TikTok Devotional Series Transcript:

September 2023

September 1, 2023 - Did not love their Lives

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Revelation 12:11

More Christians died for their faith in the 20th century than the previous 19 combined, and the 21st century is shaping up to be at least as deadly, but likely more. According to Open Doors International's latest World Watch List, 312 million Christians face "extreme" or "very high" levels of persecution—1 in 5 in Africa; 2 in 5 in Asia.

Last year was the worst year on record for persecution, with 5,500 Christians killed for reasons related to their faith, more than 2,000 churches attacked, and over 4,500 Christians detained or imprisoned. For the most part, each year of the past decade has been worse than the previous year.

This persecution can fuel the growth of a Church whose Lord overcame the world and will ultimately grant rest from all persecution. Let us remain faithful to our Lord Jesus and not love our lives but look to Him in faith.

September 2, 2023 - Marriage Works

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him". Genesis 2:18

Recent research from political scientist Ryan Burge indicates that, at least in the United States, the Christian faith is found primarily among the educated and wealthy. Americans most likely to regularly attend church hold graduate degrees and have an average annual income of $60,000-$100,000. Does this mean Christianity is a "luxury religion?"

Not exactly. According to marriage experts John Van Epp and J.P. DeGance, "one's economic future is greatly impacted by the relationship choices one makes, specifically in the areas of marriage and parenting." So, for example, for people whose values include having children after marriage (and not before), the likeliness of being in the "middle- or top-income tier" brackets more than doubles despite their background.

This reinforces, again, that God's design of marriage and family is built into the created order and, when followed, leads to economic, social, and spiritual flourishing. Marriage works.

September 3, 2023 - Have Mercy on Me

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. (Psalm 51:1)

Three times: "Have mercy," "according to your steadfast love," and "according to your abundant mercy." This is what God had promised in Exodus 34:6–7: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty."

David knew that there were guilty who would not be forgiven and there were guilty who by some mysterious work of redemption would not be counted as guilty but would be forgiven. Psalm 51 is his way of laying hold on that mystery of mercy.

We know more of the mystery of this redemption than David did. We know Christ. But we lay hold of the mercy in the same way he did. The decisive thing he does is turn, helpless, to the mercy and love of God. Today that means turning, helpless, to Christ, whose blood secures all the mercy we need.

September 4, 2023 - The Grace of our God

We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:11–12)

Grace is not only God's disposition to do good for us when we don't deserve it — we call this "undeserved favour"; God's grace is also a power from God that acts in our lives and makes good things happen in us and for us — which we also don't deserve.

Paul says, By the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. So, grace is an active, present, transformative, obedience-enabling power.

Therefore, this grace, which moves in power from God to you at a point in time, is both past and future. It has already done something for you or in you and therefore is past and it is about to do something in you, both five seconds from now and five million years from now. This is the grace of our God.

September 5, 2023 - Thirst for God

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1–2)

What makes this so beautiful and so crucial for us is that he is not thirsting mainly for relief from his threatening circumstances. He is not thirsting mainly for escape from his enemies or for their destruction. It's not wrong to want relief, and to pray for it. It is sometimes right to pray for the defeat of enemies. But more important than any of that is God himself.

When we think and feel with God in the Psalms, this is the main result: We come to love God, and we want to see God and be with God and be satisfied in admiring and exulting in God. Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." And Paul said that when we are converted to Christ we see "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

May the Lord increase our hunger and our thirst to see the face of God and may he grant our desire, even today, through the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God for whom we thirst.

September 6, 2023 - Every Work of Faith

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power. (2 Thessalonians 1:11)

When Paul says that God fulfills our good resolves by his power through faith, he means that we defeat sin and we do righteousness by faith, by being satisfied with all that God promises to be for us in Christ in the next five minutes, five months, five decades, and into eternity.

Here are three examples of how this might look in your life:

1. If you set your heart to give sacrificially and generously, the power of God to fulfill this resolve will come to you as you trust his grace in the promise, "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).
2. If you set your heart to look at good things only, the power of God to fulfill this resolve will come to you as you trust his grace in the promise, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).
3. If you set your heart to speak out for Christ when the opportunity comes, the power of God to fulfill this resolve will come to you as you trust his grace in the promise, "Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour" (Matthew 10:19).

May God increase our daily faith in the precious promises of God — promises of his inexhaustible, blood-bought, Christ-exalting grace.

September 7, 2023 - The Cure for Loneliness

God sets the lonely in families. Psalm 68:6

Though the state cannot solve all problems, it can incentivize and disincentivize certain behaviours. For example, many social welfare programs disincentivize marriage. No-fault divorce policies disincentivize long-lasting marriages. Legalized abortion incentivizes (or at least de-stigmatizes) risky sexual behaviour. Calling same-sex relationships legal "marriage" reduces marriage from being the basic unit of social society and the source of healthy population growth into little more than "two people who like each other. . . at least for now."

The reality is that healthy, intact families are the single most effective tool to combat loneliness. Yet with every one of these policies, the government has weakened family stability. Any proposed legislation to "fight loneliness" that doesn't mention the cancer of fatherlessness just isn't serious.

Loneliness is a public crisis because people are lonely. People are lonely because their hearts were made for relationships with others and with God. The answer is to get married, have children, go to church, and honour their father and mother.

September 8, 2023 - The Lord has put away Your Sin

Nathan the prophet comes to David after his adultery and murder and says, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die." (2 Samuel 12:13–14)

This is outrageous. Uriah is dead. Bathsheba is raped. The baby will die. And Nathan says, "The Lord has put away your sin." Just like that? David committed adultery. He ordered murder. He lied. He "despised the word of the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:9). He scorned God. And the Lord simply "put away [his] sin"?! What kind of a righteous Judge is God? You don't just pass over rape and murder and lying. Righteous judges don't do that.

This was one of Paul's greatest theological problems, God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

In other words, the outrage that we feel when God seems to simply pass over David's sin would be good outrage if God were simply sweeping David's sin under the rug. He is not. God sees, from the time of David, down the centuries to the death of his Son, Jesus Christ, who would die in David's place, so that David's faith in God's mercy and God's future redeeming work unites David with Christ, God justly passes over David's sin for Christ's sake.

September 9, 2023 - Enjoy God Now and Forever

Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. (1 Peter 3:18)

The greatest good of the good news — the gospel — is the enjoyment of fellowship with God himself. This is made explicit in this verse and that's why Jesus died.

All the other gifts of the gospel exist to make this one possible.

We are forgiven so that our guilt does not keep us away from God.

We are justified so that our condemnation does not keep us away from God.

God is propitiated so that his wrath doesn't stand between us and God as our Father.

We are given eternal life now, with new bodies in the resurrection, so that we have the capacities for being with God forever and enjoying God to the fullest.

Test your heart. Why do you want forgiveness? Why do you want to be justified? Why do you want the wrath of God to be propitiated? Why do you want eternal life? Is the decisive answer, "Because I want to enjoy God now and forever"?

September 10, 2023 - Teens, Depression, and Friends

I do not call you servants any longer…but I have called you friends. John 15:15

The number of teens experiencing symptoms of depression are higher than ever. According to research from psychologist Jean Twenge, 49.5% of teens report that they feel they "can't do anything right," 44.2% report that they feel their "life is not useful," and 48.9% say they "do not enjoy life." Each of these findings is roughly double what they were in 2009.

These stats are the latest in a growing body of research that demonstrates a significant link between teens' mental health and their usage of new media. The combination of smartphones, internet, and social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter is dramatically harmful especially when contrasted with those who spend time participating in in-person activities like sports and Christian services and activities.

For families who hope to help their teens avoid or overcome depression, the best starting place is to restrict usage of smartphones and social media. All families should proactively cultivate healthy disciplines with devices, as well as habits and choices that promote real-time, in-person relationships with Family, Friends and especially Jesus.

September 11, 2023 - Look to God and Live - This devotion was removed by TikTok

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. Isaiah 45:22

Recently on NPR, reporter Rachel Martin interviewed Dr. Lisa Miller, Professor of Clinical Psychology at Columbia University, about her controversial claim that spirituality is good for mental health.

According to Miller, those who say spirituality is "very important" show an 80% decreased risk for addiction to drugs and alcohol and are 82% less likely to die by suicide. "The more high risk we are," Miller said, "the more that there's stress in our lives, … the greater the impact of spirituality as a source of resilience."

"Here is published, peer reviewed science for sceptical audiences," the interviewer concluded, which runs contrary to what we so often hear. Apparently turning our focus outward and even upward is better for us than just "looking inside" or "following our hearts." This is just what Christianity does. That makes sense if we are indeed creatures and not just self-creations, made for relationship with the One who gave us life in the first place as we look to God and live.

September 12, 2023 - Joy and Gladness

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:8, 12)

Why isn't David crying out for sexual restraint? Why isn't he praying for men to hold him accountable? Why isn't he praying for protected eyes and sex-free thoughts? In this psalm of confession and repentance after essentially raping Bathsheba, you would expect David to ask for something like that. The reason is that he knows that sexual sin is a symptom, not the disease.

People give way to sexual sin because they don't have fullness of joy and gladness in Christ. Their spirits are not steadfast and firm and established. They waver. They are enticed, and they give way because God does not have the supreme place in their feelings and thoughts that he should.

David knew this about himself. It's true about us too. David is showing us, by the way he prays, what the real need is for those who sin sexually: God! Joy in God. This is profound wisdom for us. Let us hear joy and gladness as God liberates us by the power of his Holy Spirit working in us.

September 13, 2023 - Our Culture

Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:30

Our culture is brimming with slogans that promise peace, fulfillment, freedom, empowerment, and hope. These messages have become such an integral component of our consciousness that many people don't even think to question them. … The problem? They are lies.

Today you may write and maybe tomorrow you will wash feet, clean toilets, or start a food blog. God knows. He is trustworthy. Your identity is grounded in him. True biblical authenticity is glorifying Christ with whatever gifts and talents he has given you. This is your calling whether you find yourself in a palace or in a prison.

Christian, your truth doesn't exist. Your truth won't bring hope or save anyone. ... The Cross is the answer to every lie that tells you, you can find everything you need inside yourself. … The Cross is not just a symbol of salvation. It's the place of rest and is just what our culture needs.

September 14, 2023 -What should survive?

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1

According to a growing number of scientists, Darwinian evolution is "absurdly crude and misleading." For one thing, Darwinian evolution assumes much of what it needs to be explained. For instance, consider the origin of light-sensitive cells that rearranged to become the first eye, or the blood vessels that became the first placenta. How did these things originate?

The habit of fixing upon a dogma and calling it "settled science" is just bad science that stunts our understanding of the world. It is a kind of idolatry that places "science" in the seat of God, appoints certain scientists as priests capable of giving answers no fallible human can offer, and feigns certainty where real questions remain. The great irony is that this image of scientist-as-infallible-priest makes them seem like the caricature of medieval monks charging their hero Galileo with heresy for his dissent from the consensus.

As challenges to Darwin mount, we should be able to articulate why "settled science" makes such a poor god, and we should encourage the science and the scientists challenging this old theory-turned-dogma and holding it to its own standards. After all, if Darwinian evolution is as unfit as it now seems, it shouldn't survive.

September 15, 2023 - Bless the Lord

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! (Psalm 103:1)

The psalm begins and ends with the psalmist preaching to his soul to bless the Lord and preaching to the angels and the hosts of heaven and the works of God's hands that they should do the same.

Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!
Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will!
Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul!
(Psalm 103:20–22)

The psalm is overwhelmingly focused on blessing the Lord. What does it mean to bless the Lord? It means to speak well of his greatness and goodness — and really mean it from the depths of your soul. What is David doing in the first and last verses of this psalm? He is saying that authentic speaking about God's goodness and greatness must come from the soul.

Blessing God with the mouth without the soul would be hypocrisy. Jesus said, "This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8). David knows that danger, and he is preaching to himself. He is telling his soul not to let this happen. He is saying, Come, soul, look at the greatness and goodness of God. Join my mouth and let us bless the Lord with our whole being.

September 16, 2023 - Richly Rewarded

"Whoever desires to love life and see good days . . . let him turn away from evil and do good." (1 Peter 3:10–11)

There is only one basic reason why we disobey the commands of Jesus: it's because we don't have heartfelt confidence that obeying will bring more blessing than disobeying. We do not hope fully in God's promise. What did he promise?

Peter, following Jesus, is not ashamed to motivate obedience to hard commands — like not returning evil for evil — with the promise of greater joy. “Bless those who revile you . . . that you may obtain a blessing!” Do you want to enjoy everlasting life? Turn away from evil! Joy for all eternity awaits you!

You will always be better off to obey than to disobey Jesus, even if that obedience costs you your life. Jesus said, Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time . . . with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29–30)

The only way to have the power to follow Christ in the costly way of love is to be filled with hope, with strong confidence that, if we lose our life doing his will, we will find it again and be richly rewarded forever.

September 17, 2023 - Judge Righteous Judgement

Judge not according to the appearance but judge righteous judgment. John 7:24

Over the last 60 years, studies have confirmed that western countries have become more tolerant of alternative sexual lifestyles, non-traditional beliefs about God, and certain political identifications, such as Communism. According to the most recent State of Theology report from Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research, some 56% of self-described evangelicals believe that “God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.” Upon closer examination, this shift has far more to do with losing convictions in these areas than about gaining tolerance.

Christians should call out bad behaviour and do similarly difficult but right things, we should reveal the consequences of relativism when lived in the real world. What begins as a desire to not judge others turns into the narcissistic demand that no one, under any circumstances, judges us. But that also renders healing and forgiveness impossible. After all, with no way to say that we’ve been wronged, neither is there means or reason to forgive those who harm us. Any culture that rejects objective morality lacks any way to counter evil and needs to learn to judge with righteous judgement.

September 18, 2023 - God Raised Him

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

What does it mean to “believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead”? Satan believes that God raised Jesus from the dead. He saw it happen. To answer this question, we need to ponder what the resurrection means for God’s people. The meaning of the resurrection is that God is for us. He aims to overcome all our sense of abandonment and alienation.

The resurrection of Jesus is God’s declaration to Israel and to the world that we cannot work our way to glory, but that he intends to do the impossible to get us there. The resurrection is the promise of God that all who trust Jesus will be the beneficiaries of God’s power to lead us in paths of righteousness and through the valley of death.

Therefore, believing in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead is much more than accepting a fact. It means being confident that God is for you, that he is transforming your life, and that he will save you for eternal joy.

Believing in the resurrection means trusting in all the promises of life and hope and righteousness for which it stands. It means being so confident of God’s power and love that no fear of worldly loss or greed for

worldly gain will lure us to disobey his will. That's the difference between Satan and the saints. May God cause us to rest in knowing that God raised his Son.

September 19, 2023 - What is Obviously True

Men suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. Romans 1:18

Recently, ADF International's Lois McLatchie Miller tweeted out her "radical takes" for 2023: "1. Biological men shouldn't compete in women's sports. 2. Silent prayer is not a crime. 3. Ending the lives of babies in the womb is wrong."

She then offered this conclusion: "Radicals of the past got to say things that were groundbreaking. We're stuck with defending the obvious." She's right. We ought not underestimate, at least if we take seriously Paul's description from the first chapter of Romans, how prone fallen humans are to deny what is obviously true and embrace what is obviously false. That's why, in this cultural moment, stating the obvious is so "radical."

Still, reality eventually wins. For example, many Western nations are backing away from trans-extremism. Tragically, until they do, many lives will be ruined. Ideas have consequences; bad ideas have victims. Thus "radical" Christians must be ready to combat bad ideas and care for their victims and state what is obviously true.

September 20, 2023 - The Risen Christ

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18–20)

The last chapter of Matthew is a window that opens onto the sunrise glory of the risen Christ. Through it you can see at least three massive peaks in the mountain range of Christ's character: the peak of his power; the peak of his kindness; and the peak of his purposefulness.

All authority is his — the right and the power to do his will and he uses this power to pursue his unwavering purpose to make disciples from all the nations and in the process, he is personally kind to us, promising to be with us to the end. We all know in our hearts that if the risen Christ is going to satisfy our desire to admire greatness, that is the way he must be. Great in power, great in kindness, great in purposefulness.

What we long to see and know is a Person whose power is unlimited, whose kindness is tender, and whose purpose is single and unflinching. We must have the real thing. We must see the Original of all power and kindness and purposefulness. We must see and worship the risen Christ.

September 21, 2023 - Our Bodies Do Matter

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:44

Contrary to Gnosticism, Christianity does not teach that reality is divided between physical and spiritual. Christianity divides reality between Creator and creation. Think of the creation of Adam. God forms man out of the dust of the ground—that's physical—breathes into him the breath of life—that's spiritual. And man

becomes a living soul. We don't have souls: We are souls. To be a human soul is to be embodied. Our bodies are essential, not incidental to our humanness.

For many of the ancient pagans, the most scandalous of Christian teachings was the resurrection of the body. Just as God raised Jesus' body from the dead, He will someday raise our bodies, too. When Jesus says in John 6 that He will raise believers "up on the last day," He's talking about our bodies. How our glorified, resurrected bodies will resemble our current bodies is a mystery. But we do know the disciples recognized Jesus after the resurrection because of His body, including the wounds of His crucifixion. As Paul says, our bodies will be sown as perishable, but raised imperishable.

If Christ came in the likeness of men, if He promised to redeem humanity, and if our humanity includes the body, then our bodies really do matter.

September 22, 2023 - Blessed is the Nation

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD. Psalm 33:12

Participation in a Christian community generally correlates with better health outcomes and longer life, higher financial generosity, and more stable families—all of which are desperately needed in a nation with rising rates of loneliness, mental illness, and alcohol and drug dependency.

Christian faith is an irreplaceable force for good in society. Its decline will leave societies less healthy, less charitable, less connected, and less capable of dealing with major social ills. Evidence suggests it already has.

At the same time, it is essential to remember that these benefits are byproducts of the Christan faith, not the main point. Anyone who hopes to halt and reverse church decline must remember what that the main point is.

Low expectations of those in the pews and widely embraced individualist assumptions have led to fewer and fewer people finding time for church. If Christianity is merely a kind of hobby or weekly pep talk designed to enhance psychological wellbeing or career success, then we can find better stuff on YouTube or Spotify.

Everything else in our society directs our gaze inward, to ourselves, our feelings, our priorities, and our problems—as if every individual is the centre of his or her own universe. Why make time for this type of church every week?

For 2,000 years, the knowledge and fear of a transcendent God, not helpful social programs, has built and filled churches. If the magnitude of that claim is forgotten or even obscured, our churches will indeed become sepulchres—but not for God, who lives and reigns forever and ever. They will become memorials of the squandered heritage of a once deeply, but no longer, Christian blessed nation.

September 23, 2023 - Your Joy may be Full

"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11)

God is absolutely sovereign. "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Psalm 115:3). He is not frustrated. He rejoices in all his works when he contemplates them as colours of the magnificent mosaic of redemptive history. He is an unshakably happy God.

His happiness is foundationally the delight he has in himself. Before creation, he rejoiced in the image of his glory in the person of his Son — his beloved Son in whom he was well pleased (Matthew 3:17). Then the joy of God "went public" in the works of creation and redemption.

These works delight the heart of God because they reflect his glory. The heavens are telling the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). "May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works" (Psalm 104:31). He does everything he does to preserve and display that glory, for in this his soul rejoices.

All the works of God culminate in the praises of his redeemed people. "Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!" (Psalm 150:2). But our praise is not only God's delight, as an echo of his excellence; it is also the apex of our joy. Praise is the consummation of the joy we have in seeing and savouring the greatness of God. God's pursuit of praise from us and our pursuit of pleasure in him are the same pursuit. This is the great outcome of the gospel of the glory of the grace of God in Christ that our joy may be full.

September 24, 2023 - Our Father's World

For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. 1 John 2:16

What can and should continue to encourage us is that reality will always strike back. Dangerous ideas, even when mandated by cultural gatekeepers, cannot change reality. When Christians and other likeminded people stand up against dangerous ideas, we're not pleading for our own narrow, partisan claims. We're standing for the reality of the world as it truly is. We're standing for science and fact, for basic biology and common sense. No matter the folly of human pretensions against reality, this is still our Father's world. Its boundaries can only be pushed so far before there are disastrous consequences.

September 25, 2023 - All Things were created by Him

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:15-17

A fundamental problem–the one at the root of the many identity crises infecting our cultural moment–is that so many young people have absorbed a way of thinking about themselves and reality best identified as "expressive individualism." For years, they've heard that the world is whatever they decide and make of it, that their bodies are plastic and do not govern who or what they are, and that what is most true about themselves and the world is how they feel on the inside.

An overwhelming identity crisis among young people is also a clear indicator of what the Church is being called to in this time and this place. Testifying to the work of Christ in the world, which is always the calling of the Christ-follower, must include testifying to the work of Christ in creation. John 1 and Colossians 1 are clear: Christ was present and at work in the creation chapter of God's story. Proclaiming the Good News today must involve pointing to God's good design of human beings, how He created them in His image. That must include theological instruction about the human body, especially in the wake of a dramatic increase in depression and anxiety among teens and of a growing number of "detransitioners" dealing with regret and facing the long-term harm of our culture's worst ideas.

September 26, 2023 - Let the Peoples Praise You

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! (Psalm 67:3, 5)

Why does God demand we must praise God?

C.S. Lewis says:

Just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: “Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?”

The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about. My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can’t help doing, about everything else we value.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. Let us, God’s people, praise Him and encourage others to do likewise.

September 27, 2023 - All One in Christ

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28

The most well-known line of Martin Luther King’s speech is this one: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.”

That vision has largely been realized, but its greatest threat today is a set of ideas that purport to advance racial justice but instead oppose it. Critical Race Theory and the critical theory mood that infects so many areas of our culture, especially education and media, are all about issuing judgments about the character of entire groups of people based solely upon the colour of skin.

Only the Christian vision of the human person can ground an understanding of human rights, universal human dignity, and value that extends to everyone, let us rejoice that we are all one in Christ.

September 28, 2023 - Glorified in His Saints

When he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thessalonians 1:10)

Some people stumble over the teaching that God exalts his own glory and seeks to be praised by his people because the Bible teaches us not to be like that. For example, the Bible says that love “does not seek its own” (1 Corinthians 13:5, NASB).

How can God be loving and yet be utterly devoted to “seeking his own” glory and praise and joy? How can God be for us if he is so utterly for himself? God is unique as an all-glorious, totally self-sufficient Being, he must be for himself if he is to be for us. The rules of humility that belong to a creature cannot apply in the same way to its Creator.

If God should turn away from himself as the Source of infinite joy, he would cease to be God. He would deny the infinite worth of his own glory. He would imply that there is something more valuable outside himself.

We must come to see that God is love precisely because he relentlessly pursues the praises of his name in the hearts of his people. Our praise for his greatness is the capstone of our joy and his greatness, as God is glorified in His Saints.

September 29, 2023 - They Became Fools

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Romans 1:22–23)

It would be a great folly and a great tragedy if a man loved his wedding ring more than he loved his bride. But that is what this passage says has happened. Human beings have fallen in love with the echo of God's excellence in creation, and lost the ability to hear the incomparable, original shout of love and power and glory.

The message of creation is this: There is a great God of glory and power and generosity behind all this awesome universe; you belong to him because he made you. He is patient with you in sustaining your rebellious life. Turn and bank your hope on him and delight yourself in him, not merely his handiwork.

According to Psalm 19:1–2, day pours forth the "speech" of that message to all who will listen in the day, speaking with blindingly bright sun and blue sky and clouds and untold shapes and colours and beautiful designs of all things visible. Night pours forth the "knowledge" of the same message to all who will listen at night, speaking with great dark voids and summer moons and countless stars and strange sounds and cool breezes and northern lights.

Day and night are saying one thing: God is glorious! Turn away from the creation as your supreme satisfaction and delight yourself in the Lord of glory and don't become a fool.

September 30, 2023 - Christ Loved the Church

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. (Ephesians 5:25–26)

If you only hope for unconditional love from God, your hope is great, but too small. Unconditional love from God is not the sweetest experience of his love. The sweetest experience is when his love says, "I have made you so much like my Son that I delight to see you and be with you. You are a pleasure to me because you are so radiant with my glory."

This sweetest experience is conditional on our transformation into the kind of people whose emotions and choices and actions please God. Unconditional love is the source and foundation of the human transformation that makes the sweetness of conditional love possible. If God did not love us unconditionally, he would not penetrate our unattractive lives, bring us to faith, unite us to Christ, give us his Spirit, and make us progressively like Jesus.

But when he unconditionally chooses us, and sends Christ to die for us, and regenerates us, he puts in motion an unstoppable process of transformation that makes us glorious. He gives us a splendour to match his favourite kind: his own. But the apex of that enjoyment is that we not only see his glory, but also reflect it, which was purchased by Christ for us, as he loved the Church.