



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 7
July 16, 2023

A Life of Being a Disciple

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

²² *Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;*

²⁴ *for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*

¹ *So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, last week we kicked off our stewardship series on the God-lived life. Many of you responded to our last stewardship campaign wonderfully, increasing your giving in order to give back to God as He has given to you. You became more thoughtful and intentional in your offerings. And that was great! But, sadly, when we hear the word “stewardship,” that’s the kind of thing we think of — money. It’s not wrong. God has given us everything we are and have, and we want to give back to Him our firstfruits, our offerings. And it’s really easy to see if we’re doing that, right? It’s a simple matter of doing the math. You’re either giving 10% of your income to the work of the church or you aren’t. But is that the best answer? Is just writing a check the end-all and be-all of a God-lived life? Is it perhaps too easy to do the activity without really involving the heart? Sure. Just giving an offering doesn’t necessarily equal good financial stewardship.

And it’s not just about money, is it? God has given us *everything*, not just our stuff. He’s given us our time, our health, our intellectual ability, our relationships, and our opportunities. All of it is a gift from God. So, this year, our stewardship campaign is going to talk about more than money. We’re talking about living the God-lived life. And did you notice the double meaning in that title? The only way we can live a life for God is because Jesus, true Man and true God, lived His life for us. His God-lived life inspires ours.

So, each of the next four months, we’ll have a special service with a special Bible study and sermon about what the God-lived life looks like. After each of these, we’ll have a one-month challenge based on that aspect of the God-lived life. In your worship materials today you’ll find a Challenge Card. If you need an extra, you can find them on the ledge in the narthex. Please prayerfully consider your response to this month’s challenge.



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So, what *is* a God-lived life? What does a God-lived life look like? Well, that depends. Things aren't always as they seem, are they. Things aren't always what they look like, right?

The Pharisee in today's Gospel never missed his time in the temple. Like clockwork, he was there for his prayers, bringing his offerings. He was consistent. He wore the right clothes, said the right prayers, did the right things. He gave his tithes and fasted and did everything he was suppose to do. Every box was checked on his religious resumé. He was *doing* it. He was *living* the God-lived life. Or so it seemed. I'm going to go out on limb and guess that after hearing today's Gospel, none of you thought, "That's who I want to be like—that Pharisee." There was something missing, wasn't there? He was living what looked like a God-lived life, but he was really doing everything for himself, for his own pride, his own reputation. But what does Jesus say about this? He taught that it was the tax collector, the repentant sinner, who was forgiven, who had a right relationship with God. It was the children, the ones who didn't seem to be worth the disciples' time, who received the kingdom of God. The God-lived life is the one that looks to God's mercy, not to our doing.

So, where do you fall in that Pharisee/tax collector parable? Do you *seem* to live a God-lived life, or do you *live*, by the grace of God, a God-lived life? The God-lived life is not just doing the right things. It's *being* who God has made you to be—not someone who lives to gain God's favor, but who lives *because* of God's favor. It's doing things not because you're supposed to, but because it's who you are. It's the difference between going through the motions and experiencing the fulfillment of living your purpose. The God-lived life is a life lived in relationship with God, in reaction to God's love and His life lived for you.

Today, we focus on the truth that the God-lived life is a life of being a disciple, a life that wants to learn more about God, that wants to grow closer to God. The God-lived life is a life that craves God's Word. Our text is 1 Peter 1:22–2:3 – "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart."

Do you see how Peter starts with who we are and then tells us to live like it? Because you are believers, because you've listened to the truth which has made you pure and holy through faith in the work of Christ, he says: "show that." Love one another "earnestly" — intensely and intently, never giving up — consistently, not just when it's convenient. "Love one another *deeply*, from the heart." And then he tells us the why and the how: "You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." Why love so committedly? Because you've been born again. You have a whole new life. That living Word of God, in other words, the Word of God that *does* something, has an effect — that *living* Word of God *makes* you who you are. And it's the *abiding* Word of God. Long after you're gone from this earth — that Word will stand. So



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Peter quotes Isaiah who had written that Word eight centuries earlier to make the same point. Isaiah was long dead and gone, but the Word he wrote endures: “For ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.’” *Verbum Domini manet in aeternum*. The Word of God remains forever. We are here and gone, but God’s Word stands. His promises endure. Then Peter says: “And this word is the good news that was preached to you.”

Let that sink in. It’s one thing to agree that God’s Word is powerful. It’s what He used to create the universe, after all. His Word is powerful. We know that. But it’s another thing to act on that knowledge. If you really have access to something that powerful, that lasting, that important — aren’t you going to want to cherish that? Aren’t you going to want every opportunity to be connected to that power?

Now, I realize that there’s a part of us that comes to church or tunes in out of duty or habit instead of eager excitement. How many times has your daily devotion been pushed off ‘til tomorrow? Is your Bible your favorite book? Or would you rather read something else?

Think about it. If you sacrificed and went above and beyond to give someone you loved a precious gift and they acted like it didn’t matter that much to them, you’d be offended. If you saw a guy get down on one knee and give his girlfriend a diamond ring he’d spent every dime he had on — only to see her toss it to the side like it was nothing — you’d be appalled. What does God think when He sees our attitude toward His Word, that precious gift He’s given us? What does He think when He sees our lack of participation in Bible study, our faithfulness in daily devotion? Lord, have mercy!

This is the living and enduring Word of God we’re talking about. It’s the Word that tells us of the God-lived life. Jesus, the Word made flesh, lived the life God demands. He cherished the Word — even as a 12-year-old in the temple. He used the powerful Word, defeating every one of Satan’s temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4) and throughout His earthly life. And He gives us salvation through that very same Word. The Word tells us of His forgiveness, even for our failures to value His Word. It tells us of the blood He shed and the death He died in order to save us, so that we are purified through that Word. This is why you have it. God gave it to you because He desperately wants you to have life, His life, and have it to the full.

Peter continues: “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.” Since you are God’s children, it doesn’t make sense to live in those old ways. Instead . . . “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation — if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

It’s been a few years since our granddaughters were newborns, but still, the picture couldn’t be more vivid. What happens when you give a baby a bottle? Once they realize what it is, they latch on. They don’t want to let go. And if you try to take that bottle away,



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what happens? They're furious! Their skin gets red. Their little fists clench. They scream at the top of their lungs. If they could form words, you know what they would be saying: "Give me that back!"

Why? Well, first, they like it. It tastes good to them. And they need it. Deep down they know they need it to grow. Without it, they would die. It's a matter of life and death.

Now translate that picture to the point Peter's making. God's Word is just as necessary for our spiritual life. Without regular feedings in God's Word, our faith gets weaker and eventually dies. And God's Word tastes just as sweet. What could be better than to hear that you're loved by God? So, of course, Satan wants you to take it for granted.

I can't help but think of what we sometimes call the post-Confirmation syndrome. You know what that is? Our confirmands spend three years of their life studying God's Word, learning about their faith. I couldn't count how many wonderful opportunities I've had to answer questions and watch the faith of these young people grow. I've even had some tell me they were sad when the class came to an end, saying they would miss the opportunity to ask questions and learn more. And that's good. They've tasted that the LORD is good. But then what happens? Satan tries to convince them that they don't need it anymore. And they disappear, no matter how we try to keep them connected. And my heart breaks for each and every one. What would our weekend attendance look like if every confirmand fulfilled his promise to stay connected to the Faith and to the church? So, Peter reminds us all— "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk," and why? — "so that by it you may grow up in your salvation."

It's the Word that God uses to rescue you from the punishment you deserve for every time your life hasn't been the God-lived life He expects. It's the Word of God that strengthens you to fight against every temptation. So, long for it, beloved, crave it. Realize its value and don't let anyone take it away from you!

By God's grace, commit to living a God-lived life. On your challenge card this month, there are challenges for several aspects of craving the Word. Commit to coming to worship and Bible study — and let your brothers and sisters in Christ hold you accountable. Challenge yourself to a daily schedule of Bible reading, to devotions with your family, to finding ways to be in the Word and guarding your time for it. Crave that pure spiritual milk, for it gives and sustains your life. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen