TikTok Devotional Series Transcript:

April 2023

April 1, 2023 - Do Not Be Afraid

"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 1:8)

A great obstacle to serving the Lord, especially among the young, is the fear of rejection and opposition. All kinds of thoughts enter the mind about how some people might not like the way we act or speak. People might disagree or be offended. I might make a mistake and get criticized. The fear of man is a great hindrance to ministry.

So God says, Don't fear, because I will be with you and I will deliver you. God's presence and approval is more valuable than all the accolades of men. And God says that, in and through all your troubles, I will deliver you. You will triumph in the end. You will be more than a conqueror.

And the same thing is promised to all of us in Christ Jesus today:

"[God] has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5–6)

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

So do not be afraid.

April 2, 2023 - Never Thirst

"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (John 6:35)

This text points to the fact that believing in Jesus, is a feeding and drinking, from all that Jesus is. It goes so far as to say that our soul-thirst, is satisfied with Jesus, so that we don't thirst anymore. He is the end of our quest for satisfaction. There is nothing beyond, and nothing better.

When we trust Jesus the way John intends for us to, the presence and promise of Jesus is so satisfying that we are not dominated by the alluring pleasures of sin (see Romans 6:14). This accounts for why such faith in Jesus nullifies the power of sin and enables obedience.

In John 7:37–38: *"Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."'"*

Through faith, Christ becomes in us an inexhaustible fountain of satisfying life that lasts forever and leads us to heaven, and on the way sets us free from the sinful illusions of other satisfactions. This he does by sending us his Spirit so that we may never thirst.

April 3, 2023 - Consider Your Heavens

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? Psalm 8:3-4

When you see the confusion of today's cultural landscape, do you wonder if there's hope? There is hope because of God's promise to make Himself known through signals—observations and experiences that hint at a reality beyond what we see and what we presume:

- A sense of injustice that points to the existence of a universal moral foundation
- Our hunger for deep joy that nothing in this world seems to satisfy
- The shared recognition of beauty in something as simple as a flower

These experiences are the means God uses to wake people from their spiritual stupor and call them to seek Him as the Source of meaning. In the past, we could assume the people we met had a basic understanding of the truth claims for Christianity and that it was plausible to believe in them. In our cultural moment, we need to start upstream from arguments and make the case based on their longing for joy, meaning, and purpose. This is all part of considering God's heavens.

April 4, 2023 - Delight in God's Word

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalm 119:103)

Never reduce Christianity to a matter of demands and resolutions and willpower. It is a matter of what we love, what we delight in, what tastes good to us.

When Jesus came into the world, humanity was split according to what they loved. *"The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light" (John 3:19).* The righteous and the wicked are separated by what they delight in — the revelation of God in Jesus, or the way of the world. How can I come to delight in the word of God? 1) pray for new tastebuds on the tongue of your heart; 2) meditate on the staggering promises of God to his people.

No one naturally hungers for, and delights in, God and his wisdom. Meditate on the benefits God promises to his people and on the joy of having Almighty God as your helper now and forever. Psalm 1:3–4 says that the person who meditates on God's word *"is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away."*

Who would not delight to read a book, the reading of which would change one from useless chaff to a mighty cedar of Lebanon? Nobody deep down wants to be chaff — rootless, weightless, useless. All of us want to draw strength from some deep river of reality and become fruitful, useful people. That river of reality is the word of God, and all the great saints have been made great by delighting in God's Word.

April 5, 2023 - The Resurrection

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (1 Corinthians 15:17)

Here are ten amazing things we owe to the resurrection of Jesus:

1) A Savior who can never die again.
2) The gift of Repentance.
3) New birth with a new nature.
4) Forgiveness of sin.
5) The Holy Spirit living within us and empowering us.
6) No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

7) Jesus's personal fellowship and protection. *"I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).*
8) Proof of coming judgment and knowledge that we will escape it because of Jesus.
9) Salvation from the future wrath of God. *"[We] wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). 10)* Our own resurrection from the dead. *"[We know] that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence" (2 Corinthians 4:14).*

How amazing is The Resurrection!

April 6, 2023 - Deep Love of Jesus

That you may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:18-19

O the deep, deep love of Jesus! Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free.

Rolling as a mighty ocean, In its fullness over me.

Underneath me, all around me, Is the current of Thy love.

Leading onward, leading homeward, To my glorious rest above.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus! Spread His praise from shore to shore.

How He loveth, ever loveth, Changeth never, nevermore.

How He watches over His loved ones, Died to call them all His own.

How for them He intercedeth, Watching over them from the throne.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus! Love of every love the best.

It is an ocean vast of blessing, It is a haven sweet of rest.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus! This is a heaven of heavens to me,

And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee, where I will know more of the deep love of Jesus.

April 7, 2023 - How to Thrive

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

God strips every pain of its destructive power. You must believe this or you will not thrive, or perhaps even survive, as a Christian, in the pressures and temptations of modern life. There is so much pain, so many setbacks and discouragements, so many controversies and pressures. I do not know where I would turn, if I did not believe that almighty God is taking every setback and every discouragement and every controversy and every pressure and every pain, and stripping it of its destructive power, and making it work for the enlargement of my joy in God.

God reigns so supremely on behalf of his elect that everything which faces us in a lifetime of obedience and ministry will be subdued by the mighty hand of God and made the servant of our holiness and our everlasting joy in God.

If God is for us, nothing can succeed against us. He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all will infallibly and freely with him give us all things, the world, life, death, and God himself.

The promise of God's grace is simply overwhelming. But all-important is the foundation: Here is a place to stand against all obstacles. God did not spare his own Son! Therefore, how much more will he not spare any effort to give us all that Christ died to purchase — all things, all good, and all bad working for our good! It is as sure as the certainty that he loved his Son!

April 8, 2023 - Resurrection and The Life

I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. John 11:25

This weekend we celebrate Easter as a time to remember and hold dear. Easter has a lot of meaning. Some get time off work, and extra time with family, or a long wait on Good Friday for fish and chips. Others, such as emergency workers get no such luxury and can even be busier than normal.

It is a time we think about the sacrifice that Jesus made, and the debt of sin that He paid for us, so that we can have eternal life. The cross, a symbol of pain and loss, is also a symbol of hope. The cross reminds us that we too can rise to a new life, pure and holy.

Easter reminds us of God's love, sent from Heaven above, in the person of Jesus and the promise of eternal life. It reminds us to be good to each other and to count our blessings.

Family and Christian values that underpin our culture are at the core of what we are, and what we seek to share with those who don't know the truth of the Gospel. May God bless you, as you think on these things and take some time to thank God for all that he has done for you this Easter.

April 9, 2023 - Jesus is Risen

Jesus is Risen. As such he has the final word. It is a powerful position to be in, to have the final say. It indicates that there is someone whose authority or view trumps all others and can close the conversation. In life at times, it seems like the final word is disappointment, suffering and disillusionment. We live with the realities of disaster, crime, violence, wars and personal disappointment.

International power plays threaten peace and security while creating more and more insecurity. At the same time the global economic complexity creates further anxiety and pressure at home and abroad. What can we say in the face of all these overwhelming realities?

We can say none of these have the final word. The Christian message at Easter is the final word; 'Life'. Jesus dies with no justice, torture, and cruelty. There is no compassion. Jesus is abandoned by the men who flee and attended to by the women who remain. Three days later, the borrowed grave is empty, and the testimony of the women and men is a simple and wonderful statement, 'He is Risen'.

Resurrection is the final word in Christian faith; Jesus lives. Two words and behind them a life transforming affirmation. The final word is life and resurrection. Bringing this perspective to our present realities may not alter them, however, it can change how we see and engage with them. Let us rejoice in the fact that Jesus is Risen.

April 10, 2023 - The Lord Will Sustain

[The Lord] will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:8–9)

What are you depending on to ensure that your faith will last until Jesus comes? The question is not, Do you believe in eternal security? The question is, How are we kept secure? Does the perseverance of our faith rest decisively on the reliability of our own resolve? Or does it rest decisively on the work of God to "keep us trusting"?

It is a great and wonderful truth of Scripture that God is faithful and will keep forever those whom he has called. Our confidence that we are eternally secure is a confidence that God will do whatever is necessary to "keep us trusting!" The certainty of eternity is no greater than the certainty God will keep us trusting now. That certainty is very great for all whom God has called. The "faithfulness" of God guarantees that he will keep safe forever all whom he has called.

April 11, 2023 - Hands of Love

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. (Colossians 1:3–5)

Many professing Christians are spending ten minutes reading Scripture and then half their day making money and the other half loving and repairing what they spend it on. It's not heavenly-mindedness that hinders love for the lost and hurting of this world. It is worldly-mindedness that hinders love, even when it is disguised by a religious routine.

Where is the person whose heart is so passionately in love with the promised glory of heaven that he feels like an exile and a sojourner on the earth? Where is the person who has so tasted the beauty of the age to come that the diamonds of the world look like marbles from the dollar store, and the entertainment of the world feels empty, and the moral causes of the world are too small because they have no view to eternity?

He is not in bondage to the Internet or eating or sleeping or drinking or partying. He is a free man in a foreign land, and his one question is this: How can I maximize my enjoyment of God for all eternity while I am an exile on this earth? And his answer is always the same: by doing the labours of love, by expanding my joy in God, no matter the cost, if by any means possible I might serve others with the hands of love.

April 12, 2023 - An Unchanging God

"Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations; You established the earth, and it stands. They stand this day according to Your ordinances…" Psalm 119:89

We all struggle with spiritual discouragement and lethargy. Some days our circumstances threaten to overwhelm us, and we struggle just to pray. Many times we just don't feel like doing the things we know we should. For one reason or another, God sometimes seems far off and unreachable.

David faced times like these in his life. The Psalms are filled with verses that express his despair and feeling of abandonment. God is the same today as He was when He hung the stars in the sky, led the Israelites through the Red Sea , and fed the five thousand.

All things, even the things affecting me right now, are God's servants. The circumstance, people, and events around me are all under God. They are His servants, designed to help and bless me spiritually.

Next time you feel spiritually drained or inadequate, remember that you have a choice. You can wrap yourself up in excuses and self-pity, or you can choose to draw your strength from an unchanging God.

April 13, 2023 - The Good I Want

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. (Romans 7:19)

Christians do not live only in defeat but neither do we live only in perfect victory over sin. In those times when we fail to triumph over sin, Romans 7:13–25 shows us the normal way a healthy Christian should respond.

We should say:

I love the law of God. (verse 22)

I hate what I just did. (verse 15)

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? (verse 24)

Thanks be to God! The victory will come through Jesus Christ my Lord. (verse 25)

No Christian wants to live in defeat. No Christian settles for living in defeat. But if we are defeated for a time, we shouldn't lie about it. No hypocrisy, No posing, No boasted perfectionism, or superficiality. God save us from blindness to our own failures and the consequent quickness to judge others. God, help us to feel worse about our own shortfalls than the failure of others and may God help us to do the good we want.

April 14, 2023 - Set that to My Account

"And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him." Leviticus 1:4

Our Lord's being made *"sin for us"* is set forth here by the transfer of sin to the bullock. The laying of the hand was not a mere touch of contact, for in some other places of Scripture the original word has the meaning of leaning heavily, as in the expression, *"thy wrath lieth hard upon me" (Psalm 88:7).* Surely this is the very essence and nature of faith, which does not only bring us into contact with the great Substitute, but teaches us to lean upon him with all the burden of our guilt. God made to rest upon the head of the Substitute all the offences of his covenant people, but each one of the chosen is brought personally to ratify this solemn covenant act, when by grace he is enabled by faith to lay his hand upon the head of the *"Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world."* Believer, do you remember that wonderful day when you first realized pardon through Jesus the sin-bearer? Can you not make glad confession, and join with the writer in saying, *"My soul recalls her day of deliverance with delight. Laden with guilt and full of fears, I saw my Saviour as my Substitute, and I laid my hand upon him; and now it is my unceasing joy to know that my sins are no longer imputed to me, but laid on him, and like the debts of the wounded traveller, Jesus, like the good Samaritan, has said of all my future sinfulness, Set that to my account.'"*

April 15, 2023 - Lamb who was Slain

All who dwell on earth will worship [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. (Revelation 13:8)

Salvation is secured for all who are written in the book of life. The reason that being written in the book of life secures our salvation is that the book is called "*the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.*" The names in this book are not saved on the basis of their deeds. They are saved on the basis of Christ's being slain.

The books, which record our deeds, contain enough evidence of our belonging to Christ that they function as a public confirmation of our faith and our union with Christ.

When I say that what is written in the books is a public confirmation of our faith and of union with Christ, I do not mean that the record will contain more good works than bad works. I mean that there will be recorded there the kind of life in Christ that shows the reality of faith — the reality of regeneration and union with Christ. That is how we enter each day as a Christian: confident that our condemnation is past (Romans 8:1), and that our name is in the book of life, and that the one who began a good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of Christ by the lamb who was slain.

April 16, 2023 - Common Ground

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Romans 1:18

As one of the most prominent "New Atheists," Richard Dawkins provided a kind of academic façade to the anti-religious and specifically anti-Christian movement. In more recent years, however, he has found himself on the same side as those he once opposed.

Recently on Piers Morgan's television show, Dawkins pushed back against trans activists, even calling them "bullies." Looking back on the time he was cancelled for simply asking to discuss why trans-racialism is bad but transgenderism is good, Dawkins observed that while race is literally a spectrum, science allows for only two sexes to our species.

Whatever our disagreements with atheists like Dawkins, and there are many, scientism and theism do share common ground. We both believe that truth about reality exists beyond our perceptions and is not changed by a prevailing cultural mood. At the same time, what Dawkins tends to forget is that he owes Christianity, a worldview he despises, for the intellectual framework for the science he so believes in which gives us common ground.

April 17, 2023 - Remember Jesus

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel. (2 Timothy 2:8)

Paul mentions two specific ways to remember Jesus: Remember him as risen from the dead. And remember him as the offspring of David. Why these two things about Jesus?

Because if he is risen from the dead he is alive and triumphant over death — including our death! *"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).*

The resurrection of Jesus was not a random resurrection. It was the resurrection of the son of David. "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David." Why does Paul say that?

Because every Jewish person knew what that meant. That meant that Jesus is the Messiah (John 7:42). And that meant that this resurrection was the resurrection of an everlasting King.

So, remember Jesus, the one you serve, and the one for whom you suffer. He is not just alive from the dead, but he is alive as a King who will reign forever — of his kingdom there will be no end. No matter what they do to you, you do not need to be afraid. You will live again. And you will reign with him, so remember Jesus.

April 18, 2023 - Love Your Enemies

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44)

Prayer for your enemies is one of the deepest forms of love, because it means that you have to really want that something good happen to them.

You might do nice things for your enemies without any genuine desire that things go well with them. But prayer for them is in the presence of God who knows your heart, and prayer is interceding with God on their behalf.

It may be for their conversion. It may be for their repentance. It may be that they would be awakened to the enmity in their hearts. It may be that they will be stopped in their downward spiral of sin, even if it takes disease or calamity to do it. But the prayer Jesus has in mind here is always for their good.

This is what Jesus did as he hung on the cross: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. (Luke 23:34) And it's what Stephen did as he was being stoned: Falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:60)*

Jesus is calling us not just to do good things for our enemy, like greeting them and helping supply their needs (Matthew 5:47); he is also calling us to desire their best, and to express those desires in prayers, even when the enemy is nowhere around. Our hearts should desire their salvation and desire their presence in heaven with us and desire their eternal happiness, this is what it means to love your enemies.

April 19, 2023 - Resist the Devil

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

The more real Satan appears in our day — the more obviously active — the more precious the victory of Christ will become to those who trust him.

The New Testament teaches that when Christ died and rose again, Satan was decisively defeated. A time of limited freedom is granted to him, but his power against God's people is broken and his destruction is sure.

"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8)

"[Christ] himself likewise partook of the same things [flesh and blood], that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil." (Hebrews 2:14)

"[God] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." (Colossians 2:15)

The decisive blow was struck at Calvary. And one day, when Satan's time of limited freedom is over, Revelation 20:10 says, *"The devil . . . [will be] thrown into the lake of fire . . . and will be tormented day and night forever and ever."*

Therefore, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you!" He has been defeated, and we have been given victory. Our task now is to live in that victory and make Satan know his defeat.

April 20, 2023 - Talk to God

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. (Psalm 23:4)

The form of the 23rd psalm is instructive. In Psalm 23:1–3 David refers to God as "he":

The Lord is my shepherd . . . he makes me lie down . . . he leads me . . . he restores my soul. Then in verses 4 and 5 David refers to God as "you":

I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me. You anoint my head with oil.

Then in verse 6 he switches back: I shall dwell in the house of the Lord.

The lesson we can learn from this form is that it is good not to talk very long about God without talking to God. Every Christian is at least an amateur theologian — that is, a person who tries to understand the character and ways of God and then put that into words. If we aren't little theologians, then we won't ever say anything to each other, or to God, about God, and will be of very little real help to each other's faith.

But what I have learned from David in Psalm 23 and other psalms is that I should interweave my theology with prayer. I should frequently interrupt my talking about God by talking to God. Not far behind the theological sentence, "God is generous," should come the prayerful sentence, "Thank you, God, for your generosity." On the heels of, "God is glorious," should come, "I adore your glory." That is how we talk to God.

April 21, 2023 - When to feel Shame

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. (Romans 6:20–21)

When a Christian's eyes are opened to the God-dishonoring evil of their former behavior, the Christian rightly feels ashamed. There is a proper place for looking back and feeling the twinge of pain that we once lived in a way that was so belittling to God. We are not to be paralyzed by dwelling on this, but a sensitive Christian's heart cannot think back on the follies of youth and not feel echoes of shame, even if we have settled it all with the Lord.

Well-placed shame can be very healthy and redemptive. Paul said to the Thessalonians, *"If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thessalonians 3:14)*. This means that shame is a proper and redemptive step in conversion, and even in a believer's repentance from a season of spiritual coldness and sin. Shame is not something to be avoided at all costs. There is a place for it in God's good dealings with his people.

We can conclude that the biblical criterion for misplaced shame and for well-placed shame is radically God-centered. The reason we should feel shame is disapproval for behavior that dishonors God. The reason we should not feel shame is behavior that honours God, even if people try to shame you for it.

April 22, 2023 - Truth and Love

Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. Ephesians 4:15

Since at least the mid-20th century, the Church in the west has been divided over whether it should be primarily about proclaiming truth or about serving others. More recently, the volume of this debate has significantly increased. The Lord's Supper and Jesus' "new" command remind us that this is a false dichotomy, an unnecessary choice to make. Truth and love need never be separated and should never be separated. On the same night when Jesus commanded us to remember how His broken body and shed blood rescues us from sin (that's the truth), He commanded us to demonstrate our new life by serving others (that's love).

We need not choose between truth and love. In fact, we must not choose. They always go together, because they are both grounded in the same Source, or specifically, the same Person. Jesus embodied truth and love, not only in his death, but also in his resurrection and everything else he does for his people. He is truth and He is love.

April 23, 2023 - I will build my Church

I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18

A recent study commissioned by The Wall Street Journal found that the percentage of those who self-report valuing things like "hard work," "community involvement," "patriotism," and "tolerance for others" has tanked in recent years. The only one value that showed a marked increase in the study was "money." Our changing values reflect a deeply changed worldview and are the root of the broader issues we face as a society, including the heightened political divisions, the growing number of deaths of despair, and the loss of fundamental freedoms.

It is to this cultural moment that God has called us. It is in this cultural moment that Christ has placed His Church to be salt and light. "The Church is God's plan A, and there is not a plan B." There is obviously a lot of work to be done. Let us get on board with plan A and help Jesus build His Church.

April 24, 2023 - Our Bodies

He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to [our] mortal bodies. Romans 8:11

Christians should immediately reject the ever-changing cultural standards of beauty that so often function as moral imperatives. We reject all cultural messages, whether implicit or explicit, that dehumanize those who are different to the norm. A Christian worldview unequivocally affirms that every human being, no matter their appearance, bears the image of God and therefore possesses an inherent and eternal dignity. The last several decades of Western culture, dominated by a consumerism that treats people as commodified means to an end, have been particularly dehumanizing in this regard. The unrealistic and unhealthy expectations that have been hoisted, especially on women, have caused great harm. Recent and more careful efforts in media and elsewhere to represent people with diverse physical characteristics have been important and helpful changes.

Humans are not souls who happen to have bodies. God formed humans out of the dust of the ground and breathed into them the breath of life. Humans became living souls. To be human is to be physical and spiritual. And, of course, Jesus Christ came to the world embodied, rose from the dead bodily, and will be

known in the age to come from the scars on His body. We need to take care of our Bodies that God has given us.

April 25, 2023 - Don't Be Like the Mule

Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you. (Psalm 32:9)

Picture God's people as a farmyard of all sorts of animals. God cares for his animals, he shows them where they need to go, and supplies a barn for their protection. But there is one beast on this animal farm that gives God an awful time, namely, the mule. He's stupid and he's stubborn and you can't tell which comes first — stubbornness or stupidity.

Now the way God likes to get his animals into the barn for their food and shelter is by teaching them that they all have a personal name and then calling them by name. *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go" (Psalm 32:8).*

But the mule will not respond to that sort of direction. He is without understanding. So God gets in his pick-up truck and goes out in the field, puts the bit and bridle in the mule's mouth, hitches it to the truck, and drags him stiff-legged and snorting all the way into the barn. That is not the way God wants his animals to come to him for blessing and protection.

One of these days it is going to be too late for that mule. He's going to get clobbered with hail and struck by lightning, and when he comes running, the barn door is going to be shut. Therefore, don't be like the mule.

April 26, 2023 - Sharing The Truth

You will know The Truth, and the Truth will set you Free. John 8:32

A recent report by Barna Research listed the top reasons people question Christianity. Among those who claim to be Christian, practicing or otherwise, the problem of human suffering (23%) topped the list, followed by hypocrisy of religious people (22%) and conflict in the world (19%). Among those who claimed no faith, religious hypocrisy was far and away the most cited response, identified by 42% as behind their doubt about Christian beliefs.

To be a member of the Church is to carry the mantle of both the worst sin and the finest heroism of the soul *… because the Church always looks exactly as it looked at the original crucifixion, God hung among thieves."* Until Christ's return, we will face accusations of hypocrisy.

The Barna study results are also cause for optimism. While half of Christians have experienced doubts in the past few years, there is also an unprecedented openness to questions within the general population. Seventy-four percent of adults say they *"want to grow spiritually."* Seventy-seven percent report believing in a higher power. Forty-four percent say that they are *"more open to God today than before the pandemic."* So don't stop sharing the truth.

April 27, 2023 - New Every Morning

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22–23)

God's mercies are new every morning because each day only has enough mercy in it for that day. God appoints every day's troubles and God appoints every day's mercies. In the life of his children, they are perfectly appointed. Jesus said, *"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34).* Every day has its own trouble. Every day has its own mercies. Each is new every morning.

But we often tend to despair when we think that we may have to bear tomorrow's load on today's resources. God wants us to know: We won't. Today's mercies are for today's troubles. Tomorrow's mercies are for tomorrow's troubles.

The manna in the wilderness was given one day at a time. There was no storing up. That is the way we must depend on God's mercy. You do not receive today the strength to bear tomorrow's burdens. You are given mercies today for today's troubles. Tomorrow the mercies will be new, they are new every morning.

April 28, 2023 - Perfect Peace

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Isaiah 26:3

Saint Augustine famously observed that the human heart is restless until it finds its rest in God. That applies not only to individuals but also to cultures and entire generations. Practically speaking, this "restlessness" can take many forms, including an unprecedented mental health crisis.

The recent and much talked about report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describes precisely that. As a CDC spokeswoman bluntly stated, "young people"—especially young women—"are in crisis." An article in The New York Times summarized, "Nearly three in five teenage girls felt persistent sadness in 2021 … and one in three girls seriously considered attempting suicide." Jonathan Haidt, author of The Coddling of the American Mind, painted an even starker picture: "We are now 11 years into the largest epidemic of adolescent mental illness ever recorded."

Age, sex, and politics are not the only predictors of trouble. Political scientist and pastor Ryan Burge suggests that religious commitment is another important factor. Those who rarely or never attend Christian services suffer worse mental health than those who attend regularly or weekly.

Controlling for economics and education, those under 25 are doing very badly when it comes to mental health. Those suffering the worst are young, female, politically left, and secular. For them, brokenness is, incredibly, the norm instead of perfect peace.

April 29, 2023 - Love God

This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. (1 John 5:3–4)

Notice: Loving God is not just keeping his commandments. It is having a kind of heart for God that means that commandment-keeping is not burdensome. That's what John says. But then he puts that truth in terms of new birth and faith, rather than love. He says, without a break, "For" — here's why God's commandments are not burdensome: "Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world." So, the new birth is what overcomes the worldly obstacles to keeping God's commandments without burdensomeness.

And finally he adds, "And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith." So, the new birth overcomes the worldly obstacles to burden-free commandment-keeping, because the new birth gives rise

to faith. So, the miracle of new birth creates faith, which embraces all that God is for us in Christ as supremely satisfying, which makes obedience to God more desirable than the temptations of the world. And that is what it means to love God.

April 30, 2023 - God Touched Them

Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went men of valor whose hearts God had touched. (1 Samuel 10:26)

Just think of what is being said in this verse. God touched them. Not a wife. Not a child. Not a parent. Not a counselor. But God. God touched them.

The One with infinite power in the universe. The One with infinite authority and infinite wisdom and infinite love and infinite goodness and infinite purity and infinite justice. That One touched their heart.

The touch of God is awesome not just because it is God who touches, but also because it is a touch. It is a real connection. That it involves the heart is awesome. That it involves God is awesome. And that it involves an actual touch is awesome.

The valiant men were not just spoken to. They were not just swayed by a divine influence. They were not just seen and known. God, with infinite condescension, touched their heart. God was that close. And they were not consumed. Let us know that God will touch his people and do good to them forever.