



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau
June 25, 2017
"SAMURAI CHRISTIANS" (How to Pray Series)
The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

We continue our series on How to Pray. Up front I'll tell you my message's behavioral objective: To help you read the Bible a lot.

We will pray better, IF we read the Bible. We will listen to God and other people better, IF we read the Bible. We will be wiser, IF we read the Bible. And I don't mean reading a little bit of Bible; I mean a lot of it, if not all of it. We will also be stronger and more protected, IF we read the Bible. Why the word *protected*?

In the Bible, the Word of God is referred to as a sword. Yes, a sword. This is what it says in a book in the Bible called Hebrews, in the fourth chapter and 12th verse: *"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

The Bible is a sword! Knowing the Bible, or as it is called, the Word of God, is so important. Notice it says that The Word is not a dead, inactive, irrelevant book. It's ALIVE, ACTIVE, and relevant to us today. It penetrates our soul and spirit with truth and love. It helps us examine our hearts and our true intentions and those of others.

If we haven't read much of the Bible, we will not have the mind of God. We will not even recognize His voice when we pray. If we don't know the Bible, then we fall into living by clichés that many people think come from the Bible, like, "God helps those who help themselves."

It is one of the most quoted lines by Christians and non-Christians alike, and yet the Bible never said that. It is actually the opposite of what Jesus says: God CANNOT help people who are always trying to help themselves with their own power, instead of trusting God, His strength, His wisdom, and leadership.

When we don't know the Bible we might fall into American capitalism, where God's purpose is to make us rich, that if we accumulate more we will be happier; that if we exclude more people from our lives, we will be safer; that if someone hurts us, then we should hurt them back. These are not from the Gospel of our Lord at all. Unless we immerse ourselves in knowing His word – constantly reading and listening to it—then we will be overwhelmed or seduced with values that are not from God.

The average American watches more than six hours of TV a day and is bombarded by 362 radio, TV, and app commercials with values that are not necessarily from Jesus! [*"New Research Sheds Light on Daily Ad Exposures" by Sheree Johnson 9/29/14.*]

It is also estimated that if you count every time you look around your house and the supermarket and see brand labels on clothes and products, watch TV, or listen to radio, we are actually seeing/hearing between 5,000 to 10,000 marketing ads EVERY day.

All of this marketing that say, "Buy me! Use me to make you richer, sexier, more powerful, more successful" can subtly make us less of a follower of Jesus and more of a follower of the world; less Spirit and more flesh. Hence, we need a HUGE sword to guide our prayers and to help us hear God's voice, so we can slice off values not from Him.

Therefore, today is a call for Samurai Christians. We need Christians with large swords – meaning Christians with huge Bible knowledge! Huge swords, as large as a big sharp katana for Samurais! We need a huge knowledge of the Bible to fight off the demons of the world and unchristian thinking.

How big a sword? Like the one actor Toshiro Mifune used in the classic movie *The Hidden Fortress* directed by my favorite Akira Kurosawa! (*A movie clip from The Hidden Fortress was shown.*)

See that large sword? That is a metaphor of how we need to really know a big quantity of what the Bible says, or else our prayers will not be as well informed, and we will not be well protected. The Word is sharper than any two-edged sword.

Our church has always talked about how we need to be about Word and Spirit. Word and Spirit, so it's not ONLY the Word, nor is it ONLY about the Spirit. We need both the Spirit and the Word. It's the Word, Scripture—the playbook of life—that protects us and our children from worldly thinking or temptations or against the demons or Satan himself.

What protected Jesus from Satan? Scripture! Did you know that Scripture was the Lord's weapon to protect Himself from Satan? Jesus, therefore, had a big Samurai sword.

Turn to the 4th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, which was written by one of the apostles who personally knew Jesus. Matthew tells an account that Jesus must have told him:

Matt. 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Matt. 4:2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards He was famished.

Matt. 4:3 The tempter came and said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

Matt. 4:4 But Jesus answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matt. 4:5 Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city and placed Him on the pinnacle of the temple,

Matt. 4:6 saying to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Matt. 4:7 Jesus said to Him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Matt. 4:8 Again, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor;

Matt. 4:9 and he said to Jesus, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Matt. 4:10 Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him.'"

Matt. 4:11 Then the devil left Him, and suddenly angels came and waited on Jesus.

What a great episode! Satan tempts Jesus first with the temptation of involving basic human desires – hunger. Turn stones into bread, Satan said. But Jesus parries with the Word – His samurai sword— and quotes Scriptures. Hear Him say over and over again this phrase about Scripture "so it is written, so it is written."

So He says, so it is written, "Man does not live by bread alone." Ha! You, Satan, were gonna get Me to give up my lordship for a loaf of bread. No, I don't need bread, and here's a Scripture verse from the Old Testament to prove it.

Then Satan goes for the spectacular. Why don't you jump from the top of a very tall building and have your angels catch you. Yeah and maybe do some back flips, with a two-and-a-half quarter twist. Do something spectacular, and you will be famous! Give in to me and I will give you fame.

But no! Jesus pulls out His large Katana Christ Samurai Sword – representing the huge backlog of knowing the Word of God—and says, so it is written in the Word, "No, you are not to put the Lord to test" with such trivial things as fame.

And then Satan goes for the jugular and tries to tempt Jesus with possessions of the world. Look out from this mountaintop. See the city below, like today looking from a tall window in the New York Times building in Manhattan. Look at all this! I will give all of this wealth and power to you if you worship me, Satan said.

But Jesus parries again with His sword and says, so it is written in the Word of God, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him."

Gang, when we are being tempted with money, sex, power, peer pressure, drugs, porn, or fame, we are in a knife fight with Satan! We are in a knife fight with a gang of demon-like thinking, and we better have more than a little penknife of Bible knowledge to battle with and protect ourselves. We are going to have a really hard time surviving in the spiritual world if we only have a penknife and not a samurai sword.

A travel story. Shortly after 911, TSA was really jumpy. They were overly careful and understandably so. I was going through an airport checkpoint, and they found that I have a nail cutter. It's not even scissors. Homeland Security said we have to confiscate that because it has a sharp edge. I thought, "You have got to be kidding. You're taking my nail cutter?"

Imagine, I am in a knife fight with a bunch of gangbangers, fighting for my life and the gangbangers say, "Oh no! Wait! Watch out this guy has a nail clipper! Back off! Oh my gosh, he's got a nail clipper!" My only defense would be if they fell down laughing and I ran away.

Friends, when we are fighting the forces of evil, and we don't know the Bible, then it's like having a nail clipper in a fight with Satan and all of the demons.

If you are into the *Lord of the Rings* stories and movies, you know what this sword is, don't you? (Show sword.) This is Sting, the sword of Frodo. And this hangs in my office. *Lord of the Rings* was written by JRR Tolkien, who was a strong Christian who was in a small group with C.S. Lewis. In the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the Sword Sting glows blue when the Orcs, the demon characters in the story, are around.

It's a perfect metaphor for what I am saying today. The word of God, our Swords, our Bible knowledge, should glow, and warn us of the danger of Orcs--the temptations of pride, lust, greed, jealousy, unfaithfulness to God and people etc. But here's the problem.

Most of us have not read a lot of the Bible. We find it hard, or it's too time consuming. We are busy people. We have other priorities.

I'm saying today, Bible reading has to be a priority for us, and if you are a parent, it has to be a priority for your children. Often times, you ask parents what do you want for your kids and they often say "I just want them to be happy or successful." But you don't really. You want them to be wise. That's my heart for our children, youth, and adults. I want to cultivate wise people. Why?

Because if you make a lot of money and you are not wise – then you will not properly use cash or the things you own or manage. If you are successful but you are not wise, you can use success for your own fame. Getting married or having kids is not good if you are not wise. Being single and unwise is not good either.

If you want to be truly wise, you need to have the wisdom of God, which is found in the Bible of how to be all that God designed you to be. Don't we want to live a life of how God designed us to be?

My friend Bill Hwang is a Hedge fund investor who works in Manhattan in New York. He says most Christians have not read the Bible. They might hear about it at church as each week, and there might be a reading of the Scripture, but most Christians have not read the entire Bible or even most of it. He says it is like always seeing movie previews but never seeing the entire movie.

Fuller Seminary has a new online resource called Fuller Studio, which features interviews with people (like Eugene Peterson and Bono) who can help deepen our spiritual lives. It's worth subscribing too, and it's free. They've interviewed Bill Hwang, and here's that interview where he offers a possible solution to the problem of many Christians not having read the entire Bible. (A video of the interview was shown.)

Did you hear some of Bill Hwang's great words?

- We are trying to help people be in love with God's word, to be in love with Jesus Christ and follow Him."
- The public reading of scripture is really two things for me: it's home; it's a reality check of who I am and who God is."
- Bible content is great but the delivery part, when I tried to do it by myself, I failed
- Every Christian that I meet wants to read more Bible. It's not an issue of desire, it's an issue of strategy. So what's the strategy?

So here's the strategy: Bill has started all over America and some in other countries Communal Bible reading groups, which he also calls *Just Show Up Clubs*. In fact, more than 1,000 such clubs started in the last couple of years.

When exercising is hard or dieting is hard, it is better to work on it WITH others. Same for Bible reading. Whether it's for busy business people meeting in the New York Times building, or at Goldman Sachs, or in law offices, or in people's homes, or in churches – these groups meet for about one to one-and-a-half hours. For about 30 minutes they listen to a recording called *The Word of Promise*, featuring the voices of famous actors like Jim Caviezel as Jesus, Marisa Tomei, Richard Dreyfus, and Michael York. And then they discuss it.

Perfect for busy people. Some of them do it like at 6:30 am before they go to work and some during lunchtime or some in the evening. People bring their Bibles and follow the reading even though it may not be a translation they have.

Bill says they have found that nonchristians are willing to drop in to do it too. He says busy people have found this immensely helpful. And after 80 hours over two years, you will have finished the entire Bible.

In fact, their program comes with a plan of what passages you should start with and so you might in one session listen to Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms and maybe Proverbs. So it's not in order from Genesis to Revelation but is grouped in a way that makes sense with the themes rather than chronology.

So starting in August, as one of the WAKO classes, we will try out a four-week *Just Show Up Club*. There is no homework. You just show up. It will be led by me and Rosella Shishido, our Director of Communications. And then in the fall, as one of the Life Training classes on Sunday mornings, we will have another *Just Show Up Club*. So think about signing up for that.

It might be something you or your small group might want to do in the fall during your regular small group time. I can send you an outline of how to do the schedule of listening throughout the Scripture. You can buy a *Word of Promise* set at Logos or on Amazon, or use one of a myriad of free Bible apps that feature free audio Bibles.

If you take the Psalms, they are basically prayers. And as you listen to the prayers, you pray with them and it teaches you how to pray – authentically, openly, simply. So I thought we would close this sermon with listening together to Psalm 107 from the *Word of Promise*. It's a model of how to pray. Notice how authentic the person prays. And notice this pattern in the text.

Psalm 107 has to do with a feeling of desperation and thinking that God is on mute. But if you know God's word, you can see how God responds to their cries of help. In a moment we are going hear it and read it.

In this Psalm there are four kinds of people. First are homeless people, who are about to die. They cry out to the Lord. And God saves them. Second are some prisoners, who are about to die. They cry out to the Lord, and God saves them.

Third, are people who are sick and about to die. They cry out to the Lord, and God saves them. And fourth, are the business people, sea merchants, who go out to sea and they are about to die. They cry out to the Lord, and God saves them.

When we are in despair and we think we are dying, then cry out to the Lord, and the Lord will answer even though you think He is silent.

Hear this passage of Psalm 107. You may want to close your eyes and just put your hands on your lap and receive the word of God as we roll this audio version of the Word of Promise of Psalm 107, or you may want to read the words to yourselves on screen or in your own Bible during the reading. Imagine you are at a *Just Show Up Club*. But more important here is how to pray:

*1 Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.
2 Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,
3 And gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.
4 They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; they found no city to dwell in.
5 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.
6 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses.
7 And He led them forth by the right way that they might go to a city for a dwelling place.
8 Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!
9 For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness.
10 Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons—
11 Because they rebelled against the words of God, and despised the counsel of the Most High,*

12 Therefore He brought down their heart with labor; they fell down, and there was none to help.

13 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses.

14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces.

15 Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!

16 For He has broken the gates of bronze, and cut the bars of iron in two.

17 Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted.

18 Their soul abhorred all manner of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.

19 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses.

20 He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

21 Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!

22 Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing.

*23 Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters,
24 They see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep.*

25 For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea.

26 They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble. 27 They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.

28 Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses.

29 He calms the storm, so that its waves are still.

30 Then they are glad because they are quiet; so He guides them to their desired haven.

31 Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!

32 Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people, and praise Him in the company of the elders.

33 He turns rivers into a wilderness, and the water springs into dry ground;

34 A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of those who dwell in it.

35 He turns a wilderness into pools of water, and dry land into water springs.

36 There He makes the hungry dwell that they may establish a city for a dwelling place,

37 And sow fields and plant vineyards, that they may yield a fruitful harvest.

38 He also blesses them, and they multiply greatly; And He does not let their cattle decrease.

39 When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, affliction and sorrow,

40 He pours contempt on princes, and causes them to wander in the wilderness where there is no way; 41 Yet He sets the poor on high, far from affliction, and makes their families like a flock.

42 The righteous see it and rejoice, and all iniquity stops its mouth.

43 Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the loving kindness of the Lord.

Many of you are here today because you are crying out to the Lord. And you may feel you need wisdom to understand the loving kindness of God. Let us pray to the Lord to receive a word from Him. Lord, may this begin a journey for many of us to know your word, the Bible more. We need to graft your word into our hearts.

As it says in Psalm 119:165, "Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble." Be with those who are crying out today. May they know You are a great God who hears their cries and you will help them. In Christ's name, Amen.