NEW BIBLE STUDY *COMING THE FIRST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER!*

CHRISTIANITY BEYOND THE EASY ANSWERS

AND OTHER THINGS THAT CHRISTIANS ARGUE ABOUT.

A BIBLE STUDY SERIES *FOR REAL QUESTIONS AND REAL FAITH.*

- SUNDAY MORNINGS WITH PASTOR IN THE GYM
- INVITE A FRIEND
- 9 AM TO 9:45 AM

1. **Can You be a Christian without the Church?** (A challenging question for an increasingly unchurched culture that still likes Jesus just fine—as long as nobody asks them to join.)
2. **Is God speaking to me or is it just my own thoughts?** (For those nights when you're lying awake wondering whether the Lord is revealing His will for your life—or whether you just had coffee too late.)
3. **Are men and women called to different roles in the church, and what does the Bible say about women leading?** (A calm, reasonable, totally non-combative discussion that will surely produce no strong opinions whatsoever. Yeah... 😉)
4. **What is God's plan for Israel?** (Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump aside, this topic has managed to generate strong opinions for only a few thousand years.)
5. **Are you troubled by fears or confusion about predestination?** (Martin Luther's pastoral advice.)
6. **How can we practice the liturgy without just going through motions?** (A deep dive into why we do what we do in worship—it's more than just synchronized standing.)
7. **Why is the Lutheran view of Baptism so difficult for Baptists and Evangelicals?** (Hint: God's grace isn't stingy, but apparently that makes some people nervous.)
8. **Why does a good God allow suffering?** (A serious look at evil, free will, and comfort in pain—because "everything happens for a reason" is usually not as helpful as people think.)
9. **Can we really trust ancient Bible manuscripts?** (Covers biblical reliability, history, and canonization—because apparently "it's old" is both a criticism and a selling point.)
10. **What happens exactly when a person dies?** (We'll explore death, heaven, hell, judgment, and the afterlife—lightheartedly, in the way only Christians can discuss such ultimate things.)
11. **Can a true Christian ever lose their salvation?** (A dive into grace, assurance, and the kind of theological question that has made very confident people suddenly much less confident.)
12. **How do I forgive someone who isn't sorry?** (Explores the hard boundaries of biblical forgiveness—because "just let it go" is easier said by other people.)

Question 2

Does God speak to me or is it just my own thoughts?

† **This isn't a simple yes-or-no question. The real issue isn't whether God speaks—He certainly does—but the crucial matters are these:**

- _____ where and in _____ _____ what way does He speak,
- The _____ purpose of the message (i.e. does it concern salvation in Christ?),
- Is His Word meant only for me personally or as an _____ objective truth for all people?

Last week we saw that our walk with God is not meant to be a private "me-and-Jesus" experience; being a Christian brings us into the body of Christ, the Church, and orients us toward other believers. This is even reflected in the way the Bible uses the word "you" or "your," which almost always refers to the collective church rather than to an individual—what we call the "Texas y'all" principle. Therefore, God's Word and the way He speaks to us are presented as an objective reality addressed to the community of believers, not merely a subjective, personal feeling.

BIG IDEA:

God does not want us guessing about His Word.

① Read Isaiah's commissioning in Isaiah 6. What makes this vision/word from God different from a subjective dream or purely personal experience?
While the vision was for Isaiah, it was not *for* him personally. He was to be the prophet that God would send to His people to proclaim Law and Gospel and call them to repent. The message was meant for everyone, not just Isaiah and his own personal future or fortune. It was recorded and continues to serve the people of God.

② What are ways that God makes His Word known to us?
Even in the bible, dreams and visions are the exception. God's people as a whole have always received God's Word in the same way: God ties His voice to something outside of us so we can be sure what He says.

In Numbers 12:6-8 God says He reveals Himself to a prophet only in vision or dream—an exceptional, divinely-initiated act that is recorded for the community;

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 then sets the standard: even a true sign is insufficient if it leads people away from the covenant, whose benchmark is the written Word. Compare with Galatians 3—"anyone who preaches a different gospel… let them be accursed." Consequently, Old-Testament visions (e.g., those given to Joseph or Daniel) were rare, public, and served God's redemptive purpose, pointing forward to Christ and later incorporated into Scripture. The New Testament teaches that God's complete revelation is now external to us, contained in the canon of Scripture and administered through the sacraments, so any private vision that contradicts that written Word cannot be from God.

The Bible, preaching, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Holy Absolution are the channels (Means of Grace) He has promised us today.

BIBLICAL SUPPORT:
Consider how these verses apply.

- **2 Tim 3:16-17** – "All Scripture is breathed out by God…"
- **Romans 10:14-17** – "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."
- **Isaiah 40:8** – "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of God stands forever." Reinforces that God's voice is outside us and fixed—it does not depend on our mood or personal experience.
- **1 Corinthians 1:21** – "God chose to save through the foolishness of preaching."
- **Acts 2:42** – "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching…"
- **Acts 2:38** – "Repent and be baptized… for the forgiveness of your sins."
- **Matt 26:26-28** – "This is my body… this is my blood… given for you."
- **John 20:22-23** – "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven for them."
- **Psalm 119:105** – "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." The Word illuminates the path—no guesswork.
- **Hebrews 1:1-2** – "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke… but now he has spoken to us by his Son."
- **1 Thessalonians 5:21-22** – "Test everything; hold fast what is good."

In all these ways, God makes His word objective not subjective and verifiable—received by a community of believers with witnesses who recorded what they heard and saw.

③ Why do you think God gives us an external, objective standard—His written Word and the means by which it is delivered—rather than allowing us to rely on our own hearts, feelings, or imaginations? Consider how this safeguard protects the community of believers from personal deception, cultural bias, or "private revelations" that may simply reflect our own imagination.

BIBLICAL SUPPORT:
Consider how these verses apply.

- **Jeremiah 17:9** – "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Human hearts can self-delude and misinterpret inner impressions. Any "inner nudge" must be tested against the outside standard of Scripture.

- **Proverbs 28:26** – "Whoever trusts in his own heart is a fool…" Trusting only what feels right leads to folly.
- **Proverbs 3:5** – "Lean not on your own understanding."
- **1 John 4:1-6** – "Test the spirits… every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." There are false spirits that can masquerade as "inner guidance." The test is whether the impression aligns with the public gospel revealed in Scripture.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **So based on our discussion so far, how would you answer the original question: Does God speak to me or is it just my own thoughts?**
   God can speak personally, but every purported "voice" must be tested against the objective truth of Scripture and the historic faith of the church. If a "voice" aligns with the Bible and the Christian faith and confession, it may be God's Word, but it might also just be a good idea. Good ideas and inspirations should not always be equated to divine commissioning. This is why Isaiah's call was not a vague impression but a Scripture-anchored vision that fitted the mission of God's people.

2. **Why is relying on feelings or "inner nudges" so tempting and more popular than the objective, Christ-centered, Word of God in Scripture and its delivery through God's chosen means of Word and Sacrament Ministry—preaching, teaching, confession and absolution, and the administration of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper?**
   Our hearts are deceitful (Jer 17:9) and naturally seek quick, personal reassurance. A feeling gives an immediate sense of direction, whereas obedience to the Word often requires humility, communal accountability, and submission to the means of grace. Consequently, many prefer the comfort of a personal impression to the disciplined, communal discernment demanded by Scripture, the preaching of the gospel, and the sacramental life of the church.

   "I felt God was calling me to quit my job, but later realized I was just burnt out."

   Stress → panic; Guilt → self-condemnation; Wishful thinking → "I want this to be God's will."

   Compare the impression with what Scripture says—does it align with God's character, moral will, and the Gospel? If it conflicts, it's not from Him.

3. **How does knowing that God's Word is unchanging affect your confidence in daily decisions?**

   Because the Word "stands forever" (Isa 40:8) and is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, I can base my choices on a firm, reliable standard rather than on shifting emotions or cultural trends. This stability gives me confidence that the moral and

spiritual direction I follow is anchored in God's eternal truth, not in my own fleeting circumstances.

Some common ways people describe hearing God speak:

BIG IDEA

God does not hide a secret plan for every decision in life. He gives us freedom, wisdom, and ordinary vocations to serve and live in His image.

BIBLICAL SUPPORT:

Consider how these verses apply.

- **Genesis 1:26-28 –** "Let us make man in our image." God gives mankind dominion over the earth.
- **1 Cor 7:17** – "Lead the life that the Lord has assigned to you…"
- **Col 3:23-24** – "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord…"
- **James 1:5** – "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God…"

④ What is Christian Vocation?

Christian vocation is the purpose God has placed each believer in the world—to live out the image of Christ within the specific relationships and responsibilities He has given them, so that every major decision is measured by how it advances that mission of loving God, loving neighbor, and reflecting Jesus to those around us. When weighing a new job, ask whether the role enables faithful witness, service, and stewardship in your family, church, and community; when considering a potential spouse, evaluate whether the person shares your confession and can help you fulfill your calling; when thinking about relocation, ask if the move allows you to stay connected to your congregation or a new church family, continue serving your neighbors, and remain on mission in the new context; and when dealing with conflict or reconciliation, test whether the response aligns with Scripture's call to restore relationships and bear Christ's love. In each case the decisive question is not "What do I want?" but "How will this choice let me live out the vocation God has given me?"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **When you think about a big decision (career, marriage, relocation), what worries you most about "missing God's plan"?**
   In a sinful world and given our own propensity for sin, we strive for a world where everything is sure, certain and good---sort of like Eden was meant to be. But that world is gone. We look to a new heaven and earth to come. Until then, we find our hope and assurance in what God is doing in Christ.

2. **How does the concept of "vocation" (service in everyday roles) change the way you view daily tasks?**

   Note: Faith in Christ—His perfect work—relieves me of any notion that I "must live a certain way or accomplish something specific—Christ has done everything needed for me. This is true Christian freedom. Now, I love Christ and live for Him.

   Some Examples:

   Household chores – Even the most ordinary tasks become acts of worship when they are done "for Christ." Because Christ's perfect work has already satisfied the requirement for righteousness, you are free to perform these duties not to earn God's favor or anyone else's but to love the people who share the home with you. A clean kitchen, for instance, is a tangible way of caring for your spouse and children, reflecting the self-sacrificial love that Christ showed the church.

   Workplace responsibilities – Suppose you manage a small retail team. Your vocation in that role is not merely to meet sales targets but to model integrity, patience, and service that point customers and coworkers toward Christ. When you take the time to listen to a struggling employee, offer fair wages, or greet every shopper with genuine kindness, you are embodying the image of Christ in a setting that the world often treats as "just business." Because your identity is anchored in what Christ has already accomplished, you can serve without fearing that your value depends on performance metrics; instead, you work "as unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:23). Of course, this is also what is going to often put us at odds with the world or just our boss, who may very well only determine our value based on performance. This approach to life probably won't make us rich or make it easier to pay the bills, either. But while Christians don't dismiss these concerns completely, we do remember at the same time that *we live in the world but are not of the world* (John 17:14-19). However, when we say this a Christians, we must remember that in John 17, Jesus is saying that being the "in" the World is intentional and on purpose.

3. **Why is Baptism more comforting and assuring than chasing a feeling?**

   Baptism is a concrete act—water plus God's promise. It doesn't depend on how I feel; it's a sealed covenant.

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