

How To Stay Alive as a Believer and as a Church

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[0 : 00] That's the deal. I won't interrupt you if you've fallen asleep later on. The question is how to stay alive as a believer and a church.

It's a bit of a shock, isn't it, that some people begin their lives as Christians or become Christians during their lives and then seem to fade away from Christianity, don't they?

You might know people like that. You might have been a person like that. And it's also true of churches, that churches can function quite well and be lively churches, very committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing God, serving God.

And then they seem to lose their way. And in a way things keep happening in the church, but you get the sense that something's died, something important has died.

So that's why I've chosen the title, How to Stay Alive as a Believer and a Church. And the reference I want to bring to you is the first one from Matthew chapter 4.

[1 : 08] And if you have a Bible, you might like to turn to that. We'll look at two verses in connection with this reference. We're in Matthew chapter 4, which I think is page 967.

And we find here that Jesus is tested in the wilderness. Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

After fasting for 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. That's understandable. Now, it's very important to realise this is not just a personal temptation for Jesus, a personal testing.

It is a testing of his role as the Son of God. That's why the tempter came and said, if you are the Son of God. Because if you look back at the last verse of the previous chapter, chapter 3, verse 17, at Jesus' baptism, the voice from heaven, that is, God the Father says, said, this is my Son whom I love, with whom I am well pleased.

So, God the Father has said, this is my Son. And now the tempter is saying, well, if you are the Son. Now, I think the most striking thing is Jesus' reply in verse 4.

[2 : 39] Jesus answered, it is written, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Now, there are a number of remarkable things about that reply. The first one is that Jesus doesn't say, well, I'm the special Son of God.

He replies with what is true of every person. So, he doesn't say, he doesn't pull rank and say, well, I'm the Son of God, I can do what I like.

He gets from the Old Testament a general rule about how the people of God must live. And the answer is, not by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

That's extraordinary, because the Son of God is saying, I live by God's words. I stay alive by God's words.

[3 : 39] Isn't that extraordinary? So, even the Son of God stays alive on the words of God. They must be important, mustn't they? Here's something else which is extraordinary.

He doesn't just say in his answer, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. He introduces that with, it is written.

So, now we know exactly what words of God keep Jesus alive. What are they? Written words, aren't they?

Which means, they're from the Old Testament. Also extraordinary, because the words that Jesus quotes from the Old Testament, It is written, man shall not live on bread alone.

Of course, man includes women and children there. Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. If you turn back to Deuteronomy, if you keep a finger in Matthew chapter 4, we'll come back to that.

[5 : 02] Turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 8. Here is Moses preaching to the people of God, just before they enter the promised land. It's page 187 in the Bibles.

And Moses giving them a series of sermons before they enter the promised land. Let's read from chapter 8 and verse 1.

He says to the people, Remember, in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

He humbled you, causing you to hunger, and then feeding you with manna. Remember that bread which came down from heaven? The manna. And why did God feed them by manna?

There it is in verse 3. To teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. It was a great miracle, wasn't it?

[6 : 16] I mean, wouldn't it be wonderful to be walking through a desert and have God pelting you with food? That's what was happening. This was bread this time. Another time it was quail, which must have been more painful when they came down.

But anyway, I mean for the quail, but also for the people. Imagine being hit with a quail on the way past. A fat quail might do some damage. But here it is.

I remember the first time I heard this miracle. I thought it was a wonderful miracle of God providing food in the desert as he provided drink in the desert. But we discover from Moses that this feeding has a particular purpose, an educative purpose.

It is to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. So here's another remarkable thing about Jesus' reply.

He's quoting not the direct word of God, but the word of God through the servant of God, Moses. So Jesus is sustained by the word of God through a human agent, a human prophet, that is Moses.

[7 : 25] And Jesus is saying, this is not just a rule for me.

This is a rule for everyone. So according to Jesus, how do we stay alive as a believer and as a church?

The answer is, we stay alive by every word of the Scriptures. Well, if I'd asked you when you came into the room tonight, how do you think God keeps you alive as a believer?

I wonder what you would have said. There are lots of good replies to that question. I think you could say, well, by his kindness, by his steadfast love, by his faithfulness.

That's quite right. But what means does God use to keep you alive as a believer? You might say, well, it's my experience of God that keeps me going as a believer.

[8 : 35] Or you might say, well, it's belonging to a church like St. Silas. That keeps me going as a believer. You might say, well, it's, you know, I've prayed to God and God's answered my prayers, so out of gratitude I keep going as a believer.

But Jesus' answer is, you stay alive by the word of God, as he does. Isn't that extraordinary?

So what we're talking about tonight is how, what Jesus teaches us about staying alive by the word of God, by the scriptures.

This is why reading the Bible is so important. This is why hearing the Bible read in church is so important. And this is why hearing preachers teach the word of God is so important.

This is the reason why teaching the Bible to children is so important. It's the reason why teaching the Bible to young people, I mean, anybody under 60, is very important.

[9 : 53] This is the reason why teaching the Bible to people who aren't Christians is so important. Jesus answered, it is written, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Now, one of my rules when I read the Bible, I don't always keep this rule, but one of the rules is, whenever I read a Bible verse, turn it into a prayer. So what would be a good prayer to pray from this Bible verse?

God is, dear Heavenly Father, keep me alive by every word that comes from your mouth.

Dear Heavenly Father, please keep this church alive by every word that comes from the mouth from your mouth. for it is, of course, from the mouth of God we know the mind of God, isn't it?

God reveals his mind, what he thinks, through his mouth as you reveal your mind through your mouth and I do the same. So from the mouth of God we learn the mind of God.

[11 : 19] I was just talking a moment ago about how our world has changed and one of the big changes in our world is the number of words we hear. You see people walking along the street, don't you, with those things in their ears and they're hearing words and they're also reading their,

what is it?

That phony thing, don't they? So they've got words going in their ears, you don't do this, I'm sure, but they've got words in their ears and words in their eyes so much that they don't actually know where they're going so they're doing things like, oh, here's one.

One of those, that's it. That's recording you. Is it? I did. Good evening. And we surround ourselves with voices and indeed people often put the radio on just for company.

Nice to have a voice in the background and things like that. Always nice to turn it off as well, I think, but it's nice to have a voice in the background. But you know, the most important voice to hear is God's voice.

And the most important words to hear are God's words. So what happens when you read your Bible? It's the moment in the day when God speaks to you.

[12:45] God has his word. God's allowed to say something to you. Of course, it's right for us to talk to God and say what we want to say to God. And God loves to hear our prayers and answer our prayers.

We can pray funny prayers, odd prayers, selfish prayers, generous prayers, thoughtful prayers. It's good to talk to God and his ears are always ready to hear us.

But it's really important, isn't it, that we stop long enough to hear what God wants to say to us. It's like a good conversation, isn't it? You can talk for a while, but then you have to stop and listen, don't you?

And if you don't listen to someone, you're not respecting them, are you? Careful listening is a great gift, I think, to the person we're talking with or rather hearing.

And that's what we want to do with God in church and in our own lives. So, dear Heavenly Father, please keep us alive by words from your mouth, from every word, by every word from your mouth.

[13:58] and please keep our church alive by every word from your mouth. Now, that's the most important thing I want to say tonight.

We could all go home now if you'd like to do that. We could go home. But let me stop before we move on to if there are any questions or comments you'd like to make in response to that.

I remember the first day I went to Sunday school when I was 11. I was a slow starter and I had a new Bible to go along to Sunday school and the teacher said God didn't like new Bibles, he liked used Bibles.

So, I knew what to do. I took my Bible home, ripped some pages out and scribbled in the margins. I thought God will be really pleased with me now because I've got a used Bible. I was a trusting young lad and always did what teachers said, well, on this occasion anyway.

I think I've learnt that's not quite the right way to teach a Bible, but a lived-in Bible is a good sight to see. Let's move on to Matthew chapter 7.

[15:16] I'm sure you'll know this section of the Sermon on the Mount, the basic teaching of Jesus about discipleship. Jesus has been teaching from chapter 5 to chapter 6 to chapter 7 and then in the last part of chapter 7, he says, everyone who hears these words of mine, verse 24, and puts them into practice, is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, the wind blew, beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand, the rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell with a great crash.

And the important lesson there is we must not just hear God's words or Jesus' words here, but we put them into practice.

If we do that, we're wise. If we hear them but don't do them, we're foolish. so it's unwise for us to go to church on a Sunday and hear the Bible read and hear the sermon and then go away and forget about it.

As it's foolish, Jesus says, to read the Bible and then instantly forget what you've just read. what we're meant to do, you see, is to remember and then put into practice what Jesus said.

[16:58] So I love that verse in 1 Peter chapter 5 where Peter says, cast all your cares on him for he cares for you.

Isn't that a wonderful verse? But there's not a lot of point in remembering the verse but not actually doing it, is there? So we should not only think I'm going to put this Bible verse into a prayer, help me cast all my anxieties on you for you care for me and I praise you for that, but also put that into

practice in our lives.

So every time an anxiety clouds our minds, we do indeed cast it on God. Next we move to Matthew chapter 22 where Jesus is talking with the Sadducees who were a group of Jews at that time who were contemporaries of his and they had a trick question for him.

I used to love asking the teacher at school trick questions and that's exactly what the Sadducees do. This is Matthew chapter 22 and verse 23.

It's on page 991. The Sadducees were one group of Jews who didn't believe in the idea of a resurrection, that is, that people are raised on the last day.

[18:36] The Pharisees, another group, they did believe that everyone would be raised on the last day, but the Sadducees different, so they didn't. So they came with the question.

That same day, the Sadducees who say there's no resurrection came to him with a question.

Teacher, they said, Moses told that as if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him.

Now there were seven brothers among us, the first one married and died. Since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right down to the seventh.

Finally the woman died, no wonder, after seven husbands. I think that would be more than enough in my opinion. Now here's the sneaky question. At the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven since all of them were married to her?

Well, I can imagine them sitting back and sniggering after asking that clever question. It's a bit like trying to ridicule politicians, isn't it, at interviews. And this is exactly what's happening to Jesus.

[19:38] Well, look at Jesus' reply in verse 29. You're in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They'll be like the angels in heaven.

But about the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God said to you? I'm the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Now please notice in verse 29 that Jesus not only says that they are wrong, but he also tells them why they're wrong. He says you're in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God.

So they're in trouble, aren't they? If you don't know the scriptures, you don't know the power of God, you're certain to be wrong. And then he tackles the power of God first.

He says, well, at the resurrection, we're different people, neither marry or are given in marriage. And then you don't know the scriptures, so then he reminds them of Exodus chapter 3, have you not read?

[20:41] Now look very carefully at verse 31. He doesn't say, have you not read what God said to Moses? What does he say instead? Have you not read what God said to you?

Isn't that extraordinary? So he's saying, well, those words God spoke to Moses all those years ago are the very words he's saying to you now.

So it's silly to say the Bible's an old book for people long dead when Jesus says, have you not read what God said to you?

Well, Jesus is only doing what we found in Matthew chapter 4, isn't he? He's treating an ancient word as a contemporary word, as a present word. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

In other words, he's only telling the Sadducees to do what he himself did. He's no hypocrite, is he? He's saying, well, here is God's word for you, and previously we found that he's applying God's word to himself.

[21:55] And I think what's good enough for Jesus ought to be good enough for us. That's a good idea, isn't it? When in doubt, follow Jesus, is my advice.

Move on to Mark 7. This time we meet not the Sadducees, but the Pharisees. And they come to complain about how Jesus and his disciples are living.

And Mark writes his gospel for non-Jews, for Gentiles, so he wants to explain what the Pharisees believed and the way they lived. The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who'd come from Jerusalem, this is page 1010, they gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.

And then Mark helpfully comments, the Pharisees and all the Jews don't eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, following the tradition of the elders, that is, the ancient teachers. And when they come from the marketplace, they don't eat unless they wash, they observe many other traditions such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles. So the Pharisees and the teachers of the law asked Jesus, why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?

[23 : 30] Now, notice they're not quoting what the Bible says, they're quoting what their old teachers have said. That's who the elders are. They're not quoting Moses, they're quoting the ancient teachers whom they follow.

well, Jesus' reply is somewhat abrupt, I think. Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites.

That's a bit unkind, isn't it? Because Isaiah was talking about people of his day, but Jesus is applying Isaiah's words to the people in front of him. As it is written, a quotation from Isaiah 29, these people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they worship me in vain, their teachings are merely human rules.

And then I want you to focus very carefully on verse 8, and then verse 9, and then verse 13. First of all, he says, you've let go of the commands of God, and are holding on to human traditions.

Then he says, you have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God to observe your own traditions. traditions. And the third version of the same thing is, you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you've handed down, and you do many things like that.

[24 : 54] Now, it's a very odd feature of Christian churches, but often they're more committed to their own traditions than they are to the Bible. And I visit lots of different churches as I travel around the world speaking, and I find often that Christian churches and Christian leaders are more committed to what their church has always done than they are to the scriptures.

And I think, well, that must be the wrong way around, doesn't it? Because Jesus says we have to be more committed to what the Bible says than we are to our own traditions.

Now, traditions can be good things. it's rather good to have electric light in churches so you can see that's not a bad tradition, it doesn't do any damage, does it? But sometimes our traditions become a bit legalistic, and sometimes they inhibit our growth as believers, and sometimes they make it hard for unbelievers to come into the church and know what's going on.

So the great thing about traditions is to hold them with an open hand. If they're useful, use them. If they're not, let them go. But hang on to the Bible.

The expression is for grim death, but that's not quite the word to use, is it? For grim life. No, for abundant life I think would be a better word to use. And then a warning from Mark chapter 8, the next chapter.

[26 : 27] I remember the first time I read this, it struck terror into my heart. Let's pick it up at verse 27.

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, who do people say that I am? They replied, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, still others one of the prophets.

What about you? He asked, who do you say I am? Peter answered, you're the Messiah. Wonderful moment in Mark's gospel. Jesus warned them not to tell anyone because he had to explain what kind of Messiah he was, which he does in the next verse.

He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, that he must be killed, and after three days rise again. he spoke plainly about this, and Peter, always impetuous, always brave, took him aside and began to rebuke him. Isn't that very unwise, don't you think?

[27 : 30] Would you take Jesus aside and rebuke him? I would have thought that was not a very good thing to do. If you're thinking of doing it, my advice is think. My father used to say, think before you speak.

My advice is think before you rebuke Jesus. Well, Jesus replies, pretty abrupt, get behind me, Satan. You don't have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.

And then he continues telling them that his way, that of death and resurrection, will be the way of the disciples as well. Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.

Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. Whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul? What can anyone give in exchange for their soul? And here is, I think, the striking verse, verse 38. If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with his whole angels.

[28 : 47] Please notice, Jesus doesn't say, if anyone is ashamed of me, he says, of me and my words. Well, there are times when we might think that Jesus' words are a bit tough, a bit hard to understand, and even harder to put into practice.

But being ashamed of Jesus and his words is a very dangerous practice. Run from it, I think, as if it were a plague.

We move to the end of Luke's Gospel, chapter 24, the very last chapter of Luke's Gospel, Gospel, the next Gospel. We're on page 1062.

Well, let me ask you a question. If I asked you to summarise the Old Testament, how would you summarise it?

It's a big thing to do, isn't it, summarising the Old Testament? You could say, well, here, it's over here, actually. Look, over on the board, there it is. God created the world, God created people, and birds, and a little dog, I'm pleased to see.

[30 : 23] It's a bit like my dog, Bertie. Then sin into the world, and then God rescues Noah, that's a good idea, and then God makes a promise to Abraham.

We could go through the story of the Old Testament, couldn't we, from beginning to end? And if you had a good memory, and if you won a prize at Sunday school, you might know what happened in the Old Testament.

it. But let's read from Luke chapter 24, and verse 45.

He opened their minds, the disciples' minds, so they could understand the scriptures. He told them, this is what is written. Verse 46, the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.

Or back to 44, which is the one I think in our notes. This is what I told you, what I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that was written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms.

[31 : 33] So if you understand the Old Testament right, you understand that it contains promise of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. well that was a bit of a shock for the disciples.

I hadn't quite picked that up. But that tells us what we must look for when we read the Old Testament. Let's move on to John chapter 6.

This is the feeding of the 5,000. We've had lots of food themes tonight. We had the manna in the wilderness and now we have Jesus feeding 5,000 people in John chapter 6.

Right at the end of the chapter on page 1071, we discover that after Jesus has fed them and then begins to teach them, some people move away.

They can't understand or believe his teaching. That's verse 66. from this time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

[32 : 46] You don't want to leave too, do you? Jesus asked the 12. Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We've come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. Well, we began by thinking that God's words keep us alive and now Peter is saying, Jesus' words keep us alive.

You have the words of eternal life. So, again, we're kept alive by the words of God. Here, we're kept alive by Jesus' words.

Well, I had a remarkable experience back in February. A friend of mine emailed me and said that a friend of hers was in hospital dying.

Would I go to visit her? She wanted to speak to a minister. And so I went to the hospital and met this lady, Julianne, whom I hadn't met before. She was going to die in about a week's time.

[33 : 58] That's why she wanted to talk to a minister. And she told me about her life and then she said, I'm about to die. What's about to happen to me?

So I said, well, there is a God and you're about to meet him. So then she asked me what God was like and we talked on about what God was like and God's love in sending his son.

God gave her the words from John chapter three, God so loved the world that he gave his only son that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Though she hadn't been to church all her life, she remembered the words from Sunday school. She said them with me. Isn't that remarkable? So she remembered the words. And then I reminded her of the story of the thief on the cross.

Do you remember that when he says, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom? Jesus replied, today you'll be with me in paradise. I said to her, well, if you believe in Jesus and trust him as your saviour, then the day you die, you'll be with him in paradise.

[35 : 18] What I was saying to her was, please believe what Jesus said. And she did. And after we prayed a prayer, she then said to me, would you please write those Bible verses out for me?

So I said, I'll make sure you get a copy. I went home, sent a copy to a friend. I said, please print these out. Please take the print out tomorrow and read them to your friend.

And I went the next day and there Julianne had the verses written out. See, what I wanted her to do was to trust Jesus' words for eternal life. And she did. Isn't that wonderful? She had nothing to offer God at all, did she?

She died just six days later. Nothing to offer God. She couldn't say, well, I'm going to serve you forever. All she could do was trust that Jesus had the words of eternal life.

And one of the great privilege of being a minister is you're often talking with people who are dying. And I love saying to Christian believers, well, you're perfectly safe in God's hands as you prepare to die, and you're perfectly safe in God's hands as you go through the process of dying, however long it takes or however painful it is, and then you're perfectly safe in God's hands for eternity.

[36 : 44] eternity. How dare I say that if Jesus doesn't have the words of eternal life, if Jesus isn't the resurrection of the life as he claims to be in John's gospel.

See, Jesus' words are so important to live by and to die by. So when Peter says you have the words of eternal life, he's spot on, isn't he?

Jesus does have the words which will bring eternal life. Well, a few more references from John. We won't look them up. I just want to read them out for you. Jesus' words in John chapter 8, if you abide in my word, that is, dwell in my word, you are truly my disciples, you'll know the truth, the truth will set you free.

So a disciple of Christ, a follower of Christ, is not just someone who admires Jesus' character, or who's inspired by his miracles, or inspired by his example, but someone who abides in his words, lives in his words.

[37 : 55] If you abide in my word, you're truly my disciples. Or in John 15, he says to the disciples, you're clean through the word I've spoken to you. And then in John 17, when the Lord Jesus is praying to his father, he says to his father of the disciples, I've given them the words you've spoken to me.

Isn't that striking? The words Jesus says to the disciples are the words the father has said to him. So Jesus' words are the father's words.

I've given them the words you've spoken to me. And what's the result? They've received them and come to know in truth that I came from you.

Then he prays, sanctify them, make them holy in the truth. Your word is truth. Well, friends, I want to tell you that's a very big view of the power of the Bible, isn't it?

and the significance of the Bible. How do we stay alive as a believer in the church? We live by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

[39 : 08] We believe that Jesus has the words of eternal life. Now let me pause for any response or any questions or comments you'd like to make.

And I'll get a drink of water. there's a man outside him I'd like to come in with oh, bro.

Shit. Anyone look at that and think, well, my favourite Bible verse is missing.

I'm happy to include it. Okay, let's move over the page then.

And we're moving to a slightly different... I'm ahead of this, staying alive by meditating on God's words.

[40 : 28] We should be consciously trying to change our lives all the time unless we are already sinless. Is anybody in the room, by the way, sinless? No? No volunteers for sinlessness?

I'm sure your neighbour will tell you if you are. Or perhaps if you're not. We should be aiming to die to sin and live to righteousness every day. To escape the power of the lies of our past or the lies of

Satan.

To live in the truth, love and freedom of God. To stop being controlled by our sinful flesh and see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Well, that's a good idea.

How do we change? The means that God has provided to enable this to happen is the Bible. For God's words are powerful to change us.

As they were written by God the Holy Spirit originally. And the same Spirit applies them to our hearts and lives today. But this is unlikely to be effective with a read, run, forget approach to reading the Bible.

[41 : 40] Our lives are so full of activity, information, responsibilities, worries, information again. Notice that. I've come twice. Input and people and elections, I might say.

That we quickly forget. And gossip. That we quickly forget our morning Bible reading and quickly forget our weekly sermon. That's why God has told us not just to read or hear his words, but to meditate on them.

And to meditate is to reflect on, to ponder, to mull over, to talk about, to re-read, to re-hear, to say to others, and to hear from the lips of others.

We learn in Psalm 1 that God blesses those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers.

And our meditations, or our self-talk, or what we think about when we're doing the ironing or going for a walk or something, often express worry, unbelief, criticism of others or ourselves, busyness, activities, complaints, or tension.

[42 : 45] This is kind of worldly meditation, I think. And we should replace this worldly meditation with godly meditation. Good meditation should replace bad meditation.

Healthy meditation should replace unhealthy meditation. As Psalm 1 tells us in the next verse, God blesses those who both delight in and meditate on God's teaching.

Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. So please don't hear me saying to you, you should be reading the Bible. I'm saying, please delight in it and meditate on it.

That's more demanding, isn't it? Delight in it and meditate on it. It's a long time since I've had a love letter. I did have a Valentine's Day card this year.

I don't know who it was from, but I enjoyed it. A brief moment anyway. But I remember the last love letter I had, and I did read it, not just once, but a number of times.

[43 : 54] Kept it close to my heart and so on, until it finally wore out, as did the affection of the person who'd sent it. I've probably got it, I love keeping things, so it's probably in my house somewhere, but probably illegible by now, and I've probably forgotten who sent it.

But you see, as the great St. Augustine said, we should read the Bible as a letter from God. Isn't that lovely? A letter from God.

Or if you prefer it, an email from God. If God, indeed, deigns to use email. Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.

It's only delighting in and meditating on God's teaching which will fill our minds, hearts and lives with God's truth, rather than the rubbish found all around us.

If garbage goes into our minds, garbage will come out. God's words go into our minds. God's words will come out in our life, speech and actions. We'll become fertile and fruitful, as Psalm 1 tells us.

[45 : 04] But those who delight in and meditate on God's teaching, they're like trees planted by streams of water which yield their fruit in its season. The leaves do not wither. In all they do, they prosper.

Well, we do desert rather well in Australia. We all live around the coast in the cities because the inland's a bit dry and so on. And if you're walking through the desert, which I don't ever do because it's too dangerous, but if you walk through the desert and you see in the distance a big tree, you know there must be a plentiful supply of water around.

See, there's a tree. There's a green tree, a fruitful tree. There must be lots of water. That's exactly what the writer of the Psalm says. They're like trees planted by streams of water which yield their fruit in its season.

Their leaves don't wither. In all they do, they prosper. In biblical meditation, our aim is not to empty our minds and consciousness. Lots of forms of meditation say, please empty your mind.

No, that's not right. In biblical meditation, our aim is not to empty our minds and consciousness but to fill them with the words and works of God. And for meditation on the words of God, see those references from Psalm 119.

[46 : 16] For meditation on the works of God, see the other references from the Psalms there. And we can only meditate on the works of God as we read them in the words of God.

So what did biblical meditation mean in practice? Deuteronomy tells us, here's Moses again, Deuteronomy 6, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.

How do you love God? Moses. Answer. Keep these words that I'm commanding you today in your heart. Then notice what they're to do with these instructions, this teaching of God given through the mouth of Moses.

Recite them to your children. Talk about them when you're at home and when you're away, when you lie down and when you rise.

bind them as a sign on your hand so whenever you do anything, you're reminded of God's words.

Fix them as an emblem on your forehead so whenever you think or remember or decide something, you're reminded of God's words.

[47 : 28] And write them on the doorposts of your house so every time you go in or out, when you go home, when you go out, you're reminded of God's words. And on your gates, that doesn't mean, you know, the gates of your property, it means the city gates because in those days only cities had gates and that was the place where the elders met to do legal transactions and to make legal decisions about the life of the community.

So whether you're at home or at work, whether you're at your house or the city gates in the public square, then you're keeping these words and reciting them and remembering them.

Notice this all-day, private and public meditation in which God's people are to keep his words in their hearts, their minds, on their lips, in their ears and in their eyes 24-7.

This is a long way from read, run and forget. Well, I don't know how you get on with your daily prayer and Bible reading.

When I first became a Christian at the age of 16, I read lots of missionary biographies and the missionaries seem to be all great prayers as far as I can see. They all got up at 3 o'clock in the morning to pray, so I thought, this must be what Christians did.

[48 : 48] So I'd set my alarm clock at 3 o'clock in the morning, get out of bed, kneel down, start praying and fall asleep immediately. You wake up five hours later with a sore neck and a guilty conscience.

So my record for valiant all-night praying wasn't very good. And I do find I tend to fall asleep very easily when I'm reading or praying or even preaching on some occasions.

It's a bit alarming for everybody. But mostly people just leave the building quietly and I wake up later on. Actually, my favourite story of a preacher is the one who dreamt he was preaching and woke up and found that he was in fact preaching.

Well, how should we meditate on God's words? When we meet on Sundays, we hear the Bible read, we hear the Bible preached and we can encourage and we can encourage and teach each other from the Bible in our conversations and in our songs.

And our songs, that is, the songs we sing in church and the prayers we pray should be shaped by the Bible so we sing and pray God's words back to him.

[50 : 00] During the week, we can study the Bible ourselves at home and talk about what we've found with others. We can read and meditate on the Bible in growth groups and routes as we read, learn, teach and encourage each other.

Our children and young people read and meditate on the Bible in our children's ministry, I hope, our youth fellowship and youth zone. Those getting married, being prepared for marriage and those learning to be parents learn from the Bible in mentoring and training courses.

When we're in need or in trouble, distressed or bereaved, we need the comfort of God's words.

When we share faith in Christ with those who are not yet believers in Christ, when we encourage them to read the Bible for themselves, we want them to find the words of eternal life.

So we're not just hearers but doers of the word as the Bible shapes how we live, how we work, how we relate, how we contribute to our community and our society.

So if I meet somebody who isn't a Christian and doesn't, as many people in Australia now have no understanding of Christianity at all, my aim is to get them to read the Bible.

[51 : 15] I say, you don't have to believe it to read it. Let's read through Luke's Gospel or Mark's Gospel or whatever we're going to do. Let's just read a chapter together and you tell me what strikes you all, what you don't like or what you do like or what you do like.

What are the questions you have? I say, you don't have to believe it, just read it and see what happens because my aim is that people will find God in the words of God, that they will be made alive by the living and abiding word of God, that they'll be kept alive by the words of God from Scripture for the rest for the rest of their lives.

So we read in Colossians chapter 3:16, let the word of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and encourage each other with all wisdom.

Now I think this is a lost art in churches today, certainly in Australia. so if I asked you, do your friends often teach and encourage you from the Scriptures?

Most people in Australia would say, well, no, that doesn't happen very often. If I say, do you often mention the Bible when you're talking in ordinary conversation?

[52 : 45] do you teach and encourage somebody else? They say, no, we don't do that very much. Well, I think that's a pity because Paul says here, the word of Christ dwells among us richly as we do that.

Now, I often wonder why we don't do that more often. I guess it's because in Western society people have swallowed the idea that religion is a private matter, you mustn't talk about it in public. I think that's part of it, isn't it? Another reason could be that we're not sure that our friendships or relationships in the Church would survive mutual encouragement.

That's very interesting, isn't it? we might think that our relationships and friendships are so fragile that if I did say, oh, I'd like to show you this Bible verse or could I encourage you to trust God more, that people might be offended.

And I think that's a realistic problem actually in Church. We have a saying in Australia, you might have it here, good fences make good neighbours.

[53 : 57] That is, it's best to keep a distance from other people. When I hear that, I say, well, good fences are useful, but the Bible tells us that love makes better neighbours, not fences.

Because fences say, keep your distance. I'm keeping my distance. Love says, let's relate to each other. Now, I'm not suggesting that you ring up your dearest friend at five o'clock tomorrow morning and berate them about their life.

I find a great way to teach and encourage someone is to say, look, I've just found this great verse in the Bible and I'm really excited about it and I just wanted to share it with you.

See, that's not threatening, is it? That's not putting someone down, that's just saying, isn't this great? So let me tell you about the one I found this week. it was about Jesus, our great high priest, entering the most holy place and I thought, well, that's actually right, isn't it?

And he's interceding for us. So the big person who's praying is Jesus, who's right next to the Father and he's praying and my prayers are just tacked onto Jesus' prayers.

[55 : 15] He's the powerful prayer, I'm a weak prayer, but if I just tack my prayers onto Jesus' prayers, then his Father will hear them from his lips. Isn't that wonderful?

So, I want to encourage you in your prayers tonight, here's a personal word of encouragement, to think when you pray, you're tacking your prayers onto Jesus, our great high priest and intercessor, the Son of God, who's even now in heaven, in heaven, interceding for us.

Doesn't that dignify our prayers and make us think that perhaps God will hear our prayers from the lips of his Son? So, I want to encourage you in sort of gentle and polite Glasgow-esque ways to learn the art of teaching and encouraging each other with all wisdom.

Well, you may know the motto of Glasgow is Let Glasgow Flourish. The words were taken from St Mungo or St Kentigern, who once said, Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the word.

And that used to be the motto of Glasgow, but they dropped by the preaching of the word in the 19th century, I think, because it was too embarrassing. So they want Glasgow to flourish without the preaching of the word.

[56 : 40] I think Glasgow will only flourish with the preaching of the word of God. Glasgow will be a rich city if God's words are heard and believed and remembered and practised by his people.

And I might also say, let St Silas and its ministry flourish by the reading, hearing, preaching, speaking, and living of God's words. Well, you've been very patient as I've tried to teach and exhort you, and I'd be very happy for any questions or comments you'd like to make now.

I think I'll sit down. Why don't you chat to your neighbours about what we've been talking about?

That would be a good idea. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Thank you.

[58 : 27] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[60 : 57] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

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[63 : 27] Thank you.

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[65 : 57] Thank you.

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[68 : 27] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[70 : 57] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[73 : 27] Thank you.

Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Amen.

[75 : 57] Thank you.

You did not live.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[78 : 27] Thank you.