

SEASONS



SUMMER 2023

**Theology
for
Today**

Publication of the EFCC

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The Goal of Theology



I think of theology as the middle step of a three-step process. I find this helpful as it moves me past theology that is a collection of beliefs or field of study and begs the question – how does this area of theology transform my life?

Here's how I see this three-step process:

Revelation – It starts here. God reveals a glimpse of Himself to us. Much like Moses, who only got to see a fraction of the glory of God, we only get a glimpse of God. We see what God has chosen to reveal in the Word – both living and written. We see what God has chosen to reveal about his plan for all of creation. And we see what God has chosen to reveal about what part we play in that incredible plan.

Theology – Making sense of revelation is what I believe we do in theology. Finding our way through all God has revealed takes time, study, and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. In doing this, we as finite humans, employ methods that help us make sense of our observations of revelation. Let me mention two here (these are clearly my names, no theologian would call them this):

Pull-it-apart method

As a young guy, I loved to tear things apart, see how they worked, then put them back together. This usually worked okay. Although I did cause my parents concern some days. In the process of pulling everything apart, I learned how a lot of household gadgets worked. We do the same thing in theology. We pull the revelation of God apart, determine key categories, place the pieces in those categories, so we can see how it works.

Let-it-live method

I once heard Leonard Sweet talk about the difference between a toaster and a cat. To repair a toaster, you use the previously mentioned pull it apart method. You don't do that to a cat, well at least if you want it to live. To figure out a cat (is there really any figuring out a cat?) you need to see its personality, how it behaves, etc. Akin to this, is treating God's revelation as a unified story and observing the themes and storylines

that run through it. Doing this lets it live, intact. Check out the Bible Project (bibleproject.com) to see more examples of this method.

I think both methods (and others) can be helpful, but they don't guarantee we get it all right, and they certainly are not the end goal.

Praxis – Praxis is the living out of an idea or belief. This is the reason we do theology. God reveals, we attempt to make sense of it, so we can live in accordance with it. The goal of theology is not just right belief, it's life with God, and life with other's done God's way. The end of theology is the worship of God and the Holy Spirit's transformative work in us.

In doing theology, I hope we never stop at the second step. To move beyond mere belief to lived out action, we need to ask our theology questions like:

- How does this inflame my passion for God again?
- How does this lead me to fall to my knees in worship?
- What does this call me to obey?
- How is this shaping me to be more like Jesus?
- How does this help me relate in Christ-like ways to others?

NEIL BASSINGTHWAIGHTE

ServeCanada Director &
Interim Prayer Catalyst

Serve**CANADA**



I recently read an article by Karl Vaters titled 8 Non-Numerical Ways To Assess The Health Of A Church – good, practical wisdom from someone who has loved and served the church for many years. I shared it with our District pastors hoping it would be an encouragement to them.

DAN CARLAW
Canadian Pacific District
Superintendent

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Mission, Theology and the Bible

Theology for Today

If we ask about the biblical basis for mission, many will answer and direct us to the words of the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:16-20).

But for Paul, the biblical basis for missions went much further back. The "Great Commission" in its present Scriptural form did not yet exist. In Paul's missiology, he defended both his mission practice and mission theology based on the Old Testament scriptures. In the Old Testament Paul found a rich and deep theology of the mission of God for the nations, and he built his mission theology on that foundation.

Paul sees the mission of God as bringing the whole of the created order to liberation along with the sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:18-27). He proclaims the Messiah's resurrection as the first fruits of that new creation and can affirm that a new person is already a new creation when a person is in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Paul also goes back to Abraham. He sees the mission of Israel as being called into existence as the covenant people of God and to be the agent of God in blessing all the nations (Galatians 3:6-8). This understanding is Paul's foundational block of his theology that he calls "the gospel in advance" – that is, the good news that God intends to bless the nations from the call of Abraham.

For Paul, the mission of God through Israel for the salvation of the nations was the message of the scriptures. Paul's mission as the apostle to the Gentiles was grounded in the Bible of the time. His biblical theology was a theology of mission – the mission of God.

Our Lord Jesus did the same thing. He fully understood his mission in light of the Old Testament, and He taught His disciples to see mission in the same light and on the same foundation.

⁴⁴ Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things that are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, "So it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. (Luke 24:44-48)

Jesus says that this passage is the whole point and thrust of the scriptures: the Law of Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets. The message of the Old Testament is the death and resurrection of the Messiah and the preaching of the gospel to the nations.

The Old Testament then is as much about mission as it was about Jesus. These two are an inseparable part of the same reality – the saving mission of God. If you truly know who Jesus is from the Scriptures, then to confess Jesus as the Messiah is to commit yourself to His mission to the nations.

With the New Testament, the biblical basis for mission is the whole bible – from Genesis to Revelation. God revealed Himself in the scripture as a missionary God. Biblically, mission is the mission of God (Missio Dei), and the Church is God's agent in fulfilling God's mission. God's mission is to redeem all the nations (people groups) of the earth, and He is carrying this out through His redeemed people, the Church. Mission is not an optional ministry of the Church. The mandate of the church is to be on mission with God. "As the Father has sent Me, even so, I am sending you" (John 20:21). The Missio Dei is God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit send the Church into the world.

IKE AGATIN
ServeBeyond Director

ServeBEYOND



A Puzzle Worth Your Time

Theology for Today

For us who are part of God's family, and even for many who are not yet there, Jesus has always been, and will be, our model, our mentor, the one we follow. The life and teachings of Jesus are our foundation – our "go to" – when it comes to figuring out how to live well as a child of God. But there are times in the life of Jesus when it can be difficult to understand what his life means for us, what the message is for us.

This Easter I revisited one such passage – the fascinating story of the healing of Lazarus as found in John 11. There is so much in that story, but I admit that I have often puzzled at Jesus' response to a sick friend. He doesn't rush to his side, instead he waits until He knows that Lazarus has died. And then he finally arrives at the place where families and friends are grieving, outside of the tomb where the body of Lazarus has now lain for 4 days – long enough that the perfumes and spices have worn off. And what does Jesus do? He stops and he weeps. Now, while I appreciate the model of joining friends in grief, my question has always been why Jesus would not immediately bring life back into Lazarus's body. He knew he could. He knew he would. And in so doing, he would put a stopper in the flow of grief of his dear friends. Why not stop their grief as quickly as possible?

I am pretty sure I do not yet have a definitive answer to that question, but through reflection several things have been impressed upon me. Certainly, I have been reminded that I must keep learning the lesson that my timing is not God's timing. Rushing to the solution is not always the best thing to do. I have also been learning the importance of joining friends in grief without having to talk, or explain, or rationalize. Both of those are important for me to come to terms with.

Above all though, it seems that there is a key lesson that rooted in Jesus actions, his delay, his weeping, his wisdom. That is this: for God, it is about relationship above all. Jesus wants us to know that he understands our pain and he hurts with us. He wants us to know that he joins us. He wants us to know that

our relationship with him isn't simply about the solutions he brings, it is about the bond we have. His person should be more important to me than his plan. His presence in my life should be more important than the solution I am hoping for.



So, in no matter what your role may be, whether you are a leader in formal ministry, or a new member of the family of God, keep following the model of Jesus – love people well, join them in struggles, and make the relationship more important than any resolution. But most importantly, as you follow Jesus, as you meet with Jesus, don't ever forget that he wants to know you, he wants to join you, he does understand your journey, and nothing is more important to him than a relationship with you.

It can be hard to believe that when you compare who we are with who he is as creator of universe and giver of life. And yet that is the truth we find in His Word. And maybe it is a truth you needed to hear today as you journey through whatever this life is giving you right now. I say to you all, revel in his Word where you find such truth, and revel in the place you have in the heart of God. That is a mystery bigger than any others, a puzzle bigger and better than Jesus' timing with Lazarus. Bask in that one for a while!

TERRY KAUFMAN
EFCC Leadership Catalyst



A Non-Anxious Presence

a non-anxious presence

Perhaps the best book I've read since the start of the pandemic is Mark Sayers' *A Non-Anxious Presence*. Sayers describes how we're currently living in a gray zone moment: the world has changed, and we do not yet know completely how, or what, the world is changing into.

In gray zone moments, we seek out comfort and security in "strongholds" that have brought us identity and "safety" in the past. However, they fall short in the new context we're finding ourselves in. And the result is anxiety. Sayers writes, "Most understand that the world has changed. However, the sheer rate of change has left many disoriented. We, too, have been left with a sense of the potent chaos in the world. We are not as in control as we thought. We are left with questions of how to lead at such a time when the rules seem to have changed" (p.20)

Sayers spends time looking back at how we've arrived here, and some time describing the current landscape. And then, he highlights how this is a time of opportunity. We don't grow when we're comfortable. It's in the "wilderness" where God grows leaders for the Church. "Leaders move people toward growth. Comfort zones insulate us from development" (p.109).

God is at work during the anxiety-filled gray zone moments! He is growing leaders who will lead with a non-anxious presence in the midst of change and seeming chaos. These leaders are able to lead with a non-anxious presence, because they encounter and are refreshed by the presence of God (p.145).

Our churches and our people, and I would add, our society, need us to be leaders who live daily in the presence of God. Our identity, our strength, our wisdom come from Him. As the psalmist declares, "He is my loving ally and my fortress, my tower of safety, my rescuer. He is my shield, and I take refuge in him..." (Psalm 144:2). Keeping our eyes on Jesus in the midst of the storm is the best thing we can do for the people whom we lead and serve.

"In an anxious, crisis-driven environment, the leadership leverage comes from a non-anxious person" (p.100). We become non-anxious persons by living and leading in the presence of God.

TREVOR BRANDY
Prairie District Superintendent



Is Leading Like Jesus the Right Goal?

LEADERSHIP
Theology
for
Today

I expect for some that question seems rhetorical at best and irreverent at worst. Of course, I recognize that "leading like Jesus" is the right goal for anyone Christian in leadership! It is a great goal – so good and pure and high that we will never reach it. It is worthy, righteous, even. But I am beginning to wonder if it is not the right one – at least, not without any postscripts. Allow me to explain.

As I have given more consideration to the implication of the essential doctrine of the Triune nature of our living God, I am finding myself placing the Trinity into conversations, thoughts, and processes where I did not previously or explicitly do so. Leadership is one of those such places. My questions in leadership were always about Jesus, God the Son.

- What does Jesus teach us about leadership?
- What does Jesus model in leadership?
- What does Jesus expect of us in leadership?

All essential questions. Yet I am now beginning to try to understand what the implications are when God the Son is an inseparable part of God the Father and God the Spirit. While I have not intentionally separated the Trinity, I have failed to at least ask some key questions:

- What does the nature and work of God the Spirit have to say about my leadership, or leadership overall?
- What does the character of God the Father have to say about leadership?
- What does the very nature of the Trinity, three in one, perfect union of wills, perfect sharing of all things, mean when it comes to leadership?

There are many more such questions. To answer them goes beyond the intent of this blog. Here my hope is simply to encourage you to wrestle with those same questions. Please do not ignore the lessons of leadership given to us through God the Son, but don't stop there. Ask the bigger questions. What does the fullness of God – Father, Son, and Spirit in perfect union – teach me about leading among His people and in His name? To me, that is a much more adequate, appropriate, and robust question for a calling that is intended to reflect God's fullness.

If you have not ever asked those extra questions can I invite you to join me in starting to do so? Let's see what God has for us to learn.

TERRY KAUFMAN
EFCC Leadership Catalyst





BUILDING FOR GROWTH



COVID-19 caused some unexpected price hikes in the construction phase.

**The final cost is \$2.2M
We have raised over \$1.5M!**

We have now entered the final phase of this project. We are asking churches and individuals to come alongside us, and raise the remaining \$750,000 by the end of 2025.

Achieving this fundraising goal will require generous giving from individuals and churches throughout the EFCC family.

The result is a facility that is better serving the EFCC's needs, and will continue to for generations into the future!

EFCC Home Office
and
**Fosmark Centre
Expansion**

**You can find out more about, and support
Building for Growth online:**

fosmark.efcc.ca

Answers in Genesis

Theology for Today



From the EFCC Statement of Faith:

God's gospel originates in and expresses the wondrous perfections of the eternal, triune God.

1. We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

In an earlier post I highlighted some "Questions in Genesis." In this post I want to think briefly about the rich "Answers in Genesis" that these two chapters present to gospel people. Rather than debating the mechanics of creation, I wish to affirm that these chapters provide us with deep, rich insights into the character and plans of our God. Many of these ideas are summarized in Article One of our EFCC Statement of Faith (which I have quoted above).

Genesis 1-2 reminds us that our God is Creator – and creative! Time and again in these chapters we see that the creation is good – very good, indeed! It is good because our God is good – He is holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing! If you have read any of the ancient stories about the Greek, Canaanite, or Roman gods, you cannot but be amazed at the goodness of our God (as introduced to us in Genesis 1-2).

He isn't malevolent, capricious, or immoral, or any of the things we see from the ancient pagan gods. He has good plans for His creation. He is goodness, through and through! His rule is benevolent. He invites Adam and Eve to join Him in a "tending" of the creation meant for its flourishing, not for His own personal abuse. He is sovereign over it – He is king, but He is a loving, wise king who revels in the beauty of what He has made and invites humanity to join Him in its flourishing.

We see that our God is a "loving unity of equally divine persons." He declares, "Let us make man in our image!" Loving unity is such a central feature of His nature that He declares that it is "not good" for Adam to be alone – and He creates a perfect counterpart so that Adam and Eve can experience the same loving unity. The beauty of God's plan for male and female reflects the loving

heart of an infinitely perfect, relational God. Genesis shows us God's plan of shalom – loving and flourishing community for His creation and for humanity, the pinnacle of His creation. Genesis 3 of course shows how sin and rebellion destroy so much of this beauty, and yet, we see throughout the Word that "God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory."

The first two chapters of Genesis remind us that our God is essentially a God of lovingkindness whose plan for creation and for male and female is beautiful and fulfilling. All human substitutes for His plan may seem good and satisfying in the short run – but in the end fall short of the beautiful plan God had for creation, creature, and community.

Even the Fall of Genesis 3 cannot destroy the dignity of humans (the image of God in us), nor the beauty of creation. We do well to anchor our vision of God, creation, sex, marriage, calling, vocation, and community in this beautiful passage that introduces our God and His plan for His creation!

BILL TAYLOR
EFCC Executive Director



ServeBeyond ReConnection Days 2023

ReConnection Days are coming up July 12-14 at Town + Field. As Home Office staff, we have the privilege of listening to our missionaries, valuing and affirming God's call on their lives, and understanding how we can support and pray for them in their ministries. We are very thankful to Town + Field church for their help in hosting this event!

There are several ways you can help our ServeBeyond missionaries:

1. Pray for our ReConnection event
2. Pray for our missionaries as they travel and connect with supporters
3. Invite missionaries on Home Assignment to visit your church, event, or prayer group (Need to know who is available? Please contact us at info@efcc.ca.)
4. Join us in supporting missionary kids as they re-adjust to life in Canada. If you'd like to help make it possible for our MKs to go the MORE Network's ReBoot Camp, please consider donating to project 2-4015, MK Re-Entry Camp Scholarship:

bit.ly/DonateCareMK



ServeBEYOND



I am haunted by some verses found in John 5. The context – Jesus has just healed on the Sabbath and the leaders are upset. Jesus offers up an explanation for healing on the Sabbath. This leads to more trouble as the Jewish leaders clearly understood Jesus’ statement about his father (v.17) and want to kill him for blasphemy. In the middle of the subsequent rebuttal by Jesus we read verses 39-40:

³⁹You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! ⁴⁰Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

Wow! Think about those words for a few moments. These men were the elite theologians in Jesus’ day. They knew their Scriptures inside and out. They had been educated in the best rabbinical traditions. They had systematized their Scriptures into a detailed theology and created a whole host of religious practices to live that theology. But they missed the point!

They missed Jesus.

Do we do the same thing?

Before we go further, please understand that I am in no way advocating that we give up on becoming better students of the Bible. I am also not setting up a false dichotomy between theology and religious experience, or theology and Jesus, or the Bible and Jesus. We need to be more robust in our theology, but we also need to experience Jesus in our daily lives. Theology without experiencing life with Jesus is like the experience of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day.

- When was the last time you truly experienced Jesus in your life?
- Do you have friends that can ask if and how you are experiencing Jesus?

When I say experiencing Jesus, I am simply referring to those moments where we can clearly identify God showing up in some way, shape, or form in our daily lives. It might be as simple as a Bible verse taking on new meaning. It might be an answer to prayer. It might be another member of the body of Christ who visibly lives out Jesus in their words and actions toward us. Whatever it is, it leads us to a bigger, bolder, and more beautiful vision of who Jesus is.

Our theology comes to life when it is infused by seeing and experiencing the

living Lord in our lives. As we meet Jesus throughout our daily lives: we learn more about Him and His good plan for the flourishing of all life, we learn more about His character, we are drawn deeper into His love, life, and mission, and we grow in our understanding of what it means for us to follow Him. As our experience of Jesus grows, our theology deepens.

Do you want to deepen your theology?

The flip-side of that question could be this one:

How are you making space in your life to be open to hear from, see, and experience Jesus?

NEIL BASSINGTHWAIGHTE

*ServeCanada Director &
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