

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabible.org.

Date: **October 30, 2011**

Title: **“A Cord of Three Strands”**

Text: Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

Theme: Learning from the past, living in the present, and looking to the future enables this fellowship to maximize their moment in the *Story*.

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

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Introduction:

Show video clip at beginning of sermon

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4GIAdlbtLY&feature=related>

You tube - a bug's life - revolution

A Bug's Life is a 1998 American computer animated fantasy film produced by Pixar and released by Walt Disney Pictures in the United States on November 25, 1998. *A Bug's Life* tells the tale of an oddball individualist inventor ant named Flik who hires what he thinks are "warrior bugs" - actually circus performers - to fight off a small band of grasshoppers that have made the ant colony their servants.

The colony (of which Flik is a part of) is constantly oppressed by a gang of marauding grasshoppers who arrives every season demanding food from the ants. Flik has an ally in the queen's daughter, Princess Atta. Together, the ants unite to defeat the grasshoppers and in so doing bring freedom to the Ants.

Every local church has adversaries. These adversaries seek to divide and conquer. If we can but unite, we can move forward the mission of the church in the strengthening of the church and the establishing of new ones.

THE BIG PICTURE:

The Preacher in Ecclesiastes provides the reader with a running commentary on life lived apart from the *Story*. When life is separated from the overarching Storyline of the Bible, "All is vain and empty."

¹ "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. ² 'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher, '**Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.**' ³ What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun?" (Eccl. 1:1-3).

Yet when life is lived in *Story* we can conclude with the Preacher, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil" (Ecc. 12:13, 14).

In *Story* we know,

¹ "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven-- ² A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. ³ A time to kill and a time to heal; A time to tear down and a time to build up. ⁴ A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance. ⁵ A

time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. ⁶ A time to search and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep and a time to throw away. ⁷ A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak. ⁸ A time to love and a time to hate; A time for war and a time for peace. ⁹ What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? ¹⁰ I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves" (Ecc. 3:1-10).

Yet how might we live in *Story* and stay the course every moment of every day? Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 speaks to this idea. Listen to his counsel.

⁷ "Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. ⁸ There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task. ⁹ Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. ¹⁰ For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. ¹¹ Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? ¹² And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart" (Eccl. 4:9-12).

Perseverance is done in community. The power of community protects us from sin and enables us in the pursuit of God. As it relates to our story within the one *Story* of God, let me take some liberties and speak to the idea of a three stranded cord.

Outline:

I. The first strand is to learn from our past

There are two elements forming this first strand.

A. The first element is the gospel

When John Fiddler came to Waukesha County in 1950 there were few churches with a clear gospel message. Now sixty years later there is a plethora of churches that stand as a testimony to the work of God in and through Waukesha Bible Church.

As leadership we often bemoan the fact that churches in our county are populated by "use to." We kiddingly speak of the largest family in our fellowship are the "use to" family. Those who "use to" attend, but no longer do. Yet the literally thousands of people who "use to" attend but now attend other gospel preaching churches is a testimony to the far reaching impact of what God began sixty years ago.

B. The second element is the whole counsel of God for discipleship

In addition to the gospel, the emphasis on the Word of God is central to the Christian life. Waukesha Bible Church is noted as a Bible teaching church. Whatever else we might have been, we are a Bible teaching church.

Discipleship is essential. Discipleship reaches people in their cultural context with the unchanging truth of the gospel. Matthew 28:18-20 describes for us the means to this end, baptism and instruction in the Word. This instruction in the Word revolves around two ideas, eating right (i.e. Bible study) and exercising (i.e. obedience).

These two elements form a sure foundation on which we can build for the future. This is the baton we have taken and the “strand” with which we weave a strong cord.

II. The second strand is to live in the present

What I will stress here is the form or culture in which the church gathered looks like. I will come back to this in a moment but for now let me simply note how the gospel forms the foundation on which the local church is built. What it looks like is defined by the culture in which it is found. I will place this thought on a shelf and come back to it in a minute. Let us return to our first point for just a moment. Taking these two elements as primary, the gospel and the whole counsel of God for discipleship, we must now do more than survive or exist. We must grow; but how?

There are churches populating our county, state, and nation that were once hubs for gospel ministry. They pulsed with life and vibrancy, but are now sparsely populated and those present speak of a time past. The key is rather simple; it is captured in some rather simplistic ideas.

- A. First, if your parents had no children, chances are neither would you.
- B. Second, a local church is always a generation away from extinction.

The emphasis of any church after securing the gospel and the whole counsel of God for discipleship is to mentor the next generation. Every one of us has a role to play in the mighty church of Jesus Christ. Let me note two ideas as it relates to mentoring or parenting or training the next generation.

First, as family you and I need to pass the gospel to our children [i.e. the next generation]. Second, as family we need to realize our children will not maintain our form. As family we get hung up on this. We do not like the music they listen to, the clothes they wear, and the color or cut of their hair. Friend, these things really do not matter. What matters is the heart. When God selected King David, the prophet Samuel made this profound statement, “Man looks at the garment, but God looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). Thus the Proverb calls us to guard the heart (Prov. 4:23). Why? Because the heart is the issue.

We must accept the fact that most of our children will be different than us. They will do things differently than we do. Whether or not a local church is “relevant” depends on whether or not the leadership recognizes this idea. The word used for this idea is contextualizing.

“The principle behind Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 9:22 to “become all things to all men” is what Christian thinkers call “contextualization.” Contextualization is the idea that we need to be translating gospel truth into language understood by our culture. Cross-cultural missionaries and Bible translators have been doing this for centuries. They take the unchanging truth of the Gospel and put it into language that fits the context they are trying to reach. Contextualization simply means translating the Gospel—in both word and deed—into understandable terms appropriate to the audience. It’s Gospel translation that is context sensitive.”

Contextualization begins with a broken heart for the lost and a driving desire to help them understand God’s liberating truth. Only by real listening and learning can we hope to persuasively communicate God’s unchanging Word to our constantly changing world.

Sadly, some well-meaning Christians conclude otherwise. For these Christians, contextualization means the same thing as compromise. This misunderstanding of contextualization has led these people to argue that cultural reflection and contextualization are at best distractions, at worst sinful. They admonish us to abandon these things and focus simply on the Bible. While this sounds virtuous, it ends up being foolish for two reasons. **First**, the Bible itself exhorts us to understand our times so that we can reach our changing world with God’s eternal truth. To not contextualize, therefore, is a sin. And **second**, we all live inescapably within a particular cultural framework that shapes the way we think about everything. So if we don’t work hard to understand our context, we’ll not only fail in our task to effectively communicate the gospel but we’ll also find it impossible to avoid being negatively shaped by a world we don’t understand.

In a recent interview, pastor Tim Keller put it this way: “to over-contextualize to a new generation means you can make an idol out of their culture, but to under-contextualize to a new generation means you can make an idol out of the culture you come from. So there’s no avoiding it.”

Therefore, every day and in every circumstance, we need to be consciously and rigorously translating our faith into the language of the culture we’re trying to reach.

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2010/03/10/contextualization-without-compromise/> Tullian Tchividjian serves as the Senior Pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Fort Lauderdale, FL.

What does this mean as it relates to the local church?

III. The third strand is to look to the future

First, we must be intentional in **maintaining** the gospel and the whole counsel of God. It is our responsibility as defenders of the faith to protect the purity of the gospel.

Second, we must be intentional in **teaching** the gospel and the whole counsel of God. It is not enough for us to sit on our laurels. We must continue to proclaim the gospel.

Third, as it relates to form, we must think 20 years younger than ourselves. I have spent my entire adult life attempting to reach and teach the next generation. This idea is ever changing, never constant. The passion is stable; the cosmetic is fluid.

Fourth, for us to do this well, we must immediately begin to mentor the next generation of leadership and enable them to have a voice as to what the local church looks like and how that message is packaged.

How have we begun to address these areas?

First, as leadership we are inter-generational. Two dynamics are at play in this alliance. The attractiveness of youth is their willingness to do and try anything. They are risk takers. They might not always consider the consequences of their actions, but they are willing to attempt new things. The flip side of this is the strength of old age or maturity. Maturity provides stability. Maturity might be slower to act, but maturity stays the course.

When I am with my grandson, his energy appears to have no limit and he runs from one activity to the next without any thought of finishing or consequences once he begins an activity. What I bring to the relationship is direction, stability, and perseverance.

As older men we sometimes tire of their perpetual motion, but in the absence of their energy we become old. The dark side of "growing old" is an unwillingness to change. We can become comfortable and territorial with the status quo.

We must remember how "a body in motion stays in motion and a body at rest - dies."

Generationally we must and are learning to dance without stepping on each other's toes.

Second, to stay intentional in our means of discipleship locally, nationally, and globally we are entertaining alliances with larger networks of churches. One of those alliances is with CONVERGE Great Lakes and their alliance with BILD International/ANTIOCH SCHOOLS.

Friends, we have a common enemy and it is not the body of Christ. We can take the three strands before us and weave them together to form a cord that is not quickly torn apart. The question confronting us is, will we? Will we take the gospel and the whole counsel of God and place it into a trans-generational form for the strengthening of this church and for the establishing of new churches.

We have before us three strands. It is our responsibility to weave those strands together for a strong cord that is not quickly broken. **How we weave will determine what the future looks like.** I am not so much concerned for my own well-being but I am concerned about those who would follow in my footsteps. The cord we weave builds a bridge on which others will travel. If confronted by two choices, one well built and the other most precarious, which one would you naturally choose?

What if we are so determined to hold onto our singular strand that we refuse to weave well with others? Friend, it will not bode well for us, but for those who follow in our footsteps it will prove tragic.

"The Bridge Builder"
Will Allen Dromgoole

It was possibly first published in 1900 in the now rare book *A Builder*.

An old man, traveling a lone highway,
Came at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm deep and wide.

The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
For the sullen stream held no fears for him,
But he turned when he reached the other side,
And builded a bridge to span the tide.

"Old man," cried a fellow pilgrim near,
"You are wasting your strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day,
And you never again will pass this way.

"You have crossed the chasm deep and wide.
Why build you a bridge at eventide?"
And the builder raised his old gray head:
"Good friend, on the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet will pass this way."

"This stream, which has been as naught to me,
To that fair-haired boy may a pitfall be;
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim -
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him."

The Bridge Builder is a poem written by the acclaimed author Will Allen Dromgoole. "The Bridge Builder" is often reprinted and remains quite popular. It has even graced plaques on real bridges such as the Bellows Falls, Vermont Vilas Bridge in New Hampshire. It was possibly first published in 1900 in the now rare book *A Builder*.

My prayer is that you will say yes by participating in the dialogue for forward movement and building a bridge in the present that reaches into the future for the next generation to cross.

Shepherding the Sheep: (What's the NEXT STEP?)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEL8PYu4RR4&feature=related>

we are marshall