

APRIL WOMEN'S GATHERING

There are many important facets to a vibrant walk with Christ. As Pastor said in his Easter message, being saved is a daily experience of hearing the Shepherd and being in vital communion with Him. We must, through consistent prayer, Bible study, and reading of the Word strive to grow spiritually and to discern the voice of God in order to thwart the plans of the enemy in our lives and to allow God to lead us into the green pastures He has laid out for us. Sometimes we make the mistake of either giving the enemy too much credit for difficulties in our lives or of ignoring his existence. Remember that God allows difficulty in our lives to teach us things we need to learn in order to mature in Him. Every difficult thing we experience is not an attack of the enemy. In other words, there must be rain to make the grass in the pastures God has for us green. When difficulties come, our response should be to seek God and to ask Him what He is doing and what our response should be.

But also remember that the enemy uses things we come in contact with everyday to pull us away from God. There are things that seem harmless and so without thinking we participate, not realizing that over time our sensitivity to God's voice and our ability to refrain from sin are dulled. The so-called "refined" sins of pride, a critical spirit, jealousy, resentment, selfishness, impatience, and an unforgiving spirit will cause the same damage to us spiritually as the sins listed in the Ten Commandments.

We must cultivate a greater sense of what it is to live our lives in Christ. Vital communion with the Lord will help us to know which way to turn, what to do, and how to do it, moment by moment. Jesus said in John 5:30 that He could do nothing Himself but only as He was taught by God and got God's orders. In these turbulent and uncertain times, knowing God intimately and loving Him passionately is critical to our spiritual and emotional survival. We know Him, love Him, and understand His love for us through the Word.

If we are going to grow into Christlikeness through exposure to God's Word, one of the things we must do is to develop Bible-based convictions. A conviction is something you believe in so strongly that it affects the way you live. Someone observed, "A belief is what you hold, but a conviction is what holds you." You can live contrary to what you believe, but you cannot live contrary to your convictions. Convictions, of course, can be good or bad, so you want to make sure your convictions are Bible-based. **(Christine story)**. Our convictions must be derived from our personal interaction with the Scriptures. How do you develop Bible-based convictions? Let's look at Romans 12:2.

²Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you].

In this Scripture Paul assumes there are only two alternatives: our convictions and values will come from society around us (the world), or they will come as our minds are renewed by the Word of God. There is no other option. There are two opposing influences: the pervasive influence of sinful society or the life-changing influence of the law of God. There is no neutral sphere of influence.

All of us who are believers are, realistically, partially influenced by sinful society and partially influenced by the Word of God. What determines which is influencing us more? The psalmist in Psalm 1 gives us the answer:

¹^[a]*BLESSED (HAPPY, fortunate, prosperous, and enviable) is the man who walks and lives not in the counsel of the ungodly [following their advice, their plans and purposes], nor stands [submissive and inactive] in the path where sinners walk, nor sits down [to relax and rest] where the scornful [and the mockers] gather.*

²*But his delight and desire are in the law of the Lord, and on His law (the precepts, the instructions, the teachings of God) he habitually meditates (ponders and studies) by day and by night.^(A)*

³*And he shall be like a tree firmly planted [and tended] by the streams of water, ready to bring forth its fruit in its season; its leaf also shall not fade or wither; and everything he does shall prosper [and come to maturity].*

The psalmist states that the answer is our attitude toward the Word of God and the time we spend thinking about it. Nothing else will determine where you are on the spectrum—someone who is influenced by God’s Word or someone who is influenced by the ways of the world. Someone who lives on the godly side of the spectrum delights in the Word. The Scripture says she habitually meditates, ponders, and studies the Word and is firmly planted. Everything she does will come to maturity. What an amazing promise! If we are faithful to meditate on the Word and to diligently and faithfully apply it, God promises that our efforts to grow as women of God, to raise our families in the care and admonition of the Lord, to build our marriages, and to minister to others will come to fruition! Like the apostle Paul writes in Romans 7:12, she has determined that God’s law is “holy, righteous, and good.” She sees God’s law is not burdensome, but rather is given to help her please God and to live a life that is productive and satisfying. She sees that the Bible is not just a book of rules that are difficult to live by but is a love letter from her heavenly Father who deals with her in grace and love.

As we’ve discussed, a woman who lives toward the godly side of the spectrum meditates on God’s Word continually. Now, I know we all are very busy, often going in many different directions at once. I believe that continually means consistently and habitually, not every single moment of every day. For instance, when your mind is free to think about anything, it is important not to turn to TV, the internet, and other worldly things. As my husband likes to say to the youth, get off your Facebook and get your face in the Book!

You also should not think constantly about your problems, mentally argue with someone, or let your mind drift into foolish or destructive thoughts like those refined sins I mentioned earlier. Instead, take the opportunity to prayerfully meditate on Scripture. The word “meditate” in Scripture means to think about a truth with a view to its meaning and application to your life. As God told Joshua in Joshua 1:8, “⁸*This Book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe and do according to all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall **deal wisely** and have good success.*” It is the application, or “doing,” that should be the goal of meditation. We should reflect on our lives to determine whether we are conforming to the scriptural truths we are learning in the Word. The psalmist said in Psalm 119:59, “*I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes.*” He not only thought about Scripture. He also thought about his life and the extent to which it conformed to Scripture. If you don’t know the Word you may not even recognize the things in your life that are hampering your walk with God.

Thinking is our most constant activity. Our thoughts are our constant occupation. We are never without them. But we can and must choose the direction and content of our thoughts. Ephesians 5:15-17 says, *“¹⁵Look carefully then how you walk! Live purposefully and worthily and accurately, not as the unwise and witless, but as wise (sensible, intelligent people), making the very most of the time [buying up each opportunity], because the days are evil. Therefore do not be vague and thoughtless and foolish, but understanding and firmly grasping what the will of the Lord is.”* Let’s not be vague and thoughtless! Let’s take control of our thought lives and grasp God’s purpose for our lives.

Meditation on Scripture is a discipline. You must commit yourself to be diligent. We are diligent regarding taking care of our families. We are diligent regarding our other earthly responsibilities, and we need to be diligent regarding spiritual disciplines also. Memorize key passages of the Bible or carry them with you on index cards so you can think about them. You must be alert for the times during the day when you can turn your mind to the Word of God and apply it, and then you must do it.

Even daily Bible reading is insufficient without meditating on truths of Scripture. We must choose to meditate on the Word instead of focusing only on worldly things. We simply have to decide whether we want to live under the world’s influence or whether we want to be under God’s influence and take steps accordingly. The Word must be in us so we can impart its life-giving Truth in our families—not just telling them what to do but framing our whole lives in accordance with Scripture, so that it becomes their foundation and framework also. Remember, Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:1 that if a woman lives with a husband who doesn’t obey God, he can be won over by the way she lives her life in God. That is powerful influence in a home!

Your knowledge of the Word and application of it is one of your weapons to fight the enemy’s influence in your own life and the life of your family.

One thing you can be sure of: if you do not actively seek to come under the influence of God’s Word, you *will* come under the influence of the sinful society around you. The impact of our culture with its heavy emphasis on materialism, living for yourself, and instant gratification is simply too strong for us to not be influenced by it. Scripture says in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, *“For the time is coming when [people] will not tolerate (endure) sound and wholesome instruction, but, having ears itching [for something pleasing and gratifying], they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold, and will turn aside from hearing the truth and wander off into myths and man-made fictions.”* The enemy is in the world, seeking to give us things that please us and to give us people who say things that tempt us in order to cause us to forsake God’s Truth.

If we are not anchored in Christ, we are at the mercy of the ever-changing winds that blow unstable souls in every direction. This is a picture of instability, helplessness, and restlessness. But God desires that we be stable, steadfast Christians who know the Word, have spiritual perception, and direction toward the goal. Philippians 3:12-14 says, *“Not that I have now attained [this ideal], or have already been made perfect, but I press on to lay hold of (grasp) and make my own, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me and made me His own. I do not consider, brethren, that I have captured and made it my own [yet]; but one thing I do [it is my one aspiration]: **forgetting what lies behind** and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the [supreme and heavenly] prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward.* We must not be content to remain in weakness, immaturity, and spiritual infancy but must press on in the purpose and high calling God has for each one of us.

There is no such thing as a neutral stance. You are either being drawn more and more under the transforming influence of Scripture, or you are being progressively drawn into the web of the ungodly society around you. Remember, Peter tells us, “*Be well balanced (temperate, sober of mind), be vigilant and cautious at all times; for that **enemy** of yours, the devil, roams around like a lion roaring [in fierce hunger], seeking someone to seize upon and **devour**.*” 1 Peter 5:8

Second Timothy 3:1-7 states, ¹***BUT UNDERSTAND this, that in the last days will come (set in) perilous times of great stress and trouble [hard to deal with and hard to bear].***

²*For people will be lovers of self and [utterly] self-centered, lovers of money and aroused by an inordinate [greedy] desire for wealth, proud and arrogant and contemptuous boasters. They will be abusive (blasphemous, scoffing), disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy and profane.*

³*[They will be] without natural [human] affection (callous and inhuman), relentless (admitting of no truce or appeasement); [they will be] slanderers (false accusers, troublemakers), intemperate and loose in morals and conduct, uncontrolled and fierce, haters of good.*

⁴*[They will be] treacherous [betrayers], rash, [and] inflated with self-conceit. [They will be] lovers of sensual pleasures and vain amusements more than and rather than lovers of God.*

⁵*For [although] they hold a form of piety (true religion), they deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it [their conduct belies the genuineness of their profession]. Avoid [all] such people [turn away from them].*

⁶*For **among them are those who worm their way into homes and captivate silly and weak-natured and spiritually dwarfed women, loaded down with [the burden of their] sins [and easily] swayed and led away by various evil desires and seductive impulses.***

⁷***[These weak women will listen to anybody who will teach them]; they are forever inquiring and getting information, but are never able to arrive at a recognition and knowledge of the Truth.***

We don't want to be these weak women, do we? We can't afford to! We are the heart of our homes. Our spouses and our children look to us to guide, to comfort, to instruct, and to counsel. We cannot afford to allow the enemy to come into our minds through idle, worthless, carnal, thoughts and to cause us to lose focus, ignore the spiritual needs of ourselves and others, and to give wrong input into the lives of our families. Remember what God told Joshua—meditate on the Word and do all that is written in it so that you can deal wisely and have success. In these days, don't we need wisdom to deal with all that is going on in the world? There is a spiritual war raging. We are not dealing with flesh and blood, and we need spiritual weapons.

We can't just stick to our yearly Bible reading plan and think that we are doing enough to feed ourselves and our loved ones. Proverbs 10:17 says, “*He who heeds instruction and correction is [not only himself] in the way of life [but also] is a way of life for others.*” I exhort you and encourage you to get into the Word, to be a serious student, and to meditate on what you are reading so that you can not only survive the times we are living in, but thrive, and help your family to thrive also through applying God's Word to your lives and by making it the very fabric of your being!

Do not forget the high calling I mentioned earlier. You are not meant for mediocrity, so don't be afraid. Fear is one of the tactics of the enemy. Do not be insecure. You CAN do this. As the Scripture says, forget what lies behind.

Learn to write your hurts in sand and carve your blessings in stone.

We tend to focus on our regrets and fears and hurts of the past and let our blessings wash away in the waves of life. That is not God's will and purpose for you! Remember what Pastor said on Sunday—God knew everything about you when He saved you and He loved you anyway! You don't have to be perfect! There is no mistake you've made that He didn't forgive. Pursuing the high calling of Christ is for each of us!

I'll end with this. First John 2:20 says you have an anointing from the Holy One. Verse 27 says the anointing abides within us. He is not just talking to pastors or perfect people, but to all of us. Wherever you are in your lives, God has anointed you. If you are married, God has anointed you to be a wife. If you are a mother, you are anointed for the task of raising your children. If you work a job, you have anointing for that job. God has anointed you to be where you are in this church and to do what you do here. The anointing is the power of the Holy Spirit working in your life.

In these last days, God wants to equip women powerfully through the power of the Holy Spirit to minister to others and to thrive as followers of Christ. There are several important spiritual disciplines, and meditating on the Word is one of the mighty weapons in our arsenal to fight the good fight of faith!