

# PERSPECTIVE

SEPTEMBER 2020

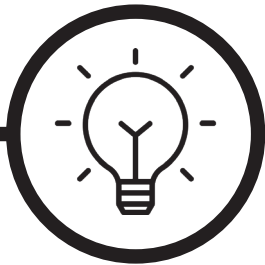
## GENEROSITY & OUR MIND



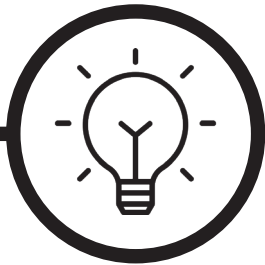
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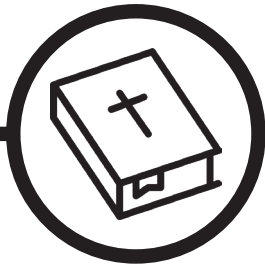
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## Generosity & Our Mind

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” Those are the now-famous words of the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper. They beautifully and powerfully make the point that Christ owns everything. Every bit of our lives is his and are therefore to be gladly given over to him.

What few people know is that there’s more to Kuyper’s quote. Those words are actually the second half of a sentence. The full sentence reads, “Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”<sup>1</sup> The point being, that we cannot compartmentalize our Christianity. Christ’s sovereign ownership of all things includes all of our minds. There is no corner of the human mind over which Christ does not cry: “Mine!”

Like everything else we possess—our money, our homes, our time, our careers, etc.—our minds belong to the God who made us. And, like all that he has given us, God has given us our minds for a very specific purpose: that we might use them to glorify and enjoy him forever.<sup>2</sup> As John Piper explains, “the main reason God has given us minds is that we might seek out and find all the reasons that exist for treasuring him *in* all things and *above* all things.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, God has given us our minds so that we might gladly give them back to him. This is part of what Jesus meant when he said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and *with all your mind*. This is the great and first commandment” (Matt. 22:37–38, emphasis added). We are called to be generous with our minds toward God. But that’s not all.

Just like Kuyper’s quote, there is more to Jesus’ words in Matthew 22. After laying out the “great and first commandment,” Jesus says, “A second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). The word “like” serves to connect the first commandment with the second. Our love for our neighbor is to be “like” our love for God. They aren’t the same, but they are to be similar. This means our love for neighbor should include loving them with our minds. This becomes even clearer when we think about what it means to “love your neighbor *as yourself*.” Apart from God, is there anything we love more than ourselves? Is there anyone we think about more than ourselves? We love ourselves with all our minds, and God calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to be generous with our minds toward God *and* our neighbor.

## WITH ALL YOUR MIND

But what exactly does it mean to be generous toward God and neighbor with our mind? To love them with all our mind? Though these categories fall woefully short of capturing all that the mind is and does, for this article, let’s think of the mind in terms of our intellect and our thoughts. Our intellect is our *capacity* to reason and understand. Our thoughts are the *ideas* produced by our intellect as we reason and seek to understand. We love God with all our mind by gladly devoting the full use of our intellect and our thoughts to the end of glorifying and enjoying him forever. We love our neighbor with all our mind by doing the same, but to the end that we might do him good. This is what it means to be generous toward God and neighbor with our mind.

But, what does this look like practically? It would be easy to answer that question and abruptly end this article by saying, “That, my friend is exactly why God has given you a mind—so you can figure it out!” While there is certainly some truth to that, telling someone to be generous toward God and neighbor with their intellect and then saying, “Go do it!” is a little bit like giving someone a 4x6 picture of a house and telling them to go build it. To build a house you need more than a picture, you need blueprints. And, when it comes to being generous with our minds toward God and neighbor, we are greatly helped by having a basic framework to guide our efforts. So, what does it look like to be generous toward God and neighbor with our minds?

## BE GENEROUS WITH OUR INTELLECT

*God has placed no limits to the exercise of the intellect that he has given us, on this side of the grave.*

– Francis Bacon

God has gifted each of his image-bearers with an intellect. Yet, not everyone has the same capacity to reason and understand. Like all of God’s gifts, he has given this gift to each of us in varying degrees that are subject to change over the course of our lives. Our intellectual capacity generally increases as we grow and mature (e.g., 1 Cor. 13:11). It can also decrease due to aging, illness, or accident. Whatever our intellectual capacity, God has given our intellect to us that we might fully and gladly exercise it for the purpose of loving him and our neighbor.

### *Loving God with Our Intellect*

What does it look like to fully exercise our intellect for the purpose of loving God? First, it looks like laboring to know everything we possibly can about him—his person, his nature, his works, and his ways. As Charles Spurgeon so eloquently put it, “The highest science, the

loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.”<sup>4</sup>

The primary way we labor to know God is by laboring to know his Word. In his great generosity, God has revealed himself to us in his Word and given his people the gift of his Spirit to lead us into the truth of that Word. A generous mind toward God is one that receives these gifts with thanksgiving and joyfully and regularly gives itself to the prayerful and careful study of the Scriptures. This takes time and effort. Sadly, many Christians aren’t willing to give of their time and effort to study God’s Word. According to a 2019 LifeWay survey of those who regularly attended Protestant churches, only 32% read the Bible daily compared to 40% who read the Bible once a week or less. My hope is that these statistics don’t hold true for the members of Mount Vernon.

No matter where we are when it comes to being generous toward God with our intellect by digging into his Word, we all have room to grow. Let me suggest a few practical ways to grow in generosity toward God in this area:

- *Schedule time to study the Bible.* Put it on your calendar and commit to prioritizing this time the same way you would an important social gathering or special event. Knowing how you want to use the time will also help. Maybe you want to dig deeper into Sunday’s sermon text using your notes. Maybe you want to look up and dig into some passages related to a specific topic or attribute of God. Make a plan and dive in!
- *Learn how to study the Bible.* For some, the idea of Bible study can be intimidating because we don’t know where to start. If that’s you, *Asking the Right Questions: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Applying the Bible* by Matthew S. Harmon is a short read that will set you on the right path.
- *Use tools to help you study the Bible.* We have more helpful resources for understanding the Bible available to us than any Christians in history. Three of the best of these resources are the *ESV Study Bible*, the *New Bible Dictionary* (IVP, 1996), and the *New Bible Commentary* (IVP, 1994). All three of these are available in the MVBC Bookstall, and the latter two can be checked out from the recently updated and reopened MVBC Library along with a large number of commentaries and other Bible study resources.
- *Study the Bible with the church.* The church is one of God’s great gifts to us and one of the means by which he helps us grow in our knowledge of him. When we

gather to study God’s word together, whether in Sunday School or a small group, we have the opportunity to not only dig deeper into God’s Word, but to learn from other Spirit-filled believers whose knowledge and experience serve to help us know God more.

- *Be willing to dig deep into difficult passages, doctrines, and questions.* It’s tempting to just pass over things that we don’t understand in the Bible. It’s also tempting just to ignore our nagging questions about God and the Bible. But, to do so is to miss an opportunity to fully exercise our intellect. Knowing God is not easy. Seeking to know and understand the infinite mind of an infinite God should stretch our intellects to their limits. May we always be willing to generously exercise our God-given intellects in the pursuit of knowing as much of our infinite Creator as our finite minds will allow.

Though not nearly as important as studying God’s Word, we can also labor to know God more by reading good Christian books, especially those that focus on doctrine. The best Christian books are those that are filled with Scripture and lead us to dive deeper into God’s Word. Often, I’ll hear people say, “I’m not much of a reader.” If that’s you, let me encourage you to start small and be willing to plod (to simply commit to reading a page or two a day). There are a ton of great Christian books that are less than 100 pages. One that I particularly like is *A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God’s Love* by Milton Vincent. It’s available in both MVBC’s Library and Bookstall. Another, longer book with short (3-4 page) chapters is J. I. Packer’s *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*. I trust either of these books will whet your appetite for reading good Christian books so that you might grow in the knowledge of God.

If you’ve made it this far, you may be asking yourself, “So is he saying that the only way to be generous toward God with my mind is to go into full-time ministry so that I can read the Bible and Christian books all day?” The answer to that question is, of course, an unqualified, “No!” The Bible teaches us that most Christians will not be in full-time ministry. God doesn’t expect us to spend every waking moment of our lives reading and studying his Word or books about his Word. It’s the primary way we love God with our minds, but it isn’t the only way.

Fully exercising our intellect for the purpose of loving God also looks like laboring to know all that we can about the created order, *especially* those areas that relate to our God-given vocation (Gen. 1:28). Not everyone has the intellectual capacity needed to become a “Renaissance man.” Some do. But everyone does have the intellectual capacity



needed to glorify God in their vocation. This means that, whether God has called you to be a CEO, a carpenter, a programmer, a homemaker, or a barista, you should labor to be generous toward him with your mind by learning everything you can about your job so that you might do the best job possible for the glory of God (Col. 3:23).

#### *Loving Our Neighbor with Our Intellect*

*There are many who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge: that is curiosity. There are others who desire to know in order that they may be known: that is vanity. Others seek knowledge in order to sell it: that is dishonorable.*

*But there are some who seek knowledge in order to edify others: that is love.*

– Bernard of Clairvaux

We can also be generous toward our neighbor with our intellect. Here, it helps to think of the two categories mentioned above, knowing God and knowing about the created order. To be generous toward our neighbor with our intellect is to gladly share with them our knowledge of God and the created order. Has God revealed something edifying to you through the study of his Word? Be open-handed with that knowledge for the sake of building up the church. Use it to encourage the brother or sister you disciple. Share it at Bible study or small group for the sake of helping the group grow in their knowledge of God. Has a book been helpful in your Christian walk? Recommend it to another brother or sister. Or, better yet, offer to re-read it along with them and meet up regularly to discuss what you've read. Consider asking another brother or sister to read through it with you. Has the Lord given you the ability to understand and explain difficult doctrines or complex ethical issues? Use that ability to walk with others as they wrestle through them. Consider reaching out to an elder and letting them know that you are interested in teaching or possibly being trained in biblical counseling that you might use your God-given intellect to bless the church.

When it comes to our vocations, the same principle applies, but it can be harder for us to *want* to apply it. A cutthroat office environment doesn't negate the call to be generous with our intellect. How are you doing in this area? Are you someone who gladly shares your knowledge and insights with your co-workers? Or, do you keep them to yourself to ensure that you stand out? When a team member (up for the same promotion as you) struggles on a project and you have the knowledge to help, do you gladly give of that knowledge? Or, do you keep it to yourself? How are you doing when it comes to loving your neighbor with your intellect at work?

Being generous toward God and neighbor with our intellect takes some serious effort. It also takes a significant amount of humility—the kind that, in light of the generosity of God in the gospel and out of a love for both God and neighbor, gladly and regularly sings the prayer, “Take my intellect and use every power as you choose.”<sup>6</sup>

#### **BEING GENEROUS WITH OUR THOUGHTS**

Generosity of the mind also includes our thoughts. Whether we are fully using our intellect or not, we are always thinking, reasoning, formulating ideas, making judgments. These thoughts provide us with opportunities to be generous toward God and our neighbor in a number of ways.

#### *Loving God and Neighbor with Our Thoughts*

For starters, we can be generous with our thoughts simply by thinking about God and our neighbor more. The great temptation of the human mind is to think mostly of and about ourselves. But the gospel calls us to put off this selfish mindset and to put on the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5-7), to think of ourselves less and to think of God and our neighbor more and more. This includes thinking of how we might serve them (Ps. 2:11; Gal. 5:13), how we might honor them (Ps. 96:9; Prov. 3:9; Rom. 12:10), and, when it comes to our neighbor, how we might bear their burdens (Gal. 6:2), encourage them (1 Thess. 5:11), and stir them up to love and good works (Heb. 10:24).

Another way that we can be generous with our thoughts is by laboring to fix them on God or our neighbor when we are in their presence—to give them our full attention. Of course, we are always in the presence of God, but here I'm thinking about times of prayer, Bible reading, or worship when we are particularly aware of being in his presence. There are few things we possess more valuable than our attention. Because, in giving someone our full attention, we are giving them ourselves. If I give you my attention, I am saying, “I am going to give my mind to thinking about you—what you are saying and doing in this moment—and to no one and nothing else.” We do this by prayerfully focusing our minds and eliminating distractions (e.g., your smartphone or smartwatch, the TV in the background, etc.). We live in a world where this is increasingly hard to do, and because of that, it's an increasingly powerful act of generosity and love.

Generosity of thought includes laboring both to be increasingly selfless in what we think about and to fix our thoughts on God and neighbor when in their presence. It also extends to how we think about God and neighbor.

*Loving God in Our Thoughts*

*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*

— A. W. Tozer

A. W. Tozer makes an important point: it is crucial that we think rightly about God. The problem for many, if not all of us, is that we don't. Our thoughts about God don't always correspond to reality. Tozer explains why this is. He says, "We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God."<sup>7</sup> We allow our thoughts to determine what God is like rather than God's self-revelation. To put it bluntly, we choose not to believe what God says about himself. We aren't generous toward God in our thoughts about him.

Some people struggle to reconcile God's wrath and justice with his love. I struggle to believe God loves me. And, the longer I'm in ministry, the more I'm convinced that we who have a high view of God's holiness, justice, and sovereignty struggle to have an equally high view of God's love. Despite everything he tells us about his love for us—a love so great that he was willing to crush his Son to bring us into his loving presence for all eternity—we struggle to believe that God is actually for us (Rom. 8:31–32). We doubt that he is good and that all he does is for our good (Ps. 100:5; Rom. 8:28). Though he goes out of his way to prove he is our loving heavenly Father who loved us while we were yet sinners, we often think of him as an angry taskmaster who has forgiven us our sin but will only love us when we live up to his perfect standards. How uncharitable! How unloving! How antithetical to the gospel!

Generosity toward God in our thoughts means laboring to take him at his Word even when tempted to think otherwise. It is to embrace him for who he is and to speak the truth of his Word to the lies in our heads. We do this by memorizing and meditating on Scripture that speaks to God's character and nature (see the verses above for a starting place) and praying that God would do the work of transforming our minds that we might take him at his Word.

*Loving Our Neighbor in Our Thoughts*

Generosity toward our neighbor in our thoughts works similarly. Scripture makes it clear that we are to think the best of our neighbor. "Love . . . hopes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). Pastor John Crotts, in his helpful book, *Graciousness: Tempering Truth with Love*, explains, "If you love someone, you discipline your mind to assume the best about that person's words or actions until you have the facts to prove otherwise. . . The opposite of love [and generosity] is not hate, but selfishness. Instead of selfishly assuming that you

know the thoughts and motivations behind another person's words or actions, in love you should selflessly assume the best interpretation of what the other person has said or done."<sup>8</sup> How different would our interactions with others be if we labored to be generous toward them in our minds?

**THE ONLY TRULY GENEROUS MIND**

You would think it would be easy to give of something that you've received. Sadly, it doesn't work that way when it comes to our minds. Rather than gladly giving of them for the worship and glory of God and the good of our neighbor, we too often keep them for ourselves, instead seeking our own good and glory. Even when we do try to give of our minds for the sake of God and neighbor, we fall short of the generosity that God commands. We do not love the Lord with all our mind and we do not love our neighbor as ourself.

This reality is intended by God to direct our minds to the gospel and to fix them on Jesus Christ. He alone had a truly generous mind. He alone loved God with all his mind and loved his neighbor as himself. He alone fully used his intellect for the glory of God and the good of his neighbor. He alone never had a single wrong or selfish thought. And, in his selflessness, he gladly bore the wrath for our selfishness and sinful shortcomings so that we might not only be forgiven our sins, but be given his mind (1 Cor. 2:16). We can be generous with our minds because the one who owns them all has been so generous toward us. May we labor by his grace to give to him what is already his for the sake of his glory.

— Dustin Butts

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty: A Public Address Delivered at the Inauguration of the Free University, October 20, 1880."

<sup>2</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 1.

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Immutability of God: A Sermon (No. 1) Delivered on Sabbath Morning, January 7th, 1855, by the REV. C. H. Spurgeon At New Park Street Chapel, Southwark," The Spurgeon Archive, accessed August 31, 2020, <https://archive.spurgeon.org/sermons/0001.php>.

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Earls, "Few Protestant Churchgoers Read the Bible Daily," Lifeway Research, accessed August 31, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/07/02/few-protestant-churchgoers-read-the-bible-daily/>.

<sup>6</sup> Frances R. Havergal, "Take My Life and Let It Be."

<sup>7</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (Fig Books, 2012), 5.

<sup>8</sup> John Crotts, *Graciousness: Tempering Truth with Love* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 90.

# Training: How Do I Grow As A Christian?

Written by Isaac Adams

*Training: How Do I Grow As A Christian?* by Isaac Adams seeks to help new believers navigate daily Christian living in their new life in Christ. In this short guide (124 pages), Adams challenges new Christians to cultivate basic spiritual disciplines for the purpose of fully knowing and enjoying God.

In the opening chapter, Adams gives a clear definition of a disciple of Christ: one who follows Jesus and “is learning to obey all things Christ commands” (24). Chapters 2–5 are devoted to the disciple’s training for godliness (1 Tim. 4:7) through Bible reading, prayer, and worship. These chapters are filled with practical tips and encouraging words for Christians practicing these disciplines for the first time. On Bible reading, Adams suggests one way to approach the Word wisely is to read along with an older Christian, allowing the older brother or sister to “show you how they study the Bible” (46). One particularly helpful aspect of Adams “training” regimen is the memory verse woven into each chapter. For instance, in the chapter, “Prayer: Talking to God,” Adams uses Romans 8:26 to remind us when we don’t know what to pray, the “Spirit helps us in our weakness.” Likewise, in the chapter, “Worship: Living for God,” Adams uses Mark 12:30 to remind us that our worship should be total and undivided (83), that we should “love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.”

The final chapters focus on the public disciplines of joining the local church and sharing the Gospel with those who are lost. Adams describes the local church as vital to Christian life. “It’s where we hear God’s word, baptize those who believe, eat God’s meal, sing God’s praises and pray” (101). Adams concludes with our call to evangelize. He notes that evangelism is part of every Christian’s job description. “It’s not just for pastors, extroverts, or really serious Christians. Jesus commanded all Christians to make disciples (Matt. 28:20)” (112). The memory verse in the last chapter grounds the reader in God’s power and grace: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6).

I would recommend this book to new Christians and mature Christians alike. Practically, it serves as a great guide for the new believer. Adams writes plainly, and his ideas are easily digestible, yet the wisdom packed in six short chapters gives the reader deep insight in how to train for godliness. This book will cause all Christians to reflect on our need for Christ, and his desire for us to enjoy him and glorify him in this life. Read it, and you will find your heart singing God’s praises.

– RECOMMENDED BY WILL DAVIS



## Excerpts From the Book

### 1

“The Christian’s hope isn’t that practice makes perfect, but that Jesus makes perfect. When we trust in Jesus, God declares us innocent of all our sin. He sees us as he sees Jesus—His perfect child.”

– Introduction: Get Ready for Training, p.18

### 2

“Repentance is the other side of the coin of faith. According to God’s word, faith isn’t sitting back and hoping for the best. It’s not blind trust. Rather, faith is being confident in our hope as Christians and certain of what we don’t see (Heb. 11:1). It’s being confident in God and His promises, and this confidence leads us to action. One of those essential actions is repentance.”

– Discipleship: Following Jesus, p.28

### 3

“Many people feel like they’ve never heard from God, and they assume this if he’s real they would have. These folks may even beg God to speak to them, to show them a mighty sign, but all the while their Bibles are covered in dust.”

– Bible: Listening to God, p.41



## Theologians You Should Know

Written by Michael Reeves

"If a tree is to grow great, its roots must go deep. It is no different in the church; without good roots into the past, we will be blown around by the assumptions of our generation, overly sensitive to petty changes in our immediate environment, ever more pinched and puny, our gospel all puckered and sour." Such is the heart behind Michael Reeves' book *Theologians You Should Know*.

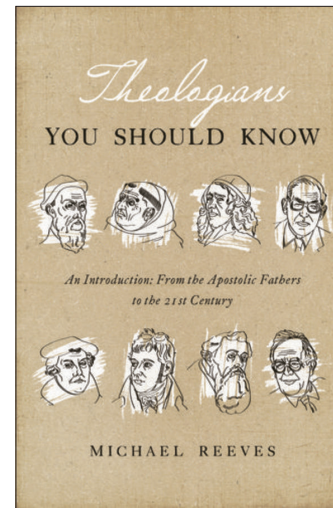
Reeves' main goal is to provide accessible introductions to theological giants of the past in order to spark a curiosity to engage the works of these giants firsthand. By his own admission, these introductions are not exhaustive. In each chapter, he provides a short summary of the theologian's life and then a brief survey of the overall structure and feel of that theologian's greatest works. At the end of each chapter, the hope is that you walk away with a desire to get your hands on Calvin's *Institutes* or Augustine's *Confessions*. Each chapter is independent of the one before, so it is completely viable to dip in and out of this book. However, you will be greatly encouraged if you read the book cover to cover. In the sweeping course of historical theology, two overarching truths stand out:

1. *The church today stands on the shoulders of the church yesterday.* For better or for worse, we are directly affected by the theology of those who have gone before us. It is sobering to think about where we would be if Athanasius had not defended the doctrine of the Trinity or if Martin Luther compromised on justification by faith alone. Just as sobering is the realization that much of modern liberal theology finds its roots in the teaching of Friedrich Schleiermacher, a theologian most of us have never heard of. As a church, we have the responsibility to protect the integrity of the gospel for the next generation and one of the ways we do this is by learning how our forefathers preserved it for us.

2. *God has been faithful to preserve the truth of the gospel.* For over 2,000 years God has preserved the fundamental truth of Jesus dead, buried, and resurrected for the salvation of God's people. Though many pages have been written and many men martyred for holding fast to this gospel, it is ultimately God who has miraculously worked to preserve the truth about who he is and how we can come to know him in Christ. Praise God that he is sovereign and always acts to preserve the glory of his name!

Overall, this book is a great read and I trust it will both humble you and inspire you to engage with some of the great theologians of church history.

— RECOMMENDED BY KALEP KANODE



### Excerpts From the Book

## 1

"The fact is, theologians like Athanasius and Calvin are like famous guests of honor at a party. Most people there would love to have some time with them, but few dare to approach them without a polite introduction. And providing a few introductions to fascinating but potentially intimidating celebrity theologians is the aim of these pages."

— Introduction, p.15

## 2

"Theology is something to be done corporately by the church. But if we ignore what the bulk of the church has said down through history, then we act as schismatically as if we ignored the church on earth today."

— Introduction, p.15



# SEPTEMBER

*These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!*

September 1	Genesis 1	September 16	Colossians 1:24–2:23
September 2	Exodus 34:1–16	September 17	Colossians 3
September 3	Leviticus 16	September 18	Ruth 1:1–18
September 4	1 Samuel 16:1–13	September 19	Colossians 4
September 5	Matthew 6:29–7:6	<b>September 20</b>	<b>Colossians 3:1–4</b>
<b>September 6</b>	<b>Romans 8:26–39</b>	September 21	Ecclesiastes 1:1–11
September 7	2 Corinthians 8:1–15	September 22	Ecclesiastes 1:12–18
September 8	2 Corinthians 8:16–23	September 23	Ecclesiastes 2:1–11
September 9	2 Corinthians 9:1–5	September 24	Ecclesiastes 2:12–17
September 10	2 Corinthians 9:6–15	September 25	John 18:12–27
September 11	Proverbs 11:17–31	September 26	John 18:28–40
September 12	Proverbs 22:1–16	<b>September 27</b>	<b>Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:17</b>
<b>September 13</b>	<b>2 Corinthians 6–15</b>	September 28	Ecclesiastes 2:18–26
September 14	Colossians 3:1–4	September 29	Ecclesiastes 3:1–8
September 15	Colossians 1:1–23	September 30	Ecclesiastes 3:9–15

**\*Sermons in bold**

# TAKE UP & READ



*Mount Vernon*  
BAPTIST CHURCH