

“Our spiritual satnav” (9)

As Christians, we are but pilgrims in this world; our lives are but a journey toward our true home which is in heaven. But as we travel through this life, we are not left without a "spiritual satnav." To guide us on our journey, God in His grace has given us His wonderful Word, contained in the pages of what we call the Bible. Unfortunately many people go through their lives and never seriously consult this book which can direct them to heaven. But what is more unfortunate is that many Christians go through life ignorant of much of its content.

I hope and pray that today through this sermon I can wake people up to the value of the wonderful Word of God. And I also hope and pray that I can impress upon you the importance and necessity of reading the Word of God on a daily basis.

Five-year-old Stephanie asked her seven-year-old brother Paul, "Why does grandmother read the Bible so much?" Replied Paul, with all the wisdom of his additional two years, "I guess she must be cramming for her finals."

And I guess the point of the story is to remind you that it's going to be God's Word which will judge us on the last day. Please turn your Bibles to 1 Peter 1:23. Within this passage of scripture, we can bring together various attributes possessed by the Word of God that makes it so wonderful.

1 Peter 1:23-25 "For you have been born again, not by a seed that perishes but by one that cannot perish-by the living and everlasting word of God. For "All human life is like grass, and all its glory is like a flower in the grass. The grass dries up and the flower drops off, but the word of the Lord lasts forever." Now this word is the good news that was announced to you."

Peter says God's Word is wonderful because of its nature. He says God's Word is wonderful because it is not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible. He says God's Word is wonderful because it lives and abides forever. He says God's word is wonderful because it is the Word of the Lord which endures forever. In a world where things are passing away all the time, things that are here today and gone tomorrow, Peter says God's word isn't like that.

Mr. Leslie Stephen says: "A writer is entitled to be called a classic when his books have been read for a century after his death. It takes a very powerful voice and a very clear utterance to make a man audible to the fourth generation." He goes on to say, "If this is true, what a testimony to the Word of God, and the words of Jesus therein. The Bible is sold and read by millions, and while our Lord continues to declare in Matthew 24:35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away".

Loved ones when we look back in time and see the efforts of people who try and rid the world of the Word of God, we shouldn't be surprised that they failed. Look at what Diocletian tried to do, in 303 A.D. he proclaimed an edict requiring Christians and their sacred scriptures to be destroyed, but within 25 years, the succeeding emperor ordered that 50 copies be made and distributed at government expense.

Look at the claims of Voltaire, the French atheist who died in 1778. He boasted that within 100 hundred years of his lifetime, Christianity would be swept from the earth, but only fifty years after his death, his own printing press and house were being used by the Geneva Bible Society to produce stacks of Bibles.

You see loved ones, people come and people go, people make claims which never come to fruition but Isaiah was right, that's why Peter quotes him and says in 1 Peter 1:24+25 "As the scripture says, "All human beings are like grass, and all their glory is like wild flowers. The grass withers, and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord remains forever." This word is the Good News that was proclaimed to you."

The Bible is wonderful because it stands the test of time and will forever stand the test of time. But the Word of God isn't just indestructible; it's also very powerful, powerful enough to change people's lives. Or in the words of Peter it causes people to be born again. 1 Peter 1:23 "For through the living and eternal word of God you have been born again as the children of a parent who is immortal, not mortal."

I don't know if you're aware of this but there is a law of science known as the Law of Biogenesis which states that "life produces life." And loved ones because the Word of God is what it is, it too is able to produce spiritual life. Now you may ask what about life produces life, doesn't the Bible need to be living for it to be able to produce life? Well yes it does, but not only is it living, it's also active.

Hebrews 4:12 “The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart”. You see loved ones God’s word is alive and active and it reaches the very parts of our being which only God can reach.

As the powerful chain saw cut its way through the oak tree, it uncovered an object foreign to a tree. There, embedded in the tree was a 22-bullet, once hidden from view, now made visible by the cutting asunder of the tree. From the outside, the point of entry was no longer visible, but on the inside, the path of the bullet had clearly left its mark in the wood. Compared to the size of the tree, it was an extremely small mark, yet by its presence, had caused the area surrounding it to turn black with rot. Had one been present when the bullet entered the tree, it would have been possible not only to see the mark, but to dig the bullet out. However, with the passing of time, the tree grew larger and stronger. The bark had grown thicker and the bullet remained hidden, a part of the tree.

You see loved ones just as the bullet penetrated into the tree, so sin penetrates us. The point of entry may not be visible to anyone else, but the sin becomes embedded in our lives, and unless it is removed, causes a growing spot to rot. You see whether people want to admit or not we’re all sinners and we all have a major sin problem.

And what the **Hebrew** writer is telling us is that only God’s word can tell us how to remove sin from our lives. There are people everywhere who claim they have the power to make you a better person, whether it’s through meditation or reading a book on how to change you life in 30 days. But loved ones the dead are dead and anything that is dead cannot produce life, you need something alive to produce life.

And that’s why Jesus says in **John 6:63** “What gives life is God's Spirit; human power is of no use at all. The words I have spoken to you bring God's life-giving Spirit.” When a person receives the Word of God and obeys it, he or she is truly brought to life again. **James 1:18** “By his own will he brought us into being through the word of truth, so that we should have first place among all his creatures”.

Now I said earlier that the Word of God can reach the parts of our being which nothing else can reach. And this is true because the Word of God actually purifies the soul. **1 Peter 1:22** “Now that by your obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves”. Now that word ‘purify’ basically means to get rid of all impurities. Now you can have a bath or shower and give yourself a good clean and yeh your body may look clean and smell great but all the washing you do will not clean your soul.

I remember a religious friend of mine who was going through his ceremonial washing before eating his dinner and when I asked him why he did it, he explained about the importance of ceremonial cleansing, so after a little discussion I asked him about his heart, **how do you wash that?** You see loved ones the physical and the spiritual are two different things, what is seen is different to what isn’t seen and the Bible says, it’s only God’s word that can cleanse the soul.

But how, how does the Word of God do that? Well simply through obedience, Jesus says in **John 17:17** “Dedicate them to yourself by means of the truth; your word is truth.” In other words because the truth contains the gospel, when the truth is believed and obeyed, the result is the forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ.

Now we know that healthy babies don’t stay babies, they begin to talk and crawl, they grow a little more and become youngsters with temper tantrums and then they become teenagers with their hormones going nuts and then they grow into young adults and eventually get elderly if God permits. And I know that I only have to look into the mirror to realise that I’m getting older, there are wrinkles where I didn’t have them before, and there is no hair where there was once loads.

Now we can see that growth and everyone else can see that growth, but there is another type of growth which isn’t so visible. You see just like a new born baby needs regular feeding to help with their continual growth, a new born again Christian also needs regular feeding. Peter says in **1 Peter 2:2** “Be like newborn babies, always thirsty for the pure spiritual milk, so that by drinking it you may grow up and be saved”.

One of the blessings of my life has been to have had excellent cooks. Meals have always been especially sumptuous during the Christmas season. The table always abounds with turkey with all the trimmings, potatoes and gravy, all kinds of rich desserts and an incredible variety of vegetables.

Along with the salted nuts, pies, cakes and sweets that are always available, there is usually a profusion of fruits to serve as a healthier substitute. Bananas, oranges, tangerines, grapes, grapefruit, and apples offer a "better way" if we choose it.

But isn't it amazing that everybody goes for the sweets, and the fruit just lies on the table to rot. Honestly, how many of you will pick up a banana when you can enjoy a chocolate-covered Gateau or a gorgeous toffee cheese cake? All of us, it seems, are called upon to make choices as to what our spiritual diet will be just as we must select our foods.

There was a slogan which was going around for a while which said, 'you are what you eat'. And despite eating lots of sweet corn I never did turn into a green giant. But loved ones if, as they say, we "are what we eat" physically, it is also true in the spiritual realm. Peter says, God's Word is compared to "pure milk" which causes young Christians to grow.

Now Christian, Satan doesn't want you to grow. He wants you to have 'Peter Pan syndrome', you know the little boy who said, "I don't want to grow up". There are many Christians today, like the little boy who had his first night in a big bed, after 3 years in a cot, and he got in. In the middle of the night his mum and dad heard him cry, and when they went through, the little boy was lying on the floor, rubbing his head, and his parents said, "What happened"? The little boy said, "I guess I stayed to close to where I got in".

And sadly that's what many Christians choose to do, they don't want to grow, but growing is not an option loved ones, it's a command. Look again at 1 Peter 2:2, "Like new born babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it, you may grow up in your salvation". Memorise that phrase, "Grow up in your salvation". 1 Peter 3:18 says, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ".

Loved ones if you don't grow you will become what you eat, spiritually out of shape with a flabby faith. Hebrews 5:11-14 says, "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil".

Notice that phrase! "They have trained themselves". You see, you have nothing to do with your justification just like a baby has nothing to do with its conception. But a baby has something to do with its development and you have a lot to do with your spiritual fitness. You must train yourself, you can't stay a little baby; you're supposed to grow up and work out that salvation.

And so Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:1+2, "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly, mere infants in Christ, I gave you milk not solid food for you were not ready for it, indeed you are still not ready". Paul's trying to say as diplomatically as he can, "Your still a bunch of fat babies, when are you going to grow up and do the things that you need to do, to put on some spiritual muscle and grow?"

Loved ones there is a lot of religious junk food in the world today, there is a lot of literature available to make us feel good and forget our moral responsibilities. Even a lot of evangelical material is aimed at the human craving for entertainment and excitement. I remember when I was younger, if I had an illness my mum used to give me medicine which tasted horrible. I asked her why she couldn't give me medicine that tasted nice? She said Mike the worst the medicine tastes the better it is for you.

Now loved ones sometimes the best reading is hard, yes there are admittedly parts of the Bible which are difficult to practice. But usually that which is the most profitable for us is not the sweetest to our palate. The best spiritual food for us is the food which causes us to love God more, love others more, and dedicate our lives to doing right. Because spiritual growth as a Christian is totally dependent upon the Word of God.

And we know if we don't eat in the physical sense we end up ill even to the point of death. It's the same for the Christian who doesn't regularly eat from God's word; they end up ill and can even die spiritually. Do you see why the Word of God is too wonderful to neglect loved ones? Peter is saying that there is no way you can destroy it, and if you desire to be born again and grow spiritually, it is impossible without the incorruptible seed of the Word of God.

Now if we really want to allow the Word of God to produce a spiritual life and spiritual growth in our lives, then there are a couple of things we need to do. If we want to grow by the word of God we **first** need to prepare the soil of our hearts. You know I've never really been into gardening but I know this much, if you want to plant some seed you first need to prepare the ground before hand. You need to cleanse the ground of all insects and weeds so that seeds can grow unhindered.

Well loved ones in much the same way Peter says there are some things which first need to be cleansed from our lives. The **King James Version** says in **1 Peter 2:1** "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings."

Peter says if you want to grow, then get rid of all **malice**. In other words get rid of anything within you which wants to cause trouble. Peter says if you want to grow, then get rid of all **guile**. Get rid of anything within you that goes about craftily trying to deceit people. Peter says if you want to grow, then get rid of **all hypocrisies**. Get rid of anything within you which is stopping you practice what you preach.

Peter says if you want to grow, then get rid of all **envy**. Get rid of anything within you which is causing you to be unhappy because someone else has something you want for yourself. Peter says if you want to grow, then get rid of all **evil speaking**. Get rid of anything within you which is causing you to talk slanderous words and defamatory statements about others. Peter says for the Word of God to flourish in our lives, we must rid ourselves of these things.

If we want to grow by the word of God we first need to prepare the soil of our hearts and **second**, we must have the proper desire for the Word. **Have you ever had those moments when you're in the house and think to yourself, 'wow I could really do with a Chinese?' And as the day goes on that craving stays with you and you convince yourself you really need to have one and when tea time comes your on the phone ordering your Chinese.**

And that's because you have that strong desire and whether it's a Chinese or a Mars Barr you will go out of your way to fulfil that craving. **1 Peter 2:2+3** "Like new born babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it, you may grow up in your salvation. As the scripture says, "You have found out for yourselves how kind the Lord is."

Peter says just as babies "**crave**" for milk, we are to "**crave**" for the Word of God. You know if a baby needs fed it will cry and cry and cry until you satisfy that need. And I'm wondering if our attitude towards the Word of God is the same, **do we crave God's word? Do we as God's children demand regular feeding upon the Word of God?**

Loved ones we go out of way to eat physically and we should have the same attitude towards the Word of God. Because remember we're not just physical beings we're spiritual beings. When Jesus was being tempted by the devil to turn rocks into bread Jesus reminds him in **Matthew 4:4** "Human beings cannot live on bread alone, but need every word that God speaks."

The **Psalmist** reminds us back in **Psalm 119:165** "Those who love your law have perfect security, and there is nothing that can make them fall". The prophet **Jeremiah** reminds us back in **Jeremiah 15:16** "You spoke to me, and I listened to every word. I belong to you, Lord God Almighty, and so your words filled my heart with joy and happiness".

Loved ones you won't grow unless you eat and I'm convinced that many Christians don't grow because they don't have a craving to grow through reading God's word. You only have to turn on the TV and open the newspaper to see that people are dieing everyday due to malnutrition.

And when I look at some Christians today I can see the same thing, Christians who are dieing spiritually due to malnutrition. Christians who don't meet regularly together are in danger of dieing spiritually, that's why we have mid-week and home Bible studies, there is no reason for you be suffering from spiritual malnutrition. Christians who don't overcome sin in their lives are in danger of dying spiritually.

1 John 2:14 "I write to you, my children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who has existed from the beginning. I write to you, young people, because you are strong; the word of God lives in you, and you have defeated the Evil One".

And I personally believe that's why the church has so many baby Christians. Christians who never grow into godly men and women, people who have been Christians for **5, 10, 15 years or more** and yet they have never grown spiritually.

Ask yourselves loved ones, if we do not read, study and meditate upon the Bible daily. If we just go on year after year, failing to read through the Bible on a regular basis. **Can we really say that we are craving the Word of God?** The Word of God is too wonderful for Christians to neglect loved ones but sadly there has been a wholesale neglect of the Word of God among Christians in the Lord's church today. If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious and if you have been born again by the Word of God, then I plead with you to make Bible reading an integral part of your daily life.

Because the very thing I've been speaking to you about this morning contains the gospel, it contains the good news. **1 Peter 1:25 "This word is the Good News that was proclaimed to you."** If you have read the Word of God but not obeyed the gospel, **why not do so this very day?**

The Word of God says in **Mark 16:15+16 "Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all people. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned"**. I pray you will obey the Word of God and be baptised, be born again and find new life.