

THE WORD WE LIVE BY

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented to Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, August 23, 2015

The printed text of this message is longer than the recorded version, for time did not permit the full presentation.

I have borrowed the three perceptive subtitles from the words of Pastor Brian Houston, National President of the Assemblies of God in Australia.

Some of these thoughts are also gleaned from the excellent video work of Teaching Pastor Dan Franklin, of Life Bible Fellowship Church in Upland, California.

This sermon was to be titled, "What Is Love?" but the message has matured over time. I want to do more than provide an accurate definition, or counter-definition to the flimsy and fickle thought of the present pop culture.

I want to anchor our souls instead to the only firm and unshakeable foundation available to us for life and godliness—that is, the unchanging Word of God, the Holy Bible.

The WORLD We Live In

The world of the Book of Acts was generally unreceptive to the Gospel and politically oppressive. The culture and moral climate were hostile to God and to His people.

Yet, Christ gave the Holy Spirit to the Church to empower them to thrive in the midst of just such resistance. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble, but take courage, for I have overcome the world. After the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and you will be my witnesses—everywhere."

Jesus' words were true then; they are still true now.

Yet, the world we live in today is broken. Not because it is not Republican. And not because it is not Democratic. Not because of the economic inequities, or the racial biases, or the ecological imbalance. All of those things, and many more things like them, are *symptoms* of the problem—signs of our brokenness—but not its cause.

But, generally, we don't want to see it that way. So we keep blaming those things and trying to fix them. And I agree that the symptoms need to be fixed and should be addressed, because they are hurting people and diminishing their lives. But the cause is more subtle and more personal, and, therefore, also more disagreeable.

The world is broken because of sin. Sin is not the evil we do to one another; those are abuses and crimes. Sin is what we do to God. Sin is a Bible word. People who reject the truthfulness of the Bible usually don't speak much about sin.

Some loosely use the word *sin* to refer to people's evil actions, but the Scripture offers a unique definition, as expressed in the prayer-song of David: *"Against You, and You alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in Your sight"* (Psalm 51:4). What makes an action sinful is not its impact upon people or the planet, but its impact on God by its contrariness to His character and will. It is an affront to Him who made us.

"In Him we live and move and have our being." When we choose to act in ways that ignore, usurp, or counter God's will, we sin. Even actions that we might otherwise consider good, will in this way become sinful. Paul taught: *"Whatever does not spring from our confidence in God, is sin"* (Romans 14:23).

And sin is bad for everyone, not just those directly affected by our actions. Sin corrupts the environment, pollutes the culture, and diminishes the sense of God.

This is the world we live in.

We should not be surprised when non-Christians act like non-Christians, or when our nation's government adopts policies that contradict God's Word. The Church is not the government, and the government is not the Church. And the United States is not Heaven.

Recently, the Supreme Court of the United States, handed down a decision to recognize same-sex marriages in all fifty states, as an example of equal rights under the law. As I have said before, while the Supreme Court can make same-sex marriage a legal option, it cannot make it a moral choice.

The understanding of marriage between one man and one woman is emphatic from the first book of the Bible (aberrant exceptions notwithstanding), and is emphasized also in the New Testament, and in the words of Jesus Christ Himself. No court of the land can alter that.

However, this is not cause for panic or protest or relocation to another part of the world.

For a wide variety of reasons, many people disagree with what is plainly presented in the Bible. Usually, they prefer to revise the Bible, or abandon it. Sometimes, they resort to rude argumentativeness.

Christians believe in human equality under God, regardless of the laws of the land. However, some have championed this judicial decision as a victory for human equality, even though it encourages behavior that is clearly forbidden in Scripture.

Are we guilty of singling out homosexuality above other sins? Surely some people are. Some sins are more easily identifiable than others, but no sin is more grievous than another. ALL sins should be called out and all sinners should repent.

Or, have we elevated human equality above human righteousness?

Who is most passionate about human equality and dignity, if not God? He created us in His image, and sent His Son to bring us all into His family. No one else is remotely as passionate about human equality as He!

Yet, sin is a blight on the human race. Every expression of it is bad for all of us, and will always lead to further pain and loss and brokenness. Left unchecked, it would eventually lead us all to Hell.

God identifies sin in the Scriptures in order to protect us from further corruption and harm, like a marine cartographer who charts reefs and shoals hidden beneath the waves, so that we might avoid damaging our vessels or running aground.

Was the Court's decision really a win for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, if it encourages behavior that God forbids?

We need to be consistent in compassionately calling one another to repentance. All sins are bad for EVERYONE. Sin *never* leads to life and freedom and joy, and that grieves the heart of God.

If you are satisfied that God knows what is good for us, could you sincerely say to a homosexual friend, "I am happy for you that you now have more freedom to practice something that God says will bring you further brokenness"?

Or, would you tell a heterosexual friend, "I personally would not commit adultery, because of my beliefs, but I'm happy that adultery is working for you"?

Some have hailed this as a victory for civil rights, akin to the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of Jim Crow laws. But just think how different your conversations might be with a homosexual friend and an Afro-American friend, if you said to each of them, "I am so happy for you, that you now have equality under the law!"

If your gay friend said, "Thanks, but what does God say about what I am doing with my life now?" Your only sincere answer would be something like, "Well, He says that He has always loved you, but that this kind of behavior will not result in the fulfillment you are seeking, and will only add to your pain and alienate you from His purpose for your life."

On the other hand, if your Afro-American friend said, "Thanks, but what does God say about what I am doing with my life now?" Your answer would be dramatically different! You get to say, "God

made us all in His image and He celebrates that our culture has now made a statement in favor of our equality!”

I think that either God is less interested in human equality than we are, or this is not really an issue of equality.

Do you crave the approval of your friends more than the approval of God? Rather than publically celebrating what we privately disapprove, we ought to simply celebrate what God celebrates and grieve at what grieves Him.

Jesus predicted of the years that would follow: *“Many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”* (Matthew 24:10-13)

The Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, the Information Age—thousands of years of human development—and still our most advanced societies are beset by rape, murder, suicide, riot, human-trafficking, racial and ethnic oppression, terrorism, and genocide.

This is the world we live in.

We shouldn’t blame it on money. Money is just a tool. We needn’t blame it on political power. Power is just a tool. We shouldn’t blame it on guns. Guns are just tools. Nor should we blame it on technology. Technology is just a tool. These may each and all be used for good, or for evil. And we are the ones who choose how they will be used.

The cultural slide in America is obvious, considering:

- Rampant drug use
- Sexualized youth
- Family breakup
- Redefining marriage
- Profiting from abortions
- Economic improprieties
- Loss of privacy
- Corruption in government, business, and church

God addressed such circumstances through a prophet, named Isaiah (5:20-23):

²⁰ *What sorrow for those who say that evil is good and good is evil, that dark is light and light is dark, that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter.*

²¹ *What sorrow for those who are wise in their own eyes and think themselves so clever.*

²² *What sorrow for those who are heroes at drinking wine and boast about all the alcohol they can hold.*

²³ *They take bribes to let the wicked go free, and they punish the innocent.*

This is the world we live in. And it takes its toll—on all of us. It brands us with uncertainties, fears, doubts, isolation, and measured responses, while Christ has called us to be free and bold and victorious.

The WEIGHT We Live With

The world is broken. God intends to fix that. It is in His plan. And He has the know-how, the power, and the resources to do it. In little ways—like multiplying food for thousands and healing the sick and calming the storm and raising the dead—Jesus has hinted at His capacities.

But what bothers most of us is not the measure of God’s abilities. It’s His sense of timing. He seems too slow to take action, while people are suffering and dying. And it is His choice of action. Sometimes, it appears that the wicked prosper, while the righteous suffer. Thus, even if we’d rather not, we often hold God accountable for the brokenness.

But that seems to me like the pot complaining against the potter, “Why did you treat me so? You shouldn’t have made me as you did!”

Even though God demonstrated—in Jesus—His thorough and personal acquaintance with both unjust pain and agonizing death, we don’t trust Him. We read of the suffering of His only begotten Son, and we imagine God either does not care or has too little power. Any overcoming power on His part seems too weak, too slow, and too ineffective for too few.

I am willing to say here what you have likely felt or thought, but dared not say, lest you be embarrassed, judged, overlooked, or ostracized. While it’s true that nobody can be nicer than Spirit-filled Christians, it is also true that no one can be meaner than Christians who are not walking in the Spirit!

And what if we cannot understand God’s ways because we are *missing* something. What if the shortness of our time and the largeness of our feelings have blinded us to the eternal grandness and wisdom of God’s ways? And what if our failure to trust Him when we do not understand Him is the *source* of that continuing blindness?

That is the weight we live with.

Have you never come to the end of yourself and, in desperation, thrown up your hands in an act of surrender, and said something like, “I give up! I don’t understand what is happening to me or why. It wasn’t my choice to begin with, and I seem powerless to change it now. (You know how I

have tried!) But I will trust You. In this darkness, I will hold to Your hand. I believe—somehow!—You will bring me through.”

Job, in his mental and physical misery, said it: *“Even if He kills me, I will trust Him.”* (Job 13:15)

The three Hebrew young men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—faced with execution by fire, said it too: *“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”* (Daniel 3:17-18)

The Lord Jesus, facing extreme humiliation, shame, and agonizing death, also said it: *“My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”* (Matthew 26:39)

And though none of us can see how it will work out or come together, God does it—often in ways we could never have guessed.

This, too, is the weight we live with.

People’s thinking has become polarized, instead of integrated.

We have forgotten how to listen to each other, to discuss or debate civilly, to restrain ourselves in order to learn what is true.

We define ourselves more by what we’re absolutely against than what we are patiently working toward.

We cry for tolerance, but we refuse to tolerate delay or the pace required for collective development.

I think we have fallen for the Great Lie: you can be as gods. I’m thinking of that scene from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), which describes the first sinful action of the human race:

¹ *The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”*

² *“Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied.*

³ *“It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”*

⁴ *“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman.*

⁵ *“God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”*

The same temptation and the same sinful response are still active today. In fact, they define our fallen human nature.

The serpent suggested that if the man or woman were to eat what was expressly forbidden, they would enter into God's domain.

To desire it was not forbidden. To touch it was not forbidden. Only to consume it. The temptation was to overstep a divinely established boundary for lack of confidence in God—in the wisdom of His purpose and command.

These days, any restriction that we don't understand may automatically become suspect. We may argue and resist, with no interest to understand its origin or its beneficial purpose. We may assume it's a snow job; therefore, that rule *deserves* to be broken.

If my natural desire runs contrary to a Biblical prohibition, what am I to do? "I can't help myself, though I've tried." This argument often has been raised in the church's discussion surrounding homosexuality, but it could apply as well to other deep longings in any of our lives.

One may argue, "Would God give me these desires and then ask me to stuff them? Am I called to deny who I really am?"

Some say they did not ask for same-sex attraction; they were born that way. Others say it is not genetic, but learned behavior. Frankly, I suspect both are true—sometimes one, sometimes the other. But the real issue for me is not the origin of the attraction or orientation, but the response a person makes, for *that* is what the Word of God addresses.

I know this is a very emotional issue, and I hope I don't seem dismissive or insensitive. God's Word gives us vital perspective. Jesus plainly said, "*If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" (Luke 9:23)

Let me make three comments here.

Comment #1: It's not hypocritical when we choose *not to act* on our desires.

Virtually no one believes that in order to be genuine we must act on every impulse or desire. There are times when we want to shout at someone, but we control ourselves, and typically we think that is admirable. There are times when we want to quit our jobs, or drop out of school, or walk out on our families, because we are frustrated. But when people hang in there and follow through on their commitments, we don't see that as "faking it." We see that as strong character.

So, you're not pretending to be someone other than yourself—playing the hypocrite—if you choose not to seek fulfillment of a desire you have.

Comment #2: Sexual orientation is not the core part of who you are as a human being.

According to Scripture, we are creations of God, created in God's image and with His imprint, and are deeply loved by Him. The essence of that image is not sexual. And as Christians, our further identity is as men and women who have been welcomed into God's family as sons and daughters and heirs. Any question of sexual orientation or attraction or desire is far from the core of who we are.

There is nothing sinful about an attraction, an orientation, or a temptation. That should not be a point of shame among us. We all have temptations and desires that we did not ask to have. We just have them; they don't *define* us. And if we don't act on them, we have not shut off a part of who we really are.

Over the centuries of Christian history, there are many Christ-followers who have chosen not to marry, even though they had the desire to do so. Either marriage just didn't happen for them, or they chose not to marry in order to be freer to serve the Lord in other ways.

Paul encourages one church to consider the possibility of not marrying and never having sex as a legitimate way to live in the service of Christ. It's not inhuman to live without sex, just as it is not inhuman to marry without having children.

Don't panic! If you miss out on sex, or on riches, or on a dream job, your core being will still be intact. Your identity in Christ is secure.

Comment #3: Jesus calls everyone who follows Him to radical self-denial.

If we say, "I can't imagine that God would call me not to act on this desire," someone might legitimately wonder how closely we have read the Bible.

Abraham denied himself and left the safety and comfort of home and family to follow the plan God had for him.

Moses denied himself and left the security of shepherding to make demands of the king of Egypt and lead a nation out of slavery.

David, as a young boy, denied his own welfare to take on the warrior giant, Goliath.

Paul denied himself to follow Christ and faced shipwreck, prison, beatings, loneliness, and martyrdom.

Jesus also denied Himself, and faced opposition, imprisonment, beatings, humiliation, and death, in order to purchase our salvation.

The Gospel message is not about victory through ease, but about joyous triumph, even through danger, difficulty, and great loss.

I think many Christians have bought into a soft version of prosperity theology that suggests we have been promised ease and comfort in this life. Actually, according to Jesus' own words, we've been promised trouble and opposition. The only certain comfort we have been assured of is Christ's presence and compassion through it all.

Sometimes we understand why God has called us to self-denial and sometimes we don't. Yet we move forward in trust that every sacrifice we make for Him will pay off in the end.

This is the weight we live with.

Life is full of divinely established boundaries (starting with the Ten Commandments), as well as humanly established boundaries that have God's approval (see Romans 13:1-5). These boundaries are for our safety and welfare; they are not designed to rain on your parade.

Some seem to think that joy and contentment are the result of experiencing as much fun as is humanly possible, but the truth is that you can miss out on a ton of fun in this life and still experience fullness of joy. You need only visit with Christians in any part of the Third World to see that it is so.

Fun results from the impact of activities *outside* of yourself, but joy grows from your *inward* responses to life's daily opportunities and challenges. Fun dries up quickly, like water on your skin. But joy produced by the Holy Spirit is a deepening pool within.

"Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die," said the wise king, Solomon, cynically. So also said the rich landowner in Jesus' story, who thought he had an easy future in hand. And so said the Apostle Paul, sarcastically defending his self-sacrificing ministry.

"Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." The attitude expressed by this saying betrays an outlook in which God does not exist. It is completely self-centered and leads to neglect, exploitation, abuse, and oppression of others. You may oppose the ways other people abuse their power, but if you lead your life in this direction, you will eventually become like them.

"Love is love" has become another rationalistic slogan of late. But is it true? If we rely solely on subjective feelings to identify "love"—if all "love" is love—where will the variant groupings of people end?

Many people are unaware that anything other than subjective feelings defines true love. If you accept the Bible as God's word of wisdom for the human race, you will find that it offers three contexts that define love objectively.

The foremost context of love is personal relationship with God, our Creator, through Jesus Christ, our Savior. *"Herein is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the judgment-substitute for our sins."* (1 John 4:10)

The second context of love is the nuclear family, based on a life-long monogamous marriage of a man and a woman. *"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one life."* (Matthew 19:5)

The third context of Biblical love is the Church—that extended family of believers who are growing in and living out their faith in Jesus Christ. *"Love one another as I have loved you. This is how all people will know that you are my disciples."* (John 13:34-35)

In each of these examples, the Bible writers used a unique word coined to express this godly, resilient, enduring kind of love: *agape*. It is deeper than family attachments, stronger than the bonds of friendship, and higher than emotional affection.

There is no ambiguity about the Biblical ideals of celibacy for singles or monogamous, heterosexual fidelity for married couples. All sexual sins are equally egregious, whether stirred by same-sex or complementary-sex attractions. The Bible is replete with stories of the fallen behaviors of even its greatest heroes, but that does not change the standard.

However, there is a big difference between *struggling* with sin and *surrendering* to sin. So, the question is not, "Do you have sin in your life?" for we all do. The issue is not the presence of sin, but our response to sin. Pursuing life in Jesus inevitably means a battle with sin. If you're not battling with some sin, you're not pursuing Jesus.

All of this creates a weight that is difficult to bear, with its resulting uncertainty, self-condemnation, and diminished hope.

Based on the Bible's record of the history of the Early Church, it was not God's plan to effect a wholesale change of the world's culture, but to salt the culture by the Church's presence and to enlighten the culture with its truth. In fact, history records recurring spiritual battles fought just to keep the world's culture from taking over the Church.

Christ's invitation is this: "Whoever wants to may come to Me." The Church should have a similar open-door policy.

I will tell you, we want sinners in our church. We don't want anyone in church to live in sin, but we want anyone living in sin to come to our church, where we all get called to repentance, repeatedly.

The WORD We Live By

All that Adam and Eve had to rely on—to guide them— were the words of God. Either He knew what He was doing in initiating this grand experiment, or else He was cluelessly groping in the dark.

But we seldom think in those terms. Yes, sadly, we are moving so fast through life that we seldom stop to think at all, unless its about acquiring something or consuming something.

We search for information—mostly trivial—as if knowing something was the same as doing something, as if seeing something was the same as going somewhere. But the one thing we desperately need to know we avoid, or dabble with, or water down.

We search the Bible for proof texts to prop up our sagging faith, and hope God will be pleased with our effort. What if, instead, out of a faith deepened by daily reliance upon God, God's words were to spring to mind to equip us for action?

We quote Scriptures to ourselves to ward off the deeper feelings of anxiety and fear and guilt. What if, instead, a deeper well of truth banished those feelings from our minds, like swatting mosquitos?

We want God's blessing in our lives and our families—we even pray for it—but we still see it as something we must earn or produce for ourselves. We simply don't *trust Him* for it.

Yet, Jesus said (John 5:39-40):

³⁹ *"You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!*

⁴⁰ *Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.*

God's written words are designed to introduce us to the Living and Life-giving Word, Jesus Christ. By so doing, God transforms our nature as humans—we become spiritually alive, reconnected with our Creator.

As Paul wrote, *"This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

This is the Word we live by.

Peter declared, *“By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. He has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share His divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires.”* (2 Peter 1:3-4)

God has given us all that we need for living a godly life. That doesn’t mean “some of what we need” or “most of what we need.” In His covenant promises we have ALL that we need. God’s words are sufficient.

God’s Word is authoritative and inerrant. It is the infallible rule of Christian faith and practice.

That it is often contradicted by personal experience does not diminish its veracity or authority, for it reveals a reality that is congruent with our experience, but not limited to what we can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell.

Like God Himself, the details of Scripture are not limited to time and space, so they often cross those boundaries, confusing our sense of chronology. We wonder, “Is this speaking of the past, or the present, or the future?” And, sometimes, it is all three!

God’s Word reveals a world that already exists (Heaven)—in fact, coexists with us—and is gradually and continually penetrating, influencing, and shaping the world we live in, while restraining the corruption in our world due to sin.

God’s Word also reveals a world that is yet to come (new heavens and earth), which is full of righteousness, peace, and joy in the presence of God.

And, of course, God’s Word describes the world we live in, from God’s perspective, overlaid with God’s insights, to help us understand the people we meet and the person we are becoming, and to navigate the shifting landscape and seasons of life.

This is the Word we live by.

We live by God’s words, as did the prophets and the apostles, and Jesus Himself.

Jesus did not quote the Buddha or Confucius or Lao Tzu, or any of the wise men of the East. He quoted the Hebrew prophets and psalmists. He was a Man of the Book. I would rather have the Bible plus nothing, than all other books in the world without the Bible. God speaks through this Book! (Everyday, if you’ll let Him.)

God’s words heal. Like medicine, they heal our souls and bodies, as we mix them with faith.

God’s words build. They cause us to grow in faith and holiness. They are the seeds of Life.

God's words guide. They guide us to avoid sin and to do what is right. This pleases God and fulfills His will.

God's words give victory. We use God's words to battle the forces of sin—temptations and lusts of various kinds. They are the “sword of the Spirit.”

God's words transform. We use God's words to shape our environment, by applying and obeying them in faith, as the Holy Spirit directs.

This is the Word we live by.

When your feelings tell you one thing and God's Word, another; acknowledge your feelings, but follow God's Word. You can follow God's Word by faith, even when it doesn't make sense. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how.

When your mind argues against what you have read, and your reasoning is unsatisfied with what you find, make a note of it, and then read on. Try not to end your reading at a point of frustration. You cannot learn every lesson in a single day. Some are reserved for later; some wait for you to get ready.

Doubtless, you will encounter people with all kinds of disagreements with the Scriptures. If they are sincere and respectful, give them your attention. You may be able to help them to understand Christ better, or they may help you to describe Him better. If they are insincere or disrespectful, you're not obligated to give them the time of day. Don't let them steal your joy. Move on; God has other things for you to do today.

This is the Word we live by.

God has said, concerning His words:

Isaiah 55:11 (NLT)

It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.

Jeremiah 1:12 (AMP)

I am alert and active, watching over My word to perform it.

Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT)

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

If you want to understand life, God, and humanity—go to the single authoritative Source, the Holy Bible. Dictionaries and commentaries are useful tools, but they cannot tell you what to do with what life will bring you today. Men’s views of God cannot compare with God’s view of man.

Many have criticized the Holy Bible—far more than have ever read it. It bears criticism; it bears argument; it bears questioning. And when we are done criticizing, we will go to our graves, and the Holy Bible will remain. Think about that.

Though many have attempted to prohibit it, or eradicate it, the Holy Bible survives, as the world’s #1 best-selling book, offered in more languages and formats than any other work.

This is the Word we live by.

If you haven’t read it all the way through, you owe it to yourself to do so. If you have read it through, it’s time to start again! For God has more He wants to show you. You’ve already forgotten more than you remember.

Which translation should you choose? The one you like best to read!

Some versions are translated word-for-word, others translate thought-for-thought, interpreting idiomatic expressions. You won’t lose any key doctrine, no matter which translation you choose. And, after you’ve read it through, you can go on to another translation to get a fresh point of view. They’re all good and useful.

However, the most important translation of the Scriptures is not found in any printed or digital format—it is you. For most of the people you meet in your lifetime, you will be the only Bible they have read. How accurate is *your* translation? That’s the question to worry about.

Can Christ be felt in your attitude? Can He be experienced in your actions? Can He be heard in your voice? Can He be known in your presence? That’s what really matters.

Eat this book. Chew on it frequently. For this is the Word we live by.

Let it lift the weight from your soul. Let it transform your world.

The Church does not exist to prosecute adults for any private behaviors with which we may disagree, nor to deny how people may genuinely feel. The Church exists to model the love of God to

anyone who may be watching, and to proclaim the love of God in Jesus Christ to everyone who will listen.

Love did not win when the Supreme Court rendered its decision. Love won over 2,000 years ago on a cross atop a hill called Golgotha, just outside of Jerusalem. Jesus Christ demonstrated God's true love by paying the ultimate price for our salvation. As a result, whoever believes in Jesus and follows Him, regardless of where you've come from or what you've come through, may have the assurance of forgiveness, grace for daily living, and the hope of everlasting life in heaven.

Troublesome days are when the Church shines brightest. When others become confused and frightened and lose their way, the Church of Christ is the beacon of enduring hope. Stop just going to church, and start being the church, wherever you are.