

SCRIPTURE**PSALM 1:2; 119:133; DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7**

Natan Sharansky is a Russian Jew who was imprisoned by the old Soviet regime for several years before finally being released and allowed to immigrate to Israel where he now lives. During the nine years he spent in Soviet prisons and work camps, most of his possessions were taken from him. But he clung desperately to a copy of the Psalms that his wife, Avital, had sent to him from Israel where she was already living. Sharansky once spent 130 days in solitary confinement because he refused to allow the Soviet authorities to confiscate his copy of the Psalms. Shortly before his release, he learned that they wanted this book once he left the Soviet Union. Sharansky threw himself in the snow in an act of defiance. He later explained, "I said I would not leave without the Psalms that had helped me so much. I lay down in the snow and said, 'Not another step.'" The Soviet guards scrutinized his little copy of the Psalms carefully and then finally handed it back to him. Natan Sharansky might be a living example of an attitude toward God's Word found in Ps. 119:111 (NLT), "Your laws are my treasure; they are my heart's delight." Do you delight in God's Word like Natan Sharansky delighted in the Psalms? Even if it meant risking your freedom from imprisonment?

"ROPES: Discipleship Described" is the name of the message series we're concluding today. By now most of us know that the word "ropes" is an acronym that stand for five words: relationships, obedience, prayer, evangelism, and Scripture. This is how we define or describe being a disciple – an intentional follower – of Jesus in this place – Karl Road Baptist Church. We've already talked about relationships, obedience, prayer, and evangelism. Today I want you to think with about the S in ROPES which stands for Scripture. There are three truths to think about with me today. Here's the first one.

A DISCIPLE TAKES IN SCRIPTURE.

A key verse for this truth is found in the very first psalm. The entire psalm contrasts the lives of people who are blest by God and those who have no use for God. You could say that a blest person is a disciple of Jesus. Here's one very important characteristic of blest people. A disciple of Jesus interacts with Scripture regularly and often, because he or she delights in God's Word. Would you read the verse up on the screen with me out loud? "But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night." (Ps 1:2 NLT) Do you delight in God's Word? You delight in things that you think are valuable and, also, that bring you pleasure and satisfaction. In another psalm, we read, "Your instructions are more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver." (Ps 119:72 NLT) and, also, "How sweet your words taste to me; they are sweeter than honey." (Ps 119:103 NLT) For the psalmist, nothing was more valuable than gold or silver. This was well before the time paper money was used or investing in stocks and bonds was possible. By the same token, nothing tasted better in that day and time than natural honey. Refined sugar hadn't made its debut yet. The psalmist delighted – found value, pleasure and satisfaction – in God's Word more than in anything else.

Is the psalmist exaggerating just a bit? No. In terms of something having eternal and enduring value, God's Word – and the relationship with God to which it points – is of

infinitely greater value than gold, silver, stacks of \$100 bills, or the most lucrative investment portfolio imaginable. By the same token, when you understand and appreciate the Bible for what it truly offers you, you will find pleasure and satisfaction in it. Some of you out there delight in football; therefore, you might just watch some kind of game being played later today! When you delight in your spouse, you enjoy spending time with him or her and giving him or her your focused attention. To delight in something or someone is to be “into” it or “into” that person. Well, a disciple of Jesus is “into” the Bible. You focus on it often and regularly. You delight in it and the more you delight in it, the more it becomes the joy of your heart.

What about people who don't delight in God's Word? They rarely if ever read it. They find it boring and dull. The Bible is just uninteresting and irrelevant to them. That's a good sign such folk aren't born again spiritually regardless of what they say they believe about God. You need the Holy Spirit dwelling within you to delight in God's Word. Now, if you're here this morning there's a good chance that you delight in God's Word, or – at least - you have the potential to delight in it! That's why you're here. One evidence that you're truly a child of God and that the Holy Spirit lives within you is that you have this odd appetite for, this hard to explain hunger for, this strong, persistent desire to hear and understand your Heavenly Father's words. Disciples of Jesus don't worship the Bible, but we delight in in the Bible because there we find a revelation of our Father's character, our Father's love, and how to have a relationship with our Father.

Now the verse we read together points to another very important aspect of taking in Scripture. A disciple of Jesus – a blest person - meditates on God's Word. “But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night.” (Ps 1:2 NLT) Now, in our culture, meditation is often associated with an Eastern religious practice where you sit with legs crossed, blissed out in a semi-conscious way, and maybe even saying “Om” occasionally. That's not what the psalmist means! But meditating does mean more than just reading. It means to slow down and really take in God's Word – every word, every concept, and every principle. It means to mull it over and kind of marinate in it. It means to look for ways to personally apply what you've just read to your life today.

The Hebrew word for meditate there in Psalm 1:2 conveys the same idea as a cow chewing its cud. Just for fun, I read up on cud chewing a little this week. Fascinating stuff! I know there aren't too many cows in Northland or probably in your neighborhood either, but most of you know what I mean when I talk about a cow chewing its cud. Have you ever noticed that cows always seems to be chewing something? The reason is because cows must chew their food twice in order to digest it properly. In fact, cows spend nearly eight hours out of every day chewing their cud. Cow have stomachs that contain four compartments. When a cow first takes a bite, it chews just enough to moisten the food. Once swallowed, the food goes into the first section where it mixes with other acidic digestive liquids and is softened. The softened food is called cud, small balls of food. Next, the stomach muscles send the cud back up to the cow's mouth, where it is re-chewed and swallowed again, this time going to another section of its stomach in order to squeeze out all of the moisture. Finally, the food enters the last part of the stomach where it mixes with digestive juices and makes its way to the intestine to

be completely digested. I'm sure you'll be pleased and blest to know that effective cud chewing indicates a happy, healthy cow that produces more and better milk!

I want to give you a quick example of spiritual cud chewing – or meditating – on God's Word. Meditation is really all about asking questions of a chapter or a verse in the Bible to promote personal application. We shared this same simple technique at the recent Devotional Life Seminar two weeks ago. It's one of many ways to meditate on Scripture; there's not just one way. I'm using it in my own personal devotional time right now and enjoying it. Open your Bible to Psalm 1. Now I'm going to ask five questions of what we just read. Call it the "SPECK" method – like a speck of dust – because the first letter of the key word in each question helps me remember all five questions. First, is there a **sin** to avoid in these verses? Not explicitly. But, implicitly, we're told in v. 1 to avoid a scornful, mocking attitude toward God and the things of God. Second, is there a **promise** to claim in these verses? Yes! V. 3 tells us that people who delight in God's Word will have a blest, prosperous life. They will be like a well-watered tree in a dry land that doesn't lose its leaves or fruit. V. 6 tells me that the Lord watches over people who honor and obey Him.

Third, is there an **example** to follow or avoid? Both, actually. I'm encouraged to follow the example of blest people in v. 1 by resisting the influence of people who have no use for God. I'm encouraged in v. 2 to delight in God's Word and meditate on it day and night. That's what blest people do. By the same token, I'm warned in v. 1 not to be like ungodly people who scorn God and the things of God. Nor do I want to experience in v. 5 the instability of ungodly people who get blown away by life's circumstances. And I surely don't want to face God's judgment mentioned in v. 5-6. The ways and lives of ungodly people have no lasting substance or significance. Four, is there a **command** to obey in these verses? I see two implied in v. 2. Delight in God's Word. Meditate on it day and night. Finally, is there some kind of **knowledge** of God to receive? Absolutely. In v. 3, I discover that God longs to bless and loves to prosper people who delight in His Word and show that delight through actual obedience. In contrast, I discover in verse 5 - 6 that God will judge people who have no use for Him. What we just did was more than just reading God's Word. We asked questions that promoted personal application. We chewed the cud. We meditated. Here's a second truth about Scripture.

A DISCIPLE IS INFLUENCED BY SCRIPTURE.

Reading Scripture isn't good enough. Even meditating on Scripture isn't good enough. The ultimate purpose of interacting with God's Word is personal transformation. Personal transformation happens when you actually obey Scripture and allow it to change your actions, your lifestyle, your attitudes, your relationships, anything and everything about you. We find that truth expressed in this key verse which I'll ask you to read out loud with me. "Guide my steps by your word, so I will not be overcome by evil." (Ps 119:133 NLT)

Why does the Bible provide such a powerful influence upon your life and mine? There are many possible answers to that question, but let's simply focus on the answer

provided in the verse we read. God's Word provides reliable guidance for living out our lives. It's full of God's truth – truth about God, about people, about this world, about life itself. You can count on it, because it's absolutely trustworthy. You can live out your life on the basis of what you find in God's Word. A very familiar verse tells us, "Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path." (Ps 119:105 NLT) What does light do? It illumines the darkness. It enables you to see where you're going. Sometimes as you journey through life, it seems dark. You can have a hard time figuring out what to do or what is the right way to go. Most of us want to make good decisions in life. What values will guide me? Who should I marry? What kind of career should I choose? What's the right thing to do in this specific situation? How should I handle this relationship issue? How about this financial concern? The Bible doesn't always give specific answers to your questions and mine. What it does provide are overarching principles and truths that God then expects you to apply to many specific issues you face in life. How do you find out those principles? You read and meditate on God's Word so that when a situation comes up you know how to apply it.

Anne Graham Lotz is one of Billy Graham's daughters. She has her own ministry of Bible teaching and speaking now for many years. When she and her husband attend football games at their alma mater, the University of North Carolina, it's like games at the Shoe. Thousands of people cram into the parking lots and she can't see where she's going. Her husband, however, is 6'7" so he can look over the crowd. He just takes Anne's hand and leads them both to their seats in the stadium. She says she has learned to follow pretty much the same procedure with the Lord when it comes to life itself. She just tries to follow the Lord step by step and day by day. And it's an ever deepening knowledge of and experience with Scripture that makes the difference.

In one of Paul's letters to his younger friend and partner in ministry, Timothy, the great Christian leader writes these key verses about the Bible's influence. "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work." (2 Tim 3:16-17 NLT) We're told right there that the Bible is useful. It's useful in teaching you everything you need to know about God, life, salvation, and yourself. It provides positive and practical instruction on how to live. The Bible is useful in identifying where we've gone wrong. We all go wrong in life from time to time. Scripture has a way of saying, "No, there's nothing good if you choose that approach to life or you have that attitude. You need to change." The Bible is useful for correcting. Sometimes we can just misunderstand what to do in a situation. It's not intentional, but it's still wrong. Scripture can correct us. The Bible is useful for training – just helping us figure out what is the right thing to do – the God-pleasing thing. The Bible is useful for equipping. It will help you do what pleases God and blesses other people. The Bible's primary purpose is not about giving you lots of data or even to satisfy your curiosity. It was given to you and me to enable us to live to God and for God. The Bible's primary purpose is to transform you not to inform you. It's always been about transformation not information.

I don't need to tell you that increasingly it's all about cell phones, texting, tweeting, and instant messaging. Recent studies show that the average teenager sends and receives over 2,270 text messages a month. That's over 75 per day. What if we all had a relationship like that with our Bibles? What if we stayed in touch with God's Word as frequently and tenaciously as we text, Facebook, and touch base with our friends? I wonder if we'd have a much healthier spiritual life and a stronger grasp of the Bible. The best texting you can ever do is studying the texts of the Bible. They are "...more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb. They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them." (Ps 19:10-11 NLT). Here's a final truth about Scripture.

A DISCIPLE EXPLAINS SCRIPTURE.

When God was establishing the nation of Israel, here's what He said to them. Please read it out loud with me. "Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night." (Dt. 6:6-7 MSG) Now the primary context of those wonderful verses is the family – Mom and Dad passing along the truths of God's Word to their children. Discipleship starts at home. The most important and the most effective discipleship happens at home.

Parents, did you know that the single most important attitude that you ever pass on to your kids is your attitude about God? Is He the central, focal point of your life or is He on the edges of your life? Is God Someone to be obeyed regardless or can you safely ignore Him? Is God Someone you pay lip service to on Sunday only or is He a vital part of everything that happens to you on Tuesday morning or Thursday afternoon as well? The Hebrew language has a word for a formal proclamation or a lecture. It's not used here. The words used here refer to just ordinary conversation throughout the day. There's nothing automatic or inevitable about teaching your kids to know God. Those verses imply that discipling your kids is a thoughtful, intentional practice. What God calls His people to do here is a rather aggressive, assertive, conscious, and consistent transfer of God's truth from parents to kids.

I was raised by two wonderful, godly parents who discipled me although I never recall them using that word. I'm not sure there is a greater blessing than godly parents who disciple you in the things of God. I am profoundly grateful to God and to them. Some of you enjoyed that same blessing, but many of you didn't. Maybe you grew up in a home where your parents didn't follow Jesus and you came to faith as an adult. Or maybe Mom and Dad had a faith, but they just didn't disciple you effectively. I've been increasingly aware that many followers of Jesus have never had anyone come alongside them at any point in their lives and help them to understand how to follow Jesus better. It's not your fault. You didn't know what you didn't know. But that's where I hope and pray our church can make a difference. No, we can't force anyone to grow spiritually. But we can, as a church, come alongside any disciple of Jesus that wants to grow spiritually and help him or her take the next step in their journey of

following Jesus. One manifestation of that will be talking about Scripture when we get together – what it means, how to apply to our lives, how it can have a greater influence on us as we walk through life.

When the very first Christians – the first disciples – figured out what God had done for them and how life-changing it proved to be, they adopted a discipleship method that had a kind of family structure or feel to it. In a family you have biological generations. In discipleship, you have spiritual generations. A key verse is something Paul wrote to, again, Timothy. “You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.” (2 Tim 2:2 NLT) Do you see how many spiritual generations are identified in that verse? There is Paul himself. He’s the “me” in that verse. Paul disciplined Timothy. Timothy is the “you” in that verse. Then Timothy is encouraged here to disciple “other trustworthy people.” Finally, those people are expected to disciple “others.” So, in that one verse we see four distinct spiritual generations. This is how the Christian faith grows, develops, and expands. This is the biblical blueprint. This is the biblical method. Every disciple of Jesus is called and expected to become a disciple-maker. Part and parcel of being a disciple-maker is helping others navigate through the Bible for themselves.

We’re doing more of that kind of thing all the time here in our church. We aren’t promoting it heavily as some kind of program. Frankly, if discipleship is just a program, it will fail. We’re trying to build a culture. I can tell you that a whole lot more people are involved in intentional discipleship in our church than a year ago. And it’s our hope and prayer that even more people than today will be getting together for intentional discipleship a year from now. By the end of this month we hope to launch several more discipleship triads. What’s that? It’s three people – a triad – getting together regularly to study God’s Word together, to pray for one another, and to hold each other accountable in loving and gracious ways for personal spiritual growth. If a group like that dedicated for that purpose appeals to you – resonates within you – then please talk to me, call me, or email you. I will do everything possible to get you placed in one of those discipleship triads.

The Super Bowl is on tonight! How many of you like the commercials more than the game itself? Cheryl and I watched a TV show earlier this week that identified the top 50 Super Bowl commercials. Several years ago during the Super Bowl, FedEx ran a commercial that spoofed the movie “Castaway.” Remember that movie? Tom Hanks played a FedEx employee whose company plane went down in the Pacific Ocean stranding him on an uninhabited island for years. In the commercial, a bedraggled looking Tom Hanks lookalike with long hair and beard approaches the door of a suburban home, FedEx package in hand. When a lady opens the door, he explains that he survived five years on a deserted island. During that entire time, he kept her package safe, secure, and unopened in the hope that he could deliver it to her personally someday. She thanks him and starts to close the door. But he’s very curious about what’s in that package he’s been protecting for five years! He asks her, “What was in that package after all?” She opens it and shows him the contents, saying,

“Oh, nothing much at all really. Just a satellite telephone, a global positioning device, a fishing rod, a water purifier, and some seeds. Just silly stuff.” Just like the contents in that package, all the resources for spiritual growth are available to every disciple of Jesus who will take advantage of them. Perhaps the most important one of all is the Word of God. Open it. Get to know it. Allow the Holy Spirit to use it to transform you and then help others get transformed by it, too.