

# DISCIPLESHIP BY DOCTRINE

Testimonies of Treasuring & Transferring the Truth



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TESTIMONIES OF TREASURING AND  
TRANSFERRING THE TRUTH

*MCBC Man of the Word*  
*Spring 2017*

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# DISCIPLESHIP BY DOCTRINE

## THEME

In every generation there is a need to preserve and proclaim the truth, to “retain the standard of sound words . . . in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13). Our moment in history is no different. God has settled His Word in heaven (Ps. 119:89) but has also commissioned us to treasure and entrust His eternal truth to those coming behind us. Discipleship is impossible unless we teach God’s truth in Christian faith and love.

## THEME PASSAGE

“Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*. . . . You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

**2 Timothy 1:13-14, 2:1-2**

## TIME

10 weeks: January 29 – April 8, 2017

## GOALS

1. To participate enthusiastically in this year’s catechism project.
2. To treasure specific doctrines for our own growth and others’.
3. To edify fellow Mt. Calvary men with doctrinal truth.

## EVENTS

Men’s Prayer Breakfasts: January 29, March 4, April 8

MY PRAYER PARTNER (NAME, PHONE NUMBER, EMAIL):

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# MAN OF THE WORD PROGRAM

The leadership of Mount Calvary Baptist Church created the Man of the Word program in obedience to the command of 2 Timothy 2:2: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." This ministry functions under the leadership of Pastor Mark Minnick, Pastor John Tipton, and Chris Baker, elder. The following men are the current Man of the Word officers.

- President ..... Dan Dahlhausen
- Vice President ..... Dave Howell
- Treasurer ..... Jeff Foster
- Food Director ..... David Baker
- Project Coordinator ..... Jesse Keck
- Manual Director ..... Eric Newton

We are grateful to Pastor Mark Minnick for his encouragement and leadership and for his vision for the men of Mount Calvary Baptist Church. We would also like to express our gratitude to the men who have donated their time, energy, and gifts by writing spiritually edifying articles for our growth and encouragement.

# FOREWORD

If you were able to improve three things about your childhood, what would they be? Better at sports? More money in your pocket? Better food? *More* food! Well. . . , probably none of those things (smile).

One for which I'm certain that I would wish, however, would be to have had a much better grasp of scripture. Though raised in a Christian home, I really knew very little about the Bible when I began to prepare for the ministry. I'd never read it through entirely. Though I'd memorized hundreds of verses to earn the prizes of summers at Christian camps, I really didn't understand most of them. And as far as major doctrines were concerned, I was pretty much clueless, apart, of course, from how to be saved.

It wasn't that I hadn't heard the major doctrines preached; perhaps even taught systematically in Sunday school. But I'd had a lot of other things on my child's (and teenager's) mind while I was sitting in church. And the preaching and teaching alone weren't getting and holding my attention. What I needed, but didn't know it, was for someone to create a situation in which it was natural for me to respond back and forth with the teachers I was hearing.

That's the genius of catechisms. The question & answer format *engages* the young person. It constrains him to remember and repeat, the very methodology that best fixes truth into an impressionable mind.

Mount Calvary's attention to catechizing this year is going to be a great friend to you as you attempt to increase your own grasp of scripture, but especially as you attempt to disciple your children. Seize the opportunity! Don't let it drift by. Embrace it as a great friend in helping you to rear your family for the Lord. We're in this venture together. Some are going to find it easier than others, but everyone can make it work.

Give your children the rich advantage of being systematically drilled in the fundamentals of our precious Faith. And by God's grace, they will someday look back with great appreciation and call you *blessed!*

*Pastor Minnick*

# PREFACE

Our theme for the Man of the Word this spring is *Discipleship by Doctrine: Testimonies of Treasuring and Transferring the Truth*. It is a companion to our church-wide emphasis this year on catechizing.

This booklet is a ten-week study designed to encourage you in the practices of meditating on doctrinal truth and edifying others by transferring this treasure to them as well. The articles are testimonies written by various men in our assembly recounting the importance of doctrinal truth in their own lives. Each week's resources consist of:

- THEME – An introduction to the Scripture reading and article
- SCRIPTURE READING – A passage pertaining to the week's article to be read and considered during the week (and perhaps used in family worship)
- CATECHISM – Each week a catechism question and answer is listed to aid memorization and review.
- BOOK READING – J. C. Ryle, *Five English Reformers* (Banner of Truth, 2014 reprint)

[For those who have already Ryle's book, consider Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Zondervan, 1986).]

- M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE – A way to keep on track in reading through the Bible in 2017 using the M'Cheyne system
- ARTICLES – Testimonies and devotionals about the transforming nature of doctrine written by Mt. Calvary Baptist Church men

Don't let these materials become daunting. Let whatever you do be a delight. If you can't keep up every component, choose the ones that you can use consistently and stick with them. At the very least, work to incorporate the catechism into your home during family worship or at meals.

## THEME

Paul's exhortation to Timothy stands as an inspired pattern for discipleship by doctrine.

## SCRIPTURE READING

**2 Timothy 1:1-2:13**

## TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*.”

**2 Timothy 1:13-14**

## CATECHISM (1)

**Q:** What is the chief end of man?

**A:** The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

## BOOK READING

Ryle, pp. 1-24

## M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

<b>Jan 29</b>	Gen 30	Mark 1	Esther 6	Rom 1
<b>Jan 30</b>	Gen 31	Mark 2	Esther 7	Rom 2
<b>Jan 31</b>	Gen 32	Mark 3	Esther 8	Rom 3
<b>Feb 01</b>	Gen 33	Mark 4	Esther 9-10	Rom 4
<b>Feb 02</b>	Gen 34	Mark 5	Job 1	Rom 5
<b>Feb 03</b>	Gen 35-36	Mark 6	Job 2	Rom 6
<b>Feb 04</b>	Gen 37	Mark 7	Job 3	Rom 7

# TREASURING AND TRANSFERRING THE TRUTH

ERIC NEWTON

My earliest memory of watching sports was the 1988 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. My dad had borrowed an old green TV for the occasion. I was especially transfixed by the sprinting events, including the relays. But as a nine-year-old I did not understand how problematic the baton pass could be. All I could see was speed.

I have come to realize that these hand-to-hand transfers are the essence of relays. There have been embarrassing moments in recent track-and-field history when passes have not gone well, such as the historically epic failure of the USA 4x100 relay teams at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

But it isn't the Olympics that now captures my attention. In recent years I have been struck with the eternal significance of passing the truth down to the next generation. The names of gifted preachers and teachers are etched in the annals of church history. But giftedness is not ultimately important. Faithfulness is. The kind of reliability that outlasts itself by influencing those next in line. Sometimes we remember the names of those in this lineage; sometimes we don't. But what matters is that biblical doctrine is faithfully transferred.

The passage that has burned this conviction into my soul is 2 Timothy 1-2. Successfully transferring the truth is the mission that grips Paul as he writes his final canonical letter to his son in the faith, Timothy. Paul knows "the time of [his] departure has come" (2 Tim. 4:6). By God's grace he has "kept the faith" (4:7). He has fulfilled his calling to bear the light of Jesus the Messiah to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47). Now, Paul is passing the baton.

As he makes clear, Paul is not the "leadoff runner." The gospel begins with God, who entrusted it to Paul. He was "appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher" (1:11). Paul was now, in turn, entrusting this "treasure" to Timothy so that he would "guard" it (1:14) and "entrust these [doctrines] to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2:2). Timothy was to protect the gospel truth, but not in a covert way that keeps treasure stowed away. Rather, Paul means the kind of preservation that honors an

heirloom and ensures that younger family members understand, appreciate, and protect it themselves. This is the inspired pattern of discipleship by doctrine.

Ever since Paul's commission of Timothy, the gospel has been passed down from one post-apostolic generation to the next. Although Paul and Timothy were missionaries and preachers, it would be wrong to presume that this passage has little application for the rest of us. In various ways we can and must be among the "faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2:2).

It is readily apparent that we stand at a critical juncture in church history. Ambiguity and relativity pervade postmodern thinking. Apathy and distaste for strong doctrine are the norm in many churches. Millions of opinions are just a few clicks away. Christians with convictions stick out uncomfortably. As one book puts it:

"Most [emerging adults] are at pains to keep open as many options as possible, to honor all forms of social and cultural diversity without judgment or even evaluation, and as quickly as possible to get on the road to autonomous self-sufficiency. Little of that encourages them to put down roots within particular religious communities that engage in committed faith practices."<sup>1</sup>

After taking in the scenery of our times, I have often struggled with discouragement. But the Holy Spirit refocuses my gaze on what Paul wrote. He charges Timothy to endure as a soldier, compete like a good athlete, sow with the faith of a hard-working farmer, and remember Jesus Christ, who is risen from the dead (2:3-8). There are many troubling circumstances in this present age, "but the word of God is not imprisoned" (2:9).

So when our times of family worship seem to be reaping few immediate dividends, we must persevere with the prospect "that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory" (2:10). When we wonder whether spending time with a friend discussing a matter scripturally is all that important, we must remember that God's Word equips us "for every good work" (3:17). When we ponder whether the effort of catechism should be a priority, we can be assured that God makes

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 280.

us “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” in order to disciple by doctrine (2:1).

By God’s grace may we add our lives to the long list of faithful, common Christians who grabbed hold of the truth and transferred it on. As Paul exhorted Timothy, “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (1:13).

THEME

Instead of taking for granted that we understand the Bible’s doctrine, we must urgently seek the Lord for His help.

SCRIPTURE READING

**Psalm 119:1-40**

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to *dishonest* gain.”

**Psalm 119:35-36**

CATECHISM (2)

**Q:** What must I do in order to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever?

**A:** In order to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever, I must know and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

BOOK READING

Ryle, pp. 25-43

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

<b>Feb 05</b>	Gen 38	Mark 8	Job 4	Rom 8
<b>Feb 06</b>	Gen 39	Mark 9	Job 5	Rom 9
<b>Feb 07</b>	Gen 40	Mark 10	Job 6	Rom 10
<b>Feb 08</b>	Gen 41	Mark 11	Job 7	Rom 11
<b>Feb 09</b>	Gen 42	Mark 12	Job 8	Rom 12
<b>Feb 10</b>	Gen 43	Mark 13	Job 9	Rom 13
<b>Feb 11</b>	Gen 44	Mark 14	Job 10	Rom 14

# INCLINE MY HEART!

SAMUEL HAWKEY

Have you ever been frustrated by your own inconsistency? I know I have. Many people make New Year's resolutions, only to discover their resolve waning after the first week! Maybe your resolution sounds something like this: "My goal for 2017 is to accomplish the goals of 2016, which I should have done in 2015, because I promised them in 2014 and planned them in 2013!" Have you been frustrated about your inconsistent communion with the Lord? As we set resolutions to "do better spiritually" this year, we already know something about our heart. Like a marble on an uneven surface, *it is always moving somewhere, and apart from divine help, it will move away from God.*

One day as I was frustrated by my own spiritual apathy, I turned to Psalm 119:33-40 and read truths that gripped me powerfully. I was so affected that I carefully studied the passage, preached on it, and many times have shared its testimony with family and friends. It even inspired some poetry (see the end of this article)!

I like to picture the Psalmist on his face before the Lord, pleading with the Lord to stir up revival in his otherwise cold heart. Psalm 119:33-40 says, "*Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes, And I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, and keep it with all my heart. Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Thy testimonies, and not to dishonest gain. Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, and revive me in Thy ways. Establish Thy word to Thy servant, as that which produces reverence for Thee. Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Thine ordinances are good. Behold, I long for Thy precepts; Revive me through Thy righteousness.*" I underlined the Psalmist's requests and have found that when I pray them, my heart inclines toward the Lord. **My heart is prone to wander! Only the Lord can incline my heart to commune with Him.**

The Psalmist in verse 33 begins with entreating the Lord to give him instruction, with the result that he will keep God's statutes. This instruction is more than intellectual knowledge of what God's law says, but rather understanding how God wants us to apply it to everyday life. Several years ago, one of my young sons grabbed a cookie from a picnic line and

quickly took a bite. When admonished that this was not a polite thing to do, he apologized and reached to put it back on the plate before being quickly stopped by my wife! He partially understood the correction, but missed the whole point. I chuckled at this, but then I thought about how often I miss the point of my Lord's instruction. I need to think in the same way God thinks about his own law. **I can't apply God's law without His help. My heart is prone to wander! Only the Lord can incline my heart to commune with Him.**

The Psalmist's next request is for understanding—a discerning, ethical insight that can only come from God. I need help from God to understand and keep His law wholeheartedly. *Wholeheartedly* means my mind, emotions, and will must be bent in pursuit of God! I like to think of an Olympic athlete bending his whole person to reach a goal. Mind: He listens to his trainer to gain knowledge about how to compete. He learns all the rules and the layout of the course. Emotions: He stays positive and avoids discouragement. He knows how to regulate his emotions and harness them to win. Will: He is careful about what he eats and pushes himself physically. He does not allow himself to be distracted by other less important matters. He does not give up. If I have the feeling that I'm holding parts of my mind, emotion, or will back from the Lord, I need to surrender that part immediately. Yes, even if the part seems small—the benefit is far greater! I've found this surrender energizes a spiritual momentum that propels me further toward greater communion with God. **I can't understand God's law without His help. My heart is prone to wander! Only the Lord can incline my heart to commune with Him.**

Inclining my whole heart toward God has to begin with a sense of desperation for His help. A nonchalant attitude will not do. Robert Murray McCheyne said, "We must be *driven* more to our Bibles, and to the mercy-seat, if we are to stand in the evil day." I find that inclining my heart devotionally is like a rudder slowly turning a large ship. It takes time, focus, and spiritual sweat, so I can't give up when I'm not sensing immediate results. Deuteronomy 4:29 says, "But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with *all* your heart and all your soul." God is a person who delights to be pursued and who wants to commune with me. I am thankful to have a Helmsman who is always directing my heart back to Himself.

Incline my heart to seek for Thee,  
Lest my rudder lead astray.  
Lift my hand to grasp the helm,  
For I have no strength today.  
Give me wisdom to obey,  
For I have none of my own.  
Teach my heart to think like thee,  
'Till I know as I am known.  
Then when I have lived my days,  
I will calmly cross death's door.  
You are the Helmsman of my heart—  
Take me to the other shore.

THEME

Theology provides a framework for all of life, not just the answers to antiquated or purely philosophical questions. Therefore, we must prize sound doctrine. As 2 Peter 1 demonstrates, truth is the basis for our growth in Christian character.

SCRIPTURE READING

2 Peter 1

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

2 Peter 3:18

CATECHISM (3)

Q: How can I know about God?

A: I can know about God by His creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which are *before my eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate “the invisible things of God.”* [Belgic Confession, quoting Rom. 1:20]

BOOK READING

Ryle, pp. 45-62

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

<b>Feb 12</b>	Gen 45	Mark 15	Job 11	Rom 15
<b>Feb 13</b>	Gen 46	Mark 16	Job 12	Rom 16
<b>Feb 14</b>	Gen 47	Luke 1:1-38	Job 13	1 Cor 1
<b>Feb 15</b>	Gen 48	Luke 1:39-80	Job 14	1 Cor 2
<b>Feb 16</b>	Gen 49	Luke 2	Job 15	1 Cor 3
<b>Feb 17</b>	Gen 50	Luke 3	Job 16-17	1 Cor 4
<b>Feb 18</b>	Ex 1	Luke 4	Job 18	1 Cor 5

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

DAN SCHAFFNER

“I don’t want to study any heavy theology.” This was the response of one girl in my church youth group back home when the leader invited us to suggest topics for our next weekly Bible study. In my mind, something about that statement struck me as being the wrong sentiment. To be fair, I don’t exactly know the motivation behind her statement, but I do know this girl who grew up in the same church as I did had the privilege of attending Christian school while I attended public school. I thought maybe she was more familiar with theology than me. My assumption was that perhaps she just thought studying theology causes too many arguments, or it’s too confusing to understand all the positions on certain doctrines and which one is correct.

I don’t remember if this occurred the summer before or the summer after I attended my first year at Bob Jones University. What I do remember is that from the time I stepped on campus, I fell in love with the school. Even though I had grown up in a Christian home and had attended a fairly conservative, Bible-preaching GARBC church, BJU was teaching me to look at everything from a different lens. I’ll have to admit I was a slow learner at many things even though I was appreciating all I was learning. I was learning I had to consider others in my decision making, musical tastes, and dress. I was learning how to interact socially appropriately on various levels with different people. I had to learn self-denial, responsibility, and respect for authority. I was learning that the Bible had things to say about all matters of life, and it even had things to say about the kinds of positions people were arguing about in the dorm rooms. These were all matters of doctrine.

One example of this type of discussion occurred before I ever thought of attending Mount Calvary. I remember having a discussion in a dorm room about hats and head coverings on ladies during church services. That discussion got me pulling out my Bible and actually looking at the passage dealing with the topic we were discussing so I could weigh in on it. That started a very helpful habit. As I looked at the passage I tried to sort through what the passage was saying. I think I came to the wrong conclusion about the matter at the time. But I soon started realizing that having

discussions about theological matters without looking at Bibles sends you around in circles. The comment the girl in my youth group made and all of these early discussions in college occurred prior to my taking Bible Doctrines in undergrad or Systematic Theology, New Testament Theology, or Old Testament Theology in grad school. As helpful and informative as these courses have been for me, I'll admit it's easy to forget a good bit of what one has heard and supposedly learned. (I must say that Systematic Theology was my "baptism-by-fire-hose" into grad school.)

I appreciate my training at a Christian college and seminary, and this is vital for people studying for ministry and various vocations; however, I have appreciated more and more the theology I'm learning in the course of regular worship delivered by a faithful under-shepherd who's not forgetful of the things he's learned, and continues to pour his life into learning and passing on doctrine. I'm thankful that when I had sudden doubts about joining another church in town that I'd been attending for several years, the Lord helped me remember the discussion I had as a freshman or sophomore about head coverings. I remember thinking, "at least Mount Calvary thinks seriously about the Word. I think I need to go there and get better grounded." I visited that evening and had the same refreshing, exhilarating feeling as when I came to BJU. I'm thankful for sermons Pastor has preached, such as "Theology Matters," that kindled my desire to do more reading in systematic theology when that course had become like water under a bridge. I'm thankful for reminders such as the fact that "separation is a doctrine of Scripture," therefore we can't just dismiss it as being less important than the gospel. More and more I see the importance of individuals being taught the doctrines of Scripture apart from an official class that will be done at the end of a semester where the details and specific passages quickly become foggy. Theology is part of worship both in our homes and during corporate worship as it helps us know and understand God and His ways better and be able to give Him the glory He's due.

Now that I've been out of seminary for a few years, I've become even less concerned than I was then of being able to put a label on everyone or know the lingo for the five positions on every doctrine. Now I seek to think theologically as a filter for interpreting and describing things that are happening in the world and in people's lives, and then as God brings opportunities, help others see these theological realities. In the last two years, God has allowed me to have these types of conversations through a part-time job I hold as a private security officer stationed at Ingles of

Cherrydale. You can probably imagine the range of personalities that come in and out of the store in that part of town from different socio-economic, political, and religious backgrounds. This gives me a wide variety of opportunities to discuss personal, local, national, political, and world events with shoppers and employees who are willing to chit-chat with the security guard as they pass by, as I move throughout the store occasionally, or as we stare across the aisle at each other. (Granted, some “shoppers” avoid me like the plague.) I have one customer who fancies himself as a prophet, tells me to look up Bible verses, is fixated on the kingdom of God (sounded good at first), and claims Jesus never talked about a religion or church and Paul’s words should basically be ignored. These are theological matters. I haven’t yet had the courage to tell him he’s not a prophet as he boldly predicted Hillary Clinton would be elected (based on some Biblical criteria), and I would see he was a prophet when she was, but I do try to give him statements of Scripture that will hopefully help him find biblical balance.

When you understand theology correctly, you start to realize it’s not merely a matter of facts, labels, and verses you need to memorize to pass a test. It’s not a matter of taking pride in being able to describe yourself as being in a certain theological camp. Theology has questions to answer about God his purposes and his creatures, this world, and eternity. These questions can be answered by meditating on specific scriptures or by making inferences informed by scripture, its structure, or even its silence. May the Lord help us to think theologically and teach others to do the same through the conversations God brings our way.

THEME

Our salvation in Christ is exceedingly personal, but it is not merely an experience. It is our trust in objective truth—who God is, what He has accomplished, and what He has promised. Therefore, a catechism positions us to commend and defend our faith.

SCRIPTURE READING

Acts 26

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;” **1 Peter 3:15**

CATECHISM (4)

Q: How can I know about God most completely?

A: I can know about God most completely by the holy scriptures.

BOOK READING

Ryle, pp. 62-82

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

<b>Feb 19</b>	Ex 2	Luke 5	Job 19	1 Cor 6
<b>Feb 20</b>	Ex 3	Luke 6	Job 20	1 Cor 7
<b>Feb 21</b>	Ex 4	Luke 7	Job 21	1 Cor 8
<b>Feb 22</b>	Ex 5	Luke 8	Job 22	1 Cor 9
<b>Feb 23</b>	Ex 6	Luke 9	Job 23	1 Cor 10
<b>Feb 24</b>	Ex 7	Luke 10	Job 24	1 Cor 11
<b>Feb 25</b>	Ex 8	Luke 11	Job 25-26	1 Cor 12

# A DEFENSE OF THE HOPE THAT IS IN US

DICK KELLY

Occasionally we are asked to give our personal salvation testimony. This could be in a conversation with an individual or in a more public setting such as joining a church. The former is likely to be impromptu and spontaneous and the latter more formal. In either instance the scriptures command us: "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15).

One of Merriam-Webster's definitions of testimony is: "a public profession of a religious experience." Unfortunately, that is the average Christian's perception of a salvation testimony. The emphasis is on "a religious experience." What happened is more important than the truth we believe. The Scriptures emphasize that the gospel truth we believe, know, and have embraced is the central part of our salvation testimony (1 Jn. 5:10). In other words, our statement of faith supported by Scripture is more important in our salvation testimony than our experience.

We are commanded to always be ready to make a defense, but our defense will likely be weak and lacking in substance if there has been no preparation. A defense that does not reference God's Word gives the impression that this is only our opinion (Prov. 16:25). Citing Scripture gives the hearer God's opinion as the basis of understanding. Also, faith comes by understanding the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Including God's Word is most helpful. If our salvation testimony is primarily a storyline with little gospel truth, is that really a defense of the hope that is in you?

Our first responsibility then in preparing a defense is to develop an organized thought process of the core gospel truths as found in Scriptures. This is no different than memorizing Scripture in certain categories of thought such as what we did when learning the *Armory for Victory* verses.

Catechizing is also a similar concept but a more organized method of preparation. Of course, our statements of faith will vary in understanding depending upon age and maturity.

*Example statement of faith:*

- Scripture is God's revelation to man (2 Tim. 3:16).
- God is holy (Ps. 77:13).
- We are sinners going our own way (Rom. 3:9; Is. 53:6).
- Without Christ, a person will perish in an eternal hell apart from God (Rev. 20:11-15).
- Christ, the Son of God, was sent to deliver anyone from their sin who believes in Him (Jn. 3:16).
- He died a substitutionary death for sinners (2 Cor. 5:21).
- He was raised from the dead and reigns as Lord (Acts 2:23-33).
- Jesus is the only way for man to gain access to God (Jn. 14:6).
- A person must be born again to enter God's kingdom (Jn. 3:5).
- God requires sinful men to repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).
- We are justified by faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1).

My salvation testimony could simply be my statement of faith coupled with the confession that I have come to believe and know that Jesus is the Savior of the world (e.g. Peter's confession in Jn. 6:69). I realized that I am a sinner and have trusted in the Lord Jesus to save me (Acts 16:31).

Having developed a scriptural statement of faith, we can add the providential experiences God ordained to bring us to Christ if we so choose. The experiences I include in my testimony are intended to address common misconceptions and to cultivate the hearer's interest. Other experiences such as struggling with assurance of salvation are excluded but may be helpful in certain venues.

*My storyline:*

I was raised in a Christian home and attended Sunday morning church meetings. I came to assent to certain truths about God, the Bible, sin, and Jesus, but even so I was not a Christian. Frankly I was living my life for myself and going my own way with little regard for God. I hoped everything would be OK. I attended church all my formative and teenage years and yet never understood how to become right with God. It wasn't until I was in college that I became concerned about my sin and its effect on my relationship to God. I started reading the Bible to understand God's perspective of what I must do to have a right relationship with Him. Finally,

after much searching I was saved in the summer of 1977 on the campus of North Carolina State University.

I weave my statement of faith and storyline together when presenting my salvation testimony. Notice my storyline does not communicate the gospel nor make a defense of the hope that is in me. Only my statement of faith coupled with a confession of having appropriated these truths personally by faith in Christ actually makes a defense. Our statement of faith undergirded by Scripture is the substantive part of our salvation testimony. It is my hope and prayer that this will help you to better prepare your defense for the hope that is in you.

THEME

Testimonies from church history shed light on the role of doctrine in the transformation of lives. Few are more notable or compelling than Martin Luther’s rediscovery of the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone.

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 3

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’” **Romans 1:16-17**

CATECHISM (5)

Q: What are the holy scriptures?

A: The holy scriptures are the inerrant Word of God, the Old and New Testaments, *the only rule of my faith and obedience, the only rule to direct me how I may glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

BOOK READING

Ryle, pp. 82-96

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

<b>Feb 26</b>	Ex 9	Luke 12	Job 27	1 Cor 13
<b>Feb 27</b>	Ex 10	Luke 13	Job 28	1 Cor 14
<b>Feb 28</b>	Ex 11:1-12:21	Luke 14	Job 29	1 Cor 15
<b>Mar 01</b>	Ex 12:22-51	Luke 15	Job 30	1 Cor 16
<b>Mar 02</b>	Ex 13	Luke 16	Job 31	2 Cor 1
<b>Mar 03</b>	Ex 14	Luke 17	Job 32	2 Cor 2
<b>Mar 04</b>	Ex 15	Luke 18	Job 33	2 Cor 3

# LUTHER AND THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

ERIC NEWTON

The year 2017 marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the traditional beginning date of the Protestant Reformation. There has hardly been a more significant doctrinal turning point in church history as when Martin Luther came to understand that Scripture teaches justification by faith in Christ alone. Since we are considering testimonies of treasuring and transferring God's truth, the story of how God illuminated the gospel to the famous German Reformer bears repeating.

From the time of his entry into a cloister of monks in Erfurt, Luther demonstrated a serious approach to Christianity—or, rather, what he believed to be Christianity. He excelled most monks in his commitment to physically taxing spiritual disciplines, such as extended fasting and wearing coarse undergarments. He confessed his sins at length, exhausting his religious superiors. He believed that people were inherently sinful and, therefore, must accept the just condemnation of an all-righteous God if they were to be saved.

In fact, even when he nailed his academic disputations to the church door in Wittenberg (95 theses in all), Luther knew Roman Catholic practices had serious flaws but still lacked clarity about the core of the gospel. He rightly believed that divine justice is very bad news for sinful people. What the Spirit would enable him to discover is that through the cross of Christ, divine righteousness is also the best possible news for sinners.

In the providence of God, it was Luther's calling to teach theology at the University of Wittenberg. He voraciously studied the Bible and, after long grappling with Romans 1:17, eventually discerned its evangelical meaning: *God righteously declares unrighteous sinners to be righteous by accrediting to them through faith His Son's own righteousness*. Hope does not reside inside the sinner but outside him, in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Here is Luther's own testimony of divine light breaking in on his soul in his Wittenberg tower study—what we refer to as his “tower experience”:

“At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, “He who through faith is

righteous shall live.” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’”<sup>2</sup>

This rediscovery of the biblical doctrine of justification was no mere intellectual enlightenment. Later in life Luther described it this way: “Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.”<sup>3</sup> By God’s grace Luther had received what Paul calls “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of [Christ]” (Eph. 1:17). He had warmly received the very heart of God’s good news.

Luther’s story is unique in some ways, of course. He had few of the benefits all of us enjoy, such as exegetically faithful preaching, sound Bible study tools, and an abundance of scripturally-minded Christian fellowship. Admittedly, he did have some positive human influence that was instrumental to his conversion, such as the vicar of his Augustinian order, Johann von Staupitz. But thankfully, our doctrinal world is very different from Luther’s.

Nevertheless, Luther’s transformation reminds us that there is no substitute in Christian discipleship for the Bible and spiritual illumination. Luther went on to write prolifically, including smaller and larger catechisms. Yet the rich theology penned by the Reformers and those that followed them began with discoveries like this one in Scripture itself. Luther treasured God’s truth personally and then transferred it to others.

One interesting and significant footnote to the story of Luther and the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the role it played in the conversion of John Wesley. Though Wesley had pursued holiness, traveled across the Atlantic to Georgia as a missionary, and even started to articulate an evangelical understanding of the gospel, it was not until May 24, 1738 that he rested his faith in Christ alone as his own Savior. Wesley recounts his experience this way:

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation* (B&H Academic, 2009), 47-48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

“In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while the leader was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was giving *me* that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.”<sup>4</sup>

In other words, Wesley was converted while listening to someone he did not know read the preface to Luther’s commentary on Romans. The Reformer transferred the truth through his explanation of Paul’s message to the Romans, and God used it to persuade Wesley to claim the gospel treasure as his own. How remarkable is God’s gracious orchestration of history to rescue sinners like you and me! May this glimpse into church history stir us to prize the precious truth of the gospel, for our own sake and for those we disciple.

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in Fred Sanders, *Wesley on the Christian Life: The Heart Renewed in Love* (Crossway, 2013), 33, emphasis added.

THEME

Scripture is full of wisdom for everyday life, which means good discipleship incorporates the hands-on teaching of passages such as Proverbs.

SCRIPTURE READING

**Proverbs 1**

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.” **Proverbs 1:7**

CATECHISM (6)

- Q:** According to the holy scriptures, what is the only way for me to know and worship God in spirit and in truth?
- A:** According to the holy scriptures, the only way for me to know and worship God in spirit and in truth is through Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son.

BOOK READING

Ryle, pp. 97-115

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

<b>Mar 05</b>	Ex 16	Luke 19	Job 34	2 Cor 4
<b>Mar 06</b>	Ex 17	Luke 20	Job 35	2 Cor 5
<b>Mar 07</b>	Ex 18	Luke 21	Job 36	2 Cor 6
<b>Mar 08</b>	Ex 19	Luke 22	Job 37	2 Cor 7
<b>Mar 09</b>	Ex 20	Luke 23	Job 38	2 Cor 8
<b>Mar 10</b>	Ex 21	Luke 24	Job 39	2 Cor 9
<b>Mar 11</b>	Ex 22	John 1	Job 40	2 Cor 10

# THE WISDOM OF PROVERBS

JEREMY MOFFITT

Have you ever asked your child(ren), “How many times have I told you . . . ?” Often my wife and I have asked each other, how many times do we have to repeat the same basic admonitions, discipline for the same offences, or quote the same verses that we’ve told them so many times already? Why is their spiritual growth so slow that sometimes we wonder if there is any?

At times it feels like insanity. It seems like we’re doing the same thing over and over but expecting a different result. I see this not only when observing my children’s choices, but also when reflecting on my own struggle over the years to live like Jesus. Questions go through my mind. Why don’t I change? Is it worth the struggle? Why doesn’t God grant relief and deliverance from my besetting sin(s)?

The truth is that there is a major reason why our repetitive struggles to change are not futile. We’re not expecting a different result based on a vain hope in our ability to change. Our hope is a confident expectation based on God’s Word and His faithfulness to it.

It is true that all Scripture is profitable, but I have found Proverbs to be exceptionally helpful in daily living and teaching. Each year I make it a personal priority to read through Proverbs. Though the content is very familiar from repeated reading, I am consistently encouraged and corrected in my thinking and daily living. Am I tempted to doubt? I need to “Trust in the Lord with all my heart” (Prov. 3:5). Impatience and anger are present in my responses to others and then I read, “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute” (Prov. 5:8). Difficult problems arise, and though I’ve sought the Lord in prayer I’m uncertain what to do. Though my heart may “plan my ways” I can be confident that the Lord is “directing my steps” (Prov. 16:9).

I found myself so regularly repeating various proverbs to my family that a few years ago I interrupted our systematic reading during family worship and jumped to Proverbs. Even though some of the children were very young, it was rare that there was not something in each chapter that they could easily understand. I found this to be a very profitable exercise for our family.

Based on that experience, we have made it a priority to read the entire book of Proverbs at least once, and often twice, a year during our family worship time. The practical admonitions and pithy sayings not only shape our thinking, but also provide opportunities to naturally discuss wise and foolish ways of living. The broad range of topics addressed provide a natural way to discuss a wide variety of life's problems. Key topics are repeated over and over and give an opportunity to remind us how much we need to hear God's instructions about anger, speech, etc. Difficult-to-address topics are also addressed, and I find it such a help to me to read what God says about the "strange woman" and then, in an age-appropriate way, discuss the pitfalls of this way of living.

Not very long ago I had a couple of children who had an ongoing struggle with unkind responses. Not being home at the time, I wondered how best to address the situation. The Spirit prompted me to have them read a chapter from Proverbs, choose three verses, tell me what they learned from them about their speech, and then memorize those verses. I chose a chapter, but later when giving them their instructions, I "accidentally" said a different chapter than I intended. After they chose their verses and called me back about it, I realized the mistake, but each one had found verses so appropriate that it was obviously God's choice. Then within a couple of days we came to that same chapter in our family worship time. As soon as I started reading, everyone laughed. Then we allowed God to again use those verses to teach and correct us.

## THEME

Trusting the Lord is not a sentimental wish but a way of life rooted in the revealed character of God. By growing in our conviction regarding sound doctrine, we position ourselves to follow the Lord in the midst of life's challenging circumstances.

## SCRIPTURE READING

**Psalm 62**

## TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him.” **James 1:12**

## CATECHISM (7)

**Q:** How do we know that the holy scriptures are inerrant?

**A:** We know that the holy scriptures are inerrant because they claim to be, and because the Spirit of God bears witness with them in our hearts.

## BOOK READING

Ryle, pp. 117-147

## M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

<b>Mar 12</b>	Ex 23	John 2	Job 41	2 Cor 11
<b>Mar 13</b>	Ex 24	John 3	Job 42	2 Cor 12
<b>Mar 14</b>	Ex 25	John 4	Pro 1	2 Cor 13
<b>Mar 15</b>	Ex 26	John 5	Pro 2	Gal 1
<b>Mar 16</b>	Ex 27	John 6	Pro 3	Gal 2
<b>Mar 17</b>	Ex 28	John 7	Pro 4	Gal 3
<b>Mar 18</b>	Ex 29	John 8	Pro 5	Gal 4

# TRUSTING THE LORD

KEN BRACKBILL

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12).

As an accountant, I have to make sure that everything is in order and in balance. But there are times that God brings things into our lives that don't seem to us to be in order or in balance. At those times it can be a struggle to truly trust the Lord that things are the way they should be.

One of my personal prayer requests in 2016 was that the Lord would help me to trust Him fully.

My place of employment was purchased by a German company in May of 2015. This was the third time the company had been sold over the nearly 36 years that I was employed there. The Lord had preserved my job through the other two buyouts. However, it wasn't long until I realized that the way the new company was structured, many of my accounting duties would be handled out of their corporate office in Fort Mill. I still had some monthly reporting to do, some general management duties like before and took on some other projects. In February of 2016 my general management duties were given to another person who worked for another local location owned by this German company. I soon realized my time there could possibly be shorter than the four more years I wanted to work before retiring.

In the middle of September, I started choosing a verse a day from my Bible reading to meditate on throughout the day for my own accountability. I also shared this verse with my wife as a way to edify and encourage her.

The last day of September I was called into the conference room early one morning and was given the news that my position was being eliminated immediately. Even though I thought it might happen, it still came as a shock. All my plans were superseded by God's plans and He put me in the position to see if I meant what I was asking Him to do in my life.

At that time my daily meditation verses turned more in the direction of

trust as I discovered that everywhere you go in the Word, there is encouragement from the Lord as to why we should trust Him and abundant promises if we do.

Have you ever asked, why should I trust God? The spoken Word gives us the command to trust Him. David told his people in Psalm 62:8, "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us." In Proverbs Solomon says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding" (3:5). Even though these were written to Israel, they are relevant for believers today.

Have you ever considered what you gain when you trust in the Lord? One thing is rest. In Matthew 11:28-30 our Lord says, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Another thing He does is take away our anxiety. Isaiah 41:10 says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Paul writes in Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

Thirty-six years prior to December of 2016, I had been out of work for six months. During this time, we were looking forward to our son John's birth in April. The Lord met all our needs during that time including supplying the job that recently ended in September. We can look back now and see how the Lord met our needs while I was unemployed that time and has met our needs ever since then. What an amazing God!

As I mentioned earlier, I had hoped to work for a few more years before retiring, if that is the Lord's will. God has additional promises if we will trust in Him.

- "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).
- "But they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing" (Ps. 34:10b). "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it" (Ps. 37:4-5).

- “Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken” (Ps. 55:22).

You ask, “But how did the Lord answer your desire to work a few more years?” He has not chosen to reveal that to me yet, so we wait by faith with a sincere hope in our unchanging God.

I would like to leave you with three more verses for encouragement:

- “Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps. 119:165).
- “Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity? In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 1:10b).
- “For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. They you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:11-13).

## THEME

God is a perfect Father whose care is universal and whose kingdom is preeminent.

## SCRIPTURE READING

**Psalm 104; Matthew 6:19-34**

## TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” **Matthew 6:31-33**

## CATECHISM (6)

**Q:** How did God give us the holy Scriptures?

**A:** God gave us the holy scriptures as “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

## BOOK READING

Ryle, pp. 147-167

## M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

<b>Mar 19</b>	Ex 30	John 9	Pro 6	Gal 5
<b>Mar 20</b>	Ex 31	John 10	Pro 7	Gal 6
<b>Mar 21</b>	Ex 32	John 11	Pro 8	Eph 1
<b>Mar 22</b>	Ex 33	John 12	Pro 9	Eph 2
<b>Mar 23</b>	Ex 34	John 13	Pro 10	Eph 3
<b>Mar 24</b>	Ex 35	John 14	Pro 11	Eph 4
<b>Mar 25</b>	Ex 36	John 15	Pro 12	Eph 5

# A MINIVAN'S LASTING MINISTRY

ROGER BRADLEY

When our family was much younger and smaller, someone told us that the most difficult number of children to manage is three. The reason is that a parent has only two hands. We confronted another significant difficulty when we discovered that we were expecting child number four.

When we had three children, our four door sedan was only marginally viable as a family vehicle. A seven-year-old and a five-year-old had no little trouble sharing a back seat with a toddler's booster seat. With Dad at work all day, Mom had become extremely limited in what could be done outside the home with that setup. With the additional expectation of another child on the way, we knew that we would have no choice but to find a larger vehicle.

Large purchases have always been a challenge, at least in part because for most of our married lives my wife and I have been involved full-time in Christian ministries. Our regular income has usually been such that needs like these have naturally been a matter of prayer for us. Given the prospect of a new addition, we were tempted to worry. However, my wife and I knew that our older children were then at ages at which they would be well aware of the need and how Dad and Mom handled it. The need for a larger vehicle was a critical opportunity to demonstrate to our children how Christians should approach times of need and uncertainty. God had always made ample provision for us previously, and we were sure that He would again. For our children's sake, we asked God to meet our need in a way that would show them God's gracious provision for His people. We began to pray during our family worship time for God to provide for our need.

I worked a grounds/landscaping job at Clearwater Christian College during the summer when school was out. One hot afternoon in late summer I got a message asking me to go see the vice-president in charge of financial affairs at the college. While I was grateful for the opportunity to get into some air conditioning for a few minutes, I couldn't help wondering whether I was about to get some bad news. Was my summer job going to

be terminated? Would I have to find other work for the rest of the summer? What about my full-time teaching job? What was this all about?

I went to the office. The vice-president told me that a person who had been a long-time benefactor of the college had inquired whether there was someone working at the college who had a specific financial need of some kind. The benefactor had been told about my family's need for a larger vehicle, and decided to give my family a gift of \$10,000 in order to help us get one. Needless to say, I was anxious to get home to tell my wife and especially our children how the Lord had provided for those who expressed their dependence on Him.

We bought a gold Pontiac minivan with that money. We had that van for seven years, and every time we drove it or saw it in the driveway we were reminded of the kindness of God. It was the first vehicle that many of our children remember. Even though it is now long gone, it still comes up in conversation now and then and continues even today to provide tangible evidence of the gracious provision of our Heavenly Father.

We prayed for a vehicle, and at the time we likely thought it too audacious to pray for \$10,000 to buy it. In truth, this example is only one that our family has experienced in which God has demonstrated that He is "able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). Moreover, it is altogether too easy to forget the many ways that God has shown Himself faithful to His people. I was and still am thankful to God for that kind anonymous donor and that van. However, I am many times more thankful that God used them to give two young parents and five children a visible example and a long-lasting reminder of His love and care.

THEME

What is God’s purpose in trials? Feelings will come and go, but by grounding ourselves and our families in the truth, we can give God thanks for orchestrating all things together for His glory and our good.

SCRIPTURE READING

Psalm 136

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”  
**1 Thessalonians 5:18**

CATECHISM (9)

**Q:** How are we to interpret the holy scriptures?

**A:** We are to interpret the holy scriptures by the infallible scriptures themselves; *and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.*

BOOK READING

Ryle, pp. 169-196

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

<b>Mar 26</b>	Ex 37	John 16	Pro 13	Eph 6
<b>Mar 27</b>	Ex 38	John 17	Pro 14	Phil 1
<b>Mar 28</b>	Ex 39	John 18	Pro 15	Phil 2
<b>Mar 29</b>	Ex 40	John 19	Pro 16	Phil 3
<b>Mar 30</b>	Lev 1	John 20	Pro 17	Phil 4
<b>Mar 31</b>	Lev 2-3	John 21	Pro 18	Col 1
<b>Apr 01</b>	Lev 4	Psalm 1-2	Pro 19	Col 2

# THANKFULNESS AND OTHER THINGS . . .

NEIL SCROGGINS

## BEGINNINGS

I remember the day my parents split up for the last time. Although it has been nearly 40 years ago now, images are still vivid in my memory. I was only 6 years old at the time. There were 4 of us kids, and we were watching television. Mama was fixing supper—sloppy joes. Mama would always butter and toast the buns (which made for a better sandwich). As siblings are apt to do, we were arguing over something, and Mama came in and “yelled” at one of us. About that time Daddy came home—inebriated—and upon seeing this immediately launched out at Mama. That led to an argument and then a fight. In the end Daddy told Mama to leave . . . and take the kids with her. We ate supper. The buns were toasted more than we’d like but still edible. After packing, we made our way over to Mema’s house to “spend the night.” Little did we know that we would basically spend the rest of our growing-up-years at that house.

Mema was Mama’s mother. She had lived in a small, two-bedroom, A-frame house for several years. Papa was a carpenter and had purchased the house unfinished with the plans to do the work himself. Papa’s health declined, however, before he could finish the work. When we came to live there it was habitable, but there were some notable deficiencies. There was no air conditioning (in Houston, TX!). One of the bedrooms had a wall with tar paper and visible studs with no insulation. Much of the house that *was* finished had an older style and materials (steel water pipes, older electric wiring, etc.). Two bedrooms, 1 bath, a kitchen, a living room, and 6 people. But we made it work.

The neighborhood we lived in had gone “downhill” over the years. Mama was afraid to send us to the public school in that area, so she sent us to a relatively inexpensive private school that had good academics. Mama worked full-time, but we still had little money to spare. As you can imagine, things in the house began to break. This was the days before the rise of the DIY movement and YouTube videos. A single mom would have to rely on someone who knew what they were doing, and hiring someone like that cost money—money that we didn’t have. So, as things broke they

typically just didn't get fixed. The hot water heater broke early on. We just boiled water on the stove. Over the years, every faucet except for one broke. We just kept getting out water out of that one faucet. You might think this was a hard life, but for us it was all that we knew. We adapted.

Our growing up years weren't easy. It was a lot of work, and there were many times that I wished for the dad that wasn't there. This simply pushed me to cry out even more to the Father of the fatherless.

## LESSONS LEARNED

By the time I graduated from high school it was clear that the Lord wanted me to go BJU. (That's a whole other story.) In fact, the Lord led both my sister and I to go to BJU at the same time. For many incoming freshmen it is an exciting time of discovery, independence, making friends, exploring and growing. It was no different for us, but considering how and where we grew up it was an especially exciting time. I was living with other like-minded believers. I had my own bed. There was carpet on the floor. No bugs (mostly). And I remember calling my sister and exclaiming that we had air conditioning . . . and hot running water! Scripture enjoins us to give thanks in *everything*.<sup>5</sup> And it's not that we can't be thankful without going through hardships. But oh how the Lord can imbed certain lessons like this through the circumstances He allows us to encounter. Thankfulness for *all* that He gives us. Thankfulness in *every* circumstance. I'm still learning, but those lessons learned early on through difficult circumstances have served me well. Even to this day there are times when I stand in front of a sink with hot running water and get a little giddy with gratefulness.

## OTHER LESSONS

Over the course of my years in college (and beyond) the Lord has shown me other areas where He had or would use those difficult years as a child to grow me in ways that I had not realized and to a degree that I would not have learned otherwise had I not gone through the path that He appointed for me.<sup>6</sup> One of the most significant lessons concerns the

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<sup>5</sup> "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18).

<sup>6</sup> "For He performs what is appointed for me" (Job 23:14a).

sovereignty of God. He oversees all things.<sup>7</sup> He is in control of all things – even those circumstances that can seem so devastating at the time<sup>8</sup>; those circumstances where we feel like we’re just treading water. What we may not even realize at the time is that all that treading water builds muscle. The Lord can use those events if we’ll let Him – to refine us – to grow us – to make us more like His Son. And while we may not be able to see it at the time, He is using these things for our good.<sup>9</sup> He is perfecting us as He promised He would.<sup>10</sup>

So what trials are you facing right now? Rejoice! The Lord is at work. We can and should teach truth to our families that we have learned from others. However, the truths that we mine from the Scriptures *ourselves* and especially those truths that are acquired through providential trials become *ours* in a unique way. They give us an understanding and a passion concerning those things that allows us to be even more effective in communicating to others within our sphere of influence.

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<sup>7</sup> “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,  
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven  
And among the inhabitants of earth;  
And no one can ward off His hand  
Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’ (Dan. 4:35).

<sup>8</sup> “If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble?  
If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?” (Amos 3:6)

<sup>9</sup> “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

<sup>10</sup> “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phi. 1:6).

**THEME**

The focus of the final week of this cycle is personal application of the theme, *Discipleship by Doctrine*.

**SCRIPTURE READING**

**Psalm 40**

**TRUTH FOR MEDITATION**

“I have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness in the great congregation; Behold, I will not restrain my lips, O LORD, You know. I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great congregation.” **Psalm 40:9-10**

**CATECHISM (10)**

**Q:** According to the holy scriptures, Who is God?

**A:** According to the holy scriptures, God is, “I AM WHO I AM,” “the LORD,” “the LORD God.”

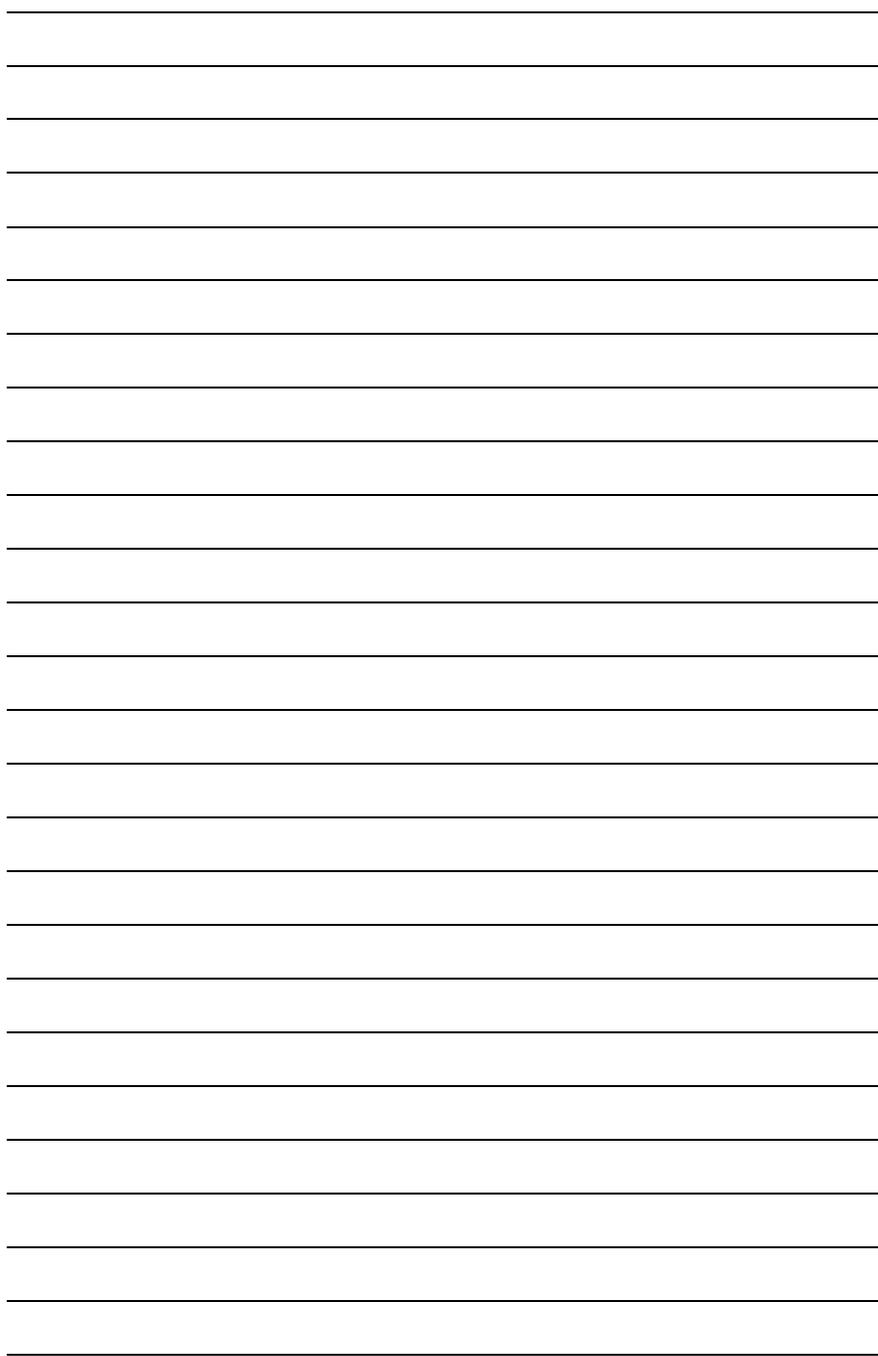
**BOOK READING**

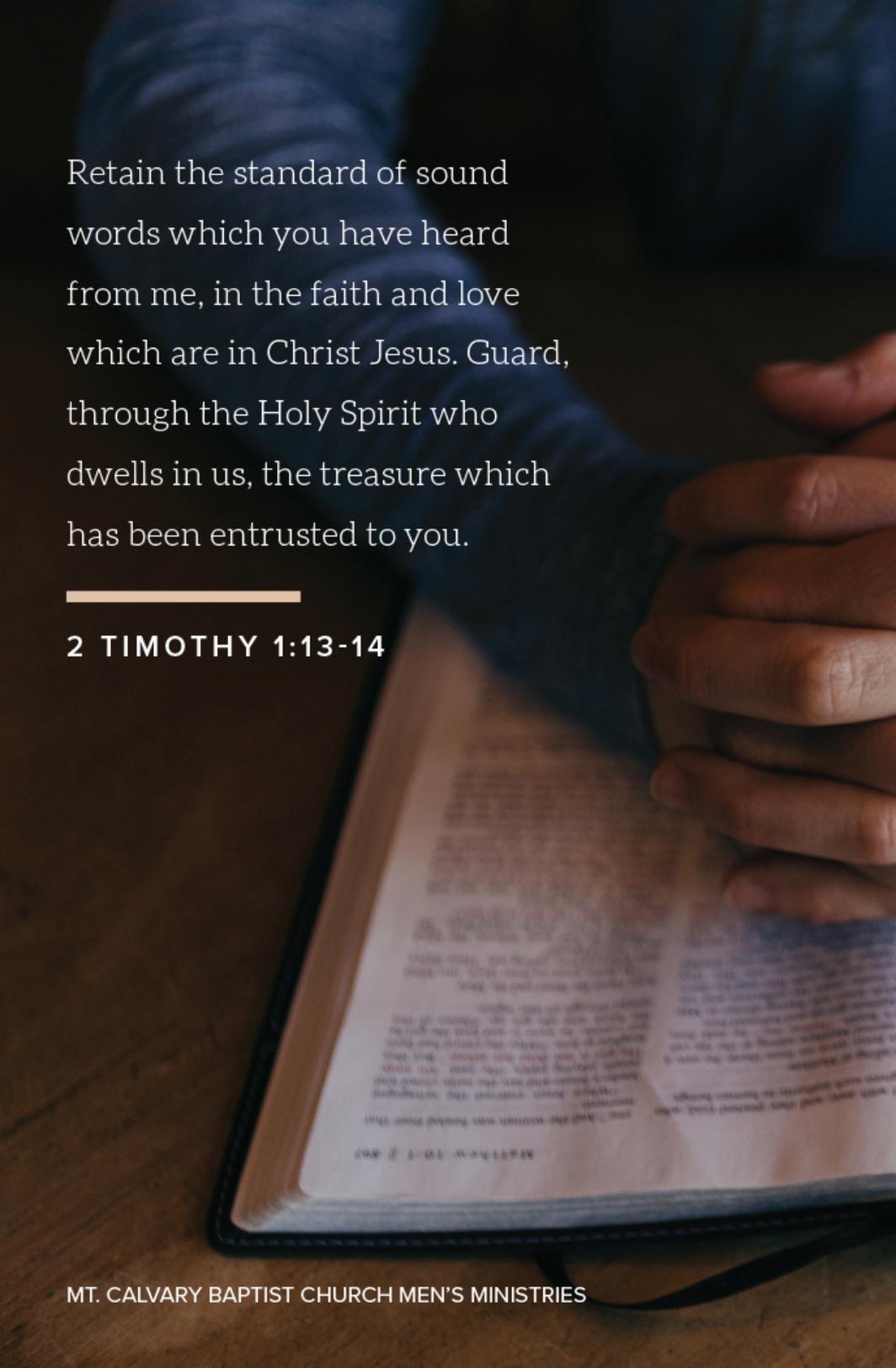
Ryle, pp. 197-221

**M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE**

<b>Apr 02</b>	Lev 5	Psalm 3-4	Pro 20	Col 3
<b>Apr 03</b>	Lev 6	Psalm 5-6	Pro 21	Col 4
<b>Apr 04</b>	Lev 7	Psalm 7-8	Pro 22	1 Thes 1
<b>Apr 05</b>	Lev 8	Psalm 9	Pro 23	1 Thes 2
<b>Apr 06</b>	Lev 9	Psalm 10	Pro 24	1 Thes 3
<b>Apr 07</b>	Lev 10	Psalm 11-12	Pro 25	1 Thes 4
<b>Apr 08</b>	Lev 11-12	Psalm 13-14	Pro 26	1 Thes 5





A close-up photograph of a person's hands clasped in prayer over an open Bible. The Bible is open to a page with text, and the person's hands are resting on the pages. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a book cover or a piece of fabric. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the hands and the pages of the Bible.

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

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**2 TIMOTHY 1:13-14**