

## ***“Blessings in the Boundaries”***

### **Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

Ruth 1:1-9

Pastor Jeff Stivason

November 24, 2017

**Jeff:** Our heavenly Father, we are thankful for this day. We're thankful for the Lord Jesus and for the power of the Holy Spirit who opened our eyes to the wonder of His grace. Father, we thank You that when we were yet sinners You loved us and sent Your Son to die for us. Father, You, the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, You are a great God. You are the only God. And we bow before You this morning asking that You will feed our minds and our hearts, that we might know You better, that we might understand Your salvation more clearly, and that we might take our hope and our trust and root it deeply in that gospel.

Father, as we come before you this morning, we're thanking You for the many blessings of a holiday season like Thanksgiving and Christmas to come. Father, we praise You for the time with family and friends. And we also seek Your help, Lord, because we know that these are times of difficulty and loss. And we experience discouragement. And so, Father, for those who struggle during these times of the year, we pray that You will bless them with Your presence.

Father, we're so thankful to hear about Sarah and how she's recovering. And we pray that You'll continue to help her to do that. Lord, bring her to wellness. And Father, we pray for Doug as he ministers to her and the children as well.

Father, we're so thankful for Evan and his presence here after such a difficulty in his life. It is wonderful to see Your hand upon him. And Lord, we pray that it would continue to be so.

Father, we pray for Bill and ask that You will strengthen him and work in his life. We pray that You'll bring him health. And we pray that You'll teach him through this experience. And Father, we ask and pray that You'll teach us from Your word today. We pray it in Christ's name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Okay. Well, you did hear that we're going to begin a new series today. We're going to begin a series on the book of Ruth. But I want you to know something. We're going to—What in the world happened there? Sig, what did you do?

**Sig:** I tried to screw it up so you could have some fun with it.

**Jeff:** Did you? You did a good job, Sig. *(Laughter)*

**Participant:** He did.

**Jeff:** That's me. Yes, that's me.

**Sig:** Well maybe your book was touching it.

**Jeff:** Maybe it was.

**Sig:** You had a blank slide in there.

**Jeff:** I did have a blank slide in there. All right. All right. So we're going to start a new series today. And that new series is going to be on the book of Ruth in general.

## *“Blessings in the Boundaries”*

But one of the things that I want you to understand is that we are going to look at the book of Ruth from a particular angle. And the angle that I want us to—

**Transcriber’s Note:** An apparent computer or phone glitch.

**Jeff:** Ha, ha, ha. You know, you give me a day off. If you give me a day off, it’s like you give a mouse a cookie, you know? There you go. Give me a day off and things fall apart.

We’re going to look at the book of Ruth from a particular angle. And that angle that we’re going to be looking at the book of Ruth through is decision making. We’re going to be thinking about how it is that we make wise decisions.

Now I want you to think about that for just a minute. We oftentimes think about decision making in a wrong way. For instance, we think about decision making in terms of shooting an arrow at a bull’s-eye. And we say that we have to hit the bull’s-eye in order to know that we’re in the will of God.

And what I want to do is that I want to challenge that perception. I want you to see that there is wisdom and that God has left us to exercise wisdom in a world where He doesn’t always tell us exactly what the bull’s-eye is, what the answer is.

In some cases He does. And in some cases He just gives us parameters. And we’ll think today about boundaries. But within those boundaries there are any number of decisions that we might make that will be wiser or less wise. And then it’s incumbent upon us to live with those decisions that we make in godliness. And so we’re going to be thinking about decision making through the lens of the book of Ruth.

Now I need to tell you this because I want you to know something. I talked to Sig and Sig said what he said to you just now. He said, “You know, are you sure you want to do this? This is an all-male study and you’re picking the book of Ruth?”

Well I want you to know something. Manly men study the book of Ruth. *(Laughter)* I’m just saying it, okay?

**Transcriber’s Note:** Jeff shows a picture of a man with a beard.

**Jeff:** You got it, Don? There’s a big bearded man there. All right.

**Participant:** That don’t look like Sig. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Because it’s not, my friend. *(Laughter)*

**Sig:** Is that why you’re drawing a beard?

**Jeff:** That’s right. That’s me last year. *(Laughter)* All right. So let’s look at today’s outline. We’re going to look at some introductory matters.

The first point is that *we need to know the boundaries. We need to know the One who establishes the boundaries. And then we need to choose to live within the boundaries.*

Now that’s pretty straightforward and self-explanatory. But again we’re going to look at this through the lens of the book of Ruth. So let’s get started. And let’s do that by looking at Ruth 1, and we’ll read 1-9, men. Somebody who has a good, strong voice. I know I have 1-18 on your outline. But we’re just going to read 1-9 today. Don, Does somebody—Don, would you read that for us—1-9?

**Don:** Okay. *“Now it came to pass, in the day that the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimilech, the name*

## ***“Blessings in the Boundaries”***

*of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. Then Elimilech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.*

*“Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread. Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.*

*“And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go, return each to her mother’s house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.’ So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.”* This is the word of the Lord.

**Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** Okay. So today we need to think about making wise decisions. And we need to think about it through the lens of Ruth. And when we think about making wise decisions, what are we saying? What are we asking when we think about that concept?

Well I would suggest that one of the things that we’re thinking about, one of the descriptive words that we can use when we talk about wise decision making, is the word *discernment*. We need to discern the will of God. I’m sure you’ve heard that expression. We need to discern the will of God in order to make a wise decision.

Now the question becomes what does that word *discernment* mean? Well, the etymology of it means that you separate something out. You parse it out. You divide it from something else.

Now when we think about discerning the will of God, one of the things that we’re asking is how do we separate the will of God from, for instance, the will of others, our own will, our own emotions? How do we parse it out so that we know that this is the will of God for our lives?

Now that becomes, I think, a difficulty. And yet we have some encouragement. In Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, one of the things that we realize is that when we become Christians, there is a renewal of the mind that occurs. In other words,—and you find this in Romans 6:17—“*we became obedient from the heart to the form*” or the type “*of teaching to which we were committed*”, says that verse.

Now that idea of *committed* means to be handed over. It’s a divine passive. God is the One who takes us and delivers us to this form, this mold of teaching. And that mold of teaching is obviously Christological in form. We are being fashioned after the image of Jesus Christ the Son.

And so there’s a sense in which this transformation of the mind that we read about in Romans chapter 12:1 And 2 is that same idea—that mold, that form of thinking. Our minds are being transformed to think, as Paul says in Philippians chapter 2, “*to think Christ’s thoughts after Him,*” to “*have the mind of Christ.*”

## *“Blessings in the Boundaries”*

So there’s a sense in which we need to sit back—not too much!—and relax, right? *(Laughter)* We need to sit back and relax because when we start thinking about decision making, we need to say to ourselves that we’ve been given the mind of Christ. We’ve been given a renewed mind. We’ve been handed over or delivered to a new form of thinking, a new form of teaching. And so we have the equipment that enables us to make wise decisions.

I think that is so absolutely crucial for us to remember, that God has equipped us to make right decisions, to make wise decisions.

Now here’s the thing I want to remind you of as we go on, and that is this. We have a tendency to think that the only time that we need God in the decision making process—or let me put it like this. The only time that we need special help from God in the decision making process is when we make big decisions.

So when I’m thinking about the girl I want to marry, and there’s Susie and Sally, and I go, “Oh man, I just don’t know which one!”, I need God’s help.

And then what do we say? We say, “God, help me.” And God doesn’t speak from heaven and say, “Marry Sally!”

**Transcriber’s Note:** Spoken with a loud, deep voice.

**Jeff:** And so what do we do? We make God talk. We make Him talk. And so we say this. We say, all right. If the phone rings in the next three minutes,— *(Laughter)* I’m going to marry Sally! Right? That’s the kind of thing we do. We make—

**Participant:** And it was Susie calling. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** And it was Susie calling! *(Laughter)* Then we’re really in a bind! But that’s the kind of thing we do, right? And we get ourselves into quandaries. And those are the kinds of things that happen.

So then, what do we do? We parse it out again and say, “Well Susie called, but that really drove me to Sally in this way.” Because not only do we impose the principles that will judge the circumstances, but we are the interpreters of the circumstances. And so we’re doing our best to try to get God to speak to us when God has frankly said, “Look! I’ve given you a renewed mind. Make a wise decision.”

Let me give you an example of what I’m talking about. Think about the Susie and the Sally situation. We’re going to talk about boundaries. Are there boundaries? Are there parameters to marrying Susie and Sally?

Well of course there are. For instance, one of them is in 2 Corinthians chapter 6.

**Participant:** Right.

**Jeff:** These girls have to be Christians, okay? Let’s turn it around the other way. This is your daughter getting married, because I like this one so much better. *(Laughter)* I do. I mean, this is my daughter. This is what I tell my daughter.

I say, look. The first thing I’m going to ask, is the boy a Christian? I understand that.

The second thing I’m going to ask you, and what I’m going to sit down and talk with you about, is whether or not I like him. And I don’t mean whether or not I like his personality. I want to know if this boy is for us or against us, right? There are all kinds of ways we can tell that.

## ***“Blessings in the Boundaries”***

So here’s the third thing I want to know. Does he work, because if a man doesn’t work, he doesn’t eat, says the Bible. And I want my daughter to eat.

So there are all kinds of parameters, right? But in the end, if there’s Mike and Mark, and they are both Christians and they both have jobs and they both seem to like the family, and so on and so forth, then I’ve got to say to my daughter, “Well, make a wise decision. You’ve got to make a wise decision.”

“Well, what if I choose wrongly?”

“No, no, no, hon. You may choose less wisely, or you may choose more wisely in this. But even if you choose less wisely, you have to make the best out of a less wise decision, because God has given you the parameters, and now you’ve got to choose.” You see, that’s the idea.

But here’s the problem. The problem is that we need the same process whether we are making big decisions like do I take this job or not take this job, marry this girl or not marry this girl, go to this school or that school. We need the same process whether it be big decisions, or getting up in the morning and shuffling to the cupboard and opening it up and saying, “Lucky Charms or Cocoa Puffs?”, right? (*Laughter*) Right? I don’t say, “Lord, help me with what decision to make. Is it Lucky Charms or Cocoa Puffs this morning?” I don’t agonize over that decision.

But why don’t I? If all I do, whether I eat or drink, is all to the glory of God, then why am I not agonizing over what to eat in the morning, for instance, if all it’s to the glory of God?

And so my point is that the process of decision making, whether big decisions or small decisions, ought to be the same process. And I’m going to tell you right up front that what ought to govern that process of decision making is *wisdom*.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Wisdom. And so all I’m going to talk to you about in the next several weeks is going to have to do with wisdom.

Now I just thought I would give you a little treat this morning, because one of the things that we have a tendency to do is we have a tendency to think that—well here’s what I want to do. You know the phone ringing thing? The phone ringing thing is something we do. We’ve done it before. I’ve done it, okay? I’m confessing. I’ve done it.

But we are not the only ones to do things like that. A long time ago there was something called *pedoscopy*, okay? What was that? You got an animal and you dissected it, and you examined its liver. Did I say *libber*? It’s *liver*. Did you ever hear of that quiver in your liver?

Well you examined the liver because examining the liver would tell you and it would help you to discern the will of the gods. So in ancient times people would examine the liver.

Do you know the name Nebuchadnezzar? Nebuchadnezzar was supposedly an expert in liver examination.

How about this one: *rhabdomancy*? Rhabdomancy is when you see this in the Scriptures. Rhabdomancy is when you take sticks and you shake them. That was rhabdomancy.

## *“Blessings in the Boundaries”*

Let me tell you another one. Well let me tell you a form of this one. Did you ever see the guy with the diviner stick?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Jeff:** That’s a form of rhabdomancy, looking for water.

**Participant:** What was the other one you were saying, shaking a stick?

**Jeff:** Well you know, you actually find this in the Scriptures.

**Participant:** Joseph?

**Jeff:** No, no, no. Remember where the prophet is dying and he tells the king to shake a stick, to shake the arrows, to hit the ground with the arrows?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Jeff:** That’s a form of this. Now we won’t go into why he does that. But that’s a form of this.

And then there’s just plain idolatry. And you find all three of these in Ezekiel 21:21. *“For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination. He shakes the arrows, he consults the household idols, he looks at the liver.”* That’s Ezekiel 21:21. We find Nebuchadnezzar doing all three of these things.

And you know, this is the interesting thing. If you read Ezekiel 21:21—well I’ll let you read it. But it’s interesting because what he does is that he chooses to go to Jerusalem. And the whole idea is that his hard and darkened heart leads him through these means to Jerusalem. But it is really the sovereign God who governs it all. And God is looking down and laughing at all of this as it happens.

So we need a decision making process for every decision. So where do we start? Let’s start with some boundaries.

Now I want you to think about football for a minute. Football is an easy example. *(Laughter)*

So when you think about a football field, what surrounds a football field?

**Participant:** Lines.

**Jeff:** Yes. Big lines, right? Big, big lines. So this is Antonio Holmes making that big catch in what, 2011?

**Participant:** ’06.

**Jeff:** Was it 2006? That long ago! Yikes! Now on TV you’re watching the TV, and you see that, right? So he’s making the catch. His toes are on the ground right next to the line. And then the TV shows this, you know? And then they’re talking. And this is really scientific, you know. And then they’re talking a lot longer, and then they bring it in like that and you’re looking at his toes. And you know, you spend fifteen minutes looking at a guy whose toe is on the white line, right? You know. You’re going, “Is he in bounds? Is he out of bounds?”, trying to determine whether or not the play is foul.

Now that’s easy. I went to an ROTC event that my son was in. And I was watching it unfold before it actually happened. And they brought in the teams from out of town. And they took them to the basketball court. And they went around the floor and they explained where the boundaries were.

Now think about this. They were using basketball markings. And they were reinterpreting them for the ROTC crowd, telling the cadets, “This is where you go. This

## *“Blessings in the Boundaries”*

is out of bounds. This is in bounds. This is where you’ll turn. This is where you’ll not turn.” That sort of thing.

And I thought to myself that when you’re in the midst of your routine, I have to think that every mark on that floor is going to look like a basketball mark, and not an ROTC mark. It’s going to be hard to discern the boundaries in that situation.

And I want to say to you that when we think about life, I think that we have boundaries that are very clear, and I think we have boundaries that are hard to see.

For instance, go back to the illustration that I gave you about who to marry, Sally or Susie? There are some very clear, clear boundaries. Is Sally and is Susie a Christian? That’s a very clear boundary.

But once I get down through the list of clear boundaries, then I begin to ask the more subjective ones. Well, do I have something more in common with Sally than I do with Susie? Do I like one more than the other? Am I attracted to one more than the other one?

Now I’m into less clear boundaries. Now I don’t know whether it’s the date I had with Susie the other night that makes me like her more than Sally at this point. You see what I’m saying? I just don’t know. I’m in difficulty when it’s time to discern these boundaries.

Now when you get to the book of Ruth, you find that a famine comes upon the land. And they have to decide what to do.

Now this is a difficult thing. What do we do when famine comes upon the land? I don’t know. Have you ever thought about this? Have you ever thought about what the family of Naomi could have done when famine came upon the land?

I mean one of the things that they might have done, what they could have done, was to go to the elders. What was the problem with going to the elders at that particular time, the leaders of the community? Well we learn that one of the problems was that this was during the time of the judges. And what was happening during the time of the judges?

**Participant:** War.

**Jeff:** Well everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes, right? I mean, that was the time of the judges. So it was very difficult, apparently, unless God had raised up a judge who was going to follow His ways, it was very difficult to find a leader who was godly and who was going to do the will of the Lord. Everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes. And so there’s a sense in which what we find Naomi and her husband Elimelech doing is what was right in their own eyes.

The question, though, is where there boundaries that they could have followed? Were there not maybe two-foot white lines, but were there at least markings that they could have discerned such that they said to themselves, “It’s probably not a good idea for us to go down to Moab?”

I think there were. I want to give you three boundaries that I think could have helped them to make a wiser decision than the one they made.

In Deuteronomy 23:3 it says, *“No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD.”* Now we’re going to find out why that’s the case in just a minute. I’ve parsed that out and made it a separate reason. But one of the things that I want to communicate is that obviously the Moabites were on the outs with Israel, okay?

## *“Blessings in the Boundaries”*

I mean, let’s think about it. Let’s think about this. If God says that this group is our enemy, are you going to go to that group?

God’s people have done that before. David went down to the Philistines and lived among them. And he regretted it, okay? So this is one boundary marker that they might have discerned. Yes?

**Participant:** The last one, Samson going along with the Philistines, didn’t he want the Philistine wife, and that was God-ordained, because his parents were against it. But didn’t it say in Scripture that God ordained it and that it was His will?

**Jeff:** I can’t remember that verse. But it happened and so it was. But that doesn’t relieve him from making the wise decision. You know, she’s a harlot. She’s a Philistine. He’s not to marry outside of the covenant community. So he had clear boundaries that he should have operated according to.

That draws us back to a passage like Romans 9, where the interlocutor says, “Why do you blame me for this? Who can resist Your will?” And God, through the apostle Paul, says, “Shut up!” (*Laughter*) I mean, that’s what He says, right? He says, “*Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?*”

And so I can always get to the other side of an event and say, “God, why did You do this to me?”, right? Why did You put me with this woman?” You know, that sort of thing, right? But I made the decision to be put with this woman or to be put with this man, or to be put in this job or to be put in this school. You know, those kinds of things.

And so all of it, looking in hindsight, is God’s sovereignty. And God declares it to be so. But I made the decisions that put me there. And if I rebel against God and say, “God, who can resist Your will? I’m here because You sovereignly put me here,” I’m going to come up against the same answer I came up against in Romans 9.

I mean that’s the kind of the easy answer. I mean, let’s face it, right? Who doesn’t struggle every day with something in life? I mean, every day, almost every day—and I think the older I get, the more I struggle with it—I struggle with the loss of my own brother. You know, in the sovereignty of God events happen. It’s just remarkable that they turned out the way they did, which led to his death. And I struggle with why that happened. But in the end I have to lay it down at the foot of His throne and say, “I just don’t know and I’m going to have to submit to You in this, you know. Does that make sense? Does that help you out?”

**Participant:** Yes.

**Jeff:** Anybody else?

**Participant:** With divorce, God never ordained it. But He allowed it because of their stupidity. (*Unclear*) They’re stiff-necked, pigheaded, whatever. But there are consequences to it, and we see it all the time. And God teaches us through that. He didn’t ordain it. The Pharisees tried to tell Jesus. “Well, why did God do that?” No, no. You made the decision. Now you live with your decision.

**Jeff:** Yes. Crossing the boundaries has consequences. Somebody back there?

**Participant:** I’m pretty sure that it did suggest that was the will of God. It says that Samson’s parents did not know that it was the will of God.

**Jeff:** Okay.



## *“Blessings in the Boundaries”*

**Participant:** That’s a subject in itself, isn’t it?

**Jeff:** It is. But in my mind I’ll tell you where it immediately draws me. It draws me to Deuteronomy. What is it? 12? Not 12. Deuteronomy. What’s the mystery—

**Participant:** 29:29.

**Jeff:** 29:29. The things of mystery, *“the secret things belong to the LORD”* and the revealed things belong to His people. So they were operating according to the revealed will, not according to His secret will which He had not revealed. So, I mean, I’m still good with it. I still think that kind of gives me footing with how I explain it. They didn’t know that would have transpired. They didn’t know that was God’s secret will for Samson.

**Participant:** So I’m okay, and I like the fact that you’re saying, Listen. You’re never a victim, because we have a victim mentality.

**Jeff:** Yeah, right.

**Participant:** It’s just a bad habit. So what you’re saying is that, you know, even if it was of God, he still has to pay the consequences. He still could have fought that. He still could have asked God for help in not succumbing to this sin.

**Jeff:** So here’s the deal. Let’s look at Joseph. (*Laughter*) Think about Joseph and think about his brothers selling him to the traders. At the end of chapter 50 in the book of Genesis you have that very famous explanatory verse. *“You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.”*

Had you sat down with Joseph’s brothers and just sat at the table with them and said, “Look, did you boys really mean to do this to Joseph?” , they would have said, “You’re daggone right we did! There were things about that guy that just irritated the daylights out of us, you know? We didn’t like him.”

Now they would have said, “Now we were sinful; don’t get us wrong. We were sinful. And we shouldn’t have been doing the things that we were doing. And he reported us and got us in trouble. But we still should have been in trouble. We were doing things we shouldn’t have done for Dad, right? But man, that guy just had a way of getting under our skin, right? And so we did what we wanted to do.”

And I think that’s the whole idea of the freedom of the will in the Reformed view. The freedom of the will in the Reformed view is that I did what I desired to do. God just hadn’t enabled me to desire Him yet, and to desire the things that would bring Him glory and honor. And so there’s a sense in which the Reformed view of freedom is that I choose according to my desires. I choose according to my thought patterns. And until God renews those, I can’t choose Him or the ultimate good. And so in this case I think you have culpability resting squarely with Joseph’s brothers, with Samson, or whoever else you want to name, because they were choosing according to their desires.

I mean, let’s face it. Samson saw the Philistine harlot and said, “Oo la la !”, right? “You know, down to Philistia I go.” And he chose according to his desires.

Now you say, “Wait a minute! What if he was a believer?” Well you know as well as I do that even with believers, it’s like what Augustine said. A believer is characterized by somebody who can, who has been enabled to choose the good, but who still may choose

## *“Blessings in the Boundaries”*

the bad. And there’s forgiveness if there’s repentance in a genuine believer. But like you said, there are still consequences.

And so take Samson. Samson seems to come to himself when he’s in that temple and he says, “I’ll put my hands on the pillars.” And he serves God one last time through the destruction of God’s enemies. But again he reaps the consequences of his decision.

And I would say, in just kind of going back to where we’re going, despite the secret will of God, which is always there, he clearly transgressed the revealed will of God by marrying outside of the Israelites at that point. Yes?

**Participant:** More than one commentary points out that the period of the Judges is probably the most corrupt in Israel’s history.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** The end of the book tells you that everybody did what was right in their own eyes. They had the word of God.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** But they didn’t have the desire to obey it.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** How is that any different from churches today, because you have people in the church who continually do what they desire to do?

**Jeff:** Well there’s a sense, Bill, in which I don’t think it is much different. I mean, there’s a sense in which God spoke, gave promises, gave signs, temple priests, all those things. And yet people continued to act corruptly. So there’s a sense in which it’s not much different.

I think that the same Spirit that awakens people today is the same Spirit that awakened people with the promise of the Messiah then.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Jeff:** And so, you know, I think that until the consummation, God’s people will always go through corruption and therefore need reform. And I think you see that pattern in the book of the Judges. You know, you see corruption and reformation, corruption and reformation. And it’s like we said two weeks ago. The Reformation was not the golden age. Reformation is much needed though within the church, in order to bring back godliness to the church, at least to some degree. And thank God for those reformations. Yes, Don?

**Don:** Isn’t it the same thing, Jeff, with what Rebekah did? I mean it was the will of God that *“the older shall serve the younger”* *“before they had done good or bad.”* And yet Rebekah’s underhanded means produced consequences for their family for a long time.

**Jeff:** Yes. That’s a great example. You have a situation where somebody fiddled with the processes that God would have brought about, but did it in a sinful way, right?

**Don:** Or Abraham and Sarah.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** It’s just the simplicity here of ignorance of what we know, so to speak. I mean we know, but we’re still accountable to it.

**Jeff:** Absolutely.

## *“Blessings in the Boundaries”*

**Participant:** I think even with bill’s situation, where we know what’s happening in the church today, in many ways we’ve essentially lost the fear of the Lord. We’re not counting the cost of our actions. We’re not concerned about our actions. We don’t necessarily need to know all the details. But we should be of the mentality that you know what? I need to give thought to what I’m doing before I actually go and do it.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Participant:** And you know, work through those consequences. What are the side effects of my actions here? It’s just that we’re often doing it without any sense of fear of God and the consequences that might ensue. I mean we don’t need to know all the details, so to speak. But we do need to understand that we’re going to stand before a holy God , and that all of our actions regardless, we need to consider before acting on them.

**Jeff:** Yes. You know, you raise a really good point. I don’t know if you intended to do this or not. (*Laughter*) But no, it’s a side point to your point. And that is that there is a way to stand before God and not have that shame. Or at least we can minimize that shame by choosing wisely. And God has given us His word as a guide, and then left us the freedom to choose within the boundaries of that guide.

And so the point is that why is it that we’ve lost that fear of the Lord, and so choose unwisely, if not sinfully? And that would really be the focus. We choose sinfully in matters where we transgress the boundaries. And I think the reason for that is that there is a lessening of our view of God’s word.

I’m going to give you this example, and hopefully I’ll tie it back in. One of the things that I’ve noticed, and I’ve only been going to the Evangelical Theological Society, which is an academic society where anywhere from 2500 to 3000 academics come in and deliver papers—that’s where I was last week. And it was a great time. You could hear great papers. I heard a great paper by Timothy George on Luther and the devil. It was just a fantastic paper.

Anyway, one of the things is that I often go to the systematic theology talks because that’s what I do. And so the more I go to those talks the more I realize how out of sync I am with those guys. And here’s why. My view is that the Bible is God’s word. It’s the inerrant word of an infallible God, and therefore it’s infallible. And therefore I go to Scripture and I read out of it what we might call the facts, and then I systematize the facts.

Now that’s putting it pretty crudely, but that’s basically it. And the more that I go to the Evangelical Theological Society, I realize that the systematic theologians who are operating from the broader church are not operating with that view. They’re operating with the view that says that we can’t describe the Scriptures as inerrant anymore. We’ll talk about them as if they’re infallible. But what does infallibility really mean? And all of a sudden, when you begin to compromise your view of Scripture in that sort of way, all of a sudden you bring that which is our sole guide and comfort in this life and you reduce it to just mere opinion, or just ancient wisdom at best. And then what do you have? You really have nothing.

And I was telling my congregation a couple of weeks ago that I was reading a book by a scholar. This is an Oxford University Press book where the guy says in the beginning of

## *“Blessings in the Boundaries”*

the book, *“I never read the Bible.”* This is a book on the Bible! (*Laughter*) And he never read the Bible cover to cover.

And you know, he says, “It’s just too hard. I get to Leviticus and I stop. Numbers is boring.” You know, that’s what he says.

And then later on you get into the book, and he talks about 1 Thessalonians. And he says, *“There are no Scripture references in 1 Thessalonians.”* And he interprets this as Paul doesn’t read his Bible either.

It’s remarkable, the academic sort of thinking that’s going on out there with regard to the Scriptures. We’re losing our boundaries. We’re losing our boundaries is what we’re doing here.

**Participant:** To tie into this #1, with what you said,--and I don’t know if you were trying to make this point,--but you have to be prepared. You have to know what you believe before you get into that situation, because if you’re trying to figure it out in that situation, then you’re already lost. And so with things like what should my daughter be looking for in a man? What should my son be looking for? It’s not only does she like him? Does she find him attractive? But can she submit to him? Can she be a Biblical woman under his authority?

**Jeff:** That’s right.

**Participant:** Can I trust him and be aligned to my fatherly duty to give her away?

**Jeff:** That’s right.

**Participant:** And I really respect him like crazy in order to do that. So it’s going into preparation for that before you can get to that point.

**Jeff:** That’s exactly right. Knowing the boundaries before you get into the process is crucial. Wait a minute. Bill, you’re up.

**Bill:** I was going to make a comment. You were talking about the shift in systematic theology to where today’s churches are getting to be. I believe there’s an arrogance that the end justifies the means. And since I have a good purpose in mind, which is the communication that Jesus loves you, or whatever the case may be.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Bill:** I shouldn’t be burdened by the very boundaries that have been revealed to me because ultimately I have a good thought in mind. My heart is clean, and it’s not as if I’m trying to break boundaries. They are by definition cumbersome and difficult, and they’re impeding the ends.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Bill:** As a result, the means are once again continuing to—I don’t think it started out as a personal decision to attack inerrancy. I think it was, for all intents and purposes, various people saying—

**Jeff:** I think you’re right. I think it’s a desire for influence, too. I think the desire for the evangelical/Reformed church to have influence in the liberal world, which is considered the real scholarly world, is strong. And when you have that desire, you have to give something up that you can’t take with you into the real conversation. And inerrancy is one of those things where we’re not going to be heard. And I think the desire for influence is there. Hold on just a second, Sig. I want to say something.

## *“Blessings in the Boundaries”*

In 2014 I delivered a paper. B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, Archibald Alexander—all those old Princeton theologians—the idea of theology that I told you about, their method of doing theology, that’s what I told you about. So in 2014 I delivered a paper on B. B. Warfield and True Church Unity, which I just got published in the *Westminster Theological Journal* this fall. So if you’re interested, since last week you talked about church unity, if you’re interested in church unity I can make you a copy of that.

But thirty seconds before I delivered that paper, there was a prominent young evangelical, kind of a sassy guy, somebody you wanted to punch. (*Laughter*) Anyway, so I’m sitting there and this is what he said. Thirty seconds before delivering the paper, he said, “B. B. Warfield, huh?”

I said, “Yes.”

He goes, “you know, we evangelicals think he’s a pretty unsophisticated theologian. Don’t you?”

**Men:** A collective sigh.

**Jeff:** You know what I mean? And everything in me, my sanctification! (*Laughter*) All that.

**Participant:** Wow!

**Jeff:** Yeah! Sorry, I got myself so worked up that I can’t remember my point. (*Laughter*)

**Participant:** Speaking back to what God and Abraham were talking about, God showed Abraham the boundaries of the land flowing with milk and honey. And that’s what Ruth and Elimelech forgot. That was the land. And he had Abraham walk the boundaries. And Scripture teaches us, “*Do not forsake the ancient boundaries.*” We need to go back to the beginning, and the gentleman behind me said, “Believe.” It’s all belief. Believe who? Believe what? You have to know who you’re believing in. It’s God Almighty through Jesus Christ.

**Jeff:** Yes. Okay. So listen. I think it was influence that I was trying to say with my last point. So let me just say this. Sig?

**Sig:** Just this one brief thought. The man who became my boss earlier from Grove City, T. David Gordon.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Sig:** In his book *Why Johnny Can’t Preach* he was making the same point you just made. Our tendency as a culture today is not to read a text and listen to what the text is telling us.

**Jeff:** That’s right.

**Sig:** The tendency is to read the text and pull out of it what we want to hear.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Sig:** And I think we do that with the Bible, especially with the guy who you said hadn’t read the Old Testament. And he reads Thessalonians and there’s no reference, and he doesn’t know what to make of it.

**Jeff:** Yes. The whole thing is that it’s all post-modern revisionism, a reader response kind of reading the text. Absolutely.

## ***“Blessings in the Boundaries”***

**Sig:** But this guy’s point from Grove City was that we haven’t taught our children how to read, or to get something out of a text. Just listen to a text. Read a text and don’t go in there saying, “I want to find this. I’m looking for this point,” and make it fit your agenda. And I’m guilty of that too, especially with the Bible. You know, I want to make a point and I’ve got to find something that makes my point.

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely.

**Sig:** And that’s hard. I mean there are a lot of tough passages in the Bible that we don’t deal with, probably for that reason.

**Jeff:** Yes, that’s right. So here’s what we’re going to do. A good conversation, and we’re going to come back to it. So my seven-week series is now going to be eight.

*(Laughter)*

Let me pray. Father, thanks for this day and for the time you’ve given us to be together and for the conversation we’ve had. Father, glorify Christ in our lives day by day and especially today, for we ask it in His name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*