

Reading With The Gospel In Mind

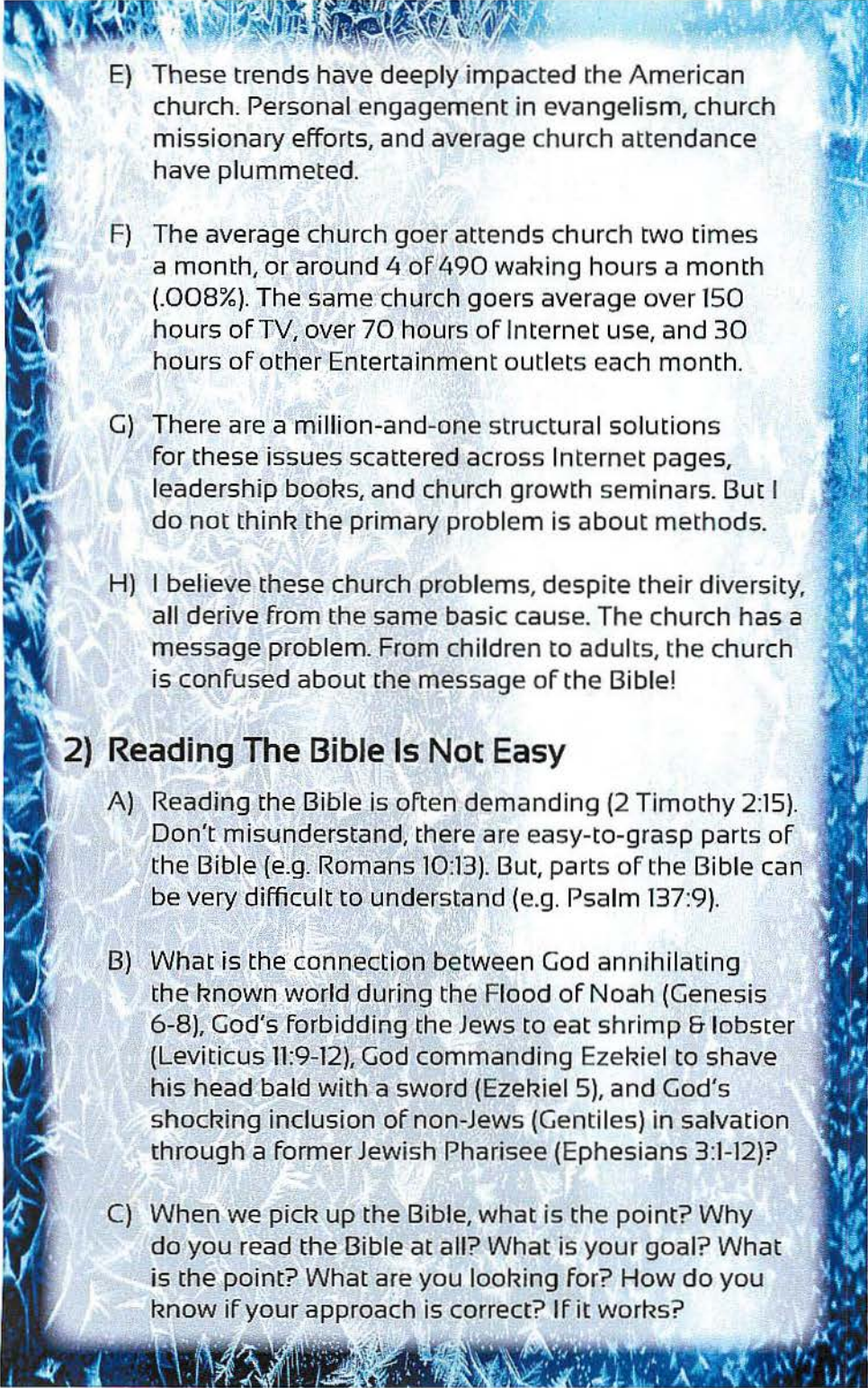
Long Beach Alliance Church • December 29, 2013 • Pastor Chris Lankford

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

~Acts 8:35 (ESV)

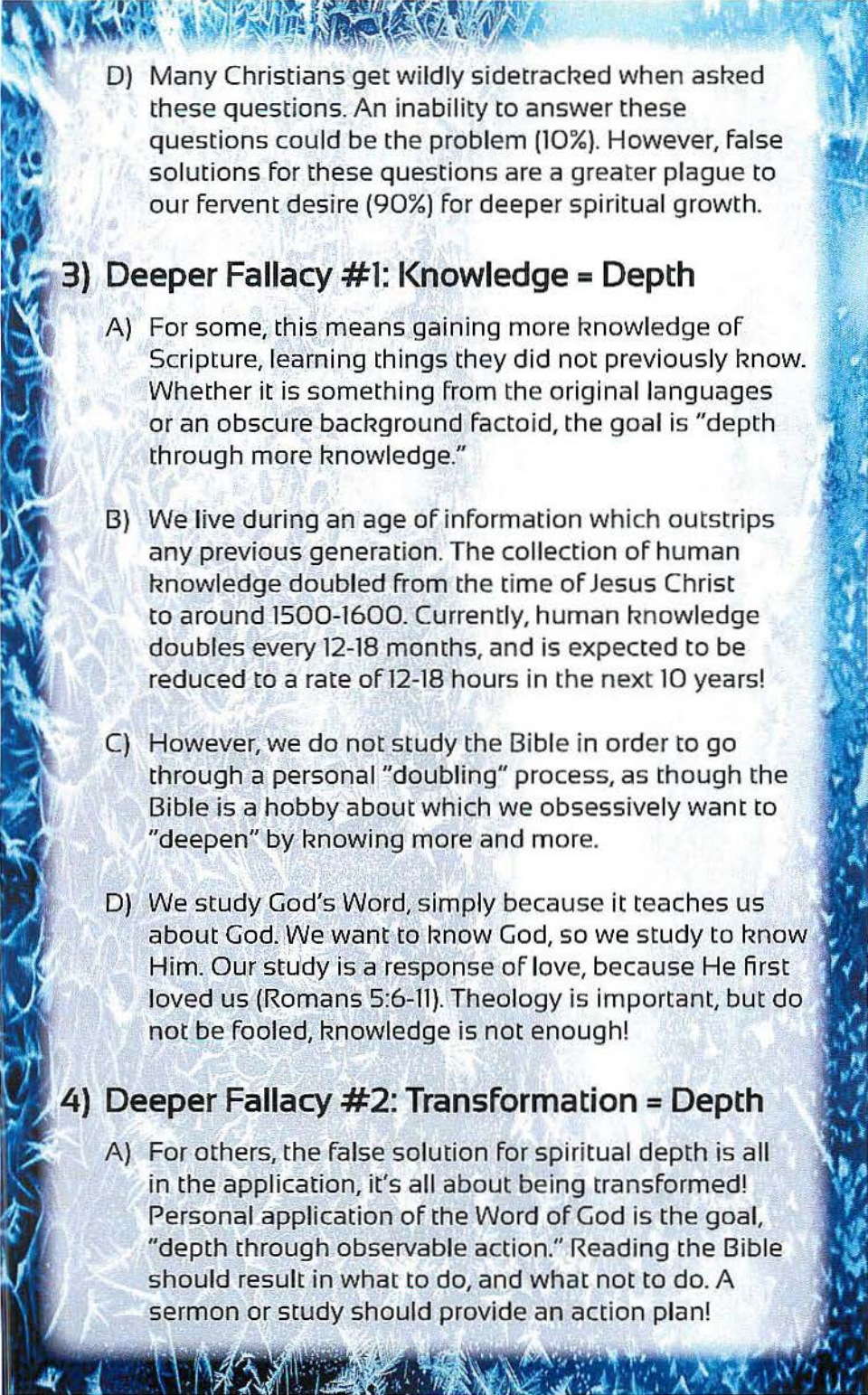
1) The Hole In Our Holiness

- A) It is not uncommon to hear comments about “wanting more depth” in a person’s spiritual life. I often hear people say they want to make a bigger impact for Jesus Christ in their world. People regularly tell me they don’t understand the Bible, but wish they could.
- B) This is consistent with trends in the American church. Almost 90% of church goers are seeking help in a better understanding of the Bible. However, 40% of church goers are “bored, discouraged, doubtful, or overwhelmed” by attempting to read the Bible.
- C) Unfortunately, 54% of regular church attenders do not read the Bible outside of a weekly church service. Of those who read the Bible more than once a week, 3 of 4 only read in a Bible study group, and just over 10% of followers of Jesus read the Bible every day.
- D) Equally disturbing is the modern preaching trend of presenting Bible content in short topical sermons with an emphasis on self-help applications. While many attend church, biblical literacy is increasingly shallow.

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- E) These trends have deeply impacted the American church. Personal engagement in evangelism, church missionary efforts, and average church attendance have plummeted.
 - F) The average church goer attends church two times a month, or around 4 of 490 waking hours a month (.008%). The same church goer averages over 150 hours of TV, over 70 hours of Internet use, and 30 hours of other Entertainment outlets each month.
 - G) There are a million-and-one structural solutions for these issues scattered across Internet pages, leadership books, and church growth seminars. But I do not think the primary problem is about methods.
 - H) I believe these church problems, despite their diversity, all derive from the same basic cause. The church has a message problem. From children to adults, the church is confused about the message of the Bible!

2) Reading The Bible Is Not Easy

- A) Reading the Bible is often demanding (2 Timothy 2:15). Don't misunderstand, there are easy-to-grasp parts of the Bible (e.g. Romans 10:13). But, parts of the Bible can be very difficult to understand (e.g. Psalm 137:9).
- B) What is the connection between God annihilating the known world during the Flood of Noah (Genesis 6-8), God's forbidding the Jews to eat shrimp & lobster (Leviticus 11:9-12), God commanding Ezekiel to shave his head bald with a sword (Ezekiel 5), and God's shocking inclusion of non-Jews (Gentiles) in salvation through a former Jewish Pharisee (Ephesians 3:1-12)?
- C) When we pick up the Bible, what is the point? Why do you read the Bible at all? What is your goal? What is the point? What are you looking for? How do you know if your approach is correct? If it works?

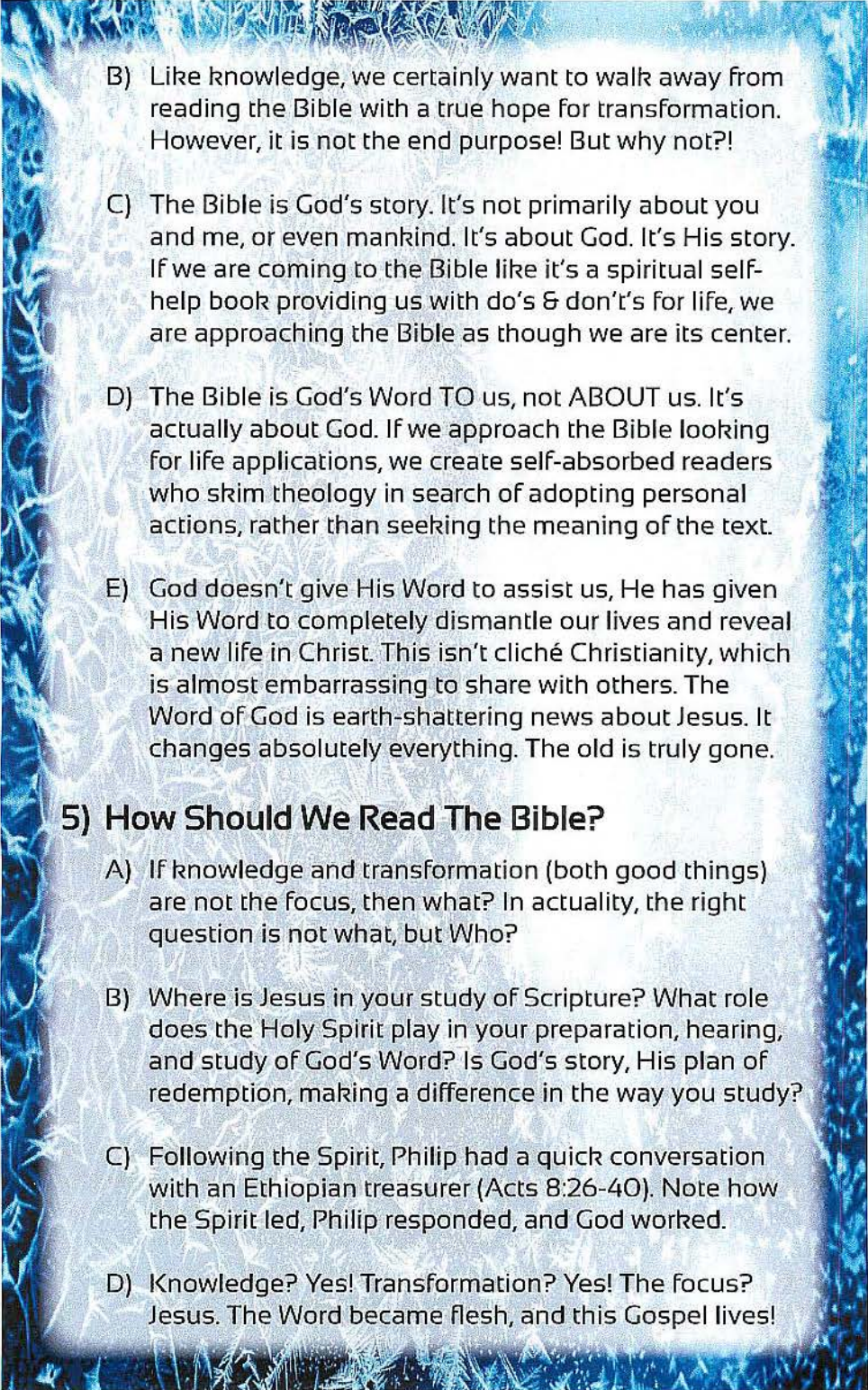
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- D) Many Christians get wildly sidetracked when asked these questions. An inability to answer these questions could be the problem (10%). However, false solutions for these questions are a greater plague to our fervent desire (90%) for deeper spiritual growth.

3) Deeper Fallacy #1: Knowledge = Depth

- A) For some, this means gaining more knowledge of Scripture, learning things they did not previously know. Whether it is something from the original languages or an obscure background factoid, the goal is "depth through more knowledge."
- B) We live during an age of information which outstrips any previous generation. The collection of human knowledge doubled from the time of Jesus Christ to around 1500-1600. Currently, human knowledge doubles every 12-18 months, and is expected to be reduced to a rate of 12-18 hours in the next 10 years!
- C) However, we do not study the Bible in order to go through a personal "doubling" process, as though the Bible is a hobby about which we obsessively want to "deepen" by knowing more and more.
- D) We study God's Word, simply because it teaches us about God. We want to know God, so we study to know Him. Our study is a response of love, because He first loved us (Romans 5:6-11). Theology is important, but do not be fooled, knowledge is not enough!

4) Deeper Fallacy #2: Transformation = Depth

- A) For others, the false solution for spiritual depth is all in the application, it's all about being transformed! Personal application of the Word of God is the goal, "depth through observable action." Reading the Bible should result in what to do, and what not to do. A sermon or study should provide an action plan!

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- B) Like knowledge, we certainly want to walk away from reading the Bible with a true hope for transformation. However, it is not the end purpose! But why not?!
 - C) The Bible is God's story. It's not primarily about you and me, or even mankind. It's about God. It's His story. If we are coming to the Bible like it's a spiritual self-help book providing us with do's & don't's for life, we are approaching the Bible as though we are its center.
 - D) The Bible is God's Word TO us, not ABOUT us. It's actually about God. If we approach the Bible looking for life applications, we create self-absorbed readers who skim theology in search of adopting personal actions, rather than seeking the meaning of the text.
 - E) God doesn't give His Word to assist us, He has given His Word to completely dismantle our lives and reveal a new life in Christ. This isn't cliché Christianity, which is almost embarrassing to share with others. The Word of God is earth-shattering news about Jesus. It changes absolutely everything. The old is truly gone.

5) How Should We Read The Bible?

- A) If knowledge and transformation (both good things) are not the focus, then what? In actuality, the right question is not what, but Who?
- B) Where is Jesus in your study of Scripture? What role does the Holy Spirit play in your preparation, hearing, and study of God's Word? Is God's story, His plan of redemption, making a difference in the way you study?
- C) Following the Spirit, Philip had a quick conversation with an Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:26-40). Note how the Spirit led, Philip responded, and God worked.
- D) Knowledge? Yes! Transformation? Yes! The focus? Jesus. The Word became flesh, and this Gospel lives!