



The IMAGINE Series focuses on the hope of a different world as followers of Jesus make disciples who make disciples.



I. Introduction

We all begin our relationship with God by declaring ourselves to be sinners in need of a savior. From that moment, we begin our walk with Christ. Thankfully, God also provides several avenues through which we can continue our growth and pursuit of Christlikeness. We have the opportunity to approach God through prayer. We have the provision of fellowship with the body of Christ—His church. We can relate to God through corporate worship. Additionally, God has given us His Word so that we might come to know Him and His desires for our life and ministry.

It is to this provision of Scripture that we want to give our focus. Could it be that, in our efforts to grow and mature in Christ, we are not doing everything we are supposed to be doing with the Bible? Could it be that, even in our best attempts at discerning God's truth and working to apply it, we have not done all that we need to do with Scripture? Could we have missed a critical purpose of God's truth?

II. The Forgotten Purpose of Truth

"On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:40). There is a "forgotten purpose" of truth that His Spirit wants to make real. This forgotten purpose can serve His longing to restore relevance to His church, exceeding abundance to His followers, and great gospel witness.

A. The Rational Purpose of God's Truth.

We know that Scripture tells us what we should believe and that God's Word is our determiner for what is true, immovable, unchangeable, and eternal. For example, Acts 4:12 tells us, "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." This boundary of right doctrine lets us know that to claim there is any way to salvation other than Jesus is error or sin.

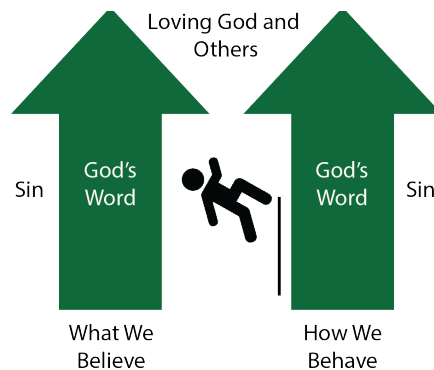
B. The Behavioral Purpose of God's Truth

Most of us are also acquainted with the behavioral purpose of God's truth. We look to God's Word to tell us how to live our lives. We know that the Bible gives us commands and principles for how to live a life that is pleasing to God and in harmony with one another. Ephesians 4:29 speaks of not letting any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth (reproof), but only what is helpful for building others up (correction). Therefore, to revile, judge, or gossip with our words is to fall outside of the boundary of right living. These are sin.

While these two purposes of truth are critical for life and ministry, they are not sufficient in themselves. God's Word gives us boundaries for our life and ministry. The Bible defines the limits of sound doctrine and clearly sets the boundaries for what we are to believe. God's Word also gives us boundaries for how we are to live our life and outlines how we should behave. Yet, we must see that these are boundaries given by God in order to direct our journey toward a relationship with Him and with those He loves.

C. The Relational Purpose of Scripture

As we will elaborate in the section to follow, the relational purpose of truth is this: God's Word was written so that we might have a loving, intimate relationship with the One who wrote it as well as with those He loves.



2 Timothy 3:16–17:

"All Scripture is God-breathed (Greek: *Theopneustos*—*Theos*—"God"; *pneustos*—"breathed") and is useful . . . for teaching doctrine (Greek: *didaskalia*—"context of teaching") and rebuking or correction (Greek: *elegmos*—"reproving wrong" and *epanorthosis*—"restoring proper condition")."

Many of us, though, get sidetracked on this journey toward a deep, intimate relationship with God. We carefully look to Scripture in order to tell us what to believe and how we should behave, but **we miss the opportunity to more deeply know the God of the Bible**. As a result, our lives may suffer from a lack of significance and diminished eternal impact for the cause of Christ. Our ministries may be void of relevance and demonstrable impact because week by week, we leave church knowing what to believe and how to behave, but we never take the journey into a deeper relationship with the God of the Bible. Tragically, many of us have yet to experience the **relational purpose of truth**.



W-2 Being a "living epistle" in reverence and awe as His Word becomes real in my life, vocation, and calling

Walking in the light of God's Word through frequent experience of Scripture (John 12:35; Psalm 119:105)

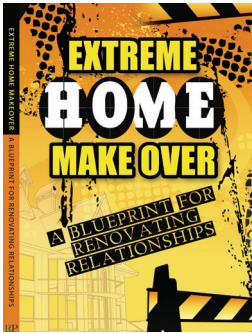
"Since you have in obedience to the truth, purified your souls—fervently love one another from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22).

Prayerfully reflect on the Bible verses below. Which one of these might you need to experience more often?

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

“Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . .” (Col. 3:16).

Pastor/Teacher: I sense your spirit might want this verse _____ to be particularly true of me in my relationship with _____



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- *Taking your faith “out the door” into the workplace, community, school and beyond.*

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We must both explore the objective meaning of Scripture and encounter the relational significance of it.

- Proverbs 15:1 *“A gentle answer turns away wrath.”*
- Romans 15:7 *“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.”*
- James 5:16 *“Confess your sins to each other.”*
- Ephesians 4:32 *“Forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*
- Ephesians 4:15 *“Speaking the truth in love . . .”*
- Ephesians 4:29 *“Let no unwholesome words come out of your mouth but only such words that edify/buildup.”*

Take time to reflect on this one verse. Pray together with a partner or small group. Ask Jesus to make this verse truer of you and empower you to do the Bible.

Lord Jesus, lead me beyond merely knowing the truth. Please lead me into a genuine experience of truth. Replace knowledge with Your love that builds up as Your truth is lived out. I sense that Your Spirit might want this verse to be particularly true of me in my relationship with _____

III. Re-hanging the Mirror of God’s Word

“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:23–24).

The New Testament reveals that God intends for us to look into the mirror of His Word and allow the Spirit to transform us into His image thus bringing glory to God. Christ’s answer to the Pharisee in the gospel of Matthew expands that vision. Jesus’ response reveals that it is not enough to simply know God’s truth and study His commands, but that all of Scripture must be lived in the context of loving relationships with God and one another.

A. Scripture has both objective meaning and relational significance.

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40).

We must not miss the significance of Christ’s words in this text. Not only do these two commandments constitute the nail on which the rest of the instructions of Scripture hang, they also provide a framework for the interpretation of God’s Word. Christ’s words reveal how relevance returns when Scripture comes alive through relationships.

Christ seems to argue for relational hermeneutics (principles of Scriptural interpretation) in His declaration about the greatest of commandments (Matthew 22:40). His words suggest this principle of interpreting Scripture.

B. Scripture “hangs” on loving God and others.

We might illustrate this approach to Scripture by exploring the limited number of New Testament passages which contain the Greek word *kremannumi* (“depends” or “hangs”):

- Matthew 18:6—“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone *hung* around his neck.”

Imagine the scene described in this text. You see a man with a millstone hung around his neck. The stone’s weight makes it difficult for the man to walk, and you see him stumbling toward the edge of a boat. You are quite certain that if this man falls into the ocean, the weight of the stone will cause his death. With this scene in your mind’s eye, you cannot focus only on the millstone’s objective meaning, for to do so would be to miss the relational significance. Consider the absurdity of reacting to the situation described above by simply asking objective questions about the millstone: “How much does that millstone weigh? How old might it be? Where might that millstone come from?” Limiting our response to such questions would be to miss the critical significance of what we were observing. The significant issue is that the millstone is hanging around a person’s neck! To miss where the millstone is hanging is to miss its relevance entirely. Christ’s declaration in the gospel of Matthew reveals that we face a similar challenge as we interpret Scripture. We often observe its objective meaning but miss its relational significance: God’s Word “hangs” upon loving Him and loving others.

- Acts 28:3, 4—“Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake *hanging* from his hand . . .”

In this passage, it is certainly important to notice that a poisonous serpent came out of the fire, but to focus on its length, color, or type would be trivial in relation to the significance of the scene. The significance is found in the facts that the serpent was hanging on Paul’s hand, and Paul did not die from the poison. We may gain understanding of the meaning of a text by asking objective questions, but we must go further. We must examine the relational significance of the passage by asking ourselves, “How might this encourage my love of God or empower my love for others?”

- Galatians 3:13—“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is *hung* on a tree.’”

This text reminds us of the precious gift of redemption. Surely it is important to look toward Golgotha and see Jesus of Nazareth, but focusing only upon such objective issues as the age, weight, and physical condition of the man hanging on the tree would be preposterous since the significance of the event is found in the fact that the Son of God was hung on a tree (See also Acts 5:30; 10:39).

Christ seems to argue in Matthew 22:40 that we have not finished the hermeneutic process until we have fully explored both the objective meaning and relational significance of Scripture.



W-2 Being a “living epistle” in reverence and awe as His Word becomes real in my life, vocation, and calling

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

“Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . .” (Col. 3:16).

Pastor/Teacher: I’m grateful to God for using (Verse) _____ in my life in order to lead me out of the darkness of _____

_____ and into the light of _____

Walk in the light of God’s People through faithful engagement in fellowship. (John 12:35; Matthew 5:8-14)

“I will delight in your principles and not forget your word” (Psalm 119:16). Disciples delight in God’s Word, not forgetting how His truth has blessed them. Consider a specific Bible verse that has become especially meaningful to you. Then reflect on how God made it alive for you, leading you out of darkness into light.

Maybe God used a particular Bible verse (like John 3:16) to draw you out of sin’s darkness into a new-birth encounter with Christ.

Maybe God used a particular Bible promise (like Psalm 23) to lead you out of a valley of despair into “green pastures.”

Maybe God used a specific Bible admonition (like Ephesians 4:31) to challenge you to rid yourself of some area of darkness so that you could walk with Him and hear His voice.

After sharing your responses with your partner or small group, pray together, expressing gratitude for the power, promise, and potential of the light of God’s Word.

IV. Nourished by the Light

“Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow” (1 Peter 2:2).

Disciples grow in maturity as they are nourished by the Word of God. Satan sought to tempt Christ in the desert, but Christ overcame Him by continuing to walk in the light of the Word of God (Matthew 4:1–11). His declarations speak to the power and necessity of being nourished by the Word: “Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (v. 4). As we live out the divine calling to express and extend God’s presence in a dark world, we must take full advantage of every opportunity to encounter God in His Word and to experience its nourishing benefits and blessings.

- As we **hear the Word** taught, preached, and shared, our faith will be strengthened: “Faith comes from hearing the message” (Romans 10:17).
- As we **read the Word**, we will be blessed: “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy” (Revelation 1:3).
- As we **study the Word**, we will be approved by God as “a workman who . . . correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15)
- As we **memorize the Word**, we will be less vulnerable to sin: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11).
- As we **meditate upon the Word**, our yielding to it will increase: “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it” (Joshua 1:8). Meditation upon the Word will also produce spiritual prosperity, health, and fruitfulness (Psalm 1:1–3).

A. Pause and Reflect.

1. How many of these five ways of being nourished by the Word of God have you taken advantage of this past week?
2. Sadly, too many of God's children remain "babes," as week by week they come to hear God's Word preached or taught by others, but rarely take advantage of other avenues of nourishment.
3. What other ways of "feeding upon" the Word might you desire to pursue at this time?
4. How might you go about it?

I could pursue more of these additional ways of being nourished by God's Word (circle any that apply):

Hearing Reading Studying Memorizing Meditating
by _____

B. Scripture loses power and relevance apart from its relational purpose.

Imagine what might happen if you removed the nail that holds a mirror on the wall of your home. That mirror would fall and shatter into pieces as it hit the floor. If you picked up one of the pieces that fell to the ground would you still have a mirror? Yes. But could you see everything as clearly as before? No. Without the nail supporting the mirror, your view would be distorted. Without the nail, you would not be able to see the image as a whole.

- The Pharisees seem to have had a mirror that had fallen to the ground. They seem to have only been able to see certain pieces of God's truth. They were masters at picking up one piece of God's mirror and, with an incomplete and distorted view, looking for others who were not living in alignment with that piece. Their knowledge of Scripture consistently contrasted with the testimony of their lives, provoking anger and rebuke from the Lord. Jesus revealed the disparity between the Pharisees' knowledge and their relationship when He said, "*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me (John 5:39).*"
- On one occasion, Scripture tells us that Jesus and His disciples were passing through the grain fields, and the disciples began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees asked the Lord, "*Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?*" (Mark 2:24). The religious leaders were looking for someone who was not living out the command to "keep the Sabbath holy" (see Exodus 20:8–10). Did God command that we observe the Sabbath and give honor to the Lord? Yes. Were the Pharisees correct in their study and knowledge of this truth? Yes. They understood the rational purpose of truth, and embraced the behavioral purpose of truth, but they missed the overarching relational purpose of truth. They neglected to see that the command to "keep the Sabbath" must be interpreted in the context of loving God and loving others.

Jesus responded to the Pharisees by recounting the story of King David and his men. Christ reminded the Pharisees that when David and his men entered the house of God, they ate the consecrated bread because they were hungry (Matthew 12:3–8). Jesus “re-hung” the Sabbath requirements back on the nail of Great Commandment love as He said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath”* (Mark 2:27).

- We must not only dedicate ourselves to scriptural knowledge and purity of lifestyle; we must learn to hang all of Scripture on the Great Commandment—loving God and one another. We must do more than memorize Bible verses; we must live them in relationship with God and other people. We must do more than arm ourselves with biblical knowledge and pass that knowledge to others. We must model it and live it in loving relationships. When we equip people with the knowledge of truth, but fail to show them the relational purpose of truth, we may promote a Pharisaical perspective. Week by week, we may be arming saints with a small piece of God’s truth and sending them out into the community to look for people who are violating it.



W-3 Yielding to the Scripture’s protective cautions and transforming power to bring life change in me

“Walk in the light of God’s Son through fresh encounters with Jesus” (John 12:35; John 8:12)

Pause quietly to meditate on Jesus praying these words over you!

“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

Join with one or two others asking that His word becomes the explanation of your life. “Holy Spirit I say ‘Yes’ to your God-breathed book. Without even knowing all that Your word will ask of me, I yield to You that it may become true of me.” “Be it done unto me according to Thy word” (Luke 1:38).

V. The God-Breathed Word Becoming Alive in God’s People

Has the church of the twenty-first century lost the nail that should be holding the mirror of God’s Word? Have we lost sight of the two commandments that all other aspects of God’s Word hang upon? Could this explain why there is so much knowledge of God’s Word, yet so few people who are actually living it? Could this explain why so many Christians know the truth, yet too frequently find themselves in the same moral and ethical failures as those without a relationship with Christ?

In order to be effective in our efforts to reach the world for Christ, we have to move beyond giving intellectual assent to the Bible, debating over rational beliefs, or assessing standards of behavior, and begin to experience the Word with God and one another.

A. The God-breathed Word: What will it look like in our personal lives?

“For the word of God is living and active . . .” (Hebrews 4:12).

This Scripture tells us that the Word of God is living and active, but what is the evidence that God’s Word is truly “living” in my life? What does it look like for the Spirit of God to take the Word of God and empower our experience of it?

Taking this journey into a deepened loving relationship with God is an experience because any relationship must be experienced. It involves more than knowledge and dutiful compliance. Our journey in loving the Lord will change our lives in relevant, meaningful ways. Here are some of the benefits of taking this journey toward a more intimate relationship with the God of the Bible:

1. You will live life with an expectancy of actually encountering Him—the One who wrote the Book!
2. You will experience freedom like never before. Your Christian life will move beyond duties and obligations, from “got to” to “get to.” You will be constrained by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14 KJV).
3. You will be empowered to actually live what you believe. You will find that this power comes not from a doctrinal treatise or a code of conduct, but from a Person!
4. You will express humility instead of pride. Your heart will not be able to fully grasp the wonder of how the Creator of the universe meets you in His Word.
5. You will demonstrate vulnerability instead of judgment. You will be excited to share what God’s Word is doing in you rather than pointing to the failures of others.

B. The God-breathed Word: What will it look like as we follow Jesus together?

- *“I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8).*

Many ministry leaders and followers of Jesus are beginning to change the way they approach God’s Word. Instead of spending time in Scripture primarily as a means of preparing to preach, teach, or lead others, they study in order to know and to love God more intimately. These leaders seek to know and love God first for who He is and what He wants to do in their lives, and second for what He wants to do through their lives.

- *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16).*

Do you notice a paradox in this verse? The ministry of effective Bible teaching begins by allowing something to happen “in us.” We must allow the Holy Spirit to work the Word into the soil of our own hearts before fruitful teaching and admonishment can take place. As we set out to study, outline, and interpret the Word, we must also allow the Word to penetrate soul and spirit, to judge the thoughts and attitudes of our heart.

- *“We must devote ourselves to prayer and ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4).*

To “devote” or “give attention to” implies purposeful intent that includes time and focus.

The equipping of the saints for the “work of service” (Ephesians 4:12), involves each follower of Jesus in a call to serve. In order to effectively minister the Word, we must “serve” others with God’s truth as it becomes more and more the explanation of our life.

C. An encounter with Jesus: What will it feel like for us?

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

To each of us who experiences such feelings of accusation and criticism, the apostle Paul poses the question, “Who will bring any charge against you?” (Romans 8:33). Paul goes on to answer this question with a declaration of truth. He explains that there is only One person with the right and power to accuse, criticize, or condemn: “It is God who justifies” (v. 33). Knowing that we might resist such a liberating truth, Paul asks again, “Who is he that condemns?” (v. 34). Again, we read that there is only One who has the right to condemn us—Jesus Christ, the One who died and was raised from the dead. He has the right and power to judge, but notice what He is doing for those who believe: He is interceding for us (v. 34)! This is why the apostle can say, “There is now no condemnation” for us (v. 1). The only One who can condemn you is praying for you!

Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you into an actual experience of Romans 8:33–34 as you encounter Jesus.



L-3 Experiencing God as He really is through deepened intimacy with Him

Walk in the light of God’s Son through frequent encounters with Jesus (John 12:35; John 8:3–12)

“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:33–34).

Meditation: Close your eyes and form a mental picture of a courtroom. The words Paul uses are legal words. We still use them—“bring charge,” “condemn.” You feel intimidation at your surroundings. You look around and see the faces of people who have spoken against you, been harsh and cruel, or abandoned and neglected you. But who can condemn? Only Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Suddenly, Jesus enters the room. You see His flowing robes, sandaled feet, and bearded face. Rather than taking His place behind the judge’s bench, Jesus stands by your side, slowly eases His arm around your shoulder and gently leads you to join Him, kneeling in prayer.

He’s praying your prayer list, the needs in your life, and then you hear Him ask, “Where are your accusers?” You glance up and realize that the courtroom is completely empty. Every one of those faces filled with condemnation has disappeared from the room. Each person who brought a charge against you has vanished. Everyone who had responded with neglect or abandonment is gone. He then proclaims, “Neither do I accuse you.” The only One who can condemn you prays for you! The only One, who is equipped to judge, does not. The Holy One of the universe prays for you!

Pause and allow the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with wonder and gratefulness for this Jesus!

“Thanks Father for your incomparable love that empowers Christ to pray for me rather than condemn me. Praise you, Jesus, because there is no condemnation for we who are in Christ Jesus!” The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free!