

Sermon for Sunday, February 23, 1975, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

GOD'S SECRET DIARY

II Timothy 3:10-17

Text: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

II Timothy 3:16,17

For the past four Sundays I have been preaching a series on the Christian Faith. Actually, I didn't mean for it to be a series when I started, but the Lord led me in that direction. The first Sunday I preached on the theme of how to become a Christian. The second sermon dealt with how to be a Spirit-filled Christian and the third sermon gave the steps for staying filled with the Spirit. Last Sunday I added another step to staying filled with the Spirit when I talked about how to pray and how to communicate with God. When I talked about how to stay filled with the Spirit, one of the steps for staying filled was the need to read the Bible daily. I realized at the time that I would need to come back to that step and elaborate on it and that is what I plan to do this morning.

So, our subject this morning is one of the steps in staying filled with the Spirit and that step has to do with the need to read the Bible. Now, I have called our meditation this morning "God's Secret Diary." There is good reason for that title. First of all, a diary has been defined as the written record of the writer's experiences. Well, the Bible is surely the record of God's mighty acts, of his experiences with man. And surely the Bible is written by God. He may have used second means - such as men like St. Paul - but it was His spirit working through such men that made the Bible the Word of God. Secondly, I have called it a secret diary because for many of us what is recorded in the Bible is a secret. It is secret because we have not read it. It is secret because we don't know what it says. And it is secret because St. Paul tells us the mysterious secret which has now been made known to the world, the secret that God in Jesus loves us and has made a way for our salvation. (See Romans 16:25,26,27) And thirdly, I have called it God's secret diary because this book of all the books in the world is God's book. There have been many who have criticized it, vilified it, ignored it, rallied against it, but always it has stood the test of men and of time. It is indeed God's book. As II Peter puts it, "but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (1:21)

Last Sunday when I preached on prayer, I defined prayer as a "God Chat." I then took the words, "God Chat" and used them as an anagram to talk about prayer. Well, actually I rather got carried away with that anagram! I had so much fun doing it, that when I came to write the sermon for this morning, it was rather inevitable that I would do it again.

The anagram for this morning is the word "Read". When you think about the Bible, one of the first things we think is something like this, "Well, I really must read the Bible." Or we think, "One day soon I'm going to start to read the Bible every day." Or we think, "Now where is my Bible - I know it is around somewhere and I may want to read it." Most of us have guilt feelings of one sort or another because we don't read the Bible as we think we should or know we should. So, the one word we think of in connection with the Bible is the word 'read'. With that in mind, I want to give you four words to reinforce us in our efforts to read the Bible.

The first letter is "R". Now there are a lot of good words that start with "R" that would be appropriate in relation to reading the Bible - words such as

"reverently", or "repeatedly" or "regularly." However, the word I want to use is "Reprogram." We read the Bible in order to reprogram our lives. Now, you may not be aware of it, but about two-thirds of your emotional /mental life is unconscious. Most of us tend to think of life in terms of our conscious minds. Yet, all of us know that actually our actions are more often determined by our unconscious minds.

Day by day a lot of unconscious material is being fed into our minds. We are not consciously aware that it is there. There is a lot of debate going on in the public media today about the impact on our society of pornographic material. Well, the fact is, that sort of trash is fed into our unconscious minds and begins to shape and determine who and what we are. Most of the emotional problems we have come from the materials that have been fed into our unconsciousness, whether it be fear or hate or greed or anxiety or whatever. And, from the depths of the unconsciousness, those things rise up to plague us and control us and determine ultimately who and what we are.

Now, if I begin to read God's word daily - if I read it in depth and if I read it extensively - actually what I am doing is reprogramming my subconscious mind. What I am feeding into my emotional/mental life is ultimately going to become a part of me. I don't have to worry about what I might get out of the Bible that day for my conscious mind. I am engaged in a long-term process of reprogramming. And this is nothing new. Jesus himself once said, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45) And long before Jesus was born, the Psalmist had written, "I have laid up thy word in my heart that I might not sin against thee." (119:11) And isn't that what James meant when he wrote, "Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls." (1:21) When I am implanting God's word in my heart, I am reprogramming my unconscious life.

Isn't this what happened to Jesus when he was tempted? Out there in the wilderness after his baptism, the Bible tells us he was tempted by Satan. And each time he responded to that temptation with a quote from scripture. You see, when we are tempted, we like to think that we will handle temptation in a logical and rational and sane way. Actually, that isn't the case at all. Instead, our rational minds are victims of our unconscious emotions. What we have fed into our unconscious lives will determine how we respond when we are tempted. Jesus could respond positively to temptation because we know that from his early youth he had studied God's word - so much so that at 12 he could question in the temple with the priests.

So "R" is for reprogramming. If you are not happy with who and what you are this morning and with the sort of emotions that control you, let me suggest that you begin to reprogram your unconscious life by reading the Bible. It won't happen overnight, but day by day you will see the changes taking place. As our text says, we will be "complete, equipped for every good work." (For additional references see Phil. 4:8, Acts 20:32, II Peter 1:3 and 3:18, Hebrews 4:12)

The second letter is "E." It stands for "effort." I don't think you ought to have any illusions about the Bible. To reprogram your life will not be easy. As a matter of fact, nothing really worthwhile comes easily. A good athlete trains and practices with great effort. A doctor puts out great effort to stay up in the medical field; a lawyer works hard to keep up with changes in the law; an engineer or scientist must put out great effort to stay current with the rapidly expanding knowledge of the 20th century. By the same token, to read the Bible adequately will demand effort, it will demand discipline. Jesus once said, "if you continue

in my word, you are truly my disciples." (John 8:31) And the Greek word there is the equivalent of our English phrase, "to keep on keeping on." And that is effort. Don't think a changed life, a reprogramed unconsciousness will come easily. It won't. You will have to put out the discipline and effort. You see there is no cheap grace. A lot of people I think like to assume that being a Christian is really easy. And it is to become one. You just accept Christ as your Saviour. But that's when the work begins. To be a Christian and to live out your Christian life is effort. There is no cheap grace. There is no magic wand that you can wave and be an instantaneous Christian With no effort on your part. Instead, you will have to change your habit patterns. You will have to change your life-style to include a daily and regular reading of God's word. So, when you think about reading the Bible and reprograming your life, don't forget the cost will be effort on your part. I tell you this so that you won't get discouraged. One day you will be bored with the whole thing. One day you will feel that what you are reading is not relevant. One day you will feel that you will put it off until you have more time. But remember that "E" is for effort.

The next letter is "A." It stands for "abide." Now the word "abide" is a good Bible word. It means to stay in something, in this case God's word. You see, it isn't enough just to read the Word of God. We must abide in it. By that I mean to think about, to meditate about, what God has to say. Now, suppose I read the Bible before breakfast every morning and then forget about it. The rest of the day I go about my business and never remember it again. Now, I am reprograming my unconscious life, but I need to program my conscious life as well. To do that, I must think about God's word. I must consciously abide in that word. Jesus once said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." (John 15:4) Now, let me ask you if you do that - do you abide in God's word - do you, with your conscious mind think about God's word for your life as you live it out? It isn't enough to deal only with the two-thirds of my emotional/mental life, the unconscious part, I must also deal with the conscious part. I do that by abiding in the word day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment. You see, if I stay in the word, the word stays in me. If, with my conscious mind, I ignore or reject that word and do not abide in it, that word ends up condemning me. As Jesus once put it, "He who rejects me (and to reject is a conscious act of the conscious mind) and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day." (John 12:48)

So, we have R - reprogram; E- effort; A - abide. The final letter is "D: and it stands for do. The book of James puts it this way, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." We make the effort to reprogram our unconscious lives; we make the effort to consciously let the word program our conscious lives. But that isn't enough. The Bible tells us that we must reinforce the word by acting it out. As the book of Revelation puts it, "Blessed are they who hear, and who keep what is written therein." (1:3)

Are you doing God's word? That's the ultimate test, isn't it? You can memorize the whole Bible and read it through and through - but until that word is acted out in your life, you still have not succeeded. Paul once wrote to his friends, "what you have learned and received and heard and see in me, do...." (Phil. 4:9)

Let me tell you a strange thing about God's word. When you hear it and then don't do it, after a while you can't hear it any more. That happened to the Hebrews in the Old Testament. During the days of the prophet Amos, the people turned from God and did wicked, evil things. They were not doing the word of God. And do you know what God said? He said, "Behold the days are coming says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water,

but of hearing the words of the Lord." (Amos 8:11) Jesus once said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." And though we may have bread and water aplenty, we may find ourselves hungering and thirsting for the word of God because we didn't act it out, we didn't do his word.

So "D" stands for "do" -- do the word of God. I have a friend who reads his Bible every morning and he keeps reading it until he finds what he calls his "marching orders for the day." He finds some command or some insight from God and he determines that for that day he will act out that command, he will do that word of God -- it is his marching order for the day. Ultimately we have to ask ourselves, by whose orders are we marching.

Harrison R. Anderson was a chaplain during the First World War. He tells this little story: "One of the last lads I buried in France was one who had been killed a few minutes before eleven on that Armistice day. In his breast pocket, over his heart, was a New Testament. A second piece of shrapnel had struck him. It had gone through his pocket and part way into his Testament. I reverently opened it and found written on a front page, these words, 'I, Daniel Venzor, am leaving America to fight for my country in France. I pray God that he will care for my mother and that he will make me a good soldier of Jesus Christ.' I suppose that is the sort of marching order we all need -- to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. We will be when we are reprogramming our unconscious lives, when we are making the effort required of us, when we are abiding in God's word as we program our conscious minds, and when we are doing his word day by day. As some poet has put it,

And should my soul be torn with grief

Upon my shelf I find

A little volume, torn and thumbed,

For comfort just designed

I take my little Bible down

And read its pages o'er,

And when I part from it I find

I'm stronger than before.

E. A. Guest