A. Our quest for spiritual insight starts (and ends) with The Book.

³ A recent study defined ‘mantra meditation’ as ‘the repetition of a phrase in such a way that it transcends one to an effortless state where focused attention is absent.’ (Keller, p. 149f). This is not the kind of meditation the Bible advocates.

⁴ See: Joshua 1:18; Psalm 19:14; 63:6; 77:10-12; 104:34; 119:15, 97.

1. The good news is, God has revealed himself.⁵
 - a) Both in nature – which we call general revelation⁶ - and beyond nature, supra-naturally or supernaturally – which we call special revelation.
 - b) The highest form of special revelation is Jesus himself (the Word of God incarnate).⁷ But right behind that we have the Bible (which is the Word of God written).
2. Given God's effort to reveal himself through the Book, we need to read it and study it. There is nothing like it. It is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword. It deserves our attention.
3. Let me out it this way. As Christians we understand that there are four sources of authority – four ways that we know things: reason; tradition; experience⁸ and revelation.
 - a) We recognize the value in all four. Indeed, all truth is God's truth, which is why, when they seem to be in conflict we should humbly assume that we are not understanding something correctly. In the end it will all mesh together.
 - b) That said, though we recognize four sources of authority, we default to Scripture. If the four sources are like four suits in cards, Scripture is trump.⁹

⁵ The Greeks were wrong, God is not the unmoved mover or simply the First Cause, nor is He simply a source of energy or power. He has revealed himself to us as a loving, engaged Father who wants to be known and heard. In fact, at times he appears so desperate to be with His people that He keeps returning to them like a battered woman who has been treated poorly but who hopes that next time will be different. (Read Hosea). He wants a relationship with us. He wants a relationship with you.

⁶ General revelation refers to what we know from creation about God. This information is limited and general, but it is available to everyone. In fact, in Romans 1:18f the Apostle Paul makes it clear that there are things about God that we cannot not know. We may deny it, but it is there for us to see.

⁷ Hebrews 1:1-2

⁸ When it comes to these kinds of things I've heard people report that they are doing X because of a dream or a horoscope or circumstances or the comments of their 5th grade science teacher. Not long ago Marcus Gladwell wrote *Blink* suggesting that some people have the unconscious ability to sift through the situation quickly, throwing out all of the irrelevant info and zeroing in on what matters.⁸ And these people need to learn to "go with their gut." Others seem to rely on street smarts and some say something to the effect that, "this is what God told me to do."

⁹ The way we state this at Christ Church is in article one of our statement of faith, which reads: We believe that the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible (as originally written) were inspired of God, hence free from error. They constitute the only infallible guide in faith and life.

4. I am not suggesting that we worship the Bible – like some do. Nor am I suggesting that the Bible is magic. We need to read it and study it in context to understand what it means.
5. The big point I am making is, God has broken the silence and told us what we need to know in order to find him and live a good life. It is a lamp unto our feet – it is a light to help us see and make sense of the world.
6. As part of my devotional reading this week – I’ve been reading the Deep devotions, but I’ve been doing some other things as well. Part of that took me to Psalm 119, where we read: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”
 - a) And what jumped out at me was that the value of a lamp is that it helps you see everything else. You don’t stare at a lamp.
 - b) In some settings, a person’s maturity is measured by their knowledge of the Bible – we equate godliness with scholarliness. That is not what this passage is calling for. The metaphor of a lamp is meant to celebrate the usefulness of Scripture. God’s word shows me the way in a dark and confusing world. The value of Scripture, like that of a lamp, does not come from staring right at it, but from using it in order to see everything else more clearly.¹⁰
7. Insight number one – our understanding of God and the life we are called to starts and ends with the Bible.

¹⁰ Commenting on this, Skye Jethani writes, “Likewise, the wise person is not the one who *knows* Scripture, but the one who *employs* it. The Bible is a means to an end; a gift given to us by God to light our path to him. It is not an end in itself. The failure to recognize this distinction explains why so many can be filled with biblical truth, or sit under strong biblical teaching for decades, and still lack spiritual fruit.” Later he writes, “A disciple is, ‘a student of the teachings of another.’ With this generic definition, we may conclude that a disciple of Jesus is someone who studies theology and reads the Bible every day” and a disciple of Jesus is someone who knows truths about Jesus and can regurgitate his teachings accurately. A closer examination of Scripture, however, reveals that Jesus’ disciples were expected to do far more than learn knowledge. In fact, “It is possible to have our mind filled with all the truth of Scripture, and even agree with it, and still not belong to Christ. In John 5, Jesus confronts the Pharisees. These were educated and devout men. They had literally memorized every word, every letter, and every punctuation mark of Scripture. And still Jesus said to them: ‘You search the Scriptures because in them you think you will find eternal life, and yet these are the Scriptures that testify about me, and you refuse to come to me.’ The Pharisees made it their mission in life to know the Bible, but when the God of the Bible was standing right in front of them, they didn’t recognize him. Even worse, they rejected and killed him. Like the Pharisees, we are often tempted to have a relationship with the Bible and miss the importance of having a relationship with the God of the Bible. I do not mean to diminish the value of the Bible in any way. It is one of God’s most beautiful gifts to us because through Scripture we discover who he is, but in traditions that greatly value the Bible there lurks a danger of making it into an idol that replaces the Living God. Knowing doctrine, Scripture, biblical history, and orthodox theology is very important and useful. We would all be better equipped if we engaged the Bible more regularly and deeply. However, knowledge alone—even divine knowledge—does not make one a disciple of Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote, ‘If I have all prophetic powers, and if I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, but have not love. I am nothing.’”

B. Number two: We are responsible for pursuing God – and that entails putting God’s word in both our head and our heart.

1. Once a week of hearing a bit of Bible read and expounded is not enough. If this is all you get, you will not be like the Psalm 1 tree, that is firmly rooted, stable and vibrant. You will be drift wood. You will get carried hither and yon with the current.

2. This is part of the reason we’re offering a Digging Deeper workshop on spending time with God every day. We want to give you some insights into how to make this time work for you.

3. I was talking with a younger man a few days ago and he was encouraged that his times with God had popped after he had changed pronouns. He reads a passage and takes notes. And in his notes, instead of saying, “Jesus did this,” he has started to write, “you did this.” These are some of the many tools and ideas we’re going to look at.

C. Number Three: We also gain spiritual insight through prayer.

1. I said we start and end with the Bible. I’ll double back to this in a moment. Let me note here that we hear from God – are shaped by God, transformed by Him – through the Holy Spirit through prayer.

2. As you may have noted, our prayers tend to evolve over time.

a) At first we talk at God. This form of prayer is focused on our needs and desires with little interest in God himself. Before I came to faith – and for a while afterwards this was my experience. I talked at God. I made a lot of asks and tried to strike a few deals. He was a means to an end. I didn’t understand it this way, but I essentially viewed him as a genie and I wanted my three wishes.

b) The second kind of prayer – which some people never get to – is listening to God. Here the focus shifts from our words to God’s. Some use Scripture to hear from Him; others are more inclined to sit in silence or to journal, but they are generally waiting for some internal direction. The point being, that God is neither silent or distant and we want to meet with him.

c) Finally, the third stage of prayer is simply being with God. This is when prayer moves beyond communication to communion. It is abiding in the presence of God. Like our most intimate human relationships, this form of prayer does not require words. In the stillness and silence, we know his goodness and love. We are not looking to God for what He can do for us, we are drawing into His presence because of who He is. He is awesome and beautiful. He is majestic. He is holy. Being with him resets things for us. He is not a means to an end. He is the end.

3. Now let me pause here for a brief side bar, because this gets a bit mystical.¹¹

a) Years ago, during a live interview, then CBS anchor Dan Rather, asked Mother Teresa what she said during her prayers. She answered, "I do not say anything. I listen." So Rather turned the question and asked, "Well then, what does God say?" To which she replied, "He doesn't say anything, He listens." And then she added, "I don't think you are going to understand."

b) Talking about this is not without risk, because as soon as we allow for hearing from God in any way other than the Bible, things can get out of hand. Hybels said he waited for thirty years to write, *The Power of Whisper: Hearing God and Having the Guts to Respond*,¹² because as soon as he'd mention it people would either point out that ax murderers often claim they were listening to God. And others grow nervous. I get that.

(1) I bristle when people say to me, "God spoke to me and said," first because there is no easy way to interact with that. If God truly spoke to them then we are all honor-bound to do what God said.¹²

(2) Secondly, sometimes they will say, "God said XYZ." And I will think, "No, because in the Bible he says the opposite."

¹¹ Hybels says that he waited thirty years to write *The Power of Whisper: Hearing God and Having the Guts to Respond*, because when he talks about this people hardly wait until he is off the stage to report that ax murders report that God told them to do it. "Conservative Christians question my orthodoxy when I describe my experiences with the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and secularists either are humored or quietly tell their spouses that Hybels has lost his marbles. Or both. (Bill Hybels, *Whisper*, Zondervan, 2010, p. 16). See also pg. 60, Rev. 2:7.

¹² I have often wanted to point out that in the Old Testament a prophet was expected to be 100 percent correct 100 percent of the time, or they were to be put to death. You cannot casually claim to have special insight from God. Also, do not casually place yourself under someone else's authority like this. We are not bound to do what someone says just because they claim authority. Not all claimed authority is legitimate.

c) This is why pt. one says, “We start and end” with the Bible.¹³ Everything we think we may have heard from God needs to be tested against the Bible. He is not going to contradict himself.

d) But if you’ve heard from God then you do not want to deny that He sometimes breaks through.

(1) There are a handful of times when I’ve sensed God saying something so clearly that I felt like it was him and I needed to act. One was the call to come here.

4. Video from Lachelle

D. We need to make time to hear God.¹⁴

1. Pt one: God has revealed himself, principally through His word; point two: we are responsible for getting his Word into our head and our heart; Point three: We also may hear from God through prayer of at other times. Point number four: We need to make time and space to hear Him.

2. It is counter cultural and not always efficient, but we need to be with God.

3. Let me note, God doesn’t always compete. Sometimes He seems determined to be heard. But we are also told that He has a “still, small voice.” In I Kings 19 we read the account about Elijah – in a low point – asking to hear from God.

¹³ In his book, *The Power of a Whisper: Hearing God and Having the Guts to Respond*, Bill Hybels sets out a handful of filters to discern if it’s truly God speaking; 1) Prayer asking if something someone else has said was from God really is from him; 2) the filter of the Bible; 3) is it wise; 4) is it true to my own character (i.e., does it make sense that God would prompt you to do this kind of thing or is it totally foreign to your gifting / wiring; 5) what do the people you trust the most think.

¹⁴ Much to our dismay, hearing from God is not as easy (clear) as hearing the audible words of a friend or mentor. For what it’s worth, here are some thoughts: 1) If my heart is right, God will break through. He tends to preserve; 2) often, we’re called to step forward, trusting Him, even if we don’t know exactly what He’s pointing us toward; 3) ask Him to Help You Hear (i.e., do not just ask God to speak, ask for the ability to hear); 4) do not be afraid of silence

a) The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

4. Sometimes the voice of God is soft – it’s a nudge. This is one of the reasons why I am encouraging a technology fast.

a) Fasting is abstaining from something – food or media or something – in order to free up time for something else – principally God (to fast from something is to feast on God), and in order to learn how to be sweet and kind even when you don’t get what you want.

b) A tech fast amounts to turning off some of the technology in your life in order to make more room to hear God.

5. I suspect you see the need. I have the statistics if you need them: the average American home now has more TVs than people; the average TV is on for 8 hours and 14 minutes per day;¹⁵ the average kid spends

a) And that’s just the TV. People now Twitter while they drive, talk while they text, and surf themselves to sleep. Some stay plugged in and available 24/7. People tell me they could not live without their cell phones or the Internet or e-mail – and I think they mean it. Yet in many ways, these technologies lead us to more disconnected from each other – and from God – than in the past.¹⁶

b) How can we hear the voice of God if we are multitasking nonstop? How can we see the face of God in still waters and green pastures if we never look up from the screen? The digital generation is a distracted generation.

¹⁵ A 2010 Study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation. See Neal Samudre, “Why Screen Addiction is a Spiritual Problem.”

¹⁶ We’ve since raced past that, through the Internet, message boards, chat rooms and e-mail to text messaging, iTunes, Bluetooth, YouTube and Twitter. Most of these mediums did not exist a decade ago. How do they affect us? How do they affect the neurological development of children? I don’t know but we are conducting that experiment with about two billion people right now. And my concern is not physical, emotional, or social, it’s spiritual.

6. I do not have answers to these questions, but I know enough to suggest that you set it all aside from time to time to see how you are doing – and to be sure you can hear God’s still small voice if he was saying something.¹⁷

a) I can hear some of you protesting right now. “I’m not sure what planet this clown lives in, but I have a real job and real kids and there is no way that I can give up email or my I-phone or” whatever.

b) I’m guessing that many of you see yourself as an exception to this because of work. Or you are thinking, “I have waited over 100 years to see the Cubs win the World Series, I am not missing Wednesday’s playoff game.”

c) Fine. I’m not angling for a fight. I’m simply suggesting that you give up what you can for a hours or days or weeks – in order to make time for God – and you see what happens. You might be fine. You mind find that you are addicted and it is going to require that you do more of this kind of thing. Right now, just cut back on what you can cut back on.

d) My plea is that you open up time for God and identify any forms of technology to which you have become addicted.

e) And my guess is that you might discover that there is life and sanity when we walk away from some of these things. Saying no to a lot of these things – if only for a few hours – is a way we can take back our freedom.

E. There is more to this topic. For instance, I think it’s important to note that God is unlikely to call you up if you are unwilling to respond.

F. But let me move to the last one. We need to see God in Worship and the Sacraments

1. Later in our Luke series I am going to do a small series on the sacraments. For now let me simply note, I am not Roman Catholic. I do not subscribe to what theologians call Transubstantiation – the idea that the bread and wine become the literal body of Jesus. But I do think many of us are too casual as we approach this table and that we need to learn to see the sacred in the midst of the ordinary and to create the cadences into our lives that God intends.

2. And we will have a chance to do that again in just a moment.

¹⁷ Hybels writes, “When it comes to being heard by his children, our Father does not compete, nor does he contend for our undivided attention.” Often he delivers nothing more than a nudge.” *Whisper*, p. 11.

IV. Before we go there let me summarize the options in front of you. Steps you can take to draw closer to the God who wants to draw closer to you.

A. First, I am encouraging a tech fast. I'm suggesting it start tomorrow and go for five days. You can start whenever and go for however long you chose. Figure out what that means for you. And let me be clear, the goal is not simply to not spend four hours watching cat videos, or texting every time you have a free moment. The goal is to spend time with God.

B. Second, there are two workshops.

1. Next Sunday night, I will lead a workshop at the Lake Forest campus on How to spend time with God every day. That same workshop will be led by Dan at HP and Garth at CR on Monday, Oct. 12th.

2. On Oct. 24 there is an opportunity to spend an extended time with God in prayer. There are weekly opportunities at all of the campuses to pray on Sunday mornings before the services.

C. There are some other options:

1. If you are open to meeting with someone

2. Next month I will be doing two lectures for those of you who are skeptical of all of this or new.

V. Men and women: God is not silent. You owe it to yourself to learn to listen.

VI. Prayer / Communion