

Four Cornerstones for Cornerstone Moving Forward

Educational Responsibility:

Commitment #3 Teach the Breadth and Depth of the Whole Counsel of God

May 29, 2022

Three weeks ago I introduced you to the second of *Four Cornerstones for Cornerstone*. As we move forward into God's future for us together, we acknowledge there is no going back. The world has changed in a fundamental way, and though we may reminisce about the old normal, we embrace that God is doing a new thing in our day, a thing we had not expected and certainly in ways we would not otherwise have asked for.

But we trust God. We trust His sovereignty over us, His love for us, His word in us, and His Spirit through us. And so, as we move forward with the eyes of faith trained on Him, we are considering four fundamental pursuits God sets before us as a congregation of Christians in this community at this time. The four cornerstones are these:

1. Establish our theological identity
2. Engage our educational responsibility
3. Enact our relational opportunities
4. Empower our mission priorities

We are pursuing a congregational theological identity in Bible studies on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, and in private studies and discussions happening daily. We have one simple question of God: Who, according to Your word, ought we to be? Rather than being a mere mash-up of religious ideas and cultural philosophies, some of which have little to do with Christian faith or biblical truth, we are asking God to define us. We are asking God to work in us the admonition of the Spirit through Paul to the Romans. Paul wrote,

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV) *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

That is what we are asking God to do for us as a congregation, to prevent us from being conformed to the world and transform through the renewing of our thinking about Him into the fully integrated Body of Christ that bears the image of God in the world. That is the theological identity in which we are asking God to establish us.

The second *Cornerstone for Cornerstone* is ***engage our educational responsibility***. When Jesus sent His disciples out into the world to make disciples He set upon the church of that day and every day after the singular responsibility to bring the next generation into a relationship of faith with God through Christ, and to do that through proclamation of the gospel and instruction in God's word.

As part of the message three weeks ago I introduced you to David Michael and Truth78. You

took home copies of David's book, *Zealous*, which I am pleased to find that many of you are reading with great zeal! *Zealous* outlines seven (7) commitments we must all make, personally and as a congregation, for successfully, biblically discipling the next generation.

Two weeks ago John Hay introduced the first commitment: ***Embrace a biblical vision for the faith of the next generation.*** John pointed out to us that to embrace a biblical vision for the faith of the next generation means, at the very least, to realize the position and threat the next generation faces. John reminded us of Ephesians 6:12,

Ephesians 6:12 (NIV) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Remember? Neither we, nor the next generation among us, or the generations yet to come, wrestle against mere humans and human ideas and philosophies but against spiritual powers and forces arrayed not only against us but against God Himself. The next generation faces not merely a misdirected, self-serving, sin-loving culture. The threat is not just the ideology of wokeness, or manipulative critical race theory, or the LGBTQ+ movement, or the sexual revolution. The threat is not just abortion, or corrupt politics and politicians, though the world is full of them. The threat is not even rampant inflation and impending poverty, or hard classes. It isn't even the delusion of gender fluidity.

All of these evils espoused and expressed by human beings have one sinister, seductive, seditious source: not the people who hold these views sacred but the evil that destroys through deception and delusion and rules within the heart and minds of broken, sinful, vulnerable people.

The great threat that faces the next generation is the same threat every generation faces. It is not a social, cultural, philosophical, or ideological threat. It is a real, powerful, deceitful spiritual enemy whose victory over them means eternal destruction. The real threat is an unobstructed path to hell.

Make no mistake. The threat is not minor or imaginary. The threat is real. It is awful. It is powerful and profound and it must be met with a more authoritative power than anyone in the next generation, in all the next generation put together, naturally possesses.

Only Jesus Christ overcomes the darkness. Only through faith in Jesus Christ will the next generation face and win their battle. **They must be prepared for spiritual war and we must prepare them.** In light of these conditions John asked us, he exhorted us, when considering our responsibility to disciple the next generation, to think in terms of a common phrase, a phrase which we will all understand and to which we will all commit. Do you remember that phrase? ***For the glory of God, let's armor up!***

I believe John is absolutely right calling us to both prepare our own souls for battle and to see to it that the next generation is prepared and armored as well!

Last week, in an emotional and powerful message, Mike Crotteau set out the second commitment David Michael outlines in *Zealous*. The second commitment for successfully disciplining the next generation is: ***Foster a robust partnership between church and home.*** I love the idea Mike repeated throughout that message. He was speaking of zeal, of passion for disciplining the next generation and he told us, **“We must have strong feelings for magnificent matters!”**

Mike reminded us that zeal, passion, strong feelings for magnificent matters is the work of God through the Spirit of God in us. He reminded us that the promises of God motivate strong feelings for magnificent matters. He taught us that the home already has three things going for it in the discipleship of the next generation: opportunity, place, and influence. He quoted J.C. Ryle who confessed his approach in raising his own children. “I train them with an eye to my children’s soul!”

God has placed children within the scope of opportunity, place, and influence of church and Christian home with an eye to their soul. Together we must work with God in the power of the Spirit of God through the word of God to disciple the next generation for the kingdom of God and the glory of the Son of God. **We must have strong feelings for magnificent matters!** Amen?

Today, I bring you face to face with the third commitment we must make as we embrace our educational responsibility and successfully fulfil the call of Christ and the purpose of God for disciplining the next generation. The wording of this third commitment comes from the apostle Paul’s final words to the elders of the church at Ephesus. Paul is on his way to Jerusalem. He does not know exactly what awaits him but he knows through the Spirit that “in every city imprisonment and afflictions await.” He knows he will never see these beloved brothers again. These are his last words to them.

He recounts his history among them. He lived among them. He served the LORD among them with humility, with tears and trials. He reminds them that he did not shrink from anything profitable, teaching them in public and “from house to house.”

Paul simply reiterates his strategy for disciplining the next generation in his day. Before he shares a final exhortation with them he asserts the principle that has guided all his disciple-making efforts among them:

I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:27)

Paul told them everything God intended, ordained, and revealed for them to know. He left nothing out. The good of their souls was in their own hands because he gave them ALL God gave him for them

The third commitment we are called upon to make as we commit to disciplining the next generation is the commitment Paul made to the Ephesians and to all he taught and disciplined: ***Teach the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God.***

Paul wrote to Timothy furthering Timothy's training as a pastor. Paul wrote,

All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for teaching in righteousness.

Let me ask you, Cornerstone, if **ALL** Scripture is profitable, if all Scripture has potential for spiritual good, then why would we expose children to some good but not all good, to some Scripture but not all Scripture? **Why would we withhold from any child all the good God has for them in His word?**

That doesn't make any sense, does it? That's like giving someone a recipe for ultimate chocolate chip cookies and leaving out the chocolate chips, the butter, and the brown sugar. That makes no sense and neither does telling children a few Bible stories but withholding the breadth and depth of the riches of God's word from them!

Let me ask you, have you heard of Noah's Ark? How many animals were in the ark? How many people were in the ark? How many doors were in the ark? Do you know WHY there was only one door and why it was God and not Noah who closed the door when the rain came?

There was only one door because there is only one way for salvation and God closed that door because He alone can secure the salvation we need from His righteous and holy judgment, the consequences of our own sin! When children know there was an ark but don't know about doors and sovereignty and salvation they don't know the whole counsel of God.

When children know that God commanded, "Thou shalt not kill!" but don't know that abortion is murder, they don't know the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God. When children know God created the world but don't know God created them as either male or female, that He didn't make a mistake, and that they are to restrict intimate relations to one person of the opposite sex in a monogamous, life long marriage, they don't know the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God. When children learn that we all die, but don't know that upon their death they will face their Creator who will judge their sin and condemn them to hell and eternal punishment unless their sins have been covered by the blood of Christ through faith in Christ; when they know they will die but do not know where they will spend eternity, then they do not know the breadth and the depth of the whole counsel of God. The whole counsel of God is ALL that God says about ALL that He addresses.

How does it make any sense for the next generation to face the challenges and threat of spiritual warfare without being fully armored, without a real zeal for magnificent matters, the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God? It's like sending a boxer into the ring without gloves or a soldier onto the field of battle without weapons. It's like David facing Goliath without a sling. It makes no sense!

David Michael reminds us that *when we limit the Scripture children are exposed to, we limit their view of God.* I love what David writes here: *Only through exposure to a variety of stories and biblical passages can children understand the balance of God's character—that He is*

merciful, yet just; that God is high and lofty yet dwells in intimate fellowship with His people.

Once, many years ago, as a young teenager, I was on a Bible quiz team with our youth group. We were locked in a tie battle with our archrivals from Miller Road Sanctified Church on the north side of town when they missed the answer to this answer question. We were quizzing in the book of Exodus and the question was, “How did Moses make the tabernacle in the wilderness?” Seven church youth groups fielded the question. Six of them, one after the other, offered incorrect answers. If we go that answer correct, even if every other team got every other question right for the rest of the competition, we would be the champions. The trophy would come home with us!

I could barely contain myself. I didn’t even consult with my team (though I learned afterward that’s not a good interpersonal strategy.) The MC repeated the question, “How did Moses make the tabernacle in the wilderness?” I stood and answered, “Moses made the tabernacle in the wilderness according to the plan God gave him on the mountain.”

You know God gave Moses the 10 Commandments on Mt Sinai but did you also know God gave him all the details for building the tabernacle, even down to the recipe for the incense?! Do you know why God gave Moses the full instructions? Because the right way to worship God is determined and revealed by God and is not left to human imagination or self-interest. Every detail of Israel’s worship of God was described by God, was derived from His will and not theirs. That’s the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God.

Our children need the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God. That is the commitment discipling the next generation requires. And God has provided all we need to make and keep this commitment. What has God provided? First and foremost, His Spirit and His grace. But there is more.

Mike took us to Ephesians 4 last week. Let’s go back there for a moment.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (ESV) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

God gave as gifts to the church people who could teach and lead us into spiritual maturity. And do you know what God has produced and provided through these gifted men and women? Let me recount five categories of resources that are ours through the working of the Spirit on behalf of the church.

First, we have Bible surveys and Bible book studies. We have titles like *More Than a Story* that help one generation dig deeply into the reality of the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God with the next generation. We have the *Fighter Verse Journal* written by Linda McIntire for Truth78 that helps one generation learn and assist the next generation to learn and memorize the word of God. We have Sunday school curriculums. We even have Bible study books like

Catching the Wind: A Guide to Interpreting Ecclesiastes, written by Pastor Dale McIntire to help us delve into the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God.

We have studies in Biblical theology like *Bitesize Theology* by Peter Jeffreys. We have systematic theologies like the New City Catechism that John and Mike are leading the adults through on Sunday mornings. We have the gospel proclamation in word and song. We have moral and ethical instruction that is based in the solid exposition of the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God. There is no famine when it comes to tools to know and love God's word.

In the end, the whole counsel of God is the core knowledge of the breadth and depth of Scripture that is essential for coming to salvation by faith in Christ and living life in that saving faith.

Parents, commit to teaching the next generation the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God, even if it means you may have to become more familiar with the whole counsel of God than you are now.

Teachers, pastors, elders, commit to teaching breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God, even if doing so means changing your mind on some things and losing some folks who don't want to learn.

Worship team, kitchen crew, Sunday morning regular attenders, Ladies' Bible study group, quilters, Wednesday night Bible study group, commit to teaching the next generation among you, whoever they are, the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God, however many or few they are, even if you have to go up and introduce yourself to them because you don't even know their names.

Church, commit to teaching the next generation, no matter who they are or how old they are, the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God. Make the investment in yourself, in God's word, for the sake of the next generation.

Make the commitment. Do what it takes to say with the apostle Paul, ***I testify to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.***" We cannot dictate the response of the next generation to our discipleship efforts but we can commit just as God has to providing everything they need to know and put their faith in Jesus and follow Him with their whole heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Make the commitment. All of you. Each of you. Teach the next generation the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God. And if you don't know the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God, make the commitment to learn it so you can teach it.

Make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior.
Make a concerted effort to learn all you can.
Make a regular connection with the next generation.