Sermon series on the four ways God encourages us to use his Word

1. Devotions/Commentaries (Psalm 119:130)
2. Worship in Church services (Psalm 122:1)
3. **Group Bible Study (Proverbs 27:17)**
4. Individual Reading of the Bible (Psalm 1)

**Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpens iron, and a man sharpens the insight of his friend.**

When was the last time you felt weak in your faith? Maybe it even felt like your faith was getting tired and flabby. It’s a good thing that faith doesn’t rely on how we feel about it or the effort that we put into it. Our faith relies on Jesus, our Savior. Only he is the one who truly gives us faith that is worth anything. Our faith is based on him. He is the one who has died for our sins. He is the one who has won heaven for us. Jesus is the one who give our faith any value.

Jesus does, however, let us know that we who have faith can be strengthened through the use of his Word. Our faith can be worked out. Jesus encourages his follows to get to practice working out their faith. By doing so they strengthen their faith and get ready to use their faith. This is why God encourages and tells us how important it is to be gather with other Christian. We are to gather regularly to sharpen each other.

How does the sharpening happen? Have you ever taken two pieces of the same substance and rubbed them together? Take for example what happens when you rub two pieces of metal together such as iron. As they move against the surface of each other, the friction creates an edge. With more time and activity as the two pieces have contact with each other, they both can become sharper, stronger. Both will be noticeably different. You will be able to tell where they have worked on each other.

Christians when they contact with each other through group Bible study have a similar effect on each other. The effect is mutual when both are using God’s Word.

Take the example of Jesus engaging in group discussions of God’s Word in Luke 2. There we are told that as he was sitting among the teacher of God’s Word four things were happening—listening, asking, giving understanding, and answers. Each of them is a vital part of group Bible study and helpful skills for all to put to use as one Christians sharpens another. Let’s look at each of them.

Listening: As Jesus was in the temple, he was listening to what the teachers were saying. He was taking in what they were saying. For three days, he sat with open ears. He was doing what he could to discover what was the focus of that given time.

Asking: As Jesus sat there, he was asking them questions. Questions are used to get clarification. It’s a way to check to see if what was said has been understood. It allows people to be on the same page. Jesus asked questions so that he might check and go deeper into what they were saying. Those questions caused him to rub against the teacher and it left a mark as they went back and forth.

Giving understanding: As Jesus sat in the temple, he gave understanding as he spoke about what he knew from God’s Word. Sure, it was a special circumstance for the Lord himself to be engaged with sinners in this conversation. It wasn’t just getting the information down. It was also Jesus giving how he understood something. He was active in also giving to the teachers as well as getting from them.

Answers: This is the fourth thing that happened while Jesus met with the teachers in the temple for three days. There were times during the discussions Jesus was able to point blank tell it how it is. Based on what had been said by those involved answers were reached. Clarity was achieved and the people involved, teachers and student, were sharpened. They all worked on the faith of each.

Do you remember what Jesus called what was happening in the temple? *My Father’s business* (Luke 2:49). Jesus knew the will of God the Father is for people to engage with each other with God’s Word. To use the Word to sharpen each other. To listen, ask, give understanding, and answer using the Bible. To not just be ones who take in his Word but openly discuss it with other people. To be in God’s Word with other Christians so that both might be built up. Our connection with God’s Word isn’t just to taking in God’s Word like we do when we read a devotion, listen to a commentary, or worship in a service at church. God encourages believers to gather with God’s Word and to get talking about it—as in everyone talking about it not just the teachers. It is God the Father’s business for Christians to be discussing, studying, his Word with each other.

What Jesus demonstrated with his three days spent in the temple is a way God encourages Christians to connect with his Word. He wants Christians to be going back and forth with God’s Word. Faith isn’t just to be a personal individual activity; it’s a group event where all are actively engaged in discussion around God’s Word.

Sadly, a common trap that is snaps on people when they think about group Bible study or even a friendly conversation about God’s Word is the fear of getting something wrong. It has been drilled into us over and over that there are right answers and wrong answer. It is true to a point. But here’s a little secret for you: the last person on this earth to never have anything wrong was that boy Jesus in the temple who grew to be our Savior. He increased in his understanding of God’s Word through his time spent with others in a group. So, can we when we get over the fear of getting something wrong.

When it comes down to it, group Bible study is never to be about getting it right or wrong. It is about growth, sharpening. While studying God’s Word with a group, your fellow participants serve to hone your focus on God’s Word. They will get you to question what you know about God’s Word to continue checking your faith to make sure it is guide and molded only by God’s Word. They will give insights that you were unaware of before they brought them up.

It’s like two athletes practicing together to encourage, expose weakness, push each other around, not to beat someone down but to refine their skills and abilities, to strengthen and better their performance. They focus on a certain part sometimes on just the smallest detail rather than just an overall skill itself for improvement and refining. The goal is to get better, stronger in the skill the practice. This is what Christians do as they gather to study the Bible together. They want to get stronger in their faith, better connected to God and his Word. This is truly what fellowship is. A refined oneness together with God’s Word at the center.

What happens when Christians fail to dig deeper into God’s Word is weaknesses in faith and misunderstanding of God’s Word never get brought to light. When we actively participate, we are able to question where we might have a weakness and be strengthened as another Christian is able to explain it to us. The application of the Word is able to be given right where we need it rather than stay at a more general area that may or may not help to strengthen us. This is why God encourages us to not just let our connection with his Word stop at devotional reading and coming to worship services.

God encourages us to let the word of Christ dwellin us richly. Out of gratitude he wants us always to be curious like children who will boldly ask questions and excitedly tell what they know to others. In this way, Christians teach and admonish one another as Christ flows from their hearts. (See Colossians 3:16) When we get into groups with God’s Word to study, God blesses such things with growth. Christians are never to be alone but always with other Christians rubbing off on each other to sharpen each other with God’s Word.

Quickly to review what is key with group Bible studies is being active in the group. Being openly participating. Actively paying attention. Actively participating. Actively listening, asking, questions, and giving understanding.

What does it look like? Well, this is where it looks all kind of different. Group Bible study meanings it’s more than one. The group can be as small as two or three and the number grows from there. Although there is some benefit of closeness lost when the group gets bigger than about 7-8, your Bible study group could look like a parent reading the Bible to children. Like a married couple reading God’s Word together. Like a group of people gathering in a church basement. And maybe the most common groups within our congregation, our school students with their teachers or myself in a classroom.

What is sad and disappointing with all the different varieties and ways of group Bible studies is that not everyone in our congregation is benefiting from being part of such a group. I know it can be very different from what you might have normally done. For many it is something you did until you were confirmed and now you don’t do any more. Without engaging with other in the study of God’s Word you are just a lump of iron, not being sharpened by others. That doesn’t say you don’t have faith, but you aren’t getting the blessings of being sharpened by others and you certainly aren’t following God’s encouragement to sharpen others.

Training in God’s Word with other Christians giving and taking is one of the best if not the best and more powerful ways to connect with God’s Word. God works great things as he allows his Word to be heard, discussed, applied, and yes even questioned. Through such our focus on our Savior grows, is sharpened. Our thanks for what he has done increases and our care and closeness for others deepens.

I want to make sure to share with you just one more thing: the gathering of the early Christian church under the direction of the Apostles didn’t look like what we are doing today. This is amazing and I wouldn’t give it up for the world. But it’s not the way they did it. They didn’t get together sing hymns and psalms, read some lessons, have one person talk about something, and then get up and go home. They got together in homes, in fields, on roads, and wherever they could get together and they talked about and through God’s Word. They reviewed and shared with each other to sharpen what they knew about the Savior. Some of them even wrote down what they believed and understood about God so that others would be able to hear, understand, discuss, and ask questions.

God’s Word encourages us to be active not just in receiving God’s Word but also engaged with it. The blessings will always be there.

Next week, we will look at the final way God encourages us to connect with his Word which might also be the most underused and intimidating: Individual reading of the Bible. Amen.

Questions for you as an individual or in a small group:

Group Bible Study is like…

List 2 benefits of group Bible study.

What is a possible trap of only connecting with God’s Word with group Bible study?