

A Meditation on God's Ways

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Tonight is something a little different, you might say. I've titled it "A Meditation on God's Ways." A meditation on God's ways, and it's kind of the final preparatory message before we get into the extended series of series of messages that I'm going to do, but I want to say this, I'm going to cast what I have to say tonight in the context of the future several months of our pulpit, but to give you a sense that everything that I have to say here actually has a lot of direct personal application for anything that you might be going through in your own life as we consider the ways of God and what we want to do strategically from our pulpit, what we have should serve as a meaningful encouragement to you tonight, especially if you are in the midst of a prolonged trial, a prolonged affliction, prolonged adversity that just seems to be never ending, and one obstacle comes upon another like waves on the shore. And you know, I've been there, and I know how deeply discouraging that can be when there aren't immediate answers. I can think of times sitting on a wall talking to my friend, Joe Trofimov, who preached here back in October going back a couple of decades, and as a family we were going through some difficulties that just had no answer apparent to them at all, you know, and these sort of things that I'm sharing tonight can help you if you're in a time like that. And so I'm on your side as I preach here this evening as I always try to be, so just keep that in mind as I apply it in a different direction. These things are meaningful on a personal level.

Coming to the pulpit, coming to what's ahead in the future as all of you should know by now, I'm just back recently from a four-month study leave. I described it to somebody I've done so much reading, so much thinking, so much pulpit planning over that time that I'm a little bit like a bottle of Coke you've got your thumb on and you just shook it and shook it and shook it. I think I said that last Tuesday. Now you let the thumb go and everything comes out all at once in an explosive manner. I'm trying to channel that in constructive ways, knowing that, you know, you need time and the opportunity to catch up with me on many of these things. But my heart is full, my heart is burdened, my heart is convicted over what's ahead in a way that, you know, at a different level even than most of my preaching in the past, I could say.

So all of that. We are going on Sunday, this coming Sunday, I intend to start a series of a series of messages on fundamental Christian thinking. We have nothing less in mind for these series of messages than to develop minds for biblical living, biblical thinking for biblical living, you might say, and that's what we want to do. And just the fact that someone is a Christian, and just the fact that someone comes to be in a church and joins a

church even, does not necessarily at all mean that they actually think in a biblical way. You know, we think inconsistently, for one thing; we have certain convictions that we have from Scripture but on a day-to-day basis we don't live that out and I'm the first one in the guilt line on this. You know, we believe, we say, in the providence of God, and that God directs our lives and that he works all things together for good. We say that and we believe that together, don't we? But how often is it when some kind of reversal comes our way that we get discouraged, we start to doubt, we get anxious, we wonder what's going to happen and the things that we said that we believed on Sunday somehow have escaped our thinking the way that we view life on Wednesday, for example. And so we all need help to greatly strengthen our position with a biblical mind, with biblical thinking. Even if our convictions are going in the right direction, we are at best inconsistent on it. And what I said a week ago Sunday is that it's all the more critical for us to engage in a series like this because of the chaos that's in our culture, the chaos that is in the broader evangelical church, the chaos that Satan and demons create as they promulgate false teaching and false philosophies to confuse the people of God and to blind people to the truth. The answer to all of those things, to our inconsistent Christian thinking and Christian living and the demonic stronghold of false philosophies that engulf our culture, the answer to all of that is truth. Truth preached. Truth read in Scripture. Truth applied to our heart by the Holy Spirit.

We don't need more games and social nights at a time like this as much as we need the truth of God brought to bear upon our hearts, our minds and our consciences, with power by the Holy Spirit, and so that's, you know, I've laid out that and I'm not going to repeat it any further than to say this: our responsibility, our responsibility as individual Christians, as elders of Truth Community Church, as a congregation, our collective and individual responsibility at a time like this is for us to focus intently on real truth, on fundamental truth. This is a time to go back and establish the most basic presuppositions of Christian thought, because that is what is going to engage us and what is going to strengthen us in the task ahead. And beyond that, beloved, and I want to qualify what I'm about to say before I say it, you know, one of the romantic things about preaching is that you never know how God is going to use it. You never know if God will use a particular sermon to work in someone's heart and draw them to Christ under the preaching of the word. You pray for that. You ask for that, but a lot of times it doesn't happen, but you never know when God's going to use something particularly in someone's life, and so you just, you know, the idea is that you're just faithful to the truth and you proclaim it, and you leave the results to God and that's certainly the way that I think about this series of series of messages that are coming up. You know, from Scripture I know that the things that we're going to talk about in the coming months, and it will be months, beloved, these things are generationally important. These things are important for generations to come. They're important for young people that are maybe 8, 9, 10 years old to be hearing and to be embracing and for it to shape their lives into their 60's and 70's and to affect them for a long, long time to come. It's important for us to teach these things for the sake and for the benefit of a generation yet to be born as the influence of God's word goes to a younger generation and they speak these things and repeat them to those that will come up under their influence as parents, as teachers or whatever it may be.

And Scripture speaks to these kinds of things, speaks to that kind of theme explicitly in 2 Timothy 2 where Paul says to Timothy, not so much about chronological generations but spiritual generations, he tells Timothy as he is about to die, as Paul is about to die, that is, he says, "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." There's four spiritual generations in that verse. There's Paul teaching to Timothy, Timothy who is to entrust the things that he heard from Paul to faithful men, and those faithful men in the future will be teaching them to others as well. And so there is this thought of new generations coming up, and Psalms speak about that, that these things will be spoken of a generation yet to be born.

Now we're not, you and I, we're not really used to thinking that way very often, are we? We're so consumed with daily life that we're not really thinking about what happens, you know, next year, let alone to people that are yet to be born, and yet Scripture calls upon the people of God to think that way, and one of the things that we have to do is we have to clearly establish the most basic assumptions and presuppositions of Christian biblical thought so that these things are able to be passed on into future lives. And so from a principled standpoint, I know that the things that we're doing here and what we're going to be talking about, they are generationally important whether God chooses to bless what we do, the truth is generationally important whether God chooses to bless this particular manifestation of it, I don't have any control over that, and I make no predictions but I do know that I need to do this for the sake of the fact that these things are generationally important.

And so what we're going to do, I mentioned this two days ago on Sunday, and what we're going to do, I'll repeat it here for the benefit of those of you that were precluded from being with us by the weather, I set forth a schedule of coming series and I just want you to know where we're going in advance, and I set forth seven series which is incidental to the fact that in Scripture seven is the number of completeness, but what we're going to do is we're going to start beginning on Sunday with a series on how to know God exists, and then we'll move from there to how to know that the Bible is true. From there, how to know Jesus is Lord. Yeah, those things are pretty important, aren't they? Does God exist or not? And how do we know? How do we explain that? How do we articulate that? How do we defend that? Yeah, I think it matters to know that and have that clear in our minds however long it takes to establish it. Is the Bible true? How do we know that? On what authority do we accept the truthfulness of Scripture? On what authority do we believe that? How do we know that Jesus is Lord? Those three, and then going on that beyond that we'll address how to know that God rules over all, how to know Christianity is true, which, if Christianity is true, every other religion is false. Christianity makes exclusive truth claims. These things assault the philosophical underpinnings of our entire society. Well, of course we would spend time on these things if they're that important. If what Scripture says shows us and exposes to us that everything in culture, everything around us, everything that is taught in public schools is premised on lies and avoidance of the truth, we're going to stand and make that assertion in the face of an onslaught of ungodliness. Do you know what? We better have our act together. We better know what we're talking about. It's not just enough to say these things are true, we need to know why

they are true and be able to articulate them in an intelligent, gracious, loving, informed way. I think that's important. And so how to know God exists, how to know the Bible is true, how to know Jesus is Lord, how to know God rules over all, how to know Christianity is true, how to know truth exists, not the church, you know Truth Community Church exists, not that truth, truth itself, and how to know true salvation. You know, if there's only one way to God through Jesus Christ, man, it is eternally important for every one of us to know what that is and on what authority we receive it, and how you and I can know if truth has been borne in my soul. We need to know these things.

If, you know, if, let's say, you know, maybe you're kind of new to Bible teaching, you're coming out of a different background or something like that, if all of these topics sound a little bit intimidating to you, it's precisely for someone like you that I'm doing it, so that these things would no longer intimidate you, but you would say, "I know. I know, and I can explain why God exists, how I know that, I can explain that the Bible is true. I can explain that Jesus is Lord. I can explain all of these things." I want that for you. I want that for you not just for the sake of the glory of God, that's the preeminent reason, but I want this for you because I know, beloved, I know from the work of the Spirit in my own heart that these things will change your life from one image of glory to another as 2 Corinthians 3:18 says. I know that these things are transformative and I want that for you. That's, you know, I mean, that's what a pastor does, he seeks, a true pastor, he seeks the spiritual good of the people that are under his teaching.

And so these things are critically critically important for generations to come and for us today, and do you know what? I need to be strengthened in all of it myself. I'm looking forward to going through this with you, interacting with you as we go through these things. And here's the thing, trying to keep a restraint on that Coke bottle here before I get out of control too quickly here, here's the thing is that each message within the context of each series, and then each series upon each series, it all builds together. These are different bricks being put together as we build something up. It all fits together. These things all need to be known. These things all reinforce each other. And so it's going to be important to be with us as often as you can to get the full benefit of it. You know, in one sense they're stand alone, but they're really not. The truth of God and the truths of which we're speaking here tonight, it's a seamless garment. Think of it as, you know, the soldiers didn't rip the garment of Jesus, they gambled lots for it to keep it in the single whole unit that it was. You know, the truth of God, in one sense, is a unit that we consider together.

And so with all of that said, it's essential for us as a church going forward that collectively you understand what our goal is in this approach and what it is that we're aiming to do, and I just kind of wrote this out this morning to just have some statement to make about it and it's this: what is our goal as we do this? Well, it's kind of lofty and that's why I want to pursue it, we aim to form a biblical Christian mind in anyone who will hear us. We want to develop men and women who can think critically about the spirit of our age. I'll say it again: we aim to form a biblical Christian mind in anyone who will hear us. We want to develop men and women who can think critically about the

spirit of our age. This is not simply about communicating information, this is about enabling noble-minded people of God to think critically and to be effective and to live to the glory of God in the age in which he has placed us. There's no need for us to look back and wish that we lived in former days when the philosophical things and the sexual chaos wasn't like that. That's not the age that God gave to us to live in. God has given us this age to live in and, beloved, it's not too much for us to say as the people of God, that God has given us to this age. God has given us to this age that we would proclaim the excellencies of him who called us by his eternal grace. Well, the way that we proclaim the excellencies of him is to know his truth and the way that you proclaim it with confidence and with effectiveness and with power is to know it with clarity. Confused minds, shallow minds, unconvinced minds are not going to be as effective.

I'll say it as gently as I can and, beloved, another thing about it, and you look back and you read church history and all of that, shallow convictions, seeker-sensitive models of ministry are not going to produce courageous lions for the truth in the age in which we live. Those who will be courageous, those who will stand, those who will proclaim Christ unafraid and in a fearless effective way are going to be the ones who have the deepest knowledge of truth and have the most convinced mind about it and can articulate why these seven things, they know them to be true. And I want that for our church. I want that for you in. In one sense, it's the only reason I'm living is to be able to say these things and to be used like that, and by comparison everything else seems secondary to me.

Now, we want to form a biblical Christian mind and then, you know, beyond that, you know, what I want for you, you know, even in your older age, you know, you're older and you say, "Do you know what? I don't have a whole lot of time left. Maybe I've got five years, 10 years left. You know, most of my life is behind me." That's okay. Moses prayed in Psalm 90, "Lord, confirm for us the work of our hands." Yes, confirm the work of our hands. He only had a short couple of years to live when he said that and as he reflects back on the wilderness wanderings and, "Lord, give us a heart of wisdom," he says, "Lord, with the short time I've got left, I ask you, I beg you, I pray you to take what I am doing and establish it. Bless it. Establish it so that it would benefit posterity after I'm gone." And so, having considered these truths for ourselves, what I want for you, what I want for our church is this, is that our men and women could effectively lead others, including their children, in truth and in discernment. I want to strengthen you so that you can be better with your kids. I want to strengthen you so you're better with your grandchildren. I want to strengthen you so that you're better with people that come in new to the church after these things have already been taught. And beyond that, beyond that, I want your kids that you teach to one day be able to lead and teach others in this as well. I know we're not used to thinking and talking this way but to me it just seems like that's what we ought to be doing. That's what we ought to be aiming at. Not entertaining ourselves. Not just, you know, reciting our favorite Bible verses with each other and being content to edify ourselves and, you know, just securing our own little circle, our own little bubble that we can live in. We've got to think bigger thoughts about the purposes of God in establishing us in the age in which we live.

And so with all of those things, think of what is to come over these next six months, nine months, I don't know how long it will take. I'm continually telling myself, I say, "Don," I call myself that, I say, "Don," and look in the mirror, "Don, oh yeah!" I say, "Don, don't put a timetable on this. You may find that, you know, as you get into it, there's other things that you want to say that you're not anticipating now." So there's no time frame. There's no time frame on this, but what it will help you as you're considering this and we're entering into this in the days and weeks and months to come, think of this as an accelerated systematic development of church-wide discipleship with the word of God as our textbook. Everything I say to you is going to come from the word of God. You're going to be able to put your finger on chapter and verse and say, "Okay, I see it." How do we know that God exists? Verse, verse, verse, verse. Psalm here. Psalm there. And what we'll find down the road, and the the thing of it is, is that this is going to be so, it's going to seem like it's so incremental that you'll wonder from week to week what exactly is happening but what you'll find is two years, five years, 10 years from now when life changes for you, when crises come, that you're responding out of a position of strength grounded in truth rather than just responding emotionally to the difficulties around you. I think all of these things are worthwhile to pursue.

Now having said that, the form of our preaching may be different than what you're used to, but it's important for you to see historically in the historic context of the Christian church the precedent, not the president, the precedent for what we're doing. And just one quote as an illustration here. Stephen Charnock was a Puritan preacher back in the 17th century. He lived 1628 to 1680. He was a notable theologian and a pastor for a time in London before his death. You can get five volumes of his works that are very profound, and he is known today, Stephen Charnock is known today especially for his systematic work on the existence and the attributes of God. And he'll have, you know, there's a chapter, he has a discourse on divine providence, for example. You say, "Oh, a discourse on divine providence," and you just keep turning and turning and it's like it's 60-70-80 pages long. That's his idea of a discourse.

So Stephen Charnock did this. Charnock's biographer was a Scottish man named James M'Cosh who lived in the 19th century from 1811 to 1894, and he says this about the nature of systematic theology, and he addresses it in the context of why systematic theology is important and it applies to the form of teaching that we're going to be using in the days to come, and I want you to hear this and to be able to appreciate the significance of it. I know of a theology teacher from my past who would object to this. I don't object to it. I affirm it wholeheartedly. So here's what Stephen Charnock's biographer said, and you'll hear me quoting Charnock in the days to come, but his biographer said this. He said, "Systematic theology has important purposes to secure not only in testing and guarding purity of doctrine in a church," here's the critical part, "but in combining the scattered truths of God's words so that we may clearly apprehend them. Systematic theology exhibits the unity of the faith in the face of the misapprehensions, mistakes and errors which may arise." He goes on to say, "The best Puritans awaken the unthinking and arouse the careless, and compel them to think of the things which belong to their everlasting peace." The significance for what we're going to be doing in the coming months of that statement is this, is that it's the task of systematic theology to gather

together truth that is found in God's word on a particular topic or a particular doctrine, things that are spread throughout the Bible, to gather them up in one place so that the fullness of the teaching of God can be brought to bear on a subject so that there is, as much as possible, a comprehensive understanding of the doctrine at stake.

And so, you know, if you consider divine providence, you know, you read about the life of Joseph, you see in a narrative form, you know, an outworking of divine providence. You go to Matthew 6 and you see what Jesus says about God's care for the flowers and the birds and how that bears on providence and what the implications of it are. You read further in Matthew 10 and you read Jesus saying that the hairs of all of your head are numbered and not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from your heavenly Father. And that's just a very brief, you know, illustration, is all that is. You take those things together, you place them side-by-side alongside each other and you have a fuller picture of the doctrine of divine providence than you would have if you simply looked at one in isolation without comparing Scripture with Scripture. This is very, very important for us to understand, and that's the spirit in which we're going to approach the work and the opportunity in the ministry that lies ahead of us. I'm very, very excited about it. I can't wait to get into it with you and so all of that expresses our philosophy and our goals as we move forward as Truth Community Church.

This is a bit of a pivot point. Not a change in direction of our church but this is a new chapter, you might say, as we move forward with what the Lord is going to do with us in the coming year. And so I say this and intend this to be a humble statement with what I say here even though it sounds lofty, but, beloved, we believe, together we believe that we are undertaking a work of. God with what lies ahead that is suited for the particular age in which we live. We're undertaking a work. This is God's truth. This is God's world. This is God's church. It's God's Spirit. It's God's Christ that we seek to uphold and to glorify. You know, as we sung earlier in that second hymn, you know, they can forget the channel through which these things come, you can forget the channel through which they come but the work of God needs to be established in our midst.

I had a seminary professor one time back in my MDiv days, which back in the '90s, and a student was objecting to a doctrine that he had articulated, something that he had said, and he just kind of shrugged his shoulders and he said, "Look," he said, "this is what I think and they asked me to teach the class." You know, and there's a certain profundity. There's a certain profundity to that. This is what, you know, and just looking at it, you know, here today as I stand before you, this is what I think we need to do. They asked a long time ago, they asked me to be the pastor. I don't know what else to do but to do what I think needs to be done. And so with all of that, what follows here tonight is not really a sermon at all. It's not a message as you're used to hearing. This is just a meditation for us as we start on the Sunday to come, and I invite you to turn to the book of Isaiah 55. A meditation that will give us a practical perspective as we look to the future and also as we consider our own lives before the Lord and the heartaches and opportunities that are before us.

In the context of this verse, God is calling the wicked to repentance, and there might be a tendency to think and to question, "Well, will God really forgive me?" And the point is, is that God is a merciful God, a gracious God, that he will forgive even where humans might refuse to do so. So you see in chapter 55, verse 6, it says, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." And so there's this call to sinners to come to the living God for salvation and pardon of their sins. On this side of the cross we know that that is a free offer of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every sinner who would believe in him, the one who made an atoning sacrifice on the cross, shed his blood for the forgiveness of sinners just like you, God calls to you and says to you, "Repent. Forsake your wicked ways and come and you will find abundant pardon in my Son." It's a wonderful thought.

Then verse 8 it goes on and the prophet speaks on the Lord's behalf and the Lord says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." So that someone who is deeply burdened by a conviction of sin and realizes the enormity of their guilt before God, you know, there's a tendency in that condition to shrink away from God even as a believer saying, "I have just committed, I have just, I have sinned again in the same way that I did yesterday and the day before that," and you start to have these thoughts that flit across your mind if you're not grounded in Scripture that says, "The Lord has to be tired of me," and you hesitate to even go and ask for mercy, to go and confess it once more again because your thinking is rooted in human ways and humans get tired of forgiveness, humans get tired of, "I'm sorry," humans have a limit to the compassion that they show to those who have offended them. God says, "Don't think about me like that. Don't think about me in human categories because I'm a God of abundant pardon. I don't pardon like man does. I pardon freely, abundantly, gladly. I'm a God of compassion upon sinners just like you, and so come, come and return to the Lord," so that you can find that compassion so that he will abundantly pardon you. It's a great invitation and is the focus of that particular passage.

As you extend it out in what we're about to see as we have this meditation on God's ways, want to just see something of the ways of God that are different from the ways of man as we contemplate life and what we're, you know, what we're about to embark on. And these things are, you know, we'll go through rather quickly. I probably just did a 40 minute introduction for a 60 minute sermon. What I want to do is consider with you three distinct ways that God works among his people, ways that are reflective of the way that he will deal with you over time in your life. One of the things, one of the many things that I hate about the health, wealth and prosperity movement and all of that, is they create this impression of quick and immediate results from God, and how many times, if you've had any familiarity with that, you know, one of their favorite words to use is a breakthrough, you know, and you're looking for a breakthrough where God suddenly changes everything in the circumstance and you're, you know, and things go from bad to good, from bankruptcy to wealth in just a flash of an eye, and it creates these expectations of the timing of God being operated according to our stopwatch or our calendar. And that's

so destructive. It's so wrong. It teaches people to be impatient with God rather than patient and to wait on him as Scripture repeatedly says, "Wait on the Lord. Be strong and let your heart take courage." Yes, wait on the Lord. Well, why the biblical admonition to wait if God's way is for us to just immediately quickly get what we want so as to minimize the discomfort and suffering that we have, as the hucksters of moralistic therapeutic deism would say, "God just wants to fix your problem."

Well, we need to, first of all, we need to see this about the ways of God and it's this: he works with a deliberate providence. He works with a deliberate providence. Providence, just to give it a 5 cent definition is an indication that God controls and directs all events in the universe in order to accomplish his purposes. Nothing is outside the ultimate decreed will of God. And so God works all of the motions of man, and all of the motions of oceans, and the motions of the skies, and the hearts of kings, he works it all to accomplish his purposes. Even sinners who rebel against him, God works through that to accomplish his ultimate will. That's the idea of providence.

Our point tonight is not to articulate that doctrine per se, but simply to acquaint you with the sense that God works with a deliberate providence and I'm not going to have you turn to Scriptures here, I'm just going to point things out to you for the sake of time. This is like standing, you know, on a little bit of a plateau looking out at a range of mountains, looking at the Rocky Mountains from a plateau in eastern Colorado and seeing the full sweep of it without getting into all of the details. That's what we want to do here tonight. God works with a deliberate providence, and so we start with this: the ways of God are sure in their outworking. God certainly works out his will, but this is where we need to bend the knee and bend our minds, but he does not work according to the timetable of man. God works on his timetable, not on ours. As part of being God, part of being sovereign, you get to do what you want, when you want, when you see fit undistracted, unaffected by what happens on earth below.

God works according to his timetable. God, and here's the thing that you and I need to remember for this evening, God perceives time and God acts in human affairs differently than we do. God views time differently than we do. Of course, the most famous verse to that effect, I suppose you could say, is 2 Peter 3:8 which says this, it says, "do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." God is indifferent to the passage of time. God is not restrained by schedules and deadlines. You know, we're driven by these things, and in part because we have to be. We are creatures of time. God is not a creature of time. He's not a creature and he's beyond time. He created time.

And so, bringing this to personal application as I promised you, especially when we are afflicted, suffering under grinding chronic trials, you and I understandably want immediate relief. Look, we live in the age of smartphones and drive-thru orders and Google giving us the information we want in .0023 seconds. And we're conditioned to think that way, and we're always so much in a hurry, and so we take that which our culture has conditioned us to expect, and what the affections and the motions of our heart, we want things now. We want them and we want them now. And we carry, here's the

thing, this is a really important transition point, beloved, and we carry that over into our expectations from God. We've lost sight of patient persistent prayer. Praying when the answer doesn't come and being content as we wait on an answer that is long, long delayed. But beloved, God is not like us like that at all. God is not like us when it comes to time. God works his purposes over years, over decades, over centuries, over millennia. Revelation 20, thousand year future reign of Christ still to come.

God works out his purposes on a timetable that is inconceivable to us and let me just illustrate this with you with select familiar examples from Scripture and history to make my point. I have scripture references for all of these things that are biblical that if you want, I'll be happy to share those with you another time, this is the panorama not the detailed exegesis here. And so, starting in Genesis, Abraham waited 25 years from the promise of God until the birth of Isaac, Genesis 12, Genesis 21. The children of Israel were enslaved for 400 years in the nation of Egypt. Beloved, there were generations that came, lived under slavery, lived under that oppression, and died and saw nothing of the purpose of God worked out in their visible eyes. Even when God delivered them, the nation spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness, Numbers 14. Later on the Babylonian exile, God carried the people off in judgment through the Babylonians. Babylonian exile lasted 70 years. 25 years. 400 years. 40 years. 70 years. You know, God did not act instantly. God was perfectly pleased and perfectly wise to allow his people to suffer, to wait to have his promise and for his promise to be sufficient to secure their faith, even if they did not see the fulfillment to come. Hebrews 11 talks about that. They embraced the promises from a distance, not having seen them, not realizing fulfillment in their lives.

You can move from the Old Testament to the New Testament era. From the end of the ministry of the Old Testament prophets at the end of Malachi to the beginning, the start of the New Testament, another 400 years during which the Jews suffered greatly under the hands of the Romans at times. Even our Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, think about him. He's born in Bethlehem, born to Mary. What happened with our Lord? He lived in obscurity working as a carpenter for 30 years prior to the start of his ministry. Our Lord himself, three decades just living in a way that people just thought he was the natural child of Joseph and he was a carpenter's son, and they viewed him with derision when he came out for his public ministry. 30 years. The Apostle Paul knew a 14-year delay early in his apostolic ministry, Galatians 2.

We can move beyond the close of the New Testament canon and see it in history. I refer to this a lot. The early church, those blessed brothers and sisters in Christ, knew 300 years of different waves of persecution under the Roman Empire. If you read that book that I recommended last Tuesday, "Sketches From Church History," you can see a little bit of a vignette. You know, they lived in tombs. You know, they lived in those underground catacombs in Rome. That's where they'd meet for worship. And this went on for decades and even centuries and that's what they knew. You know, there wasn't, you know, they would have, who knows, who knows how they would have immediately rejected and scorned and despised, if time travel was possible and you sent a prosperity preacher back to them and preaching, you know, "God wants you healthy, wealthy and well," and preach that to them in the catacombs, I don't know if they would have laughed

at him or stoned him. That message would be utterly contrary to what the early church knew for the first three centuries after Christ. God was content to do that. The corruption of the Roman Catholic Church lasted nearly 1,000 years before the Reformation launched by Luther and carried on by Zwingli and Calvin and Knox and other great men of whom the world was not worthy. You get the idea, don't you?

We could multiply illustrations endlessly. We could look at the Apostle John in exile on the island of Patmos. We could accept the testimony of church history and, you know, that the other 11 apostles were martyred, lost their lives for the sake of Christ. The appointed representatives of Christ came to that kind of an end. You get the point. Here's the point: God's ways, not our ways. God's ways, not our ways. The way that he chooses to allow his children to go through affliction, the length of time that he'll allow them to suffer, the fact that he will let them, he will allow them and bring them under the domination of godless rulers in order to discipline them, I can't read and interpret God's providence but I'll tell you what, the professing church of Jesus Christ, we deserve the corrupt leadership that is over us. God brings godless leaders to discipline his people in order to drive them back to godliness and to repentance, and to forsake their foolish worldly ways. And now we have people that just want to double down even more on politics. What is that? What is that? You know, we'd rather have 10, not we, Truth Community Church, but the church for decades since the moral majority, would prefer, you know, political instruction rather than humble repentance. Well, why would God bless the church and provide us with further ease when that's the mindset and the attitude? But our point here is one of simply of chronology. God does not operate on the timetable of man. His purposes are sure even though they are often, if not usually, slow and hidden from our eyes.

Now surely that has personal relevance for some of you in your life. It reminds me of the hymn that we sometimes sing, "All creatures of our God and King. You, who long pain and sorrow bear. Praise God and on him cast your care, Oh praise him, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah." Long pain and sorrow is sometimes the way of God with his people. He may delay the comfort and the outcome but his mercies are still sure and new every morning. Our faith does not wrap around the roots, do not wrap around the circumstances in which we find ourselves, true faith, true Christian biblical faith, the roots of that wrap around the promises of God, around the unchanging immutable attributes, the immutable essence of God and rests in him there regardless of the passage of time. So I just encourage you to remember the sure but deliberate providence of God and continue to persevere.

Now that also has relevance, as I see it, for the prolonged study that we have ahead on the Christian mind. We cannot set artificial timetables for the work of the word in us. And look, beloved, you know, and I'm reminding myself on a daily basis to be patient myself as I go through this as I preach through these things in the months to come, but I want you to understand and I want you to think clearly about these things. The church and our culture has rejected truth for decades and for centuries and we are living in the environment that that produces. Beloved, it's going to take time to start to undo the effects of that, that our culture has rejected truth for decades, for centuries, the church has

followed along in a chronological delay like an unthinking puppy. And so what we have to do is we have to reestablish the fundamentals that have too long been neglected. That requires patient attention to systematic teaching. There are no shortcuts. Shortcuts beloved, you don't take anything away from the preparation for the series of series to come, keep this in mind, there are no shortcuts for establishing a biblical mind, shortcuts are what got us into the present mess. A disaffection and an impatience and a disregard for truth is what led us into the chaos in which we find ourselves. We're not going to get out of it by being in a hurry. That would only make the problem worse.

So the ways of God include a deliberate outworking of his providence. Secondly, I'd like to remind you of what we could say is the recurrent instruction of God. The recurrent instruction of God, the fact that some things are repeated in ministry. As we build fundamental thought in a fundamentally Christian mind, another biblical pattern of instruction is very helpful for us to frame our expectations and to frame our approach, and to frame the whole mind in which we received it. I received a lovely e-mail recently asking how can we absorb this material? What can we do to prepare our minds and how can we best make use of what is to come? Well, as we build fundamental thought, beloved, here's what I want you to remember and to think about that will help you as you come to be under the word of God week by week, month by month. It's a simple point. The apostles of Jesus Christ often repeated instruction to the churches. Not every message was something new to them and from them, and you see this endlessly in the Apostle Paul. Endlessly, you see Paul saying these kinds of things. Just listen as I read half dozen passages from the letters of the Apostle Paul with this focus on repetition.

He said in Romans 15, he said, "On some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder because of the grace given me by God." Reminder. I've written you these things. You've heard them before, I'm reminding you of them. In 1 Corinthians 4, he says, "That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach them everywhere in every church." He said, "Everywhere I go, I teach these things and now I'm sending you Timothy so that Timothy will remind you of what you've already heard." Philippians 3:1, he says, "To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and it's safe for you." 2 Timothy 1, he says, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands." In 2 Timothy 2:14, I told you this was endless speaking metaphorically there. 2 Timothy 2:14, he says, "Remind them of these things." In Titus 3:1, "Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authority." Remind. Remind. Remind. Same things. Remind. Reminder.

Let me give you an opportunity to turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter just to see these things from another apostle. 2 Peter 1. I'll have a little, if I don't forget, I'll have a little confession after we go through these final passages for you here, something of my own to publicly repent of. 2 Peter 1, beginning in verse 12. Peter says, and he's also on the verge of his earthly departure. Verse 12, he says, "Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have." He says, "You know these things. You're established and I'm still going to remind you of them." That's how important repetition is in biblical ministry. He goes on and he says in

verse 13, "I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things." Peter says, "I'm staring down the barrel of death. Here's what I'm going to do while I've got breath, I'm going to remind you of the things that you already know." That's how important it is.

In chapter 3, same book, you see him coming back to this again. 2 Peter 3:1. "This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles." I'm reminding you of teaching that you've already heard.

Even the short letter of Jude which in many ways parallels the message of Peter. Jude 5 says, "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe." He said, "You knew this. I'm reminding you of it again." Recurrent instruction being the biblical pattern.

Now, what does the recurrent instruction of God have to do with us here at Truth Community Church as we seek to develop a biblical mind? Well, couple of things that I would say. First of all, it's going to be really, really good for you if you make the effort and commit your time and narrow down some of the things that you do and choose to listen to, to listen to things again and again, to listen to these messages not once on Sunday, not just once on Tuesday, but to download the files to listen to them again, to develop just as you have to train a child who is learning obedience and learning the different things of entering into caring for himself, and you have to repeat things again and again and again before they get it, you and I, we need to humble ourselves and say, "I need that same thing in my own life, Lord." And I can't control this. I can't control outcomes. I know in advance that there will be a section of people that will just go through the motions of this and not really embrace it like what I'm talking about. I can't do anything about that, but you can control and be different yourself and say, "I need, I need the repetition so these things sink in deep in me." You need that.

As a practical matter for a pulpit perspective, I'll be really candid with you: I intend to adapt and to go over material that I've previously taught in the past. You know, it'll all come out new, it will sound fresh, but I'm going to repeat things that have been taught at Truth Community Church in the past, you know, at times as we go through this. Understand why, and those of you especially that have been with us for a long time and said, "I've heard this. Why is he teaching this again?" Let's just deal with this graciously upfront. You know, it's not about any one particular person and what any one particular person has heard in the past. We can't be that selfish about it. The fact of the matter is, is that some of this material, there's been such an extensive turnover of those that identify with our church that for 80-90% everything that I'm about to teach in these coming months is going to be new to you, new to them. Would we really withhold the benefit of

fundamental truth from someone just because a small select handful of us have heard it before, particularly when we've forgotten it? That doesn't make any sense to me.

But along with that and I have mentioned the children of our church repeatedly, and I do so without apology, our church has been around for about 11 years now. Do you know what that means? That means that even for families where their kids have been with us from the very beginning, that means that children under the age of 15 have no meaningful memory of the foundational things that we were teaching at the start. Am I to neglect them just to keep bringing something new? I can't do that. I won't do that. And so let me just encourage you to patience and to a teachable spirit mindful of what it says in Hebrews 2:1, you don't need to turn there, not using the phrase reminder but you see the same thing. The writer of Hebrews said to his readers, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it." He says we need to pay closer attention to what we've already heard. We need to be stirred up by way of reminder.

I promise you, I nearly forgot this and it's not like any sin that I've committed against anyone in the room, but I just want to publicly acknowledge and just kind of before my own sense of presence before God, you might say, is that I used to, especially when I was back at the other place, I used to be really sensitive and irritated with people who would come up to me after I preached and they would say, "Thanks. Thanks for that reminder." And at the time, I took offense at it. The way that I received that at the time is, "You're telling me I didn't tell you anything you hadn't heard before." I wanted to be fresh. I wanted to be original because that's what you're supposed to do to keep an audience. Now I see it completely differently after I see these things from Scripture. Now I understand a big responsibility that I have is to remind people of things that I've already said, things that are in Scripture that you already know, and to bring them to bear upon your mind again and again, not just what I've taught, but what you've seen from Scripture in the past. The way of God is recurrent instruction, not always chasing after something new, not a new series every three weeks with clever titles designed to draw people in. That's like living off candy bars. It tastes good for a little while, the sugar high is great, but ultimately you need nutrition and you end up impoverished if you do it any other way.

Well, thirdly, finally then very briefly, what's the way of God? The way of God is, thirdly, seen in the sure promise of God. The sure promise of God. Whatever lies ahead for us as we pursue this path, we will not take this path in vain. This is not an empty pursuit that we will do. God will honor his truth. Psalm 138, he's exalted his word in accordance with all of his name. We're just trying to honor the word of God here. That's all. In one sense, that's the ultimate goal here. We just want to honor God's word in a culture that's rejected it and in a church that's largely rejected it. Based on Scripture, I'm convinced, I'm confident that God will bless us for that without trying to define in advance what that blessing will look like. Listen to just three passages. 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." Galatians 6:9 of particular consequence when you remember the deliberate providence of God. Galatians 6:9, "And let us not grow weary of doing good for in due season we will reap if we do not

give up." Beloved by the grace of God, we will not give up. Come what may, we will not give up. 2 Thessalonians 3:13, "As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good."

Well, we'll need to recall these three distinct ways of God as we go forward, his deliberate providence, the recurrent instruction, his sure promise. As I said earlier, the effects of this teaching may not be instantly obvious but, you know, we're not microwaving a bowl of instant oatmeal here, we're laying down principles of eternal truth for now and for generations to come, so we're not seeking immediate gratification. We'll be building minds. We must be patient and faithful. I trust that God will use it in you for your sake, that he'll use it in Truth Community Church for our collective corporate sake, and even more, beloved, we're trusting God to somehow use this for generations yet to be born.

Let's pray together.

Father, what can we say except that we commit these things and the intentions of our heart into your hand? We ask you for your own glory's sake to bless your word as it goes forth. We ask for the good of your people, that you would bless your word as it goes forth. We ask for the sake of a degenerate culture that you would bless your word as it goes forth. We ask for the sake of the young generation, dozens, scores of young children under the umbrella of our church, Father, that you would bless your word in their lives as it goes forth. Father, for generations to come that we won't meet on this side of glory, bless your word as it goes forth. Father, may the ministry that we undertake in the days and weeks and months and even years to come, Father, may you so bless that that the work of it would follow us into heaven long after we've departed from this earthly tent in which we now abide. Help us to that end, Father. We believe you to be a great God. We believe you to be able to do great things far exceeding abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think. And we believe that about you and so, Father, we simply ask in humble dependence for the glory of your name and for no other sake but we ask you to do great things as we pursue this path in the time to come. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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