

The Sacred Path (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38–42)

A Brief Review

- A. We find ourselves this morning continuing down what I called last week "The Sacred Path".
 1. You recall that all of this is really emerging in response to our text back in Luke. We saw there that we are called to pursue this one necessary thing with Mary (v. 42)—that we are to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to Him (v. 39).
- B. But then last week we talked about the disturbing reality that while sitting and listening to Jesus—which we now understand to correspond to things like reading our Bibles and praying—are deemed utterly essential for the Christian life, so many Christians are not engaging in this.
 1. At best this is because we are confused. We don't know how to do it. We don't know what it looks like. We open our Bibles to try to sit at Jesus' feet and listen but we feel a bit awkward and lost in it.
- C. So in an attempt to help, not just you, but myself in this, I'm putting forward the idea of this Sacred Path. The goal is to provide some ideas for us, to clear away some of the confusion that might discourage us from ever trying to engage God like Mary is here.
 1. It certainly is not the only way to go about this, but I did feel compelled to try to provide us with a way.
- D. Last week we looked at the first three steps along this path (which you can find in the worksheet provided for you on your handout). But let me briefly refresh you on these points:
 1. In Solitude we get alone with God. We saw how Jesus maintained this rhythm in His own life. We made note of the practical importance in such a thing as it allows us to engage God with both minimal distraction and minimal reservation.
 2. In Silence, we get quiet before God. We saw how Silence, in many ways, is a return to sanity, a way of remembering our place in the world. In this place of Silence two essential

things start to happen: (1) We begin to open ourselves up to God as He really is; and (2) We come to find ourselves as we really are.

More on Scripture

- A. I didn't really touch on Scripture last time only to say that the goal of Solitude and Silence is to move us towards a place where we are ready to hear God's voice in Scripture. Like Elijah in [1 Kings 19:11-13](#), we get alone with God, and in the quiet, we hear Him address us.
- B. Now, I don't have time here to discuss the various ways you might go about reading Scripture. My recommendation would be to find some sort of a reading plan that keeps you progressing through the Bible—not necessarily in a year, but over time.
 - 1. While God certainly can speak to you if all you do is pull one of those numbers where each morning you just flip open the Bible, put your finger down, and read, nonetheless, it's been my experience that having some sort of system really helps. You'd be surprised how God uses our systems to "spontaneously" show up and speak in just the way we needed.
 - a. If you need some suggestions here, I'd be happy to help.
- C. One last thing before we transition to the next step. If you are prone to question the value of reading Scripture consider these words by Donald Whitney in his book [Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life](#). Commenting on [2 Tim 4:13](#), he writes: "The apostle Paul was in prison and writing the last chapter of his final New Testament letter. Anticipating the arrival of his younger friend Timothy, he wrote, 'When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.' The scrolls and parchments Paul requested almost certainly included copies of the Scriptures. In his cold and miserable confinement, the godly apostle asked for two things: a cloak to wear so his body could be warmed and God's Word to study so his mind and heart could be warmed. Paul had seen heaven (see [2 Corinthians 12:1-6](#)) and the resurrected Christ (see [Acts 9:5](#)), he had experienced the Holy Spirit's power for miracles (see [Acts 14:10](#)) and even for writing Holy Scripture (see [2 Peter 3:16](#)); nevertheless, he continued to study God's Word until he died" (p. 32).
 - 1. Now, why would Paul, the author of so much of Scripture himself, still find reading the Scriptures so valuable, so essential, so necessary?! Well, to put it simply: Because it is through the word that we come to see "the Word" . . . namely, Jesus ([John 1](#)).
- D. And this leads now to the fourth step along this Sacred Path, what I would call: "Sanctum".

(4) Sanctum

The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ

- A. For Sanctum it might help you to think of the related word sanctuary. It's the idea of a sacred meeting place between you and God. It's a word that in the Latin was used in reference to the Most Holy Place in the Jewish temple, where God was said to dwell in His glory.

- B. The basic sense, then, is this: In our reading of the Bible, we trust, by God’s grace, there will come times where we become suddenly, even surprisingly, aware that we are no longer merely reading words on a page, but are, in fact, sitting in the very presence of God—that God, by His Spirit, is speaking to us through the ink and paper, that Jesus is in the room.
- C. Now, I get this idea, in particular from [2 Cor 3-4](#), where Paul is drawing on this OT imagery with Moses meeting with God in the sacred place of the tabernacle and things, and then he brings the discussion into his modern day, New Covenant context and says now it is through the ministry of “[God’s word](#)” (4:2), and the “[gospel](#)” in particular (4:3-4), that we are brought into God’s presence and given sightings of “[the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ](#)” (4:6).” In other words: We now encounter the risen Christ through God’s inspired word!

The DNA Method

- A. Now, it’s at this point that I really wanted to drill deep and consider what in fact it actually looks like to read the Bible and encounter Jesus there. For this, let me introduce you to what I would call the DNA Method of Bible study. It’s an acronym that stands for Discover, Nurture, and Apply.
- B. There are two things that I’ve found to be particularly helpful about this method:

(1) It Keeps the End Goal in View

- A. For one thing, the acronym as a whole keeps before us what is really the end goal of our times with Jesus. Let me explain.
 - 1. The idea of DNA carries with it the idea of genetics. With this we are reminded that our Bible study and meditation, our time in God’s word, is intended to transform us in Christ at the most basic, even genetic, level. When we are born again in Christ, you could say, in a sense, we are given His DNA, by the Spirit. We become sons and daughters of God. We begin to draw from a different gene pool. And we are now being renewed into His image, into the image of the God.
- B. That’s why Paul, back in that same discussion just referenced, said earlier in [2 Cor 3:18](#): “[\[W\]e all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.](#)”
 - 1. So, as we come to Scripture, and as we meet with Jesus there in that sacred space, we come to find that we are slowly but surely being transformed into His image and likeness.
 - a. For Moses, if you recall, after spending time with God in the tabernacle he would literally start to shine. For us, after spending time with God, we should start to look more and more like Him—in the way we think, feel, talk, act.

(2) It Moves Us towards This End Goal One Step at a Time

- A. “Okay,” you say, “Well and good, but how does this work out?” Well, that leads to the second reason I find this method so helpful. Each letter in the acronym takes you step by step towards this goal.

- B. Really, we'll spend the great majority of our time here this morning on these. Discover, Nurture, and Apply. It might help you to see these three as a journey from Head, through Heart, to Hand.

(1) Discover

- A. Now, practically speaking, as you sit down, perhaps in the morning, you get alone with God, you quiet your soul, and you open the Good Book. And as you read, a chapter here, a chapter there, you might identify a key word, phrase, verse, etc. and write it in your journal or on something like this worksheet.

1. The idea is that, from your larger reading, you land on something to focus in on a bit more, something to chew on. As you read, it's as if the Holy Spirit takes out a highlighter and illuminates certain things that are especially for you to consider this day.

- B. When you've landed on a place to focus, you might consider some of the following questions: "What do you see in this text? What questions do you have? What answers can you find? What is God revealing to you here? Is there an attribute to adore, a truth to trust, a promise to hope in, a command to obey, a warning to heed, an example to follow? How does what He is revealing here connect to what He has revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus? Every verse in Scripture becomes good news when run through the cross of Christ. Preach the good news to yourself once more."

1. The first set of questions here gives you basic ways of breaking down and drawing out things from the text.
2. But the latter part of these questions is where I especially want to offer help at this point. I'm thinking in particular of this idea that, whatever God is revealing to you, wherever you are in Scripture, it can and should be connected to what He has revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus and the cross.

- C. There are a couple of presuppositions that stand behind this idea for us:

(1) All of Scripture Is Held Together And Made Sense of By the Good News of Jesus Christ

- A. To remove the gospel from the Scriptures would be to remove the binding from your Bibles, as it were. You tear that off and all the pages just fly apart. The gospel is what holds the entirety of God's revelation together.

- B. I could take you to countless texts on this, but I'll give you just one:

1. You remember, at the end of Luke's gospel, what Jesus says to His disciples after He's risen from the dead and about to ascend to His Father: " ⁴⁴ 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the

third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations . . .” (Luke 24:44–47).

- a. He’s saying: “Guys, why are you so troubled and confused here? The OT should have prepared you for this moment because that’s what the whole thing is about—My death, My resurrection, and the forgiveness of sins that can now be proclaimed in My name to the world!”

(2) What You Need More Than Anything Every Day Is the Good News of Jesus Christ

A. Again, I could take you to countless texts on this, but I’ll give you just one:

1. [Gal 3:1-5](#). Back in the early years of my walk with Christ, this text set off a personal revival for me. I had fallen into a legalism that was choking out my joy in God and growth in grace. And then God rescued me by way of these words: “¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith . . .?”

- a. The implication is plain: You do not start by faith in the gospel and carry on by your own strength. You carry on the same way you began: Hearing the gospel with faith. If you want the Spirit filled life, this is the only way to get it!

B. Consider the words of Tim Keller here: “[I]n our Christian life we never ‘get beyond the gospel’ to something more advanced. The gospel is not the first step in a stairway of truths; rather, it is more like the hub in a wheel of truth. The gospel is not just the ABCs but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.

We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience; rather the gospel is the way we grow (Gal. 3:1–3) and are renewed (Col. 1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power to take us through every barrier (Rom. 1:16–17). It is very common in the church to think as follows: ‘The gospel is for non-Christians. One needs it to be saved. But once saved, you grow through hard work and obedience.’ But Colossians 1:6 shows that this is a mistake. Both confession and ‘hard work’ that is not arising from and in line with the gospel will not sanctify you—they will strangle you. All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. Thus when Paul left the Ephesians he committed them ‘to the word of his grace, which can build you up’ (Acts 20:32).

The main problem in the Christian life, then, is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel; we have not ‘used’ the gospel in and on all parts of our life. Richard Lovelace says that most people’s problems are just a failure to be oriented to the gospel—a failure to grasp and believe it through and through. Luther says, ‘[The truth of the Gospel] is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine. . . . Most necessary is it therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually.’ The gospel is not easily comprehended. Paul says that the gospel does its renewing work in us only as we understand it in all its truth. All of us to some degree live around the truth of the gospel but do not ‘get it.’ So the key to

continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is continual rediscovery of the gospel. The discovery of a new implication or application of the gospel—seeing more of its truth—is an important stage of any renewal. This is true for either an individual or a church” (The Centrality of the Gospel).

The Hub Diagram

- A. Now it’s one thing to know and agree with all of this, and it’s quite another to actually start to see how all of Scripture really does speak of Jesus. As we sit down at His feet to listen like Mary, as we open our Bibles and read, whether in the NT or the OT, how do we connect whatever text we are reading to the good news of Jesus Christ?
- B. Keller puts forward here that the gospel is like a “hub in a wheel of truth”. I wrote virtually the same sort of thing a while back in a training manual for our Home Group leaders: “The gospel is not merely the starting line of a much longer race. It’s more like the hub of a wheel. Without the gospel always at the center, nothing in the Christian life turns. Everything stalls out. You go nowhere.”
1. Drawing on this idea, and to help us see the various ways we might find Jesus in the Scriptures, I put together what I’d call the Hub Diagram. Now I could do a whole series on these things, but I’ll just have to read this to you here without much explanation and let you consider it on your own time. I just want to get your mind going with all the myriad ways you can make your way to Jesus in the Scriptures:
- C. Jesus is . . .
1. . . the realization of every promise (cf. [2 Cor 1:20](#)).
 2. . . the fulfillment of every prophecy (cf. [1 Pet 1:10-12](#)).
 3. . . the essence of every symbol (cf. [John 1:29](#); [2:18-22](#)).
 4. . . the substance of every shadow (cf. [Col 2:17](#); [Heb 8:1-6](#); [Rom 5:14](#); [1 Cor 10:4](#)).
 5. . . the apex of every attribute (cf. [Heb 1:3](#); [John 14:9](#)).
 6. . . the epitome of every theme (cf. [Ps 118:22](#); [Matt 21:42](#); [Acts 4:11](#)).
 7. . . the unveiling of every mystery (cf. [Col 1:25-27](#); [Eph 3:8-9](#)).
 8. . . the climax of every story ([John 5:39](#); [Luke 24:44-47](#)).
 9. . . the obedience of every command (cf. [Rom 10:4](#); [2 Cor 5:21](#); [Matt 5:17](#)).
 10. . . the solution of every problem (cf. [Acts 4:12](#)).
 11. . . the satisfaction of every longing (cf. [John 7:37-38](#); [Matt 11:28](#)).
 12. . . the point of everything (cf. [Col 1:15-20](#))!!!

Psalms 119:11

- A. Let me just give you one example of what this might look like as you get alone with Jesus in His Word. We’ll carry this same example through the next steps in this DNA method.
- B. Imagine you’re reading in [Psalm 119](#) and a certain verse jumps out at you: “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (v. 11). You write that down in your journal and begin to ponder it.

1. You see an example to follow there, do you not? So is that it then? You run off into your day and try to do it? Hold on.
 - a. Perhaps on most mornings, you might read this verse and find it inspiring. “Okay God I want to do this, I want to follow the Psalmist’s example here.”
- C. But now imagine this morning you’re feeling a bit different. Imagine you’ve been discouraged lately, stumbling, far from God. You look at the example held out by this Psalmist and you don’t see something inspiring. You see something condemning. “I’m not storing up your word in my heart. I don’t feel like I have the strength, let alone the time to make this happen. What in the world is there for me in this text but just another heap of discouragement?!”
 1. Don’t you see, in [Ps 119:11](#) you might initially see a good example or good advice, but you don’t yet see good news. And it is good news, remember, that you need above all else. You need to see Jesus here. And you mustn’t stop pressing into the text until you do!
- D. So in you press, and here’s the sort of thing that comes to light. Jesus is the singer of every Psalm. He is the epitome of this theme here. He is the obedience of this command. He is the substance of this shadow. It all is leading us to Him.
 1. He is the One who truly, fully, perfectly stored up God’s word in His heart. And in every trial He faced, we see plainly, that it was this word that kept Him from sinning. In the wilderness, when tempted by the devil, it is Scripture that Jesus quotes at every point to fight him off. And, later, when the devil comes at Him again in full force at the cross, it is Scripture stored in Christ’s heart that keeps Him strong.
 - a. Spurgeon says that the word of God ought to be so in us that when we are pricked we bleed Bible. Well, that’s precisely, quite literally, what we see with Jesus. The more they punch and whip and strike, the more Scripture flows out of Him.
 - i. Even His statement of utter despair—“[My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?](#)” ([Matt 27:46](#))—is Him quoting [Ps 22:1](#).
- E. So Jesus is the fulfillment of [Ps 119:11](#). Suddenly I see that He is here to help me in my weakness. He was put to death for my failure and sin on this point, and He is here now by His Spirit to help me grow in it. There is not just a good example or good advice in this text, there is good news. It’s all being brought into the light of the cross, and that changes everything!

(2) Nurture

- A. Now we move from Discover to Nurture. We continue on our journey from Head to Heart.
 1. Here’s where we really start to get real with ourselves before God. Now it’s no longer just: “O I understand the text.” Now it’s: “Do I really believe this?”
- B. So, at this point, you might consider questions like these: “[Do you believe the things God is revealing to you in this text? If there’s an attribute, are you adoring? If there’s a truth, are you trusting? If there’s a promise, are you hoping? If there’s a command, are you obeying? If there’s a warning, are](#)

you heeding? If there's an example, are you following? Why or why not? What's in the way? How are these things being tested in what you are currently facing? How can Jesus come to your rescue? Make the good confession once more."

- C. So if what we have before us is an example of what we ought to be doing, we need to consider whether we are following it or not. And we've already said, let's imagine that we've not been. Well, now we come to face the question: Why not?
1. As you think and maybe journal on these things you come to realize that you've been storing up different words in your heart, words that won't keep you from sinning, but instead are leading you into it.
 - a. You saw this come out just the other day with your coworker. The project went bad and when the boss called you in to give an account this guy threw you under the bus with all sorts of false accusations and outright lies. You lashed back in self-defense and went beyond that even into slander. And lately you've been nursing thoughts of how you can make him hurt, buying the lie that getting vengeance will get you peace.
 - i. And then coming to this verse, sitting in it before God, seeing Jesus fulfill it on your behalf, recognizing that He is present here to help you do as He did, you begin to repent and move back towards the place of faith: "Jesus I'm sorry. I have seen this morning once more how You responded in the face of abuse. You had Your Father's word stored in Your heart and You were kept from sin, you were enabled to love. O Jesus, forgive me and help me. You alone can turn my heart right—turn me towards mercy and patience and kindness. I throw everything I have upon You. Don't let your servant falter today!"
- D. Again, do you see how everything now is different in light of the cross? You are not condemned or disturbed by the Psalmist's example because you know it comes to you now through Jesus who forgives and is here to help. There is good news for a bitter soul in these moments.

(3) Apply

- A. Now we move from Discover, through Nurture, to Apply. We continue on our journey from Head, through Heart, to Hand.
1. Here is where we come to face Jesus' words like the ones we'll see in a bit later in [Luke 11](#): "Blessed . . . are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (v. 28). We are not just to hear God's word, nor should we be satisfied merely claiming to believe it. We must keep it. We must do it. Our faith should work. Our time with Jesus should change us.
- B. To get at this, you might consider asking questions like these: "What would this text look like walking out into the details of your life? Think again about what you are currently facing. If you adored, trusted, hoped in, obeyed, heeded, followed, how would it change your next 24 hours? Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matt 6:34). If this word from God can touch the next few hours,

it will start to touch your life as a whole. Identify one thing you can do to apply this. Who else might need to hear this? Bear the good fruit once more.”

- C. So returning to [Ps 119:11](#), how might we apply this, now with fresh faith in and reliance on Jesus? Well we might look for some word to store up in our hearts, right? Something that will give us strength when we head into the office again and there he is, looking all smug or whatever.
 - 1. Maybe we land on something like [Rom 12:21](#): “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Maybe you write it on a notecard and put it in your pocket, or you record it in your phone, so you can revisit it throughout the day.
 - a. With Jesus’ help, you’re beginning to apply [Ps 119:11](#). You’re leaning in on Him to help you do what only He can do.

(5) Solace

- A. All this leads naturally then to the last step in this Sacred Path: what I’ve called “Solace”. The idea is simply that of prayer. Where the heart now starts to take refuge in God, talking to Him, worshiping Him, requesting from Him, and so on.
 - 1. No doubt, prayer has been happening through each of the steps before it, but here it becomes our primary focus.
- B. I didn’t plan to say much on this since, if you noticed, Jesus is going to take us into prayer next in Luke’s gospel ([Luke 11:1-13](#)). But let me at least leave you with a quote, once more, from Bonhoeffer’s [Life Together](#). He’s making the case that prayer should naturally follow our time in the Scriptures. He writes: “Scripture meditation leads to prayer. . . . [T]he most promising method of prayer is to allow oneself to be guided by the word of the Scriptures, to pray on the basis of a word of the Scripture. In this way we shall not become the victims of our own emptiness. Prayer means nothing else but the readiness and willingness to receive and appropriate the Word, and, what is more, to accept it in one’s personal situation, particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations. . . . According to a word of Scripture we pray for the clarification of our day, for preservation from sin, for growth in sanctification, for faithfulness and strength in our work. And we may be certain that our prayer will be heard, because it is a response to God’s Word and promise. Because God’s Word has found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, all prayers that we pray conforming to this Word are certainly heard and answered in [Him]” (pp. 84-85).
- C. Solitude-Silence-Scripture-Sanctum-Solace. The Sacred Path. This would be one way we might pursue with Mary that one necessary thing.