

Wash Up and Eat

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[0 : 0 0] If you have your Bibles this morning, I want you to turn to Amos, Amos chapter 8. I'm sharing with you these days a sermon series I call First Things First because straight out the gate I wanted you to know the priorities that I have and what really becomes the underpinning of so much of what I do as a pastor and how I preach and how I think and to get an understanding of those things.

One fine summer day in 1606 in a grove of towering sequoias that would one day be in the state of California, a tiny seedling poked through the virgin soil.

A year later as that seedling became a sapling, Jamestown was settled in Virginia. A year later after that sapling became a young sequoia, there was a territory named New France.

That would one day become Canada. Three more years after it grew, a group of scholars released an elegant English translation so that people could read the Bible in their own language, in their own understanding.

It was called the King James Version. As that tree continued to grow, America became a nation. They fought a civil war.

[1 : 3 6] They waged in two world wars. They put men on the moon and they suffered a horrible terrorism attack on 9-11-2001.

All in that tree's lifetime. And then at the age of 400 years old, the tree fell to the earth in a thunderous crash.

It was the first of Yosemite's magnificent sequoias to fall in years. And the Forestry Service immediately began an investigation to find out what caused it.

What would cause such a majestic tree to fall in such a way as that? There were no windstorms that caused it. There were no widespread fires that had caused it. No floods or lightning that had hit it.

When they looked at the tree, there was no evidence of animal or insect damage. Finally, in all their investigation, the forestry experts came to a startling conclusion.

[2 : 4 0] The cause of the tree's failure was foot traffic. People walking around the base of the tree over so many years had damaged the root system.

So a new policy was formed. That some of the oldest, largest, and most historic significant trees would be fenced to keep the public from trampling the root systems.

How significant that is. That even the strong and stellar trees that have lived hundreds of years cannot survive when there's no protection. When there's not a sacred enclosure around their root systems.

Let me tell you, friend, what's true for big, beautiful trees is also true for you and me. The reality is our root systems are delicate.

We're a lot more fragile than we want to appear. And unless we protect and nourish our root systems, we fail. Now that collapse sometimes is slowly.

[3 : 5 5] It's not as obvious as a sequoia falling in the forest. It could just be a wandering away slowly at a time. Or it could be a thunderous crash.

It could be someone who makes a dumb mistake that forever changes their lives. But in reality, it didn't just happen instantaneous.

No. There was damage to the root system. Due to the foot traffic of our life. We need nourishment.

We need protection. We need our roots at the base of who we are to be fed. And that's got to be a priority. It cannot be taken lightly. Because if we're not careful with the foot traffic that we face in life today, we'll set ourselves up.

The prophet Amos gave us a warning. It was timely for the day in which he spoke it. It's timely for the day in which we live. Amos chapter 8, verse 11 and 12 simply says this.

[5 : 05] Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord God. When I'll send a famine on the land. Not a famine of bread. Not a thirst for water. But of hearing the words of the Lord.

They shall wander from sea to sea. And from north to east. They shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord. But they shall not find it.

The grace of God is amazing. Seldom is it seen any greater than when you look at the compiling of the word of God. For God took 400 of his top people.

Put their raw, unedited stories in a whole library of books. Gathered 66 of those books together. And put them into one. And the Bible tells all of that.

Why did he do all that? He did it for us. He did it so that we would have it to look to. When speaking of the events of the exodus. The apostle Paul said about the word of God.

[6 : 11] In 1 Corinthians 10, verse 11. He said, Now these things are written for our instruction. Upon the end of the ages have come.

The reality is in the word of God. We have the greatest book of divine wisdom in the entire universe. I want you to listen to the psalmist describe the impact of God's word in Psalm 119.

And by the way, all of Psalm 119. All 150 verses. Is absolutely wonderful. And points to the strength. And the foundational structure that the word of God can give to our lives.

But I want you to listen to what verse 98 and 99 says. It says, Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies. For it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers.

For your testimonies are my meditations. So what is wisdom? Wisdom is experiential knowledge. You can be born smart.

[7 : 13] But that don't mean when you're old you'll be wise. You can gather knowledge along the way. But if you don't apply that knowledge and live by that knowledge. You won't become wise.

But you can't become wise without going through some stuff. Being knowledgeable of it. Experiencing it. And learning from it.

The greatest way for us to obtain wisdom is to learn. Not from making the dumb mistakes ourself. That's the hard way. That's the old school of hard knocks that a lot of people grow themselves up in.

The best way is to learn from somebody else's dumb examples. Why don't we learn from somebody else's mistakes? Why don't we see where they messed up? And learn from that.

And change the way we live based upon that. That's why we have those unedited stories in scripture. That's why it tells us the weaknesses of those dear folks. So we don't go through the same dilemmas that they do.

[8 : 15] I don't believe you can learn what you need to learn in this life alone. By yourself. And more and more I believe that a famine of the word of God is upon us.

Now don't misunderstand me. There's still a lot of preachers. But I want to be clear. A lot of them don't preach God's word anymore. They don't. Feel good ideologies and pretty smiling faces that fill arenas and sell books in the name of Christianity.

Ain't getting it done. Pop psychology has taken the place of biblical preaching. Even among some of America's most beloved pastors. Motivational monologues have replaced biblical preaching.

They may lead to emotional stirs instead of heartfelt mind-altering life-changing surrenders. And even when there is solid biblical preaching, the attention of so many other things of this world has taken too high a priority.

There was a day when Sunday was set aside for worship. Unless there was some type of significant family outing. But the reality is now for too many, Sunday is only honored if nothing else is happening.

[9 : 30] If your kids see you doing that, what are they going to do in response to it? The reality is when you look at the last four generations, you'll see each generation become weaker than the previous generation.

In their faithfulness to follow the Lord. And as more things happen on Sunday, our greatest priorities are revealed. Our true colors are shown. What really matters rises to the top.

So get this now. If there's a shortage of the word of God from the pulpit. And a shortage of commitment to any congregation. Whether it's preached or not.

That leads to a famine. And it heads toward what could be spiritual genocide if the word of God is not. We don't take it in as we need to.

Or if we're not getting it. And so how do we respond to that? I believe we respond in three ways. One is we make a commitment to the preached word. No compromise in that.

[10 : 31] Now I realize when I preach what the word of God has to say, it's going to rub up against what a lot of society says. And believe me, the evil one is fighting hard to change the ideology of society.

And so don't be surprised if what you hear me say may be contrary to what the news says. Are contrary to what the self-help says.

Are contrary to what the common ideologies are. Because the reality is the word of God is true whether people claim it or not. I believe you have to have a commitment to the preached word.

Second thing is you've got to have a commitment to the pew. Miss for the extraordinary. Please don't miss for the ordinary. Because I believe that we all need it.

We need each other. We need the word of God. We need to come together as God's people. We need to be faithful in that. And then the third part of that is a commitment to personal devotion. And that's really what I want to hone in on today.

[11 : 34] From personal habits of studying God's word. Wayne Cordero wrote a book several years ago called The Divine Mentor. And he called it the need for a self-feeding program.

If you were to come to me and you were to say, Pastor, I'm just so weak I can hardly get out of bed. And I ask you, have you been able to eat? Well, you know, not much.

Well, have you seen a doctor about that? Yeah, but the doctor couldn't find anything wrong. Well, are you eating enough? Well, I eat. I eat every week.

I eat at 1030 on Sunday. You're going to have to eat more than that. Okay? I mean, you're going to need more than that.

You're going to have to feed yourself. Listen to what Peter says in 1 Peter 2, verse 2 and 3. Like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual meal.

[12 : 38] That by it you may grow into salvation if indeed you've tasted that the Lord is good. Listen, if you think the word of God is good secondhand, you ought to try it firsthand.

You ought to spend time with the Lord. Not just binge on the word of God on Sunday, but instead develop a plan in your life for a steady daily diet.

Because the reality is if you're not being fed, it's your fault. The word of God is ready. It is waiting. It has exactly what we need.

I mean, I want you to think about this for just a moment. Think about what is before us when we have the word of God. For over a period of 1,500 years, God chose 40 different men to write down his divine words in a book.

Their experience combined with the breath of the Holy Spirit makes for the best mentoring book for your life no matter who you are. There is no better businessman or businesswoman than the richest and wisest that have ever lived, Solomon.

[13 : 50] There's no better mentor for a pastor, a shepherd of God's people than Moses. There's no better mentor for a professional than Dr. Luke.

Sir William Ramsey was one of the world's most brilliant intellects. He was a historian, noted for his Middle Eastern understanding, and he's from Aberdeen, Scotland, and he was renowned for his writings on the Middle East, and he studied the book of Acts, and he laughed at it.

He ridiculed it, and he said that the book of Acts was highly imaginative and a carefully colored account of primitive Christianity, not rooted in facts.

And it was upon that that he went to the Middle East to prove his theory that the book of Acts was fanciful.

And after carefully investigating the accounts and the events in the book of Acts, in that pursuit of the accounts of God's word, not only was he convinced it was true, but he was transformed by it.

[15 : 01] He followed that research up with a book called Luke the Physician. And in that, he says this, I now take that Luke's history is unsurpassed in regard to its truthworthiness.

You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian, and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment. End of quote. No more accurate account, and no better mentor for a professional than Dr. Luke, a physician by trade.

No better mentor for an educator than the Apostle Paul. We get our understanding of theology from him sharing with us what it is that Christ was actually saying to us.

No better mentor for a mother than Mary. I mean, do you begin to get what I'm talking about? Now, when you add to that Isaiah, who spoke to a nation in crisis, when you add to that Daniel, who stood when many others would not stand, or Esther, who followed God's timing, or Ruth, a lady of uncompromising commitment, I could go on and on, but I'm telling you, we need the word of God daily.

So I want to challenge you today. I want to challenge you today to a spiritual self-feeding plan, a devotional Bible plan. If you'll give God up to a half an hour a day, he'll change your life.

[16 : 25] Now, I'm going to be honest with you. I thought about that very statement many times this week, and I thought I'm going to lose some of them when I say that, because you just said a half an hour.

A half an hour. Preacher, do you know what all I've got to do? Well, let me ask you this. Do you ever watch a half hour of the news?

It's useless. There's no need to do it. What else do you do for a half hour? Do you exercise your body for a half hour?

It's important. You need to do it. But is it more important than nurturing your soul? What about eating Cheetos on the couch? You ever do that for 30 minutes or binge on Netflix for 30 minutes at a time?

That's hours at a time for many. Let's be honest. We always make time for what's important to us. We always make time for that. And if you don't have an half hour, you don't have to give a half hour.

[17 : 29] But I promise you if you do, it'll change your life. I promise that based on the authority and the power and the spirit-filled word of God. It'll change your life.

So I want you to wash with the waters of the word of God. And I want you to feed your soul and your conscience daily. And how do you do that? First, you use soap. That's an acrostic.

It's been used around here before. I've seen it on papers in youth buildings and those type things. So I know it's been used. You may be familiar with it. I'm not sure.

But the first S stands for Scripture. The Bible reading plan I'm talking about, if you'll read two chapters of the Old Testament, one chapter of the New Testament, and maybe a psalm a day, you'll read through the entire Old Testament in about 10 months.

You'll read through the New Testament in a year twice. However, I want you to understand something. The point is not to read the Bible through. You can go home and read the whole book of Genesis this afternoon.

[18 : 33] And you still may not be able to tell me any of the events that were in it because you read it so fast. The point is not to read through. You can read it every month if you want to, but it's still not applied.

It'll make a difference. But what I'm asking you is before you ever begin to read, pause. Are you uncomfortable yet?

Just pause. Let all the things that are circulating in your mind settle for just a moment.

And then ask God, God, will you show me what you'd have for me today? God, will you give me one verse today that I can hang my hat on?

One verse that I can live by. One verse that speaks to me where I am today.

[19 : 40] Before you ever open up the Word of God. Before you ever know where you're going to read. God, what it is. What is it that you want to show me?

And then as God gives you that verse, and he will. Write it down. I just lost you again, didn't I? Because the men are looking at me saying, I ain't writing nothing down, Bridger.

I'm not doing it. Well, I'm telling you, if she goes, tells you to go to the grocery store, you better write it down. Because if you don't, you won't come home with the right stuff. You write down what's important.

You write down what you want to remember. You write down what makes a difference. And if you'll write that down, so you'll remember it. You just have to remember it for the day. You just have to apply it to your life for the day.

And when the hectic pace of the day begins to hit you and begins to overwhelm you, when the foot traffic begins to beat on you, you'll need that verse.

[20 : 41] The journaling sometimes throws people off. But if you'll do it, you'll not only remember what God said, you'll have a legacy for you to look back on and see how God moved in you.

As I packed my study in banana boxes for the move here, I found an old spiral notebook from my college days.

I did a summer youth ministry position in somewhere between Salisbury, Kannapolis, and Concord, North Carolina, out in the middle of nowhere.

And in that time, I took out a little spiral notebook and began to write out my prayers. I am dangerous because I am unmedicated ADD.

And so I will lose my train of thought. And when I pray about a matter of how to deal with it, when God shows me, I'll get up and go deal with it instead of finishing my prayer.

[21 : 47] It's the way I am. So it helps me instead to not put feet on it yet. Let's wait until we finish our prayer. And so I begin early in life to journals, sporadically throughout life.

But I'm telling you, when I look back at that journal, when I opened those pages and read some of those prayers, I laughed at myself. How trivial. The little things that I was concerned about.

And then I begin to realize, look how God has brought me through that. Look how God not only provided when I was 21 years old, but how I've watched him provide for me.

I'm telling you, I need that right now. I need to know that the same God that called me and the same God that led me is the same God that's got it figured out where I'm going to unpack my stuff and live.

I trust him in that. And he reminds me daily that he's got it. So first you write down the scripture. The second, the O, is the observation. What's happening in that passage?

[22 : 57] Just take a moment to read the scripture now. Sometimes you have to read the paragraph before. Sometimes you have to read the paragraph that it's with. Get the context and write down what's happening. And then how does that apply to you?

What does that mean for today? What difference does this verse make for today? And then pray about it. And write out that prayer. Can you imagine the fun that you'd have to see how God speaks out of that same passage year after year?

It's a revolutionary idea that'll change your life. It'll change this church. Now, you may say, preacher, I don't really need to do that.

I read the word of God daily. I've got it figured out. Well, if you've got a plan, that's great. That's wonderful. Let me tell you what's cool about this. One of the greatest blessings about this plan is that everyone is reading the same passage every day.

Those passages will be provided on bookmarks. They're on both sides of the stage. They're in the foyer. They're on the newsletter beginning next week.

[24 : 12] They're on the website as well. Journals are made available. There are journals that you can have for the cost of the church paid for it if you can afford it. And if you can't, take one anyway.

And I'll cover it. Journals that you can give to your children. Listen to this. Those journals on the front row down here help a child learn how to dig through Scripture daily.

Not by reading two chapters of Old Testament and one chapter of the New Testament and maybe a psalm. But instead just by reading a couple of verses out of the same thing that mom and dad's reading.

You want to know how to do a quick family altar on the way to school? Just look at what passage your kid read that day and talk about it with them. Share God's Word with them while you go.

I often, as I take Millie to school, will tell her what God showed me for the day. She'll roll her eyes at me and ignore me. Of course she will. But she hears it daily. What God showed me and how that applies to her and how I've prayed for her and how I hope she has a blessed day and then I always follow it with nothing stupid.

[25 : 29] If you've got a teenager, you know what I mean. I read the Word daily and I'm thankful for what He shows me. Last week when we were dedicating children, I read Deuteronomy chapter 6.

Deuteronomy chapter 6 talks about the need to talk about what God is doing in your life when you wake up. When you sit at the house and when you walk or drive along the way.

That's my new version of it. Drive along the way or when you lie down. In other words, throughout the day. This rolls right into that.

Just talk about what God showed you. What a blessing it is as well to share that passage on that day with others. I get texts that people share with me what their passage was for the day.

I get emails. I've seen Sunday school classes that scrapped the curriculum and instead went home and read God's Word. And went around the class and said, what did God show you on Tuesday?

[26 : 35] That will open up a conversation and a discussion along the way. You say, preacher, 30 minutes. That's because they're basing it off about 20 minutes of the average person reading.

For most folks, it won't take you 20 minutes. I can tell you that. Don't take me 20 minutes to read that. But maybe that's too much. This black journal down here on the front row has an express plan. You don't have to read through it all.

You get short one day, just read the New Testament passage. Don't miss out on what God's got in the old. But if you get short, just read the New Testament passage. And listen, this is the cool thing.

If you miss a day, you don't have to go back. Just keep rolling. God, what would you have for me today?

I missed it yesterday. But I want it today. God, would you tell me what you'd have for me today? I'm telling you, couples will get closer.

[27 : 40] Families will have an easy way of doing a family devotion. And if you mess up, you just strive on. You get short on time, just read part of it. Just steady on.

And I want you to imagine for just a moment, if many in this congregation all deal with the same passage every day, that we've all read the same stuff every day, and God begins to interact in our lives, and God begins to move in us, he will when we give him that opportunity.

This morning, as I was reading, I read this, and it spoke to my heart, and I asked God to use me today for this very purpose. It's in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

I read Chronicles about a lot of people who had different jobs. Okay? Easy reading. Quick reading. And I got to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, and it said this, Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you receive from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

And I asked the Lord Jesus this morning, I said, Oh God, help me to help them do it more and more for you. He will give, he will touch your heart if you will give him the opportunity.

[29 : 07] He will guide your life. He will make your path straight, not just for graduates, for all of us, if we'll listen to him, and if we'll interact with the Holy Spirit daily in his word.

Now you may say, Listen, preacher, I don't understand all that stuff. You know? I mean, I read, and I don't understand it. Well, look, look. Focus on the 90% that you do understand, and don't worry about the 10% you don't understand.

Because when we're faithful with what we know, he'll reveal to us what we don't. We just got to trust the Lord in what he shows us.

And so I asked you today, would you commit to give him time and place every day to pray, to pause, and ask God to show you what he'd have for you in his word.

Ask him how that applies to your life, and then apply it to your life. Wash up with the word. Get busy spiritually feeding yourself. Because I'm telling you, there's no limit to what God can do through a people with one heart toward God, focused in on what he has for them each and every day.

[30 : 25] If you would, bow your heads. Close your eyes for just a moment. I want to ask you to just answer just to the Lord.

How am I doing with this today? How much time do I give the Lord each day? Do I give him place? Do I trust him with my life?

Do I ask him to guide me? Or when I panic, do I crack open a book and stick my finger on a verse and hope that's the one for the day? If you'll commit today, he'll ease your inconsistencies.

He'll smooth over your roughness, and he'll bless your life. He will. You'll be stronger because of it. You may be here this morning, and you say, preacher, not only do I not read God's word, the reality is, I don't have a relationship with the Lord.

There's never been a time in my life when I've asked the Lord Jesus to forgive me and to cleanse me and to come into my life and to change me, and I'm telling you, if you've never surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, thank God, today's the day of salvation.

[31 : 45] We serve the same God, and he's the same yesterday, today, and forever, and he will change your life today. And in just a moment, we'll stand and sing, and it's that opportunity that you have to come down and tell me, preacher, I'd like to know the Lord Jesus personally.

I'd love to have you guided through that and what that means. Maybe you're here this morning, and you have done that, but it's not reflecting in your life.

It's not reflecting in your daily practice. It's not reflecting in how you act on the weekend. It's not reflecting in how you think and what you ingest into your mind.

Maybe today is the day of repentance. It's the day of saying, Lord, I'm sorry for who I've been, and I want to make things right again. I'll be happy to help you with that in that process, or you can do it where you are, or you can do it at this altar.

I just know that unless you do what God tells you to do and obey him, you'll never be satisfied because he's made you for himself. And so church, why don't we just commit today to give God place and to live our lives to please him?

[32 : 57] I promise you he'll honor that. He'll bless that. Lord Jesus, I love you, and I thank you for the time that we've had together today, but oh God, I ask right now that your Holy Spirit will move and work in our midst and help us simply to be obedient as you lead us.

In Jesus' precious name, amen. Stand together.