

Ministry of the Word

Welcome/Prayer

Introduction

Last week, we observed that Christian worship follows a particular pattern in Scripture:

When you gather for worship, each one of you be prepared with something that will be useful for all: Sing a hymn, teach a lesson, tell a story, lead a prayer, provide an insight. (1 Corinthians 14:26 *The Message*)

This verse suggests worship consists of three distinct movements: ministry to God, ministry of the Word and ministry to one another. Last week we explored the first of these, ministry to God, through songs of praise, adoration, repentance, and thanksgiving.

The second aspect of passionate worship happens when we “teach a lesson” or “tell a story” (cf. NIV calls these two activities – “instruction” and “revelation”). Since Scripture is “alive and powerful,” it makes sense that if we want our worship to be alive and life-changing, it must include Ministry of the Word, the Bible.

1. Describe an experience when what a speaker said became “alive and powerful” to you.

The ministry of the Word has always played a significant role in Christian worship.

In the Book of Acts, the sermons of Peter and Paul center on the explanation of the Old Testament passages and how Jesus fulfilled God’s promises given in the Hebrew Scriptures. Later in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the centrality of the ministry of the Word to his young protégé, Timothy:

Focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them. (1 Timothy 4:13 NLT)

God has breathed life into all Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. (2 Timothy 3:16 NIRV)

The greatest problem for most Christians is how to use Scripture. Scripture itself provides us the solution to that dilemma. In the book of Nehemiah, the Israelites had been taken captive by the Babylonians and exiled from their land. Two men, Ezra and Nehemiah, led the contingent back to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the temple and the protective walls of the city. Once those tasks were accomplished, the people decided to renew their covenant with the Lord. Ezra, a scribe or scholar, is called upon to read from the book of the Law of Moses.

The description that follows provides a formula that will enable us to minister the Word of God in a way that is both comprehensible and life-changing.

Break It Down

How to Minister God's Word in a Useful Manner

1) **Read**

All the people assembled with a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey. Ezra the priest brought the Book of the Law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people listened closely to the Book of the Law. (Nehemiah 8:1b-3 NLT)

In order to minister the Word, we have to read it since it is the *written* Word of God.

Perhaps we have taken for granted what an incredible privilege it is to be able to read the Bible. Four out of 5 Americans say they believe the Bible is the revealed Word of God, yet only 11% read it every day, while more than 50% never read it or do so less than once a month. As a result, we are by and large biblically illiterate as less than 50% of the American population can name the four gospels (but 90% the four Beatles!)

1. What does it mean to call reading the Bible a "privilege"?
2. What are some hindrances that keep us from reading the Bible daily?

2) **Respect**

Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform that had been made for the occasion... Ezra stood on the platform in full view of all the people. When they saw him open the book, they all rose to their feet. Then Ezra praised the LORD, the great God, and all the people chanted, "Amen! Amen!" as they lifted their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. (Nehemiah 8:4-6 NLT)

The Bible has the ability to change and transform people's lives.

Part of the power of God's Word is demonstrated in its ability to convict & convince.

The word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thought and desires. (Hebrews 4:12 NLT)

The Word truly ministers to us when we have respect for its power. Here's what our denomination says about it: "Through Scripture, the living Christ meets us in the

experience of redeeming grace. We are convinced that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God in our midst..." (*The Book of Discipline 2012*). As we read the Bible, we do so with respect and reverence for it as the living Word of God, and it ministers to us accordingly.

1. What does it mean to have respect for God's Word?
2. Describe a time when a verse or story from the Bible convicted you.

3) **Relate**

The Levites...then instructed the people in the Law while everyone remained in their places. They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage. (Nehemiah 8:7-8 NLT)

Just as the priests helped the people grasp the meaning and significance of the Law for their lives, preachers and teachers can assist us today. Left on our own, we sometimes misunderstand what Scripture is saying. The ministry of the Word is useful to us because it clarifies the message.

1. What are some tools/study methods you find helpful when reading the Bible?

In addition, we can learn how to relate the Scriptures to our lives through interaction and discussion with other believers. Through joint study of God's Word, we're able to share what God is teaching us.

2. How has being in a Bible study or small group enhanced your study of the Bible?

At the same time, we should not depend too much on the aid of others. Seek to be like the Berean's described in Acts 17:11 "The people of Berea...were very willing to receive God's message, and every day they carefully examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true" (GWT).

3. Why is it important to examine the Word of God for ourselves rather than depending solely on the aid of others?

Ministry of the Word is useful to us when we not only read and respect Scripture, but also relate it to our lives.

4) **Respond**

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were interpreting for the people said to them, "Don't mourn or weep on such a day as this!" ...For the people had all been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. And Nehemiah continued, "Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the LORD is your

strength!” So the people went away to eat and drink at a festive meal, to share gifts of food, and to celebrate with great joy because they had heard God’s words and understood them...The family leaders of all the people, together with the priests and Levites, met with Ezra the scribe to go over the Law in greater detail. (Nehemiah 8:9-10, 12-13 NLT)

Look at how the people responded to the reading of Scripture:

- They were convicted (i.e. mourned and wept because their lives didn’t measure up)
- But then they celebrated (i.e. enjoyed God’s blessings and rejoiced in His goodness)
- They also shared what they had with others (i.e. felt blessed and were a blessing)
- Lastly, they wanted more (i.e. met with the priests to gain more knowledge/insight)

The goal of Bible study is knowing God and obeying His will.

As James tells us in his New Testament letter: “Don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says” (James 1:22a NLT). The ultimate usefulness of the Word is not based on how much we know; rather it is determined by how much we do in response.

“Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.” (John 13:17 NLT)

“God will bless you in everything you do, if you listen and obey, and don’t just hear and forget” (James 1:25b CEV).

1. Why is obeying God’s Word so difficult?
2. What does personal application of God’s Word look like in your home, your work, or your church?

Conclusion

Passionate worship is alive and authentic when it includes the ministry of the Word.

1. What can and will you do to become a more effective minister of God’s Word?

Close in Prayer

- **Bible Reading Plans**

www.navigators.org → Tools → Bible Study Resources → The Bible Reading Plans)

- **Resources for How to Study the Bible**

<http://www.resources4discipleship.com/mediafiles/Weekly-Highlights-Record.pdf>

http://www.resources4discipleship.com/mediafiles/Time-With-God_BobEwell.pdf