

NEW TESTAMENT CHALLENGE

Good morning! Welcome to Fil-Am. I'm glad you're here this morning. I'm glad to see you all again. I hope you're glad to see me, too. Well, as you know, some folks and I were away last week because we went to our annual youth camp. Two words can describe it: Awesome and Amazing! Because it was God who worked in that camp. He is awesome and amazing. Amen? At least 10 kids from different churches were saved and many more made a recommitment to God. Let me show you some of the highlights of the camp. (Show video)

Our church was a big part of this camp and I'm truly so grateful to our tireless youth leaders and volunteers and counselors who came to lend their support beginning with Kuya Andrew and Tita Rhoda. Then there's Christine and Merbin, Jim and Faith, Jojo (who's Jojo?) - Jonathan and Jobelle, Daniella, Ian, Liana, Gene, Anne, Nanay Monet, and last but not the least, Eza. Oops, Anabel, I mean. Anyone I forgot?

So, we're looking forward to next year. It keeps getting bigger. By the grace of God.

Today, we're starting a new message series. I'm so glad you are here because this is the kick-off day. We are beginning a spiritual adventure over the next 63 days where we are going to go from Matthew through Revelation in the New Testament. We're calling it the New Testament Challenge.

We've all heard and seen and even did some of the challenges that have become viral. Like the Ice Bucket Challenge, the Mannequin Challenge, what else? Have you done any of those? Well, all these challenges require focus, energy, perseverance. These are the same qualities that are required in the New Testament Challenge. This is not for the faint of heart. But one thing I can assure you, once you overcome the challenge, it will strengthen your heart.

For the next 63 days, I'm going to challenge you to get into the Word of God, meaning, reading the Bible daily, without fail, and in 63 days you should be able to finish the entire New Testament. You will be given a reading plan. As an incentive, those who finish will receive a special gift from Kuya Rey.

But, as we know, reading doesn't help if you don't apply what you read. And so, every week, I would challenge also our home groups to meet in order to distill from the pages of the Bible some practical truths that can be applied in our lives. Study questions are being prepared by Pastor Dave and will be distributed to the home group leaders by next week. And so, your reading plan and the home group study will begin next week, not this week. This is a church-wide program and so the home groups will do it at the same time. Get it? Got it? So be it!

And, finally, our message for the next nine weeks, actually 11, because we're taking a break twice for Independence Day and Father's Day, will center on what the New Testament teaches us about how to become more like Christ.

Traits like radical love, generosity, forgiveness, godliness, etc. The question is: Will you accept the New Testament Challenge? Will you still be here next week? Will you invest the next nine weeks of your life, studying the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation? And I want to give you a chance to respond to that challenge. I am going to do everything that I can today to help you succeed if you say yes to that challenge.

So, let's dig into the New Testament. Get your Bibles. I hope you have the hard copy and not just the app on your phone. Nothing wrong with the app but this illustration will not work with the app. Open it to Matthew. Matthew is the first book of the New Testament. Now, hold Matthew to the end of the book. See, how thin it is compared to the other part which is the Old Testament? You see, the New Testament is not very long. It is composed of only 27 books. As a matter of fact, there are only 7,957 verses in the New Testament, written over a span of 50 years by nine different authors. So it's really not a very, very big book, but it is a life changing book. If you decide to dig into the inspired Word of God, as found in the New Testament, nine weeks from now, your life will be on a better place than it has ever been.

But what I wanted you to see is Matthew 1, because this is where the New Testament begins. Matthew 1:1 says, "*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.*"

I want you to look at that name, Jesus Christ. Some folks think that Christ is the last name of Jesus. No, Christ is Greek for “Anointed One” or “One sent from God”. Matthew wrote his gospel in Greek. Thus, the word “Christ” describes who Jesus is. The equivalent in Hebrew is “Messiah”, that is why other versions of the Bible say, “Jesus the Messiah”. So even as the New Testament is diverse in its authorship, and its span of writing, and its impact, it is unique in its focus. In that it says—Jesus is the Christ. This challenge that I am putting out is not just a challenge for you to gain new information, it’s ultimately a challenge for you to become more like God’s Son, Jesus Christ. And that’s our hope at the end of the 63 day challenge, that you will be more like Jesus than ever before, because Jesus is the central figure of the New Testament.

Now, let me give you a pop quiz on the New Testament. The challenge begins right now.

First of all, how many books are there in the New Testament? 27, exactly right. I gave that to you earlier. I hope when this is all over, you’d be able to name all the books of the New Testament. Kuya Rey will give you an incentive.

Even though we believe that all 27 of those books are inspired by God, the word “inspired” means “God breathed”, God used human authors to write the books. How many human authors did God use? Nine. Very good.

You have been paying attention. I gave you that one. Nine authors. Can you name the nine authors? Kuya Rey will give you an incentive.

Anyway, here is something just for this series. We figured out if you will read the New Testament 20 minutes a day, it will take you 63 days to read through the New Testament. And so that's why this challenge that we are doing is 63 days long. And so, will you take the New Testament Challenge? Are you willing to say yes, today, I am in. Count me in. If so, what I believe you will see over the next 63 days, I believe you will learn more about God than you ever learned before. I believe you will learn more about yourself than you have ever learned before. I believe that you will be transformed from the inside out to become more like Jesus than you are right now. Will you take the New Testament challenge?

So today we are beginning the New Testament Challenge. And whatever challenge you are taking, whether it's the challenge to break the land speed record, the challenge to run a marathon, or the challenge to please your wife on a daily basis, whatever challenge it is, you should know how to succeed in that challenge. You should think about what you are committing to and how to get the most out of it to really succeed. So during the next few minutes, I want to talk about that. If you turn over in your notes, I want to talk to you about how you can get the most out of this challenge. In many ways, this is about how you can succeed. Because I want you to know what you are getting into.

I want you to know what challenge you are accepting. And I want to begin by looking at a verse in the Old Testament, the 90th Psalm, verse 12. So if you can find that in your notes, Psalm 90:12, let's read this verse out loud with great enthusiasm. "Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are. Help us to spend them as we should." This is really a prayer. But the prayer is—God, our days are numbered. So what's the best use of our time? Let me ask you. As you think over the next 63 days of your life, what is the best use of your time? Honestly, can you think of any better use of your time than studying the Bible together, reading the Scriptures each day, meeting together each week in a group, coming together on Sunday to study that? Can you think of any better use of your time that you have been given than what we are doing in this New Testament Challenge? So if we are doing this, how do we get the most out of it? Well, let me give you four ways to get the most out of this. How to get the most out of the New Testament Challenge:

- 1. Commit the challenge to God.** Commit the challenge to God. After all, this is a spiritual adventure that we are going to be on. So we want to take this challenge, and we want to hand it over to God. And so, if you want God to bless the next 63 days, commit that time period to God. You want God to bless your marriage, commit that to God. If you want God to bless your finances, commit your finances to God. On down the line. So, I'm just asking you to do that.

Now, look in your notes at Proverbs 16:3 (NLT). It says, “*Commit your actions to the Lord and your plans will succeed.*” Now, what is success for the New Testament Challenge? Success is allowing God to do in your life exactly what He wants to do. That’s what success is. But the phrase “commit” implies intent. It implies action. And you know, some of you at this time, at this very moment, are thinking, I’m afraid to really commit. I’m not sure I can get up in the morning and spend the first 20 minutes reading the Scripture. I’m not sure I can complete the readings. Look, it’s okay to be afraid. Just be a little systematic like you divide that 20 minutes into, 10 in the morning, 10 in the evening. What I am saying to you is, just commit that to God. And as you do, God will strengthen you. He will give you his grace. Now, on the flip side, there are some people who are the exact opposite. They’re thinking, I’ve read the New Testament 20 times, do I really need to do it again? Here’s what I’m saying to you, I’m saying commit this to God as well. Because the Bible is unlike any other book that you will read. I will show you that in just a few minutes, and God will speak to you in different ways than He has ever spoken to you before. So, let’s all go into this process together, committing it to God and letting God define what success is by how He wants to work in our lives. So that’s where it starts. Commit the challenge to God.

2. Complete the readings each day. Complete the readings each day.

Now there are daily readings that you are going to be doing.

At the heart of this challenge is a collection of 63 daily readings. That reading plan will be given to you next week by your home group leaders. If you don't have a home group yet, you'll still get a copy. You have to pay though. Just kidding. So your leader will give you a printed copy. And email it to you as well. Maybe even create bookmarks for you. Or a postcard that you can stick to the door of your ref. And so that is at the heart of this. We are going to do everything we can to help you succeed at the daily readings. We are going to give you everything we can to help you succeed so that you can do these readings each day, because we want you to interact with God's Word. As a matter of fact, you can use your Bible app to listen to God's Word. So every day you can just select the chapters that go along with the daily readings, and you can actually listen to the Scripture as you go back and forth to work. Or while waiting at the doctor's clinic or at the laundromat.

We're serious about getting you into the Scripture. Because the Bible is different than any other book that you have ever read. You know at Fil-Am, we don't believe it's a sin to read other books. Maybe some churches are overzealous they teach that you should only read the Bible. We believe it's okay to read other books, but the Bible is different than other books. Amen?

Let me try to explain. Let's say you read a book called "In Man's Image". It's a short book, maybe shorter than the New Testament. It's a novelette, in fact. Longer than a short story but shorter than a novel.

So it's an easy read and easy to get. Just go to Amazon.com and search for the book. It won't cost you an arm and a leg. It will cost you just one Starbucks coffee. You can spare that amount, right? Anyway, if you read that book written by this guy who thinks he's a writer, and you finish that book, and you put in a good review, you wouldn't want to go back again and again to read that book, right? Maybe once, yes, but twice, I doubt it. Once you discovered what happened to the main character, that's it. Spoiler alert! You wouldn't discover anything new even if you read it a hundred times. But the Bible, you can read it thousands of times and there's always something new to discover, Amen? You'll never get enough of the Bible. Because it is living and active. The plot never changes since its main theme is God's redemption of mankind through his son Jesus but the sub-plots are dynamic for it involves you. But don't forget to get this book. OK?

Folks, the Bible is a living book. You can read the Bible over and over and over, and every time you read it, even though the words on the page may not have changed, what God says to your heart will. The Bible is fundamentally different than any other book available today. In fact, look at what the Bible says about itself. From Hebrews 4:12, let's read this out loud together, because it's our memory verse today, *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and*

marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” So let God speak to you as you read the daily readings. Now, we go onto number three.

3. Contribute fully to my home group. Contribute fully to my home group.

If I sound like a broken record, I am. Please join a home group, if you don't belong to one yet. I cannot overemphasize the importance of being a part of a home group. This is the place where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. Because this is the place where you grow and you begin to develop your character. God uses the home group with the various personalities in there to make you the person he wants you to be. The members may not be perfect but God put them there for a purpose. And that purpose is to care for each other, encourage one another, and build one another. Now I'm challenging you to join a home group. Then, when you're in a group, I am challenging you to pray up and study up before you go to meet your group. Then when you get to the group, I challenge you to speak up and share your heart with your group. Don't be afraid because it is a place where you can find acceptance and fellowship. And you can find some good food, too.

So, be fully committed to your home group. Contribute fully to the group. Now, if you sign up for a home group, keep your commitment. It's good for your relationship with God. It's also good for us as a church.

Because do you realize that if you don't contribute fully to your home group, our church is going to be less of a church, and your home group community is going to be less of a community.

Let me try to explain. The Bible refers to the church, in a couple of places in the Scripture, as a body. So the church is like a body. And so people in the body are arms. Some people in the body are legs. Well, your home group is like a small body. And God has brought the group together. And so you have a part to play. I mean, if you aren't there that part doesn't get played and your group becomes less of a group. So I'm just encouraging you to stay strong in the commitment that you have made. Look at this passage, Romans 12:4-5. *"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."* So, I must contribute fully to my home group.

Then finally, the last way that you can maximize your commitment to the challenge, to get the most out of it, to succeed at this challenge is this. . .

4. Call upon God to grow me. Call upon God to grow me. Ultimately, what we are doing over the next 63 days is a challenge for spiritual growth. For God to take us from where we are, to where He wants us to be. And all of us in this room have room to grow. I have room to grow in my life spiritually, and you have room to grow in your life spiritually.

And the measure for what our spiritual life should be is God's Son, Jesus Christ. And so the whole purpose behind this challenge is that you and I would become more like Jesus Christ. So I want you to see Romans 8:29, and I want you to do a little reflection on your life. Romans 8:29 says, "*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*"

You see, the ultimate purpose of what we are doing over the next 63 days is not just for you to be entertained. It's not just for you to gain new information. It's for you to be transformed from the inside out so that when you finish you are more like Jesus Christ than you are right now. Because God chose us to become like His Son. So this is not just an intellectual exercise that we are engaging in. It's not just a data dump that we are doing over the next 63 days. It is a life transformational process. And so I want you to do some self-reflection. When you think about the life of Christ, and the characteristics of Jesus, when you think about your life, what is the room for growth? What areas of your life do you need to grow so that you would be more like Jesus? That's what this box is in your notes. In my own life, I know there are a lot of areas I need to grow in. I need to grow in love for others, I need to grow in forgiveness, I need to grow in generosity. These are areas of growth I need in my life. And I have some more. So what areas would you like to see God grow you in?

And then take these areas and put them before God. And if you aren't certain, just every week as we go through this, say—God, where do you want to grow me?

Now, I have been calling on you to take this challenge. Are you ready, willing, and able to accept the New Testament Challenge now? Let us all bow our heads and ask God to help us to meet this challenge.

God, today, as we start this incredible adventure over the next 63 days, we we ask that you do a wonderful work in our lives. We ask that you do a beautiful work in our church. God, we thank You that the New Testament is living and active and that it speaks to us every time we read it. So, God, I pray as we engage the New Testament, as we learn more about Jesus, that You will mold us from the inside out and make all of us more like Your Son, Jesus. God, we pray this together. In His name. And everyone said. Amen.