

Retreat 2010 – February 5-7 in Asheville, NC at Lifeway Conference Center

Retreats, in my opinion, are essential for discipleship. The way we live in America can be easily demonstrated by the drive through window at the local McDonalds, Chick-Filet or Wendy's. In most cases we are in a hurry, and since we live in the age of consumerism then we expect what we want and when we want it. In the case of the drive through, we can order, get it almost immediately and then be gone. Believe it or not I have eaten chicken nuggets so fast that I have almost finished at times before leaving the parking lot. My mouth looks like a tree shredder with nugget remnants flying past my mouth and cheek. Many people in church take almost that exact approach to Bible devotion time. As I have said many times before "the church isn't influencing the culture but rather the culture is influencing the church." Do we have any idea from the learning and living perspective what it means to "Be still and know that I am God."

A couple of weeks ago in class we discussed the great commission, which is located in Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit..."

Therefore, we are to be a people of God that are constantly making learners of Jesus. I know that that is bad grammar but hopefully you understand my point. As we learn from God's word, by the Spirit then we become equipped to teach others about Christ. The Bible teaches that a Christian moves from learning correctly to living correctly. So how might we expect to accomplish the great commission which is learning others about Jesus if we don't know this Jesus? Please don't be confused at this point. I am not talking in terms of knowing about Jesus but rather a genuine knowing of Jesus. And if God has ordained that to know Him properly we must know His word, then how can we disciple without this as our basic foundation?

Here is the point; retreats are designed for the specific purpose of making learners of Christ by knowing His word. Over the years in ministry the most significant movements in spiritual growth have normally happened in a retreat format. Think about why that might be true in the context of American Christianity;

- First, you are away from the normal distractions at home and work.
- Second, there is a specific period of time of intense focus on the Lord.
- Third, not only can one learn, but the context allows for discussion with other Christians during breakfast, lunch, breaks and dinner.
- Fourth, the people who are investing time, energy and money for a retreat normally have hearts that are prepared to hear.
- Fifth, since groups are smaller there is more time for dialogue in the form of questions and answers.
- Sixth, there is an expectation of spiritual growth from the people that come.
- Seventh, I find those attending are ready to rest in the Lord. This principle is so important to our learning and living the God-centered life.

During the summer months through prayer and discussions with various people two predominate themes came to mind. The first was an understanding for the will of God in our lives. And second was looking at end times from Genesis to Revelation approach. My lean toward end times from Genesis to Revelation came out of the fact that we are not going to study “end times” as part of our Bible doctrine. The knowing of God’s will is going to be flushed out when we get to the doctrine of salvation and specifically as we talk about our sanctification. This simply means our transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ as we walk with Him on a daily basis.

So, over the months I have been thinking and praying about the best way to accomplish in a retreat format the following title “End Times from Genesis to Revelation.” It became very obvious to me that a weekend discussion about “the rapture”, current events in the Middle East, or who is the Anti-Christ would not be the best way to invest our time. I have been in groups where there is infinite dialogue about these things that even include how the temple is to be rebuilt where the “dome of the Mosque” presently resides. Please understand that in many of these discussions where speculations rule the day and there becomes very little discussion of Christ. Over the years in ministry the big disappointment in talking with other Christians has been the lack of understanding in the unity of the Bible. Here is what I have found to be predominant. People have favorite verses they quote and then proof text the verse so that it coincides with their theological belief system. Please forgive this next statement as I do not mean it critically but it comes from observation and discussion. Most people haven’t read the Bible to develop their theology, but have been the recipients of their theology from other pastors and teachers. The problem is when you have a pre-existing theology or belief then you come to the Bible and read it through that particular colored lens.

Over the past year I have talked with a good number of people in our class about Bible reading, devotion and study. As I have assembled this information I am more convinced now than ever of the need for the foundational basics for learning the Bible. And those basics include a proper “hermeneutic” when reading and studying the Bible. Don’t let the word “hermeneutic” intimidate. It means a system of study to understand what the author meant by what he wrote. As a matter of fact the Lord Jesus Himself does this in explaining the Scriptures with the two men on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. In other words Jesus gave them a Bible study on “how” to interpret the word of God. And here is the bottom line in that discussion which we read in Luke 24:27 “Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” Do you think it may be possible to talk about end times, try to figure out all the signs from current events to the Anti-Christ and in the process leave out Jesus Christ?

Well, this retreat, by the grace of God is going to be formatted around provided you with the Biblical tools in order to understand and interpret end times from God’s word. I am as excited about teaching and discussing these Biblical truths as anything we’ve done to date. In a discussion this week I gave the following illustration. Pretend you go to the

beach for a week and during that time you buy a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle. You tell the family that at night one of the activities will be the puzzle.

So imagine getting out the puzzle and everyone get a piece in which they look at the shape, colors and key markings. Everyone is focused on his or her particular piece. But we all know two basic principles that most use when putting together a jigsaw puzzle. First is to determine the border pieces and then second be sure you have a picture of the box top. Before you can start to understand and interpret the pieces of end time revelation in the Bible you need to have the box top.

During the weekend I am going to provide you with what I believe to be the most succinct and accurate way to have a framework from Genesis to Revelation. I really believe that this could be explained to a 10 year old. And I will repeat the words of my old Bible teacher, "it is simplicity through great complexity." Our ultimate view of eschatology (study of end times) is most impacted by the very hermeneutic that we come to and lay over the Scripture. It becomes very difficult to discuss end times if we are all looking just to prove our point with various proof texts. The first order of business is to bring an overview from Genesis to Revelation that doesn't bring violence to the Scriptures. Did you know we have eschatology in Genesis?

There is so much to cover and it always seems that there is so little time. Please be in prayer for me specifically as I edit the teaching modules over the next few weeks. I really don't want this to be a retreat where you come back and say "that was like trying to get a sip from a fire hose." But rather a time where we learn these important Biblical basics so that we can saturate ourselves in order to better understand an end times theology.

As always should you have any questions, remember Pat is available 24/7 – blessings,

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