



## A Note from the Pastor's Corner

I have mentioned from time-to-time that most American Christians are biblically illiterate. And before you start thinking that I'm missing something or expecting too much, this is much more than my own observations. Ministers of every stripe and denomination see it and surveys prove it out. Now, this isn't a condemnation; just a statement of fact. I've been in discussion with people – in our own church as well as from other places – that reinforce what I'm talking about. I'll give just a few examples.

I've been told by someone that their favorite verse is "God helps those that help themselves." OK – but that's not in the Bible. Benjamin Franklin included it in Poor Richard's Almanac although he may not have been the originator of it. And, actually – the biblical story indicates just the opposite.

Another is, "I looked all through Hebrews, several times, and could not find the Lord's Prayer." Now, I don't care if a person doesn't know exactly where a passage is located. But, since the Gospels contain the accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus, and Paul's letters do not, I would have expected their search to be in the Gospels.

Here are a few others. Someone expressed much more than surprise when, in the course of conversation, I said that a murderer can be forgiven by God. Another person told me how Solomon was such a great king. Actually, he was a terrible king. He may have gained wisdom, but his hard-hearted and self-centered actions lead to the break-up of the united kingdom of Israel. Several have the idea that David only made one truly major mistake. Actually, his life was full of major mistakes, all of which ruined his family and diminished his ability to rule. However, he was a man after God's own heart.

I could go on – but won't. I hope you get the picture.

The problem is not that most are biblically unknowledgeable. The problem is that many of those think they know the Bible. Now, they may know *about* the Bible – they may be able to quote verses they've been taught to memorize – they may have sat in Bible studies or Sunday school classes. And I am glad there is that level of interest.

But very few have actually gone beyond a superficial treatment of what they read. And so many studies I have reviewed or been part of extract a verse here and a passage there in order to cobble together proof to back up a specific claim. The problem here is that one can 'prove' almost any belief they want to defend this way. And when one zeroes in on a text fragment and ignores its context (literary, historical, cultural, etc.) it does damage to the integrity of our Book and its message and purpose.

And so it goes. Many would prefer to cling to what they were told by their saintly Aunt Sarah or their grandfather who was a beloved deacon, or get their input from an unchallengeable voice on the radio, or go with their gut than to consider the possibility that they have much yet to learn – and, perhaps, to unlearn.

I know I do. Besides my preparation time and training, one thing that helps me learn is the community discussions our Bible studies encourage. I invite you to take part in our Thursday evening study of the Bible. Currently, we're studying the Gospel of Luke. You can take part in our Serendipity Bible study during the Sunday school hour, which is an intergenerational class where the youth are given the same voice as the adults – and everyone benefits and grows as they learn. There's even a Friday morning study group that has outgrown the classroom and is now meeting in our Fellowship Hall.

This is crucially important in a nation where a clear majority still claim they live in a Christian nation, yet fewer than 17% are involved with a church on a regular basis. Adding to this is that just 16% claim they try to make their moral decisions based on the Bible.

*Believe this.* Nobody – *nobody* 'knows' the Bible, 'knows' the mind of God, 'knows' the will of God. The Bible is a living testimony, and life did not stop when the last word was penned. God has not stopped working. If *nothing* else, study of the Bible reveals that God and the story of God's interaction with humanity is a story of on-going change and growth. God's continued revelation to us involves each of us in unique ways – in ways that may not find a match in the biblical story but, at the same time, in ways that bear witness to the testimonies of God's undying love for us that is documented in the Bible.

I urge you – each of you. Fulfill the part of the promise that is made when we read our Church Covenant together. Come and join us.

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud