

Bible Saturated

If you've got your Bibles, turn with me to *Matthew*, chapter 22. I really did try to not teach from *Matthew* this week, but that's just the way it panned out. It's part of our identity now as a church. But *Matthew* 22 is where we'll be. In the 1970s, a computer programmer named Rob Campbell was looking for a job. He wanted to work for a company that was deeply invested in the future of personal computing—which was actually a relatively new market in the 70s. He wanted to be wowed, inspired, at where that market was headed.

So he went and talked to three different companies. At the first one, he asked, “what is your vision for the personal computer?” They replied, *we think it could be the next big thing on everyone's wish list for the holiday season*. He found that answer incredibly boring and unimaginative. “Who cares about *that*?” he thought. That wasn't the inspiring vision he was looking for. So he went to the next company, another mover and shaker in computing, and asked *them* the same question: “what is your vision for the future of personal computing?” They replied, *we think a personal computer could help our stock rise above two dollars a share*. That answer was even less inspiring to him than the first.

So still uninspired and a bit cynical about the whole thing, Campbell went and talked to one more person. He asked *them* the same question: “what is your vision for the future of personal computing?” // And the way *that* person responded, Campbell says, literally gave him *goosebumps*. This guy talked for an hour as if he were some sort of “magical storyteller.” He talked about all that personal computing could be and how using a personal computer could be a fun, energizing—even *exhilarating* experience. (Keep in mind that in 1977, a personal computer looked something like *this*—so when he called this guy a magical storyteller, he meant it.) But at the end of that conversation, this guy looked at Rob Campbell and said, with full conviction, as if he believed it deep in his bones: “Rob, personal computing can change the world.”¹

That last guy's name was Steve Jobs. Later that same year, in 1977, he and Steve Wozniak introduced the Apple II at the West Coast Computer Fair. It is the first consumer product to have been sold by Apple Computer. And the rest, as they say, is history. / So there is something to be said for offering a compelling vision for the future. Now, I'll freely admit that as a pastor, I'm a bit cynical when it comes to a word like “vision.” In the world of church leadership, sometimes that word (vision) gets used and overused to the point of exhaustion. People will constantly ask you, and pastors will ask each other, “what is the vision for your church”? A lot of times, when people ask me

¹ Much of this story can be found [here](#).

that about *our* church, I have to work really hard not to roll my eyes at them. That's how over that word I am.

But at the same time, I've also found that often, churches *without* a compelling vision for the future, either die out or stall out. Or, in *other* cases, they just spend the bulk of their life together *reacting* to a variety of things they *don't* want to be—which in many cases, can be *worse* than dying out—to just define yourself entirely by what you're *against*.

And also, if I'm just completely honest, at least a lot of *our* church's existence is *due* to us offering a *vision* for what this church could be. So back in 2016, when we asked twenty-five people in South Carolina to consider moving four hours away to start this church, we had to at least partially *describe* to them what that church would look like and what it was going to be. When we stand up here on Sundays and teach from the Scriptures, at least *part* of what we're doing is laying out for you a *vision* of what a vibrant, transformative relationship with Jesus looks like, and attempting to inspire you to give that a shot. When you sign up for LifeGroup Basics in order to join a LifeGroup here at our church, part of what *Colton* does in that class is gives its participants a *vision* for what a community like that can look like, and then hopefully *inspires* you to join one.

So despite my personal *aversion* to the word “vision,” I do think there's actually something to it. So much of what we do as a church requires the ability to imagine and describe a compelling future, and invite people to participate with us in working *towards* that future together.

Which brings us to the series we're kicking off this morning, which we've called *Future Church*. In this series, we want to lay out for you four goals for the next four years of our church. We're going to unpack a “vision” (so to speak) of where we're headed for the next era of our life together. These goals have been discussed, and hashed out, and fine-tuned by our pastors, staff, and others. They've been debated and prayed through and discerned, to the best of our ability. And after all that, *these* are the things that we feel like the Holy Spirit has set on our hearts to work towards together over the next four years.

Now, there is at least one *difference* between *our* vision, and the story I told at the beginning about Steve Jobs. It's an *important* difference. Because *our* vision in this series is not something we dreamed up because I or anyone else on our staff is some sort of “magical storyteller.” Although if you want to call me that, I'm not opposed; I've been called much worse. The goals that we have are *not* conjured up from scratch, or from our imaginations; they're things we get directly out of the pages of the *Bible*. But, at the same time, they are things that we believe God has uniquely put on

our hearts as things for *our* church to focus on over the next handful of years. They are things we believe the Holy Spirit wants *us specifically* to focus on, in the near future.

So **one final thing here**, before I tell you what they are (**I'm building the anticipation—can you tell?**). Okay, just for clarity, *none* of the things we're highlighting in this series are *replacing* who we already are. Our church is going to *continue* being a Jesus-centered family on mission (as we've always been), and we're going to continue *living* in Knoxville as it is in heaven (as we've always done). None of *that* is changing. Rather, **I think these four things are an opportunity to press deeper *into* those goals that we already have.** I think they are all specific ways for us to *become* a Jesus-centered family on mission, and to *live* in Knoxville as it is in heaven. These are ways to leverage who we already *are*, in an effort to become *more* of who we are. So we're not *changing* who we are; we're continuing on the same trajectory, in some specific ways. Does that make sense?

Okay. So **without further ado**...here are our four goals for the next four years. You ready? Over the next four years, we want our church to grow in being:

Bible Saturated
Spirit Led
Discipleship Driven
Outward Oriented

There they are; that's what we want to grow in over the next four years. So now that you know what they *all are*, let me give you some **brief detail** on each one—so you understand what we mean by them. We're going to unpack each of them *fully* in the subsequent weeks of this series. But today I'll just give you the condensed version. First, we feel like God is calling us to be...

- **Bible Saturated.** By that, we mean that **by 2028** (so, four years from now), **we want every member of City Church to have a knowledge, understanding, and love of the Scriptures—Old Testament and New.** Second, we want to be...
- **Spirit Led.** By *that*, we mean that **by 2028, we want every member of City Church to have an intimate, bold, and obedient relationship with the Holy Spirit.** Third, we want to be...
- **Discipleship Driven.** Here, **by 2028, we want every member of City Church to have at least two people they are persistently investing in** (spiritually speaking), **and at least one person persistently investing *in them*.** And finally, we want to be...

- **Outward Oriented.** By this, we mean that by 2028, we want every member of City Church to have a burden for the *lostness* in our world, and a personal commitment to connecting friends, neighbors, coworkers, and family members to Jesus.

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So: *Bible saturated*, *Spirit led*, *discipleship driven*, and *outward oriented*. That's where City Church is headed the next four years.

Now, I would imagine that **your gut reaction** to each of those goals might vary *greatly*. It probably depends a *lot* on your past church *experience* or *experiences*. You might be very excited about *some* of those, and very nervous or skeptical about *others*. And just to be abundantly clear, *some* of that nervousness or skepticism, I actually *share*. I **actually think that any one or two of these goals, without the others, can be somewhat dangerous**. Or at minimum, can create a bit of a lopsided church. I think churches that make *one* of these things their goal, to the exclusion of the *others*, can get off-track.

To help show you what I mean by that (and maybe help *quell* some of that anxiety we might feel), I **made you a chart**. *[Put chart on screen here]* This, I'm hoping, will give us a visual of how to think about these four goals *together*. So each circle on this diagram represents one of our four goals. I want to *use* this chart to show you the downsides of pursuing these goals in *isolation* from each other. Let's start by zooming in on that top quadrant, **Bible saturated**. To me, if a church is *only* concerned about the Bible, it's often really easy for that church to become a little **dogmatic & cold**. *You show up in a community like that, and sometimes you think "they seem to really care about the Bible, but they don't really seem to care about people very much."* Not saying it's always that way, but it *often* is.

When a church cares about being **Spirit led** above all else, *sometimes*, that church can become very focused on just having an *experience* with the Holy Spirit, and therefore can become a little **malformed**; sometimes there can be a lack of spiritual maturity and even steadfastness when they don't "sense" the Spirit working in obvious, apparent sorts of ways. Again: not *always*, but *often*. Third quadrant: when a church mainly only cares about **discipleship**, sometimes that can become overly **programmatically** and **rigid**—they have a certain system for discipling people, but they don't really like to diverge or modify that, even when certain situations require it. Sometimes, it seems like they turn people into *projects*, or at least make people *feel* that way.

And then finally, fourth quadrant: when a church is *only* focused on **outward things** (like missions and evangelism), sometimes that church can become what I call **decisionistic**. What I mean by that is that they really only care about people making a one-time

decision to follow Jesus, and don't spend a lot of time helping them learn to *become like* Jesus. So those churches can become a tad **shallow** in terms of depth and maturity. Again: not always, but *often*. // Now, I fully recognize I am painting with broad brushes with everything I just said. I hope you'll extend some grace there. But I do think there's some truth in all of that: **I think at least many of us have been around churches (or seen churches) that have gotten off-kilter because only one of these things became a priority, to the exclusion of the others.** Which is part of why we want to pursue all of these *together*—not just one or two of them in isolation. In other words, **this little section in the middle** is where we want to be.

So any *one* of these goals, on their own, probably could get a little lopsided. **Each one of these, on their own, probably isn't the full picture of who God calls his people to be.** But I think *together*, they provide a really helpful model of what life with Jesus should look like—both *individually* and *communally*. Make sense? So we'll dive *deeper* into each of these in the next three weeks. But what I wanted to do *today*, with the time we have left, is talk about the *first* one, which is being **Bible saturated**.

So if you've still got your **Bibles open** nearby, here's where we finally get to our passage. Look with me at Matthew, chapter **22**, starting in **v. 23**:

[23] That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him (that is, Jesus) with a question. [24] "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him.

Now, that likely sounds like a **very bizarre practice** to us today. Back then, it was a really intentional, *beautiful* practice based on protecting a woman's social status in a society where a widow would be extraordinarily vulnerable. It was done to make sure those women were provided for and taken care of. Really incredible thing, even if it does sound odd to us. But *here*, that's not even really the point of the passage. The point is in the Sadducees' *question* about that practice, and Jesus' *response* to them. Look at verse 25...

[25] Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. [26] The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh (in other words, they're asking about the most extreme of hypothetical situations—v. 27:). [27] Finally, the woman died. [28] Now then, at the resurrection (in other words, the afterlife), whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

That's their question. Pay careful attention to Jesus' answer, v. 29:

[29] Jesus replied, "You are in **error** because you **do not know** the **Scriptures** or the power of God.

Interesting. Jesus responds, not by answering their question per se, but rather by giving them a general principle. Here's the principle: "you are in **error**, when you do not know the **Scriptures**." He then goes on to quote a passage from Exodus and drops the mic on them. But here's the point: **in Jesus' mind, evidently, not knowing the Scriptures is a problem. And specifically, a problem that can lead a person into all kinds of error.**

Now, that word **error is a little slippery** to translate. Because when you and I think of an error, we likely tend to think of something minor. We hit the wrong button on our computer or iPhone and an error message pops up that says "sorry, try again." Annoying, sure—but not always a big deal. But the *word* Jesus uses here has a little more depth and meaning than that. The word *he* uses means to be led astray or to wander off. It's the image of someone not paying attention, and before they know it, not realizing at all how far they've gotten from where they originally were. It's a big deal.

Ask **any parent who has been in a public setting** with their kids, and had that moment—however brief it was—where their kid wandered off. Where they didn't know, even for a second, where their kid was. And here's the thing, generally speaking, that kid wasn't thinking, *you know what? I'm going to get as far as I can from my parent. Hopefully I'll get out of their sight entirely—give them a heart attack, even.* That's not typically the situation. The situation is that they saw something that looked interesting or appealing or fun, and they wandered a little further, and then further, and then further, until they were out of their parents' sight.

That, I think, **is a picture** of what Jesus is describing here. He's saying if we "do not know the Scriptures," we will wander off. To put it another way, **as we've said here before: if you do not know what the Scriptures teach, you will perpetually be a slave to whatever "sounds right" in the moment.**² And I'll just go ahead and tell you: there may not be a faster way to make an absolute mess of your life than doing whatever sounds right to you in the moment. **This is deeply personal to me. I know people who have married people** they never should've married, because it *felt* right in the moment to do it. I know people that have inflicted deep, **psychological damage onto their kids** and

² I think this is originally from pastor Matt Chandler, but honestly not sure.

stunted their development, because they parented in a way that “sounded” right when they read it in a book or on a blog.

I know people that have landed themselves in **crippling debt and financial ruin** because they bought the house or the car that “seemed” right to buy, despite the high price tag on it. I know people who have **profoundly isolated themselves** for years, because it “felt” easier to not prioritize community in their life. And listen: I’m not saying any of this to scare you. I’m not trying to motivate you with fear. I’m simply pointing out that what the Bible teaches is absolutely true. If we do not know the Scriptures, we will “wander” off. And wandering off can be much more lasting and damaging than we think it is.

I say this because I **don't want you to be**, in the words of **Ephesians 4**, “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.”³ You see the reality is that there are so many types of “teaching” out there. There’s “teaching” on the news, and on social media, and blogs, and podcasts, and streaming services –just to name a few sources. Whether we’d label it this way or not, we are all hearing “teaching” constantly.

And at least **some of that teaching might** contain really *good* ideas. *Biblical* ideas. Or bare minimum, ideas that aren’t directly *at odds* with the teaching of the Bible. But at the same time, there are *many* types of “teaching” out there that don’t align with the Bible at all. **We are constantly being fed ways of thinking about the world that are directly at odds with the Bible.** Ways of thinking about gender and gender roles—from both *conservative* and *liberal* directions, and everything in between. Ways of thinking about sex and sexual *expression*. Ways of thinking about money and possessions and spending. Ways of thinking about marriage and the purpose of marriage. Ways of thinking about parenting and specifically, *how* to parent. Ways of thinking about friendships and relationships with other people. Ways of thinking about work and rest.

And **the list goes on**. You and I are being fed ways of thinking about all of those things *constantly*. And I’ll be real with you: *some* of it, on the surface, sounds really, really *convincing*. / Really, really *appealing*. *Some* of it *sounds “right.”* And, at the exact same time, is absolutely dead wrong. *And* it will lead you and people you love down a path of ruin and heartache, if you buy into it. And **if we are not grounded in, saturated by the Scriptures, that is exactly what will happen.** We will “wander off.” We will get carried along with whatever sounds most convincing to us in the moment. We will be tossed back and forth with every wave of teaching that comes our way—because we don’t have

³ See specifically v. 14

any sort of *anchor* keeping that from happening. **We, like the Sadducees, will be “in error” because we “do not know the Scriptures.”**

And there's actually **another way** we might find ourselves in error if we do not know the Scriptures. If we do not know the Scriptures, we may form **an inaccurate picture of God in our minds**. You see, being Bible saturated helps us ensure that the version of God we operate by is the *real* God—and not just a figment of our imaginations. I can't tell you how often as a pastor I hear people say something like “well the God I worship would *never* _____ (fill in the blank with something the God of the Bible absolutely did and does do).” Or “...the God I worship is an *advocate* for _____ (fill in the blank with something the Scriptures clearly teach that God *opposes*).” **Quite often, I find that the God some people worship is just a God who happens to like all the things they like, support all the things they support, and be against all the things that they're against.** Tim Keller famously pointed out the problem with this mindset. He said:

If your god never disagrees with you (if he never contradicts you, confronts you, is at odds with the things you already think), *you might just be worshiping an idealized version of yourself*. Some of us might need to sit with that this week.

But listen: as followers of Jesus, we don't just want to worship a projection of ourselves, or even a projection of God; we want to know the *real* God. And that can only happen if we are regularly saturating ourselves in what the Scriptures teach about who God is and what he's like.. So *that* is a big part of why we want to be “Bible saturated.”

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Now, all of that said: I'm aware that for many of us, **at least part of the reason we aren't Bible saturated is because we don't fully know how to read the Bible**. In other words, no one has ever taught us how to *read* it and *understand* what it's trying to say. (That's not the case for *all* of us—some of us *have* gotten plenty of instruction on how to read the Bible, and we still choose *not* to—which is a different teaching for a different day.) But for *many* of us, we honestly don't know how to *do* it. The reality is that this is a complex book, made up of a lot of different eras of history, different cultures, different outlooks on life, and different types of literature and writing. Plenty of it is not exactly simple or easy to understand. That's a barrier for a lot of people.

So here's **our plan to help with that**. I'm pumped to announce that we finally have a date and a plan for something I've wanted to do all the way from the beginning of our church. Beginning on the final Sunday of this year, and moving into the year 2025, we are going to spend an entire year just learning all about the Bible, and how to read and understand the Bible. We'll have a whole Bible reading plan put together for you, and then the series

is just going to follow *along* that reading plan every single week for a whole year. We'll spend a lot of the series just unpacking the more confounding, difficult-to-understand portions of the Bible. As well as just teaching you how to read and understand it in general. We'll call it the *Year of the Bible*: An entire year of just helping each one of us read, understand, and *love* the Bible. That mega-series is obviously a central part of us work towards becoming *Bible saturated* as a church. And maybe it's just the nerd in me, but I'm really, really excited about that. Maybe *too* excited. We'll see. Anyway, we'll have more details on that as we near the end of this year on it all.

But **in the meantime**, I want to give you just a few tips for right *now*. A few things to help you get started reading and understanding the Bible, if you're newer to it all. First, tip #1...

Start with the Gospels

Especially if you haven't spent a ton of time reading and understanding the bible as of yet, try starting with the gospels. In other words, just **start somewhere**. Even if there are significant portions of the Bible you *don't* know how to read or interpret or understand...start with the parts that you *do*. And a great place to start is the *gospels*: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They're all about Jesus (who, if you didn't know, is a pretty big deal in the world of the bible), and at least the vast majority of them are fairly straightforward to understand. You don't have to be a seminary student or theological genius to follow the bulk of what they're saying.

Maybe just start with **Matthew**, and work your way from there. *And I'll add: lucky for you, we just finished a four year series on the book of Matthew, which is the first gospel. So start there, and even if you hit portions of Matthew that are confusing to you, go to our website, find the teaching on that passage, and give it a listen. That should help.*

But my point is this. There *will* be parts of the Bible you don't understand; that's fine. Hopefully our series in 2025 will help tremendously with that. So for now, just start with the parts you likely *can* understand. Make sense? Second thing...

Get a Good Study Bible

Especially if you are diving into the more complicated, lesser traveled parts of the Bible, a great resource to help is a good study Bible. I highly recommend the *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*⁴—this is the one I read from every morning at home. I think it's

⁴ [Link](#)

exceptionally well-done and very helpful. I also really love the *ESV Study Bible*.⁵ I think you can get versions of each of these for somewhere around \$30 on Amazon. **Probably around \$50-60 for a swanky leather-bound version, if you want to be fancy about it.** But go grab you a study Bible.

If you *want* to get a study Bible and **can't afford one**, feel free to tell your LifeGroup that—I can just about guarantee that some people in your LifeGroup would love to chip in to get you a study Bible. If that doesn't work, come talk to me, and City Church as an organization would love to buy one for you. / But study Bibles are great ways to get some help reading and understanding the parts of the Bible that take a little more work and context to understand. Having one would probably help tremendously in your efforts to become Bible saturated.

Third **tip**. This one is just a website. It's...

Visit BibleProject.com

Many of you, I'm sure, already know about the Bible Project. They have a website, YouTube Channel, and podcast—among other things. But **one of the main things they do** is create beautiful, engaging, animated videos that help you understand themes and entire books of the Bible—and they're all *free*. You can literally pull up an overview video before every book of the Bible you read, and after watching a seven-ish minute video, have a pretty good idea what that book is about and how to understand what's happening in it.

Their videos **probably won't answer** every *single* question or hang-up you have in that book, but they will absolutely answer a lot of them. And they will help greatly in understanding what you're reading. If you go to their YouTube channel, you can easily go down a rabbit hole of watching all the videos they have on offer and learn so much about the Bible as a whole. **It would be the healthiest version of binge-watching you could ever participate in.** So hit up the Bible Project and get some practical help in reading and understanding the Bible.

So I think **those three things**—*start with the gospels*, get a study Bible, and look into the Bible Project—will get you a long way down the road towards reading and understanding the Bible. And then hang tight until January, and we'll have an entire year of practical help coming your way. All of these things are included in our efforts towards becoming a Bible *saturated* group of people.

⁵ [Link](#)

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Now, before we wrap up, let me give you **one last guiding principle** on all of this. The last thing I'll say about being Bible saturated is this: *don't miss Jesus in it all*. Don't miss Jesus. In **John 5**, Jesus is talking to another group of religious leaders, and drops this line on them:

*You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in **them** you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*⁶

Do you see **what he's saying** here? He's saying that **you can read, and study, and interpret, and learn from the Scriptures all day long, and still miss the point of the Scriptures**. As *valuable* as the Bible is, the *Bible alone* isn't where life is found. Life doesn't *come* from the Bible. **Just because you read and know the Scriptures, doesn't mean you look like Jesus**. The Pharisees were the prime examples of that. *No one* knew more Bible than the Pharisees. But also, by Jesus' own assessment, no one was *further* from the heart of God than the Pharisees were.⁷

So **life does not come from** the Bible *alone*. Life comes from *Jesus, via* the Bible. And *that's* what we're after when we spend time in the Scriptures: **Not a relationship with the Bible; but a relationship with the God of the Bible, made possible through Jesus. To understand the heart of the Bible, we need to have a relationship with the one that the Bible is about**. Otherwise, the Bible is no better than any other ancient book on the shelves of a bookstore or library. But *knowing* Jesus unlocks it all. And listen: this is why none of what we're saying in this series is at odds with us *continuing* to be Jesus-centered. It's all still about him; we're just wanting to be steeped in the Scriptures so we can understand more fully and more accurately what a relationship with *Jesus* is all about.

So **each week as a community**, we go to the tables all around this room and we *remember* Jesus. We remember the moment when he went to the cross and made a relationship with God possible for each of us. We take in a symbol of his body and his blood, broken and shed for us, so that we could know the God of the Bible as *our* God—*through* Jesus. And as we do that, we ask that he would lead us, in large part through the pages of this book, to know him more and more.

So I'll pray, and then we'll spend some time remembering Jesus together.

⁶ John 5:39-40

⁷ For reference, see nearly all of Matthew 23.