

“The Power of God’s Word”

Isaiah 55:10-11, Hebrews 4:12

Let us pray. Lord, you are amazing. You reign over all the earth. And we come before you this morning, simply asking you to show up in a new way. Open our ears to listen and make our hearts fertile soil for your Word to be planted and grow. We are ready to listen. Please speak to us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Several years ago, my husband Bob and I went on a Caribbean cruise. We hadn’t been on a cruise before, and I was so excited! I could envision us relaxing on the deck looking out over the wide, blue ocean. I could see Bob and I taking walks in the evening with the moonlight shimmering across the water, just like on the television show from the 1970’s, “The Love Boat”. How many of you remember “The Love Boat”?

This had been a stressful time for me. I recently started a new job, and my mom had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. This cruise was going to be just what I needed. I hoped to come home feeling relaxed and refreshed.

That first night on the ship, we were in the auditorium when I began to feel the ship rocking back and forth. As we left the auditorium and entered the hallway, the ship leaned far to the right. All of the passengers stumbled to the right. Then the ship leaned far to the left, and we all stumbled to the left. We continued down the hallway going from side to side. It was difficult to keep our balance. I looked at Bob and said, “I can’t believe this!” We made it to our cabin, but the strong wind continued all night long.

By the next day, the wind had died down some, but it still remained cool and windy for the rest of the cruise.

I was so disappointed. This was not the trip we had hoped for, and we both agreed we’d never go on another cruise.

Shortly after getting back home, I read a devotion about the Samaritan woman at the well, from John chapter four. Jesus spoke to the woman about living water, and He was referring to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can give us spiritual energy that will cleanse and refresh us. When I read this, it dawned on me that I had been looking for peace in the wrong place. There is nothing on this

earth that can give us peace like Jesus can, that peace which surpasses all understanding. Jesus is the living water, and He can renew and refresh our soul.

One of my favorite Bible verses is John 14:27. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” I have recited this verse many times when I have felt worried or anxious.

Another favorite verse is Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Reciting this verse before job interviews, before my surgery, and before giving talks like this one has helped me get over my nervousness. When we read and study God’s Word, it becomes a part of us and we can think of scripture in times of need.

There are many reasons why we read the Bible. Scripture teaches us about God and His purpose for us and guides us through all situations in life.

Psalms 119, verse 105 says, “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Joyce Meyer, well known author and speaker, says we are lifetime learners. We can apply God’s Word to situations in our life as we would apply medicine to an injury. If we are having a particular problem such as anger, depression, or fear, we can find passages in God’s Word that deal with these subjects.

God’s words are not ordinary words like the words of other people. His Words are filled with power. God’s Word heals, comforts, saves, corrects, and encourages us. God’s Word can be medicine for our souls.

So, we know why it’s important to read the Bible, but sometimes we may not be motivated to read. We may lose our desire to spend time studying God’s Word. God knows this. We are human. When this happens, we need to remind ourselves of the value of reading the Bible.

Bob and I like to read the Upper Room Devotional. We like reading it because it is an excellent resource for relating the Bible to daily life and it contains meditations written by people from around the world.

Often the meditation talks about worry and the Bible reading is from Matthew chapter 6. This is where Jesus tells us to look at the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. Since God takes care of them, we should not worry about our life. When I see that these verses are the focus of the meditation, I look at my

husband and say, “The Bible reading is the one about worry – again!” Since we’re so familiar with these verses, we don’t need to read them again, right? No, it’s wrong to think that way.

I’d like to share with you a devotion from the Upper Room. The title is “Alive and Active”. The Bible reading is from Matthew 14. This is the story about Jesus walking on water. His disciples were in a boat, quite a distance from shore. It had become very windy, and the waves were violently beating against the boat. I’m going to read Matthew 14:25-33.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

“Lord, if it is you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” He said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” He said, “why did you doubt?”

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, “Truly you are the son of God.”

The story about Jesus walking on the water is a familiar one and we often hear it read in church. So why should we take the time to read it again?

Here is what the author of the meditation writes.

I took my family to see a musical. After it was over, I asked everyone what they liked most about it. My daughter, who plays the piano, said she liked the songs the best. My other daughter, who likes to read, said she was intrigued by the story. My wife, who is a people person, enjoyed watching how the audience reacted. They all saw the same musical, but each was affected by a different aspect of it.

The same is true of the Bible. The Holy Spirit can take the same story and speak different things to us depending on what we need to hear. After reading the story of Jesus, and then Peter, walking on the sea, someone who is going through trials may see how Jesus comes to us in our distress. Someone who is struggling with doubt may see how Peter did something extraordinary by simply trusting Jesus. And someone who is wondering about prayer may see the effectiveness of Peter’s prayer, “Lord, save me!”

When we read and study the Bible, it is amazing how personal the Word of God can be. Through scripture, God speaks to our individual hearts and tells us what we need to hear.

Isn’t that awesome! Through His Word, God speaks to each one of us and tells us what we need to hear.

So how do we get the most out of reading scripture?

I always begin by asking God to open my heart and mind to what it is He’s saying to me, right now, at this very moment.

Joyce Meyer suggests that as you read the Bible verses, slowly take them in and roll them over in your mind. You will find a change taking place in your heart and life.

Several years ago I participated in a study where I learned about a practice called Lectio Divina. Lectio Divina means sacred reading. We read the Bible slowly and reverently looking to encounter the Living God.

Begin by reading the scripture and listening for a word or phrase that captures your attention and ponder it. Simply listen for something that speaks more loudly than the other words. Then read the scripture again. Begin to chew on the word or phrase that caught your attention. What connection does it have to your life right now?

Read the scripture a third time. Speak with God about what you’re noticing, hearing, or feeling. What might God want to say to you? Read the scripture a fourth time. Then sit in silence and rest in the presence of God. What is the Holy Spirit stirring in you?

Sacred reading invites the Holy Spirit to bring the Word to life in a way that speaks to us right in the middle of our daily lives. We let the Word move from our minds to our hearts where it can transform us.

Several years ago I gave my dear friend and co-worker a yearly subscription to the Upper Room for her birthday. Her life had not been easy.

My friend had a son who had been in a diving accident when he was a teen. As a result of this accident, her son was a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the neck down.

He lived with my friend and her husband and they took care of him. This young man was also battling cancer. So, I hoped the Upper Room would encourage her and help her during this difficult time.

Two months after receiving her copy of the Upper Room, my friend’s son lost his battle with cancer and went to be with our Lord. I called her a few days later to tell her how sorry I was. We talked for a while, and then she asked me, “Mary, did you read the Upper Room on that day, the day that our son passed away?” I told her I had read it, but since a few days had passed, I did not remember what the devotion was about.

She told me the Bible reading was about a crippled woman. The reading was from Luke Chapter 13, verses 10-13, and I’d like to read it to you now.

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

My friend told me that the woman in the Bible had been crippled for 18 years, and her son had been paralyzed for 18 years. The woman in the Bible had been set free, and my friend felt God telling her that her son was now free, free from his paralysis, free from his wheelchair, free to walk and run in heaven with God. She told me how much comfort and peace that verse gave her on the day her son had passed away.

I still have that copy of the Upper Room, and the page is marked. I keep it as a reminder of how amazing and awesome God is and how He speaks to us through His Word.

The Bible is so much more than words on paper. It is the Living Word, a living connection to the heart and mind of God. So read the Bible with an eagerness to listen to scripture as the Word of God and a willingness to hear and obey it. Trust the Holy Spirit to instruct you and empower you through scripture.

John 8:31 says, “If you make my Word your home you will indeed be my disciples.”

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of Your Word. We pray that we would seek you, Lord, through scripture, and let Your Word move from our minds to our hearts where it can transform us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.