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**Title:** *Discerning The Good News*

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Hi, everybody. How are you doing? We've had a collection of beautiful days here this week, and this is like one more in a row here. We want to say hi to everybody here, but also to all the folks that are watching online.

It is good to be here and be with you and share some stuff. You know, Mike Chilcoat was supposed to speak this weekend but he is sick and he couldn't make it. So sorry. I was available early, so anyway, here's the deal. I thought we'd talk about something that is at the heart of our faith and that is the importance of reading the Bible. The importance of reading the Bible.

I think sometimes we take this a little too much for granted. You know, recently there was a Barna survey that was done that noticed that it recorded that 81% of Americans thought that the Bible was some kind of revelation from God. It was actually a revelation from God. They believed there was a way that you could know what God was like and what he wanted. Stuff like that. You know? 81%. What percentage shows you that you actually read the Bible. Probably more like us. Less than 81% of us. So, yeah, especially on a regular basis.

Well, it's sort of like this. Can you imagine that if you went to the mailbox on Monday and you pulled out of your mailbox a letter from a really close friend of yours you haven't seen for a while, a handwritten letter of all things? You know, there are very few of those anymore. Anyway, you take it inside. You open it up. You're like, oh my gosh, five pages from my best friend. And you'd go to page two to chapter two, the second paragraph, and you'd read two sentences, and then you'd fold it up and put it back and put it up on the shelf.

Is that what you would do? Nobody reads a letter like that except when they read the letters in the Bible. You know, seriously, if you're going to figure out what's going on, you've got to spend a lot more time doing it. You might need some help doing it. You might need to learn how to ask the right kind of questions. A lot of that is what it's about is kind of asking the right kind of questions. That's really what it's about.

You know, a couple of months ago, I got invited to go speak at a chapel at Grove City College because somebody else couldn't make it. Anyway, they told me you're supposed to talk about, about Mark 2. So, I looked at Mark 2, and it's the story about Jesus talking at this house and the guys come and they want to bring their friend who

is crippled to have Jesus heal him, and they can't get in because there are so many people. So, they put a hole in the roof, they lowered him down, and we were like a miracle story. Oh, that's fantastic. And Jesus reveals himself to be the the son of man who comes to take away the sins of the world.

Did you ever think about what it was like to own that house, you know, and after Jesus is done, there's like a giant hole in your roof. You say to your wife, I hope Jesus stops by again later. What that's going to be like? It's like Lazarus. You know, that's actually what my joke was going to be about Lazarus being raised from the dead. The story of John 11. Think about this for a second. Lazarus has been dead for three days. He's in heaven and somebody comes up to him. And these are the kind of questions you have got to ask yourself.

Somebody comes up to him and says to him, "Hey, Lazarus, you got to go back." He's like, "what?" Hey, it's one thing to be born again. It's another thing to have to go die again. Then he's like, "what do you mean?" "Well, it's a miracle thing. Yeah, you're going to be going." And he's like, "well, I was going to go tonight down to the Soul Brothers concert. Man, they are good. They're so much better than the guys at are synagogue in terms of singing. Hey, have you eaten down at Gabriel's restaurant? The food is fantastic! I've never had anything like it. Have you ever eaten my sister Mary's dinner? Terrible. She's terrible. And you want me to go back? Yeah. Wait a minute. I'm going to be sick again when I go back and I'll probably die again?"

It makes you wonder and want to ask some questions. Those are the kind of questions you think when you sometimes read them, you know, just the whole thing about miracles in themselves. I don't know what you think about miracles. I got a friend who said one time he was looking in the newspaper and he saw an advertisement and it said, "It's this Sunday night. Such a place, such a church, a miracle Pastor is preaching, and after the service, he'll pray for people." So, the guy thought, well, okay. He goes to the service and sure enough, the guy, the miracle pastor is there and he preaches, and when he gets done with the sermon, you know, he says, "I'm going to pray for anybody who needs prayer. Please come on up front."

A lot of people go up, and so my friend goes up and it comes his turn. The miracle pastor says "Son, what can I pray for you for?" And he says, "For my hearing." And he says, "Okay." The miracle pastor puts his finger in his mouth, licks it, puts it in my friend's ear, puts his other hand on his head, starts praying loudly, and so forth. And after a while he says, "Amen." He steps back, looks, and says, "How's your hearing now?" My friend said, "How shall I know? It's on Thursday for Superior Court." Okay, thank you. I had to work that in here somehow today.

So anyway, we want to talk about reading the Bible. And here's the first thing. I don't think people realize what the Bible is kind of all about. The Bible is really kind of a four-chapter book. The four chapters are this. Creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Those are kind of the four chapters of the Bible in the sense that all the stories of the Bible, all the history, all the teaching, and all the prophecy, are somehow connected to these four major themes. Creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. And I think sometimes we read the Bible not realizing that. So as a result, we distort what these things are about. We don't see the connection between the two.

You see, here's the point. The Bible is going to try to help us to figure out who we are, where we are, what went wrong, and how do we make it right? So, in other words, what it's trying to do is give us a picture of what you might call a worldview.

You know, there was a famous theologian named John Calvin. He used to say you know what the Bible is like? The Bible is like a pair of glasses. And what has happened is that you've lost your vision, so to speak, you can't see straight. You don't know who you are anymore. You don't know what world you live in. You don't know how the world's organized or how it ought to be cultivated. And what you need is you need to somehow get your vision straight to see this is the way things are and this is how things could get better. This is how it could be different. This is God revealing Himself in such a way as to help us to understand what life is all about.

There's a passage in John 10:10. Jesus says this. He says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." I used to translate that to the Thomas translation. I used to say, Jesus said I came that you might have the all-around good time because I think that's what God is into. I think He is into you experiencing the maximum experience of what it means to be a human being in the beautiful and good creation that he's made.

Because you know what he's done? If we read it right, creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, we find out that what God's done is He's created the world beautiful, intricate, unbelievably complex, potential in every single little molecule and idea and thing that ever was created or ever will be. And what he does is he says, I'm going to make people in my image unique among all the other things. And I'm going to make this image-bearing person and give the responsibility to figure out how to unlock all this. But if they will only trust me, if they only look at me as I explain to them the way the world was made up and who they are. What will happen is they'll be able to unlock this potential, and they'll cultivate a world that's full of flourishing, joy, excitement, and blessing.

And here's the deal. When that happens, God gets glorified. God gets honored by that because he shows himself to be the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of all things. And we're talking about all things not just a couple of things. All things. And so, what he wants is he wants people to get the glasses on so they can see who he is, so they can figure out where they are, who they are, what he's done for them, and what he has in mind for them in terms of the future.

Just to show you that I think this point of getting to read the Bible is an important thing. Let me show you a couple of things. One is from the book of Ephesians. And Paul says this right at the beginning of the Book of Ephesians. He says, "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms."

Apparently, once you become a Christian, here's the best thing, you get some knowledge and insight in the eyes of your heart that could be open to the revelation of what God has in mind for you. And the power that you have. The ability to make it real in your life and in the life of other people.

Here's the next book. It's the book of Philippians. In Philippians 1 it says this, "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."

Unless I'm mistaken, it sounds to me like he said this, as soon as I heard you guys were Christian, I was so excited about that. We're in this thing together to the end, you know, and beyond. But you're going to need depth of insight. You're going to need somebody who becomes discerning about things. You need God to open up that spirit of revelation to you so that you can figure out what it's all about.

Now, just in case you wondered, the next book is Colossians. You feel the pattern coming along here. This is Colossians 1. "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, the love that you have for the saints. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light."

It's all over the Bible, you know. That's what God wants to see happen to people who decide to trust him, people who have been touched by his love and his mercy, and in the person at work of Jesus Christ. As soon as they embrace that, as soon as they respond to that, God says, okay now, it's new person time. We got to get some new stuff going on in your life.

Now, I know it wouldn't seem like church if we didn't read something from First Corinthians. This is from First Corinthians chapter 2. It says, "We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived' - the things God has prepared for those who love him - these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit."

By the way, this isn't some sort of mystical kind of experience that you have to have for God to get His will known to you. The point is this, God by His Spirit, through those who wrote the Scriptures, Old and New Testament revealed himself to people. So, it wouldn't be hidden. It wouldn't be a mystery anymore as to what life was supposed to be about. The story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. It is plain as the nose on your face if you have glasses to be able to see it correctly. And so put the glasses on so you can begin to read.

It then goes on to say, "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." Think about that for a second. God reveals the deep, not just the elementary stuff, but even the deep things of God. God reveals in the Scriptures. It says, "For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit

of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them."

That means simply the person doesn't see it that way. They haven't got the corrective lenses on to be able to see the truth. The spirit hasn't changed their heart to want to hear what God has to say. It's not a work by the Spirit in their life.

So as a result, here's what happens. They hear things and they can know exactly what they mean. They can read the Bible and know what it means, but they just don't think it's true. You know, they read love your enemies. C'mon, are you nuts? It's not like they don't understand what loving your enemies means. It's just that they don't believe it. They don't think it's true. Be faithful to the commitments that you've made, particularly the commitments that you made in marriage. It's not like they don't understand what that says. They just decide they're not going to follow it. Their wisdom is better than God's wisdom.

It goes on to say this, "They don't understand these things because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ."

Have you ever been in a discussion with somebody about something that ought to happen or what it seems like should happen or what we ought to do about something? And finally, you stop and said, "Excuse me, I got the mind of Christ here." And then you tell them and then they go oh, okay. It actually says, we have the mind of Christ. What could that possibly mean? That we have the mind of Christ.

I'll tell you what I think it means. It means that God by His Spirit has revealed these things. He's given the glasses in the Old and New Testaments. He's given us these things. He's written them down so we can understand them. If we surrender our heart to him the Holy Spirit helps us to take those things and try to figure it out.

It gives us the kind of wisdom that is not of this world. Because the wisdom of this world, they can hear this stuff, but they think it's stupid. The person whose heart changes hears that stuff. It doesn't mean they don't think it's hard. By the way, understanding what the Bible means sometimes is relatively easy. Doing what it says,

that's hard. But the point is this. You can't do what it says until you know what it says. You got to spend some time and try to figure it out.

It actually says, we have the mind of Christ. We have the ability to be able to see the deep things of God that we wouldn't know other than if God revealed them to us. And we can put together a way of looking at stuff. Do you know what it says about this person who has this ability? It says that they're able to be discerning, and they're able to make judgments about all things. Now, both of these words have the same Greek root word, both discerning and make judgments. It's the Greek word "anakrino." And when you look up that word "anakrino", know it comes from its root word that means to sift.

You know, we're talking about when we say sift. Well, just in case you didn't, I brought my sifter. We don't use sifters as much as we used to. Some people who are purist bakers and so forth, put flour or whatever they want to make sure there aren't any little pieces or groups of dough in their flour. But in the old days, when you had a sifter, it was a lot more important because if flour was ground in a wheel that was stone, sometimes little bits of stone would get in there, or sometimes the chaff from the head of the wheat would get in. I have no idea what all would get in there. But the point is, when you put it in there, the sifter made it so that you could separate the stuff that was good from the stuff that was worthless. And then you could throw the worms and stuff away.

Do you realize what this is saying? It's saying the scriptures, as you study them, God reveals these things to you as you study the scriptures. They're like the little words in the bottom of your sifter. They allow you to more and more be able to separate what is worth keeping. And that was just taken away. That's the way it works. Here's the deal, if we realized that we'd want to have a sifter with us all the time. How many of you, if you had the chance to carry the sifter to divide what you ought to do for what you ought not to do, would carry it with you on a regular basis? Just think of all the stupid stuff it would keep you away from doing.

And by the way, let me just say this, this kind of wisdom that a sifter supplies, it's not like academic wisdom. Okay? It's not like special knowledge. You don't have to have a high IQ or something like that to be able to understand this kind of wisdom.

You know what wisdom is? This is the way the Bible talks about wisdom. The Bible says that wisdom is sort of like it's the ability to make the proper contextualized decision. That's what wisdom is. That's what you want. You want to be able to read the situation in such a way that you know the answer right away and you act on that answer.

I was with a friend of mine the other day, and we were coming back from playing golf. We were riding home and somehow the conversation got to be about food and so forth. And I said to my friend, hey, is your wife a good cook? He went like this. Yes, she is. And I thought to myself, a wise man in my presence. He knew the right answer exactly.

Do you know what the problem is for most Christians? They got two wires in their sifter. They know that little about what the Bible reveals to us about creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. That they only had a couple of wires in there. And so, here's what happens. A big hunk of crap comes into their life. You know what happens? Unless it falls right on those only two wires that are in there, it goes into their life. And then when something terrible happens as a result of that big hunk of crap going into their life, they tend to go like this, God, why did you let this happen to me?

And God is like, what? I let this happen to you? I told you to go down and get your eyes checked. I supplied everything you needed to have a better sifter so that you can become wise and make contextualized decisions that are proper. Don't blame it on me. This is you.

Okay, let me wrap it up here so we can get to the passage which we're going to talk about today. I know you're happy because it means the end is near. Okay, here we go. Chapter 12 of Romans, it's another place where Paul does basically the same thing. He starts it. He says this. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

And by the way, this is a worship service that we're doing here today. It's only part of what God is interested in. You know what He's interested in? He's interested in not a worship service, but a service of worship. That means he wants everything in our lives. Nothing that you can look at that isn't covered. And by the way, he's so gracious that he's going to supply us the insight that we need to do it, the world view that we need to do it, the wires to be able to put down, to be able to have a discerning mind, to be able to figure out what will be glorifying to him, and what will lead to a flourishing life that will bless us.

This is not what the worship God is looking for exclusively, just a little piece of it. Matter of fact, I hope this isn't the only place where God gives you the opportunity to figure out what His word says. And you can lay down some wires. Take advantage of all the possibilities. Read the Bible for yourself, not just two sentences every other day



or something like that out of the middle of some book. No, do it extensively. Put some time into doing it. Do it with other Christians who have some insight and maybe a little more maturity. Join one of the life groups that we have here at the church. Get together with some other folks. You know why people don't do that? They don't do that because they're afraid to go to it and people will realize they don't know that much about the Bible. Oh, really? Like everybody does. The best person to have in a group is somebody who's willing to ask the most obvious question. That's the best person to be able to talk about it with.

You want more? Hundreds of years of insightful Christian writing in Christian books. Get a Christian book. Get a guy who can help you understand a particular topic. So, if you're involved in business, look at this. You're involved in government, look at this. You're involved in medicine, look at this. You're involved in sports, look at this. There are books on everything written by Christians trying to give insightful insight, trying to figure out how God has put the world together so we can glorify Him in the way that we act wisely in there, and he'll be blessed and we'll be able to flourish in it. In the fall, George Palombo is doing a Core Christianity class on how to read the Bible. Methods of reading. That's one of the courses I teach at Geneva on how to read the Bible. And you'd be surprised how little we actually know about the rules and so forth. It's about reading the Bible and helpful stuff that you can pick up along the way. It starts by saying this, every aspect of life, surrendered to the mercy of God, that is the personal work of Christ that you see there, surrender all yourself to him.

And then it says, here's the very next thing. "Do not conform 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." You hear that? It's just like this other letter. Once you become a Christian, once you surrender your heart, the next thing you need to do is have your mind transformed.

How do you have your mind transformed? How do you become a wise person? You put the glasses on. You start building the sifter. You start using it on a regular basis in a way that is pleasing to God. And if you do that, it goes on a little bit further in here. But it's trying to get to verse nine in a way, because verse nine says this, after you talked about all these different things, gifts that you can exhibit and places you can work these things out, it says and love, that love must be sincere.

The word sincere comes from Latin. I took Latin when I was in high school, and it comes from two Latin words "sine" and "cera" which means without wax. To be sincere is to be without wax. What it refers to is in ancient times when people would make pottery, and they would have to get a piece of clay and you throw it down. The first thing you have to do is beat all the air bubbles out of the clay because if you don't and you form a bowl and then you put it in the kiln, the air bubbles expand and

it cracks. So, a lot of people just didn't do it right, and so they'd get cracked pots. God isn't interested in cracked pots. So, here's what they do. They would see the crack, take some wax, put it into the cracks, close the cracks, and then paint it and sell it to you. And you are like what a beautiful bowl until you put something hot in it. Then it melts the wax and it's ruined.

Here's what God wants. He wants people to live with internal consistency. You say you believe something. You say you're this person. You say you've surrendered your body as a living sacrifice to the mercy that's been shown to you. You say that you have in your mind, transformed to discover what God's will is. You've been doing the work to try to figure out how to become that kind of person. Well, then act like that kind of person.

Love. You know what love is? I'll give you that in a nutshell. It's giving your life away. If you need the definition, that's what it's about. The response to the love of God is to respond to Him by giving yourself away in love. And who do you love? Well, you know, you love your family. You love your wife, and you love your husband. You love your kids. You love your neighbor. You give your life away to the people that you go to church with and live in your community for their good. You love and give your life away to people who are in great need. You supply opportunities to support them in whatever it is that they're struggling with, whether it's health, food, money, or whatever. You love them. You love the people of the world. You love people who are different than you. You love your enemy. And you give away your life.

Let's pray. Lord, thanks for this day. Thanks for the reminder of the importance of your word. By your spirit, make us people that seek to have our minds transformed by you and by your word. Get us in those places where that sort of thing is going to happen. And we thank you for these opportunities in advance. In Jesus' name, amen.