



Following Jesus Part 3

Gospel Wheel Focus: Devotion

Text: Deuteronomy 6.1-9; 2 Timothy 3.14-17

PRAYER TIME FOR UNCC

Tragedy hit UNC Charlotte this past week. Mercy Church is home for a number of students and its been a really tragic week for them. And should be for all of us. We mourn the loss of two students.

There are a couple of things the Lord has been reverberating in my heart these past few days as I pray through this. I've been praying for our students: Praying for Comfort & Praying against Fear.

Comfort because I know in traumatic loss like this, the questions of "Where is God?" "Why does this happen?" Come racing in sometimes. And God Answers that not with a theology lesson but instead he answers us with his relational presence.

10 Do not fear, for I am with you;

do not be afraid, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you; I will help you;
I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand. -- Isaiah 41:10 (CSB)

God is still Immanuel. He is still right here with us. right here in the middle of the pain. And his spirit is the comforter that we can find healing & peace in even when we don't understand his ways.

His comfort is found in the truth that his mercies are new every morning. His comfort is in the truth that he who sent his own son for us surely would not forget us now. His comfort is in the resurrection that says he has won victory over death. So we grieve, but we grieve in hope. We mourn death, but we do not fear it.

Second thing I've been praying is **against fear**. Because it can be scary to even walk on campus. Wednesday morning parents were on campus packing their students up. Now the campus has rallied & Its really encouraging. Need to pray against the fear the enemy would seize upon here. 2 Timothy tells us we have not been given a spirit of fear. Phil 4 – peace of christ

The promise of presence & peace come to us through the gospel. So yes we are praying lost will find Christ in this.

1. God comfort those who are hurting
2. God push back fear
3. God bring the lost sons & daughters home

Intro

We are in week 3 of our series called following Jesus where we are looking at the basics of the Christian life. How to follow Jesus. To help us, we are using a tool we call the **gospel wheel**. Simple tool that lays out what the life of a follower of Christ looks like.

Today is on devotion to God. When we understand God's love for us, we will then start to love God rightly. That starts with his word. You will not love others RIGHTLY OR love the world RIGHTLY if you are not personally devoting yourself to God and his word.

My sophomore year at UNC-Chapel Hill I took a class called "Intro to New Testament." I was pretty surprised UNC...a proud liberal arts school... offered an in depth study on the New Testament. I was a young Christian who for the first time was really excited about growing as a follower of Christ so I thought...hey this will be awesome. I'm gonna get to go to a bible study....for School Credit! This is amazing!

Now little did I know the professor of this course was actually a self-professing Agnostic. A former Baptist minister turned agnostic who was, and still to this day is, considered one of the foremost Non-Christian New Testament Scholars. And on the opening day of spring semester 2002 I got a pretty rude awakening. Professor addresses the class. Welcomes us to Intro to New Testament. He says...Let me get an idea of the room here. How many of you own a bible? Almost 100%. Ok, how many of you believe the bible is, as it is often called, the word of God? And like 80% of the hands in the room shot up. I bet it would be less now at UNC, but at that moment it was

about 80%. And then he said ok great so a lot of Christians in the room. OK, put your hands down. Next Q: how many of you have read the whole thing? Class of 300 people. 10 people raised their hands. MAYBE 10. And he said...Well, my goal this semester is to show you why I think this is NOT God's word but it seems like you already agree with me. Because how could you say this is God's word and yet not have read it? It was a powerful moment because I was not one of the 10. And maybe if I put that question here you wouldn't be either.

And at 19 years old I found myself staring back at this guy internally saying...you know what, you are right. What I realized is that while I was **agreeing** with the statement "The bible is the word of God"...I wasn't **THINKING** about that idea. **And my professor knew that. He banked on the idea that a lot of us would have a programmed response from a childhood raised in the bible belt that "the bible is God's word." He ALSO banked on that the bible was however, in actuality, simply an important relic we respected and not the foundation our life had been built on.**

From that moment he became the expert and we were the novice. He could say "IF YOU JUST LOOK CLOSELY" you'll see there are contradictions and timeline differences in the gospels...THIS COULDN'T BE THE WORD OF GOD! Your parents are good people who fed you this because they didn't know any better but now you know! So you can leave this silly faith behind. And your life won't really change that much anyway!

And the reason I can recall that moment so clearly is because it was THE watershed moment in my Christian life. I couldn't

pretend like that didn't just happen. And so I immersed myself in the bible that semester. I had to study twice as hard as the classwork required because not only did I need to learn all of my professor's arguments...I needed to find answers. And I did. Turns out he wasn't offering new arguments but the same arguments that have been around for centuries just dressed up in new clothing. And great responses from great Christian thinkers abounded.

But all of this forced me into the pages of scripture for hours and hours on end. AND THAT's where I began to be overwhelmed. This book all of the sudden became way more. It came to life & then changed my life. And I found Charles Spurgeon's comment on the bible to be true to me. He said a lot of people treat the bible like a caged lion. We keep it in its cage to protect it from it's enemies. And then we stand around it guarding it, defending it from it's enemies. And he said fools, let the lion loose! It will defend itself!¹

Today my job is to let the lion loose. Put yourself in that classroom. If you, like me...believe this is God's word yet don't know it, don't build your life on it, I hope today will ignite a bit of a crisis in you. We are in the middle of a series called Following Jesus where we are trying to equip you with the simple tools you need to grow as a Christ follower. And that's because I know people try out church HOPING to find hope! And here's what we are saying: The hope you are looking for has been right in here all along! The guidance, the peace, the

¹ This quote is attributed to Charles Spurgeon's sermon "The Lover of God's Law filled with Peace" preached in 1888. I have yet to find a full transcript of this sermon so at this point, even though I found multiple

presence of God with you...It's right here! The bible is a book, but its way, way more.

Today I want to show you what God says about the bible, WHY you need to read it every day, and how to get started. Now to preach about the bible is a sacred task. It's like trying to explain the vastness and majesty of the grand canyon...Or the dean dome. I can try, but my words just fall short. Ultimately You have to experience these two equally awe-inspiring national treasures for yourself. This is even more true of the bible. God says we can meet him in these pages. How can I possibly summarize that in 35...or 40 minutes? Impossible. But let's at least dip our toe in the water.

I'm going to go to 3 places in scripture to show you 3 things God says about the bible. & then show you how to get started with it. Go to Psalm 1.

How happy is the one who does not
walk in the advice of the wicked
or stand in the pathway with sinners
or sit in the company of mockers!

2 Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction,
and he meditates on it day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams
that bears its fruit in its season
and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers. -- Psalms 1:1-3

sources citing this sermon, I cannot say with 100% that spurgeon said this. The idea works though!

Here's what I want you to see first: **The Bible is God's gift to us for our flourishing**

This is how the Psalms open. The arrangement is very intentional. The first word in the Psalms is happy. The Psalms begins by saying happy is the one. Which listen...means the bible is telling you happiness in this life is possible.

- As children we believed happiness was possible, but the older we get and the more successful we become, the more cynical we get about happiness.
- If I were to ask you...Are you happy? Truly happy? I bet not too many people would raise their hands. And I bet if we asked our co-workers, our friends...are you truly happy? Even fewer would say yes. Why?

Because so often we look for happiness the wrong way. The Bible offers happiness on a fundamental level, not a superficial one. Look at what he says...Psalm 1...he is like a tree. And the tree is subject to seasons. It's leaf doesn't wither in a cold winter or a dry summer. Because it was planted by a stream of water. It always has a life source. So its always bearing fruit.

See a lot of people look for happiness in what **happens** to you. Happiness doesn't come from what happens to you, it comes from who you are. A Christian is someone who has been rooted or planted in something besides him or her self. This is what happens when you become a Christian: Something from the outside has been planted into us. We are now rooted into God himself. He gives us life. And so there's this power & outlook that wasn't there before. We draw from that for our life. And we find that life in the pages of scripture.

Happiness actually then becomes a byproduct of a search for something greater.

Listen cause this will take a second to get your mind around: **the person who is truly happy is the one who has stopped trying to find happiness.** You don't go to God for happiness. This is huge for how you read the bible. You go to God for God. To get more of him. To know him more. And when you seek first his kingdom, the byproduct will be a happiness...a deep seated joy... that no season can wither.

This is why this guy's DELIGHT is in the instruction of the lord. It's more than a set of rules, it's a rule of life. It's leading him to God. Not for what he can get for God, but for GOD. and then, as he conforms his life to God's design...he will flourish here and now!

Because God made us to flourish on this earth and the bible is our guide for recovering that original design! In scripture we see the character of God and his plan for our lives. And the more we align our lives with his words, the more we flourish in life. I don't mean prosper financially though, that may also happen. But I do mean live with a joy we could never find in circumstances.

I want to show you something else about the Bible that is INCREDIBLY important. Gonna go over to Deuteronomy 6. That's book 5. See Deuteronomy 6 is like THE CHAPTER in the OT about the bible. Big command to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind. And to teach the scriptures to your children so that they will prosper in the land. Teach them the guide. But then something happens

down in verse 20 that I picked up on this week. And thought was so awesome.

20“When your son asks you in the future, ‘What is the meaning of the decrees, statutes, and ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?’ 21tell him, ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand. -- **Deuteronomy 6:20-21 (CSB)**

The Bible...this is not just a set of rules. So when you teach your kids the bible day in and day out, there is going to come a time where your child is going to ask. Why are we doing all this? Why do we do what the bible says? Who knows, they may even complain! And listen I think one of the huge misses we can make in parenting is forgetting to tell our kids WHY we follow God’s commands. That the bible is more than a guide for our flourishing...

The bible is the story of God rescuing his people through Jesus.

For those of you newer to the bible the table of contents can seem a little odd. 66 separate books written by 40 different authors. Some people think of it as a set of rules, and yes there are commands in here. BUT, even the commands come as a part of the story. And the overarching story has Jesus as the main character. Sally Loyd Jones in her FANTASTIC work called “The Jesus Storybook Bible” subtitled the book “Every story whispers his name.” Because the bible is a collection of stories telling one big story. All 39 Old Testament Books show the need for a rescuer. But the rescuers of the OT never seem to provide lasting victory. They are always tragically flawed in

one way or another. And as a result, the people never find permanent rest or peace. When they do find victory, its either partial or temporary. Each story cries out for a savior who will bring permanent full victory over sin. And then the 4 gospels tell us all about the life of the TRUE Rescuer. He’s here! His victory comes not in political dynasty...it comes in humility and weakness. In death on a cross and then in resurrection from the grave. And then the 23 other books of the New Testament look at how what Jesus did provides hope and direction to those who follow him. If you can See the Bible is about Jesus, not about you, it will change everything about how you read it.

The scriptures are a gift for your flourishing...BUT IT IS NOT PRIMARILY ABOUT YOU. IT IS FOR YOU, But not about you. The more you see it is not about you, the better it will be for you. The *primary* purpose of the Scriptures is not to give you a how-to manual. A lot of Christians struggle to understand it because they approach it that way: You look in it for answers on “how to handle my husband when he annoys me” or “how to decide which job to take”

- But then you get into it and you find a **genealogy**, or a **list of sacrifices**, or the **dimensions of the Temple**, or page after page of **histories of characters** whose lives are of are dubious moral character and from a time very much unlike our own... and you throw up our hands and say, **“What’s this stuff got to do with anything in my life?”**

“But when you see that Christ is the subject of all the Scriptures, that he is the Word, the Lord, the Son who reveals his Father, the promised Hope, the true Temple, the true

Sacrifice, the great High Priest, the ultimate King, then you can read, not so much asking 'What does this mean for me, right now?' but 'What do I learn here of Christ?' Knowing that the Bible is about him and not about me means that, instead of reading the Bible obsessing about me, I can gaze on him. And as through the pages you get caught up in the wonder of his story, you find your heart strangely pounding for him in a way you never would have if you had treated the Bible as a book about you." –Michael Reeves²

The bible is in a class all its own. It isn't a self-help book because YOU aren't the main character, Jesus is. It isn't a philosophy textbook because its primary focus is a person, not a system of thought. It isn't mythology because its primary genre is historical real time narrative and backed up with plenty of historical evidence

IT'S ABOUT Jesus! And the more you see it is about Jesus, the better it will be for you. Because then your obedience to God's commands will flow from a place of receiving God's love for you.

One more thing I want you to see about what the Bible says about itself. Comes in 2 Timothy 3. When the apostle Paul writes to Timothy, a younger pastor who is trying to lead a church. He tells Timothy to CLING to the sacred scriptures and then says this.

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in

² Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 82–83.

righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

OK READY FOR SOME GREEK LEARNIN? IT'S GREEK TIME! I only pull out the Greek when I think it will significantly impact what you will walk away with.

That phrase "inspired by God" is one word in greek **THEO – PNEUSTOS**. Everybody say it with me!

"Inspired by God" is our best English attempt at this phrase that actually says...BREATHED OUT by God. It's the very breath of God himself. Now that may weird some of you out but if you are new to church this is why we Christians often call the bible the word of God. Because of this right here. He has spoken through these authors to us. In fact, Hebrews 4 says **12 For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. -- Hebrews 4:12 (CSB)**

Ok here's what we can say about it. **The Bible is The Living Word of God**. Which is probably the most bizzare but most important thing about what I'm saying. C.S. Lewis called the bible the book that reads you. The Spirit of God moves through the word of God in a way that is honestly a mystery. Look at what Paul says to Timothy about how valuable this word of God is...It's useful for Teaching

TEACHING – The church gets all its direction from here. You want to grow as a follower of Jesus? Everything you need to obey Jesus in ALL of life...its all right here. In fact study after study has said the number one predictor of spiritual growth is

bible engagement. Reading and responding daily to the bible. Some of you are thinking...I don't think I could ever help someone else follow Jesus. Timothy was feeling that way. And Paul said...THIS BOOK. ITS GOT EVERYTHING YOU NEED. JUST GET THEM IN HERE!

REBUKING & CORRECTING – That is, calling yourself and others away from sin. And this is crucial. Because sin is rebellion against God's word...sin is NOT rebellion against your personal preferences. So we call one another away from sin. But if you come to me and say "hey this happened and I don't like it..." My first response is...is that a sin issue or a preference issue? And if it is a sin issue, the rebuking comes with GRACE.

TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS – Right back to the tree planted by the stream. If you will train yourself with these words, oh how good for your soul it will be!

THE BIBLE IS YOUR GUIDE FOR FLOURISHING, IT IS THE STORY OF GOD RESCUING YOU THROUGH CHRIST, AND IT IS THE VERY LIVING WORD OF GOD!

Do you realize how important this book is? Let me say something: The problem is not that you don't know that—how important it is; the problem is that you're just not doing anything about it.

- Think about this: If I offered you 500K to never touch the Bible again: never hear it, read it, talk about it, or even

think about it, would you accept that? Would you take that?³

- Most of you would say "no." So think about that. You just identified this as an asset worth over ½ million dollars. Is there any other ½ million asset you'd just ignore?
- If that shows you the value you place on the word, why are you not devouring it?
- BTW, even those of you who say, "I'm not sure it even is the Word of God..." If I offered you that \$500K to never read or hear or think about the Bible again, would you take it? Most of you would say, "No," because if there is even a chance it is Word of God, you wouldn't want to be cut off from it, not even for \$500K.
 - So if you think it has that much potential value, why aren't you devouring it to figure out if it actually is the Word of God?
 - **It makes sense if someone says the Bible is not the Word of God and pays no attention to it.** It makes sense if someone says they are not sure it is the Word of God but are diligently trying to figure that out. **What makes no sense is when someone says it might be the Word of God but are not desperately trying to figure out if that is true;** or when someone says it is the Word of God but they are not devouring its contents to learn every word God has to say about their lives.

³ Illustration borrowed by sermon from J.D. Greear on Deuteronomy 30 about the importance & value of the bible.

I told you I'd give you some handles so let me close by introducing you to a devotional tool you can use in your time in God's word this week. CHALLENGE: Read the bible every day this week ok. TOOL: We call it G.R.I.P. And it's an acronym for the four components of a personal devotional time.

G. Go to God

R. READ THE BIBLE

I. INGEST THE TRUTH

P. PRAY TO GOD

If what we really need is GOD, then our time of personal devotion each day is to try and get a GRIP on God. That's where the acronym comes from. Which by the way our own Joey Schwartz put this together and it's a super helpful tool. There is a lot of instruction on this at thegospelwheel.com So each day when you want to sit down with your bible and meet with God...you GRIP.

GO TO GOD means – to begin your time with God in prayer. Go directly to him and declare your desire. We want to declare to God, and to ourselves, that we are here before him not to check something off our list, but to draw near to God our father. This can be a one sentence prayer like Psalm 119:18 “open my eyes that I may behold the wondrous things of your law”

READ THE BIBLE – Listen, I hope the one thing I've shown you today is that you can meet God in the pages of the bible. Pick a simple reading plan. F260 – great intro plan. Read the key passages in a year. I'm doing the bible in a year. Got the app

on my phone. Reminds me every morning at 6 & shows me my reading for the day. Just walking through it.

13We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. 14For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18Therefore encourage one another with these words. -- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (CSB)

INGEST THE TRUTH – There is checklist reading & there is feasting. Checklist is trying to get done so you can say you did it. Feasting is trying to take it all in. You'll read slower. But that's the point. Feast! Ask some questions: What does this say? What does it mean? What do I need to believe? What do I need to apply? – Also I encourage you to memorize. Do that with a friend.

PRAY - This will help your devotion life be a relationship and not just a learning exercise. Talk with God! If you've never prayed before...Keep your bible open and just say God, help me believe these truths....Help me take these steps....Then talk

to him about what is going on in your life. I just don't know how else to say it: There are no prayers too small for God to care about. He loves you. He loves prayer. So go talk to him. Also, there is nothing too big that God can't intervene in. My goodness we've needed him this week haven't we.

So just start somewhere. Don't know where, open to Psalm 1. Start there. And with your bible open, talk to God. Don't know what to say: God HELP ME PRAY. He's not the God that you are trying to unlock a secret code to get to. He's your creator & father who is near!

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

- Come back to God. Promises are all IN CHRIST.
- Pray:
 - God I believe the gospel gives me hope even in death. Phil 1.23 – live is Christ, to die is gain.
 - The gospel secures my eternity with you. I believe it.
 - V.18 – comfort those who are being swallowed by grief right now.
 - Come Quickly Lord Jesus

THE BENCH

20 "When your son asks you in the future, 'What is the meaning of the decrees, statutes, and ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?' 21 tell him, 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand. -- Deuteronomy 6:20-21

What I want you to see is that its all telling one story.

Colossians 1 -

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, 15 and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

And at 19 years old I found myself staring back at this guy internally saying...you know what, you are right. What I realized is that as I was agreeing with the statement "The bible is the word of God" ...I wasn't THINKING about that idea. **And my professor knew that. He banked on the idea that a**

lot of us would have a programmed response from a childhood raised in the bible belt that "the bible is God's word" is an unchallenged assumption. And he ALSO banked on that the bible was, in actuality, simply an important relic we respected and not the foundation our life had been built on. From that moment he became the expert and we were the novice. He could say "IF YOU JUST LOOK CLOSELY" you'll see there are contradictions and timeline differences in the gospels...THIS COULDN'T BE THE WORD OF GOD! Your parents are good people who fed you this because they didn't know any better but now you know! So you can leave this silly faith behind. And your life won't really change that much anyway!

And the reason I can recall that moment so clearly is because it was THE watershed moment in my Christian life. I couldn't pretend like that didn't just happen. And so I immersed myself in the bible that semester. I had to study twice as hard as the classwork required because not only did I need to learn all of my professor's arguments...I needed to find answers. And I did. Turns out he wasn't offering new arguments but the same arguments that have been around for centuries just dressed up in new clothing. And great responses from great Christian thinkers abounded.

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around it guarding it, defending it from its enemies. And he said fools, let the lion loose! It will defend itself!⁴

Today my job is to let the lion loose. Put yourself in that classroom. If you, like me...believe this is God's word yet don't know it, don't build your life on it, I hope today will ignite a bit of a crisis in you. We are in the middle of a series called Following Jesus where we are trying to equip you with the simple tools you need to grow as a Christ follower. And that's because I know people try out church HOPING to find hope! And here's what we are saying: Because of his grace...God will meet you right where you are. If you come in here today and you've never opened the bible in your life...God has hope for you. If you used to be religious but haven't been for years...God is ready for you. If you've been going through the motions for years but still feel like you haven't gotten anywhere...God is ready for you. GOD will meet you right where you are! You don't have to improve yourself to get to God. BUT...because he loves you and because he has power...he will not leave you there.

And every study ever done on spiritual growth says the same thing. The number one predictor of spiritual growth...BY FAR...is bible engagement. Willow Creek Association a few years back surveyed more than 1500 churches. #1 predictor of spiritual growth...bible engagement. Reading & responding to the bible daily. Lifeway Last year – Surveyed 3,000 protestant church goers and 45% engaged the bible weekly. YET, Those

⁴ This quote is attributed to Charles Spurgeon's sermon "The Lover of God's Law filled with Peace" preached in 1888. I have yet to find a full transcript of this sermon so at this point, even though I found multiple

that did were 3x more likely to give, 3x more likely to practice community, twice as likely to pray, more likely to serve, and 3x more likely to share their faith with others.

I'm spending all this time in the intro to a sermon talking about this because the numbers show Dr. Erhman rightly diagnosed the disconnect between respect for the bible and engagement with the bible. And what if the whole time the hope you are after, the purpose, the security, the companionship, the meaning...what if the whole time it has been RIGHT HERE and all you have to do is open it! Remember our wheel? Today is on devotion to God. When we understand God's love for us, we will then start to love God rightly. That starts with his word. You will not love others RIGHTLY OR love the world RIGHTLY if you are not personally devoting yourself to God and his word.

So, I want to show you what the bible says about itself. THEN I want to show you HOW to read it. Because I know you may have that thought of...Yeah what do I do with this thing. So, let's open this thing up. IF YOU DO NOT OWN A BIBLE, We have one for you today. Right out in the lobby.

IDEA: Have one for every person? We are like Oprah today. YOU GET A BIBLE, YOU GET A BIBLE, EVERYBODY GETS A BIBLE!

Turn with me to 2 Timothy 3.14. Let's see what the bible IS.

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Jen Wilkin – Gospel Coalition “Not your mom’s Sunday school class”

- Expert – Amateur Divide – I teach you up here and then you feel like “wow, that was amazing.”
 - Problem – A disciple is a learner. Can’t be comfortable with that. The result of this is a sort of learned helplessness. It can be a passive learning environment.
 - We want people teaching the scriptures with people.
 - Problem: We got into the problem of lowering the bar because people don’t have TIME. Now listen, that’s garbage. We have more discretionary time than anyone in human history. And the church apologizes for asking for it.
 - You do whole 30, you run marathons...you are disciplined. To the most compelling message.
- My job today: compelling message.
- People don’t know what they want. It’s up to us in leadership to show how disciples are formed. HOW ARE DISCIPLES FORMED

- 2 environments – HUGE, no commitment. Small – HUGE commitment.
- We need teaching environments
- **ACTIVE Learning**
 - Stating up front: LEARNING IS THE GOAL. There is TRUTH.
 - Partnering in the process. Taking on some of the discomfort that comes with learning.
 - 3 legged stool of learning & order is important:
 - **Personal study** – being stretched to think & not sure we know the answers.
 - **Discussion with peers** – discussion around the homework. This is why BSF has worked. And we need to bring it into the local church. Discussion leader is a co-learner & facilitator. NOT a teacher. If they try and teach, they break the stool.
 - **Teaching from teacher** – Good teacher is aware of what is happening in the other two environments and closes the gaps & answers questions.
 - Single Gender are GOOD environments here. Because they feel more comfortable processing it.
 - Learning is the highest goal but that doesn’t mean it is cold info transfer. It’s just that thought leads to feels instead of the reverse.
 - At the end of the course there is an eval. Did we deliver on what we said we were going to do.
- CREATING SPAACE

- **Structure** – The method is clearly stated and followed. They are formulaic. There is a formula.
- **Predictability** – We adhere to the same pattern every year. Ex: 11 weeks in the fall & 11 weeks in the spring. Lower barriers to entry
- **Accountability** – Leaders maintain awareness of where people are. Good leader makes sure everyone is weighing in. We charge \$\$ for classes. \$30 for classes. It incentivizes people to stay in.
- **Accessibility** – Instruction & participation should be appropriate to the environment. We communicate everything at an 8th grade reading level. Define big words, Scholarship those who can't afford it, pay for childcare.
- **Community** – Look for ways to help relationships form & deepen. NOT in the same way as in community group. These are mid-size environments that are SHORT-TERM! Great facilitators
- **Excellence** – We do what we say we will do. Do it with as much excellence AS POSSIBLE. Won't classes compete with community group? That assumes they are trying to accomplish the same goal. Classroom space actually becomes a great opt-in space.
- Mechanism for training teachers.

“But when you see that Christ is the subject of all the Scriptures, that he is the Word, the Lord, the Son who reveals his Father, the promised Hope, the true Temple, the true Sacrifice, the great High Priest, the ultimate King, then you can read, not so much asking ‘What does this mean for me, right now?’ but ‘What do I learn here of Christ?’ Knowing that the Bible is about him and not about me means that, instead of reading the Bible obsessing about me, I can gaze on him. And as through the pages you get caught up in the wonder of his story, you find your heart strangely pounding for him in a way you never would have if you had treated the Bible as a book about you.” –**Michael Reeves**⁵

In fact statistics say even though 52% of Americans believe the bible is the inspired word of God, only 19% read it on a regular basis.⁶ In other words there are a pretty large number of people who say “yes I believe it is God’s word and absolutely crucial for my life, but NO I don’t read it.”

And I think there are a number of reasons. Maybe you relate to one of these.

- “I’m not a reader.” People don’t read anymore.
- Maybe its just not interesting to you. You’d never say it but you are like..Why bother?
- I Believe in Jesus....do I really need all this? Like the apple software terms and conditions...I agree but do I need to bother?

⁵ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 82–83.

⁶ https://www.americanbible.org/uploads/content/state-of-the-bible-2019_report_041619_final.pdf

- Maybe you have tried but you feel like you can't understand it. I mean its one book but actually 66 books but they are all connected. What is a "Testament" and why are they called old and new?
- Some of you feel too busy. Life is squeezing you for your time and you feel like focused concentration on ANYTHING like this on a daily basis is just impossible
- Some of you think...That's the preacher's job. To give you the "need to know" from the bible week in and week out.
- You want to, but lack discipline. And so you hear "man, I know I should."

Because of his grace...God will meet you right where you are. If you come in here today and you've never opened the bible in your life...God has hope for you. If you used to be religious but haven't been for years...God is ready for you. If you've been going through the motions for years but still feel like you haven't gotten anywhere...God is ready for you. GOD will meet you right where you are! You don't have to improve yourself to get to God. BUT...because he loves you and because he has power...he will not leave you there.

Here's what Moses Says in Deuteronomy 6...

"This is the command — the statutes and ordinances — the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you, so that you may follow them in the land you are about to enter and possess.

2 Do this so that you may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life by keeping all his statutes and commands I am giving you, your son, and your grandson, and so that you may have a long life. 3 Listen, Israel, and be careful to follow them, so that you may prosper and multiply greatly, because the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you a land flowing with milk and honey.

. -- Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (CSB)

In fact, Jesus right after he preached the famous sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7...he closed saying whoever obeys these words of mine will be like the wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell & rivers rose & knocked on the house but it didn't fall because the house was built on the rock. But those who hear his words and don't obey are like foolish people who build their house on the sand. Storms come and destroy the house because it is built on a weak foundation.

Listen, a lot of people have a faith built for fair weather. And as long as things go ok, you feel ok. The problem is, the storms will come at some point. And when they do, that's usually when people experience a crisis of faith. And that's because their lives...aren't built to withstand storms spiritually speaking. Maybe that's where some of you are. Your life hit a rough patch and everything began to crumble.

**** WHAT ABOUT PSALM 1...**

Listen I think this applies to how we think through every area of our lives. The stability of each area of your life depends on how well it is founded on God's word. Have you figured out

how to think about dating through the eyes of scripture?
What about vocation? These are huge areas in your life and yet we tend to think the bible doesn't have much more than a couple of rules to follow there.

** WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT ILLUSTRATES FLOURISHING BETTER THAN JENGA TOWER?

And listen, our lives are not as compartmentalized as we like to think they are. anywhere in your life that is not built in line with God's word is a place that is susceptible to the attack of the enemy. And he can use that to bring your whole life down.

- **Jenga Tower**⁷ – It is a secret pleasure of mine as a favorite game. The rush of pulling that lower level block out and the tower still standing!! But, its ultimately going to fall. Because each block you remove makes the structure weaker.
- **Your life is a jenga tower** – a matrix of relationships and any part not being built on God's word is a place susceptible to the enemy's attack and he can use it to bring your whole life down.

So let me ask you...what areas in your life are most vulnerable to the enemy right now?

See Moses told Israelite to put the Bible EVERYWHERE. Look at what he says next:

4 "Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 These words that I am giving you today are

to be in your heart. 7 Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.

I love verses 8 & 9. Put them on your hand & on your forehead. Older translation says put them as frontlets between your eyes. And there is apparently a scripture memory band of brothers here at Mercy calling themselves 'the frontlets.' They are super cool. The point is put it everywhere. And not just post them on Instagram with cool scenic backgrounds, we are to SPEAK them...all the time. Sit in your house, walk along the road – that's when you are commuting. Then when you go to bed and then when you get up.

We are to always have it present on our minds and in our conversations. That's because every square inch of this world, including every person, was created by God and when we approach it according to his word it will be for our good! The bible is God's gift to us for flourishing in ALL of life.

Hey I really want to draw your attention to verse 6. Put them in your heart. Where the love of God is to be as well. And I want you to see this Mercy Church

⁷ This illustration comes from J.D. Greear in a sermon he preached in 2014 on Deuteronomy 30 in the START series. One of my favorite series we did during my time at Summit.

Because of this:

- We believe the words are inspired, not the writers. The apostle Paul could have written a recipe for Avacado Toast. I'm sure its good but we don't believe its God's word to us. The New Testament is filled with the formula "It is written" and the "Scriptures say" when referring to a written work (e.g. Luke 24:44, Mat. 26:56) Word of God = Scripture = The Written Word. And the writers are occasionally even told by God not to change or omit a word! It's the words that are inspired.
- We believe the bible is without Error. If God is perfect, his words must be. **Psalm 19.7 – the law of the lord is perfect, reviving the soul.** There are no mistakes, or errors in the scriptures. Jesus seemed to believe that. Jesus affirmed that even the spellings of words can be trusted, and that not one promise will be fulfilled in any way different from how it was detailed in the Old Testament. Jesus also maintained that the Scripture "cannot be broken," meaning that he did not believe it contained errors (John 10:31-38). Jesus even built sophisticated arguments on single words and even verb tenses from Old Testament texts (Mat. 22:23-33). Clearly he believed that all Scripture was inerrant.
- How can fallible men write an infallible bible? GREAT question. 2 Peter 1:21 says that the writers spoke as they were "carried along" by the Holy Spirit. Imagine a father holding the hand of a 1 year old just learning to walk. The toddler is taking the steps, but the father is determining where she goes and how fast she gets there. The Bible writers are like the toddler in this story, God's Holy Spirit like the father.

Now let me tell you why that matters: Because Tuesday in a NY Times op-ed a self-identifying Christian Oliver Thomas, who writes often for them, said a lot Christians are on the wrong side of issues because they believe the bible is God's word. He said "the scriptures were written by men, and these men made mistakes. And we are going to acknowledge those mistakes as mistakes because we now have more authoritative revelation."

This is just another round in a centuries old debate over whether or not the Bible is God's word to us. Because if you believe this is just a relic from the 1st century with some good principles, then by all means put it on the shelf. But if it is what IT claims to be, the word of God, then we must submit ourselves to it. Instead of flexing it to fit the winds of the day.

That is WHY we preach the bible EVERY. SINGLE. WEEKEND. Here at Mercy Church. And because the whole bible is about Jesus, we talk about Jesus EVERY SINGLE WEEKEND. You don't need my opinions on your life. You don't need some pithy moral positivity that makes you feel good about yourself in the moment but doesn't equip you to face the realities of life. No, you need THE HOPE OF GOD THAT IS FOUND IN HIS WORD GIVEN TO US!

So I have ordered the elders of our church. That's our other leaders. Man if I start preaching something other than scripture...and if I stop making Jesus the hero...sit me on the bench cause something has gone wrong. And I recognize because we live in a mobile world some of you will move from Charlotte to a new city and need to find a church home. The

first test for figuring out if a church is right for you is “do they believe the bible is God’s word and that Jesus is the hero?”

HOW TO HANDLE THE BIBLE ON YOUR OWN – GRIP IT

Notes:

How I meet with the LORD every day. HEART OF 1st TIMOTHY.
OUR ENTIRE SERVICE TODAY...

G. Go to God

R. READ THE BIBLE

I. INGEST IT

P. PRAY