

When a Workshop reminds me that God is I AM

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by Jean Conn

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:10-11

For the word of God is living and active, ... Hebrews 4:12a

It has always been a joy of mine to study the Bible, and learning how to read it well has been my goal. Our time in the Word should not be like studying a history book or a "how-to" manual. I know that there is something different about the Bible than any other book. But I must confess that for all my desire to study the Word of God, there have been times when I couldn't see "the forest for the trees," and I have treated the Bible more like a very important book than what it is – the very words of God.

This last month (November 9-11) I had the privilege of going to a Simeon Trust Workshop for women. The Charles Simeon Trust believes in following the example of Charles Simeon, a 1700s Cambridge minister who was known for his fidelity to Scripture in his expository preaching. It is so important for teachers to be equipped so they can faithfully teach the Word of God, and I was truly looking forward to learning another way to study God's Word.

And I wasn't disappointed.

One of the first things that set this apart from other seminars that I have attended was being assigned homework to complete before I had even been to the workshop. The workshop focused on teaching the Psalms and each participant was to prepare a teaching outline on two assigned psalms. While I had watched the First Principles online course, I was truly a bit intimidated by this requirement. But I learned how vital this step was. Using the tools we were taught while being taught them was instrumental in solidifying the instructions we were receiving.

The instruction time of the workshop was broken up into six plenary sessions and two small group sessions. The instruction sessions were very interactive and included mini-breakout sessions where we would look at and talk through with another woman an example of the teaching point – how to stay on the line of Scripture, seeing the context of the passage, or even talking through the frameworks people bring with them to the text which may bias their study of the Word. These moments helped to keep me engaged in the teaching and made it feel more like we were a team working together to see the Word of God.

But it was the small group time that really impacted me. In these two sessions we would go over our homework. Each of us would have five minutes to share what we saw as the structure of the passage, how the context informed the meaning, what was the author's main idea, the gospel connection, the argument or application that one would make to the audience, and a teaching outline.

As one woman would present her work, there was another woman who would first offer a point of praise and then ask a follow-up question related to how or why the presenter did her work the way she did. The praise helped to set the tone of seeing the good in the work of the woman presenting her homework, and the asking of constructive questions helped us to think critically about our work. This time was truly empowering to see the importance of how to approach the Word when teaching other women.

The instructional and small group sessions were truly amazing in making the material really stick in my heart, but there was something else that for me was even more important than the tools, and that was seeing how too often I have approached the Word of God as more of a book to be studied than God speaking to us about himself. God created us to be in fellowship with him. And when sin entered the world, that fellowship was severed.

As we read the pages of Scripture, God is revealing to us his purpose to restore fellowship with him. While each book of the Bible must be read in the context of the human author's aim and the historical time of the book, we also must read the Bible in the context of God's aim. And throughout the pages of his Word he tells us over and over again that he is redeeming his children. And Christians today can see this as we read God's Word through the redemptive work of the cross.

God is perfect and in order to be able to be in fellowship with him, we must be perfect; this, however, is impossible. So God the Father sent God the Son to live the perfect life, fulfilling all the commands to walk in obedience. Jesus then willingly went to the cross and died for our sins. After his resurrection, God the Son sent God the Holy Spirit to dwell with us and guide us into all truth. The gospel. The Bible must be read through the lens of God's purpose – to redeem his people through Jesus. As he speaks to us through his Word, he is always pointing us to this truth.

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me." John 5:39

"For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me." John 5:46

"But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John 20:31

By taking the Word that was written to them then, and asking how the gospel is reflected in the Word, I have come to understand more fully how to see God's Word as his voice being spoken to me today – the Word that IS living and active today (Hebrews 4:12). This step has helped me to be more reflective of the truth that the Bible is about God and his plan of redemption through Christ. The Bible is God speaking to us about himself. As 2 Corinthians 1:20 states, all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Jesus]. That is why it is through him that we utter Amen to God for his glory.

I am so grateful for the Simeon Trust workshop since God used it to really remind me that he is I AM, and he desires for me to know him well.