

ESSENTIALS - Session 1 ... "An Essential Big Story"

INTRO

...*"Doing Life" has lots of things that are just kind of "Running in the Background"*—they may not be the things that are "Sticking Out the Most", but when you take a careful look at life—they are essential!

The "Essentials Course" is going to start with this assumption—You've Already Come to the Place where you Recognize the Most Important Thing about Your Life is being a DISCIPLE of JESUS CHRIST!

...*So, if I'm going to live my life and flourish as a disciple—What is Essential for Me to Know?*

My Story ...*"There's Got to be More to Life than This"* ...I was shopping for some kind of "Understanding" that brought meaning & purpose to my life.

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Pondering ESSENTIAL #1 ...How Essential is it that You & I Have Some Kind of "Life Blueprint" Out of Which We Seek to Understand What We're Building?

Everyone Builds Their Lives with Some Kind of Philosophical Blueprint!—Some Core Principle that Making All Your "Apps" Run Smoothly!

...*"Laisse le bon temp roulette"* ...YOLO (You Only Live Once) ... *"Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country"* (JFK) => *"The Rise & Triumph of the Modern Self"*
 ... *"Follow Your Heart", "Chase Your Dreams", "You do You"*

"If you were to discern a main point from graduation ceremonies across the United States, you'd come up with something like this: *'the purpose of life is to discover yourself by looking deep down, and then express yourself to the world, no matter what anyone else—family members, friends, colleagues, previous generations or religious institutions—might say.'*" **Trevin Wax**, "Rethink Yourself", p. 2

Everyone Needs an "O.S." That Runs all Their Apps!! ...It is ESSENTIAL That the Way We Define Our Existence, Our Identity, Our Purpose is Carefully Considered! ...AND it is Essential That We Pay Careful Attention to This Not Getting Hi-Jacked along the way!!

Intro Key Vocabulary: "Worldview" ... "Philosophy of Life" ... "Belief System" ... "Creation/Fall/Redemption"

...Life has Always Needed a "TRUE NORTH" from which we make sense of everything else! ...Something has to CALIBRATE everything so we can locate moments & events as either "good? Bad? Meaningful?"

"What is Christianity? Some say Christianity is a religious system people follow. Others say it is a guide to living a fulfilling life or maybe a way of finding peace with God or maybe a system of ethical principles to live by. Some might say Christianity is not really a religion at all but rather a relationship with God or a relationship with Jesus. ...Put another way, Christianity is a worldview. ...Everyone has in his or her mind a story about the way the world actually is, even if they haven't thought about it much or worked out all the details. ...The story-in-their-mind is what people are referring to when they say they have certain beliefs about things like meaning, value, purpose, and significance. ...**It is their belief system**. If they did not have a basic story in their minds, they would have a difficult time making any of the important decisions people are faced with in life." **Greg Koukl**, "The Story of Reality", p. 23

...Whether you just started to follow Jesus or you've been a Christian for a decade—It is Essential to have a "Belief Structure"—an O.S. That Runs All Your Apps!!

The Big 3

Philosophy's Big Organizing Questions: "Where Did I Come From? (Origin) ... Why am I Here? (Purpose) ...Where am I Going? (Defining Destiny)

The Bible's Big Organizing Paradigms: Creation (Origin) ... Fall (Understanding) ... Redemption (Solution)

CREATION

Creation – the doctrine of Creation provides essential understandings for how we create definitions, assign purpose, locate authority, etc. Creation reveals original design and purpose from which we draw our self-understanding and self-identity.

"One of Francis Shaeffer's most memorable sayings was that Christianity does not start with 'Jesus saves you from your sins.' It starts with 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.' ...Christianity cannot be reduced to a tract or a technique for getting 'saved'. it is a comprehensive account of the structure of reality, a rational and real-world account of the history of the universe, a verifiable storyline of the unfolding of the cosmos.

...It is perfectly true that Jesus came to save us from that deforming disorder called 'sin.' But starting with that theme is like going into a movie theater halfway through the film. You don't know who the characters are, you can't figure out the plot, and you are constantly guessing at the events leading up to that point. Most important, you cannot appreciate the depth and complexity of the problem that needs to be solved. ...That illustrates a major reason the message of Christianity no longer makes sense to many people today. They are no longer familiar with the first part of the drama. As a result, not surprisingly, they cannot make sense of key concepts such as sin and salvation." **Nancy Percy** (from the Foreword to "The Story of Reality", p. 13)

"God's story begins with creation, and it ends with a new creation. If nothing else, this fact alone suggests that creation is crucial to understanding who God is and what he is about. ... "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). Genesis 1 provides the cosmic overview. Everything that exists comes into being at God's command. As we move into Genesis 2, the story focuses tightly on the details of the creation of mankind, the very first marriage, and the responsibilities entrusted to men and women. Everything is good. Everything is perfect. Everything is just as it should be." **Michael Lawrence**, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, p. 151

...So much of our lives is spent trying to make sense out of the disorder & dysfunction of our existence—How Critical is it that we are Given a "Reference Point" to Creation's HARMONY!!?

"God created everything from nothing. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1) ..."Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made." (John 1:3) What this means is that God is the owner of creation. He made it, so it's his. That means you and I are his, too. ...Consider the systematic applications we can draw from this. ...Christianity isn't a social project aiming at cultural hegemony. It's a declaration that God has a legitimate claim on all of our lives." **Michael Lawrence**, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, p. 158

...Our ORIGIN provides us with key insights on "ownership" ... "rights" ... "definitions & intents" ... "designs & purpose"

-- This is Fundamental to Life-Topics like: Gender ... Identity ... Marriage ... Morals ...etc.

FALL

Fall - the Doctrine of the Fall provides essential understandings to critical life elements like evil, sin, corruption, brokenness, pain, suffering, death, etc. ...the essential 'nature & need of man' ...the essential understanding of human conflict ...the essential understanding to the type of problem the Gospel is suited to solve.

Genesis 3's "Essential Elements" (Satan, Temptation, & Sin ...a Fallen World under Judgment)

Gen 3:1-8 ¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the

tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

...Everyday (and in Every Way) my little story is interacting with a Bigger Story that includes Satan, temptations, sin, and judgment—ie, "The Fallen World Condition"

Genesis 6 & 11 ...Insights of Sin's Pervasiveness & Man's Potential

Gen 6:5-8 ⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Gen 11:1-9 ¹ Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." ⁵ And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Isaiah 1:2-6

² Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.

³ The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."

⁴ Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.

⁵ Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.

...Do I Understand "Human Potential" the Same Way God Does?

The Fall's Organizing Paradigm/Explanation

...this informs our self-understanding, our understanding of humanity, and our engagement of evangelism
 ...Thus, it is essential that we understand the fall.

"This world is not the way it's supposed to be. God created it to be a place of joy; instead, we know it to be a source of constant frustration. God created it to be a habitat of life; we know it to be a crucible of death. God created it to be our home; we know it to be our graveyard. ...In some ways the storyline of the entire Old Testament focuses on explaining the sinfulness of humanity and the absolute futility of any solution to creation's demise and human sin that we might conjure up—whether towers, or mighty nations, or rigorous self-discipline. ...And from all of this, we draw conclusions for our theology. It helps us understand human nature, the futility of work, even government and the corrupting influence of power. We could get a doctrine of sin simply by looking at Romans 3:23—"all have sinned," it says. There it is. Isn't that really the bottom line?" **Michael Lawrence**, "Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church," p. 163

"So when your own child turns two and begins to throw temper tantrums when he doesn't get his way, you may think of Romans 3:23. But you'll also think of the book of Numbers and thousands of years of Israelite history, and you'll know what's behind Romans 3:23 and what exactly your child is doing. He's worshipping an idol. Its name isn't Baal, but it might as well be. Of course, this isn't just useful for explaining your two-year-old's heart; it's useful for explaining your own heart as well." **Michael Lawrence**, "Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church," p. 164

REDEMPTION

Redemption - the Doctrine of Redemption provides essential understandings as to what actually fixes man's problem. Session 2 will unpack the unique person and work of Christ, who alone solves our problem, but in this week, let us understand the Big Picture concept that redemption is "restoring/reconciling" relationship to God and access to His divine presence. Session 3 will unpack the outworking of this redemption in us, through the process of sanctification and its interaction with sin, suffering, spiritual warfare, etc.

This is God's STORYLINE ...This is the Providential Angle that God is Working EVERYDAY of My Existence! ...Romans 8 gives an understanding of How We Apply the Big Picture to Our Small Moment...

Rom 8:18-32 ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the

Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

How Has This ESSENTIAL Doctrine Impacted My Life?

"ESSENTIAL Takeaway"

...My "Story" (existence... experiences... emotions... relationships... conflicts... struggles... successes... goals... dreams... suffering... evil... goodness...) is part of a Bigger Story! I really can't understand my small story without the Big Story.

Discussion Questions

- How would you describe the "philosophies of life" or the "belief structures" you see people using to guide their lives and to make sense of life's events?
- What cultural issues have you observed that get informed and impacted by tonight's essential doctrine?
- How does the doctrine of creation inform the way you should think about gender, personal identity, sin, right/wrong, marriage, evil, etc.?
- When you go to live your life, encounter personal struggles with sin, endure setbacks/disappointments, etc. ...How does the doctrine of the fall inform the way you approach these experiences?
- In relational settings (marriage, children, parents, friendships, church, etc.), how does the doctrine of creation impact your approach to these relationships? (Go back and read the definition provided for "creation") ... How does the doctrine of the fall inform the way you approach these relationships? (Go back and read the definition provided for "the Fall")
- How does the doctrine of redemption help you find faith and help during times of darkness or difficulty? (Go back and read the definition provided for Redemption)

HOMEWORK!!! ...Because the deepest part of your discipleship is personal!!

- Introduction to *The Story of Reality* by Gregory Koukl (p. 19-39)
- *Justified by Christ* by CJ Mahaney (Reading assignment to prepare for Week 2)