

**In life it's important to know what to hang onto and what we can trust. I read a story a while back that illustrates this very well...**

**Inside every airplane are instruments that are critical to flying the aircraft. The instruments are designed to give a true reading of how the aircraft is flying, even if a pilot's mind may tell him differently. On a clear, sunny day a pilot may not need some of these instruments, but at night or in poor visibility, these instruments become vital to his survival. Many planes have crashed because the pilot became disoriented and failed to trust his instruments. Lt. Col. Jeff Patton flew as an F-15 fighter pilot in Desert Storm. On the first night of the war, his mission was to escort a large formation of planes in bombing a chemical weapons plant in northern Iraq. The date for Desert Storm was chosen because the absence of moonlight, and the high clouds helped keep the attacking allied fighters from being detected by enemy defenses. Flying in total darkness, the pilots became completely dependent upon their instruments.**

**Shortly after crossing into Iraq, Col. Patton's jet was "locked on" to by an Iraqi surface-to-air missile radar. He violently maneuvered his aircraft to break the radar's lock on him. His maneuver successfully broke the radar lock, but it created a new problem. Those radical movements in the dark had totally disoriented him. His mind was telling him his plane was in a climbing right turn, but when he checked his instruments, they indicated he was in a 60 degree dive towards the ground! He was sure he was in a climb instead of a dive, and his mind was screaming at him to lower the nose of his F-15 to halt the climb. While his mind commanded him to correct the plane in one direction, his instruments instructed him to do just the opposite. Because he was flying in total darkness, he had to decide quickly whether to trust his mind or his instruments. His life depended on making the correct choice. Even though it took everything within him to overcome what his mind was telling him, he decided to trust his instruments. He rolled his wings level and pulled his F-15 upward, which drew seven times**

**the force of gravity, pulling the aircraft out of its dive. It only took a few moments to realize he had made the right decision. If he had lowered the nose of his jet like his mind had been telling him, he would have crashed the plane.**

**Trusting his instruments saved his life!**

**Every Sunday we talk about God's word and all of the benefits it brings to our life. I make it a point to always be preaching God's word and trying to make it relevant to your lives and situations to strengthen you, to help you survive and thrive in this world, and most importantly to help you grow in God. If there ever comes a time when I stop preaching the Word of God and start preaching the ear candy that so many churches are serving up and so many congregations eagerly accept, I would encourage you to be looking for a new pastor immediately. That being said, today I want to continue with looking at the importance of God's word in our lives, and of trusting and holding on to that word.**

**Please stand with me as we read Philippians 2: 14-16 (Read)**

**There are many people and things in this world that try to lead us away from the truth of God's word or to twist that word to their advantage. A while back, I watched a video clip that a friend sent me. It was of a pastor of a megachurch with thousands of members and tens of thousands of online followers. This pastor was saying that as Christians we all have the Holy Spirit in us. If he stopped there, he would have been preaching truth. But he went on to say that, because the Holy Spirit is fully God and we have the Holy Spirit in us, we are fully God. That every Christian is God in the flesh. Along with being a blasphemous lie straight from the devil, this is outright stupidity! It would be like me saying because I have a splinter in my finger, I'm a pine tree. But the sad part is that, as I said, this man has thousands of people who are listening to him and are placing higher value on his twisted interpretation of God's word than they do on God's word.**

**I'm going to step on some thin ice here, and probably a few toes in the process. Something that has concerned me a lot over the past few years is the phenomenon of "The Chosen". Don't get me wrong, I think that The Chosen has a lot of value if handled properly. It's good entertainment, and it does bring Bible stories alive for a lot of people. Where it gets a little crossways with me is how often I have had people both men and women, and both inside and outside of this church, start telling me about something "in the Bible" and I've had to correct them that, "no... that's not in the Bible, it's in The Chosen". Here at Restoration, the women do a Bible study on The Chosen, and from everything I've heard they are doing it properly – watching an episode one week and then the next using both the "The Chosen" Bible study and the Bible to compare the story in line with God's true word. Not being a woman, I obviously haven't been involved in that Bible study here at church, but I have no reason to doubt that what I'm told is true. On the other hand, I've talked to people from other churches who do the study**

**with just the study guide and never even crack the Bible.**

**The nagging concern that I have about that is that the person who writes the Bible study, Amanda Jenkins, is also the lead creator of The Chosen's additional content. It just has the feel of putting the fox in charge of the henhouse if the Bible isn't used as the final authority to consistently and thoroughly check the other content. Given what I've been told, my concern level about the study in this church is very low, but seeing how some other churches have slipped into it, I hope, pray, and trust that our women are wise enough and grounded enough to avoid that trap. Way too many people attend Bible studies where they never crack a Bible, and when that happens you are really studying someone's interpretation of the word, not the word itself.**

**Another related concern I have is that I know of people who are so engaged and enthralled by the TV series that they have pretty much elevated it to being on the same level as the Bible. Much like what people have done with those megachurch pastors I mentioned earlier, they have put The**

**Chosen in place of the Bible. They sit around with their Chosen coffee mugs and quote chapter and verse of the latest episode. Folks, whenever anything takes the place of God on the throne of your life, that thing is by definition an idol... and there are way too many people in the world who are idolizing The Chosen. Again, I trust and pray that this never becomes the case of our women who do that study... But ladies, I love you too much to not at least point out the warning sign beside the minefield before turning on the music and inviting you to a dance near (or in) it. And that warning goes for men too... You can get led down the primrose path whether you're part of a Bible study or not.**

**All of that being said, today I want to motivate you, encourage you, persuade you, and lead you to give yourself to the word of God. I mean something more than a few-minute snatch at it every few days, or even a few minutes every day. I mean really give yourself to it every day.**

**Very few people that I have met are satisfied with the spiritual power and consistency and fruitfulness of their life... I know that I'm not. I don't consider anything that I'm saying today as a cure-all remedy to that spiritual weakness. God is sovereign. He changes times and seasons. And that includes spiritual times and seasons—in cultures and in families and in individual lives.**

**But one thing I know: There is a spiritual diet that no Christian can be strong and healthy and fruitful without. And that is a diet of the word of God.**

**Hear me carefully. I am making no promises that reading or memorizing the Bible will automatically make your life strong and healthy and fruitful. The Pharisees read and memorized the Scriptures more than any of us probably ever will. And most them, Jesus said, were cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus called them whitewashed tombs, looking good on the outside, but on the inside full of death and decay. Just**

**reading and memorizing the Bible and filling your mind with it is useless and pointless unless you're also filling your heart with it. Letting God's word go from your mind into your heart, where it can and will change your life. It may start as a drip or a trickle and turn to a flood, but it needs to be flowing... mind to heart. Now the flip side of that is the importance of putting God's word into your mind, because if it's not in your mind it will never flow to your heart. In this world there is always something vying for your time and attention, and whatever it is that you're putting into your mind is what will eventually be what fills your heart, whether it be the television, the latest video games, hobbies, drugs, alcohol, pornography... whatever goes in your eyes and ears and mouths is what's eventually going to land in your hearts.**

**So, reading God's word is not a guaranteed technique for power, but not reading it is a guaranteed technique for failure in all the areas that really count. The Spirit blows where and when he wills. I've known dry and fruitless**

**seasons in reading the Bible. Not in neglecting the Bible, but in *reading* the Bible. I am not God, and while the Bible is God's word, it's not God. God is God. And we do well not to think we can manipulate him by how we handle and manipulate his words.**

**There is a spiritual receptivity that only God can give. Why else would Paul pray in Ephesians 1:18 that "the eyes of your hearts be enlightened," so that we could know the glory of what the word says? Paul is praying. He is praying to God. The Bible is not God. The Bible is the infinitely precious and infallible word of God. But if the living God doesn't open our hearts to his word, we can read it a hundred hours a week and never truly see the glory of what it says or the glory of the one who gave it. If we're not going to accept God's word as God's word, if we're not going to allow the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth of God's word to our minds and hearts, if we're not going to allow God's word to change us in the ways he wants us to change.... Well, we may as well be**

**reading a cookbook, or comic book, or the 6,871 pages of the U.S. tax code!**

**Paul prays that we would see what is in the word not only with our physical eyes, but with the eyes of our hearts.**

**There's a link between prayer and the word of God. If God does not act to overcome our spiritual blindness and deafness and numbness, then like the pharisees - seeing we will not see, and hearing we will not hear, and reading we will not comprehend.**

**So, I am not giving you a guaranteed regimen or device or scheme or trick for spiritual power and health and fruitfulness. Bible reading isn't magic. As I said earlier, I don't know if reading the Bible and meditating and memorizing will give you power and health and fruitfulness.**

**What I can guarantee is that without it you starve spiritually and miss every blessing that God means for you to have.**

**So here I am, longing, praying, pleading that you give yourself to the word of God.**

**If we look again at our reading for the day, we can see two phrases and notice their connection. The end of Verse 15 and beginning of verse 16 says, “you shine like stars in the world, by holding firm to the word of life (or in many translations “holding fast the word of life).” Just like it was in Paul’s day, our culture is crooked and perverse in many ways. While I’m not sure that we’ve come up with any new perversions, we’ve certainly made access to them faster, easier, and in many cases more socially acceptable. And Paul says that Christians, whose citizenship is in heaven, shine in this dark world like stars in the night sky. In Matthew 5:14, Jesus says that you are the light of the world. Now Paul says that Christians shine like stars in a crooked and perverse generation. How? How do we take off the darkness of our sin—our selfishness and pride and fear and lust and bitterness so that we can shine in the darkness of this world? Paul answers that we shine like stars in the world by holding fast to the word of life.**

**What is translated here as “holding fast” is an interesting term that can be translated in several ways. In 1 Timothy 4:16, it’s translated, “*Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.*” In Acts 3:5, it’s translated, “*He fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.*” In Acts 19:22, it’s translated, “Paul himself *stayed* (held his place) in Asia for a while.”**

**So, the idea being presented is holding fast with your attention or physically. Holding your gaze, or holding your position. So now back to Philippians 2:15: “you shine like stars in the world, by holding firm to the word of life.”**

**Holding your gaze on the word of life. Holding your position with the word of life. Not leaving the word of life. Staying with it, fixing your mind on it, and giving yourself to it.**

**Again, the way you shine as lights in a dark culture is by holding fast to the word. Hold your gaze on it. Hold your position in it. Stay with it. Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”. He**

**was saying, “We’re going nowhere away from your word. We’re staying with you and your words. We’re holding our position here. We’re holding our attention on your word. This is life.” You can have the brightest light in the world, but if you don’t plug it in to the power source it’s useless.**

**Life and power and health and fruitfulness are provided by God through his word. This is the way he has decided to do it. If we stay away from the word, the light will grow dim. The word is the fuel of our lamps. You shine, holding fast the word.**

**Don’t starve the wick of your lamp by not soaking it in the kerosene of the word. Keep your wick in the word. Hold it fast. Give yourself to it. Hold it in your mind and in your heart. This is the only way to shine. I don’t promise you that you will shine as bright as you may want to just by reading the Bible and storing it up in your heart. But I do promise you that if you don’t, you won’t. So, whether you think of the word of God as *fuel*, without which your lamp can’t shine, or**

**as *food*, without which your soul can't live, the point is the same: If we don't soak in the fuel and eat the food, our light dims and our soul weakens.**

**There are many reasons to hold fast to God's word. Here are just a few:**

**Hold fast to it for the sake of faith. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17).**

**Hold fast to it for the sake of your joy. "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).**

**Hold fast to it for the sake of your freedom. "If you abide in my word . . . you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32).**

**Hold fast to it for the sake of your holiness. "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).**

**Hold fast to it for the sake of the Holy Spirit. “Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by *hearing with faith*” (Galatians 3:5)?**

**Hold fast to it for the sake of life. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).**

**Hold fast to it for the sake of strength and stability and fruitfulness. Your delight will be “in the law of the Lord, and on his law you will meditate day and night. You will be like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that you do you will prosper” (Psalms 1:2–3).**

**I’ve spent considerable time today talking about this word of God, but I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention another aspect of God’s word. You see, when I read this word it tells me that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” And a little later it tells me that,**

**“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” And that this Word in flesh, Jesus Christ, lived a perfect life, died on a cross for my sins and for yours, rose from the dead and lives in heaven where he’s preparing a place for all who believe in him to live with him for all eternity.**

**God has brought you here today to give you an invitation. He says, “I have an invitation for you. I have a gift for you. I give you my very word, both in writing and in flesh. It give it to you. Take it and hold fast to it. It is your life. Your light. Receive it and give yourself to it.”**

**Today there may be some here that don’t know Christ as their Lord and savior. Or you may have lost your grip and not be holding tight to him and to his word. As we sing our final song today, the altar is open if there is business you need to take care of with God... Let’s pray.**