

Sunday Update
10th January 2021

Psalm 1

Blessed is the man

who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked

or stand in the way of sinners

or sit in the seat of mockers.

2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord,

and on his law he meditates day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water,

which yields its fruit in season

and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers.

4 Not so the wicked!

They are like chaff

that the wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,

nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

6 For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,

but the way of the wicked will perish.

A few weeks ago, in our Church Wednesday Bible Study, we asked the question – “what impact does reading the Bible have on you?” It was a question that needed us to stop and think. It’s not a question you can answer quickly, nor should you. It is a question that requires consideration, and in fact the answer will be different in different circumstances. But there are two assumptions built in to the question: the first assumption is that we read the Bible at all, and the second is that we allow what we read to make some kind of impression on us. Today, we reflect on the value of reading the Bible and the benefit of letting what we read make an impact on us. Psalm 1 talks about people being rooted, and because they are rooted, they are strong; the starting point for that rootedness and strength is reading, and finding benefit in, the Bible.

I set out to find examples in the Bible itself of what happens when people read it. There are not many of these, but I found four, two in the Old Testament and two in the New. The first of these is to be found in the story of King Josiah, king in Jerusalem, whose story is told in 2 Kings 22 and 23. Josiah was embarking on a programme of repairs to the temple and while that work was going on the high priest found a copy of a book, possibly part of the book of Deuteronomy. It would appear to have been lost for a long time. The priest gave the book to the King’s secretary and the secretary went to the King – “*Hilkiah has given me a book!*” (2 Kings 22:10) Josiah had his secretary read it to him and the king tore his robes, a sign that he was disturbed into a spirit of repentance by what he heard; later he dedicated himself to renewing God’s covenant with His people and to reforming the worship in the temple that had become corrupt. The Bible changed the King’s way of thinking and reformed the nation.

Last Sunday, Martin talked us through the story of Nehemiah under the heading “Rebuilding our lives” and as part of that sermon, he talked about Nehemiah chapter 8. The people asked Ezra the scribe to read to them from the early books of the Bible; Ezra stood on the pulpit and read aloud for about 6 hours; the people listened. Later some of the Levites read from the book again, but this time they also explained it to the people – the first preachers? – and as the people took in what they were hearing,

they began to weep. The Bible was showing up their faults and failings and they were humbled by that, enough to reduce them to tears for their shortcomings. Nehemiah reminds them of something else: *“the joy of the Lord is our strength”* (Nehemiah 8:10) and invites them also to celebrate what God has done for His people. The people’s faith begins to be rebuilt when they hear the Bible and understand what it says.

The third example of someone reading the Bible is Jesus Himself. This time, He is reading it aloud as part of worship in His local synagogue. He reads part of Isaiah 61 in the synagogue in Nazareth: *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me...”* (Luke 4:18) Jesus then began to explain His mission manifesto as He says to the congregation *“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”* (Luke 4:21) The Bible shapes Jesus’ whole attitude to mission and the nature of the mission to which God had called Him. It shaped His life; it shaped what He saw as important in life; it shaped the way in which He sought to do the will of God. You can read the story in Luke chapter 4, but in fact the whole of the story of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection is shaped by what He read in the Bible.

Finally, we go to the book of Acts, chapter 8. The Ethiopian chancellor of the exchequer is travelling home from Jerusalem in his chariot. As he goes, he is reading a book that he has either been given or has bought in Jerusalem. It is a copy of Isaiah. He reads chapter 53: *“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter...”* (Acts 8:32), the picture of the servant of the Lord, who suffers on behalf of others so that these others might be healed and saved. Philip has joined him in the chariot, so the Ethiopian asks, *“Who is the prophet talking about?”* Philip explains to him the story of Jesus and that it is good news; Jesus, who suffers and dies and is raised from the dead, is the Saviour. The Ethiopian says “yes” to Jesus and is baptised, a sign of his new-found faith. Reading the Bible impacted on his life enough that he came to faith in Jesus Christ; he became a new man!

The Bible shapes, and reshapes, the life of a nation; the Bible produces humility and joy in people’s hearts; the Bible shapes lives, giving a sense of what is valuable and important; the Bible creates faith, and sustains that faith. The Bible makes an impact on people when we read it and take it in. I came across this as part of Tearfund’s Advent Calendar, reflecting on Psalm 1: *“Be like that tree (in verse 3). Stay rooted. Hold your nerve... hold your ground and you will bear fruit. What if we can come back stronger as the church of Jesus Christ in these days because we come back deeper? A people rooted to a different source, bearing the fruits of another kingdom.”* That strength and depth begins when we read the Bible and take in what we read. This is the impact that the Bible makes on us as we read it and take it in; it makes us people who are strong and deeply rooted in the grace of God, people who are able to live life well in all of life’s circumstances.

I don’t know how you read the Bible; there are all sorts of ways by which we can do that, some of which are advertised in this update. In some ways the “how” doesn’t matter. What does matter, and indeed is vital, is that we read the Bible at all, and that we take in what we read. That is vital for our spiritual health and well-being; it is vital for our faith; it is vital for the life of the Church; it is vital for the health and well-being of the nation to have people who are strong and who are rooted in the values of the kingdom of God. All of that begins when we read the Bible. If you’re looking for a place to start, begin with Mark’s gospel; read a piece each day with a notebook beside you and write down one thing that you learn each day and one question that you have. The Bible is full of treasure because it is full of Jesus; be inspired to read it and continue to read it; be challenged to take in what you read and put it into practice. This is where we find our strength; this is how our faith becomes stronger and deeper. Make 2021 a year of reading the Bible for all of us.

This is how Psalm 1 describes you now:

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”

Prayer: Father, thank you for the Bible, for the good things that we will find in its pages; help me to read it; help me to understand it; help me to live my life by what I find there. Strengthen me in my faith as I read; shape what I value and what I consider important; help me to be like the tree, rooted by the water, drawing life, health and well-being from the Bible and the grace that I find in Jesus.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For people who feel rootless and lost, full of fears and uncertainty; for those who consider that hope is a fickle quality, so easily slipping through our fingers, leaving us with nothing to hold on to. Open their hearts to the faithfulness and reliability of God.
- For people looking for a set of values that will sustain them in lockdown once more; for kindness, a generous spirit, the willingness to help and support one another, rather than a race to push themselves to the front of the vaccine queue.
- For people who have contracted Covid and are in hospital, that they make a good recovery; those NHS staff who are caring for them, under pressure by the numbers of people in hospital and trying to manage the care they provide.
- For the roll-out of the vaccine to be efficient and effective, reaching the people who need it most; for the vaccine to make people safe, as promised.
- For people who are isolated again by lockdown, spending time on their own again and feeling lonely; for people in care homes, again cut off from family and friends, and the staff who care for them.
- For schools: pupils at home and some in schools; for families trying to manage their children and helping them to take part in learning however it is delivered; for teachers working in new ways and finding that very demanding.
- For businesses that are shut: the pubs and hotels, hairdressers, and others; for those who own these businesses and it is their livelihood; for those who work and are again on furlough; for the gaps left in the social interaction of many people, adding to their sense of isolation.
- For Churches, with buildings again closed; help them to care for all of their people; may the technology be a lifeline for lots of people; help churches across Scotland to be a light in their community and share the light of Jesus with others.
- For people we know...
- This week, take time to think about these words and pray them into your own heart: *“The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.” (Deuteronomy 33:27)*

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love. (Some of the links look a bit different this week, but they should all work as usual!)

To God be the glory

O God our help in ages past

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>

[O God, Our Help in Ages Past \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU)

Yet not I but through Christ in me
Thy Word is a lamp
What a friend we have in Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zundjUFazfg>
[Amy Grant - Thy Word \(Lyric Video\) - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi1-5kmbkyQ)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi1-5kmbkyQ>

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerigpc@gmail.com

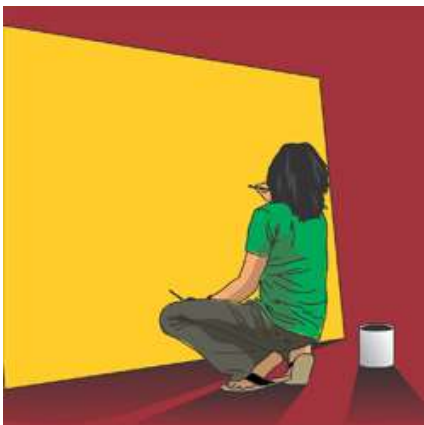
Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.igpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of “Every Day with Jesus” Booklet for January and February 2021 are now available. The Editor is Micha Jazz, Director of Resources of Waverley Abbey, who continue to publish the booklet, and Micha Jazz is now producing the daily notes from God’s Word for your life and relationships, replacing insight from the late Selwyn Hughes. .Please contact Ian Aitken who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Michael Merriman. **Let the Bible feed you.**

Christmas Offerings Thank you very much indeed if you have contributed to our Christmas offerings. We supported three charities – SWAN UK, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, and CLIC Sargent – and with your giving, we have been able to give £450 to each charity. For lots of people, life will be a little bit better because of your giving at Christmas; thank you very much indeed on their behalf.

The Nativity Trail: We apologise to you if you have tried to follow the Trail, but haven’t been able to find all of the characters. This is due to circumstances outside our control, with businesses closed due to lockdown. There will still be a small prize for every entry returned to us, whether complete or not. Email JDewar@churchofscotland.org.uk with what you have.



Heather is on holiday this week; I have attached an activity sheet that is based on the story of Jesus’ baptism in Mark 1:4-11; there are some puzzles to do that help understand what happens in that story.

His Baptism was a new beginning for Jesus. Here is a picture of a blank canvas:

What would you write on that blank canvas today as your hopes for 2021?
Have you ever experienced a fresh start in your life?