

Learning God's Word

by Stewart Ruch

Bishop Stewart Ruch emphasizes the vital role of God's Word in guiding our lives and deepening our relationship with Jesus through love and obedience.

Duration: 24:35

Scripture: Psalm 44:3, Psalm 119:105, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 6:33, John 1:1, John 14:23-24

Topics: "Word Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the uncertainty of the future and the need for guidance. He highlights the importance of the Word of God as a guide and a source of comfort in life's adventures. The speaker focuses on two verses from John 14, emphasizing the connection between loving Jesus and keeping His word. He encourages the audience to go out with God's Word, come home with God's Word, and get real with God's Word. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the Church of the Resurrection's vision to equip everyone for transformation.

Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon, Learning God's Word, is by Bishop Stuart Ruch and is part five of The Resurrection School, Learning New Life from Jesus. At our nine o'clock service we had the joy as the church and I had the joy as bishop to confirm 16 of our resurrection youth, which is, by the way, a resurrection record.

I've been doing confirmations, involved in them for 17 years. We've never confirmed that many youth. It was an incredible, incredible joy.

And I shared with our confirmands a story that I've shared with every youth confirmation class for the last 17 years. I'm going to share it with you now. Some of you have heard it 17 times.

Others of you, this will be new. It was a gift that a leader gave me when I was 16 years old. And the gift was a very, very simple gift, but it's one that I have literally carried with me the rest of my life.

I was 16. I was at a Christian summer camp. I was actually there with our current youth pastor, Lane Young.

We were high schoolers together in the same community in southern Indiana. And there were several of us young men gathered around our leader, a man named Ash. It was a beautiful night in North Carolina

and he pointed to a gorgeous full moon.

Did you guys see that moon? Yeah. Let me ask something of you. Would you, from this point on, every time you see a full moon, pray a simple but very powerful prayer.

And whenever you see a full moon, it'll trigger you to pray, Father, make me a force for Jesus in my generation. I don't know the impact that had on the other guys. Lane Young isn't as spiritual as me, so I don't know what he did with that.

But the Spirit of God used it in my life. And literally, I've been praying that prayer now for 33 years. I'll park the van at night behind the garage.

I'll walk around to the front door and I'll look up and there'll be a big full moon. I'll just pray it very simply. Father, would you make me a force for Jesus in my generation? What I haven't shared, and I've shared this several times, is that among those group of guys, and I'm in touch with actually many of them still, there are those of us who, 33 years later, in a 33-year journey, are seeking still to fulfill that prayer.

We're trying very hard amidst our sinfulness and our challenges to live by that. There are some of us who are, and very frankly, there are some of us who, 33 years later, are not trying to live by that. And the question, what's the difference and how is it that one can make a 33-year journey or a one-year journey or whatever it might be, how do we get from A, a call to follow Jesus, to give our lives for Him and for the mission to our generation, how do you get from A to B, to the place where you actually fulfill that? How do we all ultimately get to that end-of-life point that only God knows where we're able to say, I gave my life for Jesus for the sake of my generation? How do we travel that distance? And why is it there are those who do travel that distance and there are those who do not? And while, of course, there are several factors and there's moving parts around that kind of question, there's also a simple answer.

And the answer has everything to do with the gift of the Word of God, the words of Jesus that if we love Him, if we seek to follow Him and be a force for our generation, we will follow, believe, obey, submit, learn, take in His Word. We'll wrestle with His Word when we don't understand it. We'll push up against His Word, be challenged by His Word, try to understand His Word, be real with His Word.

We will realize that this gift, the words of Jesus, the Word of God, Jesus Himself is called the Word, that we can never separate a love for Jesus from a love for the Word of God, that this gift is our guide. This is our lamp. This is what brings us into a fathering relationship with the Father, a companionship with Jesus.

We are orphans. We are lost. We are deceived without the Word of God.

So if you look at just two verses in Jesus' sort of beautiful final discourse that He gives before He's crucified, section upon section, we're just going to pull two verses out of chapter 14 in John that was read for us by Deacon Valerie. Verses 23 and 24. Let me just highlight those now.

If you look at those in your bulletin, in your Bible, if anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love Me, does not keep My Words. So we hear in this verse, verse and a half, go out with God's Word on the adventure of a lifetime with Jesus.

Go out with God's Word. Come home with God's Word. And get real with God's Word.

Go out. If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word. The future is a guaranteed adventure because none of us have any idea how even this afternoon will play out.

You've got plans. I'm guessing most of you are Americans raised in this country, so you especially have plans. And you're quite convinced your plans are going to happen.

That's how our culture generally lives its life. And most often it does, which only reinforces that our plans always happen. But you know enough to even look at your last week, not to mention your last month, not to mention your last year or last decade, to know that plans do not always happen.

And to know that life will always end up being an adventure of some kind full of profound sorrow and amazing joyful moments. How will you get through the future that you cannot and will not know? How do you get there on this incredible journey? I brought this artifact. Some might even call it a relic of sorts.

This is my backpack that I took in 1990 on a solo trip by myself for two months through Europe. The soils of France are still upon this backpack. I've kept it hermetically sealed and encased.

No, I've just kept it in the basement. That's why it's just full of stuff. But this backpack was all that I had when I left O'Hare, April 1990.

It was all that I had when I returned in late May to O'Hare. I took it everywhere with me. It was my constant guide.

It's what I had to have. And it's all that I had to have to have the most amazing adventure for eight weeks through Europe. It's battered.

It's bruised. It got beat up. It's very well used.

And so with your Word, so with your Bible, it's what you take everywhere you go. It's what you have to have. At one level, I was highly dependent on this.

Another level, because I had this, I was utterly independent. I'd go to France thinking I was going to be in France, and then I'd end up in Holland. I'd go to Holland, the other state of Holland, then I'd end up in Ireland, hitchhiking, wherever it might be.

I could go anywhere. You can go anywhere with this Word. You see, I mean, a pretty Bible is not a virtue in Christianity.

Banged up, beat up. We've got a priest, I can't even find the leather in his Bible. It's just covered in duct tape.

He's been reading it so much. He's, you know, masking tape to the inside pages because he's reading it and opening it and studying it all the time, one of our pastors in the diocese. And that's what happens in our Bibles.

That's what happens as we take it with us. This is our guide. This is our way through.

The Bible says about itself, it's a lamp to our feet. So you are regularly opening it. You are regularly reading it.

You are regularly studying it. You are regularly listening to it. You can go anywhere.

And all Christians are sent out anywhere that God might lead with no security in the future because you have utter security in the eternal Word of God. The Word has always been, the Word is now, and the Word will always be. Other things will fade away and burn away like grass in the sun, the Bible says, except for the Word of God.

So that's equipping for the adventure of life. When we receive the gift, and there's no other way to describe this building but as a gift, one of our key prayers that we prayed as a church and that Kath and I have been praying for years prior to this 90,000 square foot miracle was whenever God did give us land or did give us a building, it would be a testimony. That the building itself would be a testimony so that we could say to the generations still to come, this is key in the culture of Israel as you read in the Old Testament Scriptures, that we could say to the generations to come, look what God did.

Look how God is faithful. And I shared with our youth this morning in our confirmation that this building is a testimony to them of God's faithfulness and of how God's Word is faithful. Indeed, what gave me the faith to go forward with this building, which required immense risk to step into, was a Scripture verse.

When I was reading my Bible, I had my backpack on, going through life, two months before this happened, we walked through this building, the very first day was All Saints Day, November 1st, 2010. Two months prior to that, I'm reading my Bible, I'm reading in the Psalms, and I read this verse from Psalm 44, for not by their own sword did they win the land. Now that has to do specifically with the people of Israel and the call they had to move into the promised land.

That's the specific historical context. It's important to know that. But then the Spirit of God ministered it to my context, to our context.

He said very clearly, I'm going to bring you into the land. It's going to happen, and you won't win it by your sword. You won't win it by your strength.

You won't win it by any kind of financial acumen, to which I said, whew, that's a relief. Nor did their own strength save them, the verse goes on, but God's right hand and God's arm saved them. Now I didn't share that verse with anybody else, because it would have, I think, been somewhat pretentious to say to everybody else, I just got a Scripture verse, this is absolutely going to happen.

I shared it with Katharine, my prayer partner, but I didn't broadcast it to you guys. I didn't come to you guys and say, this is absolutely going to happen, because we see through a glass darkly. I wasn't absolutely positive.

I held the verse. I wrote the verse down. But after that All Saints Day, we walked around this building, and then in a miraculous auction, this \$5 million building was sold to us for \$400,000.

Then I pulled that verse out, and I said, not only are the circumstances leading us, but even before they came, God gave me this Scripture verse that I thought might be for us. And that Scripture verse, and several others, led us through this process, an adventure, utterly dependent upon the Word of God, gives us a radical, in the kingdom, kind of independence from the perspective of the world, the perspective of others and how we should live our lives, a holy independence from the expectations of the world, because we have a holy dependence in the adventure of trusting God's Word. So we go with God's Word.

And yet dynamically, we come home with God's Word. Jesus says, if anyone loves me, he will keep my Word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. So on one level,

God's Word goes with us on an adventure, which I find very stirring.

But then on another level, God's Word brings us into a home, which I find very assuring. It's rest. It's safety.

It's home. It's where you are utterly able to be who you are, with the Lord, in a home. He paints a picture of the Father and the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in a home with us.

And God's Word leads us there. God's Word guides us there. To not live in God's Word.

To not seek to read God's Word daily. And I say that saying, you want to be in God's Word daily when you understand it. A day comes, you can't get in God's Word.

You do not condemn yourself. You're just disappointed is all. You pick it up the next day.

But in that, you want to be in God's Word because you want to be home with God. Jesus said in a few verses just prior to this, I will not leave you as orphans. He will never leave us as orphans.

The challenge is, we orphan ourselves. We need to be clear about this. Our Lord will never leave us as orphans.

If we're being orphaned, or we feel emotionally orphaned, it doesn't have to do with Jesus. It doesn't have to do with the gift He gives us in His Word. It can have to do with several factors.

Us feeling orphaned, our background, our past, our current pains. But one of those factors of why we can feel so alone, and so isolated, and so orphaned, is that we're not in our home by the Word of God. So we orphan ourselves.

And then we find ourselves, I feel so isolated. I feel so alone. But we're not in the Word, which brings us into a home with Jesus and a home with the Father.

That's the gift of the Bible. Now I realize for some of you, you've never had that experience with the Bible. I understand that.

I'm just simply trying to put a vision forward for you from Jesus' teaching that that's what the Bible wants to give you, to bring you home. We were hiking as a family up on the north shore of Minnesota. Beautiful, beautiful part of the country.

And we were coming down the trail, and you could just hear a waterfall, which is a gorgeous sound out in nature. And the water's just pouring down, and we came around the corner. It was Caribou Falls, and it had been a heavy snow season.

So in the spring, it was just pouring, this beautiful waterfall. And the kids looked at us, they're like, you know, can we go get in it? And we said, absolutely not. You might get your feet wet.

No, we didn't say that. Of course we didn't say that. We said, get in it.

Get out there. So we were running over there and scrambling across the rocks, and my boys are climbing up the rock wall and getting themselves underneath it, and just being drenched, just drenched by this waterfall, absolutely soaked, which is what God's Word does for us, for the love of the Father. In God's Word, it's like parents saying, go, go.

And in God's Word, it brings us into the full waterfall of the love of the Father. Is every day in God's Word like that? No, but every day in the family isn't like amazing moment either. But every day in a family, a healthy family, can be a day of love, a day of being home, a day of being nurtured and cared for, good days, boring days.

The love is still there, and that's exactly what the Word of God is giving us. Yes, we go out with the Word of God, and we come home with the Word of God. It's that dynamic.

And finally, we get real with the Word of God. The Word of God, if you're being honest as you read the Word, will not let you sentimentalize Jesus. There's no room for that in the Word of God.

It'll lead you into affection for Jesus, closeness to Jesus. But you don't get to have fuzzy thinking about Jesus when you're reading Jesus's words. It's actually asking something of you.

It's a consolation. It's a guide. But the Word of God is also asking something of you.

The Word of God is saying, get real about what you really believe about Jesus. In our sort of Wheaton subculture that some of us live in more than others, in our subculture, I'm not saying in your marketplace or where you may be in school, it's not uncommon for people to say, I love Jesus. And it's actually a very easy thing to say.

It's not hard to say it. I love Jesus. Sometimes it's very, very sincerely meant.

But Jesus connects love for him. He connects love for him to love and fidelity to his Word, to his teaching. He actually says, it's not abstract to love me.

It's very concrete. When you love me, I'm asking you to love what I've given you in the Bible. I'm asking you to love my body, the church.

I'm asking you to love one another. When Jesus says, love me, he's saying it's an embodied, profoundly tactile, concrete love full of teachings and beauty about how he calls us to live our lives in love and in the love of God and full of tactile and real people. The Bible, if you let the Bible be the Bible, allows no space between loving Jesus and what he has said in his Word.

But having followed Jesus myself for a long time and being around a lot of people who have followed Jesus, it is not uncommon for someone to say, I love Jesus and yet live different than his Word. And when challenged on that by the Word, are aghast. The moment questioned their sincerity about the love for Jesus, which one cannot question because one doesn't know.

But one does know is that what you're choosing and living is clearly contrary to God's Word. I can't speak to your relationship with Jesus, but I can certainly say I don't understand the discrepancy. Because Jesus allows no daylight between the teachings and the gift of his Word and himself.

Which is why John began this book with the most provocative phrase, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. The Word was with God and the Word was God. This was a massive challenge for me.

I had several years where I did not live in the Word of God. I found it fatiguing. I didn't understand it.

It had been used in manipulative ways by others in my life. I had some real reasons why I was backing off of the Word of God. But in doing so, I orphaned myself.

And in orphaning myself, I then began to think about teachings in God's Word, particularly the teachings I didn't like. For example, for me, the doctrine of hell. I still don't like it.

I find it very difficult, very difficult, the doctrine of hell. But there's an eternal reality in which people who do not choose to follow Jesus will be separated from God for eternity. That's the teaching of God's Scriptures.

It's been accepted by the church for two millennia. I found that very difficult. So what I did as I got farther from the Word of God is I tried to shape the Word of God and what I wanted to be true about hell.

And I actually thought I had a pretty good idea, much better than the stark, difficult teachings here. I kind of, you know, hell still exists. You know, I'm not going to throw it all out there.

I'm not a radical. But I formed and shaped it around what I thought would be best when it comes to hell. Very subtly, over time, I actually put myself over God's Word.

I decided what in there was helpful and what wasn't. I told you I loved Jesus. I would have told you that at any point when I was actually very far from Him.

I'd gotten very far from His Word. But I was sentimentalizing, subjectivizing, making it actually about me. It's why our Lord says, whoever does not love me does not keep my words.

And the Word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. This isn't even just about me, Jesus. It's about the Father who has sent me.

How do we know the teaching of God's Word when it is challenging to read the Scriptures? We read God's Word with the church. We read God's Word as the church has read God's Word over two millennia. And as you do so and learn to do so in our core class, it provides wonderful ways to begin to learn how to read the Scriptures as part of the church, the historical church, and the global church.

We see that there are profound themes running through that are very clear. And whether they're not clear, utterly clear, we provide charity one to another. But the clarity is great in almost every case.

This is not the clarity. The issue is, are we willing to get real with God's Word and let it get real with us? Here's my hope for you as your pastor. I hope you'll spend the rest of your life in God's Word.

Let me be really clear. I hope you'll spend the rest of your life asking Jesus to make you a force for Him in your generation. But if you get to the point where you are struggling with God's Word, make the struggle real.

Let God's Word say what it says and then wrestle with it. Work with it. Ask others to help you think about it.

Get instruction. Get wisdom. Get help in that.

I would much rather you do that and wrestle in that way than actually decide that God's Word doesn't say what it really says. I'd far prefer you to be wrestling and struggling and doubting than putting yourself over what the Lord has given us. What the Lord has given us.

It's a guide to the adventure of our lives. We go with the Word. It's a consolation in the challenges of our life.

We go home with the Word. It's also a gift and a challenge, as the Word of God calls us, to get real about what Jesus has really said and who He really is. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Thanks for listening. Our vision at Church of the Resurrection is to equip for transformation. As part of that vision, we'd love to share dynamic teaching, original music, and stories of transformation.

For more of what you heard today, check out the rest of our podcast. To learn more about our ministry, visit our website at www.churchoftheresurrection.org.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28788.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/stewart-ruch/learning-gods-word/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net