



Rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again: Rejoice!" – Phil 4:4

Joan and Laura rejoice together after our dear sister was baptized on
March 9th this year!

Welcome to our **"Blue Jean Sunday Bring Your Neighbor Day"** – which also happens to be our annual **chili cook-off!** Last year's reigning champion, Douglas Hunt, is on the hunt again this year for **"The Spoon"** – which is the trophy given to the member whose chili won the most votes! Some would argue that a chili culinary experience can change your life. Others would note that it's best to steer very clear of Rick's infamous "Judgment Sauce" – wisely keeping their taste buds un-scorched! Regardless of your preference for peppers or a mild flavor, the most important thing to ingest today and every day is the word of God. It is the first and the truest *"soul food"* as ***"man does not live on [corn] bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."*** (Matthew 4:4) Speaking of heat – the word is so hot it's ***"like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones"*** (Jeremiah 20:9) and yet ***"sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb"*** (Psalms 19:10). Some call a good bowl of chili the best comfort food, but nothing changes, challenges and comforts our souls deeply the Word of God. ***"My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word."*** (Psalms 119:28)

It is our hope today that you'll want to **set up a time to study the bible** with whomever brought you out to our service today. This is not a classroom setting nor something academic, but something more personal and dynamic. Studying the bible in this way is usually done over a meal, or sometimes a cup of coffee, with a few friends and can be set up just about anywhere. The bible has many examples of this kind of personal bible study in all manner of different locations. Typically, Christians invited people into their homes and ***"explained...the way of God more adequately"*** (Acts 18:26), but they also ***"had discussion daily in the lecture hall(s)"*** (Acts 19:9) on campuses, and even studied the bible with people along the desert road(s) while riding in a chariot!

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said,

“unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Acts 8:30-31

The dictionary defines noble as “having or showing fine personal qualities or high moral principles and ideals” when it comes to personal character. If we are not noble in our **ingestion** of the **scriptures**, “**spiritual**” indigestion is guaranteed! This is because we cannot retain nor internalize soul food without this nobility of character when it comes to our study of the bible. The scripture gives us a poignant example of said nobility in Acts 17 verses 10-12, ***“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”*** Considering the character, the passion, and even the miracles which the Holy Spirit enabled Paul to perform – the fact that these residents of the city of Berea gave the “**Scriptures**” final authority on truth is remarkable! It certainly would be tempting and much easier to just take Paul’s word for it! The bible itself makes clear the necessity of this “**noble character**” time and time again with strong warnings about things out there which cause “**spiritual**” indigestion such as false teachings, prophets, and those masquerading as servants of light but are not:

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. 1 Tim 4:1-2

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?” Matt 7:15-17

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. 2 Cor 11:13-15

Many similar verses to the aforementioned crystallize the fact that we can expect satanic



The ancient city of Berea was located in the

assaults on the truth of the bible and the faith. The scriptures themselves lend us advice on what to do in response to these assaults to our spiritual digestion. The first place to start is by being a "**Berean**" ourselves and take the "three E" challenge:

- 1 - **E**agerly receive the message
- 2 - **E**xamine the scriptures
- 3 - **E**very day!

In taking to heart these three challenges and imitating the "**Bereans**" we can know that the bible itself will weigh our character as "**noble**." We must not merely take our religious leader's word for it, but do the diligence which is due - examine the "**Scriptures everyday to see if what [whomever has] said is true!**" If we refuse this challenge and ignore this dignified example, we miss the mark in our pursuit of nobility and we're bound for spiritual indigestion, not internalizing the truth for ourselves.



Take notes - prevent spiritual indigestion!

I first visited a church like this in 1992, it seemed unusual that so many would be taking notes when someone was preaching from the bible. However, when I considered all the different contexts where I had taken notes, it made perfect sense as I had always done so when I wanted to internalize something and seriously retain it. At the time I was attending the University of Hawaii at Manoa and took notes copiously during my classes. I would often take notes for different work related training sessions at different jobs I had. I also took notes for driver's education and for student government activities. If we are willing to take notes to ingest and internalize knowledge of men and how to drive

Macedonian province of Rome of what now is modern day Greece.

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character...for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

a vehicle – it is not a stretch then to take notes to retain and ingest God’s wisdom! (How to drive on the path of righteousness) This is why those in pursuit of nobility should always have both their bible and their notebook with them at church events – prevent “spiritual” indigestion!

The scriptures teach us that we are to **“Watch [our] life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if [we] do, [we] will save both [ourselves] and [our] hearers.” (1 Tim 4:15-16)** The intense implication of this passage is that we need to watch how we live and what we believe (our doctrine) as these two things together determine not only our eternal destiny, but also the salvation of all those who hear us. This also implies that there are those around us we were telling about God, those we are speaking to about him via our **“doctrine”** – what we teach and believe. For many of us our closest hearers are those in our immediate family, our children, our spouse, and our parents and so on. It is not only noble, but critical we know why we believe what we believe and why we live the way we live. This is so that we will **“always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have”** and that we will do so **“with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15)**



Santana, Margie, Michelle and Amy celebrate with the rest of the Phoenix Church family Margie’s restoration!

In 1992 when I studied the bible with the brothers from a church just like this one in Honolulu, they went over the **“elementary teachings”**, aka the **“first principles,” (Hebrews 6:1 NIV/ASV)** with me in personal bible studies and helped me **“...understand what [I] [was] reading” (Acts 8:30)** and then **“explained to [me] the way of God more adequately.”(Acts 18:26)** There were many sources of **“spiritual”** indigestion of this spiritual *soul food* they shared with me such as my preconceived notions, numerous unbiblical traditions, personal character weaknesses, and many sins I’d never confessed or addressed. Interestingly, the biggest block was my own religious pride which masked itself in

putting my religious experiences and my heart's feelings over what the word called me to do. I wanted to be right and was tempted to **"...not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit [my] own desires...[I] gather[ed] around [myself] a great number of teachers to say what [my] itching ears want[ed] to hear."** (2 Tim 4:3-4) I remember wanting to justify myself, the sexual immorality, the drunkenness and gross impurity, and even the numbness in hating my father. No one had ever challenged me to take a clear look at my life and doctrine. I am so grateful these uncompromising men allowed God to call me out of the darkness without wavering. I thank God that they did not quit when I responded foolishly and in my angry pride focused on "who" I thought was right instead of "what" is actually right - the word of God and holding to it at all costs.

"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32) I am so honored that God chose to allow me to hear the truth and put these patient spiritual chef's in my life. God used them to preach his word and it rescued me out of hell's kitchen - forgiving me at my baptism in Jesus' name March 11th, 1992, by saving me by grace through faith. Instead of living for myself I was called to be set free from sin, repent, and live for his purposes. I would have never even met my father and would have likely walked the destructive path of the addict or alcoholic like many in my physical family have.

It was so refreshing to see our dear sister Margie restored to the faith this past week Sunday! Here is a sister who really went deep into the Word of God and in her own life, her past, and her character. **"God...grant[ed] [her] repentance...leading [her] to a knowledge of the truth,"** she came to her **"senses and escape[d] from the trap of the devil, who [had] taken [her] captive to do his will."** (2 Tim 2:25-26) She is such a great example of going after real soul food, which is more than just "reading" the bible, but actually changing your mind, your heart, and your lifestyle - actually "doing it." How incredibly encouraging it is to see the sisters pour out their hearts, sharing not only their lives but the gospel of God with Margie as well! This was all to see a woman of God decide to repent, come to her senses, and return home to her Father.

So today, please set up a time to study the bible! Get ready to dig deep into the Word of God, taking the three "E" (Eagerly, Examine the Scriptures, Everyday) challenge and avoiding

“spiritual” indigestion from traditions, assumptions, and sins. Take note, when we ingest and internalize the very word of God we’ll be living on the ***original soul food*** - and to God be all the Glory!



Jeremy Mark Ciaramella

