

## FLIPPED

### "THE FLIPSIDE OF THE LAW" MATTHEW 5:17-20

#### **This Week's Core Competency**

**Identity in Christ** – I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God. John 1:12 *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*

On the surface, v. 20 of today's passage could appear to imply a works-based salvation. After all, Jesus states, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." When studying a passage we must always pay careful attention to the original context. We must also employ a Bible study construct known as the "analogy of faith" (or "of Scripture"). That is, based upon what we know to be true about 'x' (say, Jesus' divinity), how are we to reconcile passage 'y' (say, Jesus' saying only the Father knows when the Son is to return - Mt 24:36) with 'x' (again, Jesus' divinity)? Well, by "analogy" passage 'z' resolves the apparent conflict. "[Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Phil 2:6-7). What this means is that Jesus voluntarily chose not to use/exercise his divine rights or prerogatives. So, while still being fully God, Jesus chose, at least in

***Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.***

**- Rom 3:20**

that moment, to not exercise divine omniscience.

Likewise, surveying some of what Scripture has to say regarding "righteousness" is essential to our understanding of Jesus' seemingly impossible imperative in v. 20. Scripture is clear throughout that being in a right relationship with God is by his grace through faith in his promises (Gen 15:6; Rom 1:17; Eph 2:4-9, etc). This grace of God and appropriated faith are both found in the person and work of his only begotten Son. Jesus did what he said he was going to do in v. 17; that is, principally, to fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law to sinless perfection. This demonstrated his rightful place as our substitute on the cross. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). Then, through faith in him, Jesus' righteousness was credited to our account (as if we did the work our self!). "But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Rom 3:21-22). Thus, Christ's righteousness (not the least bit of which is from us - Rom 3:10-12) is *imputed* or "put on" us

As a result, we stand before God *positionally* having been declared righteous by him (even though we often don't act like it in *practice!*). And rest assure, this is no artificial or temporal transaction. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*; *old things* have *passed away*; behold, all things have become new! (2 Cor 5:17; emphasis mine).

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It is that we are a new creation through the righteousness of Christ *given to us* that is part and parcel of today's Core Competency - *Identity in Christ*. It is our identity *in Christ* that forms the complete basis by which each believer will be welcomed into the eternal kingdom of God. And not only welcomed but given a place of honor as "joint heirs [of God] with Christ" (Rom 8:17).

This "imputation" of righteousness is not novel to the New Testament. By analogy of Scripture, one of Zechariah's visions sees a high priest named Joshua standing before God dressed in "filthy garments" (i.e. - defiled, unclean, guilty of sin; v. 3). Yet, because of God's promises to the Israelites he immediately silences the opposition (literally Satan himself; v. 1) and orders Joshua's old filthy rags (See Is 64:6) be removed and replaced with "rich robes" (i.e. - new, clean, pure; v. 4). In an instant God gave Joshua a new identity. And not because he deserved it, but because of God's mercy, grace, love and faithfulness (See also Phil 1:6).

At the moment of our conversion our old "heart of stone" was replaced with a "heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:27; see also 2 Cor 3:3-6) just as God had promised via the new covenant through Jesus Christ. Immediately, we received an irrevocable, eternally secure identity based upon Christ's righteous actions being credited to us. Through the indwelling and equipping power of the Holy Spirit within us, we have a newfound ability to put into *practice* that which we have received *positionally* from our Savior. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pt 2:24; emphasis mine; See also: Rom 6:12-14; 12:1-2; Gal 5:16-18). "Living for righteousness" (again, post-salvation) can be best summed up as the joy-filled pursuit of living out God's will for his people; that is, to "love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul...mind...and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31a). "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 22:40). .

## For Discussion

Legalism espouses that strict adherence to the law is necessary to receive God's acceptance or favor. Antinomianism espouses that since salvation is by grace it doesn't matter if we follow Jesus' teachings or not. Discuss what God's word has to say about these two extremes.

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Matthew 5:17-20

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (NIV(c)1984)

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Circle "do not think" in v. 17.
- \* Double underline "or" indicating *inclusion* in v. 17.
- \* Highlight v. 17.
- \* Box the word "fulfill" in v. 17.
- \* Underline "I tell you the truth" in v. 18.
- \* Circle "until" indicating *time* in v. 18.
- \* Circle "least" and "great" indicating *comparison* in v. 19.
- \* Box each occurrence of "kingdom of heaven" in vv. 19, 20.
- \* Double underline "For" indicating *reason* in v. 20.
- \* Highlight v. 20.

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## day 2

## EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What significance do you see in Jesus' words "the Law or the Prophets?" (i.e. - to what do these two things refer)?
  
  - 2) What do the phrases "not the smallest letter"/"not the least stroke of a pen" communicate to our understanding of Jesus' esteem for the accuracy of the Scriptures?
  
  - 3) What is Jesus trying to clarify in v. 17 (See Mark 1:27; 2:15-16, 23-24; 3:1-6)?
  
  - 4) Identify the two caveats Jesus gives in v. 18. One is hyperbolic. One is literal. How would you explain the difference to someone else?
  
  - 5) What do you think Jesus means by "until everything is accomplished"?
  
  - 6) What contrast do you find in v. 19.
  
  - 7) Verse 19 affirms that both those believers who "break" Christ's commands and those who "practice" Christ's commands will be in the kingdom of heaven. Why does Jesus encourage us to do the latter?
  
  - 8) Read v. 17 and 20 "together". How does this contribute to your understanding of Christ's righteousness being imputed upon believers?
  
  - 9) **Discussion:** What present day value do you find in following Jesus' moral/ethical teachings today?
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## day 3

# EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Matthew 5:17-20 serves as introductory or thesis statement to his remaining teachings from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins by correcting the manner in which his teachings were being misrepresented by the establishment elites. Because of his harsh criticisms of their contemporary reinterpretation and expansion of the Law, rumor had it that Jesus was therefore against the Law. Not only was Jesus a proponent of the Law of God...he came to *fulfill* it and *all* that was spoken by the prophets! Together these constitute the totality of the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament). There are three primary means by which Jesus accomplished this fulfillment. There are literally hundreds of OT passages that foretell characteristics relative to Messiah's coming: his ancestral heritage (from the tribe of Judah - Gen 49:8-10; in the line of David - 2 Sam 7:12-13), place of his birth (Bethlehem - Micah 5:2-5), that he would be rejected by his own (Ps 118:22-23), his manner of execution (via crucifixion - Ps 22:16; Zech 12:10), etc, etc.

Second, he fulfilled the Law in the sense of providing a correct interpretation of its original intent. Thus, fulfilling the Law was not a matter of, heartless, legalistic adherence (much less falling into casuistry; that is, a dishonest application through sly reasoning) to its written form. Rather, the Law was to be obediently followed as an outflow of one's love and gratitude for God resulting in a genuine desire to do his will and care for one's neighbor (Matt 7:12).

And lastly, Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets by walking in perfect obedience to their true divine meaning and intentions. This last point is especially significant in light of God's righteous requirements that human sin be atoned for by a sacrifice without blemish (1 Peter 1:19; cf. Ex 12:5). Walking in perfect obedience to the Law, Jesus proved he was indeed the holy Lamb of God who "takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

Next, in v. 18, Jesus expands upon his assertion from v. 17 yet introduces an important caveat. The Law will remain in effect and unchanged "*until* everything is accomplished" (emphasis mine). This relates directly to Jesus' perfect life (in accordance with God's Law and

sacrificial death). "By so dying upon the cross and bearing in Himself and upon Himself the punishment due our sin, He has fulfilled all the Old Testament types [i.e. - an example, image or figure that foreshadows or symbolizes another]...the burnt offerings...the sacrifices... the tabernacle...the temple ceremonial...the altar...the laver of washing...the shewbread...the [role of the] high priest. [All these] are nothing but shadows, types, prophecies of what [was] done fully and finally by the Lord Jesus Christ" (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 168; See also Col 2:13-17). These represent what scholars refer to as the "ceremonial" aspects of the Law. Viewing Jesus' caveat through this lens thrusts immense weight upon his last cry out to the Father on the cross - "It is *finished*" (Luke 19:30; emphasis mine).

For the purpose of our study, it is the moral or ethical aspects of the Law that remain in full effect for Jesus' disciples. These imperatives can essentially be summed up by Jesus' retort to an "expert" of the Law. "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Mt 22:37-40).

After confirming his unwavering commitment to fulfill/accomplish the Law, he then turns his focus upon his disciples sitting in the audience. Jesus is challenging his disciples - both then and now - to follow his interpretation of the Law as well as to walk in his footsteps relative to these two great commandments (examples follow in v. 21ff). However, such an obedient response can only be done via the divine enablement accompanied by the new covenant promised centuries before. "*I will* give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; *I will* remove from your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And *I will* put my Spirit in you and *move* you ['cause you' - NKJV, ESV, NASB; 'make you' - NET Bible) to follow my decrees" (Ezek 36:26-27; emphasis mine; See also Jer 31:31-34). This is the new covenant Jesus inaugurated with his disciples at the Lord's Supper (Mt 26:27-29; Mk 14:24-25; Lk 22:20).

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Additionally, v. 19 makes it clear that Jesus is not invoking works-based righteousness in v. 20. Rather Jesus is calling for a radical devotion to follow him in his love for God and love for others. The result will be one's "rank/reward" in the kingdom. Those who "break" these and "teach others to do the same" will be called "least in the kingdom of heaven" (v. 19a). Whereas those who "practice" and "teach" these commandments will be called "great in the kingdom of heaven" (v. 19b). Both the nominal and noble believer will receive entrance into God's eternal kingdom - for salvation is truly by grace (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:3-7, etc). Yet, the rank/rewards of the noble believer will last for all eternity. This takes us to our last verse and the one that is so likely to trip up a casual reader's initial assessment of Jesus' words

(even though v. 19 mitigates against any such notion). This is where our understanding of Christ's righteousness imputed to us becomes so vital (see pg.1 essay). All of mankind's supposed "righteous acts are like filthy rags (Is 64:6). The new covenant Jesus came to establish affirms that our obedience can only result from a changed heart (Ezek 36:26-27; Jer 31:31-34). This new heart indwelt by the Holy Spirit is at work in you "to will and act according to his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). "For what the law was powerless to do...God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering...in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sin nature but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:3-4).

## *The Message of the Passage*

*In light of the imputed righteousness of Christ  
and enabling presence of the Holy Spirit,*

*obey Jesus' kingdom ethics with a glad and sincere heart.*

*Believers who do will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

## day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know, feel or do . . .

### **“The Flipside of Privacy”**

(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

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# notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 17-20 "[This unit] functions as a control on the way 5:21-48 is to be read. It aims to protect against any interpretation of what follows that depicts Jesus as doing away with the observance of the Law or the prophets" (Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 59).
- v. 17 **I have come** (lit. - "my purpose is...")
- v. 17 **abolish** (lit - "to cancel" to "nullify")
- v. 17 **Law/Prophets** "Although the Law and the Prophets specifically refer to two of the three major sections in the OT (the third part being wisdom literature), it is probable that the whole of the OT Scriptures is intended by this phrase (cf. John 1:45; Rom 3:21). Jesus, by his life and ministry, fulfilled portions of God's previous revelation to his people and further clarified God's will" (David K. Lowery, Matthew, *The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study: The Gospels*, ed. Darrell Bock, 55).
- v. 17 **Fulfill** Jesus: fulfilled the ceremonial requirements of the Law, fulfilled every predictive prophecy relative to the Messiah's first coming (his person, work, etc) and fulfilled the moral/ethical intent of the Law by his perfect obedience to the Father's will.
- v. 18 "Verse 18 reaffirms the absolute authority of all of the Scriptures down to the smallest components of individual words. They will endure for all time but with the important qualification "until everything is accomplished." With the coming of Christ, many aspects of the law are brought to complete fruition (e.g., the need for sacrifices, on which see Hebrews). In other instances certain requirements of the law endure until Christ's coming again (e.g., classically, love of neighbor and God). In short, Christian application of the Old Testament must always take into account both the continuities and the discontinuities with the New Testament" (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, 104).
- v. 18 **letter/stroke** "Jesus fulfillment would extend to the smallest Hebrew letter, the "jot" (lit. yod), and even to the smallest stroke of a Hebrew letter, the "tittle." In English a jot would correspond to the dot above the letter "i" (and look like an apostrophe), and a tittle would be seen in the difference between a "P" and an "R". These things are important because letters make up words and even a slight change in a letter might change the meaning of the word" (Louis A Barbieri, Jr., Matthew, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, eds., Walvoord and Zuck, 30).
- v. 19 **breaks** "In Hebrew parlance, to "break" one of the commandments meant to "relax" it, to tone it down either by allowing what it forbids or by exempting men from some of its positive requirements" (Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 179).
- v. 19 **practices** "To see the imperatives as law is to misunderstand them. They are not law in the sense that one must obey them in order to become or remain a Christian; our salvation does not depend on perfect obedience to them. Rather, they are descriptions, by way of imperative, of what Christian life should be because of God's prior acceptance of us" (Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*, 3rd ed., 144).
- v. 20 **righteousness** A righteous act is doing God's will with a glad and sincere heart. Yet, performing such acts are not possible if one has not received a heart "transplant" ('stone' to 'flesh') wrought by the Holy Spirit. "Righteousness for Matthew includes both the elements of status [position] and conduct [practice]. It is the gift of God's redemptive activity (6:33) establishing new relationships with his people and granting the basis for the corresponding conduct that gives expression of this new [covenant] relationship" (Robert A Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 172). "The righteousness He demanded was not merely external; it was a true inner righteousness based on faith in God's Word (Rom 3:21-22). This is clear from what follows [in the sermon]" (Barbieri. 30).
- v. 20 **Pharisees** "Pharisees rely on their birth instead of observance of God's will; they teach but do not practice (23:3); they focus on minor things and neglect the major things (23:23-24); they do what they do for human approval (23:5, 27-28); they seek to evade the intent of the Law (23:16-22; 15:1-9); they persecute God's messengers (23:29-36; 12:14), failing to recognize God's Spirit (9:34; 12:24) or to understand the meaning of Jesus' ministry (9:11, 14; 12:2, 38; 15:12, 16:1, 6, 11-12; 19:3; 21:45; 22:15, 34, 41; 27:62)" (Talbert, 64).
- v. 20 **kingdom of heaven** "The "kingdom of heaven/God" in the preaching of Jesus as recounted in the Gospels is the reign of God that he brings about through Jesus Christ - i.e., the establishment of God's rule in the hearts and lives of his people, the over-coming of all the forces of evil, the removal from the world of all consequences of sin - including death and all that diminishes life - and the creation of a new order of righteousness and peace" (NIV Study Bible, **sn**, 1953).

Connect the **FAMILY**. Kids Kindergarten thru 6th grade receive Kid Pix tokens for discipleship activities completed during the week.

### Family Time

Family time will help you take a break from your busy schedule and spend time connecting with your family.  
**Tips for your Family Time: Keep it simple! Be flexible! Do it often! HAVE FUN!!**

Celebrate Father's Day by putting on a skit for dad. Choose some of dad's favorite stories from his childhood or some things he likes to do now and reenact them in a funny way. You can even dress up in his clothes and use his favorite things as props. Take on the roles of his parents, siblings, friends, even the family pet as you act out special memories from his life. Record the performance on video so he can enjoy it again. After your family has had fun with dad, take turns praying a special prayer for him. You can include a special blessing prayer found in Numbers 6:24-26. "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." Enjoy blessing your dad today!

**SPECIAL PROJECT:** We are collecting BANDANAS in Children's Ministry. Some families in our church will be traveling to Spain on July 6th to lead western street festivals to introduce people to Jesus. We are helping by collecting bandanas for them to give away. Please bring your bandanas to church on June 10th or June 17th. You may place them in the collection bins in the Main Lobby or in the Connection.

#### What Does The Bible Say

**Weekly Verse:** Matthew 5: 17-20  
 Jesus said, "Do not think I have come to \_\_\_\_\_ the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to \_\_\_\_\_ them but \_\_\_\_\_ them." (v 17)  
 According to verse 19, who is the least in the kingdom of heaven?  
 According to verse 19, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

#### What Do You Think

Is anyone righteous enough to get into heaven on his/her own?  
 The Pharisees thought their good deeds were enough for them to get into heaven. According to Acts 4:12 and Romans 10:9-10, what is the only way a person is declared righteous and can be saved?

#### What R U Going To Do

Jesus told the listeners that he had come to fulfill the Law and in doing so he became our righteousness. This is a great time to do a spiritual checkup on family members. Ask those who have trusted Jesus as Savior to record their testimony on video. And keep praying for those in your family who have yet to accept Christ's righteousness by faith.

### MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

#### Core Comp

Salvation By Grace - I believe that I become a child of God through faith in Jesus, not because of anything I do.

#### Memory Verse

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

### KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC \_\_\_\_ and Verse \_\_\_\_\_. Family completed **Say** \_\_\_\_\_ **Think** \_\_\_\_\_ **Do** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.  
 Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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**Keith Smith** (B.A. in Speech Communication, Texas Tech University and M.A. in Religious Education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the Family and Children's Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. Keith speaks at children/student camps across the country. He has developed a number of relational parenting seminars designed to motivate parents to empower their parenting by emotionally connecting with their kids. Keith lives with his wife, Denise, and their two children, Jordan and Alex.

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).