

Series Preview:

As we continue to discover what it means to live in a post-modern and post-christian culture, I think it's essential for the church to be reminded of what we believe and why it's important to believe it. Many attempt to confuse the church by over-simplifying the church into the idea of love {just love God, love others, and know because God loves everyone, he'd never send anyone to hell}

Others attempt to confuse the church by ignoring the reality that our faith grows in the soil of God's Word and not just in the emotion of a newest worship song or the latest conference or retreat we attend. So, over the next few weeks, we want to share some essential truths rooted in God's Word that are important to believe and essential apply to our lives.

Last week, we looked at what the Trinity is all about and how it shapes our understanding of God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit created all we know out of an abundance of relationship and connection! Today, we are going to look at another foundational element – Scripture.

Social Media Connections:

YouVersion Event, [#FCCiBelieve](#), Facebook (sign-in, mention in your status, etc). Grab your **insert** today, take some **notes**, follow along in our **YouVersion** Event ...

Proverb 4:20-27 NLT ... **My child, pay attention to what I say. Listen carefully to my words. Don't lose sight of them. Let them penetrate deep into your heart, for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body. Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. Avoid all perverse talk; stay away from corrupt speech. Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you. Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil.**

My week started off by looking at this verse. I was struck by several things in this passage:

- ◆ child language ... wisdom of a loving father
- ◆ protection that is available for those who listen to the words of the father
- ◆ goal to fix your attention on the path – don't lose your focus

** I shared this with our Board and we wrestled with it at the beginning of our Board Meeting Monday evening and I was humbled as others heard other things stand out to them (God uses the Word to challenge us with exactly what WE need WHEN we need it!).

Hearing, reading and studying the Word of God is essential to be able to experience the work of God within us. Without the Scriptures, we have no reliable source of understanding the nature and will of God for our life.

For centuries, the scripture was known by a few and passed down through oral traditions – with only a few copies of the scripture existing. When Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1440, the scriptures then became available to more than just a few. One would think that with all the

bibles available for the world today that we would have the most Biblically literate culture this world has ever seen ... but in fact, sadly, just the opposite is true.

In 2012, LifeWay Research surveyed more than 2,900 Protestant churchgoers and found that while 90% "desire to please and honor Jesus in all I do," only 19% personally read the Bible every day. Last year they found only 45% of those who regularly attend church read the Bible more than once a week and only 40% of attendees read their Bible once or twice a month.

How will this impact our communities? The UK is further ahead of America in the decline of scriptural engagement ... the United Kingdom Bible Society surveyed British **children** and found many could not identify common Bible stories. When given a list of stories, almost 1 in 3 didn't choose the Nativity as part of the Bible and over half (59 percent) didn't know that Jonah being swallowed by the great fish is in the Bible.

British **parents** didn't do much better. Around 30 percent of parents don't know Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, or the Good Samaritan are in the Bible. To make matters worse, 27 percent think Superman is or might be a biblical story. More than 1 in 3 believes the same about Harry Potter. And more than half (54 percent) believe The Hunger Games is or might be a story from the Bible.

But it's more than simply not knowing stories from Scripture. Our lack of biblical literacy has led to a lack of biblical doctrine. LifeWay Research found that while 67% of Americans believe heaven is a real place, 45% believe there are many ways to get there. As a whole, Americans, including many Christians, hold unbiblical views on hell, sin, salvation, Jesus, humanity, and the Bible itself.

Present day irony ... when few had the Bible in their homes, it was so revered and held at such high regard ... more people knew it and treasured it through their local church. Now that the Bible is sold everywhere and multiple copies are in every home and phone, fewer actually engage what it says which obviously leads to a decline in living in obedience to it.

In theological traditions (the study of God) there are various factors that contribute toward how we see and understand God. Throughout the years of recently history, this was diagramed using 4 overlapping circles {printer issues}:

Personal **Experience**: {how you individually intersect with God}

History/**Tradition**: {church history has a great deal to offer for us today}

Reason: {God has given all of us a brain to reason and consider }

John Wesley (the founder of our much of our theological understanding) understood the final and most critical element to discovering Godly Truth was the **Holy Word**. Some corners of the Christian family emphasize the individual personal experience – say that God works mostly in the present. Some would lean more on history and tradition and form their worship services around those meaningful rituals and creeds {Catholic church does this among others} sometimes ignoring the fresh movement of God. Others form their understanding of God based on human logic and reason primarily and they draw conclusions that feel good and are politically correct but don't align well with historical understanding of what pleases God.

Listen, NONE of these things can stand alone and ALL of them must align with Scripture – it's the circle that holds the others in place. **My child, pay attention to what I say. Listen carefully to my words. Don't lose sight of them. Let them penetrate deep into your heart, for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body.** (Prov. 4:20-22 NLT)

We believe that God speaks to every human heart in these ways but the scripture is to be considered above them all – yet I wonder ... What's the greatest obstacle standing in your way of understanding Scripture? I want you to think about this for just a few seconds today – and I bet you'll have your answer pretty quickly. What is getting in your way of making the Word of God a more significant element of your life? Our personal journey, our history and traditions and even our thinking and reason must ALIGN with God's Word. Why are so many church-going believers ignoring the discipline of engaging it?

What is God's Word? 66 books, 27 NT, 39 OT ... written over 1800 years by 70 different authors! It's not reasonably possible to make this stuff up!

How do we view it in our church? We believe in the plenary inspiration {beginning to end – take it as a whole thing} of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand were given by divine inspiration, inerrantly {without error} revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained in the Bible is not to be elevated as an eternal truth.

Inerrantly revealing the will of God = Scripture provides us with everything we need to grasp a perfect picture of who God is, what he is like, and what he wants. Yes, **nature** can show us God's creativity, **feelings** can provide us with his presence, and **music** can share God's power, but it's very difficult to get to know someone if you never engage in communication and never hear/read his or her words.

Literal vs. Liberator ...

What role does scripture then play in our life? It must be primary!

Psalms 119:105, 111-112 :: **Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path. Your laws are my treasure; they are my heart's delight. I am determined to keep your decrees to the very end.** Do you hear these words and long for them to be true or do you hear them and affirm them to be true? A guide for your feet; a light for your path; your treasure and delight? This passage challenges me to allow His Word to influence my reason and it lightens the burden of my own experience as I place my trust in Him.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 :: **"Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.** There is no more sacred words for the early followers of Christ than these. This passage was believed to be the inspired words of God for every household in Israel. Many took these commands literally and tied parts of the law to their clothing and body.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 :: You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. 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. At the time that Paul wrote this to Timothy, nearly all of the Old Testament had been agreed upon as Holy Scriptures (few modifications I believe since that time). The bulk of the text we read today in the OT was in place ... but none of the NT was ... it was still being lived out and experienced. So Paul is telling Timothy, the story of God from the beginning of time has been taught to you so that you can clearly see in our present time that salvation comes through Jesus Christ. Jesus alone affirms the Law of God and it's the Law of God (scriptures) that helps us see right/wrong, left/right, up/down.

What do we DO with this book?

◆ Get on a **reading plan** and make sure we read from it every day (some kind of cosmic check list to help God know how serious I am about my faith) {yearly plan, some self-disciplined to read} *This is a great start but the RISK here is that reading it ONLY doesn't guarantee that anything within you will change or conform to the image of Christ. The book of James says it clearly: 22 But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. 23 For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. 24 You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. 25 But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. (James 1:22-25 NLT)*

◆ Use it as a great life application **self-help book** (so that when you go through struggles and trials in life, you turn to it and look for the best answers) *It is always a great option to turn to God's Word in the time of struggle and disappointment because it is filled with incredible knowledge that will help you navigate through all of that ... but the RISK here is that looking to God only in the dark times reduces him down to some kind of genie in a bottle who is only there to rescue you from your latest issue.*

◆ What if we ran from the idea that we have to check a Bible reading plan off our list, and what if we stopped asking primarily "how does this apply to my life" after every passage we read ... what if we started looking at God's Word as the strongest avenue to knowing and experiencing the character and will of God. If I'm always asking "how do I fit here" or "how does this apply to me" I'm really putting myself in the center of the story. But if instead I asked "how do I see God's character revealed" or "how do I see God's power and love in work here" or "what do I learn from this passage that helps me see God at work, on my street or in my town?"

God's Word is not about you; it's all about Him!

"I try to read the Bible but I get nothing out of it" ...

"I try to read the Bible but it's pretty boring" ...

"I try to read the Bible but I'm so busy that I get behind in the plan and feel so defeated" ...

"I try to read the Bible but ..." Do you hear what's in the middle of these phrases? "I"

The primary purpose of the Word of God is to reveal the character and will of God to all of creation throughout all of time. It's not to make you feel better or prove you are right in some kind of argument. It's not to be studied only to prove its validity ... it's to be soaked like a sponge and transform us into His image.

Closing Song:: **Satisfy My Soul:** "So I'm reaching out for a melody, the Word of God alive in me. Open my life to grace and truth, I'm thirsty Lord, for more of You."

Prayer ...

Response ... Be still and know