

## Fingerprint - Bible

**September 22, 2013**

Good morning Faith Church. Welcome to our new series called, “Fingerprint: What makes Faith Church unique?” In honor of this series, Apple released a new iPhone on Friday with a fingerprint sensor. We will call the company on Monday. I want some royalties. I think Apple stole our idea.

Years before I arrived at Faith Church, in the church’s by-laws, the church leaders set seven core values. These are the seven core qualities that would define Faith’s unique fingerprint in our community. With the opening of the Spencer campus, and possibly other campuses in the future, I thought it would be a good idea to teach a series on what makes Faith Church unique from other churches in our area. My original plan was to simply teach those seven core values.

As I thought about them and prayed through them, I found myself wanting to revise and expand them. While I have always agreed with these core values, I thought they needed to be repack in a way that is easier to teach and, over time, we expanded on some of the values so the language needed to reflect this.

I took the seven core values and began repackaging them. I didn’t do this by myself. I submitted them to the elders and Leadership Board for their input and approval. I say this so you know this revision of the language on our core values was not done by myself. I also say this so those of you who are familiar with the wording of our core values from the by-laws will know why the wording we are using in this series is slightly different.

This morning, we begin by looking at the most important statement in the group. From this core value everything else flows. If this one wasn't present, the rest wouldn't matter.

**BIBLE - We believe relevant expositional Bible teaching and Christ-centered worship are the backbone of church health.**

The Bible, and church history, show us repeatedly that the health of the people of God is directly linked to the preaching of the Word of God. The greatest disservice a preacher can do to his or her congregation is to be lax in his or her preaching of the Word. As goes the preaching in the church, so goes the health of the church. Everything in the church is tied to the preacher's teaching of this book. It will either make or break a church.

### **Styles of preaching**

I want you to notice that we qualified biblical teaching with the word expositional. What is expositional Bible teaching? I know this is a big word. Don't be put off by it. You need to learn what this word means. It is important. You need to understand this word so if you move and you are looking for a church you find a church that values expositional preaching.

There are roughly three approaches to preaching. They are topical preaching, expositional preaching and consecutive expositional preaching. They each have their strengths and pitfalls.

### **What is topical preaching?**

A topical sermon begins with a topic the preacher wants to talk about. The topic could be prayer, marriage, forgiveness or parenting. Once the preacher has his topic, he rummages through the Bible to find appropriate verses to go

with the subject. The sermon begins in the mind of the preacher. The preacher then creates his points and uses Bible verses to support his points.

There is nothing necessarily wrong with this type of preaching. It helps us see what the Bible, as a whole, says about a subject. I occasionally preach these type of series. The series The Mysteries of Heaven was a topical series. I put together questions about life after death, then pulled verses from the Bible to answer them. We also did a series called Reasons to Believe Your Bible. We started with a topic, formed points under the topic, and looked for verses in the Bible to support our conclusions. This new series called Fingerprint is a topical series. This type of preaching is very popular because it is immediately applicable. You have questions, here are verses with Bible answers. In the New Testament, you find this kind of preaching taking place by the apostles, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is good for us to understand what the Bible says about topic. If that is the only way we preached at Faith Church we wouldn't be a healthy church.

### **What is expositional preaching?**

Another type of preaching is called expositional preaching. This type of preaching doesn't start with a topic and use the Bible for seasoning and support. It starts with a paragraph or chapter in the Bible and explains what it says and shows how it applies today. This is letting the Bible determine the subject of the sermon, not the preacher. This does not mean preaching is boring or stale. It only means the Bible determines the subject of the sermon, not the preacher. While there are times topical sermons are appropriate, if you neglect expositional

Bible teaching, you subtly shift your source of authority. For topical sermons, the authority often rests on the preacher's creativity. For expositional sermons the source of authority is the Word of God. The preacher's job is to let God talk through his Word and show that God's words are timeless and very applicable for today. Expositional sermons let God do the talking. The preacher is only God's mouthpiece. This is very important. The authority for preaching must rest in the Word of God, not in the preacher. At Faith Church, we are committed to hearing God's Word and letting ourselves be shaped by it. If a pastor just preaches topically, he will shape his congregation into his image. Expositional preaching is letting God's Word do the shaping and letting God's Word be the authority.

In the past, I preached short expositional series. Examples include Christmas from the Psalms, where we preached on four Psalms about Christ at Christmas and Christmas from the book of Revelation, where we took a small section of Revelation and preached on it for Christmas. As a church, while we occasionally preach and teach topically, our default style is expositional preaching. I do this because I want you to know the Word of God. I want you to be shaped by the Word of God, not shaped by me. I am not worth following. God's words are worth following. I am not an authority. God's words are the authority. Anything we say from the pulpit must come upon the authority of God from this book.

### **What is consecutive expositional preaching?**

There is a third style I mentioned called consecutive expositional preaching. This is expositional, since it is teaching from the Bible, but it is also

consecutive. That means we typically take an entire book of the Bible and preach through the book from beginning to end. We did this with Hebrews, James, Song of Solomon, Daniel and the Gospel of John. This produces some long series.

While consecutive expositional teaching is not the only way to preach, I believe it should be the default way preaching comes from the pulpit. That is what you will typically find at Faith Church. Let me give you some reasons why.

**1. Studying through an entire book of the Bible helps us understand verses in context.** When we simply quote verses, we often miss the big picture.

Words, verses, chapters and Bible books only have meaning in context. When we study an entire book, we understand verses in their context.

Let me give you an example. When we studied the Gospel of John, we noticed there are some amazing blanket prayers in the book.

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. John 14:13–14 (ESV)

Most people struggle with these promises because they asked God for a car, a winning lottery ticket or a house and God didn't answer their prayers.

What gives? Is God out to lunch?

As we studied through the Gospel of John, we noticed that all the blanket prayers in the Gospel of John, I think there are five, are in a section of the book called the Upper Room Discourse. This is where Jesus was preparing his disciples to take the Gospel to the world. We realized these aren't blanket prayers for anything. In the context of Jesus sending his disciples into the world to tell others the Gospel, God promised to provide whatever they needed to

succeed in sharing the Gospel. God promises to provide whatever we need to successfully share the Gospel. There are many book-writing Bible gurus who miss this because they never looked at those verses in context. Studying through the Bible verse by verse gave us the context we needed so we didn't misunderstand those verses.

**2. Consecutive expositional preaching forces us to look at parts of the Bible we wouldn't normally consider.** Going through a book of the Bible verse by verse makes us study all of the Bible, not just the parts we like.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)

We often say all of the Bible is inspired by God and we need all of the Bible but we gravitate just to the parts we like and the verses we learned as a kid. We effectively ignore parts of the Bible. When we do that, we slowly create a picture of God of our own choosing rather than the full picture God tells us we need.

Consecutive expositional preaching forces us to deal with parts of the Bible we wouldn't normally examine. This results in what I call the surprise factor. This happens to me all the time when I am preparing for Sunday. As I study through a book of the Bible, I come to a part I thought I understood. When I study in depth, I get hit with a surprise. I realize I completely misunderstood it. I was blind to the significance of it. The part of God's Word I was forced to study yielded up precious jewels that were right under my nose all the time. When you

let the Word of God determine the sermon and you study all of the Bible, you will be surprised again and again.

In topical preaching, preachers leave their studies having learned nothing more about God than when they began to study. In consecutive expositional preaching, we are continually learning something new about God and God is continually changing us to be more like him.

**3. Consecutive expositional preaching teaches the Bible to a world that doesn't know it.** The statistics are clear. We live in a post biblically illiterate culture. We live in a culture that knows less about the Bible than the generations before us. One of the best things we can do is to simply open the Bible and read the Word of God to the people of God. Chances are, it is new.

This really hit me hard about 12 years ago. I was a youth pastor for 10 years before taking my first senior pastorate. As a youth pastor, I was an all-topical preacher. I enjoyed a great youth group. I noticed something about the kids. They knew all about the Bible, but they didn't know their Bible. They had verses highlighted but they didn't know how to read those verses in their context. They didn't know and love reading their Bible. God convicted me that I needed to repent. I needed to open the book and stop using it just to season my own ideas. If I believed 2 Timothy 3:16-17, I could teach all of the Bible and trust that God would use his words to grow his church. All of the Bible is relevant, not just my favorite verses.

This is why, at Faith Church, we typically preach through books of the Bible. The main difference between topical preaching and expositional preaching

is expositional preaching begins with the Word of God as the foundation of what we say and the authority for what we say. I simply explain the Bible and show how it applies to life. It is incredibly important that the Word of God is the authority in the pulpit, not the preacher. Let me show you why.

### **Why should the Word of God be the authority in the pulpit?**

#### **The Word of God is the way God creates spiritual life.**

Let's put our finger in the Bible at the very beginning. In Genesis, how did God bring about creation? Did he snap his fingers? Wiggle his foot? What did he do? He spoke. God's words carry authority and power. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

How did God create a people for himself in the Old Testament? He spoke and they were created. In Genesis 12, it was the Word of God that came to Abraham and called him to leave the city of Ur for the Promised Land.

It was God's words speaking through a burning bush that came to Moses and called him to set the Israelites free.

God creates life by his words. He creates a people for himself by his words. When God speaks, things happen.

Throughout Scripture we repeatedly find it is by God's words that God creates a people for himself. This is why expositional preaching is so important. Expositional preaching is basing your preaching upon the words of God in Scripture. It is powerful preaching because God's words have the ability to create God's people.

...he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. James 1:18 (ESV)



...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)

There is incredible power in God's Word.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

It is the Word of God that convicts us of sin and God uses his words as the chosen method to call people to himself. I don't want us to miss this. The preached Word of God is especially powerful. The power does not come from a slick preacher, it comes from God using his Word.

One of the great pictures of the power of the preached Word of God is in Ezekiel 37.

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy (*preach*) over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord." Ezekiel 37:1-6 (ESV)

This passage is incredibly encouraging to a preacher. When you are called to pastor a church that is on its last legs and it looks like it is a bunch of dry bones, what should you do? Preach the Word of God! God calls a people unto himself by the preaching of his Word.

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these

slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. Ezekiel 37:7–10 (ESV)

The context is the nation of Israel was exiled in Babylon. Spiritually, the Israelites were dead. They were as good as dry bones. God brought about revival among his people. How did he do it? Preaching! Ezekiel preached God’s Word and the life giving power of God’s Word caused flesh to come on the bones and life into the bodies and a vast and mighty army was raised from the dead by the power of the preached Word of God.

The same power resident in God’s word in Ezekiel’s day is still resident in God’s Word today. The difference is God spoke to Ezekiel directly and gave him the word to preach. Today, God speaks to us through his words in the Bible. If a pastor keeps his finger in the text and faithfully preaches the Word of God with the authority of God, God will use it to create life in the spiritually dead. Paul wrote the same thing about God using the preaching of his Word to create spiritual life.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:14–17 (ESV)

The best way for people to come to faith in Christ is to preach about Christ using the Bible as the authority for a sermon.

People can be gathered around a variety of things. They could gather because they are cheering for the same football team. They can gather because they come from the same family or live in the same town. People can gather in a

church because they like the same kind of music. In churches, it is tempting to gather a people around the gifts of a preacher. At Faith Church, people gather around the Word of God.

### **The Word of God is the way God sustains spiritual life.**

The Word of God is not something we begin with and graduate away from. It is what sustains us as Christians. It keeps us from drifting into error. It revives us when we drift away. The Bible tells us we need the Word of God in our life on a daily basis just like we eat food.

But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

Not only does God use his Word to maintain our lives with him but he uses it to guide us in the decisions we face every day.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105 (ESV)

As Christians, we need the Word of God in our lives much more than once a week on Sunday. We need it daily. God's Word is alive. It is like food to our souls. It is like a light to our paths. Do not be a Christian starving in a dark room. Read your Bible every day. When it comes to Bible reading, I have a Bible reading plan on my iPhone and iPad. I use a program called Logos. I read through the Old Testament once a year and the New Testament twice a year. The program allows me to underline things and put little sticky notes on verses. Every week I find what I read applying either to my life, an appointment I have during the day or the sermon I am writing for Sunday. It is really amazing the way God's Holy Spirit connects life to his Word, even when I am reading

consecutively through the Bible. He puts me at just the right place for what I need to hear.

God uses the preached Word of God and the studied Word of God as the spiritual food for our lives.

One of my favorite stories to show the power of the preached Word of God upon believers lives comes from Nehemiah 8. Some exiles had returned from Babylon to rebuild the destroyed city of Jerusalem. They had this nifty idea. Why not have church and see what happens?

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood... the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. Nehemiah 8:1–8 (ESV)

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. Nehemiah 8:9 (ESV)

And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them. Nehemiah 8:12 (ESV)

The Word of God was read. The people broken into Life Groups with Life Group leaders who talked about the Word to help the people understand and apply it. The result was the Word of God did its work. People were cut to the

heart. They realized how far they were from God. They repented. In humility they turned to God. They walked away rejoicing that they heard the Word of God and could understand it and repent.

This is the normative process for the people of God. Hear the Word of God. Let it break us. Run in repentance to God and let him put us together.

**Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. John 17:17 (ESV)**

It is God's Word that changes us to become more like God. The primary place we need to hear the Word of God is the pulpit but we also need to hear it daily in our own lives through our own Bible reading and study.

### **What role does expository preaching play in history?**

While topical preaching played an important part in the last 2,000 years of church history, expository preaching was powerfully used by God to bring people to Christ and, just like we see in the Bible, it has brought people back to God when they have drifted away.

In the ancient church from the years 347-407 A.D., one of the most powerful preachers was a man named Chrysostom. He was called "Golden Mouth." Do you know how he preached? He simply taught verse by verse through the Bible, and God brought a vast number of people to Jesus through his teaching when he taught just like Nehemiah 8.

In the medieval church, from the years 476-1500 A.D., the church taught in strange ways using allegory plus sometimes making things up and abandoning the Bible altogether. Two great voices in those years criticized this preaching that was out of men's minds rather than God's words. They were John Wycliffe

and William Tyndale. In essence, they kept telling people to put their fingers in the text. God changed the church by the preaching of the Word of God.

In the reformation church, from the years 1500-1648 A.D., it was Martin Luther and John Calvin who called people back to the teaching of the Word of God. Luther's famous quote about the reformation is he did nothing but preached and wrote about the Word of God. It was God's Word that did all the work of changing the world.

In the modern church, from 1649 A.D. to today, probably the most notable expository preachers were the Puritans. As they studied the Bible, they realized what we already learned this morning. The Word of God has power. The preached Word of God is how God changes lives. They did some radical things because of it. In their day, the altar with the mass was in the center of the church and the pulpit on the side. They switched them around and put the pulpit in the front. They then developed the practice of leaving an open Bible in the pulpit.

The church is where people came to hear the Word of God and God would use the hearing of his Word to call people to himself, just like in Ezekiel 37, and to shepherd his lost people back to himself, just like Nehemiah 8.

### **What is the role of preaching and worship at Faith Church?**

This is why the preaching of the Word of God is central to everything at Faith Church. Since the Bible is God's chosen means of calling people to himself, we preach it.

The Word of God doesn't just guide our teaching, it also guides our worship. We want to sing worship songs that are saturated with Scripture. Two

weeks ago, Sonja lead worship. Between songs she explained the worship song we sang was written by Matt Redmond. He stitched together 16 Scriptures so the song was God's Word put to music.

That is the kind of worship music we desire to use. God's Word is powerful.

## Conclusion

This morning, we need to understand that the people of God are created by the Word of God. This is why we believe expositional Bible preaching is the backbone of church health.

It is also why God wants us in our Bibles on more than Sunday. This morning, if you aren't reading through the Bible, start today. Maybe work your way through the Gospel of John, only a chapter a day. You can begin in Proverbs. There are 31 chapters in Proverbs, roughly the same number of days in a month. Try reading the Proverb that corresponds with the day of the month. God's Word is alive. It will change you.

If you don't have a Bible, we sell them dirt cheap at the Connection Center. Let me read one last time what makes Faith Church unique:

**BIBLE - We believe relevant expositional Bible teaching and Christ-centered worship are the backbone of church health.**

That is part of what makes Faith Church unique.



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