



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for October 23, 2022
"Making a Difference: Based in Scripture"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Psalm 119:105-112

Based in Scripture

Almost every week I will have reason to head down to the basement of the church. When I do, I'm quick to notice the various notes that are on the whiteboards down there. They almost always have to do with the Bible. There is no doubt that those who are studying the Bible, whether on Sunday mornings or during the week, are digging in.

I am proud and thankful for the work you are doing. Your time with scripture is time well-spent. I know you feel the same. It is good to make a regular practice of studying scripture. It is one essential way of *"staying in love with God."*

We said the same thing last Wednesday night during the men's small group I lead. We asked ourselves, *"What are some of the things we can do that help us stay in love with God."* Bible study was one of those at the top of the list. We'd all do well to stay at it when it comes to reading the Bible.

The Psalmist all but says the same in Psalm 119. You might know Psalm 119 as the longest of the one hundred fifty Psalms. It is also the longest chapter in the Bible. Psalm 119 is effectively a devotional that lifts high the word of God. In Psalm 119, we are encouraged not only to devote ourselves to the word, but, more importantly, to the God of that word.

As we close out our sermon series on the vision and values of the church, we end things with a last word about scripture. As I have said often *"last words are oftentimes the most important."* Regardless, I intentionally chose the Core Value of being *"Biblically-based"* to wrap up the series.

I did that to emphasize just how important being based in scripture really is. That's certainly the case whether it involves our lives individually or the life of the church corporately. Today we read Psalm 119:105-112. It is a good word about how the God's word is a guide for our lives. Let's hear then Psalm 119:105-112.

Psalm 119:105-112

*Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path.
I have taken an oath and confirmed it,
that I will follow your righteous laws.*

*I have suffered much;
preserve my life, LORD, according to your word.
Accept, LORD, the willing praise of my mouth,
and teach me your laws.
Though I constantly take my life in my hands,
I will not forget your law.
The wicked have set a snare for me,
but I have not strayed from your precepts.
Your statutes are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.
My heart is set on keeping your decrees
to the very end.*

“May God bless the reading of his Holy Word, and may we now take our lives and apply them to it.”

Applying Our Lives to God’s Word

I have been using that response to the reading of God’s word for quite some time. It seems to sum up what we attempt to do during a sermon. Early on I used to say, *“May God bless the reading of his holy word, and may we now take it and apply it to our lives.”*

I was checked by a dear friend about that after worship one Sunday. She said, *“What we really should be doing is taking our lives and applying them to the word, not the other way around.”*

I saw her point. Some might view that as nothing more than a splitting of hairs. It is a right thing to present ourselves before God’s word, let it speak into our lives, and let it do with us what God desires. In a word, we’d do well to let God’s word transform us.

To explain that a bit more, we are getting new neighbors in our little circle of homes off North Buckeye Lane. This past week they poured the footer for their new home. The first step for the foundation people was to build the forms where the concrete would go. The day the concrete was poured it flowed within the bounds of those forms.

Lives that seek to flow within the bounds of scripture always benefit.

The Authority of Scripture

I believe this about scripture. It is authoritative for life. It has certainly made a difference in my life. At an early age, through scripture I learned about God and his dealings with his people. Through scripture, I learned about the good news about Jesus through scripture. As I got older, through scripture I found God speaking. Sometimes, the words of scripture just seemed to leap off the page. I learned a long time ago to keep reading until you hear God speak.

It has been my honor to open the word each week and expound upon it through preaching. I have been thankful for every opportunity to study the Bible in small groups.

I can't begin to tell you about the effect that regular Bible study has had upon my life personally. Preaching has afforded me the opportunity to really dig in. The more I know learn, the more I realize I have only begun to scratch the surface. Seminary taught me a lot about scripture, but it wasn't until I regularly began to teach *Disciple Bible Study* that the whole of scripture came into clear view. I look back with fondness leading *Disciple Bible Study* right here on Tuesdays.

Years later, at another church I helped lead an early Saturday morning men's Bible study that convened at the gosh-awful hour of 6:30 in the morning. I teamed up with an engineering professor from the University of Louisville who literally studied every word we read. I was alongside to share how what we read applied to life. We made a good team.

Personally, the Bible has been a constant companion all through, for which I am thankful. One of my earliest memories is being in Sunday school and hearing about the life of Jesus. I have been formed by scripture, inspired by scripture, and challenged by scripture.

Regarding the church, I have come to realize that scripture is a necessary foundation. Scripture gives definition to what we do. If scripture is not front and center in defining who we are and what we are to be about, then sooner or later we will find ourselves just making it up as we go along. Many these days are guilty of doing just that.

Paul writes to his young protégé, Timothy, about such things. In II Timothy 3:16 we find, "*All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so the one who professes faith in God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" (II Timothy 3:16) That sort of thing applies not only to each of us as individuals, but to the church as well.

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way. "*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even dividing soul and spirit; joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*" (Hebrews 4:12)

The word of God has a way of getting to the heart of things, whether it involves an individual or the church. We live under the authority of scripture.

- Scripture is not to be put aside when deemed inconvenient.
- It shouldn't be left on the shelf when we'd much rather go our own way.
- And it shouldn't be the last app selected when so many other things seem more appealing.

The authority of scripture stands as a guard and guide for life.

A Guard

From our scripture today we read, "*The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts.*" (Psalm 119:110)

The Psalmist is keenly aware of the temptation to do other than what God desires. We are bombarded by such temptations. It's just the way it is living in an increasingly secular society.

God's word provides a sure anchor that will keep us from going too far afield. It points the way and keeps us on the straight and narrow. God's word provides the necessary strength to meet whatever challenges come our way. The word of God has a way of speaking into our lives the exact things we need to hear.

My wife, Cheryl is famous for writing down scriptures that have spoken to her and putting them on note cards or post-its. She reads them all the time. Those cards and post-its are all over the house, and I read them all the time.

Jesus shares at the end of his Sermon on the Mount about a man who built his house on the sand. The house stood, that is, until the wind and rains came. Another man wisely chose to build his house on the rock so that when the wind and rains came, it stood strong. Jesus says, *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on the rock."* (Matthew 7:24)

God's word has a powerful way of guarding our lives.

A Guide

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path," says the Psalmist in Psalm 119:105. In what is an increasingly dark world, it is good to have the light of God's word guiding us. In this beloved verse the Psalmist affirms the critical place God's word has in our lives and the life of the church. Without the word we'll simply find ourselves groping in the dark.

The image of *"a lamp for my feet"* would be quickly understood by those during the day in which it was written. It was not uncommon during that day to literally strap a light onto one's foot so that the next step was illuminated. It's good to know that scripture stands to guide our every step.

"A light on my path" references a lantern that offered light a bit further than just the next step. Scripture has a way of setting the direction of our lives. It not only informs our lives but has a way of molding us into the sort of people God wants us to be. We can all be thankful that the light God provides through scripture never goes out and cannot be extinguished.

As Methodists

As Methodists, we borrow a lot from our founder, John Wesley. He talks a lot about the importance of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience when it comes to living as God wants us to live. The four were termed the Wesleyan Quadrilateral some years ago by late Methodist theologian, Albert Outler.

While I affirm the last three as being important, it is scripture that stands far and away as the most important.

I have often likened the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to Secretariat's run in the 1973 Belmont Stakes. You may recall that Secretariat won the race going away. It was one of the most thrilling horse races I ever witnessed. Scripture is the Secretariat of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. It stands first going away.

As Methodist, we also borrow from John Wesley when he says, *"In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."*

The rub comes, particularly these days, in deciding what are the essentials and determines what they are. For me, that's where scripture becomes so important. I am content to live with the whole of scripture, even as challenging as that can be sometimes.

Reflecting on the Bible

I am glad that this Bible has not been gathering dust on the shelf. I am thankful that over time it has become tattered and torn. I praise God that he has spoken to me through these pages. I look forward with excitement to what he will say well into the future. I am thankful for God's word--for me as an individual and for the life of this church.

So, keep marking up your whiteboards. Keep studying in your small groups. Keep reading in your times of private devotion. God's every desire is to speak to you through his word.