

Open Book

Testing Ourselves with God's Word

June 26, 2022

Today we're testing how true our love for the Lord *is*. And to get an honest answer, we gotta open with this: **How reasonable is your relationship with God?** *That is*, if you were to present the case *you've* been building to *back up* your belief in Him, would others *buy* it? Are there good *reasons* for the way you see things, or do you *hope* more than *know*?

We *need* to be aware, because **how we believe what we believe determines our credibility and our belief's integrity**. And I'm not trying to be *challenging* here but, c'mon, better *reasons* make you a more *reasonable* person, *literally*. And that's important because being *reasonable* makes you *trustworthy* – which *in turn*, makes you a more *compelling* witness. I know, because in my *B.C.* days, it was those *reasonable people* that kept me on the hook and ultimately *reeled* me in.



So last week, when Bruce preached a *whole sermon* about Jesus's dad, Joseph, *despite* the extremely *limited* Scripture about him – I loved the look we took at the biblical *reasoning* we can use to paint a better picture. Because it's a *critical* reminder that deeper digging does get you to the gold, but *also*, **reading between the lines does not mean reading into them**. *Besides*, it's actually *fun* uncovering Scripture's hidden stories forensically; building **solid deductions from the information**. **Not flimsy conjectures from our imaginations**.



And I, *like a lot of you*, am at this *particular* and *peculiar* church largely because of *that* approach right *there*. And that does *not* mean condemnation of other congregations at *all* – only that **those of us with a compulsive questioning disorder need a place to work out our faith according to our condition**. And here at His Place, we use 'Bible forensics', to grow our faith by *building* our case on:



[Faith is] the *substance* of things hoped for, [by collecting] the *evidence* of things *not* seen.
– Hebrews 11:1 NKJ

And here's *why*: if our Creator *really* wants a loving relationship with any of us, **He has to have made Himself knowable**. And a *deeper* relationship with *anyone* always means listening, learning, and adjusting our perspective to see their true self. So *trust* that **God is an open book to anyone with an open mind**. And as a *loving God*, He *must* be doing everything *possible* on His end to get us *closer*. Which means **God has open arms to anyone with an open heart**. So, it's only when we consciously or *sub-consciously* shut Him out *somewhere* – that our relationship stalls. And *that* means the missing pieces in *our* understanding *all* come from *us* closing off communication.

For whatever is hidden is *meant* to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is *meant* to be brought out into the open. – Mark 4:22 NIV

[After all] It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings. – Proverbs 25:2 NIV

He's literally *dying* to share the total truth that makes sense of the universe, we just have to *work* to keep *ourselves* and *His* book, *open*. Emphasis on the word *work*. *Not that we work for our salvation!* Just saying, **if you pray for God to move a mountain, plan on waking up next to a shovel.**

[Y'know:] Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a *worker* who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. – 2 Timothy 2:15-17 NKJ

Now *somewhere* along the way, people got the idea that Christianity is somehow a *crutch* or *convenience* and that we *believe* because we're *naïve*, *uniformed*, and it's *easy*... and to be fair, I leaned that way before I switched teams, but now – WHAT?! Has that been *your* experience?! Easy sounds dreamy – but *nothing* in my life has called *more* into question, taken up *more* mental real estate, or *inconvenienced* me *more* than my walk with God. Because **our understanding of this place hinges on the amount of our life that we devote to knowing Him.** Which is why we're repeatedly told that the full relationship comes when we:

Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul and with *all* your *mind* and with *all* your strength.' – Mark 12:30 NIV

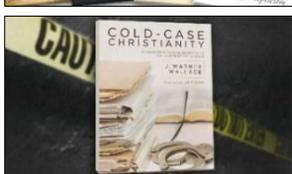
If you want it all, you gotta give your all! And God wrote His Word in such a way that it *tests* the *amount* of heart, soul, strength, and mind *you're* willing to give. Sure, He *could've* written it in a way that left no room for discussion, debate, or doubt – but He *didn't*... *on purpose!* Cuz you know what those difficulties *do*? **They give you a look in the spiritual mirror!** Because **your understanding provides you with a measure of the mental muscle you're willing to give.** On a scale of *none* to *all*. And God's goal is to push us *all in!* So –



Let us examine our ways and test them **[according to His Word]**, and let us *return* to the Lord. **[according to His Word]** – Lamentations 3:40 NIV



So let's talk *Bible forensics*. And don't you *dare* zone out and pretend it's too *brainy* for you – *this* is where you love the Lord with all your mind! So stay with me! Bible forensics is just the term we're using for **digging past the surface of Scripture by using our God-given reasoning to reconstruct the details and stories not explicitly stated.** And it's *important*, because the Bible becomes a real problem for a lot of people when they realize the stories are all chopped up and scattered. Yet it's *because* of this design that it's also **an opportunity spiritually stretch our mental muscles and express our obedient, trusting, desire to better know the God we claim to love.** And there's *tons* of great books on this approach, but when hunting that one, big, *unifying* truth behind all those scattered clues in God's Word, give me J. Warner Wallace, the ex-homicide *detective*. Cuz his book *Cold-Case Christianity* has some great tips for *Godly gumshoes*. So let's put our detective hats *on* and put our faith to the test by *examining* how we *handle* God's Word. *First* –



Do you WASH YOUR HANDS? Search yourself and *ditch* your background beliefs, baggage, and assumptions. Regardless of your *awareness*, they're *there* and they taint every word ever heard.

So **we must seek and destroy every expectation and agenda if we want to be open minded when we open His book.** How often do you pray like this:

Search me, God, and know my heart; *test* me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is *any* offensive way in me, and *lead* me in the way everlasting. – Psalms 139:23-24 NIV

Ouch! That first step is a *doozie!* Calling out our personal *bias* is a *powerful* but *painful* prayer – because we are riddled with them! And **they make it impossible to discern God's voice from our agenda.** So we gotta scrub 'em off or we could compromise the Bible bits we collect! *Remember–*

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? The one who has *clean hands* and a *pure heart*, who does *not* trust in an idol or swear by a *false* god [like the picture we paint of *our God before opening His book*]. – Psalms 24:3-4 NIV

But *after* a good cleaning, it's time to **COLLECT THE EVIDENCE.** As you read the Bible, remember to keep your *eyes, ears, heart, and mind* open to *everything* or you risk missing *something.* **If you only look for something specific – you can overlook something substantial.** Hold your horses and don't bring *back* your bias by favoring *just* your favorite parts! Lay them *all* on the table, whether or not they seem *helpful* because:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness [even though we won't know when each piece's purpose will *present*] 2 Timothy 3:16 NIV



Like Pokemon – to be prepared for any battle – *you gotta catch 'em all!* And once you *do*, you can start to **DEVELOP DEDUCTIONS.** Put your pieces together into *possible* pictures. And honestly, they really do *this* on their own. Cuz **every person, place, story, and symbol of Scripture makes it clear where they fit – if you're clear on the difference between deduction and conjecture.**



To trust our beliefs, they must be built on factual *conclusions* not pleasant *possibilities.* From the foundation up, **the case for our faith must arrange all our evidence in reasonable order.** And until then, we can't *deduce* their meaning or what's missing.

For instance – understanding the four Gospels as *conflicting* accounts of a true story means our reasoning can only build on *inconclusive* evidence which is, by definition, *speculation.* Whereas reasoning built on *irrefutable* evidence (like a flawless *harmony* of all four Gospels) produces factual *deductions.* Because **deductions are just the logical results of whatever premise we present.** There's no wiggle room in logic; **it's mathematic and only bears the fruit of its foundation.** This is how I always reasoned with my kids; most recently, "We want a dog!" "Okay, let's say that happens, what's the logical conclusion?" And we landed on "probably, a dead dog". But I was proud they didn't do much of what we *all do* to get the conclusion we *want:* switch to a *false* premise. They didn't say, "Forget the dead Guinea pigs, *this time* we'll be responsible." Even though building on *that false* premise, might logically lead to a living dog.

So when we build our faith on a *Scriptural* foundation, **we need to be careful not to falsify what it says to produce the outcome we want.** Any modification in the foundation produces profound problems as you build, and *will* turn your *deductions* into a full-fledged *fallacy*. Think *Galatians*:

You are turning away so *soon* ... to a *different* Gospel, which is *not* another; but there are some who trouble you and want to *pervert* the Gospel of Christ. – Galatians 1:6-7 NKJ

So lastly, check for foreign influence. **TAKE THE TRUTH TEST and make sure your heart hasn't been compromised.** Grab a Bible and *examine your motives*. Any conviction when you read:



He who *trusts* in his *own* heart is a fool.
A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his *own* heart.
The way of a fool is right in *his own* eyes. – Proverbs 28:26; 18:2; 12:15

God's Word cleanses, clarifies or convicts its readers because it just takes our premise to its logical conclusion to show us what we're willing to work for.

To *humans* belong the *plans* [thoughts] of the heart, but from the *Lord* comes the *proper answer* of the tongue. All a *person's* ways seem pure to *them*, but *motives* are weighed by the Lord. Commit to the Lord *whatever* you do, and *He* will establish your plans [thoughts].
The Lord works out *everything* to its proper end [logical conclusion]. – Proverbs 16:1-4 NIV

That's it. All the evidence in *this* world and in *His* Word was *designed* for you to find the reasons *behind* the *one* decision that determines *everything*: **What foundation are you building on?** It's all about who our heart appoints as the ultimate *authority*. And if we want a *real, reasonable* relationship with God, we can only build on the premise *He* authorized, *His* Word. I mean –

The Word was *with* God, and the Word was God. – John 1:1 NKJ

But the Bible is a poignant example of God's *perfection* and *plan*, and it's been brilliantly designed to teach us *about His character and our own*, by just allowing us to *choose* how we handle it.

Those who want to reject God, can. Those who want to revise God, can. Those who want to receive God, can. And again, I've *personally* used it for all three – and I can tell you only *one* approach has truly felt *reasonable* and had a logical conclusion that was *worth* working for.

Because as you read to *receive*, you'll discover Jesus *Himself* came to show us what unbiased, clean hands can do when they open His Word with an open mind and get to work. It's *us* who've been tainting that premise ever since. And I'm a little sick of people thinking that *they* decide what kind of God they get – it's the *Real* one or *None*! And **we need to stop bending His book to fit our wants and start bending ourselves to fit His Word!** And that means *pushing* yourself to the limit as you seek Him. And *struggling* to let go of your expectations and assumptions. Cuz you and I, we're not interested in easy. Like any detective worth their salt, **we demand untainted, trustworthy, and total truth.** Cuz like I said, if you want God to move a mountain, you better be prepared to wake up next to a shovel. Well – **if you really want a reasonable relationship with the Lord, you better be prepared to wake up next to His Word... and read it.**