

Digging for Gold

His name was Ned. It was 1994 and he had been born on Jan1 1900. He was my patient and he lived in Wickenburg Arizona. A mining town about 70 miles NW of Phoenix where we lived.

He would come to see his "Big City Doc" on his rare trips into town. He attributed his great physical shape and mental clarity to the fact that he had been mining for gold for over 72 years.

The first time I met him, he asked me, "Doc, have you ever been mining for Gold?"

I said, "Sure once when we were on vacation. At a tourist stop in Arizona I went mining for gold. I took a pan and went down to the river.

He said, I know that you have panned....but have you ever panned....FOR GOLD? Did they just give you a pan and point you toward the river or did they show you how to pan for gold?

Then he looked at me, kind of shook his head, and said, "Shoot doc, you ain't never really panned for gold. I can tell by lookin in your eyes"

You never panned for gold because you don't believe that it is there. And because you don't believe you will find it, you are not willing to work for it.

So I asked him. Have you ever found gold? He laughed and looked off into the distance.

Smiled and said, "Once you find it, you can't stop lookin for it. Been panning for over 70 years because I know it is there."

I have been thinking a lot about Ned over the last few months as I have been planning for this series. I came across this quote recently about panning for gold...

"You don't do this to get rich. You learn real fast why gold is worth so much, because it's hard to find. Sometimes it is right in front of you but you don't see it. You get distracted. You pour through so much sand and it is really hard work. But when you find it....it is glorious."

I think panning for gold is a lot like Bible study. Most of us take the tourist approach. We get the book and we skim the water. Not really looking intently and not really sure anything is there. Like a tourist by the river. We start out enthusiastically, but if we don't immediately find gold then we give up. We spend a bit of time looking but we are not willing to invest much time and effort into it...because honestly we don't think there is really gold there. Or maybe we think there is gold there but it is for the pastor or someone else...not us.

This book contains Gold, but as Ned would say "You have to believe it is there" You have to be willing to work for it. But once you find it.....you can't stop. The Bible contains Gold..... but it does not yield itself to the lazy.

That is why we are starting this series. There may be gold in them there hills but God guarantees that there is gold in this here book.

Psalms 19:7-10 (ESV) 7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

The Jewish Rabbis used to give their students honey when they studied the Bible to remind them of this verse and to associate the study of the Scriptures with something they loved.

So I thought about giving everyone today some gold, but that is not going to happen. So, instead I thought I would give you a bit of Honey.

I believe that this series could be one of the most valuable things God has given to us. Because I believe that your ability to pick up this book, to understand what God is saying TO YOU, and the process with God what His truth means in your life, is the second greatest tool we could give to you as pastors.

I called this series Bible 101 but we are going to learn together how to go deeper in to the Word....to search for the gold. The treasure that God has placed in this ancient historical documents...treasure He expects that we will diligently search for and find.

This series is not an overview of the Bible. It is not a series about the Historical development of the Bible. We are not going to cover how the Book of the Bible were collected. We are not going to cover how we know this book has been accurately copied and translated

This series is going to focus on the nuts and bolts of how to actually pick up this book...Put the effort in to understand it ...Find the nuggets of God's truth within it....And allow those truths to transform us. Our goal is that over time you gain confidence in your ability to understand God's Word

Occasionally, people will ask me, "How did you see that? I have ready these verses hundreds of times and never saw that"

In this series we are going to do two things. We are going to study Paul's letter Colossians and we are going to study how we study Scriptures.

There are some sound approaches to studying Scripture that I want to share with you. Knowing these basic principles will keep you out of the weeds when you study the Bible.

During this series and all the series that follow, I want you to bring your Study Bible. If you don't have one and want to know how to select one, I have a video on that at the FBT YouTube Channel.

You need a good Study Bible...not just a Bible. So bring your Study Bible, Bring a Notebook, and something to write with every week. I will be giving you some handouts and the sermons as always can be printed online through our website

During this series you will need to block time to listen to and study the sermons again each week. You can listen at the FBT Podcast. Watch at the FBT YouTube Channel or our Website. It is also available on Boxcast, Vimeo or our Facebook page.

Also from the beginning remind yourself that learning to read and understand God's word is hard work. It requires diligence and takes time out of your day. It will take a lifetime and you will never grasp it all. It is an book from an Infinite God being understood by finite minds. What makes finding the gold more challenging is that this ancient text was encrypted by God. It requires an encryption key in order to find the gold.

So for a moment, I want you to pick up your Bible and hold it in your hand. I want you to look at it. Really look at it.

You hold in your hand a collection of ancient writings. These words were once written on papyrus, handed down from generation to generation, copied with exact standards, translated by people who died to do it. These words have been hidden in the hearts of believers for over 2000 years. Many memorized them because carrying them was too risky.

People have been martyred grasping on to this book. Many copies are covered in blood. People have tried to burn all of the copies of these historical documents. They have burned the people who made copies and those found with copies.

For all of history up to the Third Century, no one had a complete collection of these books. They dreamed of holding in their hands what we have in ours.

Yet no matter how hard man tried to stop people from reading these Words to us from God.....here it is...in your hands. You are truly holding an historical treasure. More valuable to you than all the gold in the all the mountains of the World. In fact, the Words of God given to you in these pages are not only historical but they are eternal.

The truths we learn from this book will be as true in heaven 40 billion years from now as they are today and as they were 2000 years ago when they were written. When we watch the universe and all of creation burn, we will still be holding these texts. This promise comes from Jesus.

Luke 21:33 (ESV) 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Additionally Jesus warns us.

Matthew 5:17–19 (ESV) 17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The book you and I hold in our hand, throw in the back seat of our cars until next Sunday, or leave next to our bed unopened...hopefully not. Was given to you with great sacrifice.

People died to get it to you, others died reading it, many have died living it. Millions have never died because of it. Skimming this book, doubting the treasures are really there, dishonors it and God who wrote it.

Do you know what will determine the impact this book has on your life?

There are two critical truths that we must address before we go too far. Do you truly believe that the gold is there and do you have the encryption key that you need to find it?

Have you ever noticed that those searching for God are often studying some kind of treasure map? That there is some kind of guide that leads them to the treasure? Often the map is encrypted...You have to fold it in just a certain way, or look at it in just the right light, in order to see the truth that it reveals.

Having the map is not enough. You might get close...but you will not really find the treasure. Encryption insures that only those who truly remain diligent find the treasure.

In the same way, God's Word is encrypted too. Like a treasure map, anyone can read God's Word, but only those with the encryption key can understand His Word and find the treasures He left for those who believe.

Anyone can study the Bible. Every person in this room can get historical facts and make some observations. But not everyone in this room can understand the Bible. Universities and TV shows are full of people who have studied the Bible, have degrees in the study of the Bible, and yet misunderstand the Bible because they don't have the encryption key that unlocks all of the mystery it contains.

We stated earlier that God wrote this book to us. Unlike every other book in your library, this book is a Spiritual Book. It is not an earthly book that can be understood by humans in the flesh...These words come from Heaven....These words are eternal...These words bring life...Spiritual life to those who are dead.

Contained in these historical pages are Spiritual Truths that we as humans cannot understand. No matter how diligently we study, how many degrees we obtain...This Spiritual Book must be taught by the Spirit and read in the Spirit.

God encrypted this text so that only those with the Holy Spirit....God who teaches everything...can understand the deeper meanings of the text...the mysteries God left only for those who truly love Him.

1 Corinthians 2:11–14 (ESV) 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

God tells us that this book was written by Him, must be taught by Him, and He will guide us to the treasures it contains.

The encryption key required to understand this book...is the Holy Spirit. Remember that Jesus left the Holy Spirit who would teach us all things. What Things? Words not taught by human wisdom....Spiritual truths that must be revealed by the Spirit of God.

Our televisions, universities, and even Seminaries are full of people who claim to be Biblical Scholars and who have never surrendered to Jesus. They don't accept the things of the Spirit and are not able to understand them. They have human degrees and impressive resumes, but the most simple minded person with the Spirit of God knows far more than they will ever know. God says that these words are folly to those who have rejected Jesus and are void of the Spirit. .

The first thing that you must know is this....You must have the Spirit of God to understand the Word of God.

Second, with the Spiritual mysteries of God in our hand...the Spiritual Guidance of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we must decide if we will prioritize the pursuit of the Spiritual Gold God promises to us. Ned panned for gold for over 72 years and I am sure up until the day that he died. I think he probably dropped dead next to the river holding that pan until the very last breath. He never stopped believing that the gold was there.

That is how I want to die. Grasping God's Word until my very last breath. Ned never doubted that the gold was there. Knowing that truth kept him panning.

So we have two prerequisites for the pursuit of God's Gold. First is to surrender to Jesus, be reborn spiritually, and have the Holy Spirit as your guide to all Spiritual things. Then and only then, you have to decide if you truly believe God's mysteries exist and you can unlock them.

Do you believe the Holy Spirit will guide you to all truth? Do you believe these mysterious truths are in the text waiting to be revealed? Do you believe that God wants to reveal them specifically to you? Are you willing to pursue those truths no matter how hard it is or how long it takes?

Otherwise you will be going 20 mph down Bee Ridge, stopping at green lights, signaling left and going right. In other words you will remain a tourist.

Once those issues have been settled in our hearts we need to understand why the study of this book is so important to us as believers in Jesus. Bible Study is absolutely essential for three things.

1) Bible Study is Essential for Spiritual Growth

1 Peter 2:2–3 (ESV) 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

As a new Christ follower, this book is like milk for you. We not only want it we long for it. We crave it. We have to have it, but here is the thing, someone else has to get it and care about us enough to feed us. If someone doesn't feed an infant, they die. They are dependent upon those who love them to nurture them. So Bible study is essential for spiritual growth.

2) Bible Study is Essential for Spiritual Maturity

But at some point, all of us must be weaned if we are to grow up. Churches were never meant to be the nurseries that they have become. The biggest problem in the church today is the absence of the Holy Spirit.

Too many people are pretending to follow God. Too many people are sitting around waiting to be spoon fed. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit in a believer or in a church, no one feeds themselves. It is like having parents that can't feed you because they are still breast feeding themselves.

Hebrews 5:11–14 (ESV) 11 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

A healthy church has people in all stages of spiritual development...Some are growing in the beginning stages of God's Word- living on milkOthers have moved on spiritually to more solid food....Some have grown to the point of feeding others. They have learned to not only follow the truths in this book but to teach them to others

We need solid food beyond the pure milk of God's Word. The rewards come to those who not only follow the Law but teach it to others. So Bible study is essential for Spiritual Growth and Spiritual Maturity

3) Bible Study is Essential for Spiritual Effectiveness.

2 Timothy 3:14–17 (ESV) 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

All Scripture is useful. That includes Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Habakuk Do you remember when Jesus was tempted in the desert by Satan?

He quoted from Deuteronomy. What if your spiritual success tomorrow depending upon your knowledge of Deut?

When we know God's Word and know how to apply it We become useful in God's hands Our effectiveness for Christ is directly related To how well we understand God's Truth The Word of God is the tool for your effectiveness

You are probably realizing that this is no ordinary Book. It was written by humans but they were not the author. God told them what to write. This is God's Book to Us

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV) 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

God literally breathed it into existence. Just like He breathed life in to us, He breathes life into His truths. Not only does He bring life to His Words, He himself teaches us.

You never read this book alone as a Christ follower. While you read the Holy Spirit is there with you Pointing out things.... Highlighting things for you to see. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see and our minds to understand

The Holy Spirit shows us how the truth in God's Word applies to our lives. He is not in the business of information...the Holy Spirit is in the business of transformation.

So we have the Holy Spirit, We believe the promises of God...How do we get started Studying the Bible?

1) Prayerfully.

Everything that we do with God starts with us on our knees asking for His Help.

When you read the Bible as a Christ Follower you are having a divine discussion with the Holy Spirit. The All knowing All powerful Holy God. You may be sitting in your living room or at Starbucks but something Holy happens with you open this book

I simply start my study with "Speak to me Holy Spirit...your servant is listening....and ready to submit to your truth" INSERT HERE

2) Humbly

We want to know God. To submit to the authority of His words. When we open this book, we have to ask Do I really want to know what this book reveals? Am I ready to do whatever it says?

Proverbs 1:7 (ESV) 7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

3) Carefully

Bible study is a journey into this book. We have to take our time and be careful where we step. We do not want to misinterpret what this book says. We do not want to twist this book to make it say what it is not intended to say

4) Simply

Our goal in this series is that you will be able with just you, your bible and Holy Spirit And begin to study the truths of God's word

5) Confidently

The Holy Spirit is in you to enable you to do this. God has put His presence in you to help you do this

6) Consistently

We need to be equipped to study every text of every book. We need a method that we can apply to every single text or passage

7) Diligently

This will take a lot of effort, but too many say, "I Have the Spirit so I can just read and God will tell me what it says." That is just spiritually lazy. God has given you a mind to dive into His word The Bible does not yield its fruit to the lazy

People come to Christ. We act like that is the goal instead of the starting point. We hand them a Bible and expect them to be able to study it. Some have been Christ followers for 30+ years and still don't know how to study the Bible. Why? No one has taught you.

Someone gave you a pan and pointed you to the river You have never really found the treasure this book contains Because no one has really shown you how to do it.

8) Intentionally

Every time you read the Bible. Get your Bible, a notebook and a pen. There is gold in this book and you will find it. If God is going to speak to you you better be ready to write it down.

9) Personally

If you don't learn how to read the Bible for yourself. You will live your walk with God through someone else. Try living out your relationship with your spouse through someone else. Bible study is personal one on one interaction with God. No one else can take your place

Ok so let me just give you a few things that we need to avoid when we study the Bible. These things are always derailers.

We must avoid the Emotional Approach

What feels right to me? You have to avoid the emotional approach. I am going to read the parts that I like and find the verses that make me feel good. I'll avoid parts of the Bible don't feel good.... Like Lamentations...or Jeremiah...or the part where God destroys nations with children...or the tithing part or the wrath of God part. You must explore and embrace all the emotions of this book. You and I must take this book in its entirety. We can't ignore the Old Testament or say one part of it is God's Word and another is not. We can't make certain sections like grace more important than others like truth. Why? Because God told us...

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV) 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

All Scripture....every word...every truth ...breathed out by God to us.

We must avoid the Spiritual Approach.

What deep hidden meaning is there for me? What special meaning can I find that no one else has found? It seems like it means this but what does it really mean? I hear what they are saying but what are they really saying

Avoid overanalyzing Most of the time the obvious meaning is the meaning. It is unlikely that you are going to discover something no one else has seen before. Completely new revelations are dangerous.

We have to avoid the Pragmatic Approach.

What works best for me? What fits best to what I want I will find a verse that says what I want Rip it out of context And use it to justify my selfish desires I will twist God's truth to make it my truth

Arrogant, self-centered way to study the Bible You miss the whole point of discovering God's truth I am going to live the way I want And use the Bible to support what I want to do Dangerous approach very common today Using the Bible to justify our lives Rather than discovering the Biblical truths and adjusting our lives

We must avoid the Superficial Approach

What does this passage mean to me? The real question is what did the Holy Spirit mean in this passage? The Text Means one thing As determined by the Holy Spirit Once we determine what the Holy Spirit means in the text Then we are freed up to consider how that truth may apply in each of our lives

The question is not "What does this passage mean to me? But rather...What does this passage mean....and only then how does that truth apply to me.

Next week we begin the Study of Colossians. Let me give you a structure of how you can approach your Bible Study. This process works with every book, every verse and every truth of the Bible. Learn it and it will become second nature. You will start doing it without realizing it. It is like driving a car.

Content.....(Exploration)

I want you to play detective. I am declaring that each of you are first century detectives. This book was written first and foremost to a first century audience. The more you can place yourself in their shoes, with their beliefs, and their culture, the easier it is to understand what is being written to them.

Imagine that you are in the very first audience to hear the Letter that Paul wrote from Prison to those in Colosse. In your mind, picture the scene. Receiving letters from an Apostle was a huge deal in the first century. Picture the room....what do you see? What do you smell? What concerns do you think they might have? Don't try to figure it all out at this stage...just notice what you see.

Explore the text like a detective at a crime scene. Take it all in. See what you see. Note it. Don't try to explain it yet. Don't jump to conclusions. Observe and note everything.

Context....(Interpretation)

Staying in the First Century mindset....think about all that you have seen in the text. What do you think it meant to the audience who first heard it? How did they receive it?

What was the impact of this letter on those who first heard it? What were their emotions? Their concerns? Their convictions? What did Paul want them to do?

Only after you have a pretty good general idea of what they understood can you move to the next step.

Connection...(Implication)

How do I bring it back home? How does it relate? Let's see how the text travels. How does what this text mean relate to the 21st Century? We don't live in their culture we live in ours This text has to travel forward 20 centuries How does this word connect to life in the 21st century?

Conduct....(Application)

Now that I have explored the truth Now that I have interpreted what it meant to the first audience Now that I have connected it to my world How do I apply what I have learned to my life? Examining the conduct

Unfortunately most who study the Bible jump to Application We open the book and say "How does this apply to my life?" It is good that we want to apply the Word to our life But if we run to application first we will miss the whole point of the passage. If we don't first go through exploration, interpretation and implication. We will misuse the Word of God.

You can't apply a truth until you fully understand what that truth is.

Later on in this series I will give you a bookmark that you can keep in your Bible that reminds you of all that we are going to cover. For now, I want you to get comfortable with the 4 C's. Content what do I see? Context what did it mean back then? Connection How do I bring this forward to now? And Conduct what am I to do with the truth that God has revealed to me.

It is also important to understand the type of literature we will be studying. Some books in the Bible are hymns, some are historical archives, some are love letters, some are wisdom saying....but we will be looking at a letter. We are going to be studying a letter. Think about that this week as you read.

You need to approach this book as a letter. You wouldn't pick up a letter from a friend and start in the middle. You would approach it from beginning to end. Because it is a letter, each thought building on the next, it is written from someone and to someone. Writing back then was complicated and required someone deliver the letter personally. Which means an author only wrote a letter if something important had to be shared. It also meant that the audience cherished each word and thought.

This letter will address some interesting topics so let me wet your appetite a bit.

Do heavenly bodies like angels have any influence over our lives today? If so, how much? Do horoscopes actually work? Is there any relationship between diet and spiritual living? Does God speak to us immediately through our minds or only through His Word the Bible? Do the Eastern Religions of today have anything to offer us as believers? Can we believe in a good God in an evil world? If God is all loving how do you explain evil? If God is all powerful why doesn't He just take away all sin? If Christ died for our sins why is there still sin in the world? Is Jesus only one way among many ways?

This week, if you don't have one get a Study Bible, Notebook and Pencil Your assignment is simple

Block out time, it will take 45 minutes or so, sit down and read Paul's letter to the church at Colosse from beginning to end At least once all the way through but I encourage you to do it each day. Try to place yourself in Colossae reading this letter for the first time. If you don't understand all of it that is ok. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you something new each time you read it.

You may be thinking....45 minutes is a long time...I don't have 45 minutes...

Let me ask you to consider this....Do you really believe God's Gold is there for your to find? Do you really believe that The Holy Spirit will not let you miss it? Spiritual nuggets are not given to the doubters or the lazy. Once you find the gold 45 minutes a day will never seem like enough.

Ned took one look in my eyes and knew I had never really panned for Gold because I didn't believe it was there. He wasn't being mean...just truthful.

I meet believers all the time who have never really panned for God's Gold in Scripture because they don't believe that it is there...I can see it in their eyes. They take the tourist approach hoping someone else will find the gold for them...the problem is there are many out there who will gladly offer you fools gold because they know you can't tell the difference.

For those who have the Holy Spirit guiding them, Spiritual growth is not optional. Too many churches cater to people who have been believers for years and are still drinking milk...refusing to feed themselves and demanding more.

Rather than challenging them, the church leaders make excuses for them. Not here. Not at Remnant. If you are brand new to the faith, we have some wonderful milk for you and you completely depend upon us to provide it for you. However, if you choose over the long haul to refuse to feed yourself, you will die spiritually and we cannot help you. What sustains you as an infant will never support you as an adult. Part of being an adult is taking responsibility for your own growth. No one can study God's truths for you. We can teach you how to do it, but only you can do it.

Many don't like this church for exactly this reason. We expect you to feed yourself. We expect you to read God's Word on your own. We expect you to obey God's Truth. We expect that you want us to hold you accountable to it.

Those who leave Remnant often tell me that I am arrogant and unkind. I have heard it for years. I am not arrogant. I have absolute unwavering confidence in the truths...the gold...that God has placed in His Word. I refuse to waver from those truths and I expect followers of Jesus to strive toward those truths. Sadly, because not all pastors hold to that standard, I am seen as arrogant in comparison. I never boast about myself but I will, with unwavering focus, demand that God's way is the only way.

I expect us to know the truth and use it for decision making and guidance in all the decisions of our lives. It is not debatable or interpretable, it is truth. We should have absolute unwavering confidence in it because it is not our truth...It is literally Gold from God's throne.

Often those who like being fed think it is unkind to demand that they grow up and feed themselves. They want their pastor to validate their Spiritual laziness and make them feel good about it. They love the truth of Gods Word until the Holy Spirit convicts them through it. They come to church looking for validation rather than transformation. Jesus warned us about this.

Matthew 7:13–14 (ESV) 13 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Notice that the path to follow Jesus is narrow...but also not that He says the way is HARD that leads to life and those who find it are few. Since that is true, Jesus said, it....what should His church look like?

God is calling you and me...to the way that is hard. We are to learn to feed ourselves...we must believe that God's Gold is there....in the pages of Scripture...and we must know what to do with it when we find it. Let's Pray.