

STUDY SCRIPTURE

This week we are focusing on a habit Jesus had ingrained in His life: Study Scripture.

There was a college student who needed a small 2 hour course to fill out his class schedule. The only one that fit was Wildlife Zoology. He had some reservations about signing up for the class because he heard that the course was tough and the teacher a bit odd. But, it seemed like his only choice, so he signed up.

After one week and one chapter, the professor had a test for the class. It was a sheet of paper with carefully drawn pictures of bird feet. Not bodies, not wings, not heads. Just different birds' feet. The test simply asked them to identify the birds from pictures of their feet.

Well, this student was absolutely floored. He didn't have a clue. The student sat and stared at the test and got madder and madder. Finally, reaching the boiling point, he stomped up to the front of the room and threw the test on the teacher's desk and exclaimed, "This is the worst test I have ever seen! And this is the dumbest course I have ever taken."

The professor looked up at him and said, "Young man, you just flunked the test." Then the teacher picked up the paper, saw that the student hadn't even put his name on the paper, and said, "By the way, young man, what's your name?" At this the student bent over, slipped off his shoes and socks revealing his feet, and said, "You identify me."

Who am I? Wow, there is a lot of confusion about identity these days. How a person sees themselves has always been a unique collection of ideas and experiences. Yet many people now don't use two basic categories of male and female. We hear there are endless possibilities of genders. And we can't assume that pronouns like "he" and "she" can be used to refer to a person.

"Who am I?" has become a very big concern for people today.

To help people discover who they are, websites like ancestry.com and 23andme.com have gone wildly popular as we

dive into our past, into our family tree, to discover something that may help me understand who I am a little bit better.

Today is about focusing in on what is your identity?

This week we will see that Studying Scriptures allows us to see our true identity.

WHY SCRIPTURE? Why would the Bible be a place to find our identity? To answer that question, we first need to know WHAT the Bible is?

Let's say you are in the grocery store check out line. There in the rack is a newspaper that looks like this. It has this headline, "World War 2's best-kept secret: Adolf Hitler was a woman." And to prove it there is a picture of him wearing a skirt with some pretty good-looking legs.

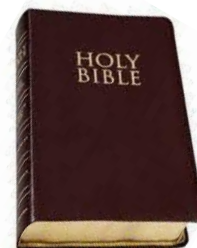
Now, when you see that newspaper, what goes through your mind? Do you take every word as true? (No!) Before you even read any of it, when you see a tabloid that looks like this, what goes through your mind? What do you expect from this kind of newspaper? Facts? – No. Entertainment? – maybe. Made-up stories? Far-fetched tales? Yup! So, before you even read it, you have an idea – a presupposition – of what it is, and how you are to read it. Right?

Let's say next to the tabloid is another newspaper – the Wall Street Journal. Now, before you even read a word of it, what idea goes through your mind about what this paper will say? Do you expect the same kind of thing as you would from the tabloid? No! We would expect the Wall Street Journal to be based on facts, thoughtful, documented. Something we can trust, right?



Everything you read and everything you watch, you already have an idea in your mind about how you are to interpret it. About what it is.

What goes through your mind when you see this literature – the Bible? Let's be honest – people have ideas in mind about what Scripture is and how to treat it. And these ideas – these presuppositions – are not all the same for everyone.



Many people, and many different church denominations, approach Scripture with the idea in mind that a lot of the Bible is fiction, made up. And that the Bible has been changed over time. Especially many main-line denominations have a presupposition that anything in the Bible that disagrees with their reason or with their modern opinions, is ancient, from unenlightened people, and they shouldn't believe it or follow it.

Other people and other church groups, use their emotion. So they filter the words of the Bible through what feels right to them. If it *feels* wrong they discard that part of the Bible.

There is a commercial running on TV right now that show us this. It's a pastor from a church talking about Issue 1 on the November ballot here in Ohio. He is presented as a pastor – as an authority figure about the Bible. And he says abortion is matter that is decided only by what an individual person thinks and feels. He never mentions any words from the Bible on this issue. See, if we are talking about what car you buy, then yes what you think and feel is the final authority. But in matters of life and death, right and wrong, God in the Bible *does* have clear words for us written there.

So what about us? What do we have in our minds before we even open the Bible to read it? What is our presupposition? And where do we get that idea from?

Yes, we do have presuppositions about what Scripture is. And our presuppositions come from the Bible itself. Scripture itself tells us what it is and how we are to understand it, and that is how we treat the words of the Bible.

What does the Bible claim to be? 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us: ***“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness ...”*** ALL of Scripture is breathed out by God. It is God’s Word. He is the author. And it is true.

Was the Bible just made up? It is just fairy tales or fiction? Again, this is what Scripture says about itself: ***“...No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*** *1 Peter 1: 20b-21* The Bible is not the product of someone’s imagination. It is God who guided 40 people over 1600 years what to write.

In addition to what the Bible itself tells us, there were eyewitnesses who gave testimony that Jesus life and teachings are NOT fabricated. John, a close disciple, wrote: ***“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*** *John 1:14*

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands ...” *1 John 1:1* Most of the disciples GAVE THEIR LIVES and SUFFERED HORRIBLY to proclaim that Scripture is TRUE.

All this is to say, you can trust the Bible is true. And in this true book you find WHO you ARE. Scripture allows us to see our true identity.

Scripture says you are created by God. Psalm 139 exclaims: ***“I praise [GOD], for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”*** *Psalm 139:14* Fearfully and wonderfully made. You are valuable. Precious to God. The book of Genesis declares: ***“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*** *Genesis 1:27* This means life – ALL life – has dignity and value. Life is sacred. And this sanctity of life is given by being created by God. It is not an accomplishment earned. It doesn’t matter how old or young or smart or self-sufficient a person is. Your value doesn’t come from inside of you, and it doesn’t matter what

any other person or group thinks or says. You are precious. All life is precious. You are made by God, precious to Him.

You, all people, and the entire planet earth, however, are not what God intended you to be. The first people rebelled against God. Their broken relationship with God has been passed down to you and me. Psalm 51 says: ***“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*** Psalm 51:5 You are sinful. And you live in a sinful, broken world. The human heart is full of evil. We are NOT going to be able to make a utopia in this world. You need a Savior.

Although you are sinful, still you are loved by God. You are loved so deeply you can't even comprehend it. Jesus Himself said, ***“For God so loved the world that he gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”*** John 3:16 God loves you so much He gave up the life of His SON to live and die to save you! He bought you back – at an incredible cost – to be His person!

You are loved! You are forgiven! And through Jesus you are heaven-bound! You have a bright future and the best is yet to come! Peter, guided by God, writes: ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you....”*** 1 Peter 1: 3-4 Your life is not pointless and purposeless. Your existence does not end when you die. You have hope! Heaven is waiting!

But now, in the meantime, you live your whole life on earth for God, in thanks, and in holiness. ***“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,”*** Scripture declares, ***“a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*** 1 Peter 2:9

This IS who you are! Scripture allows you to see your true identity. But, we have to consider, if you choose to live **Without God's true Word, then Who Are You?** If you ignore what God says about you, then what are you left with? You would be left to believe

you are not made by God, but came to be by sheer chance. You are an accident of evolution. Life then has no value, no meaning, no hope for the future. You are left with just ... YOU. Nothing more. Whatever you think, or want. Whatever pleasure you seek. Whatever you can grab by your own power. That's all that's left.

It's no secret that over the last 5 decades, we in America have tried to get rid of God. We have stopped teaching children the truths of Scripture. We've taught evolution as factual. We have stopped prayer. Our society has lost the Scripture foundation. There is no longer a basis for right and wrong. So everybody can do whatever they wish and still call it "good" and "right." Over time, things become more and more depraved because without God's truth, whatever a person thinks, goes. When we destroy the foundation of God's Word in our lives, then we can expect:

Euthanasia

Abortion

Gay "Marriage"

Pedophilia

Racism

Gender Issues WHY can we expect

these things? Because without Scripture, life is not sacred, so to take life and harm others becomes legitimate. As our society continues to turn away from God and His Word we will see more, and more, and more of these problems in the future.

So, do you see that God's Word is better?! The story of who God says you are is so much better! You are not worthless. You are made by God as priceless. You are a saved sinner, headed towards heaven, to live in holiness to honor our Lord. We have a story to offer the world – GOD's story – and it is so much better than any other alternative. God's narrative offers hope, and this is what our world needs. People are searching for their identity, and Scripture allows us to see our true identity.

But HOW? HOW do we begin to read the Bible. How do we do this? This is where most of us struggle.

So, real practically. Make your time with God in His Word, a priority. More important than watching your favorite TV show. More important than checking social media or surfing the internet. More important than work. More important than cleaning up the kitchen or

any other household chore. Make time with God #1. Not an option for you.

Set a time of day. Some like before bed. I find I'm too tired and foggy brained. I am clearest in the morning so I choose morning. Because I choose morning for my time with God, I have to get to bed early. I set an alarm to ring on my phone to remind me to stop whatever I'm doing and go to bed so that I can get up early enough for my time with God before I have to be out the door. My point is that it takes arranging your life around having your time with God in His Word.

Next, pick a place. A consistent place. Find a room, and a chair where it's quiet, where you're not going to be distracted to do household chores, or answer emails, or watch TV, or fall asleep. Pick a place and leave your Bible and any devotional books you use in that place, always ready for you.

When you finally get to your time and your place, prepare yourself to meet with God. A few deep cleansing breaths help. Breath in and exhale slowly. It slows your heart rate down. More importantly, pray. Pray something like, "God, its me here. Help me to hear from You today. Take my mind, and my heart, and my will. Amen."

You can just open the Bible, or you can use devotion guides. Portals of Pray is one we always have around here for free for you. I personally get more from the Lutheran Hour emailed devotions and from Time of Grace. Those are always listed in the monthly newsletter. Choose one, or do all of them.

Another great way to hear from God is to read a chapter from the Bible a day. A different way is something called Lectio divina. This is where you read something shorter, say a paragraph of the Bible or just a few verses. Read the same section several times. Notice what stands out in the words to you. And ask God why He has brought these few words to your attention. Ask God what He wants to say to you today through these few words that stand out. And then pray about that.

One last way to mention is the S.O.A.P. method of having a time with God. S – stands for **Scripture**. It's just reading a section

of Scripture and letting God speak. No judgement, Just hear the plain words.

Next step is O - **Observation**. What do you observe here? You turn it over in your mind again, and again. What do you notice is happening in this passage you read?

Next is **Application**. Ask, "How does this apply to my life?"

And the final step is **Prayer**. "What is my prayer that flows naturally in response to what I have read and encountered?" Just remember S.O.A.P.

And of course, Bible study groups are very important. The insights and comments from others really helps. These are great ways to grow in your faith.

Have you ever been parched, so thirsty on a hot day? A cold glass of water is what your really need and crave. Water gives LIFE when you are dehydrated. Jesus said, "***The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.***" *John 6:63* God's Word gives you LIFE!

All of us here, especially our leaders, should be CRAVING God's Word, like a life-giving glass of water on hot day. If you are dehydrated, there is not much you can do. You're no use to anyone even yourself. The same is true about Scripture. All of us – especially church leaders – should be desiring God's Word like a parched man seeking a drink. This is not a good work we do. Its just basic survival.

A woman, one day, heard the garbage truck out in front of her house and suddenly remembered that she hadn't taken the can out to the curb. She made a mad dash out of the house. She was still in her bathrobe. Her hair was sticking up all over her head. Her face was covered with sticky cream. She had a beat-up old pair of slippers on. In short, she was a frightening scene. She ran out to the street and shouted to the driver, "Am I too late for the garbage?" He replied, "No, hop right in."

Friends, YOU ARE NOT JUNK! You are precious. Made by God. Redeemed by Him. Heaven-bound. Living to His honor. You are a child of God! Studying Scripture allows us to see our true identity. So let's all make it a priority to be seriously into God's Word every day. AMEN.