

God at the Center: Habits for Spiritual Growth – #2

Reading God's Book – The Authority of Scripture

I would like to engage you in a Lenten Series – one inspired by the author Luis Palau as part of the *Discovery Series of Our Daily Bread*. In this Lenten Series, we will be challenged but mostly encouraged to establish or strengthen some spiritual habits that will materialize into a closer relationship with God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Journey with me and find yourself in a time of renewal leading to a lifetime of healthy habits.

While there's no formula that delivers the ultimate faith-filled life, God has given us ways to daily strengthen our faith. *God at the Center: Habits for Spiritual Growth* outlines clear steps we can take to build the fundamentals of faith to spiritual maturity: Talking with God in Prayer, Reading God's Book, Cultivating Dependence on God, Practicing Obedience to God, Serving God and Others, Becoming God's Ambassador.

The label "People of the Book" has been attributed to Jews and Christians and for good reason. Belief in the authority of Scripture (also known as *The Bible* or Book of books) is critical to living out one's call as a Christian. Only through such faith can one experience the joy of being children of God.

Scripture provides the basis of our faith. According to the apostle Paul, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Like *prayer*, one's engagement with and exploration of the word of God becomes permanent only through practice. It is one of those things that learned by doing and is most effective in *community* as Scripture was never intended to be studied privately, separate from fellow sisters and brothers of the faith.

What we have today as the Book of books was part of an oral tradition shared by our fore-bearers. There were also some important tools to help guide the conversation e.g. the author of the text, the intended audience, historic context, location, language, nuance, etc. Left alone, anyone reading the Bible for

the first time can be confused, discouraged, frustrated and may have a number of questions as in the encounter with Philip and Ethiopian eunuch's in Acts 8:26-39. But under the guidance of rabbi or teacher, scripture becomes a source of inspiration and authority in the life of the believer.

For those of you familiar with the sacred word of God, I would like to challenge you to memorize it. Memorizing passages of Scripture is another way to grow closer to God. Paul wrote, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Phil. 4:8)

How can we think about what is pure when we are confronted daily with deception, lies and corruption? But purposeful, intentional meditating on Scripture offers joyous hope and a freedom beyond measure. In Matthew 4:1-11 we read that, when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, he relied on Scripture to counter the devil and upon the cross of Calvary was heard reciting Psalm 22. I know that you may be thinking that you are no Jesus, but let me share with you some evidence that you too can develop a habit of engaging scripture and memorizing it for your spiritual growth and benefit.

During my Clinical Pastoral Education, I visited Mary, an 80 year old resident in a Brooklyn Nursing Home. Her eyes were failing to the point that she could no longer read, but one day as I was reading from Psalm 100 she joined in – word for word, from memory. But there was more, as Mary finished reciting the Psalm; a wide smile replaced a usually grim look. She was truly engaged in the word and the Word engaged her.

Having this encounter with Mary and knowing the richness of God's Word, I am convinced that we have the ability to commit scripture to memory, thus we worship God in a deeper way and as we do so, inspire others along the journey.

Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
92-10 217th St., Queens Village, NY
www.RedeemerQV.org ~ 718-468-8868