

Do you know anyone who is gifted at math?

Some of you have probably done the math and figured out that we're on the sixth chapter out of thirty-one, which means we have twenty-five to go!

But before anyone starts thinking "wow, this is going to take a while" I want to say a few words about why we are reading the whole Bible.

As Christians, we believe God speaks to us through the Bible.

and not just certain books of the Bible, but in every book.

And as Christians, we want to become Biblically fluent, not just Biblically literate.

Being literate implies a person knows their Bible. They can quote chapter and verse. They might even do well at the Bible version of Trivial Pursuit. But that's not why we're doing this. We aren't doing this to puff ourselves up with Bible knowledge.

We are doing this to become fluent, just like when you learn to speak a language.

Why do people want to become fluent in a language?

It's so that they can understand it, right? And speak it, and use it to make sense of life.

And that's why we're becoming fluent in the Bible.

We want to be able to speak in ways that are true.

And when we learn the stories of the Bible, we learn to speak what is true.

We want to grow in our ability to see the world through God's eyes and make sense of life through God's eyes.

As we read the Bible and grow in faith, we begin to see more and more what God is doing in our lives. Reading one book of the Bible will help, but reading the whole story will help even more.

God wants us to remember His stories from Genesis to Revelation because when we remember God's stories we will remember who God is God's identity - God's character - God's promises and God's purpose for our lives.

Today is Reformation Day and it's good to remember, that in Martin Luther's day, people didn't read the Bible. In fact they didn't even have copies of it in their own language and they didn't have Bibles in their homes.

And people in those days, were getting a distorted view of God.

And many like Martin Luther, were terrified by the view of God they heard in church.

But then Martin Luther because he had been trained to read in Hebrew and Greek, opened his Bible. And studied the stories in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And he rediscovered what had been there the whole time, that the Bible is the cradle that holds the Christ.

That yes, God is a God of wrath. God hates sin. God hates idolatry. But above all, is a God of Grace, a God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

We often wander far from God we wander in the wilderness just like the people of Israel, but God always pursues us in love. And Jesus says, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

Today, in Chapter 6 of the Story, the people of Israel have been set free, but they've forgotten the story. They've forgotten who brought them out of Egypt. And what should have been a three week march to the Promised Land, took 40 years.

Now some have said, that's because they were led by men and as you know men never stop and ask for directions.

But of course, that wasn't it.

It was because... they weren't ready. They were a lot like we are when God has something good planned for us. Instead of trusting God, instead of worshipping God, they doubted and they complained and they grumbled.

At every turn, God provided for them and asked them to walk in faith but instead, they focused on themselves, their own agendas. Instead of walking with God, they wished to go back to Egypt back to some nostalgic past. Instead of remembering their slavery in Egypt they could only remember their appetites. And as a result, they forgot who God is: the God who delivered them the God whose power and presence was all they needed.

And so they lost their way. Just like we sometimes we lose our way.

Do you ever wonder, why it is that God doesn't seem to be answering our prayers - the way we want them answered? Especially when we pray for something that seems so right and so necessary, like healing for a loved one who is sick, or for something at work to go your way

Or you pray for peace in your family, for a child to follow God's ways instead of the world's ways, or for a husband or wife to honor their marriage vows. You pray for these things and it doesn't seem like God is coming through.

Sometimes the response it seems, isn't yes or no, but wait. God says, "I need you to trust my timing." But sometimes wait is the hardest answer to take, isn't it?

When we face obstacles, our human nature is to want to find a solution and to solve the problem or fix the problem.

And so we ask God for a breakthrough, and we think our prayer is reasonable, and God's answer is... silence, or wait.

God's people were on a 3 week trip to the Promised Land and instead God's answer was wait

- you're not ready, you haven't learned to trust me
- you haven't learned to worship me above all other gods
- you haven't learned to love your neighbor as yourself

We can be pretty good at loving ourselves we know what we want.

The people of Israel knew what they wanted. When they faced the time of testing in the wilderness, they knew one thing. They didn't like being tested. They didn't like having to trust God and walk by faith. They didn't like waiting and trusting God's timing. They didn't like having to depend on God to provide for their daily needs.

They had better ideas.

Moses goes up to the top of Mount Sinai for 40 days to meet with God, and they can't wait anymore. They tell his brother Aaron, we don't know where this fellow Moses is. We have a better idea build us a Golden calf.

But God had a different plan like a good teacher or a good parent.

God wanted to teach his children how to follow a path that would lead to life, instead of heartbreak.

God gave them the 10 Commandments, boundaries within which they would find life.

God wanted to teach them patience and trust.

God wanted them to learn to walk in a relationship based on love.

God wanted to help them develop a faith that could get them through not just the mountaintops of life, but also the valleys.

And confident that they could walk into the Promised Land, not in their strength, but in God's strength, so that they could walk into the Promised Land as a people who walk in humility.

In Micah 6: 8, we hear what kind of people God wants us to be:

People who act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with God

Do you know what the biggest cause of pride is?

Do you know the fastest way to lose perspective, and lose your humility before God?

The answer is: “taking God for granted.”

It’s beginning your day, without thanking God for the way he provides for you,

- going through our day without thanking God for the food we eat, for good health, for friends and family who love us
- just expecting that those things will always be there
- focusing on our problems, instead of our blessing
- complaining about how our kids or our spouse or our boss doesn’t appreciate us

The people of Israel, had their own list of things to grumble about but one thing we have in common is this:

Taking God for granted always leads to breaking God’s commandments.

Taking God’s holy name for granted, leads to using God’s name for our own recreation, like the popular expression OMG.

Taking God for granted leads to taking God’s holy day for granted. and spending it worshipping other things.

Taking God for granted, leads to not honoring our father and mother, or spouse. It leads to harming our neighbor, physically or with words, tearing them down instead of building them up.

And taking God for granted leads to coveting, which is the same as telling God, “what you gave me, isn’t good enough. I want something else. I want what you gave my neighbor instead.” Do you hear the lack of humility in that?

That’s why God says, “Remember who I Am.

Remember my covenant promises. Remember my commandments. Love the Lord your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

God wants these commandments to be on our hearts.

And in the New Testament, we hear that God **writes** these commandments on our heart.

Do you know how that happens?

It happens best, when we see people in our own lives, who love God like that.

I know that’s true in my own life.

I saw people like my parents, and my Sunday School teachers, and youth leaders, and Bible camp counselors loving God... and I wanted to be like them.

That’s why Moses, said to the people. “These commandments that I give you, today, are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and

when you walk along the road, when you lie down at night, and when you get up in the morning.”

That’s how the Grace of God, that Martin Luther rediscovered, gets passed on to each new generation. That’s how the Bible, becomes a treasure to us, a compass and a foundation for our life.

That’s how we keep from wandering around in the wilderness grumbling and complaining. That’s how we keep from taking God for granted.

You see, that’s our mission as friends, as parents, and baptismal sponsors, and as a church. That’s why we are looking for a leader right now a leader of our youth and family ministries to guide us, and equip us, and teach us so that we remember God. And so that we stay humble, and trust God through times of testing, and learn to trust his timing when he says wait.

So that we learn to trust that God will provide what we need, not everything on our wish list, but what we truly need. And when we do that, instead of holding on so tightly to material things, our hands are open to receive the greatest gift of all - faith!

And it’s faith, after all, that calms our fears.

When the people of Israel looked over into the Promised Land, they were afraid, Moses sends out a group of spies, a reconnaissance team to check out the Promised Land, and bring home a report. And they come back and are very excited about one aspect of it, it was a land flowing with milk and honey, just like God promised.

But almost all of the spies, added to the report, by saying,

“We can’t go in because we are afraid of the people who are living there

“We can’t push them, out. We can’t do it. There is no possible way.”

But then Joshua and Caleb say, “We absolutely can.”

“This is God’s Promised Land. This is God’s plan, and God will be with us.”

What did it take to say that? It took Faith.

Look at the obstacles and challenges in your life, anything that seems insurmountable. But then remember, who God is remember God is with you.

Remember when you stumble, or when you fall, that God pursues you in love, and lifts you up, and carries you on eagles’ wings. And God fills your sails with the strength and power of the Holy Spirit, and a faith that says, “God, I will trust you, even in these circumstances, even when the obstacles look overwhelming, even when everything looks hopeless,

even when I can't in my own strength change certain things.

At those times, God calls us to surrender and entrust ourselves to Him. and may we say, "God, I will keep serving and loving my neighbor.

"I will keep giving glory to you in the big and small things of my life."

"I will walk humbly and will entrust my future to you Lord."

Faith is the assurance of things we hope for,
the conviction of things we cannot see.ⁱ

This morning, may God give you that faith. Amen

ⁱ Hebrews 11:1