

St. James UCC Havertown, PA
January 27, 2019 | Psalm 119:10-16
Rev. Emily Garcia Livingston | “Spend Time with the Divine”

Over the past three Sundays in January, we’ve gone through our “Life in the Light” series. We looked at some examples of what it means to *live in the light* of Jesus Christ. We’ve highlighted obedience, humility, and trust. There are many ways to live in the light of Christ and these are but a few. For our final week, we are going to discuss spending time with God.

There are so many things that distract us every day. Many of us have “smart phones” that seem to be blinking or flashing or making sounds to let us know that something is going on that may require our attention. Whether it’s that text that someone sent or a voicemail someone left or a status update on your Facebook or Twitter feeds, it seems as if something is always going on around us. If we’re not careful, we’ll be swept up in it and before we know it, we begin to neglect basic things.

How many of you have seen people driving on the road with their heads down OR with their faces glued to their cell phones while the person’s driving a car! How many of you have barely missed being bumped into by people walking by who are so engrossed in their phones that they are not even aware of their surroundings nor that they’re about to walk into another person?

This constant influx of information, data threads, news feeds takes a toll on us. It’s draining. If we want to walk in the light of Christ we need to nurture our relationship with God. In order to nurture our relationship with God we must first decide to be intentional about spending time with God. Anyone have ideas as to how we can spend time with God with all that’s going on in our lives?? Well, one way is to gather with other believers and to set aside time to worship God as a body. So what we’re doing right now -- is spending time with God. But how do we spend time with God when we’re not in church? There are several ways and we’re going to discuss a few today.

This Sunday’s scripture reading comes from Psalm 119, which is considered the longest chapter in the Bible. It’s an acrostic poem that is divided into 22 sections -- each section begins with a letter of the 22 letters

of the Hebrew alphabet. An acrostic has a style in which the initial letters of each successive line form a word, phrase, or pattern. Each of the sections in Psalm 119 has eight verses and today's reading came from the grouping for the letter *Bet* -- the equivalent of the English letter "B" as in boy. Why is this noteworthy?

This psalm is a prayer to God which sings the praises of God's law, and reflects on the security and happiness of those who live by it. For the psalmist, to keep God's law *is* to walk in the light. Some of you may be familiar with the following verse which comes from this psalm. Verse 105 reads, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." The author of this psalm wrote 176 verses about devotion to God – specifically, to God's Law! That is amazing to me! This person had so much love and devotion for God and God's law that he or she wrote a very long and specialized poem about it!

Can you imagine the amount of time it took for the author to create this poem with 176 verses about love for God's law? This person spent time thinking about God and about what God's word means to him or her. This individual reflected on the scriptures and on the testimonies of people of faith who believed that God is faithful and worthy to be praised. This person praised God for the scriptures because ultimately, following God's word leads to life and blessings.

As Christians, we do not necessarily follow the statutes found in the Torah, but we do follow Jesus' example. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus replied with this: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment (Matt.22:37)." And in order for us to be able to follow this commandment, we must spend time with God.

When we see Jesus' example in the Gospels, we see that there were many times that He went off on His own to be with God. There are stories of Jesus going into the mountains to pray to God or going into a garden just to spend time with God, the Father. I believe that Jesus was demonstrating to us that there will be times that we need to separate ourselves from the hustle and bustle of life so that we can *just be* with God. Sometimes we need to find a quiet place where we can just reflect on God and where we can hear from God.

I understand that for many of us, this is difficult to do. We don't always have the means in resources or time to go off on a spiritual retreat in the Swiss Alps to spend time with God. Our schedules are booked solid, for weeks on end, and we don't have much room for anything else. There are also folks who find it difficult to just sit and be still. We live in a society that is constantly competing to "get our attention." But despite all of these realities, I encourage you to be deliberate and creative about spending time with God.

Spending time with God helps to refuel you. Among other things, it also helps to unburden you and give you direction. There are many ways to spend time with God. One way to do this is by reading. Reading the Bible, God's word, is an example of how you can spend time with God. Reading for as little as 10 minutes, in one session, is a good way to get started if this is something new to you. You may find that as you read and reach the 10-minute mark, you may want to continue reading. And if that happens; Great!...Keep going!

If you're not sure what to read in the bible, start anywhere. Reading books like -- Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Job, or the Psalms can become a spiritual practice as you spend time with God. And you can read additional things to the Bible. Devotionals and books related to Christian life or spirituality are other subjects you can read. The point here is to read something that connects you to God.

Another way of spending time with God that may not feel so disruptive to jam-packed schedules is sitting in silence for 10 minutes. I admit this may be very difficult to do at first, especially for folks whose minds are always racing with thoughts of what they still have to do at work or errands they forget to run or whatever else fills your mind. But, sitting in silence for 10 minutes as you reflect on what God has done for you and for others is a way of connecting to God.

If it's hard to find a quiet place, try your bathroom, sit in your car, go for a walk, find a place in your home where you can just be for 10 minutes. As you continue this practice, you may find that you can eek out more time in a day. This can be a form of spiritual meditation that allows you to focus on God. As you sit, you can play music (and that can be any form of Christian music OR it can be instrumental OR music that connects you to God).

There are secular songs that cause me to think about God in profound ways, so it doesn't have to be Christo-centric music.

We know that for many things, the more often you do something, the more it becomes second-nature to you. The more often you spend time with God outside of Sunday worship, the more you will begin to make it a habit. Another way to spend time with God is by praying. For those who may feel like they don't know what to say to God, that's OK and don't let that stop you. Prayer is simply talking to God so speak to God about whatever's on your heart. If you don't know what to say to God, you can begin by thanking God for something. There's no precise way to pray to God...like the Nike slogan...Just Do It!

For folks who are creative or artistic, spending time with God may be playing an instrument or sketching and painting, taking pictures of nature, or writing a poem. When you do these things while thinking about God, you are spending time with God. Like the author of psalm 119 who spent time thinking about God and God's word, when you reflect on God while carrying out these types of creative activities, you are engaging with the Divine. God desires to be in relationship with us but we have to make time for God.

How many of you have tried to have a conversation with someone who's distracted? It doesn't work out very well, does it? And it can make you pretty mad to be on the receiving end. I know there have been times when my husband is trying to talk to me about something and it's not the best moment for me because I'm engaged in something else at the moment OR I'm distracted by something...I'm either in the middle of reading or in the middle of responding to a text or an email OR in the middle of watching something on TV that I don't want to miss and because my attention is elsewhere, I really can't engage him. I have to stop what I'm doing in order to hear and relate to him so that we can have a meaningful conversation.

Our relationship with God works the same way. God may be trying to get our attention to share things with us but if we're too busy; if we're too distracted; if we're trying to multi-task, we can't fully be present to engage in a meaningful way. We must be intentional about spending time with God so that we can connect with God in ways that help to shape and direct our lives. Spending time with the Divine helps us to experience *life in the*

light. God has already made the first step in being in relationship with us when God gave us Jesus.

Jesus reminds us of His desire to be with us. He said, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me (Rev. 3:20)."

God desires to be in relationship with us. We must make the choice to be in relationship with God. Let us remember the words of the psalmist:

- 10- With my whole heart, I have sought you;
- 14- I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches.
- 15- I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways.
- 16- I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your Word.

As we seek to follow the first and greatest commandment that Jesus gave: to love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, may we be intentional about spending time with the Divine.

To God be the Glory...Amen!