

2 Tim. 3:14-17

Luke 24:1-21a, 44-49

March 13, 2022

Study Scripture

Last week, in my Sunday message and in our small groups, we introduced the first keystone habit we find in the life of Jesus. He was committed to community. That must be our aim as well, if we are to truly follow Him. We talked about the influence your community has when it comes to the habits you develop. We started with community for a reason. You can have noble and laudable life goals, and nurture habits to drive you toward those goals, but if your community, those with whom you spend much time, those who influence you greatly ... if those people are aiming in another direction, you will never reach your goals. One way to predict a person's future is to look at their present company. Who makes up your community? Who are the major influencers in your life? Can you honestly say that Jesus, and those who genuinely follow Him, informs your decisions and the habits you've acquired?

Now that we've focused on the community around you, and its importance for life direction, I want to spend a little time today focusing on you, more specifically, your identity.

Habits and identity

Two weeks ago, I spoke about habits and how much our habits guide our lives. Studies have shown that 40-50% of our daily actions are not decided by us. Rather, those actions spring from habits we've acquired – consciously or unconsciously. If our goal is to grow in the grace of our Lord, then we must consciously acquire habits that shape our identity more closely to His, as God gives us to know. So, when it comes to habits and identity, which comes first? The answer is “yes.” In our identity we choose our habits, then our habits shape our identity. This is a life-long, on-going dynamic.

Popular these days are services like ancestry.com or 23andme.com that help you trace your ancestry. [My mom did a lot of genealogical research, so I know quite a bit about my family ancestry and I'm fascinated by it. Maybe someday I'll delve into it more.] Then there are the various psychological and emotional assessment tests such as Strengthsfinder, Enneagram, Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator, Five Love Languages, and so on, which can help us understand ourselves, and our relations with others. Yet, they do not fully answer the question: who am I? What's my true identity? Have you ever asked yourself that? I mean in a serious manner?

A word of caution here: don't confuse your orientation with your identity. Orientation is wrapped up in things you want to do, or are driven to do, or to be. But that's not the same as the identity your Creator has given you. For example: my orientation is that of a fallen, sinful creature who is prone to selfish, sinful thoughts and behaviors. My identity is that of a redeemed creature, my sins forgiven by Jesus Christ, who is being made holy as an adopted son of God. True identity must overcome the orientations that change with the whims and desires of our fallen nature and a fallen world.

Finding your ancestry, or your number on the Enneagram, or your personality type in Meyers-Briggs, and other tests, reveal family connections, can help emotional

intelligence, workplace dynamics, etc. But the only place to truly discover who you are is to look to the One who created you. That One is God. So how can I do that? How can God show me who I am? How can God speak to me? Remember what I said last week? Don't wait around for an audible voice from heaven. God has already spoken right here: in the Bible. You will find your true self, your true identity, in the Bible. This brings us to the second keystone habit of Jesus: Study of Scripture.

Jesus and Scripture

Jesus knew who He was and why He came – He knew his identity and purpose. Just listen to His words: *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*, Matt. 5:17. *I have come in my Father's name...* John 5:43.

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me, John 6:38. [See also Mark 1:38, John 10:10, John 12:46.]

There are more examples and probably the most telling and poignant are His words in the Garden of Gethsemane as prayed in the face of impending suffering on the cross. There He prayed, *My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will*, Matt. 26:39. He knew His identity - the One to do His heavenly Father's will, and thereby take away the sins of all.

Even though He was fully God Jesus, nevertheless, immersed Himself in Scripture. Scripture rolled off His tongue in ways that illustrate how His life and identity were rooted and nurtured in God's word. Several instances, including the only story of adolescent Jesus in the Bible, talk about how Jesus would go to the synagogue to learn and gain wisdom. Luke's Gospel tells of the 12-year-old Jesus who went missing from His parents in Jerusalem. It says, *...after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions*, Luke 2:46.

When we turn to Luke chapter 24, which describes how Jesus, risen from the grave, appeared to His disciples in that upper room where they had met for their Passover meal (Last Supper), we read this: He said to them, *"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."* Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, *"This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things*, Luke 24:44-48.

He opened their minds to the meaning of Scripture, thereby explaining who He was, and explaining who they were in light of that. Scripture shows the way to find our true identity in God. These days we hear a lot about identity theft ... the dangers, that come with the digital age, from dark forces and people who would glean your personal information to drain your bank account or worse. Yet, shouldn't we give at least as much attention to the evil one, the devil, who constantly works to steal your true identity derived from your Creator? Regular, consistent, sustained study of Scripture is vital to any Christian's heart and spiritual health. Some of you may remember our Lenten experience way back in 2013 was "Forty Days in the Word." We concentrated

our efforts on learning to make Scripture a daily part of our lives. In reality we want our church to be people who experience 365 days in the Word.

Knowing Who You Are

Knowing who you are influences the way you live. Jesus said, *It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God,"* Matt. 4:4. As we take the Scriptures into our lives, feed on the Bible, so to speak, God can work within us, and when He transforms us, we become agents for transforming the world for the better.

Evangelist Dwight Moody, "The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives." It's not just about knowing God's word, but about being transformed by God's word. That's what I mean by a biblical worldview, or outlook on life. The Bible provides information for the purpose of transformation. God's word is transformative today. The Scriptures aren't just about how we attain eternal life and go to heaven. They're also about how God is active in our world and directs us to be His active ingredients in transforming the world and its people more into the likeness of the kingdom of God. That is why we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And we know the "Lord's Prayer" because His teaching on how to pray has been handed down to us in Scripture.

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.

We don't know the storms that are going to come into our lives or into our nation in 2022 or 23 or 24 or whatever. But I do know this. You'll crumble if you don't have a solid foundation for your life. And the solid foundation for your life is not the opinions of others, it's not what's popular on TV, it's not prevailing culture; because those things change like shifting sands. You must build your life on the unchanging Word. The truth doesn't change. If it was true a thousand years ago it'll be true a thousand years from today because truth does not change. It's a rock. And you need a rock to build your life on. Otherwise, when stress comes, when great challenges come, when calamities come, you'll fall apart.

Daily Diet

In the Old Testament, God gave Ezekiel His words on a scroll and told Ezekiel to literally eat the scroll. *And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel,"* Ezek. 3:1. Likewise, to the prophet *Jeremiah, God said, Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you...* Jer. 36:2.

In other words, eat God's words and digest them, so that they become a part of your very being. Reading the Gospels, you'll notice that Scripture quotations rolled off the tongue of Jesus as though they were a part of His identity. That's because He lived by God's word and His habit of reading and studying Scripture was His identity and shaped His identity. Peter, having spent three years under Jesus' tutelage, recognized the source of Scriptures: *For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but*

prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, 2 Peter 1:21.

God spoke in different ways at different times to writers of the Bible. Each one wrote his words in his own style as guided by the Holy Spirit. Yet, they wrote what God revealed to them through observation, dream, and Holy Spirit insight.

On any day, at any moment we can open the Bible, read, and hear God speaking to us. God's word for us, becomes most clear when we read the Bible. So, when we read, *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you* 1 Peter 5:7, we can know that these aren't simply the words of Peter – who, by the way, denied Christ three times. This is God saying He cares for you.

Likewise, if you know it is God saying, *I will never leave nor forsake you*, Heb. 13:5, rather than some human, then you will find hope and comfort, especially when times get rough.

Jeremiah the prophet spoke the words of God, *I will love you with an everlasting love*, Jer. 31:3. If those were merely the prophet's own words, we'd say "So what?" But as God's words they let us know in the depths our souls that the Creator of universe loves us through all eternity.

This keystone habit of Jesus, to immerse Himself in Scripture, is essential among the habits we need to develop as His disciples. This happens by conscious effort. Commit to reading something from the Bible every day. If you miss a day, double up the next day. Get on a Bible reading plan – there are many to choose from. You can read the entire Bible in one year. *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 for every good work*, 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

When you go home today, or if you're already at home, I want you to find a Bible—maybe it's on your phone. If you can't find one, go get one today ... don't wait. What empowers you to live each day, under God's guidance and with His strength, is found in the pages of the Bible. In the right community people share encouragement from the Scriptures. Hearing God's word brings comfort and change, unlike experiences of pleasure and success. When God's word is working in you – naturally and unforced – you will join Him on mission to others.

The more of God's truth you eat and digest, the stronger you'll be, the closer you'll be to the character of Christ, and the better difference you'll make in this world.

***For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit*, John 3:34.**