



GPS GUIDE: JANUARY 9, 2022

Grow. Pray. Study

Baptism of the Lord

Sermon: People of the Book

Luke 1:1-4

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

John 20:30-31

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Monday: Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17

Paul knew that when he died his friend Timothy would face hardship. But he would still have the Bible. It was useful, he said, “for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.” He did not say it would answer all of Timothy’s historical, scientific, or financial questions. The Bible exists to tell the story of God’s dealings with humans, and to shape our interaction with God and one another.

Kenneth Teegarden, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) from 1973 to 1985, says this about biblical authority: *The Bible is authoritative because it witnesses to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It is a one-of-a-kind record of what God did and how people responded. It is not the Word. But it is an inspired and inspiring witness to the Word, who is a living person, Christ.*

What parts of the Bible’s story played the biggest role in leading you to Christ? What examples have you found in your Bible reading that seem NOT to

contribute to that purpose? Paul said that when the Bible is used correctly “the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.” Have you ever seen the Bible used in ways that provoke tension, fear, guilt, or hatred? What keys have you found that make your Bible reading a time with God that equips you to do everything that is good?

Prayer: *O God, master and guide, I need your help today and every day as I dig more deeply into the Bible. Amen.*

Tuesday: Read John 10:1-15

Hearing God through the Bible does not require turning off your brain. Careful study and analysis is often one of the ways God speaks as you read the Bible. For this passage, learn all you can about shepherds in Jesus’ day. Use a study Bible or a Bible dictionary or search the internet for terms like “good shepherd” or “Jesus AND shepherd.” (Then read carefully—just because it’s on the internet doesn’t mean it’s automatically accurate!)

“I am the good shepherd” is a metaphor. Based on what you learn (or already know) about shepherds, in what ways is Jesus most like a shepherd? When have you experienced Jesus as your shepherd? In what ways do you most need him to shepherd you today?

To do his job effectively, a shepherd has to understand sheep really well. He has to know what makes them thrive, and what things are harmful (or even deadly) to them. What is the likely fate of a sheep without a shepherd? John said, “... they follow him, because they know his voice.” How does studying the Bible help you train yourself to “hear” the voice of Jesus so that you can follow him?

Prayer: *Loving Jesus, deepen my sense of a real relationship with you as my Shepherd so that I may follow your ways more closely. Amen.*

Wednesday: Read Genesis 17:9-14, Acts 15:4-19, Galatians 5:1-6

Christians have wrestled with various parts of the Bible throughout the history of the faith. In the first century, some thought it was wrong to accept uncircumcised Gentiles into the faith. They could quote Genesis 17, which said any uncircumcised male had broken God’s covenant. They couldn’t discourage Peter and Paul, however. God, the apostles said, was leading differently in their day, pouring out the Holy Spirit on all who showed faith in Jesus.

Paul passionately urged the Galatian Christians not to give up their freedom in Christ. While no one today is trying to force Christians to be circumcised, what are some other ways you’ve seen “rules” pressed as crucial to salvation? How can living in Christian freedom produce “faith working through love”? When did you really think you were right on a secondary point, but let it go out of love, rather than pressing it?

These readings don’t address a big issue among Christians today, so they are a useful case study. After the Christian Pharisees (Acts 15:5) urged that circumcision be required, James also quoted the Bible. He cited Amos 9:11-12, and said God aimed to reach all nations. On what grounds did Paul, Peter, and James decide it was better to follow Amos than Genesis in dealing with Gentile converts? What can we learn from their example about how to apply the Bible?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, as I read and wrestle with holy scripture and how to apply it in my life keep me centered on faith working through love. Amen.*

Thursday: Read Exodus 21:15-25, Matthew 5:38-44

We saw yesterday that Peter and Paul boldly claimed that, in the light of Jesus, they could act differently than Genesis 17 said. They learned that approach from Jesus himself, who taught, “It was said ... but I say to you ...” The law in Exodus 21 (also Leviticus 24 and Deuteronomy 19) limited revenge to “an eye for an eye,” to make retribution proportional and avoid massive retaliation. Jesus said he came to teach a more radical approach: “Love your enemies.”

We think of ourselves as more enlightened than the ancient world. But we sell T-shirts and bumper stickers saying “I don’t get mad—I get even.” How does it alter human relationships to replace an ideal of revenge with an ideal of mutual love and service? In what ways does Jesus’ teaching speak to the spirit in which you deal with others? In what ways does Jesus’ teaching inform our calling as a church to live a more radical approach?

Prayer: *Lord God, as I read the scriptures through the lens of Jesus’ teachings keep leading me into the quality of love that Jesus taught. Amen.*

Friday: Read Genesis 1:1-27 and Genesis 2:4-25

Too often people mistake the Bible for something it is not. It is not, for instance, a science textbook. Genesis includes two stories about God’s creation of the world. In the first part of the first story, note the assumptions about the structure of the world (e.g. waters above and below the dome of the sky). Dr. Stuart Briscoe wrote that while Genesis 1 “raises many unanswered questions about *how* [God] created, it provides many answers to questions about *who* did the creating.” The second creation story is folksier and less structured by far than the one in Genesis 1:1-2:3. It says God created human beings first, before any plants or animals existed—so if read as literal history, as science, this account would contradict Genesis 1. But the second story carries a vital theological message about who we are in relation to God and to one another.

When we compare the Bible’s creation stories to creation stories from other Mesopotamian peoples around Israel, we can discover a divine truth in the biblical writers’ stories. In other Mesopotamian creation stores, fearsome, selfish

gods created humans to be their slaves. But Genesis proclaims good news – that God made people in God’s image for a loving relationship with God and one another. How does it strengthen your understanding of who God is and who we are in relationship to God to read the creation accounts as divine truth rather than scientific fact?

Prayer: *Lord of all creation, thank you for life. Touch my heart with awe and wonder at your creative goodness. Amen.*

Saturday: Read Hebrews 1:1-4

To a group of Hebrew Christians, who most likely knew and loved the Hebrew Scriptures, this writer said God had indeed spoken through the prophets “in many times and many ways.” But, he added, God’s greatest revelation, God’s final word, was not a book, but a person: the person of Jesus. “The Son is the light of God’s glory and the imprint of God’s being,” and only through the Son can we rightly understand the rest of God’s story unfolded in the Bible.

This passage can hugely affect how we read the Bible. Sometimes we read it as a set of short verses, all equally true. But if Christ is the ultimate word of God, then we need to read all of the Bible’s pieces in terms of how they fit into the Bible’s grand overall story, which reaches its saving peak in Jesus. When have you sensed Jesus’ presence as you read your Bible? What has he taught you about the priority of love? In what ways does making him the standard of all truth cast a different light on many of the Bible’s difficult parts?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I find some parts of the Bible appalling! But I also find your story of restoring love deeply appealing. Give me wisdom as I read the Bible and restore me as you have your people through the ages. Amen.*