

Oregon City United Methodist Church
18955 S. South End Road
Oregon City, OR 97045

Rev. Michael Benischek
503-522-9807
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Series: HOLY LIVING: Inward Spiritual Disciplines
Sermon: Study

Romans 12: 1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

John 8:31-32

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Sermon

In this season, we are examining ancient spiritual practices that help us understand the divine, our selves, and our how to connect with God, ourselves and each other. And so we think of such practices as prayer, meditation, giving, fasting, and other "churchy" endeavors. So it might seem strange to include the topic of "Study" in this list. As I heard this past week, shouldn't faith and education be opposed? The more we learn, the less we need God, right?. God created the universe, but we now know about the Big Bang, evolution, we are not the center of the universe, and so on. Jesus exorcised demons and what possessed people, but now we know about mental health, schizophrenia, and a whole host of other disorders. But faith and brains have not always have been mortal enemies. Let me just take a moment to brag on our church for a moment.

Education is a core value of The United Methodist Church that dates back to the earliest days of the Methodist movement in 18th century England. Founder John Wesley believed education was the key to a fuller, richer life. Knowledge, for him, was not so much a purely intellectual attribute but rather a channel of self-understanding, which is crucial for salvation. Wesley believed everyone should have access to education regardless of gender or class. This was insanely novel for its day. We believe that women should be able to read. We believe that even the lowest class should know their multiplication tables. One way to control others is to deny access to education. In 1748 Wesley enlarged a school he had opened for the children of coal miners near Bristol and named it the Kingswood School. Why should coal miner's kids go to school? Shouldn't they just go to the Coal mine? His goal for the school was to give young people a high quality education so they could aspire to something else, to reach for the stars, or at least to Cambridge or Oxford and to the professions. He championed education as a way to assure that leaders would act ethically and responsibly. Have you ever noticed that there are no Methodist elementary or high schools? We're not in the private school business. We believe in all education, but in particular, Public education. If you don't like the public schools, maybe we should fix them instead of bailing on them. In some parts of the country, private school means white. Public means black. We're kinda against that sort of thing. In some parts of the country, private school means rich. Public means poor. We're kinda against that sort of thing. Of course, if you go to a private school, that's fine, we believe in all kinds of education. But we believe that education should be available to all.

Even as the Methodist church took hold in America, As the Methodist movement took hold and spread in the United States, we began forming colleges and schools of higher learning. By the Civil War, Methodism had established or was affiliated with some 200 such institutions. The first school out in Oregon was Willamette University, started by the Methodists. Alvin Waller, the first pastor of Oregon City Methodist ended his career

at Willamette University, Waller Hall named after him. Nineteenth century church leaders established colleges that granted degrees to women and African Americans - again, ahead of its time. Today The United Methodist Church supports a network of 117 outstanding United Methodist-related schools, colleges, and universities in the United States, including 13 schools of theology, and relates to more than 700 institutions in the Methodist tradition globally. Places like Duke University, Boston University, Emory, Drew, SMU.

But why should we care about education? How is this a spiritual practice? Believe it or not, the Bible wants us to continue to grow in knowledge. We believe in science, and we believe in God. Truth is knowable, and God Himself is the very source of that truth. John 14:6 states that Jesus Himself is the truth incarnate and Colossians 2:3 assures us that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found in Him. God has given each of His children the Holy Spirit, who is called the Spirit of Truth. Jesus said in John 14:26 that He will teach us all things and cause us to remember the things Christ has taught us. Beginning in the Garden of Eden, when in Genesis 1:28 when God told Adam to have dominion over the earth, God has always encouraged man, His crowning creation, to learn and to seek wisdom and knowledge. In Deuteronomy 6 God speaks through Moses, commanding the Israelites not only to learn but to continue to teach successive generations the truths which have been entrusted to them. Proverbs 3:13 says, "Happy is a man who finds wisdom and who acquires understanding." God has always directed His children to learn, to seek knowledge, wisdom and understanding and the place to begin is by fearing the Lord and knowing His word. There is a biblical mandate for learning, and it walks hand in hand with the biblical mandate for Christian living and service.

We also believe in Spiritual education. To know the stories of our faith. If we say Daniel in the Den of the Lions, you know what we're talking about. Martha and Mary, it sounds familiar. We believe in the power of Sunday School, or wherever spiritual formation takes place. And this kind of education is important for children, youth and adults! We don't get a pass because we're old. We are to be life long learners in the faith. To Pray without ceasing. Here's a scary thought: If my child came to Sunday School every week for an entire year and never missed a single Sunday, he would have 52 hours each year learning about faith. I take that back. There are some holidays. 48 hours. I take that back, Sunday School is about 45 minutes. So around 36 hours. And that's if we can find teachers! Hint hint plug plug. According to recent surveys, the average teenager spends between 20 and 50 hours a week in front of a screen. That means one week of screen time equals one year of Sunday School. Wow.

One of the things the local church is tasked with doing is that of discipleship. From the Old through the New Testament we find the public reading of the word of God to be a central act in the house of worship. Ezra read the word of God and as the people stood and repented, Jesus Himself went to the Synagogue and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and Paul commands his readers to read his epistles in all the churches. The local church is the place where discipleship and teaching often take place.

Additionally this teaching ministry of the church extends to bible study and discipleship classes. All of this is in keeping with God's directive to learn, to seek knowledge, wisdom and understanding. In the end, God wants us to be smarter, yes, but also to become better servants.

Learning was designed to make us sharper instruments in God's hand, and instruments are made for service. God allows us to learn so that we can teach others.

So how do we put this truth about education, about Christian education, about learning and discipleship into application? Allow me to suggest several things to you this morning.

Get a plan for personal discipleship - There are dozens of daily reading bibles and personal discipleship programs which you can use that will help you as you seek to become a more fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Jump in a class. Read a book.

Get intentional about your children or grandchildren's spiritual formation - Don't leave to someone else that for which God will hold you accountable. Train a child in the way they should go, right?

Get involved in passing it on - There is always a need for teachers at the local church. Do you need a small group? Start a small group! We'll give you the space and tools. Want to be a camp counselor? The opportunities are there. Gotta pass a background check, but you get the idea. Keep on learning. If the last book you read was in another century, things might have changed since then.

This morning, let me leave you with a John Wesley Quote: "We are always open to instruction, willing to be wiser every day than we were before, and to change whatever we can change for the better ..." And the family of God said, AMEN.