

Figuring Out What You Believe

Getting to the Core

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Well, if you are going to identify the aspects of who you are that matter the most, that define you at the very core of your being, what would those areas be? At least for the moment let's take out the things about you you can't control like your age, your family of origin, your health, your intellect. I mean, you can't change any of that. We are talking about the kind of things that you can control that are most significant in defining your identity. And what would make that list? And, secondly, how important is it for you to be sure that you get those things right? That is what we want to talk about for the next month and a half.

The title of this new series is "Getting to the Core: Six weeks to focus on things that matter the most." And here is the topics we would like to unpack together. First of all, figuring out what you believe. Lord willing, that is what we are going to tackle this morning. And then figuring out why you are here and next figuring out who you are and then figuring out who you love and then figuring out what you want and, lastly, figuring out where you are going.

Hopefully you would agree with us this morning that those are six of the most important issues a person has to think through. That really is the very core of who you are and it determines the trajectory of your life and future.

Now what about that second question? How important is it for you to be sure that you get those things right? For example, what if you got a great education, but you never took time to draw conclusions about those six issues? Would that have been a good trade off?

So you say, "Now I have a Ph.D. in nuclear physics, but I have no idea what defines my identity." Ok, was that a smart use of your time?

Or what if you landed a great job and you made a boat load of money, but you never focused on these six areas. Would your priorities have been right or wrong?

Jesus answered that very question when he said this.

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”¹

There is as sense in which that is exactly what we are talking about here, the nature and the destiny of your soul. And that is the point of getting to the core.

Now let’s go back to our six topics for a moment, because there is a sense in which all of this is sequential. In other words, in order to draw correct conclusions about the last five, you have to decide your approach to the first one. You have to figure out what you believe or at least how you are going to go about deciding what source of truth you are going to use to determine what you believe. And before you can proceed on to those final five topics, philosophically now we are talking about the issue of epistemology. Now how do you propose to know what you know and what is your source of truth?

With that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible this morning to Isaiah chapter 40. That is on page 513 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. So Isaiah chapter 40 this morning on page 513 of the front section, obviously, the Old Testament of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

Our church’s theme this year is building core strength. We want to be sure around here we are majoring on the majors. So we are not a mile wide and an inch deep and especially right now because the Lord is both blessing us with growth and also stretching us into all sorts of ministry directions. We want to be sure, then, that we are working at getting our spiritual roots down deep at the level of the heart at the very core of who we are both as individuals and also as a church family.

And just as a data point, we had more people here last Sunday for our Easter services than any other Sunday in our history. Now on the one hand we are thankful for that. We see that as a trust from the Lord. But our goal was never just to get bigger around here. We want to be the kind of church family where any person who joins us can find the resources they need in order to grow, in order to be connected with the Lord, in order to get to the next place. And in order for that to happen we have to be strong and we have to be getting stronger in order to steward those kind of opportunities. And then, as all of these new apartments and duplexes and single family homes continue to be built just south of us and that our safe haven home comes online and then faith west comes on line, all that is good and all of it is really good if we have been busy building for strength. And so, Lord willing, these next six weeks can be a helpful part of that process.

Now one more thing just before we dive into all of this. I understand that there will be some folks who will be with us who are brand new to studying the Bible, brand new to being in church totally and I just want you to know that we designed this particular series with you especially in mind. Now I hope there is going to be truth for everybody here. I think there will be, but we have tried to be especially considerate for the individual who might just be starting out in all of this and we are going to try to be sure that we make this as clear and understandable as we possibly can.

¹ Matthew 16:26.

So how do you figure out what you believe? We are going to start right here in Isaiah chapter 40. And many times at this point in the message I read an extended passage. I am not going to do that right now. I wanted to think about one primary verse in the Bible and I will explain why in moment. It is Isaiah 40 verse eight which says:

“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”²

So here is this prophet writing 700 years before the birth of Christ answering the very question that we are posing this morning and he concluded that the way to figure out what to believe is leaning on a source that will stand forever, because it won't wither, it won't fade, it won't pass away, it won't be destroyed. There it is.

“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”³

Seven hundred years later the Messiah that book of Isaiah I just read from points to. He made a similar statement when he said this. This is Matthew 5:17.

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”⁴

And then he said this.

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”⁵

See, it is reliable. It is going to stand forever.

And one of Jesus' followers, the apostle Peter in a similar statement when he said in 1 Peter 1:22:

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.

For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ABIDES FOREVER."
And this is the word which was preached to you.⁶

² Isaiah 40:8.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Matthew 5:17.

⁵ Matthew 5:18.

⁶ 1 Peter 1:22-25.

Now I realize you might say, “But isn’t that circular reasoning? I mean you are arguing from the Bible to support the reliability of the Bible.”

And, honestly, I suppose, in some ways it is. And most reasoning is, in the final analysis, then, anyway. But what I am trying to right now is just point out three different segments of the history of God’s working with people in the Old Testament and the life of Christ and then life of the early church that those persons had all come to a similar conclusion, that God’s Word is the reliable source of truth to answer the core issues of life. And I would like us to spend the rest of our time this morning talking about why you and I should draw a similar conclusion. So let’s organize it like this. We have four steps for choosing the right source of truth. You are not going to get anything else rate, these other five topics that, Lord willing, we are going to be discussing in the remaining five weeks of this study, unless we all have the right source of truth and here is where it starts. It starts by determining your options. And what are the options? And when it comes to answering the five questions that we are going to be posting the rest of our time in this series: Who are you? And why are you here and where are you going and who should you love and what should you want? I mean, you have to choose a source of truth.

Well, what are the classifications? What are the actions?

The philosophers like to talk about four possible sources of truth or four epistemological sources. And right now I am not asking you: Do we ever use any of these sources for anything? I am asking you: Can one of these four sources be the appropriate place that you would go to answer the big questions of life? What are even your options?

Well, one of them is your intuition where you just know something to be true. You don’t even need to think it through. You were just born with that knowledge intuitively. And I understand. We know, all of us know certain things intuitively.

A mom places a bottle in a baby’s mouth and off it goes. If that baby is healthy there is generally not a whole lot of instruction involved. It is not like, well, listen, we are going to have to read a book together first or we are going to watch an instructional video. No, we know intuitively eating is a really good thing. And some of us have got that intuition going on yet to this day really well. No question about that.

So we all know certain things intuitively. But I am asking you: Can we answer the big questions of life based on our intuition?

Another option is your reason. This option is for people who believe that they have grey matter between their ears which is powerful enough and reliable enough and intelligent enough to answer all of life’s greatest questions. So they don’t need input from somebody else. They don’t need information for anywhere else. Ultimately their reason is a reliable, epistemological source. It is the old *Invictus* poem. “I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.”

Well, all right. I mean, is that what you believe about the quality of your mind? Many people do. Aristotle taught that the human mind had the ability to bridge the gap between the natural and the supernatural. Do you believe that about your mind? Thomas Aquinas taught that the fall of sin did not completely impact the mind. And just like within a wish... And I am not asking if we ever use our reason. I hope you use it. That is not the question. The issue here is: Can your reason be an ultimate source of truth when attempting to answer the big question of life?

Now, what is a third option? Totally different now is empiricism. Now we are talking about tests. We are talking about data. We are talking about research.

And, by the way, if you are starting to think: You know, this doesn't have anything to do with my life today, I mean, philosophical sources of truth, epistemology. Hello. I would disagree with you on that. In fact, I would suggest that the approach you take to determining what is true, it is going to come out every day in the kind of choices you make. That is right.

For example, let's just take this. Let's take the decision a young parent would have to make about whether he or she would ever use corporal punishment with their child. Would you agree with me? It is really important to have a right source of truth when you make that call, because if you get that wrong a lot of things go badly. True?

You are going to say, "I am not sure I agree with that."

Then, that's fine. Let's just dismiss church. Let's jump on some busses. Let's go down to Walmart and let's watch some of the kids down at the Walmart. I was down there the other day buying some night crawlers for me and my son to go fishing and I am telling you there was some kid from this community that had grabbed a bike off the rack at Walmart and was riding it around Walmart. It was all I could do not to be run over. What a terrible way to go heaven, run over by a kid on a bike at Walmart.

Have you ever had that feeling like I don't know whose kid you are, but you need a spanking like right now and I am going to be the instrument of God's judgment upon you? But anyway I am a little bit off my notes. But if you just watch kids in this culture you would probably conclude that some parents didn't make that decision as carefully or wisely as they should have.

Well, how would a parent? Think it is ... just take it a little further. I have to decide. Am I ever going to use corporal punishment with my child? Who would they use one of those first three choices as their epistemological source? Well, some just use intuition. Bottom line, I don't feel good about that. And that is the end of the discussion. I don't need to think about it any more. I don't need to talk to anybody else. I don't care about studies. I don't feel good about it intuitively and I am not going to do it, period. That is it.

Their epistemology is showing when they make a decision in that manner. Others, parent number two, perhaps, wouldn't trust their intuition, so she is going to use her reason to

make that choice. So she might read a number of books, she might talk to other people, but the ultimate arbiter is going to be her own mind, because in the final analysis she truly believes that her brain can and should be the ultimate final supreme source of truth.

And so to adjust Isaiah 48 to match that view: The grass withers and the flower fades, but her own mind and the choices that she makes will stand forever in her view.

What about parent number three? A totally different approach, not intuition, not reason, parent number three is going to look at the tests, the studies, the latest research. Studies show that parents who spank their children are 10 times more likely to wind up in prison.

That is a little joke, by the way, in case you are nervous. But that kind of a parent believes that test {?} the ultimate truth he needs to make a decision of that importance.

And in case we don't really get back to that one, the challenge with tests... it is not that we never use them. But the challenge with tests, many times, is what seem to be proven as true today, is often disproven tomorrow, right? Anybody here old enough to remember what they used to say was a healthy breakfast on the side of your corn flakes box? And, of course, you had to have a bowl of corn flakes in whole milk along with a couple of slices of bread with butter just kind of melting down over it along with two eggs and three strips of what? God's meat. That is right, bacon. And that is what they said. If you possibly left your house without eating all of that there is just something, right? The tests show. You have got to have a healthy breakfast. Well, is that what they would say today? All this tofu who ha. I mean, who knows what it is that they say? I am for bacon, aren't you? I am sticking with the test in the 60s that said it was bacon, for crying out loud.

But I am just simply saying that one of the problems, we all know it, and one of the problems with tests is that they so frequently change what was proven today is going to be disproven tomorrow. Ultimately, of course, we are talking about issues that can't be subjected to the scientific method anyway.

Now what is a fourth possible source of truth? If it is not going to be intuition, if it is not going to be reason, it is not going to be empiricism, when it comes to answering the big questions of life, what is left? Here you go. Revelation. The believing that there may actually be a God. And I am not even talking about which one yet, just the belief that there actually may be a God and he actually may have communicated his truth to us in some form of revelation that came from outside of us. There it is. Outside of us, that is higher than us to which we have to submit and learn. And for whatever it is worth, Jesus took this fourth position when he prayed to the Father about the matter of our growth and change and being what God wants us to be which is a subject later on in this series.

John 17:17. Sanctify them on the basis of their own intuition? Help them think it through, Lord? I hope there is some really good tests? No.

“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”⁷

⁷ John 17:17.

And I would just turn it around to you for a moment even at this point in the discussion. When it comes to the big questions of life, to which of these four sources of truth do you tend to turn? And what concrete evidence would you give to support your answer?

Now while you are thinking about that, let's throw this second step on to the pile. After determining your options you also have to face your limitations. And this may not sound very nice, but I have to give to you straight. There is something bad wrong with you mind. See, that didn't sound so good. It is true and if you don't believe me, look at Romans chapter three now. In the New Testament that is on page 120 of the back section, the New Testament. So Romans chapter three or page 120. We are talking now about the doctrine of total depravity.

See, what impact did the fall of sin have on your mind anyway? Here you go at Romans chapter three verse 10.

...as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."⁸

Verse 23.

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”⁹

Now you are going to have to decide if you believe that this morning. I understand that. But would you want to take the position that your mind has not been impacted by sin, that your reason is fine, your intuition is fine, your ability to interpret...? Do you really want to take the position this morning that your mind has not been impacted by sin? And in case you do, let's have a little test. A lot of technological advances going on. How about if we take a little cord and just kind of clip it to your ear. And then we will clip the other side of that cord to this PowerPoint projector and we will project every thought that you have had in the last seven days. If you really want to take the position that your mind has not been impacted by sin, let's just have a little show. Every thought, every desire, every fantasy from your last seven days will be projected on this screen. Would you stay for the show? Because, my dear friends, all the rest of us are staying. And I am going to sell

⁸ Romans 3:10-18.

⁹ Romans 3:23.

popcorn. I mean, it is going to be a long show and people are going to want to see it again. And I realize you might say, "I didn't like those verses."

Well, deep down in our core we know they are true, don't we? And that really impacts what we are talking about this morning. Theologically we are discussing the noetic effect of sin. You didn't know that term. It has nothing to do with Noah, by the way. It comes from the Greek word or mind νοῦς (nooce) or mind. And the noetic effect of sin is speaking about sin's effect on our ability to think and reason.

And I would just ask you. Do you believe that the noetic effect of sin has impacted your ability to know truth, your ability to answer on your own the big questions of life?

By the way, let's just be clear. We are not so much talking about objective truth. That is an important distinction. We are not talking here about things that can be proven in a laboratory. We are not talking about things that can be subjected to the scientific method. Under common grace, even unbelievers can know certain truths. Two plus two equals four. But here is the question. Can what we are talking about in this series be subjected to the scientific method? Can we answer those questions by test, by laboratory test, by the scientific method? No. And what means is we are completely ill equipped to derive truth about the big questions about life apart from the revelation of our God.

See, that is what is wrong with intuition and that is what is wrong with reason. Sure, we use them for some things, but our minds have been impacted by sin and we cannot know ultimate truth about the big questions of life and, yes, we can benefit from some tasks. So empiricism has its place. But those results, as I said are constantly changing and the kind of questions we are talking about in this series cannot be subjected to the scientific method anyway. So what does that leave? That leaves the possibility of revelation, a truth from a being higher than ourselves.

And you may remember the day that Jesus asked his disciples after a lot of people were walking away from him because they didn't like the Lord's message and Jesus said to his disciples, "What, are you going to go away as well?"

Do you remember what Peter said? There is a great statement about epistemology.

Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."¹⁰

Exactly, the Word of God.

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."¹¹

That is why Jesus said to Satan during the temptation:

¹⁰ John 6:68-69.

¹¹ Isaiah 40:8.

“MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.”¹²

Now let's kind of come up for air here. I have said a lot. Just going to summarize what we have said so far. If we are going to figure out what we believe, we have to know the options. We have to know the possible sources of truth. And then we have to decide how much credence we are going to give to our own minds, to our own ability to know ultimate truth by ourselves. And if our minds have been impacted by sin and what honest person this morning would say that they haven't been, then we have a real challenge. Because either there is a God who has revealed truth that is reliable, that will stand forever, or we are in big trouble. And that is exactly what the Scripture claims to be.

And, admittedly, I understand. We are now at logically another decision point. And why should a person believe that God's Word is a reliable source of truth? That is a fair question. And so let's just examine the evidence. Is there anything about the Bible that would cause you to agree with Isaiah or cause you to agree with Jesus or cause you to agree with Peter or with Paul or with John that the grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of God will stand forever? I am asking you straight up. Is there any evidence that would cause you to believe that? I think there is. For one thing, God's Word is reliable because of the relentless attacks upon it. You go to any secular college campus and if a book is likely to be attacked, what book is it going to be? Is it Homer's *Iliad*? The Koran or some other ancient text? No, it is the Bible. That's true right here at Perdue. It is true everywhere else. Isn't that fascinating? And why does everybody love to attack the Bible?

Well, possibly because that has always been Satan's method. Genesis 3:1.

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, “You shall not eat from any tree of the garden”?’”¹³

The very first verse in the Bible about Satan finds him doing what? Undermining and twisting the Word of God. And three verses later he is directly attacking it.

“The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die!’”¹⁴

Which shows not only that he attacked it, but he attacks it with lies. You are not going to die, which is where Genesis chapter five fits into this discussion. It is one of those chapters that we have in the Bible where so and so was born. He lived a certain number of years and he died. So and so was born, he lived a certain number of years and he died and he died and he died.

¹² Matthew 4:4.

¹³ Genesis 3:1.

¹⁴ Genesis 3:4.

How does Genesis five fit into this whole discussion? The answer is: Satan is a liar. Ok, he absolutely loves to attack the Word of God and he attacks it and undermines it with his lies. And, by the way, you might say this morning, well, you know, even using that example, you just hurt yourself, pastor Viars, because I am not sure I believe in a literal Adam and a literal Eve and a literal Satan and all that kind of stuff. I would prefer to listen to more intelligent people like the apostle Paul in the New Testament.

Really? Do you believe the apostle Paul did or did not believe in a literal Adam and a literal Eve and a literal Satan? See, people love to say all sorts of stuff about the Bible. They have no clue about what they are talking about. It is amazing how many people have strong opinions about the Bible who have never read it and know very little about it. That is fascinating to me. And for those who would say, "Well, I don't want to believe in a literal interpretation of the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis because smart people like Paul didn't believe that," seriously? How do you explain this verse? 2 Corinthians 11:3. Paul said, "But I am afraid."

And when a guy like the apostle Paul says he is afraid, you had better listen up. He said:

"But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."¹⁵

Your minds who? Your minds the followers of Christ in Corinth and people like you and me. And Paul was concerned that our minds would be drawn away from our simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. And I am just asking you why would there be such attacks on the Scripture like no other book in the history of man.

One possible answer is it really is the Word of God.

The French philosopher Voltaire used to love to brag that Christianity would be destroyed within 100 years of his lifetime. He used to love to say that the only place you will ever be able to find a Bible is in a museum. And ironically 50 years after his death, guess who bought his house? The Geneva Bible Society. That's right. And Voltaire owned a printing press. Anybody want to guess what the Geneva Bible Society started printing on Voltaire's printing press? Bibles.

See, just because you say it, don't confuse I said it therefore it must be true or I won't believe it therefore it must be false.

I think God's Word is also reliable because of its historic popularity. There is absolutely no other book, if you know anything about publishing stats at all, this is undeniable. There is no other book in the history of man that comes close to the circulation records of the Bible. When you see the stats they are just staggering.

For example, did you know that the entire Bible has been translated into 471 different languages and portions of the Bible have been translated into 2500 different languages?

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:3.

In several cases languages that did not even have a written form until Bible translators came into those tribes, learned the oral language, put it into a written form, wrote the grammar rules and then the first thing that was translated in written form into that particular language was what those persons wanted to hear, wanted to read, namely the Bible, the Word of God.

Just last year in 2011 the United Bible Society reported that their network distributed 431 million copies of the Bible in the previous 12 months. If you have 431 million, in that same year the Gideons placed nearly 79 million copies of the complete Bible worldwide, 79 million, the complete Bible just or Gideons, a million copies ever five days, two copies every second. That translates into total circulation of tens of billions.

What was it that Isaiah said again?

“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”¹⁶

If that is not standing forever, what is?

It is also reliable because of the manuscript evidence. This part of the discussion could be a series in itself. In fact, if you would like to study this further I want to encourage you to read these document that is available in our resource center called “Reasons to Believe.” Dr. Bob Martin and pastor Dutton put this together years ago and did a fabulous series in our church and I am so glad it is recorded and so that is available in the resource center. I want to encourage you to get that and to review it, or is little book by James Macdonald, *God Wrote a Book*, a very good explanation of what we are talking about right now.

Let me just give you a couple of examples of the manuscript evidence that would demonstrate Isaiah nailed it when he said:

“...the word of our God stands forever.”¹⁷

I mentioned a moment ago Homer’s *Iliad*. Homer’s *Iliad* was written in 800 BC. I know you knew that, about 800 BC. If you went into an average English class at Perdue and said, “I don’t think we have an accurate version of the *Iliad*,” they would look at you like you had lost your mind. I mean, no one questions the accuracy of the *Iliad*.

Do you realize there are only 643 manuscripts or copies of the *Iliad*? All of them are partial. The oldest one is from 400 BC. And I realize I am giving you a lot of stats quickly. What that means is that there is a gap of 500 years between when it was written and earliest copies that we have. Yet nobody questions its authenticity. When have you ever heard anybody question the authenticity of the *Iliad*?

¹⁶ Isaiah 40:8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Yet compare that to the Bible. There is no comparison, 5686 ancient manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, 10,000 Latin manuscripts, 9300 early versions. There are literally 25,000 ancient manuscripts that contain some part of the Word of God. And in the case of the New Testament some of them span only 29 years from when they were written and the date of our earliest copy.

“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”¹⁸

Now I realize you might say, “But pastor Viars, you were just talking about the New Testament. What about the Old Testament?”

That is a much easier case to make, because the Jews were so meticulous about copying the Bible. There was never any question about what books belonged in and they copied it meticulously. In fact, there was an entire discipline, an entire vocation that was all about the way you copied the Bible.

Now the challenge at one time was that while we believe the Old Testament was completed about 400 BC, that the oldest manuscript that we had from the Old Testament was AD 900. Again, I know I am giving you a lot of math. That means that oldest copy was 1300 years removed from when we believe that it was written. And the liberals used to love to go after that, especially like the book of Isaiah.

If you took a course on Christianity in college and you are older you probably were in a class where they used to love to rip on the Bible, especially the Old Testament, especially the book of Isaiah. And they used to say it was all added to later on, blah, blah, blah by a bunch of other writers, et cetera, et cetera until 1947 and when a shepherd boy was throwing rocks into some caves in the side of a cliff and heard a crash resulting in the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the documents that because of the climate in that part of the world were amazingly well preserved. Do you realize they found 100,000 fragments in the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery that eventually pieced together into more than 800 manuscripts including a complete copy of the book of Isaiah that was 1000 years older than any copy we previously had. And the liberals were licking their chops. I can't wait now to see how that differs, one that is 1000 years older, now much the Dead Sea Scrolls version of Isaiah is going to differ from what these Christians said was an accurate version of the book of Isaiah. We are going to find that a bunch of people after the life of Christ added a bunch of stuff to it, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Guess what they found? When they compared those copies of the books of Isaiah, although they were removed 1000 years from one another, almost absolute agreement, practically absolute agreement.

And I know you won't take it from some redneck pastor so here you go. Here is what the scholars said about that. Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53—and if you know your Bible that is the chapter that especially prophesies the life and death of Christ—there are only 17 letters even in question. Ten of those letters are simply a matter of spelling which does

¹⁸ Isaiah 40:8.

not affect the sense. Four letters are minor stylistic changes such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprise the word light which is added in verse 11 and does not affect the meaning greatly. Thus in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word, three letters in question after 1000 years of written—we are not talking about they made copies on the Xerox machine—1000 years of written transmission and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage.

“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”¹⁹

And when you are looking for sources of truth to determine: How are you going to answer the most important questions of life? I hope you will say I want that to be the Word of God.

Now where does all that leave us? I would encourage you to embrace the implications of what we are talking about this morning. First of all, by letting God’s reliable Word lead you to a saving knowledge of Christ.

You have to understand. The Bible is not an end in itself. The Bible is given as a means to point you to the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus. And John said it this way at the end of his gospel. He said:

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.²⁰

And I would just encourage you this morning if you have not trusted Christ and maybe you say, “Well, I don’t feel good about that or it doesn’t make sense to me, the gospel. I don’t like to have to admit that I am a sinner. And I don’t want to have to trust that the death of someone else in order to redeem me, blah, blah, blah.”

Listen. You are putting too much value in the quality of your own mind. And I am trying to love you enough to help you understand that you might think you are really smart right now. That is not going to stand up very well in eternity. That is the bottom line here. What are you trusting to get to heaven? Are you really going to trust your own intuition of that? You are going to trust your own reason for that? You can’t even balance your checkbook. I mean, what are you talking about?

And I know it is hard for us as Americans, but it is time for some to humble themselves and to accept the message of the biblical gospel as their only hope of eternity. And you can trust it forever:

“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”²¹

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ John 20:30-31.

²¹ Ibid.

I hope you will all say that we want God's Word to help us answer the core questions of life. If you are wondering: What is the source of truth that we are going to use for the last five weeks of this series, anybody want to guess?

Pastor Viars intuition. Let this come from some musings from him. I don't think so. How about revelation? Do you think that would be a good idea? Yeah, thank you for not shouting out yes. That is where we are coming from. Let God's reliable Word direct your paths.

My son, don't forget my teachings."²²

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding."²³

There went reason. There went intuition.

Let God's reliable Word keep you from sin.

"Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You."²⁴

Your smart phone can't help you with that, do you know that? Your television sitcoms can't help you with that. And I hope you are thinking: Do I have the same level of value for the Word of God that it deserves? If it is really going to stand forever do my habits towards it... are they commensurate with that fact?

Maybe we need to end here. Let God's reliable Word be your greatest treasure. I am going to find time for that and I am going to choose to live for that just like Joey was singing earlier. I believe.

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold.²⁵

Is that what you think about your Bible?

"...yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb."²⁶

²² Proverbs 3:1.

²³ Proverbs 3:5.

²⁴ Psalm 119:11.

²⁵ Ps 19:7-10.

²⁶ Psalm 19:10.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

04/15/12

Getting to the Core #1 - Figuring Out What You Believe

- If you were going to identify the aspects of who you are that matter the most...that define you at the core of your being...what would those areas be?...
 - and at least for the moment -- let's take out the things about you that you can't control...
 - your age...your family of origin...your health...your intellect...you can't change any of that...
 - but if we're just talking about the things that you can control that are most significant in defining your identity ...what would make the list?...
 - and secondly -- how important is it for you to be sure to get those things right?...
- that's what we want to talk about for the next month and a half...
 - **Getting to the Core -- Six Weeks to Focus on Things That Matter Most...**
 - here's the topics we'd like to unpack together...
 - **Figuring Out What You Believe**
 - **Figuring Out Why You're Here**
 - **Figuring Out Who You Are**
 - **Figuring Out Who You Love**
 - **Figuring Out What You Want**
 - **Figuring Out Where You're Going...**
- hopefully you would agree with us this morning that those are six of the most important issues that a person has to think through...it's at the very core of who you are and determines the trajectory of your life and future...
- now, what about that second question --- how important is it for you to be sure to get those things right?...
- for example -- what if you got a great education -- but you never took the time to draw conclusions about these six issues -- would that be a good trade off?....
- what if you landed a great job and made a boat-load of money -- but you never focused on these six areas -- would your priorities have been right or wrong?...
- Jesus answered that when He said -- **For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:26)**
- there's a sense in which that's exactly what we're talking about here...the nature and destiny of your soul...that's the point of getting to the core...
- now, let's go back to our six topics for a moment...- there is a sense in which at least some of this is sequential...in order to draw conclusions about the last five -- you have to decide your approach to the first one...
 - you have to figure out what you believe -- or at least how you go about determining the source of truth you're going to use to determine what you believe before you can proceed on to the final five topics....
 - it's the issue of epistemology...deciding your source of truth for the things that matter most...how you know what you know...
- with that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible to Isaiah chapter 40...page 513 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...

- our church's theme this year is **Building Core Strength**...we want to be sure we're majoring on the majors so that we're not a mile wide and an inch deep...
 - especially right now because the Lord is both blessing us with growth and stretching us into many new ministry directions...
 - we want to be sure we're also working at getting our spiritual roots down deep at the level of the heart...at the very core of who we are as individuals and a church family...
 - just as a data point -- we had more people here last Sunday for our Easter services than any other Sunday in our history -- and on the one hand we're thankful for that -- we see that as a trust from the Lord...
 - but we're not just trying to get bigger around here...
 - we want to be the kind of church family where any person who joins us can easily find the resources and the help they need to get to a better place in their walk with God...
 - we have to be strong and getting stronger in order to steward those opportunities well...
 - and as these new apartments and duplexes and single family homes continue to be built, and then as the Safe Haven Home comes on line and then Faith West comes on line...that's all good -- really good -- if we've been busy Building Core Strength...
 - Lord willing these next six weeks can be a helpful part of that process...
 - on more thing before we dive into this -- if you are brand new to attending church, or studying the Bible -- I want you to know that we've designed this series with you in mind...
 - hopefully there will be something here for everyone...but we've constantly tried to put this together with the person who is brand new to the Bible in mind...
 - so how do you figure out what you believe?...
 - let's start here in Isaiah chapter 40...
 - this is a very simple verse but a very powerful one...**READ Isa. 40:8**...
 - this prophet, writing 700 years before the birth of Christ, answered the question we're posing this morning...
 - he concluded that the way to figure out what to believe is leaning on a source that will stand forever -- it won't wither, it won't fade, it won't pass away, it won't be destroyed...
 - the grass withers, the flower fades -- but the Word of our God stands forever...
 - 700 years later, the Messiah the book of Isaiah points to made a similar statement...**Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18)**
 - one of Jesus' followers, the apostle Peter, would later make a similar statement...**Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:22-25)**
 - now I realize you might say -- but isn't that circular reasoning -- arguing from the Bible to support the reliability of the Bible -- and I suppose in some ways it is, as is most reasoning in the final analysis...but at this point I'm just trying to point out that people from three different phases of God working with His people -- the OT, the ministry of Jesus, and the beginning of the church age -- had all come to a similar conclusion...God's Word is the reliable source of truth to answer the core issues of life...
 - I'd like us to spend the rest of our time this morning talking about why you and I should draw a similar conclusion...

- let's organize it this way -- **4 steps to choosing the right source of truth.**

- here's where it starts...

I. Determine Your Options

- what are your options when it comes to answering the five other questions we're going to be posing later in this series....who are you, why are you here, where are you going, who should you love, what should you want?...
- you have to have source of truth...what are the classifications?...
 - philosophers like to talk about 4 sources of truth...[4 epistemological sources]...and we're not asking right now if we ever use any of these sources for anything...
 - because honestly we all use all of them for some things -- we'll see that in a minute...
 - but when it comes to answering the big questions of life...what are your epistemological options?...

A. Intuition

- in other words, you just know something to be true...
- you don't even need to think it through...you were just born with that knowledge...
- and we all knew certain things intuitively...
- a mom places a bottle in a baby's mouth and off it goes...
- and if that baby is healthy, there's generally not a whole lot of instruction involved...
- it's not like you read a book together, watch an instructional video...no, we know intuitively that eating is a good thing...
- so we all know certain things intuitively, but can we answer the big questions of life on the sole basis of our intuition...
- I'm not even asking you to answer that right now -- but just to think about it...

B. Reason

- this option is for people who believe the gray matter between their ears is powerful enough, and intelligent enough, and reliable enough to answer all of life's greatest questions...
- they don't need input from someone else...they don't need information from anywhere else...their reason is a reliable epistemological source...
- it's the Old Invictus poem -- I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul...
- well, alrighty then...
- but many people hold to this position...
- Aristotle believed that the human mind had the ability to bridge the gap between the natural and the supernatural...
- even Aquinas taught the fall of man did not entirely impact the mind...
- and just like with intuition -- we're not asking if we ever use our reason...I hope we use it all the time...
- but the issue here is -- can your reason be an ultimate source of truth when attempting to answer the big questions of life...a third possible source of truth...

C. Empiricism

- this is entirely different...
- because now we're talking about tests, data, research...
- now if you're starting to think that this doesn't affect the way you live every day...I would beg to differ...your epistemological source -- the way we decided what's true...is on display everyday...
- let's take this example -- as a parent with young children -- deciding if you would ever use corporal punishment -- whether you would ever spank your children -- would we all agree that's a pretty important decision for a parent to make?...

- and if you don't believe that -- let's take a field trip over to Wal Mart and watch the children for a few minutes...and perhaps some of the parents didn't make that decision as carefully or wisely as they should have...
- but how would a parent make that decision using the three sources we've just mentioned thus far?...
 - some make it on the basis of intuition...I don't feel good about that...and that's the end of the story...I don't need to think about it anymore, I don't need to talk to anyone else...I don't feel good about it intuitively and I'm not going to do it...
 - but what about parent number 2 -- maybe she doesn't trust her intuition -- she wants to use her reason to make the choice -- so she reads a number of books -- she talks to other people -- but the ultimate arbiter is going to be her own mind -- because in the final analysis -- she truly believes her brain can and should be the ultimate source of truth...
 - the grass withers and the flower fades -- but her own mind and the choices she makes will stand forever...
 - what about parent number 3? -- a totally different approach -- this parent will review the tests, the studies, the latest research -- studies show that parents who spank their children are ten times likely to wind up in prison (that's a little joke) -- but this kind of parent believes tests hold the ultimate truth he needs to make a decision this important...
 - and in case we don't get back to this one -- the challenge with tests is -- what seemed to be proven as true today is often disproven tomorrow...[remember what they said constituted a healthy breakfast when we were kids -- based on the latest scientific evidence?...

- now, what's the fourth possible source of truth?...

D. Revelation

- believing that there may actually be a God....and we're not even talking about which one yet...
- but that there actually may be a God...and He may actually have communicated His truth to us in some form of revelation that came from outside of us -- that is higher than us -- to which we should submit and learn...
- for what it's worth -- Jesus took this fourth position when He prayed to the Father about growth...
 - **Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. (John 17:17)**
- now, let's turn this around to you -- when it comes to the big questions of life...to which of these four sources do you tend to turn?...and what concrete evidence would you give to support your answer?...
- while you're thinking about that...let's throw this second step onto the pile...
- after determining your options...you also have to...

II. Face Your Limitations.

- this may not sound very nice -- but I have to give it to you straight...there is something bad wrong with your mind...
- please look over at Romans chapter 3... page 120 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...

- we're talking now about the doctrine of total depravity...and what impact the fall of sin has had on our minds...

A. Insight from Romans 3

- read Romans 3:10-18, 23
- you will have to decide if you agree with that...

- but would you want to take the position this am that your mind has not been impacted by sin?...
- because here's what we could do -- suppose we could hook a little cable to your brain -- and we show a video up here on the screen of everything that has gone through your mind in the last week...every thought, every desire, every fantasy...
- would you want to stay for that show?...because the rest of us would...
- we might find verses like the ones I just read offensive...but deep down in our core...we know they're true...

B. The noetic effect of sin

- this is a theological concept...it has nothing to do with Noah...
- it's from the **Greek Word nous -- mind**
- **noetic -- sins effect on our ability to think and reason**
- do you believe the noetic effect of sin has impacted your ability to know truth?...
- now, let's be clear -- we're not so much talking about objective truth -- truth can be proven in a laboratory -- under common grace, even unbelievers can know certain truths -- 2 plus 2 equals 4...(laboratory, test tubes, scientific method)
- but can the questions we're talking about be subjected to the scientific method?...can they be evaluated in a test tube...can they be examined in a laboratory?...
- no...and what that means is -- we are completely ill-equipped to derive truth about the big questions about life apart from the revelation of our God...
- that's what wrong with intuition and reason -- sure we use them for some things...but not these kinds of things (because of the noetic effect of sin)
- we can benefit from some tests -- but those results are constantly changing...
 - plus you can't measure the kinds of things we're discussing...
 - which leaves revelation...truth from a Being higher than ourselves...

C. Peter's position

- you may remember that Jesus asked his disciples, after a lot of people were walking away from Him because they didn't like the Lord's message -- He said -- will you also go away?...do you remember their answer?...
- **Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68-69)**
- exactly -- that's why Jesus said to Satan during the temptations --

D. Jesus' position

- **"But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.' "" (Matthew 4:4)**
- now, let's come up for air -- if we're going to figure out what we believe...
 - we have to know the options -- what are the possible sources of truth...
 - and then we have to decide how much credence we're going to give to our own minds...and our own ability to know ultimate truth by ourselves...
 - and if our minds have been impacted by sin -- and what honest person would say they haven't -- then we have a real challenge...
 - either there is a God who has revealed truth that is reliable...that will stand forever...or we're in trouble...
- that's exactly what the Scripture claims to be...
- now again -- admittedly -- this is another decision point -- but why should a person believe that God's Word is a reliable source of truth?...that's a fair question...

III. Examine the Evidence.

- is there anything about the Bible that should cause you to agree with Isaiah, and agree with Jesus, and agree with Peter, and Paul, and John, etc?...

- that the grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of our God will stand forever...what evidence is there that you should believe that?...

A. Reliable because of its relentless attacks.

- go onto any secular college campus and if a book is likely to be attacked, what book is it?...
- Homer's Iliad -- the Koran...some other ancient text...no, it's the Bible...that's true at Purdue and its true everywhere else as well...
- isn't that fascinating?...why?...
- because that's always been Satan's method...
- **Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"**" (Genesis 3:1)
- see, the very first verse in the Bible about Satan finds him undermining and twisting the Word of God...
- 3 verses later he's directly attacking it...
- **"The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die!"** (Genesis 3:4)
 - cf. Genesis chapter 5...
- and by the way -- you might say -- but that's exactly why I can't believe the Bible -- because it has all that stuff in there like Adam, and Eve, and Satan...I prefer the NT, written by more intelligent people like the apostle Paul...
- really -- do you think Paul believed in genesis 3 as literally occurring?...
- listen to this...**But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)**
- see, why would there be such attacks on the Scripture like no other book in the history of man?...
- one possible answer is that it really is the Word of God...
- The French philosopher Voltaire used to like to brag that Christianity would be destroyed within 100 years of his lifetime and that the only place you'd be able to find a copy of the Bible would be in a museum...
- ironically, 50 years after his death, the Geneva Bible society bought his house and started printing Bibles on his own printing press...
- now here's another line of evidence...

B. Reliable because of its historic popularity.

- there is absolutely no other book that even comes close to the circulation records of the Bible -- when you study that stats -- they are staggering...
- for example -- the entire Bible has been translated into 471 different languages...
- portions of the Bible have been translated into roughly 2500 different languages, in some cases ones that were only spoken -- they had no written language -- so the translators first had to learn the spoken language, then create a written language and rules of grammar, etc -- so they could then translate the Bible for the people because that is the first book they wanted to have....
- in 2011, the United Bible Societies reported that their network distributed 431 million copies of portions of the Bible in the previous 12 months...(2010 Scripture Distribution Report)
- in that same year -- the Gideons placed nearly 79 million copies of the complete Bible worldwide...(2011 Gideon's Worldwide Ministry Report)
- so just for the Gideons -- a million copies every five days...more than 2 copies every second...
- that translates into a total circulation of tens of billions....it's completely staggering...

- what was it that Isaiah said -- the grass withers, the flower fades...but the Word of our God stands forever...if that's not standing forever, what is?...

C. Reliable because of the manuscript evidence.

- this part of the discussion could be a series in itself...
- if you'd like to study this further...I'd encourage you to read...
 - **Reasons to Believe**
 - **God Wrote a Book**
- but let me just give you a few examples...I mentioned Homer's Iliad a moment ago...
 - that book was written in 800BC...
 - now, if you went into an English class at Purdue and said -- I don't think we have an accurate version of the Iliad -- they would look at you like you lost your mind...
 - yet there are only 643 manuscripts, or copies of the Iliad available, all of them partial...the oldest one is from 400 BC...a gap of 500 years...yet no one questions its authenticity...
- compare that to the Bible...there are 5686 ancient manuscripts of the Greek NT...there are also 10,000 Latin manuscripts and another 9300 early versions...so 25,000 ancient manuscripts...
 - and in the case of the NT...some of them spanning only 29 years from when they were originally written...
 - the grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever...
- now you say -- but what about the OT...
 - that case is easier to make...because the Israelites had a specific place to keep their copies of God's Word and they were also meticulous about copying it...
 - there was an entire discipline devoted to copying the scriptures...people did that as a holy occupation...
 - the challenge at one time was that while we believe the OT was completed around 400 BC...the oldest manuscript was from AD 900...
 - so at one time there was a gap of 1300 years between when scholars believe the OT was completed and our oldest copies...
 - so the liberals used to love to say -- well, we can't be sure the copies are reliable...for example, they used to love to rip the book of Isaiah to shreds...
 - until 1947 -- when a shepherd boy was throwing rocks into some caves in the side of a cliff and heard a crash...resulting in the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls...documents that because of the climate in that part of the world were amazingly well preserved....
 - they found 100,000 fragments that they eventually pieced together into more than 800 manuscripts...
 - including a full manuscript of the book of Isaiah that was 1000 years older than our oldest copy...
 - and the liberals were salivating -- now we're going to be able to compare them and find out how many errors crept in to the ones we thought were oldest...
 - so they tried that test on Isaiah 53 -- perhaps the clearest reference to Jesus in the entire OT...the liberals were sure that had been added later...
 - here's what they found -- practically complete agreement...

"Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, there are only seventeen letters in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprise the word "light," which is added in verse 11 and does affect the

meaning greatly... Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after a thousand years of transmission, and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage" (A General Introduction to the Bible, Geisler and Nix, p. 263).

- time doesn't allow us to develop this point as fully as we could -- and it kills me because this is a very exciting part of studying God's Word...but the bottom line is, as you look at the possible sources of truth, and consider the limitations of our own minds -- there are strong reasons to allow God's Word the Bible to be the source of truth to answer the core questions of life...

- now, where does that leave us?....

IV. Embrace the Implications.

A. Let God's reliable Word lead you to a saving knowledge of Christ.

- the Bible is not an end in itself...
- it is a means to point men and women to God's marvelous Son...
- the apostle John ended his gospel like this...
- **Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31)**

B. Let God's reliable Word help you answer the core questions of life.

- **Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)**

C. Let God's reliable Word direct your paths.

- **My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments...Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. (Proverbs 3:1-7)**

D. Let God's reliable Word keep you from sin.

- **Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against You. (Psalm 119:11)**

E. Let God's reliable Word be your greatest treasure.

- **The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. (Psalm 19:7-10)**