

This morning we are continuing Part 2 of “Believe” the sermon series we started last September (Part 1) and picked back up in January after a break for a few weeks leading up to Christmas. And at the end of this last September, we looked at this key belief about the Bible: **“I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.”** In that message, I largely focused on why the Bible is trustworthy, and if you missed it, I encourage you to go to pick up a copy in the lobby, or go to our website where you can read it or listen to it.

So, because we believe the Bible is God’s Word and has the right to command our belief and action, we can also affirm this: **“I study the Bible to know God and His truth and to find direction for my daily life.”** So it’s not just that we *believe* God’s word should have influence in our lives, we study it so that we would know God and give us direction through His word. We study the Bible to understand God’s Word and to let it influence how we live. Bible study is not just “head knowledge.” It’s not like taking calculus in High School or college where you know it will almost certainly never impact your life, and so it’s just information to pass a class. We study the Bible with the intent that it impacts our head, but then travels to our heart, so it impacts how we live. This doesn’t mean we are perfect at either studying it regularly or letting it influence us. But that also doesn’t mean that Christians, as a general rule, are any less sincere about letting God’s Word impact how we live. We want it to impact us, so that we would lead a Godly life. And God’s Word definitely can have a huge impact on your life. **In fact, studying the Bible could protect you and even save your life.**

There was once an older lady who lived by herself. One day she came home and found her house had been robbed and the robber was still there! Well, this lady was very well-versed in the Bible and so she shouted at the robber, “Acts 2:38!” That’s the Bible verse that says, “... repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins...” Well, the robber stopped dead in his tracks. He sat calmly and waited while the lady called the police.

The police arrived and proceeded to arrest the robber. The policeman noted that the robber was somewhat of a burly guy and the lady was small and petite. Well, this intrigued the policeman so much that he finally asked the robber, “Why didn’t you just run or something? She is so much smaller than you. All she did was yell a Bible verse at you.”

The robber looked up at the policeman with a look of shock. “A Bible verse? What? The policeman says “Yeah, a Bible verse.” The robber just can’t believe this and tells the policeman, “I thought she said she had an ax and two 38’s!”ⁱ So: studying the Bible is important.

So, if God’s word is going to influence us – even “command our belief and action” as we said in the belief statement last September – and to know its truths and allow it to give direction to our lives as today’s belief statement says, then we need to know what God’s Word says.

So: **First, how do we study the Bible?** Perhaps the first place where people get to know and study the Bible is through church worship services. Generally speaking, the Bible is read and taught in our churches. This is always the case here, and it is in every church I’ve ever been a part of in any capacity, but apparently this isn’t always the case, generally speaking. In a survey done by LifeWay Research of 1,000 protestant Senior Pastors: they found that 76% of pastors include Bible readings in worship services.ⁱⁱ 76%! **This means that nearly ¼ of Protestant Senior Pastors say they *don’t* include Bible readings in worship services.** I guess I’d be curious to hear from some of those pastors *why* they don’t include Bible readings in their worship services, but I confess: I’m completely dumbfounded and appalled that that statistic is so high. Can a church even call itself Christian if reading the Bible isn’t part of a worship service? Where is the connection to our faith? What informs our understanding of truth if not the Bible? Or maybe I’m misunderstanding this statistic somehow – the article focused mostly on some other statistics about Americans and their relationship with the Bible, and so it didn’t explain any more about this particular stat on the Bible’s role in worship services. Or maybe “Christian” and “Protestant” are understood differently by those 24%...But it just seems to me, that if we aren’t letting God’s Word be the foundation for what we’re teaching in church, what is the

connection to the Christian faith?

That's what this morning's passage from Psalms is all about, as is so many other verses that speak of the importance of God's Word: "Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees... Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for in there I find delight..." and on it goes. It's a plea for God's Word to impact the writer's life and give him direction and boundaries that are holy and pleasing to God.

This last week I was reading an article from Gallup (you're probably familiar with them: known for their polling and then analyzing the data from those polls) that was titled, "Church Leaders and Declining Religious Service Attendance."ⁱⁱⁱ A lot of the research they do is in the area of "American religious life." They asked this question in a random sample of people who said they attended worship at least once a month: "Is each of the following a major factor, a minor factor or not a factor in why you attend church or a place of worship?" And then there were several factors that people could answer with one of those three responses. What they found was that: **83% of Protestant Christians said that "sermons that teach about Scripture" was a "major factor" for why they attended worship services.** So one way we study the Bible is through the sermons on Sunday – presuming the sermon is grounded in Scripture, of course, which apparently 75% are, but nearly a quarter aren't. Hopefully, here at Rose Hill, the sermons that we have each Sunday are rooted solidly in Scripture (either a specific passage, or a Biblical theme across a number of passages) and help us understand the Bible more deeply.

Besides worship services, many people participate in the studying of Scripture in other ways. **Some people have daily personal Bible study/devotions.** Usually, this would be something brief, typically something written – either in a devotional book, or an email devotional, or some other format – where in just a few minutes a person can read a Bible verse or two, and have a brief commentary on it or some explanation for how it applies to life. Quite a few of you have read the "Jesus Calling;" Perhaps you are familiar with Oswald Chambers' classic devotional called, "My Utmost for

His Highest.” Many of you are reading the “Believe” books that go with this sermon series. So those are some examples, and there are countless other personal Bible study guides and devotionals, and so forth.

Many people study the Bible in some kind of smaller group setting that allows for more interaction and exchanging of ideas. I don’t want to turn this sermon into an infomercial for our church...and the fact is that most churches have similar kinds of opportunities to grow in understanding of the Bible and encouragement to let it shape our lives...but it bears mentioning that: **We have classes here at Rose Hill every Sunday that are about studying God’s Word and finding Biblical direction in our lives.** These classes are open to anyone to come at any time, and we typically have two classes at 9:30 and two at 11:00. Some of the classes are taught by people in our church who spend several hours every week preparing the lesson; other classes are facilitated by someone in our church, but the actual teaching is from someone else such as a Bible scholar or pastor on a DVD or online video series. All of these Sunday classes have group discussion and encouragement, and help us to understand God’s Word better so we all grow in faith.

There are also small groups that meet at other times. These are sometimes a defined, specific group of people who are committed to coming together regularly, while some others are more open to anyone who wants to join in whenever they can. They meet for Bible study, prayer, fellowship, encouragement, accountability in life and faith, and so forth. Some are in people’s homes, some meet here at the church. Some meet early in the morning like the men’s group that meets at the very unholy hour of 5:30 a.m. on Wednesdays here at church, or the men’s breakfast on the second Saturday morning of each month. Both of those are open to any guys who’d like to come. Others are in the evening like the Roots and Fruits Women’s group that meets the last Monday of each month. There are a couple women’s groups that meet here at the church during the daytime. Those are all open to any gals in the church who’d like to participate. And there are several other small groups that are more of a defined set (“closed” group) of people who meet in people’s homes. We are always open to starting more of those kinds of groups – in fact, one was started just this past fall. If you’re interested in starting a Bible study group of some kind, or joining one

that's already in existence...there's info in the bulletin, you can find out more perhaps at the Info Center, or contact the church office during the week, and let's explore that together.

Now, as I mentioned at the start, the point of Bible study is not just a mental exercise. There's an element of intellectual rigor to it, and Bible study can be really hyper-academic or only very slightly so. And so this does raise the question: **Why should we study the Bible?** What's the point of reading our Bibles and taking some time to understand what it means and how it applies to our lives? Well, all Bible Study, in the end, *is really to help shape our faith and our relationship with God...to help us live out what we believe.* **One way that we often state this is to say that we Christians “want to be more Christ-like” in our living. This is why we study Scripture.** Studying the life of Jesus in the New Testament more *obviously* and *directly* helps us to be more Christ-like; but studying the lives of others whose lives are recorded for us in the Bible (like David, Esther, Daniel, Ruth, and so forth), or studying what they've written – such as Paul's New Testament letters to a variety of churches – studying those parts of the Bible is an *indirect* way of becoming Christ-like as well.

So what does it look like to be Christ-like? The obvious answer is for our lives to look like Jesus' life. But what does that mean? Well, I had a video clip fall into my lap early this week that when I first saw it, I thought “This is pretty cute, I'd love to use it in worship some day, so I'll hang onto it.” But the fact is, I had *no* idea how it might *ever* fit into a sermon. I honestly thought I might just play it some day with the disclaimer that it had absolutely *no* connection to the sermon or our faith, but I wanted to share it anyway.

Then, as I got further into the week and was thinking about this point of being Christ-like in our living, as a major reason why we study Scripture, I thought this clip actually fit pretty well. So what I'm about to show you is something that a guy in the Midwest videoed when he located his dog, after it had been missing for a day or so. It ran off, and he found it several miles away on someone else's farm. Anyway, watch this, as the dog comes back to him... https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5EG_8N-bXM followed by

Blank Slide

Pretend for a moment, and I know this might be sacrilegious for some of you, but bear with me, ok? Pretend for a moment that the black lab...is Jesus. The light-colored dog and the goat are you and me and other people who seek to be like Jesus the black-lab. Jesus the black lab hops right into the truck without even questioning it. It's like an extension of His Father's house, and He knows it's where he belongs. And then the other dog and the goat, who seek to be like Jesus the black lab, follow Him right in. There was maybe a little bit of hesitation...and sometimes we might hesitate...but they are clearly seeking to be like the lab, and in the end do follow him right in.

The only thing that would have made this better is if Jesus the black lab had hopped into the drivers' seat to take the wheel, while everyone else got into the back seat. But that's kind of nit-picky, I think.

That minor correction aside, it's a near flawless reminder of why we study the Bible: to know Jesus and become Christ-like in our living...to let him give us direction. First, to know God. The dog and the goat knew the lab. There's clearly a relationship. They enjoy one another and have clearly spent time together. And then we also study Scripture so that God would give direction to our lives, so we'd understand what it means to be in relationship with Jesus. That dog and that goat got direction from the lab they followed the black lab, right into the truck with him.

So our study of Scripture is not just head-knowledge. We study in order to know God, to know God's word, to have a relationship with God, and so that God and His word would give us direction in life...so that we would be Christ-like in our living.

So, how are you doing in following Jesus...in living a Christ-like life?

How are your levels of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (the Fruit of the Spirit – Galatians 5:22-23)? Are they wearing thin or running low? If someone were to follow you around all day would they come away with a picture of Jesus? Or at least a partial picture? Look: none of us are perfect, so don't beat yourself up for

falling short to a certain degree...But if the reality is that you're further off the mark than you think you should be...or if you don't really even know what the mark is to be aiming for, or if you just don't even know much about the Bible which is the basis for essentially everything we know and believe about the Christian faith: then maybe a little more Bible Study is needed.

It could be done in worship, in a class, in a small group, or on your own. "In worship" is sort of the bare-minimum...it's the starting point, in many ways. All Christians should be actively participating in the life of a church through Sunday worship and serving in some capacity as well. That's like Christian discipleship 101: it's the basics. But the next step is to engage in some kind of regular Bible Study outside of the worship service, so that you might know God and His truth and find direction for your daily life. I pray that each of us would be engaged in that kind of study, either on your own or with others, for that purpose of becoming more Christ-like in all of our living.

Whether your Bible Study is only on Sundays or you've got multiple avenues of Bible Study, or if you agree in principle but you've completely fallen off "the study wagon" and need some encouragement to get back on board, I invite you to close this morning's message with this statement of belief: **"I study the Bible to know God and His truth and to find direction for my daily life."** Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ <https://alphausa.org/alpha-jokes/>

ⁱⁱ <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/208529/sermon-content-appeals-churchgoers.aspx>