**Introduction**

*(TP walks on stage with a physical Bible in hand)*

The Bible.

A lot of us aren’t entirely sure what to do with this book. It can be intimidating. Some find it confusing. In fact, for as long as it’s been around, people have disagreed about how to even approach it.

* Some see the Bible as a hammer to be used to drive their viewpoints home.
* Some consider it important but rarely ever read it.
* Some may be in the habit of declaring, “The Bible clearly says…”
* And some may see it as irrelevant to modern life all together.

However we view it, the Bible remains the best selling book of all time, whether we know what to do with it or not. And research has shown that regularly reflecting on Scripture is the most catalytic practice for spiritual growth no matter where a person is in their spiritual journey. If you’ve been on this road for a long time or are brand new to this whole “faith” thing – diving deep into the Bible is critical.

It’s for that reason that we have decided to embark on an 11-week journey together in a new series we’re launching today called “Turn the Page.”

Now, our hope in this series is two-fold:

1. First, “Turn the page” literally means to flip from one page to the next in a book. During this series, we’ll start at the beginning of the Bible and encourage everyone to “turn the page” with us as we move through a big picture view of the story of the Bible. A little later in the service we’ll tell you about the Turn the Page Bible Experience, which will be a companion to what we experience here each Sunday. The goal of this overview is to help each of us gain clarity in our understanding of the Bible and the biblical narrative overall so we feel greater confidence engaging Scripture on our own. But the goal of engaging Scripture is never just cerebral. We engage the Bible to come to know God and to allow him, through the work of his Holy Spirit, to use the pages of this book to transform our lives.
2. Secondly, “Turn the page” is also an idiom. It means, “to make a fresh start.” Each Sunday we’ll focus on a particular Biblical character that is representative of the section of Biblical history where he or she appears. We’ll learn something about what that person experienced in an area of their spiritual journey and challenge one another to “turn the page” in that area of our lives, allowing God to give us a fresh start.

So I want to invite you to enter into this series with a hungry, teachable heart. Because, here’s the truth:

1. **Everyone is a theologian.** Every single one of us has some way we think about the nature of God, or our disbelief that he exists at all. You may not think about it with four syllable words, but we all think deeply about why we’re here, how we got here, and what happens when we’re gone. But secondly,
2. **Every theology is incomplete.** No single person or denomination has figured out the fullness of any of this. Every theology this side of heaven is going to miss the mark in some way, shape, or form and it’s important for us to remember that throughout this series.

So, perhaps it would be helpful for us to think of theology as both **Art and Science.**

* Few artists ever say, “I have finished the definitive, conclusive landscape. Everyone else can now stop painting landscapes.” If artists know that landscapes evoke multiple expressions, how much more is that true of the Creator of all landscapes?
* And like art – science is fluid and dynamic. Scientists are constantly questioning, reworking theories, and proposing new ones. Theological constructs should be flexible and open to correction and growth.

Our goal then, is not an arrogant certainty in our systems but a proper and humble confidence in God! Let’s approach the Scriptures with a willingness to receive, and the confidence that the Holy Spirit will teach us.

So let’s get started, as we turn to page 1…

Video: Overview of the Bible

**Creation**

Now, these first few chapters in Genesis are some of the most debated chapters in the entire Bible, so let’s keep that in mind as we humbly approach this text. Scholars throughout the centuries have disagreed, sometimes aggressively, about what is really going on in this first three chapters and what we as the reader are supposed to do with them. In fact, it may surprise you that there are many competing creation stories that try to explain the origins of the world in ancient literature, but the story we find in the Bible is unique. It is the only story that proclaims that creation came as a result of the actions of a loving God. A lot of the Genesis stories were written as a counter to the other culture’s creation stories. Genesis 1 shares theological vocabulary with many of these myths – but takes it and turns it on its head, as God often does.

In chapter 1, God is creating. He’s bringing order out of chaos, composition out of disarray. In six days he creates, and on the seventh day he rests. In ancient Hebrew literature, the number seven represents completeness, wholeness, shalom. So, for God to create and then rest on the seventh day, the author is making a distinct claim that resting is as integral to this completeness as the creating he does the six days prior. Another important thing to note is that seven times in this first chapter, God steps back, looks at what he made, and declares that it is good. So, right at the beginning of the story, we see that God is the one who both knows what is “good” for humankind and is intent on providing that good for them.

*(Onscreen: Genesis 2:18)* As we turn the page to chapter 2, God sees the man alone and declares that something is “not good” for the first time. What this show us is that not only is God the one who knows what is “good” for human beings, but he also is the one who knows what is “not good” for us as well. As Creator, he has the ultimate wisdom. Obedience, then, is shown to be critical in experiencing God’s good for us.

**Rebellion**

If the story stopped there, there would be no more page turning. As humans we would simply trust that God knows what is good and not good for us. We’d be walking around naked and have no worries. It just got awkward, didn’t it?

But Genesis 3 begins with the introduction of a new character, the serpent. He is described as

***“More crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made”. (Genesis 3:1)***

Crafty.

That’s an important term to remember. In other versions of the text, he is described as clever (MSG) or subtle (KJV). The serpent then asks,

**“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”**

The serpent here is cleverly asking a question that leads to a conversation that challenges everything that the woman believes up to this point.

Has that ever happened to you? It’s definitely happened to me. It’s the moment when something you’ve believed for years, maybe your whole life is questioned.

In that moment nothing has really changed. But the events that follow change everything.

The woman tells the serpent,

***“We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” (Genesis 3:2-3)***

She has the right answer. She knows that God is good. Wouldn’t we all love that kind of obvious instruction from God?

* You’re thinking of buying a new home – not that one!
* You’re deciding on a career – not that one!
* You’re starting to date someone – not that one!

Well, here Eve actually has been told this! It’s not just a “sign from God” but an actual verbal directive. And yet, much like when we choose not to see the red flags to our decisions, Eve questions God’s goodness. She chooses to not trust the creator of the universe. She entertains the question, “Did God *really* say…?” Isn’t it amazing that we are still asking this question? When we come to a choice that doesn’t seem quite right for us, there’s a little voice inside that asks, “Did God really say?”

So, Eve is tempted. She gives in. The story goes on:

***“She saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye”. (Genesis 3:6a)***

Now, we know this temptation couldn’t just be about a piece of fruit, right? Often this scene is depicted with an apple, but who has ever been tempted by an apple? I mean, put some caramel on it and we’ll talk. The text goes on and says that the fruit was also

***(add) “desirable for gaining wisdom.” (Gen. 3:6b)***

She takes a bite, hands it to her husband, and he eats as well. Everything changes in that moment. This is what we call “The Fall”. It’s the fall of the perfect relationship between humanity and God. Adam and Eve didn’t just break a rule, they broke a relationship. They broke shalom – the fullness that God intends for all of us. God designed a perfect creation of wholeness, health, and peace for these first humans, but out of their desire to decide for themselves what is “good” and “not good”, they set themselves apart from God.

When we trust in something or someone to define what is good for us instead of trusting God, that’s called idolatry. Now, if you’re like me, my first impulse is to say, “I don’t do that! Of course, I think God’s way is best!” Maybe you’ve done that, too?

Not sure about this list. Make this more consistent with the idolatry idea.

* Do we acknowledge God for our new promotion, or idolize the power and financial freedom that it gives?
* Do we praise God for the family he has given us, or revere the image that we work to maintain?
* Do we thank God for the relationship we have with him, or are we proud of all the boxes we get to check in our attempts to look good?

This list could get very long as we think about the times we look to control, comfort, approval, or independence for our ultimate worth and identity.

Adam and Eve had just chosen something other than God when he confronts them in the garden. Adam and Eve are hiding among the trees in the garden, with new awareness of their own nakedness and that they have disobeyed God. God then calls out,

***“Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9)***

Now, I don’t think that God is saying this in an authoritative tone: *(stern)* WHERE ARE YOU? , or like a hide-and-seek game: *(singing)* Where…are…you….? God knows their location.

If you’re a parent, you’ve probably done this. You’ve asked your kids questions you already knew the answer to:

* “Why is your backpack in the middle of the floor?”
* “Did you just throw that at your brother?”
* “Are you eating dirt?”

Of course, there are questions we don’t want to know the answer to like, “Why are you licking the floor?”

God knows the answer to the question. He knows the location of Adam and Eve. When he asks, his tone is one of sadness. *(soft) “*Where are you?” *(pause)* “Where are you?” ~~He is asking out of desire to have a relationship? conversation…~~ He is asking, “Where is your heart? Why are you not with me?” They have shattered their relationship in a quest to rely on their own way. To trust in their own knowledge of what is good instead of trusting him. If we’re honest, we’ve all been in a similar place. Maybe you’re in that place today. And God is asking, “Where are you?” He desires this relationship conversation with us.

If we choose to not follow the good that God has planned for us, ultimately we are missing out. N.T. Wright puts it brilliantly in his book *Simply Christian* by stating that:

***“Sin is not simply the breaking of a law, it is the missing of an opportunity.”***

What opportunity are we giving away if we choose to chase after our own wisdom instead of God’s?

So good! This is not a question to make you think about missed opportunities of the past, or shame you for times you’ve relied on your own wisdom. We’ve all done that! This is to encourage us that today we can make a fresh start. Today we can turn the page to our own stories and choose to believe the good that God has for us. So, how do we actually know what that “good” is? For starters, we learn who *He* is.

**Turn the Page Bible Experience**

Shorten the explanation…

I love learning about the nature of God and the more I study and understand, the more I want to know. For this 11-week series, we know that Sunday mornings will only be scratching the surface. We’ll be craving more awareness as the week goes by. So, we’ve created a “Turn the Page Bible Experience” to learn more about God’s character and invite conversations with him through his Word – the Bible.

We don’t want to give away our opportunity by chasing after our own wisdom, but immerse ourselves in God’s wisdom. Monday through Friday we’ll be turning the pages of the Bible with anticipation of not just learning more, but experiencing the transformation that God desires for us to make a fresh start with him.

Each day, there will be a chapter of the Bible to read and listen to. Our incredible Arts Team has recorded this reading for all of us. There is also narrative material to listen to that compliments the scripture to help us understand the story. At least twice once a week there will also be bonus material where a COMMUNITY staff member is interviewed to dive even deeper into the story.

Imagine with me – 11 weeks from now what your relationship with God could look like after intentionally exploring this book. Collectively, what could our church family look like after 11 weeks of sincere relationship building with the God who made us? I think this will be absolutely transformative for our community.

Explain the 2 different versions This all starts tomorrow, so make sure to sign-up. In fact, I’m going to give us a minute to do that right now. You can download the *(slide)* COMMUNITY app or go to our website. Let’s sign-up right now! *(Background music for 30 seconds)*

**Conclusion**

I heard a question once that, at first, seemed difficult to answer. The question was, “If God didn’t want us to fall, then why did he put the tree there in the first place?” It’s a great question. I think, maybe the tree was put there to show us that obedience to God is what brings joy. When we choose to trust that God is good, he knows what is best for us, and we obey in love – our joy comes alive in us. Jesus tells us in John 14:23 that

***“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.” (John 14:23)***

Our obedience is an act of love. In return, Jesus says,

***(add) “My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”***

It’s a relationship – we love, we obey, we trust that God is good, and in return he lives in us.

Add on inspiration…not just another takeaway. Focus this on how God wants to be in relationship with us.

Let me ask this – when you have news – whether good or bad – who do you tell first? Think about that. If you found out something right now, who are you immediately calling or shooting out a text? I’m going to challenge all of us – before any human – talk with God. YES – he already knows our news, but wants us to have a conversation with him. If it’s good news, praise him. Show him the excitement you might usually give to your spouse or close friends. If it’s bad news, let him be your comfort first. Give him your tears and heartache. This one practice can be an excellent way to deepen your relationship with God.

**Communion**

What an awesome relationship this is. We are given the power of the Holy Spirit as we surrender the need to figure it out all on our own. We get to declare the Good News that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. This Good News for us came in the form of something that feels “not good”.

As we receive communion, let’s reflect on Jesus knowing what is “good” and “not good” for us. He wants us to be in relationship with him so badly that he gave up his life to show it.