

TRANSFORMED

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TRANSFORMED BY CONVERSION

What is Conversion?

A biblical understanding of conversion recognizes both what God does and what we do in salvation. In conversion, God, the Holy Spirit:

- gives life to the dead (Eph. 2:5)
- gives sight to the blind (2 Cor. 4:3-6)
- gives the gifts of faith and repentance (Phil. 1:29; Acts 11:18).

And in conversion, we

- repent of sin (Mk. 1:15; Acts 3:19)

- believe in Jesus (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 3:21-26).

A biblical understanding of conversion recognizes that only God can save, and that he saves individuals by enabling them to respond to the gospel message through repenting of sin and trusting in Christ.

Where is Conversion in the Bible?

- Jesus called people to repent and believe in him (Mk. 1:15). He said that unless someone is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (Jn. 3:1-8).
- Throughout the book of Acts, the apostles call people to turn from their sin and trust in Christ (Acts 2:38, 3:19-20, 10:43, 13:38-39, 16:31, 17:30).
- Many of the epistles describe both our need to repent and believe in Christ and God’s supernatural work to accomplish this (Rom. 6:1-23; 1 Cor. 2:14-15; 2 Cor. 4:3-6; Eph. 2:1-10; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).

Why is it important?

A biblical understanding of conversion is important for churches because:

1. It clarifies how churches should exhort non-Christians—they should call non-Christians to repent of sin and trust in Christ.
2. It reminds churches that they must rely upon God in all of their evangelistic efforts; only he can give new spiritual life.
3. It teaches churches to maintain a sharp distinction between themselves and the world.
 - Church members’ lives should be marked by the fruit of conversion

Churches should evangelize and teach about the Christian life in such a way that the radical nature of conversion is continually emphasized.¹

Am I converted?

In 1999, after some wake-up calls in my life, I decided it was time to examine where I was at spiritually. I asked the question: “Is it okay to believe in Jesus, but not do much else?” The answer I received was from James 2:17: “Faith, by itself, if it does not produce action is dead.” If I was honest with myself, I would have said: “I say I am a Christian, but my interests, priorities, and view of the world have little to do with Christ.” So, I began to read the Bible. In it, I found

¹ The conversion section is extracted from 9marks.org.

that those who have the Holy Spirit have a love for God's people (1 John 4:7-8), a desire for holy living (1 John 3:6), and an appetite for Scripture (1 Peter 2:2). I had none of these things! That's not to say that one has to bat 1000 in these areas. Scripture is teaching that one who has the Spirit will at least have interest in these areas. Jesus said: "You can tell a tree by its fruit." Further, I always wondered why so many things in Scripture did not make sense. I found that Paul said: "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). No wonder I could not understand. I did not have the Holy Spirit. It was time I was honest with where I was at on my spiritual journey.

I began to read a book titled: "Letters from a Skeptic" by Dr. Greg Boyd. It answered a lot of my objections to the Christian faith. God began to knock down obstacles. Additionally, through a men's bible study, he was wooing me to himself. One day, I verbally repented of sin and trusted in Jesus as my Savior. The Spirit led me to go to my room, close the door, and pray a prayer of repentance and faith in Jesus. My life changed. I have never been the same since.

The Holy Spirit teaches us truth (John 14:26), prays for us (Romans 8:26), grows our Christ-like character (Galatians 5:22-23), gives us wisdom and knowledge (Isaiah 11:2), gives us hope (Romans 15:13), gives us power to obey the Word (Ezekiel 36:26-27), guarantees our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14), gives us boldness (Acts 4:31), and points us to Jesus (John 15:26). He gave me new eyes to see and ears to hear and my life was transformed.

What about cradle Christians?

Some of you have been in a state of repentance and faith since childhood and have never wandered from the truth or become lost. You were fed truth growing up. Like Timothy, you were acquainted with the sacred writings since infancy (2 Timothy 3:15). You do not have a before and after testimony like I do. That is great! It is better not to experience darkness without Christ!

The gift of the Spirit is simply that: a gift! The gift of the Spirit can be given to an infant or a young child. Psalm 22:10 says: "On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God." And Psalm 71:6 says: "From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you." And Jesus said: "From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise" (Matthew 21:16).

Head: These questions help us understand Scripture

1. What stood out to you in this lesson?
2. What is conversion?

Heart: These questions help us wrestle with our beliefs for our lives

3. Do you believe that this lesson can be useful to some in the church who have walked away from practicing their Christian faith?
4. How did this lesson impact you personally?

Hands: These questions help us do something after hearing the Word

5. How will you put this teaching into practice in your relationships moving forward?



TRANSFORMED BY REPENTANCE

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. – Galatians 2:20

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. –Romans 6:4

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. -2 Corinthians 5:17

Read Romans 6:1-14. In Romans 6:1-14, we see a contrast:

<u>Old Life</u>	<u>New Life</u>
Dead in Sin	Alive in God
Crucified with Christ	Union with the Risen Jesus
Slave to Sin	Free from its Bondage
Under Law	Under Grace

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 6:4, “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” In baptism, our sinful natures were put to death, and a new person has now arisen to live a new life. As Christians, we are changed people with a new way of life (2 Cor. 5:17). As baptized believers, we are no longer slaves to doing what our sinful nature desires. Conversely, we are slaves to Christ and doing His will. Since Jesus Christ has given us His life as an undeserved gift, His love and grace transform us so that we *want* and *can* live for Him. Not only so, but in baptism we enter into his death and resurrection and God empowers us to live unto the newness of life.

What is Repentance? The Bible declares:

- The **first part of repentance is when we experience a godly grief concerning our own sin.** Paul says: “Godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation” (2 Corinthians 7:10). This is also known as contrition or sorrow for sin. No one can change their life unless they first think they need to. No one can make things right, unless they care to do so.
- The **second part is confession/forgiveness.** The Apostle John says: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9). A Christian is renewed by hearing they are forgiven. When Jesus forgives sin, it has the power to change lives.
- The **third part** of repentance is righting wrongs and **making an effort to grow.** John the Baptist said: “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Luke 3:8).

Every Sunday during the worship service we repent of sin. We ask for forgiveness and renewal so that we can do the will of Jesus Christ and bring honor and glory

to His name. We do this prior to the Lord's Supper since Paul says that repentance is a necessary pre-requisite for partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Further, repentance is at the heart of the Christian life since by it we put to death our old way of life and live as people who have been set free.

God's Word Leads Us

How are Christians supposed to know what sin is and what is pleasing to God? The answer: God's Word. In Scripture, Paul says: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21). Paul's warning is sincere. Christians who think they can live autonomous lives apart from the authority of God's Word are blinded. Instead, Christians are to put away from their lives the vices mentioned above and put on the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Paul says: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23). These are virtues that Christ desires for us to put on. The theme of putting on virtues is also found in Colossians 3:5-17 as well as 2 Peter 1:5-8. Similar admonitions to put off sin and vice are found in 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:3-7.

Jesus said: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Christians bear the fruits of the Spirit by abiding in Christ and His Word. The fruits of the Spirit are gifts from God while Christians are active in expressing them. We should learn to abide in Christ through reading His Word and prayer and then the fruits of the Holy Spirit will follow. Praying for the Holy Spirit's help each day is of great benefit since Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our Helper (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Jesus says: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Luke 11:13)!

Every Christian's Battle

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.... For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me

from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. -Romans 7:15-17, 22-25

Paul says: “in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (Rom. 7:22-23). As a Christian, Paul delights in God’s Law. He desires to do God’s will. However, because sin is still present in his nature, he has trouble obeying God’s Law, which he knows is right. Paul is thankful that on the Last Day he will no longer have to deal with the flesh (Rom. 7:25a). In the meantime, he is a slave to doing God’s will in his mind. He knows what is right and wants to do it. At the same time, Paul is a slave to sin because his sinful nature has not yet been completely put away yet.

The Christian life is a cycle. There are times when we experience what Paul experienced. When we struggle with sin it makes us feel unworthy of God’s grace and guilty of sin. In those times, we need to hear the Gospel of God’s grace, not the accusations of God’s Law. In the next verse Paul assures Christians: “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). Paul assures Christians of their salvation by God’s grace: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

Head: These questions help us understand Scripture

1. What is repentance?
2. Repentance is a part of conversion (see lesson 1). Conversion is our experience of new birth. Ongoing repentance is our experience of continuous renewal.

Heart: These questions help us wrestle with our beliefs for our lives

3. Why is repentance foundational to living as a follower of Jesus?
4. Why does repentance matter when distinguishing between a Christian and non-Christian?
5. What is the most challenging part of repentance for you?

Hands: These questions help us do something after hearing the Word

6. What changes do you intend to pursue as a result of this biblical teaching?

The logo features the words "INVEST" and "INVITE" in a bold, teal, sans-serif font. A stylized orange ampersand (&) is positioned between the two words, overlapping them. The entire logo is centered on a light green background with faint horizontal lines.

INVEST & INVITE

TRANSFORMED BY LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

Read Luke 19:1-10: Missional Desire

Head: These questions help us understand Scripture

1. God the Father often puts people in Jesus' path. Who is the first one to speak in the narrative?
2. We can also see that Jesus' initiates having a social occasion with him (staying over at his home. Jesus was a travelling missionary).
3. Jesus is eating with someone who is a social outcast. Zacchaeus is not getting a lot of invites from religious people or rabbis to dinner. The religious people and rabbis considered themselves "better" and part of a different social class. If Jesus is reaching out to people that are "different" how much easier should it be for us to reach out to people like us!
4. Zacchaeus, after receiving the love, kindness, and presence of Jesus is changed without a command! Remember that it is love that transforms lives!

5. You can see that Zacchaeus turns over his life to the Lord in repentance. This is ultimately the agenda of God in using us for outreach. He grants people repentance for the forgiveness of sins (see the Transformed evangelism lesson).
6. Jesus says in 19:10, that He came to seek and save the lost. When Jesus says, “lost” what does he mean? What happens if people die “lost” from God?

Heart: These questions help us wrestle with our beliefs for our lives

7. Are you able to initiate conversations with people you do not know? Share skills and tips with one another.
8. How can you make time for people who are living without the grace and truth of Jesus?
9. How do you build trust with your friends?
10. How do you get from relationship to spiritual conversations?

Hands: These questions help us do something after hearing the Word

11. What networks of people do you currently have regular access to? Or, what networks of people could you begin to have regular access to?

Missional Action

12. Every couple or family unit has a “neighborhood” that they are reaching out to on a regular basis. E.g. Andrew & Daisy will reach out to school community for dinners and friendship. Dinner is one idea among many for connecting.
13. Multiple couples reach out to the same “neighborhood.” E.g. We all will reach out to a school community.
14. Have a social gathering (instead of normal life group) where you invite people over every 2-3 months. You can invite people at St. John’s who are not in a group, people who no longer attend St. John’s or people that you are reaching out to in your “neighborhood.” The goal is friendship. Over time, you may feel that they are ripe for an invitation to worship or an invitation into your life group.
15. Duos/Trios or Same Gender Group Time Check-In at life group: Choose some questions from the sermon-based study guides or Finke coasters that you will ask each other to check-in and pray for each other during the life group gathering. This time is not meant to stump one another or put each other on the spot, but to pray for and encourage one another with our missional desire and plan. If you feel that people are losing their missional habits, do not abandon the questions. Instead, talk about how missional habits can be re-gained again.

Testimonial from a Life Group

Our life group was on mission to a maternity home for women and children coming out of abuse. Our group did some work around their house/yard - cleaning, replacing light bulbs, mowing the grass, etc. We also helped them sort the food and clothing donations they received from other churches. It was quickly apparent that all the support they got only went as far as the front door or mailbox (e.g. food, clothing, and financial donations), but no one else was building relationships with these women and children. Over time, as our community went inside their home and sorted the donations, the women who lived in the home began helping us. Naturally, conversations would occur and relationships were built. And, hands down, the best thing we did was bring a meal with us when we went there to serve. After doing work around the house for the afternoon we would all sit down and eat together. Again, conversations and relationships and trust. This was our mission. It started as one day a month. But even the other weeks when we gathered at my house for life group we were still praying for them, discussing how we could better serve them, and studying Scripture with one ear to God's Word and the other ear towards the women and children we were serving.

As our community grew in relationship with them and earned their trust, we were invited to help them outside planned life group events. My wife would give some of the women a ride to the doctor or store so that they didn't have to walk or take the bus while 8 months pregnant. And over time, I started leading Bible studies with them. At that point, discipleship, community, and mission, all started to blend together. During Holy Week, I got to walk them through the passion narrative. I still vividly remember when we got to the part where Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." At that point, one woman said, "So wait, He was praying for the people that were killing Him to be forgiven? All of a sudden, this room full of women who had suffered horrendous abuses at the hands of abusive boyfriends, pimps, and drug dealers started bawling at this understanding of God's love. And then singing! It was amazing! And it was all about relationships!"

A Word About Space & Growing Life Groups

1. Remember as you consider how many people you can fit in your home at life group that not everyone attends weekly due to illnesses or travel. Try and pack as many people as possible into your homes so that your life groups do not become closed off and you lose your missional plan. If your group truly is too large, please identify an apprentice in your group and let me know who they are so that we can train them to either take your life

group or send them out to plant another group. That way, we always have space for everyone.

2. Jesus loved all people. We must have a heart for all people regardless if they are a tough “fit” for our groups.
3. You can strategically add people to your group by letting them know that the goal is to grow as followers of Christ and share the group guidelines in your sermon-based study guide during their first gathering with your life group. That way, people are not coming and going each week, but they are strategically added.

**THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES
OF ALL NATIONS**



**BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME
OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON
AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

MATTHEW 28:19

TRANSFORMED BY HIS MISSION

What is the Gospel (Good News)?

The good news is that:

- The one and only God who is holy made us in his image to know him (Gen. 1:26-28).
- But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23).
- In his great love, God became a man in Jesus, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for sins (John 1:14; Heb. 7:26; Rom. 3:21-26, 5:12-21).

- He rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted Christ's sacrifice and that God's wrath against us had been exhausted (Acts 2:24, Rom. 4:25).
- He now calls us to repent of our sins and trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness (Acts 17:30, John 1:12). If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God (John 3:16).
- He is gathering one new people to himself among all those who submit to Christ as Lord (Matt. 16:15-19; Eph. 2:11-19).

Where is the Gospel in the Bible?

Romans 1-4 contains one of the fullest expositions of the gospel in all of Scripture, and 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 contains a succinct summary of the gospel.

Why is the Gospel important?

- A biblical understanding of the gospel is important because the gospel contains God's power to save people from the consequences of being separated from God. The Gospel is the only revealed way for sinful people to be reconciled to a holy God.
- Not only that, but everything in a church flows from its understanding of the gospel, whether preaching, counseling, discipleship, music, evangelism, missions, and so on.²

Joining Jesus on His Mission

Jesus said in Mark 1:15: "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Believers create opportunities to share the Gospel with others by building relationships. **We build relationships by "loving our neighbor." We love our "neighbors" (the people all around us) by enjoying them, recognizing and responding to their needs with words, acts of kindness and out loud prayer.** We believe that Jesus is the one who saves, not us. Based on this truth, Missiologist Greg Finke writes:

"Jesus is on a mission and he invites you to join Him. He does not give you a mission to do for Him. He is on a mission and invites you to come with Him."

² The Gospel section is extracted from 9marks.com

For more on this, please read *Joining Jesus on His Mission* by Greg Finke.

Here are some more ways to build relationships and enjoy people:

- Have a party and invite friends who are not Jesus followers (ice cream party, s'mores are ideas)
- Invite your co-workers to lunch who do not know Jesus
- Participate in community gatherings like festivals, art shows and city celebrations, and talk to people
- Invite neighbors or friends to happy hour
- Do a food drive or invite friends/neighbors to make a difference in the community
- Invite friends/neighbors to watch the big game
- Go walking/exercising with a friend/neighbor
- Get involved in recreational sports and other hobbies where you can meet others
- Work with neighbors to have a community garage sale and give the money to a community cause
- Go to Starbucks and look for people who are regularly there when you are. Eventually introduce yourself.
- Be a regular at a community center or park
- Let your kids play in a park league. Strike up conversations with other parents.
- Know your testimony and be ready to share it
- Study so that you have answers to people's questions

A "Neighborhood" is any network of people to which we have regular access. Who is regularly within our reach? Who are the people who live near us, work near us, play near us, etc.?

The church exists to connect people to Jesus. She exists not for herself, but for the lost. She exists not to be a club, but to be on a mission for Jesus. Jesus' last words prior to ascending into heaven were, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). In everything we do here at St. John's, we must ask the question, "Are we connecting people to Jesus?"

Crucial Conversations: What is Evangelism?

Once relationships are built, you may feel it is time to share the good news. Evangelism is simply telling non-Christians the good news about what Jesus Christ has done to save them and inviting them to repent and believe. In order to biblically evangelize you must:

1. Preach the whole gospel, even the hard news about our sin separating us from God.
2. Invite people to repent of their sins and trust in Christ. A person's repentance is typically expressed verbally to God in private. If they have never been baptized you can lead them to baptism.

Where is Evangelism in the Bible?

Scripture contains both teaching on evangelism (Matt. 28:19-20; Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Pet. 3:15-16) and examples of evangelistic preaching (see Acts 2:14-41, 3:12-26, 13:16-49, 17:22-31). Moreover, any time Scripture speaks of the gospel, it is teaching us what we are to share in evangelism (see, for example, Romans 1-4 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Why is Evangelism important?

- When a church has an unbiblical understanding of the gospel, they don't evangelize, they evangelize in misleading or manipulative ways, or they share a message that's not the gospel.
- On the other hand, a biblical understanding of evangelism clarifies our role in the mission God has given to the church: we are to preach the good news about what Christ has done and pray that God would bring people to believe it.³

Head: These questions help us understand Scripture

1. What stood out to you about this lesson?
2. What is the Gospel?
3. What is Evangelism?

Heart: These questions help us wrestle with our beliefs for our lives

4. When is the last time you shared the Good News with someone else?
How did it go?
5. What fears do you have about sharing the Good News with others?

³ The evangelism section is extracted from 9marks.com

Hands: These questions help us do something after hearing the Word

6. Who is one non-believer you need to reach out to this week to build friendship?
7. Who is one non-believer you could share the Good News with this week?



TRANSFORMED BY HIS WORD

By Norman L. Geisler

The Bible is the Word of God

Jesus referred to the Old Testament as the "Word of God" which "cannot be broken" (John 10:35, NKJV). He said, "Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18, NIV). Paul added, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV). It came "from of the mouth of God" (see Matt. 4:4, NIV). Although human authors recorded the messages, "prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21, NIV).

Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day, "You nullify the word of God by your tradition (Mark 7:13, NIV). Jesus turned their attention to the written Word of God by affirming over and over again, "It is written . . . It is written . . . It is written . . ." (see Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). This phrase occurs over ninety times in the New

Testament. It is a strong indication of the divine authority of the written Word of God. Stressing the unfailing nature of God's truth, the apostle Paul referred to the Scriptures as "the word of God" (Rom. 9:6, NASB).

What About Science and History?

Some have suggested that Scripture can always be trusted on spiritual and moral matters, but it is not always correct on historical matters. However, these matters are often inextricably interwoven with the historical and scientific. A close examination of Scripture reveals that the scientific (factual) and spiritual truths are often inseparable. For example, one cannot separate the spiritual truth of Christ's resurrection from the fact that His body permanently vacated the tomb and later physically appeared (see Matt. 28:6; 1 Cor. 15:13-19). Likewise, if Jesus was not born of a biological virgin, then He is no different from the rest of the human race on whom the stigma of Adam's sin rests (see Rom. 5:12). Further, the death of Christ for our sins cannot be detached from his shedding literal blood on the Cross, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22, KJV). And, Adam's existence and fall cannot be a myth. If there were no literal Adam and no actual fall, then the spiritual teaching about inherited sin and eventual or physical death are wrong (see Rom. 5:12). Historical reality and the theological doctrine stand or fall together. Likewise, Jesus' moral teaching about marriage was based on His teaching about God's joining a literal Adam and Eve together in marriage (see Matt. 19:4-5). In each of these cases the moral or theological teaching is devoid of its meaning apart from the historical or factual event. If one denies that the literal space-time event occurred, then there is no basis for believing the scriptural doctrine built upon it.

Jesus often directly compared Old Testament events with important spiritual truths, such as His death and resurrection which were related to Jonah and the great fish (see Matt. 12:40). Or, His second coming as compared to the days of Noah (see Matt. 24:37-39). Both the occasion and the manner of that comparison make it clear that Jesus was affirming the historicity of those Old Testament events. Indeed, Jesus asserted to Nicodemus, "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things" (John 3:12, NASB)? In short, if the Bible does not speak truthfully about the physical world, then it cannot be trusted when it speaks about the spiritual world. The two are intimately related.

Does the Humanness of the Bible Affect Its Truthfulness?

The Bible may be the inspired Word of God in some sense, but it is also human words. It had human authors, and "to err is human." Hence, we are to expect some errors in the Bible. So goes the argument. In short, the clear and simple truth of God has been confused by the lie of Satan, the master of lies (see John 8:44).

Let us analyze what is wrong with this reasoning. A simple analogy will help. Consider some parallel but equally faulty reasoning: 1) Jesus was a human being. 2) Human beings sin. 3) Therefore, Jesus sinned. Any Bible student can readily see that this conclusion is wrong. Jesus was "without sin" (Heb. 4:15, NASB). He "had no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV). Jesus was "a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet. 1:19, NIV). As John said of Jesus, "he is pure" and "righteous" (1 Jn. 3:3; 2:1, NIV). But, if Jesus never sinned, then what is wrong with the above argument that Jesus is human and humans sin, therefore, Jesus sinned? Where does the logic go astray?

The mistake is to assume that Jesus is like any other human. Sure, mere human beings sin. But, Jesus was not a mere human being. He was a perfect human being. Indeed, Jesus was not only human, but He was also God. Likewise, the Bible is not a mere human book. It is also the Word of God. Like Jesus, it is both divine and human. And just as Jesus was human but did not sin, even so the Bible is a human book but does not err. Both God's living Word (Christ) and His written Word (Scripture) are human but do not err. They are divine and cannot err. There can no more be an error in God's written Word than there was a sin in God's living Word. God cannot err, period.

Jesus' View of Scripture

By Pastor Andrew Farhat

Jesus Christ saw the Old Testament Scriptures as God's holy Word and authoritative for faith, life, and prophecy concerning Himself. When Jesus argued with the Jews, He quoted the Holy Scriptures showing that He considered them authoritative (Mt. 21:22; 22:29; Jn. 7:32). Often Jesus would respond to attacks from men and the devil with the phrase, "It is written" (Mt. 4:4, 6, 7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:31; Mk. 7:6; 11:17; 14:27; Lk. 10:26; 20:17; 24:46; Jn. 6:45). After Jesus rose from the dead, He taught about Himself using the Old Testament on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:27, 32). More than that, Jesus knew He was fulfilling Scripture testifying to its divine inspiration (Mt. 26:31; Mk. 9:12; 14:21, 27, 49; Lk. 18:31; 20:17; 22:37; Jn. 7:42; 12:14; 15:25). He told the Jews,

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (Jn. 5:39). After Jesus rose from the dead, He told the disciples, “Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Lk. 24:44). Jesus saw the Scriptures as the Word of God that spoke the truth which enabled Him to say, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35).

Jesus said the Old Testament was without error (John 10:35; 17:17; Matt. 22:29). He considered it the final authority (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Jesus refers to names and events in the Old Testament as history (Matt. 19:4-5; Matt. 24:37; John 8:56; John 6:31-51). Consequently, we believe that the Scriptures are the sole rule, norm, and guide (the final authority) for determining what we believe.

But what about the writings of the New Testament? Should they be considered God’s Word? Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed told the Apostles that after He rose from the dead the Holy Spirit would inspire them in a special way and guide them into all truth (Jn. 14:25-26; 16:12-15). The early church saw this and “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship” (Acts 2:42). In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians he claimed divine authority for all the Apostles declaring that the church “was built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone” (2:20). The Apostle Peter refers to the letters of Paul as “Scripture” (2 Pet. 3:15-16). And Paul declared that the letters he wrote were to be read and obeyed (Col. 4:16; 2 Thess. 3:14).

What about those books in the New Testament that were not written by Apostles? There are some, but none of them were written without apostolic direction. Luke received his information from the Mary (Lk 1:26-2:52) and numerous eyewitnesses (Lk. 1:1-4). Mark received his information from the Apostle Peter.⁴ Paul called James, the Lord’s brother an Apostle and pillar (Gal. 1:19; 2:9). Jude was James’ brother, probably Jesus’ half-brother, and closely associated with the Apostles in Jerusalem. Tertullian⁵ suggests that the writer of Hebrews was Barnabas, and Martin Luther suggests that the writer was Apollos. Both are very probable candidates for authorship. Either way, both were considered authoritative in the early church. Barnabas was called an Apostle (Acts 4:36) and accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-4). Apollos is mentioned in the same category as the Apostles Peter and Paul in Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth (1:12; 3:4-6, 22). Apollos, Barnabas, Jude, James, Peter, Paul, John, Luke, Mark, and Matthew are the ones through whom the gospel came down to the early church. Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons in

⁴ This is attested to by Church Fathers Papias (60-130 AD) and Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD).

⁵ *De Pudicitia*, 20.

the late second century wrote, “We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.”⁶

Prophecy as Proof of Divine Inspiration

The Scriptures show themselves to be divinely inspired since in them we see hundreds of prophecies extending hundreds – and sometimes thousands of years in the future. There are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Jesus. Jesus fulfilled them all. According to scientist Peter Stoner, the probability that Jesus could fulfill just eight of these prophecies is miraculous. The Scriptures prophecy that Jesus would be born of a woman (Gen. 3:15; Mt. 1:20; Gal. 4:4), descend from Abraham (Gen. 22:18; Mt. 1:1; Gal. 3:16), be born of a virgin (Is. 7:14; Mt. 1:18), be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:1-7), be rejected by His own people (Is. 53; John 1), be presented as a king riding on a donkey (Zech. 9:9; Luke 19:35-37), be betrayed by a friend (Ps. 41:9; Mt. 26:50), be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12; Mt. 26:15), have blood money thrown on temple floor and used to buy a potters field (Zech. 11:13; Mt. 27:5-7), be crucified⁷ (Ps. 22:16; Lk. 23:33), be crucified with thieves (Is. 53:12; Mt. 27:38), have lots cast for his clothing (Ps. 22:18; John 19:23), be buried in a rich man’s tomb (Is. 53:9; Mt. 27:57), be resurrected and exalted (Ps. 16:10; Is. 52:13; 53:10-12; Acts 2:25-32) and ascend into heaven (Ps. 68:18; Acts 1:8; Eph. 4:8). It is absurd to think that God would leave His people with no rule, norm, or guide for faith and life. The Psalms declare that God “will guide us forever” (48:14), and Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mk. 13:31).

The Scriptures show themselves to be a book of history promising historical events that come to pass exactly as promised. These promises show the divine inspiration of Scripture and show that God is active in human history bringing events to pass just as He ordains them. We can therefore trust the internal consistency of the Bible as being a faithful witness.

Archaeology and the Bible

Archaeological sites and artifacts have been found confirming the accuracy of the Scriptures. A few examples include Herod’s temple in Jerusalem (Lk. 1:9), the

⁶ Against Heresies, 3:1.1, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, p. 414.

⁷ This was prophesied prior to crucifixion being a mode of execution.

Derbe inscription in Kerti Huyuk, Asia Minor (Acts 14:20), the Erastus inscription in Corinth, Greece (Rom. 16:23), and the tomb of Augustus in Rome, Italy (Lk. 2:1). Many New Testament items have been discovered such as the Pool of Siloam and the Pontius Pilate Stone.⁸

Sir William Ramsay, a famous archaeologist and historian in the early 1900s, was highly skeptical of the book of Acts, which records the first 30 years of church history. He spent 14 years in Israel seeking to disprove Luke. Instead he wrote: “Luke is a historian of first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy.... this author should be placed along with the very greatest historians.”⁹

What about the Old Testament? Over the last 150 years, archaeologists have uncovered Hittite (they are a people described in the first 5 books of the Bible) ruins, artifacts, and ten thousand clay tablets from the royal archives. Now there is no doubt of the of the Hittite’s flourishing civilization.¹⁰

The Merneptah Stele inscription by an ancient Egyptian King, dating back to 1207 BC, was discovered in 1896. It verifies that a people called “Israel” really did exist and lived in the land of Canaan following the Exodus.¹¹

In 1993, an Israeli archaeologist discovered the Tel Dan Inscription which is a 9th century stone tablet which commemorates an Aramean King’s defeat of the King of Israel and the King of the House of David.¹²

Dr. Nelson Glueck, an American Rabbi and Archaeologist, discovered over 1500 ancient sites in Israel that are mentioned in the Bible.¹³

We believe the Bible contains historical documents that are inspired by God.

Manuscript Evidence and the Bible

Many people are willing to accept the authority of ancient writings such as Homer (ca. 850 BC), Plato (ca. 380 BC), and Aristotle (ca. 350 BC), but are unwilling to accept the writings of the New Testament (ca. 60 AD). We only have 643 copies

⁸ These are referenced in the *Concordia Self-Study Bible*

⁹ *Ramsay, the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*

¹⁰ *Lutzer, 7 Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible*

¹¹ *Wilson, the Best of Josh McDowell*

¹² *Biblical Archaeology, November 2016*

¹³ *Glueck, Rivers in the Desert*

of Homer's writings, and do not know when the earliest copy comes from. We have seven copies of Plato's writings and the earliest copy we have does not come until 1300 years after Plato's time. We have five copies of Aristotle's writings and the earliest copy does not come until 1400 years after his time. We have over 14,000 copies of the New Testament and have a scrap of papyrus containing parts of the gospel of John dating no more than 40 years after John's gospel was likely written. A non-Christian scholar, Carsten Peter Thiede, claims he has dated a fragment of Matthew to about 60 AD. Of the 14,000 manuscripts there are variants, but 97-99% of the New Testament can be reconstructed beyond any reasonable doubt. And if the New Testament is accurate, its testimony concerning the Old Testament must be accepted as well.

The Bible as One Story

The Bible was written during a 1500-year span, it contains 3 languages, and it is made up of 66 books which includes prose, poetry, romance, mystery, biography, and history. However, its internal unity is inexplicable. It forms one story with one Hero: Jesus Christ from Genesis to Revelation. For example: in Genesis, sin enters into the world. Through Christ, sin is atoned for. In the Old Testament, the sacrificial system was instituted. Through Christ, the sacrificial system is fulfilled: He is the final sacrifice. The place where sacrifice took place was the tabernacle or temple. In the New Testament, Christ claimed to be the temple and sacrificed Himself. Historically, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. This is within decades of Christ claiming to be the Temple. In Genesis, Satan is victorious. In Revelation, Satan is defeated. In Genesis, people run and hide from God. In Revelation, people are invited to live with God forever. In Genesis, tears are shed with sorrow for sin. In Revelation, there is no more sin, tears or sorrow. In Genesis, people are doomed to death. In Revelation, death is defeated, and believers live forever with God. The Bible is one story and is all about Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, for both the critical Christian and the skeptical non-Christian, the bibliographical, prophetic, and historical evidence are strong and hopefully will remove stumbling blocks in the way of accepting the Scriptures as God's Word. However, for both, it is not these arguments that are going to change hearts and minds, but it is the Holy Spirit working through the proclamation of the gospel.

How Can I Show Value to the Word in my Life?

- Buy a Study Bible to help (*The Lutheran Study Bible and the Life Application Study Bible are great options*)
- Read the Bible.

- Begin with the Gospel of John.

How do I Read the Bible?

- Who is the author? Why are they writing?

Example from Galatians: Paul wrote to the Galatians because there was a group of false teachers called the Judaizers that were teaching that one must be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law to be saved. They were also saying that Paul was not a true apostle and he was making the message easier to gain converts.

- Read the grammar closely. The Bible means what the author intended.
- To understand Galatians 3, read Galatians 2 and Galatians 4. Know the context.
- To understand how a biblical author intended to use a term, first do a bible search on that term in the same letter at www.biblegateway.com. Second, do a search on that term in all of that author's writings.

Example from Galatians: What does Paul mean when he says we are *justified* by faith? Paul says: "We know that a person is not *justified* by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16). We should look at how Paul uses the term in the same letter. Paul later says: "Now it is evident that no one is justified *before God* by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11). Paul is saying that to be justified is to be "counted righteous" in relationship with God by faith.

Faith & Obedience Towards God

- When it comes to a biblical promise, we are called to have faith.

Example: "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29).

- When it comes to a biblical commandment we are called to obedience.

Example: "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

The Purpose of Scripture is to bring people into a saving relationship with Jesus as Lord and Savior. Jesus said: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify

about me” (John 5:39). If you miss Jesus, you are missing the point. Alongside of this central purpose, the Scriptures are also good for “teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Head: These questions help us understand Scripture

1. What stood out to you in this lesson?
2. What is Scripture?
3. What is the purpose of reading and hearing it?

Heart: These questions help us wrestle with our beliefs for our lives

4. How do you show value to the Word of God in your life?
5. Do you have a good study Bible?
6. Where does your mind go first for guidance in life?

Hands: These questions help us do something after hearing the Word

7. How will you receive communication from God moving forward?



TRANSFORMED BY WORSHIP

What is the Word of God?

The word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. -Luke 3:2

The word of God is communication from the Lord that was originally given to Old Testament prophets. In the New Testament, we see that the Gospel accounts open up by saying that the “word of God came to John.” Here, the Scriptures are declaring that God is communicating a message through the Prophet John the Baptist. John the Baptist would prepare the way for Jesus who God the Father would also speak through. The writer of Hebrews says: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Prior to Jesus' death, Jesus also promised the Apostles that they would be given the Spirit to guide them into all truth (John 16:13). They continued the ministry of proclaiming the Word of God.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. -Acts 4:31

As people heard the Word of God they turned from sin and trusted in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. As they heard the Word of God, they also possessed truth for their lives. The wisdom of God guided them with decisions, relationships, priorities, and their perspective. Today, there are many voices seeking to shape our worldview, outlook on life, and lifestyle. God desires that we are equipped with His truth to lead us in every aspect of our lives.

...and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.... -Eph. 6:17

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. -Hebrews 4:12

What is a Sermon?

And he said to them [The Apostles], "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." -Mark 16:15

It is not right that we [The Apostles] should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.... But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. -Acts 6:2, 4

Let the elders [Scripture calls the pastor an elder] who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. -1 Timothy 5:17

...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. -2 Timothy 4:2

Therefore, an overseer [overseer is used interchangeably with elder] must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach....-1 Timothy 3:2

The sermon is the proclamation of the Word of God from the Scriptures.

The Apostles preached the Word of God. After preaching it, they also wrote down the Word of God in the New Testament. The sermon is normed and guided by a biblical text and is the “ministry of the Word” and the “labor of preaching and teaching.” Therefore, it is authoritative public discourse in the Name of Jesus Christ where a preacher preaches repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It is ordained by God to be a Spirit-filled event that is prophetic, as a preacher teaches forth the Word of God that He has studied and meditated upon. The sermon is a prophetic message meant to edify the church.

What is the Pastoral Ministry?

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. -Hebrews 13:17

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you. -1 Thessalonians 5:12

So I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. -1 Peter 5:1-4

When you are connected to the church and worship weekly, you are also connected to your pastor whom God has ordained to be in your life. While some people today desire to be free from spiritual authority and guidance in their lives, followers of Jesus know that a pastor “keeps watch over their souls,” is “over you in the Lord,” and is their “shepherd.” There is spiritual protection when we value the cover of authority God has placed in our lives.

What is the Lord’s Supper?

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. -Matthew 26:26-28

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. -1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. - John 6:56

Communion is the body and blood of Jesus which was poured out for the forgiveness of sins. When we partake of communion with faith in Jesus as our Lord, we experience and are assured of the forgiveness of our sins. We often go through life not feeling good enough. We also get confused regarding how God feels about us. Communion is a gift from Jesus where He wants us to be assured of His love.

When we commune, we share in the body and blood of Christ as a community in Christ. Therefore, we are expressing our unity with Christ and one another as the people of God. The church is called a family, and communion is our family meal where we get to have fellowship with Jesus and one another regardless of age, race, gender, citizenship, or socioeconomic status. We get to come together and walk in Jesus' light without fear, shame, or guilt. John says: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." -1 John 1:7

In communion, we are also experiencing a foretaste of the heavenly feast to come. Heaven is described this way: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). Communion is our earthly meal that gives a foretaste of our heavenly meal where we will see Jesus face to face!

Ekklesia is the Greek word for church and is defined as an "assembly or congregation called by God." Therefore, when we gather as the church on the Lord's Day (Sunday is day of the Resurrection), we are assembled primarily to hear the proclamation of the Word of God and to partake of communion. These are gifts from Jesus to treasure. The writer of Hebrews says: "Do not give up meeting together" (10:25). Our singing, prayers, offerings, and confession of sin is all in response to the kindness that He has showed to us through His Son Jesus Christ!

Why Do We Sing?

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. -Matthew 22:37

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. -Colossians 3:16

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. -Acts 16:25

Worshipping the Lord with song is our expression of adoration with all our heart, soul, and mind. It is a response to what God has already given to us through Jesus. It is from our hearts. Psalm 96 gives one of the greatest expressions of what singing to God is all about:

Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!
For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. -Psalm 96:1-6

Head: These questions help us understand Scripture

1. What does the Bible say that the worship service is for?
2. What is the significance of a biblical sermon?
3. What is the reason for cherishing communion?

Heart: These questions help us wrestle with our beliefs for our lives

4. What are the differences between worshipping online vs. in-person?
5. What do you believe you receive when you attend worship?
6. How is it an encouragement to other believers when you attend?

Hands: These questions help us do something after hearing the Word

7. Will you make participating in weekly worship a priority unless you are providentially hindered (illness, vacation, etc.)?
8. Who is someone you can invite to worship?

SPIRITUAL *Gifts*



TRANSFORMED BY SERVING

What Makes True Greatness?

What makes true greatness? Are we considered great by how much we have, or by what we do with what we have? Are we considered great by “getting” or by “giving” of ourselves in God’s kingdom? Jesus said: “What good is it if a man gains the whole world, but forfeits his own soul” (Matthew 16:26)? What good is it if we have all the money, power, and prestige, but we failed to make an eternal difference in people’s lives? This life is a temporary assignment. We are here for a short time. The Bible compares our lives to a “mist” (James 4:12) and says we are like “grasshoppers” (Isaiah 40:22) while we are here on this earth. Conversely, the New Heavens and the New Earth is where we will spend most of our existence. Therefore, what eternal difference do we want to make? How many people do we want to be there with us? I’m guessing that, if you are a follower of Jesus, you want as many people to be there as possible! So, then, what makes us great during this time we are here on this earth?

John chapters 13-17 record some of Jesus' last words on Holy Thursday, the night prior to his crucifixion. Jesus' "hour" had come. That is, the "hour" for him to be crucified! How does Jesus want to be remembered? Jesus "laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him" (John 13:4-5). Jesus did what!? The task of washing other people's smelly feet was the task of a menial servant that was hired by the household! Jesus "was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:6-7). Jesus was God and the greatest man that ever lived. He left us an example that gives our lives vision, healing, and power. He gives us a vision that, if grasped, can make a huge difference in our families, in our church, and in our community. That vision is: True greatness is found in serving others.

Jesus' ministry was like that. Instead of riding to Jerusalem on horses and chariots like a king, he rode "humble on a donkey" (as foretold by the prophet Zechariah 9:9, written in 480 B.C.). Instead of retaliating at those who were mocking him while being crucified, he said: "Father forgive them for they do not know what they do." Instead of living a "blessed" life as defined by the world, he accepted the death of a criminal in order to bring humanity to a restored relationship to the Father.

Memorize these words of Jesus: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be servant of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45).

Repent of Self-Centeredness

A friend of mine described his experience of being delivered from alcoholism. He said that he was having trouble admitting that he was an alcoholic. After all, who would want to admit to that? However, he said Jesus spoke these words to Him: "I will take your alcoholism from you. But, I cannot take from you what you will not own."

The first thing we all must do is own our self-centeredness. Of course, life would be easier if we could just all spend most of our time on our favorite hobbies, or reading our favorite books, or making life primarily about leisure. Who would not want that? However, we see in the Scriptures that God has chosen us for a higher purpose.

The Apostle John writes: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9). First, we must own our sin and give it God in confession. Second, we receive his forgiveness. Third, we respond to His forgiveness with obedience to His Word. His Word to us is this: “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you” (John 13:13-14).

Why would we want to give up sitting in our chairs next to our families (or friends) and serve on a Sunday team? Why would we want to give up a weeknight and serve food at a homeless shelter? Why would we _____? There are so many ways to the serve the Lord! The answer: “By serving you, I am serving my Lord Jesus Christ.” By welcoming people into the worship center, by video recording a worship service, by serving in children’s church, by serving at a homeless shelter, etc. I am serving the cause of Jesus Christ!

Discover Your Gifts

Sometimes we serve where there is a need. Most of the time, we serve in the way that we are gifted by God. The Apostle Paul writes: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). On a basketball team, there is a point guard, shooting guard, small forward, power forward and center. Can the point guard play center? He could. But, it may be rough. Can a center play shooting guard? Most centers have historically had poor free throw percentages! I would not be great at serving on the altar guild. However, I think I could do better at serving as a greeter!

We are uniquely wired by God to make an impact!

- The gift of **service** means you have a strong desire to serve and could plug into multiple serving teams (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28).
- The gift of **teaching or knowledge** means you could teach a life group, bible study, children’s church, or be a reader (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28).
- The gift of **leadership** means you could lead a Sunday team such as the greeters (Rom. 12:8).
- The gift of **acts of mercy** means you could visit the sick in hospitals or their homes. It means you can be a Stephen’s Minister and give a listening ear to those who are grieving or suffering (Romans 12:8).

- The gift of **wisdom** means you could give free counseling to those who are struggling (1 Cor. 12:8).
- The gift of **administration/governance** means you could serve on the School Ministry Team and assist our principal or serve on the Board of Administrative Services as Treasurer or Secretary (1 Cor. 12:28).
- The gift of **evangelism** means you could assist with the Love Your Neighbor Class and mobilize local missions (or just do local missions yourself) or you could participate in foreign missions such as Haiti, India, or Israel.

Get Plugged In

All Sunday teams are listed here:

- Welcome Ministry
- Ushers
- Altar Guild
- Screens
- Communion Assistant
- Reader
- Service Assistant
- Cameras
- Switch between Cameras on the Switcher
- Praise Band
- Safety Team
- Coffee Team
- Children's Church
- Live Stream Host

Administration/Governance

- Elders
- School Ministry Team
- Board of Administrative Services

St. John's Ministries

- Stephen's Ministry
- Counseling
- Homebound Ministry Team
- Hospital Visitation Team

- Seniors Ministry

Serve Your City

- Christ's Body Ministries
- Sarah's Home
- Alternatives Pregnancy Center
- International Students Inc.

Head: These questions help us understand Scripture

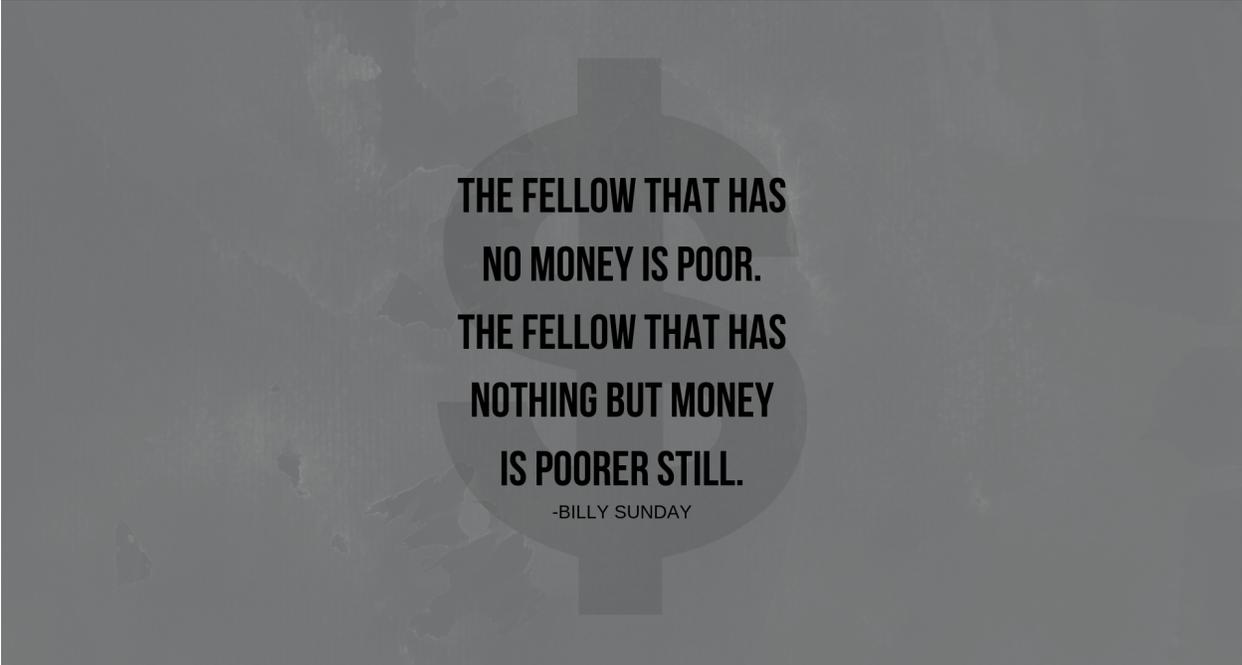
1. What would happen if we all used the gifts God gave to us? What would happen if we didn't?

Heart: These questions help us wrestle with our beliefs for our lives

2. Under the section: "Get Plugged In," what Sunday team are you most drawn to?
3. What other ministries are you most drawn to?

Hands: These questions help us do something after hearing the Word

4. What ministry do you want to participate in? (Please let your life group leader know)
5. What is your biggest takeaway from this study?



THE FELLOW THAT HAS
NO MONEY IS POOR.
THE FELLOW THAT HAS
NOTHING BUT MONEY
IS POORER STILL.

-BILLY SUNDAY

TRANSFORMED BY GIVING

Paradigm Shift

A steward is someone who has been entrusted with something. In the Gospel accounts, Jesus talks about money around 25% of his ministry. God desires that we trust Him with our finances. It comes up 15 times in Matthew and 11 times in Luke. Money is something that we can either see as God's or see as ours. The Apostle James says: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). John the Baptist said: "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (John 3:27). The Apostle Paul says: "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it" (1 Cor. 4:7)? These Scripture passages teach that it is God who gives us all things including our money. Consequently, we are not to boast or take pride in the amount of money that we have. Rather, we are to see it is a gift from God and use it for His glory. **God is the Owner of all of our life and possessions including our money.** It is this worldview shift that needs to happen for us to move from a selfish perspective to a godly perspective on money.

Worship God

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also....No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. - Matthew 6:19-21, 24

Life on Earth is a Temporary Assignment

Jesus talks about storing up for one's self treasures in heaven and not treasures on earth. Some believe that life is about accumulating as much as one can before they die. Jesus is teaching that this perspective is shortsighted. You will not take any of your possessions with you to the next state of existence. As Christians we believe that Jesus gives us eternal life. This life on earth is only temporary. When we live in the light of eternity, we shift from seeing life as not about *getting* but about *giving*. We are only here for a short time and there is nothing here for our own "profit" or "gain." When we store up for ourselves treasures in heaven by being good stewards of everything God has entrusted to us, then we live for His glory and not ours. If our hearts are with our possessions, we are worshiping our possessions and not God.

Money is not a good god

Jesus says in Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Jesus says that we cannot have it both ways. You cannot have two masters. If you worship money, you are worshiping something that is not all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving. Only God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving. Only God can give you life, joy, and hope.

1 Timothy 6:17-18 says: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. "

Here we see that the Apostle Paul teaches on the uncertainty of riches. It can be lost fast! It comes and goes. The stock market rises and falls. If we put our hope

in riches, we will be disappointed! Conversely, Paul says to put our hope in God who provides everything for us. Once we worship God and not money, we will then be able to give generously.

Contentment

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. -1 Timothy 6:6-10

1 Timothy 6:10 is a famous verse quoted in many contexts: “The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” Some who desire to get rich will sin in order to get rich. They will lie, cheat, or steal, in order to accumulate wealth for themselves. They will oppress others and treat others unfairly so that they will gain. Paul says: “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that” (1 Tim. 6:7-8). We will not take our money with us into eternity. Consequently, God calls on us to be content with whatever He provides us with. If we have food and clothing and a place to live, God calls on us to be content.

Giving

Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. -Malachi 3:8-10

- A “tithe” is 10% of one’s income.
- The “storehouse” is the treasury where funds were stored to support the ministry.
- The church is the only divinely instituted ministry on this earth.
- This is the only place in Scripture where we are told to put God to the test.
- God will supply more so that you can give more. This is also taught in 2 Corinthians 9.

- There is blessing, thanksgiving, and glorification of God as we give together as the body of Christ!

Four Biblical Teachings on Finances

- Produce (Genesis 2:15; Proverbs 12:11)
- Save (Proverbs 6:6-8; Proverbs 22:7)
- Invest (Matthew 25:14-18)
- Give (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

Conclusion

God has given us so much in Jesus Christ. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He has richly provided for our salvation and promises to provide for us financially. He simply asks for faith. By faith we receive the grace of God. And by faith we give back for His glory.

- Automatic monthly offerings to your church's general offering gives the church's ministry the greatest sustainability.

Head: These questions help us understand Scripture

1. Why is worshipping God the gateway to giving towards His cause?
2. Why is contentment such an important biblical truth?

Heart: These questions help us wrestle with our beliefs for our lives

3. How do you feel when you hear teaching in Church on money? Why?
4. Do you believe God will provide for you even if you give a tithe to the church?

Hands: These questions help us do something after hearing the Word

5. What changes do you intend to pursue as a result of this biblical teaching?



TRANSFORMED BY PRAYER

What should our approach be to God?

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

What is Prayer?

- Prayer is how you communicate with God.
- You have a relationship with a God who loves you.
- Jesus calls us His friends in the Gospel of Luke and taught us to call God our “Father.”
- Jesus said: “Father, hallowed be your name.... how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those [His friends] who ask him” (Luke 11:2, 13). Robby Gallaty writes: “With two words, father and friend, Jesus taught us that prayer is personal, relational, and intimate. He begins and ends Luke 11:1-13 with the word Father.”¹⁴

¹⁴ *Growing Up, by Robby Gallaty*

J.D. Grear writes in his book, *The Gospel*, his famous Gospel Prayer: “There is nothing I have done that could make you love me less, and nothing I could do that would make you love me more.” This is a great way to begin your prayer time as it focuses on the Good News of God’s Grace!

Prayer is not something you have to do. Prayer is something you get to do.
Prayer is not a burden-giving duty. Prayer is a burden-lifting delight
God does not need your prayers. You need your prayers.
Prayer is not telling God something new. Prayer is inviting God in to help.
Prayer is less about us moving God’s hand. Prayer is more about God moving our heart.¹⁵

Where should we pray?

- Pray privately your prayer log (Matt. 6:6). Have a prayer time. Some do it in the mornings. Some during lunch. Some in the evenings.
- Pray out loud with your spouse, your children, and with your LIFEGroup.

When should we pray?

- Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). Start your day with prayer. Know that God is always available throughout your day as you request strength, wisdom, salvation for others, etc. Dial His number in the morning and know that He is waiting, watching, and listening anytime you want to talk.
- Pray, pray, pray. No one learns how to pray without doing it.

What Does God Give to Us in Prayer?

...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. -Philippians 4:6-7

Categories of Prayers for your Prayer Time

Prayers of Thanksgiving/Adoration Example

Example: We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing (2 Thess. 1:3).

¹⁵ Extracted from *Pray Like Jesus*, by Mark Driscoll

- Give thanks for not only material things but spiritual things
- Give thanks for what Jesus has done for you
- Adore God for who He is and where He is taking you

Prayers of Intercession Example

- A prayer of intercession is a prayer for others. Paul prayed for others 42 times in just 13 letters.

Example: Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints (1 Thess. 3:11-13).

- Pray for your spouse
- Pray for your children's salvation and growth in the Lord
- Pray for God to provide a godly spouse for your child
- Pray for your church's mission
- Pray for your church's leadership
- Pray for specific people you are hoping will know Jesus as their Savior
- Pray for people in your LIFEGroup

Prayers for Spiritual growth Example

Example: "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:9-12).

- Pray about what is troubling you
- Pray for growth in the fruits of the Spirit
- Pray for courage to share Jesus with others

Head: These questions help us understand Scripture

1. What stood out to you about this lesson?

2. What does prayer do for you?

Heart: These questions help us wrestle with our beliefs for our lives

3. What does your prayer life look like right now?
4. What do you value about your prayer time?
5. What kinds of things do you pray for in comparison to Paul?

Hands: These questions help us do something after hearing the Word

6. How can prayer be a bigger part of your daily life (and your family's life if you live with them)?
7. How can every aspect of your life be brought under prayer?