

Digging Deeper



I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.

- Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 6:47-48, NIV)

On Sunday morning pastor Jerry preaches for life transformation. The assumption is we are bringing family, friends, neighbors, fellow students and co-workers to worship. So, we are “seeker friendly.” Some think seeker aware worship with “life transformation” preaching is shallow. Actually, it’s wordy using humor and illustration to build meaningful word pictures that convey theological truth.

Unfamiliar, technical terms like *sanctification* are replaced with action points such as:

How can I live a life pleasing to God?

1. Ask “*What would Jesus do?*”
2. Act, become Christ in the moment.
3. Affirm God’s control of your life.

The goal of such preaching is to help the hearer transform into a 21st century image of Christ. It’s practical theology without the terminology. When we get into more technical conversations about reality there are a couple of biases you need to bear in mind concerning your pastor so you’ll know how to filter what I say through what I believe.

First, I’m an *evangelical*— I believe in the Triune God, the deity of Christ, and experience the active Presence of the Holy Spirit. I accept the authority and validity of the text we call the Bible:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God’s way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.”

—Paul of Tarsus (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NLT)

Yet, I’m not a *literalist*—someone who believes each phrase verbatim. The Bible contains many types of writing with varied purposes. For example, when Jesus says in Matthew 5:30, “*And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away,*” he’s using hyperbole to emphasize the importance of refraining from immorality. He is not advocating self-mutilation.

As a life-long student of the Bible with some ability in the original languages and an appreciation for the history of the text we hold in our hands today, I cannot be a literalist. Nor can I be a *fundamentalist* – someone whose mind is closed to reasoned faith exploration and often locked into a specific translation and set of doctrinal standards that act as a “litmus test” for “true believers.”

I am *Wesleyan* in my theology. My study of the works of John and Charles Wesley affirms my own experience of the God of grace drawing us into a personal relationship through Jesus the Christ. I’m not a *universalist* – someone who believes that everyone will somehow be eternally in God’s presence (“in heaven”). I’m not a *pluralist* – someone who believes that many paths lead to God – but I do believe that most spiritual paths, especially the monotheistic faiths – Judaism, Islam, and Christianity – offer helpful insights into God, life, and our own humanity.

I seek truth compassionately through Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason. I am called to and enjoy preaching and teaching God’s Word and coaching others in faith development that leads to life transformation as the character of Christ is formed in us.