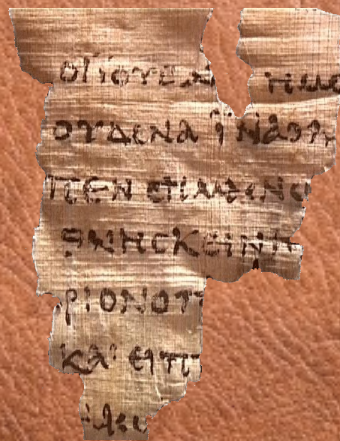


BIBLICAL RELIABILITY



The Bible-written by God to reveal Himself



COUNTRY CHRISTIAN GROWTH GUIDE
5—WEEK SERMON SERIES
February 9 – March 8, 2020



February 9— March 8, 2020

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“Certainty about the great issues of Christian faith and conduct is lacking all along the line. The outside observer sees us as staggering on from gimmick to gimmick and stunt to stunt like so many drunks in a fog, not knowing at all where we are or which way we should be going. Preaching is hazy; heads are muddled; hearts fret; doubts drain our strength; uncertainty paralyses action...Unlike the first Christians who in three centuries won the Roman world, and those later Christians who pioneered the Reformation, and the Puritan awakening, and the Evangelical revival, and the pressures of modern secularism, but this is like Eve blaming the serpent. The real truth is that we have grieved the Spirit...We stand under divine judgement. For two generations our churches have suffered from a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.” J.I. Packer

RESOURCES FOR THIS GROWTH GUIDE

We want to encourage you through this series to open your heart and mind to how different emotions are impacting your life. Here is a list of resources that we would encourage you to look into as you did into Gods plan for your emotions throughout this guide:

BOOKS:

Canon Revisited by Michael J. Kruger

How the Bible Came to Us by Meryl Doney

The Bible-How do we know it can be trusted by Answers in Genesis

deBunked by Reason for Hope, rforh.com

Alpha and Omega Ministries, Dr James White, aomin.org

The New Answers Book 2 by Ken Ham

Neil Shenvi Apologetics, Neil Shenvi, shenviapologetics.com

Cover Photo:

Rylands Library Papyrus P53 also known as St John's fragment is a fragment from a papyrus codex the size of a credit card. This fragment contains parts of seven lines from the Gospel of John 18:31-33, and the on the back verses 37-38. This was found in an Egyptian market in 1920 by Bernard Grenfell and given a date range of first or second century.

Ramifications of Reliability

BIG IDEA: The Bible is the revealed word of God, self authenticating, inherent, infallible, absolute, the Truth and therefore demands to be acted on.

WEEK 1 | FEBRUARY 9, 2020

Hebrews 12:1-2

Everyone has a set of beliefs or a system used to function and make sense of the world in which we live. That system or belief rests on or appeals to an authority that is outside of oneself. What that means is no one is neutral, everyone has a bias or makes a claim about what they believe and why they believe it, a presupposition, a foundation an authority.

Christianity appeals to, rests on, makes it's authority claim in the Bible, the revealed truth of God. This is the method God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity making Holy Writ the only authoritative, absolute, take it to the bank reliable record of who we are, why we're here, what we face, and what the future holds. God inspired every word of the original manuscripts, without error, completely reliable and trustworthy because He is the author. God used the pens and personalities of roughly 40 men, over 1500 years, in three languages, all sharing a singular message of Himself.

This serves as humanities moral, ethical, and spiritual standard whereby we can know what is right/wrong, good/bad, true/false. However, this is what humanity works so hard to avoid, the very notion that there is an ultimate standard for all people, at all times, in all places, is anathema to many. So it shouldn't surprise those who hold to the Bible's claims of authority that this Word would come under attack. The first attack was, according to God's Word, the questioning of authority, "did God say...?"

The attacks still come and will continue until Christ returns we which is also no surprise but those in Christ can have the confidence to say with Christ, "Your Word is truth."

PRAYER

Begin this study with the plea of asking God to give you the fear of Him as the starting point to know Him. Ask for the faith and strength to face the ramifications of His word because His word is true.

Pray for the understanding that His grace is enough in any and all circumstances this life will bring and to understand when you are weak His power is shown the strongest.

Pray for the strength to walk by the Spirit and when convicted, to do the next right thing in your life He is asking you to do.

READING PLAN

This week use the following steps to dig into the truth of God's word:

Reading:

Begin with reading through the passage a few times and really seek to understand the individual words, phrases, and thoughts that make up the passage. Take time to journal any specific that stands out to you. Don't try to add your own meaning, but read the text as it comes off of the page. The goal is not to see the words with your eyes, but to feel them in your heart, mind, and soul.

Meditation:

This step has everything to do with thinking of specific chunks of the passage in front of you. Think about phrases and specific words that stood out to you. Focus intently on why the Holy Spirit might have chosen these words to speak to you today. Reflect on how it might apply to your life. Is it relevant to something that you are going through? Does it bring to mind a struggle you have been dealing with? Journal some thoughts that followed your meditation time.

Prayer:

Our next step is to take all of the words, thoughts, feelings, actions, fears, and convictions that we've just experienced and offer them to the Lord in prayer. Ask him to illuminate what he would have you do with them. Simply talk to God and tell him how you are feeling. Confess any anxieties, praise him for who he is, ask him for what you need. Take time to record your prayers in a prayer journal.

Contemplation:

Be silent in the presence of the Lord. Relax, embrace, and just be with the Lord. Don't rush this. Quiet your mind and soul sitting patiently with Him. Take time after contemplation to write down your experience with God in silence.

SCRIPTURE

Monday: - Genesis 1:1-2; Proverbs 1:7; Hebrews 6:13

Tuesday: - Psalm 119:160; Proverbs 30:5; John 17:17; Hebrews 11:6

Wednesday: - Hebrews 12:1-4, Philippians 3:13-21, 1 Peter 2:1-12

Thursday: - Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalm 19

Friday: - Psalm 135:6; Daniel 4:35; Acts 17:25-28; Ephesians 1:11

Saturday: - Catch up, Reflect and Pray.

NOTES

SMALL GROUP GROWTH GUIDE

WEEK 1 FEBRUARY 16, 2020

BIG IDEA: The Bible is the revealed word of God, self authenticating, inherent, infallible, absolute, the Truth and therefore demands to be acted on..

BELONG

1. You're life has a joyous rhythm about it. You're minding your own business, doing what you do when from seemingly out of nowhere that rhythm is broken by forces outside of you. Describe a ramification of one of those times in your life.
2. Now describe why we are put off by, bristle against, or are just down right hacked off by certain ramifications or consequences. What do you think is really behind those feelings if anything?

GROW

The word "ramify" means to divide into branches or parts. We might see it as "if this" is true, "then that" response. Let's take a look at some Biblical branches of thoughts or statements and what the ramifications or consequences should be or are. We'll repeat the same question for each. "What is the thought, or statement and what is the ramification?"

1. Genesis 1:27-31. What is the thought or statement and what is the ramification?
2. Genesis 2:15-17. What happened in Genesis 3?
3. Genesis 17:1-11. Side note: Look at vs 9-10. What is the verb tense God is using? How many nations was Abraham the father of at that time? What are the ramifications of faith?
4. Mark 8:34-38.
5. John 14:6.
6. 1 John 1:5-10.
7. Hebrews 12:1 "...let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely..."
8. Those are just a small sample that if the Bible being the reliable Word of God places certain demands on our lives. How does the writer of Hebrews describe how we are to apply the ramifications we find in Scripture?
9. Go back and look at 1 John 1. Explain the tension that John is describing in verse 6 and 7. How can we live in liberty, joy and love we see in verse 7?

REACH

Keeping the word of God in obedience cannot be done, thought of or separated from God's grace. It cannot be done in our own power and if our sin so easily entangles then God's grace is the conditioner that is always there to straighten us. Dale gave a number of principles to help us deal with the ramifications of sin and be obedient. Review them and share how you already apply them or need to apply them.

1. Don't underestimate the weight of your sin.
2. Will and promise God not to sin.
3. Be suspicious of your own spirituality—pride.
4. Resist sin and first notice.
5. Meditate, be in His Word.
6. Recognize sin immediately and repent.
7. Pray always for divine help.
8. Belong in relationship with other believers.

The God Who Speaks

BIG IDEA: God is the only source of knowledge about Himself and He has decided to reveal Himself in the Bible and no other book.

WEEK 2 | FEBRUARY 16, 2020

1 JOHN 1:1-4; HEBREWS 1:1-2

Here at Country Christian, we make much about the word of God, which creates in us some very strong convictions about it. One of our five foundations as a church is the absolute authority of God's word. We therefore should be able to support those convictions, as Peter said to be able to give an answer to those who ask about the hope in us. Well the source of that hope comes from the spoken word of God, the Bible.

But is that source reliable? That's the focus of this series. We should know why we believe the Bible. How it came to us. That the evidence we have supports its validity, and we ought to know it well enough to share it with those we live, work and play. That's the confidence and conviction we should have, in fact if you read 1 Peter 3:15, Peter makes a statement at the beginning that gets passed over and missed much of the time, which is in part where the confidence comes from.

God has spoken with clarity about Himself so that He can be known. He has not mumbled, misspoken, or manipulated in any fashion but is the only source and knowledge about Himself, that source being the Bible. Apart from His revelation there is nothing humanity can learn about God from our own reasoning, not philosophy, or our own "spiritual" experiences because God is outside of us. Only God knows Himself deciding to reveal Himself, deciding how to reveal Himself by the method, means and timing He ordained to do it in. The Bible is His only authorized autobiography.

Unfortunately, not every Christian believes this, and because we do we end up standing apart from others who call themselves Christian. Many deny the Bible's authority, its inerrancy, its inspiration, saying its written by a handful of old men, no longer relevant. The result are churches that have no conviction, they are insecure, lacking in power, having no fortitude, and take a direction of lesser social or political causes.

God has spoken are you listening?

PRAYER

Begin by asking God to give you the confidence in His word. The passion for His word allowing it to build you up, strengthen and encourage you in the faith.

Pray that God would make Himself known through His word. Ask for the boldness and the words to speak giving an answer to everyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within us, with humility and gentleness.

READING PLAN

This week use the following steps to dig into the truth of God's word:

Reading:

Begin with reading through the passage a few times and really seek to understand the individual words, phrases, and thoughts that make up the passage. Take time to journal any specific that stands out to you. Don't try to add your own meaning, but read the text as it comes off of the page. The goal is not to see the words with your eyes, but to feel them in your heart, mind, and soul.

Meditation:

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Our next step is to take all of the words, thoughts, feelings, actions, fears, and convictions that we've just experienced and offer them to the Lord in prayer. Ask him to illuminate what he would have you do with them. Simply talk to God and tell him how you are feeling. Confess any anxieties, praise him for who he is, ask him for what you need. Take time to record your prayers in a prayer journal.

Contemplation:

Be silent in the presence of the Lord. Relax, embrace, and just be with the Lord. Don't rush this. Quiet your mind and soul sitting patiently with Him. Take time after contemplation to write down your experience with God in silence.

SCRIPTURE

Monday: - 1 Corinthians 2:1-14, Hebrews 1:1-4

Tuesday: - Psalm 119:89; Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:25

Wednesday: - Isaiah 46

Thursday: - Genesis 18:1-33

Friday: - John 20:30; Exodus 17:14; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Jeremiah 36:1-6

Saturday: - Catch up, Reflect and Pray.

NOTES

SMALL GROUP GROWTH GUIDE

WEEK 2 FEBRUARY 16, 2020

BIG IDEA: God is the only source of knowledge about Himself and He has decided to reveal Himself in the Bible and no other book.

BELONG

1. Everyone has a foundation on which they stand when it comes to what they believe about life, a worldview.
Discuss what some of those are?
2. Discuss how many Christians come to the Bible to support an idea or read their preconceptions into a text.
Maybe you've heard the saying, "God said it, and that's the end of it", but is it? What does that say about how we approach the Bible? Our heart, attitude, motivations?

GROW

1. Although the Bible gives us instructions and principles for godly living, what is its primary purpose?
(John 20:31,21:24-25)
2. Explain the significance of God's name. (Exodus 3:14)
3. Explain the significance of "Word" in John 1:14.
4. What is the relationship of God the Creator to His creation? (Acts 17:24-27)
5. Christianity's foundation is solely on the claim that the Bible is the revealed truth about God. Why is establishing credibility and believability important? Do other worldviews come under the same scrutiny?
6. Many people today deny that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. They say for example that the Bible contains the Word of God and what they mean is only the parts of the Bible that speak to you, as you read, are the Word of God. How is this an aberrant view and what does it allow each person to do?
7. If God had not revealed Himself to us would it be possible to fully know Him? What have been the ramifications of humanity searching for a "higher power"? What does God call that and why will it never work?
8. Revelation is God's free, sovereign act of love to show Himself to mankind. What is one type? (Psalm 19:1)
9. Read Psalm 100:3, Acts 17:24. What does this say about all other theories of our existence?
10. Read Romans 1:19-20. Who put the knowledge of God in them? What does this mean about everyone you'll ever meet? How many 10 year old atheists do you know?
11. If the knowledge of God is so clear why do some not see the evidence of God in creation? (Romans 1:21-25). Why should we not make our starting point with "evidence"? Who becomes the judge and jury? And who do we put on trial?
12. What does God allow to happen? (Romans 1:26-28)
13. Where does the Bible say we should start? (Proverbs 1:7, 2:5, 8:13)
14. What is the other way God has revealed Himself? (Genesis 18:1-33, 32:22-30; Exodus 3:2-4:17) (These are called Theophanies, a visible appearance of God in some form, His special revelation.)
15. God's special revelation has been used in the following forms, casting lots, dreams, visions, speaking, face to face, miracles, and in these last days how has He revealed Himself? (Hebrews 1:1-3)

SMALL GROUP GROWTH GUIDE

WEEK 2 FEBRUARY 2, 2020

BIG IDEA: God is the only source of knowledge about Himself and He has decided to reveal Himself in the Bible and no other book.

GROW Cont.

16. What are some reasons God would want His Word written down? What does that allow for? (A. Matthew 5:18, Exodus 17:14. B. 1 Corinthians 10:11 Who is living in the last days? C. Jeremiah 36:1-6 Why did God want His truth separate from prophet and writer? D. Nehemiah 8:1-8 What happened to the people? Where was Moses? What does this say to the power of God's Word? E. Luke 16:29 What emphasis does Jesus give to the written Word? What is the expectation God has or what does this make everyone responsible to the Word for?
17. How does our understanding of these help us avoid false teachers, cults, charlatans and hucksters of our day?

REACH

Read the following quote from J.I. Packer;

“Certainty about the great issues of the Christian faith and conduct is lacking all along the line. The outside observer sees us as staggering on from gimmick to gimmick and stunt to stunt like so many drunks in a fog, not knowing at all where we are or which way we should be going. Preaching is hazy, heads are muddled, hearts fret, doubts drain strength, uncertainty paralyzes action.”


Unlike the first Christians, who in three centuries won the Roman world and those later Christians who pioneered the reformation and the puritan awakening, and the evangelical revival and the great missionary movement of the last century, we lack certainty. Why is this? We blame the external pressures of modern secularism; but, that's like Eve blaming the serpent. The real truth is that we have grieved the Holy Spirit. We stand under divine judgment. For two generations our churches have suffered from a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.”

Let's ask some hard questions. 1 Peter 2:2 connects the Word of God directly in proportion to spiritual growth. Therefore, a believer's spiritual maturity is linked to the commitment to study and know the Bible, and it should be understood this works in both directions. So your growth or lack of it is dependent on spending time with God's word open and in your mind.

1. How would you describe your spiritual health? Weak and anemic, strong and virile, a babe, teen, or adult?
2. Are you able to overcome temptation constantly?
3. What is your commitment to the study of God's Word?

Challenge: No matter where you are in the process God's grace is sufficient to get you where He wants you to be, mature. Take time to memorize 1 Peter 2:2 and begin practicing it's truth today.

BIG IDEA: The Bible is the product of God breathing out His words so what He wanted wrote down actually was.



Inspiration



WEEK 3 | February 23, 2020

2 Timothy 3:16

Let's talk about what we mean by *Inspiration*. We hear it referred to in a such a way as, "I was so inspired by that song." Or, when one sees a sunset or sunrise, in a piece of art and so on. The notion is that it elicits an emotional response. Now that may be true from a human view but it's not how God defines it. Inspiration literally means "God-breathed". That narrows the field and brings clarity from a whole host of claims being made today about what is communication from God. What that means is either something is God-breathed, inspired, or it's not.

There can be many helpful, godly teaching but they are not inspired. No books, visions, songs, or sermons are inspired in the biblical sense. How do we know? One reason is found in Revelation 22:18. Yes, John uses the phrase, "this book" which specifically refers to Revelation but since it is the last book of the Bible if we were to add to it you'd be adding to Revelation, which is exactly what John said not to do.

So God forbids us to play fast and loose with His word, but how do we determine what books are inspired? One test was who wrote them. Were the books written by accepted prophets or spokesmen God used? This applies to both Old and New Testaments. All the books in the New Testament were written by those Jesus appointed as Apostles or worked with them, such as Luke.

Contrast that with what typically passes as inspiration such as:

- a high level of literary genius, like Homer's *Odyssey* or Shakespeare which contradicts 2 Peter 1:21
- That God just gave general thoughts to the writers which contradicts Matthew 24:35, John 17:8, 1 Corinthians 2:13, or the phrases in the Old Testament, "God said", "the word of the Lord came", or "thus saith the Lord", that show up over 3000 times.
- The idea that God's word "becomes" inspired" as it speaks to you.
- Finally that the writers were just taking dictations. 2 Samuel 23:2.

2 Timothy 3:16 says all scripture was given by inspiration and Psalm 33:6 says by the word of God the heavens were made both are inspired by and for God and were made perfect in every way.

PRAYER EXAMPLE THIS WEEK:

- ◆ Pray that God would give you more of a desire for His word resting in it, trusting it completely, submitting to it as it does its work in your life.

READING PLAN

This week, dig into the scriptures below using the Two Truths and Lie method:

Truth 1:

What is the biggest Truth that you pulled from your reading today? Why did it stand out to you? What made it an important truth for you to cling to? How can you apply it to your life? Write down the scripture and the truth that you gleaned.

Truth 2:

Use Bible study tools or google to find another Bible truth that supports the statement from the first truth that you found. Write down the scripture. What does this verse or passage say to support that truth? What do you need to do to walk in the power of that truth?

Lie:

What lie are you believing or are tempted to believe that stands in the way of these truths? Take time to refute that lie with the truths that you've learned. God has given Christians a spirit of power, love and self-control, 2 Timothy 1:7, therefore there is victory over fear. Write down a sentence that says something like this, "The lie I've believed is _____, but God's word says that _____."

SCRIPTURE

Monday: - 1 Corinthians 2:13; John 17:8; Matthew 24:35; Exodus 4:12

Tuesday: - Hebrews 4:1-13; Galatians 1:11-12

Wednesday: - John 14:6-17; John 17:17

Thursday: - Deuteronomy 4:1-5; Psalm 33:6; Revelation 22:18

Friday: - Exodus 9:13,16; Romans 9:17

Saturday: - Catch up, Reflect and Pray.

NOTES

SMALL GROUP GROWTH GUIDE

WEEK 3 | February 23 2020

BIG IDEA: The Bible is the product of God breathing out His words so what He wanted wrote down actually was.

BELONG

1. When you think of inspiration, what comes to mind?
2. We live in the midst of pluralism and a society that pushes hard against any claim of truth or exclusiveness. What happens when you commit to the Bible being the word of God? Can you give a reasonable defense of it being inspired?

GROW

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:16, Why is it important to understand the difference and implication of “breathed in and breathed out”? Or human inspiration and biblical inspiration? What are some?
2. Define biblical inspiration.
3. What is the inherent problem with saying that the Bible is really no different from other inspiring books?
4. Is God still inspiring people today to communicate? Explain.
5. When someone today says, “the Lord told me”, what does that claim really mean? What did God say so His people would really know if He was speaking? See Deuteronomy 13:1-5
6. Read 1 Corinthians 2:13 and John 17:8. What is Paul and Jesus making clear?
7. Compare Genesis 12:1-3 and Galatians 3:8. How does this comparison help to verify the inspiration of Scripture?
8. How does Matthew 22:24-32 help us understand the extent of biblical inspiration?
9. Think of some of Jesus teachings. Name some of the Old Testament events or teachings he was referring to or saw as fact.
10. Read Colossians 3:16 What should our minds be? Then James 1:22 what does our mind inform our will to do?
11. Talk through some of the following objections you have or will encounter:
 - A. The Bible is nothing more than part of a collection of high levels of writing genius, it’s a “master” work.
 - B. God just gave them the idea or planted thoughts in there minds?
 - C. It’s only the spiritual moral teaching that is God breathed
 - D. The Bible is a human book but God moves or inspires the reader.
 - E. The Bible was a dictation.

(See next page for examples)

REACH

1. How can you have the confidence in knowing that what you are reading in Scripture is inspired?
2. How will your life be different knowing that every time you pick up the Bible you pick up the Truth?

SMALL GROUP GROWTH GUIDE

WEEK 3 | February 23 2020

BIG IDEA: The Bible is the product of God breathing out His words so what He wanted wrote down actually was.

GROW CONT— Examples of Objections and Responses:

1. The Bible is full of errors.

-Have you read the Bible?

-Would you consider reading one book then telling me what mistakes you see? Can you do that?

-If you say there are mistakes in the Bible, which one are you referring to? Do you realize this is an ancient book not written in English?

-Are you really being fair and consistent with the Bible using your same criteria with other books of antiquity? Why are you subjecting a standard to the Bible you don't apply to other books?

-What is your prejudice against it?

-Has the Bible said something that you don't like?

Note: For most people this question isn't intellectual its emotional and an excuse not to believe. That very understanding is in part the key because they know, *they must change* and conform to a different worldview, God's.

Also note, how to handle this objection. At no time do you try to defend scripture. Don't do the heavy lifting meaning do the work for them, it's not your objection its theirs. Let them defend it. There will be a time for that latter, so be prepared.

2. God gave the writers of Scripture the idea planting thoughts in their minds.

-This idea could be like a book with no words or music without any notes.

- This idea denies 2 Timothy 3:16 meaning God gave them verbal inspiration. Also, 1 Corinthians 2:13, John 17:8 which claims the Bible to be the very words of God and the message of God was in words.

- The Old Testament, more than 3500 times, declares "thus says the Lord", or "the word of the Lord came", or "God said". Moses tried to get out of God's calling on his life saying he wasn't good at speaking. Yet God told him that He would be with your mouth and teach you what to say. He didn't say He would give him some good ideas to talk to Pharaoh about. Which is why God makes it clear not to add to His words in Deuteronomy 4:3 and also repeated in Revelation.

-1 Peter 1:10 lets us know that the prophets wrote down the words and also that they didn't always understand and wanted to know more about. Matthew 24:25 says everything will pass away except Gods word.

SMALL GROUP GROWTH GUIDE

WEEK 3 | February 23 2020

BIG IDEA: The Bible is the product of God breathing out His words so what He wanted wrote down actually was.

GROW CONT— Examples of Objections and Responses—2:

3. It's only the spiritual and moral teaching that is God breathed...inspired.

-Well who's going to decide that?

-God either breathed all of it or none of it.

-The scientific, historical, geographical references don't really need to be accurate then just the spiritual and moral? If God can't be trusted with the accuracy of those things why would anyone listen to any thing else? If I can't trust Him from Genesis 1:1 why would I trust Him about heaven or hell?

4. The Bible is a human book but God moves or inspires the readers.

-So what your saying is your reading something that makes no sense or is meaningless until God some how makes it "come alive" to you? How does that work and who decides?

-So you "feel" God making it a subjective experience/a wow factor of some kind? So it's not authoritative. What you get out of it is true for you but may not be true for me? History is replete with atrocities all done in the name of Christianity using this idea.

5. The Bible was a dictation inspiration.

-Sorry, the authors were people not robots. There are many variations in writing styles, language and emotions. The Bible says the authors were carried along by the Holy Spirit. They were writing down their own thoughts, attitudes, experiences under God's control.

-Hebrews 1:1 is a good example. "many portions" - sections or books, "many ways" - visions, prophecies, parables, audible voices and in these last days through Jesus Christ, Gods Son. 2 Peter 1:20, 1 Corinthians 2:10,21—none of this was a matter of one's own interpretation.

SMALL GROUP GROWTH GUIDE

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BIG IDEA: The Bible is the product of God breathing out His words so what He wanted wrote down actually was.

GROW CONT— Examples of Objections and Responses—2:

6. . The Bible is nothing more than part of a collection of high levels of writing genius. Like Homer, Plato, Dante, Shakespeare. It's a master work.
- A. First this objection exalts the human mind and “wordsmithing” but denies divine authorship outright. Which is the whole point to the objection in the first place. There is no God.
 - B. Second throughout all of the known volumes of written material we have, none have created a character like Jesus. He's only found in the Bible. No one could have every thought of him.
 - C. See the Library Test. Jesus is the theme of all 66 books of the Bible. How many genius writers does it take create a work like the Bible?
 - D. Who writes a book condemning all of humanity, letting them know they are wretched to the core with no hope except found in the person of Jesus Christ. All other religious books from Book of Mormon to the Koran, formed by supernatural demonic genius, tell the reader that salvation is by there own works
 - E. If the Bible writers were that good at writing, why didn't they write more books equal to the Bible or at least there part of the Bible? We know Paul wrote more that just 1, 2 Corinthians to that church, for example.

Preservation - How the Bible Came to Us

BIG IDEA: God created the heavens and the earth, the seen and un-seen things most of which we haven't seen, since He can do that, He can preserve His word.

WEEK 4 March 1, 2020



ISAIAH 55:11

When you build on a faulty foundation sometime in the future the structure will be compromised. So to if you start out the Christian faith with a low view of the Bible it can have disastrous consequences. However, the Holy Spirit is at work overcoming our ignorance, church traditions, teaching through the Word to bring us to maturity in Christ.

Having said that, many Christians have no real idea how we got the Bible. Still others declare there are so many errors or “textual variants”, that what we have today can’t be what was actually written and therefore the Bible can be dismissed. Well, not so fast. Dr James White has devoted his life to textual criticism, the study of ancient biblical text. When it comes to preservation here’s his thought. *“The fact that God chose to reveal Himself in a significantly less “neat” fashion, one that was very much involved in the living out of the life of the people of God, can be disturbing to people. They want the Bible to be an owner’s manual, a never-changing PDF file that is encrypted and locked against all editing. And while I surely believe God has preserved His Word, the means by which He has done so is fully consistent with the manner of the revelation itself. We dare not apply modern standards derived from computer transfer protocols and digital recording algorithms to the ancient context for one simple reason: by doing so we are precluding God’s revelation and activity until the past few generations! What arrogance on our part! We must allow God to reveal Himself as He sees fit, when He sees fit, and we must derive our understanding of His means of safeguarding His revelation from the reality of the historical situation, not our modern hubris.”*

If that had to be the case, then that kind of preservation technology didn’t exist until the 20 century...whatever did faithful follower do before that? Dr White continues:

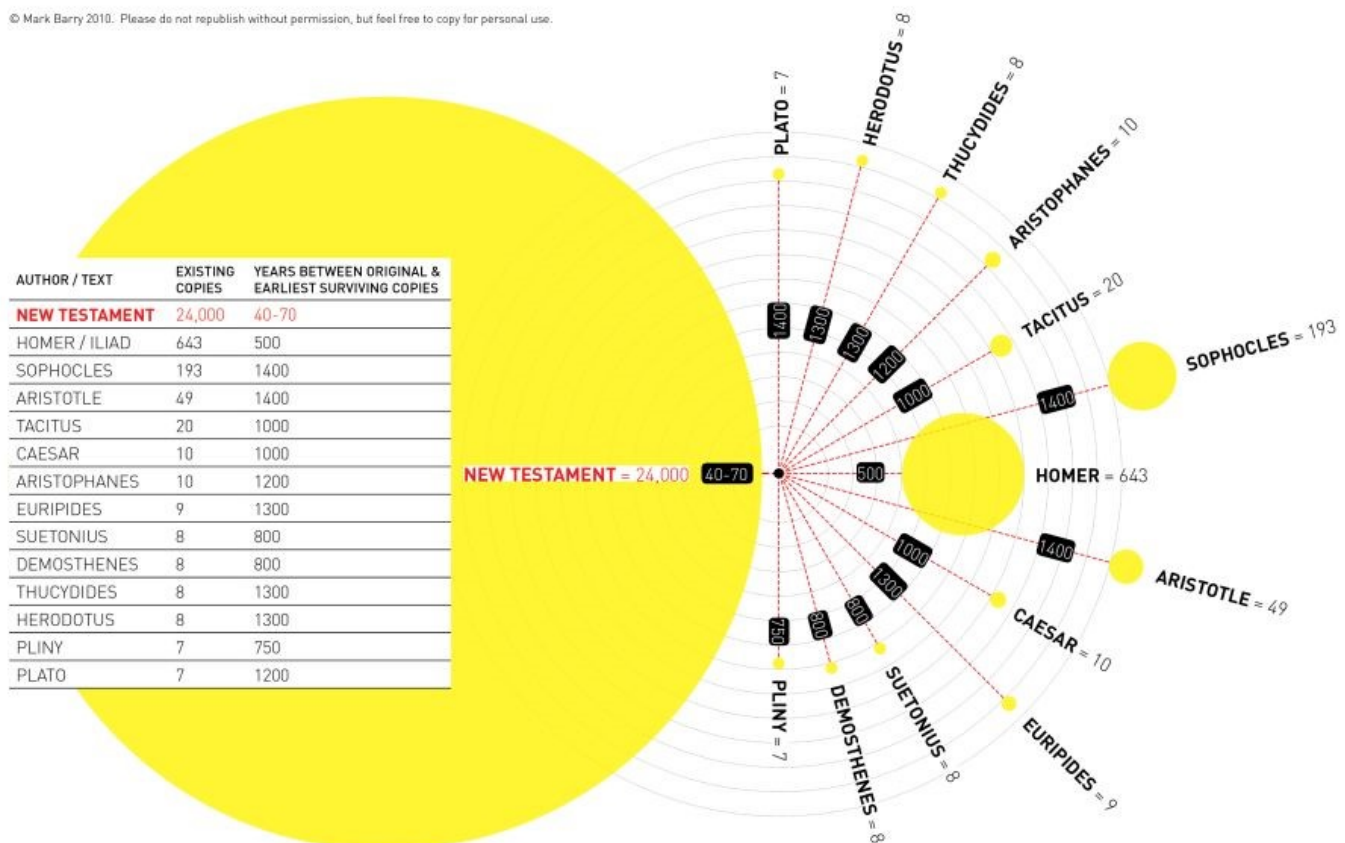
“But, someone is sure to respond, how can we trust the Bible if there are textual variants? To which I respond, the same way Jesus or Paul or Luke did. There were textual variants in the days of Jesus and the Apostles...”

What your never told by the so called skeptic is that the more manuscripts the more variants your going to have, it’s why flying is “safer” than driving your car. Your also not told there are 5800 plus catalogued manuscripts which average 450 pages. More than two million pages of hand copied text, spanning 1500 years, with an amazingly small percentage of textual variants and an amazingly accurate record of history. If you just had one manuscript there would be no variances. You would have to trust it was correct as there is no way to corroborate that story and you would have no certainty you have what was originally communicated.

Dr White continues – “...So I say to the person who wonders, “Why would God allow even small variations?”, have you considered the alternative? Aside from precluding the spread of the gospel through the widespread copying of the text, the only alternative is the Muslim one: a controlled, centrally edited text. Sound good? I hope not, as you then have to transfer your ultimate faith for the accuracy of the text from the original writers to the compilers/editors/redactors. Then you have to deal with the allegations of wholesale corruption and change, which can, in fact, be lodged against such a text. But with the means God used to spread the NT far and wide, that kind of allegation is simply bankrupt. So as I consider God’s gift of His Word, I am thankful that I have been forced to examine its history closely, and from many angles. And when I do, I am again and again forced to my knees in thanksgiving for what He has done. He has not left us to wander in darkness. He has provided us with a reliable, trustworthy guide in Holy Scripture.”

THE RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT COMPARED TO OTHER ANCIENT TEXTS

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PRAYER

This week find ways to thank God for the gift of His word. For all those who have endured hardship, persecution, and even death so that what you hold in your hand could be in a language you could understand. Ask to find ways for this gift to be treasured, anticipated and enjoyed that you would be given more of a desire to know it.

Find a scripture that you can pray together as a family and/or in your small group, such as the Lord’s Prayer, inserting your name or the names of family were appropriate.

Search the New Testament and create a list of the things people then were praying for and pray for them this month.

READING PLAN

This week, use the PLANT method to look into the truth of scripture:

Prepare:

Put away distractions and ask God to prepare your heart for your reading and journaling time.

Learn:

What does this passage have to teach me today? Write down lessons that the characters learned or a principle(s) that are present that you can glean from this passage.

Ask:

Ask questions of the passage. What don't you understand about the passage and take time to write down these questions. What could be illuminated through further study? What principles should you discuss with those around you?

Name Truths:

What are some of the nuggets of truth from this passage that you can learn from? What truths do you need to take away and put into practice?

Take Action:

What will you do with what you've read? How can you put the lessons and truths into action this week? Write out your steps and follow them.

SCRIPTURE

Monday: - John 5:43-47, Luke 21:29-33

Tuesday: - Isaiah 55:1-11

Wednesday: - Daniel 9:2; Romans 3:2, 15:4, 1 Timothy 5:18, 2 Peter 3:16

Thursday: - Psalm 18:30, 33:4; John 17:17; 2 Samuel 22:31; 1 Kings 8:56, 2 Kings 10:10

Friday: - Isaiah 45:23; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23

Saturday: - Catch up, Reflect and Pray.

NOTES

SMALL GROUP GROWTH GUIDE

WEEK 4 | MARCH 1, 2020

BIG IDEA: God created the heavens and the earth, the seen and un-seen things most of which we haven't seen, since He can do that, He can preserve His word.

BELONG

1. When you think of “preservation” what comes to mind?
2. How do you know who wrote the American Constitution and how do you know it's true?
3. How would you answer someone who asks, “How do you know the Bible is true?” Or, “How do you know what you are reading is actually what was written?”

GROW

1. Read Psalm 119:7, 160 and John 17:17. To what is the Psalmist and Jesus referring to?
2. Look at Matthew 12:3, 5, 19:4, 22:31; Mark 12:10, 26. What books is Jesus referring to? What does this say about how important those writings were and are?
3. Read Matthew 22:36-40. What does it tell you if both the Pharisees and Jesus are referring to the “Law and the Prophets?”
4. Read Exodus 17:14, 32:16; Numbers 5:23; Deuteronomy 17:18, Jeremiah 30:2. Where were these writings to be put?
5. If Jesus was referring to all these writings during his life time what does that say about the preservation of what we call the Old Testament?
6. Read 2 Chronicles 10:19. What does this say about when it was written? What would have been the time frame? See Jeremiah 36:4.
7. It is clear that the Jews had a clearly defined body of Scriptures roughly 200 years before Christ in part as they were using them in the temple and synagogues throughout Israel. Applying that same principle what can we say about the New Testament?
8. When the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered in 1947 all the Old Testament books were represented with the exception of Esther. No other books, such as the Apocrypha –inter testament books– are given the same status. There were no other books contending for a place with in the Old Testament. That means the Scripture Jesus was referring to ended with Malachi roughly 450 B.C.
9. Since the New Testament letters were spread so quickly over the Roman Empire, What does this say to the questioning that it was a central group or church council who decided on what books would make the cut and which ones wouldn't?

SMALL GROUP GROWTH GUIDE

WEEK 4 | MARCH 1, 2020

BIG IDEA: God created the heavens and the earth, the seen and un-seen things most of which we haven't seen, since He can do that, He can preserve His word.

GROW Cont.

1. The earliest New Testament book list is known as the Muratorian Canon dated around 150A.D. It left out 1/2 Peter, James and Hebrews. Peter was widely read and accepted by this time and could have been an oversight. By 240A.D. Origen from Alexandria was using all 27 books that we have. Can any other book of antiquity identify itself in such close proximity to the actual events, less than 300 years with as many manuscripts all saying the same thing?
2. What really is the issue behind all the skepticism?
3. Why do you think the early Christians weren't concerned about these issues we are today?
Possible ideas— They believed Christ was coming back in their life time.
-The letters they received actually came from Peter or Paul. They knew them, talked with them, heard them preach.
4. What did the Apostles warn them would happen? Jude 34. What would that mean and what would need to happen for future Christian generation to know the truth?

During the first 200 years, five tests were used at various times to bring clarity to Christians who didn't live during the 1st century.

1. Was it coming from one of the Apostles or one of their associates. 2 Thessalonians 3:17
2. Was it authentic and authoritative. "This is what the Lord says". Was there the internal witness of the text itself
1 Thessalonians 2:13
3. Was it ancient being used from the earliest times? Most of all the claims of other writings were rejected simply because they didn't fit the time period being written much later.
4. Was it accepted by the churches. It took time for the letters to be circulated which is why 23 of the 27 books were almost universally accepted well before the middle of the 2nd century. Again there was no one church controlling the beliefs of the other churches.
5. Was it accurate conforming to the teachings of the churches?

One major appeal which will always be rejected by the skeptic is that the preservation of God's word is the appeal to God himself. He is the one seeing to it the Christians throughout the ages has His word. It is the belief in the authority, inerrancy, infallibility, of Scripture being bound to the belief in God's divine preservation of His own words.

REACH

How can we continue to have the confidence, boldness and encouraging one another knowing what we have?

THOUGHTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

A. Two Extreme Ideas

1. A radical skepticism or complete despair because we don't have the original text manuscripts.
2. An absolute certainty that we do have the original writings...we don't

B. What do we have

1. The original text was written on papyrus, like a paper grocery bag, which probably didn't last typically more than 100 years.
2. We have 3500 complete NT manuscripts and around 5824 portions of manuscripts known to exist and 30 more that are being looked at from the first three centuries. Put everything we have together and there are over 24,000 pieces.

-The average size of those manuscripts are 450 pages.

-There are more written in Latin than Greek.

-There are dozens of manuscripts from 100-200 A.D., one being P52 about the size of a credit card. Most of the manuscripts are 100-200 years after the actual event.

-By comparison, the average classical Greek writer has less than 20 copies of manuscripts in circulation, which would stack four feet high. The new testament manuscripts would stake over a mile high.

3. The early church fathers who wrote commentaries and homilies, wrote and quoted enough of the Bible that it could be re created based solely on their writings.
4. The King James NT version, 1611, had available seven manuscripts with the earliest one being from the 11th century, and from the OT 8th century. Textus Receptus Today we have over 5800 the earliest going back to the 2nd century.
5. Dead Sea Scrolls dated 200 BC - OT

C. Can It Be Trusted

1. What we are being told by "academia" is that the PROCESS of how we got the Bible was corrupted and therefore it can't be trusted.

-Since the facts of the Bible can't be disputed what is left is *the process*.

-The sceptic will say, all you have is a copy of a copy of a copy, it's the telephone game but in written form, and we all know how that turns out.

-Example: Jesus didn't claim to be divine, that was "given" in 325 by Constantine, which was a point being made by Dan Brown in The DaVinci Code. However (P66) a papyrus written about 165 AD states that Jesus is divine. Also, there are at least 48 manuscripts before the 4th century.

THINGS FOR THOUGHT AND CONSIDERATION

C. continued

2. History is God's story, it's His Story – Galatians 4:4-5

-Why did God chose Israel for revelation? What was happening in the “fullness of time”?

-Center of the known world

-Connection of 3 continents which would make it the center/cross roads for trade. The city of Tyre, hugely wealthy, Zechariah 9:3-4

-Jews followed one God

-The Greeks established one language

-The Romans created mass travel and communication. The Bible unlike other documents, spread all over the world quickly which meant there was no central controlling authority.

-Early Christians, 2nd century, began to combine the letters into what is called a “codex” which is Latin for trunk of a tree or block of wood. Which is what an early book would look like. They were doing this on there own, so they had understanding that these were to be a unit because they put them together in a book or codex.

-These codex in the case of the four gospels always have Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and never Matthew and Thomas.

-When you look at popularity of manuscripts, which is determined by how many copies were made, there are more of, the gospel for instance, than any of the apocrypha books which would mean they weren't looked at as biblical.

-Apocrypha means “hidden”. There are 14 books. We do not consider them God breathed because: never quoted in NT, Christ never mentions them in his list Luke 24:44, not referred to by ancient Jews writers, problems with content, no prophetic power.

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THINGS FOR THOUGHT AND CONSIDERATION

C. continued

3. The Unity of Scripture

- 66 books
- Hundreds of topics and styles
- 40 authors written over 1500years
- Written in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic on 3 continents
- A common theme through the whole
- THE LIBRARY TEST
 - Go to any library
 - Pick any 66 books of the same theme, written by 40 authors, on 3 continents, in 3 languages.
 - Do they even come close to the unity found in Scripture?
- Why 66 books?

God is in control, Isa 46:10, Eph 1:11, He oversaw the writing of the books, providentially collected and preserved them. God used men to recognize and receive what God inspired. The church in no way determines the Canon, like the Catholic church teaches. If that were true how would you determine who has authority? Or where it comes from. (See point 2)

4. The Bible Claims to be God's Word

- You would expect this, you would expect it to say so.
- Revelation of God where God has to give to man what would otherwise be hidden from him.
- Inspiration is the process where God initiates by moving men by the Holy Spirit to write the very words of God. 2 Timothy 3:16
- Hebrews 1 says God spoke in two general occasions, long ago - OT and by his Son NT.
 - Types of Special Revelation
 - Theophanies Gen 17:1, 26:2, 32:30, Ex 3:2-6
 - Dreams and Visions Gen 28:12-16, Daniel 2:19,28
 - Miracles and Signs Gen 7, Ex 3, 7-13
 - Life of Jesus
 - 2 Peter 1:20-21; Psalm 11, 15, 89, 97-115, 119; Hebrews 4:12; John 10:35
 - Revelation 22:18

5. Historical, Geographical, and Archeological Accuracy

- This is the difference between the Bible and all other books that make the claim it is from God.
- Hittite empire found in the mid 20th century
- Jericho found in 1930 with wall fallen outward
- Merneptah Stele - (inscribed stone) tablet found in 1896 - King Merneptah reigned in Egypt from 1213-1203 BC and on line 27 of this tablet is written Israel has been wiped out...its seed is no more".
- Tel Dan Stele - found in 1993 has the name of King David from the late 9th century (870-750BC). This is the first time the name of David has been found outside the Bible.

THINGS FOR THOUGHT AND CONSIDERATION

C. continued

5. -Dead Sea Scrolls - 1947-1956 - Earliest known surviving manuscripts, 200 BC. When compared with the King James 1611 version, they were virtually the same.
- Objection: There aren't very many books of antiquity talking about Christianity outside the Bible.
- Answer: Just because there are few books doesn't mean you can discredit it or that that's evidence against it. It means few people were interested in writing about it.
- Cornelius Taticus - Rome 56AD - Senator, Governor, historian, wrote The Annals of History which confirms there were Christians in Rome by 64AD when Rome burned because Nero blamed the Christians for it.
 - Pliny - Governor 98-117AD in Bithynia, Northern Asia Minor by the Black Sea.
The test he gave those who called themselves Christians - Are you prepared to worship anything else but the Christian God? Then curse Christ or die. He knew a true Christian could never do that.
(Remember they were to worship the emperor)
- THIS IS A SERIOUS BLOW TO THE IDEA OF LEGEND
- In fact Pliny wrote back to Trajan in Rome telling him that (in what is northern turkey) so many people have become Christians that the temple's are virtually empty.
 - Josephus - records in 61AD the Jesus' brother James was stoned.

6. . Prophecies of Scripture

- 330 prophecies of Christ coming; 60 in the major prophets; 270 in the minor prophets
- Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:14, 9:6, 53; Psalm 22; Daniel 9:25

D. What about all the Textual Variances? - Dr. James White

1. What is a variant? **Any** change in the text.
2. How many variants are in the Bible?
 - There are 400,000 at the high end in the New Testament.
3. Why are they variants at all?
 - Because there is more than one manuscript, which is a good thing. We have so many more manuscripts we have a better chance to have what the original text said because we can compare. The more manuscripts the better and more reliable the Bible can be. Like having more anchors to secure and keep a boat from drifting.
4. What kind of variances are there?
 - 99% of the variances in the manuscripts are spelling or conjunctions like, "a", "an", or "and" which make no difference to the meaning of the text at all. Scribes didn't have spell check.
 - That leaves 1% of 400,000 or 4000 meaningful variants or 1 meaningful variant for every 3 pages. However, only half of those are viable, leaving only 1500-2000 meaningful textual variants needed to be looked at.
5. Examples.
 - The two biggest variants are Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11. The earliest manuscripts do not include these, which we've known for hundreds of years.

AUTHORITY

BIG IDEA: Everyone has a foundation on which they stand making sense of reality. Everyone is wearing a set of “worldview” glasses in which to interpret the evidence of reality. No one is neutral.

2 PETER 3:1-9

When it comes to what people believe and why they hold to a set of beliefs, everyone appeals to or calls on consciously or unconsciously, some authority in which to base their beliefs on. Some set of “facts” or research from someone with more expertise or knowledge than they have. But where does that knowledge come from? How do you know what you know? The term is called Epistemology which looks to the origin, nature and methods of human knowledge.

All of which is a fine pursuit but the real issue is your starting point or pre-supposition. Everyone has one, no one is neutral and like headings on a compass, those beginnings point each of us in a particular belief direction. Like a compass the basis for it working is your faith that it points to “true north” and you rest in that it will take you where you are going.

British philosopher Bertrand Russell said, *“That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcomes of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.”* (“A Free Man’s Worship” in Selected Papers of Bertrand Russell p.3)

That compass points in the direction of almost being sure that humanity is an accident destined to extinction. Well, the compass of Christianity rejects all of that and has been standing a whole lot longer than Mr. Russell. There in lies the clash of authority with the Bible claiming total authority, totalitarian authority and Mans philosophy /science claiming the only way to come to truth with at some point coming into conflict. The question becomes who is your authority?

PRAYER

This week pray the hard prayer and ask God for the humility and strength to submit to His authority and the authority He has placed over your life.

Pray for those in authority over you.

SMALL GROUP GROWTH GUIDE

WEEK 5 | JANUARY 26, 2020

BIG IDEA: The church is a gift to a people who are no longer just citizens of this world but foreshadowing the glories that await them in eternity.

BELONG

1. You're in high school and your parents allowed you to take the car to go to the game but to be home by a certain time. You're an hour past that time due to other circumstances. You explain it all but to no avail. How did you respond to their authority?
2. Share your experience with authority. What do you think is our inherent difficulty with authority? Why is it or isn't it such an issue?
3. Make a list of some cultural issues that are in conflict with biblical authority today?

GROW

1. The New Testament refers to authority in several ways. Being the power or ability to do something, the right to exercise authority or rulership, the potential to command, control or govern. When we think about authority being the resting place for our beliefs, what are some of those authorities used? And what or who are they appealing to?
2. What authority does the Christian base their belief? What do you believe about creation? The flood? What happens when there is compromise of God's word? Where does that lead?
3. Describe the man centered authority or worldview from the Bertrand Russell quote. What does this lead to?
4. Now look at a God centered authority, Romans 5:2, 12:12; 1 Corinthians 15:58. What does this lead to? Christians can have hope when others only have despair because we know that we serve God in this life and it's not in vain. How hopeful are you? If not, where are you placing authority in your life?
5. What happens when we place authority on something else other than on God's word? Read Luke 12:4-7. What does Jesus say not to do? This isn't just any kind of fear. Read verse 11. What would be in the balance? Read Acts 6:9-11. Where is Stephen? What happened when opposing authority claims are made vs 9?
6. What couldn't they do vs 10? How prepared are you to stand up for and have answers that oppose the biblical authority?
7. Read Luke 12:22-23, 29, 32. What three attitudes does Jesus command not to have? If you have one or more what does that say about where your authority is? How can you correct that in your life vs 31?
8. Matthew 8:5-13. How are faith and authority linked together?

REACH

1. When we see in God's word a declaring statement such as, "Don't Steal". What are we to believe?
2. Look at the list from question three. What does God say about those issues?
3. How can we encourage one another, stay strong and bold even when our beliefs come in conflict with culture?
4. What should be thinking, doing, preparing for as we see our culture becoming more secular?

READING PLAN

This week, use the WORD reading plan to dig into what God says about anger:

Word:

Pick on verse that stands out to you from today's passage. Write that verse out in your prayer journal. Read over this verse several times and pray for God to illuminate its meaning.

Observe:

Try to answer the Who, What, When, Where, and Why questions about this passage. Who wrote it? What is it about? When was it written? Where did it take place? Why did they include what they wrote in this passage?

Relevance:

How is this passage relevant to your life today? In what ways is it applicable and how can you immediately put to use what you're learning through reading?

Declare:

Write out any promises that you've gleaned from these portions of scripture, whether explicitly state or inferred. Declare these promises over your life in prayer. Ask God for his will and his timing in these promises.

SCRIPTURE

Monday: - Matthew 4:1-11, 8:1-13, 28:18-20

Tuesday: - Psalm 110

Wednesday: - John 19

Thursday: - Romans 13

Friday: - Genesis 2:20-22, 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:8-9; Ephesians 5:25,28,33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7

Saturday: - Catch up, Reflect and Pray.

NOTES



BELONG. GROW. REACH