

“Science: Bible Lab” (Back to School Pt. 3)
(Psalm 119:9-16)

- **The Story We Can’t Shake**

- Well folks, we’ve already talked and prayed about some pretty heavy stuff this morning. Even though this fun “Back to School” series is kind of “lightening the mood,” what we’re talking about in this message is going to *really help* with everything we just prayed. As you know, we started the fall with **“Back to School”**—*the School of Discipleship*. Today, our subject is **Science**. Not the natural sciences, rather, *the science of Biblical studies*. At the end I’m going to actually lead us through a *hands-on “Bible Lab,”* you got handouts on the way in!
 - What’s at stake today is massive—it’s nothing less than, *truth*. God’s truth. In all the chaos that swirls around us in this cultural moment, a huge question is, *what or whom do you look to for truth?* This is becoming increasingly tricky in an age of polarization, social media, artificial intelligence. *Is there truth, or is it all relative? What guides you?* Your heart will often fail you. People and culture will let you down. Politics will disappoint you. If you’re looking for a source that has stood the test, tried and true *through the ages*, look no further than *the B-I-B-L-E*.
 - Matt Smethurst said, **“There are only two options when it comes to knowledge of a divine creator: revelation, or speculation. Either He speaks, or we guess.”** *We believe this is God’s revelation.* Everything else is speculation—we can reach out and try to find God, try to understand ultimate truth on our terms—and cultures in every age have attempted to. But the only place we look to in which God actually comes down to our terms and allows Himself to be known on His terms, is in His revelation through Christ. We believe that in the Scriptures, *the Word of God became text*, and in Christ, *the Word of God became flesh*. The Scriptures point to Christ, and Christ fulfills the Scriptures. This is how we know God and find salvation.
- Not everybody believes this—it takes a step of faith and trust to receive the Bible as God’s inspired Word, something has to happen in your head and your heart to receive it. But people have challenged it in every age. In the 1700’s, the great French intellectual, Voltaire, predicted, **“One-hundred years from my day, there will not be a Bible on earth, except one that is looked upon by an antiquarian curiosity-seeker.”** (Picture) Voltaire was one of the leading writers of the Enlightenment in the build up to the French Revolution. He was also a major opponent of Christianity. In addition to many acclaimed plays and novels, he wrote thousands of publications condemning biblical faith. In 1764 he said, *“We are living in the twilight of Christianity.”* Well, as we say, *that didn’t age well.* 25 years later, the 2nd Great Awakening spread across America where 100’s of thousands, maybe *millions*, came to renewed faith in Christ, and it shaped Western society for centuries. Ironically, 50 years after Voltaire’s death, one of the homes he used to publish his writings was now being used as a storehouse for *Bibles and Gospel tracts* by the Evangelical Society of Geneva. 300 years later, the Bible remains the best-selling, most published, most-translated book in the world—*it’s not even close*. There are currently over *6 billion* Bibles in print. At least portions of the Bible are available in over 4,000 different languages and counting. Even in China, of all places, the Bible went from being a *banned-book* to now the *best-selling book*. Believe it or not, China is home to the largest Bible-printing press in the world—Amity Printing Company, which has sent over 200 million Bibles around the world since the 80’s (Picture). British apologist Justin Brierly said, **“The Bible has a surprising habit of outliving predictions of its death.”** Against all odds, for 2,000 years people all over the world continue to read and study and believe the Bible. This Story and this message continue to turn the world upside down, and *we can’t shake it*.

- **Studying the Word**

- But what does the Bible say about *itself*? Here’s a sampling—and hopefully this stirs up your hunger for more of God’s Word in your life: **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped.”** (2 Tim. 3:16-17) **“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”** (Isa. 40:8) **“The words of the Lord are flawless, like**

silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times.” (Ps. 12:6) “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12) “Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path.” (Ps. 119:105) “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:4)

- We need this book! We should hunger for this book! We should be filling our lives with this book! And in times like these more than ever, this is a lifeline, this is a light in the darkness, because it reveals to us the heart of God and connects us to Himself. John Wesley put it this way: **“I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God; just hovering over the great gulf, till a few moments hence I am no longer seen. I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself hath condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be ‘homo unius libri’—a man of one book.”**
- Do you feel the passion? Do you sense the urgency? This same passion for God’s Word can be found in the Book of Psalms, in *the longest chapter in the Bible. It’s all about God’s Word!* Psalm 119 is a 176-verse prayer, attributed to King David, that is all about the glory of God’s Word. It’s an “acrostic poem,” each stanza starts with a different letter in the Hebrew Alphabet, 22 letters. It’s an unrelenting poetic masterpiece about *studying* God’s Word, *speaking* God’s Word, *memorizing* God’s Word, *meditating* on God’s Word, *delighting* in God’s Word, and *living* God’s Word.
- Obviously, we won’t read the whole thing, but I want to give you one stanza: **“How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.” (Ps. 119:9-16)** What do you think will be the outcomes, the fruit of someone’s life, *if this is the song of their heart?* I want you to be equipped to *read, and study, and live* your Bible—not just a *hearer*, but a *doer* of the Word.
- **Lab 1: The Funnel**
 - So, *welcome to the Bible Lab.* We’re going to do 2 hands-on exercises today. Then I’ll give you some resources. The basic principles of solid Bible Study can be described in 3 words: **Observation, Interpretation, Application.** There’s a lot that goes into each one—the point is, we don’t just want to *read ourselves into the text*, based solely on our thoughts and feelings—that can get us off target. We want to do our best to understand the Bible on its own terms: *what is this passage saying in it’s own biblical context* and then *what does it mean for me.* Observation is about getting as close to the details as you can—and you can find a lot of details in every single verse if you want. Interpretation is putting that verse in the larger context of the passage, the chapter, the book, and the whole Bible, looking at what great teachers and scholars have said, to understand what it means. Application is taking that understanding and figuring out how it applies to your life, and your culture, today—and what God wants you to do about it.
 - This first tool is a very simple and fun way to turn that concept of bible study into a written and visual exercise. It’s called “The Bible Funnel.” We’re going to put Psalm 119:9-16 back on the screen. I want you to choose 2 verses to put in your “Bible Funnel” and work on down.
 - Start by writing your 2 verses up top where it says “Write the Scripture.” Copy it word for word. Bonnie talked last week about the concept of “encoding,” how physically writing something down helps it sink in—this really works for Scripture! Take a moment and write it out, 2 verses.
 - Next, I want you to summarize what you think this means as best you can. Put the verse in your own words—what is it saying, what is it about, what are the key points to grasp?
 - Next, boil down that summary into one concise statement—not even a sentence, but a “heading” or a “catchphrase” that simply and memorably describes the meaning of the Scripture.

- Last, *apply it*. Create a simple action step of what you think God wants you to do with it this week: “I will...” and after that, turn it into a prayer. Write a prayer based on God’s Word.
- **Lab 2: Lectio Divina**
 - The second Bible lab is a lot different than the first. The explanation and steps are on the other side of your sheet, but I’m just going to walk us through it in real time. “Lectio Divina” is Latin for “Divine Reading.” It’s a simple, ancient way of reading Scripture and meditating on God’s Word.
 - First, Prepare. Take a moment to pause and prepare to hear God’s Word. Pray that He will focus your attention and speak to you through His Living Word. *Pause and pray.*
 - Now, I’m going to slowly read this passage from Psalm 119, and then pause: **“How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Ps. 119:9-11)** *Pause.* Now we’re going to reread it. This time, listen for a particular word or phrase that stands out to you. Which part is God highlighting? **“How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”**
 - Next, I want you to take that word or phrase, and prayerfully meditate on it. Close your eyes. Repeat it slowly. Consider what it means and reflect on what God might be saying. *Pause.*
 - Now, take that, and turn it into a prayer. Talk to God about what it’s raising: you might worship, or pray for your life, or for someone else. Just pray God’s Word, as you’re led. *Pause.*
 - Finally, settle down a little more, and rest in God’s presence. Simply enjoy being with Him. Be open to hearing more, or just be aware of His nearness, and the goodness of His Word. *Pause.*
- **Resources & Habits**
 - J.D. Walt says in the end, the goal is not to *master the text*—the goal is to *be mastered by the text*. To submit our lives to His Word, to fill our lives with this Word. If you don’t have a handle on this yet, here’s a list of resources to help you: **Resources:** Understanding Scripture: The Bible Project bibleproject.com | Daily Time in Scripture: YouVersion Bible App Bible.com | Praying Scripture: Lectio365 App lectio365.com | Other Resources: Seedbed Wakeup Call seedbed.com/wakeupcall | RightNow Media JustShowUp.church/Rightnow.
 - “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” This has to sink deep, deep into our lives. Our formation in God’s word has to *outweigh* the formation this world brings us. “Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path.” We don’t have to stumble around in darkness! The Light is here. *Use it!* Make it a habit—*daily time with God*. Even if it’s just a few minutes at first, the way you *start* your day and *finish* your day will have a huge impact. And the things that become *habits* will shape your life more than anything else. Make it a habit, make it a way of life. What is God calling you to make your next step into His Word?