



Sacred Echoes

Part 4 – Truth & Not Alone

Travis Brawner & Scott McElvain

Travis Brawner: Today we're wrapping up our series called *Sacred Echoes*. A sacred echo is that passage in scripture or that verse or that principle from scripture that just keeps resonating in your life. It comes up in different places, maybe in your personal Bible study. And it may then come up being preached from the front on a Sunday. You hear it on Christian radio or just many other places where it keeps coming back and clearly the Lord is speaking to in some way and trying to prompt you in some way through this echo that keeps coming back in your life.

Over the past few weeks, we've gotten to hear from a few different members of the teaching team about sacred echoes in their life. Today, we're doing the same. Two of us, like last week, will be sharing with you our sacred echoes. First, from myself and then we're going to be hearing from Scott McElvain here in just a little bit.

My sacred echo is that of truth. And not just truth, but absolute truth, and what is absolutely true. I think one of the reasons that this is an echo in my life is because what we're seeing in the culture is that people are proclaiming that there is no absolute truth; that everything is relative, and truth is different for everyone. The problem that I'm seeing also is that this seems to be creeping into certain Christian circles and even churches, saying that there is no absolute truth. I think that is a ridiculous claim.

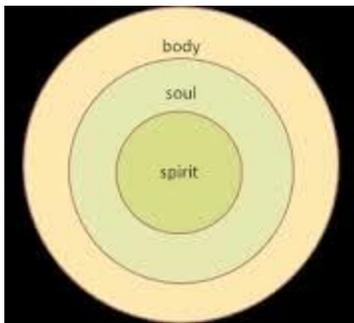
By the way, if anyone ever asserts to you that there is no absolute truth, you respond with one simple question. When they say there is no absolute truth, you ask them, "Do you believe that that statement that you just made is absolutely true?" If the answer is yes, they are wrong. If the answer is no, they are wrong. So, you see, there is absolute truth. It just makes sense, right?

Paul was concerned about this too when he wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4: 3-4. He said, ***3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...*** We notice here he mentions these "itching ears" seeking teachers that will suit their own passions. Then he goes on to say, ***4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*** I believe we are experiencing one of these times right now that Paul was writing to Timothy about. People are not enduring sound doctrine, but they are wandering off into myths.

In this scripture, I noticed something because my vocation is ear, nose, and throat doctor. You know where I'm going. So, when we read this "itching ears," it kind of gets my attention. My first thought is if your ears are actually itching, I can help you with that, but I don't think that's what Paul meant.

What did Paul mean and what does the Lord want us to understand from this passage in scripture about itching ears? Let's walk through this together. We know that the ears are the organs of hearing. Our hearing is one of our five senses: smell, sight, touch, taste, and hearing. I want to use something I've used in the past and it's a graphic to help us understand how we exist as human beings.

We've looked at this before from the front, but we need to understand we're not a physical and a spiritual being; we are one being. Three parts in one being. We were created in the image of God and after his likeness. God is three parts in one being and, as such, we are three parts in one being. These are our three parts according to 1 Thessalonians 5: 23: our body, soul, and spirit.



Our **body**, that's obvious. That's our physical condition, our physical being; that which can be seen by the outside world. Then there's our **soul**. It can't be seen by the outside world and is contained to our body. Our soul has parts of us like our thoughts, our will, our emotions or feelings, and even – and this is important – our beliefs. Then there's our **spirit**. Christians, you have probably heard it said that all men and women, all mankind, have a God-shaped hole somewhere in their being and that would be our spirit; either the Lord is there, or the Lord is not. When we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts God raised him from the dead, we receive an indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

1 Corinthians 6: 19 says, ***19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?*** So, this is how we exist. Now, as the world is around us, including other people, there is only one way that our soul can access the world around us and that's through our body, and that's through our words and our actions.

Conversely, there is only one way that the world can access our soul and that's through our five senses: smell, sight, touch, taste, and hearing. That's why we are so concerned about itching ears in our hearing. That's because through our hearing and our itching ears, the world can access our soul, that deeper part of us with our thoughts, our will, our emotions, and our beliefs. And since the world can access there, the world can change things about us there. It can change our thoughts, it can change our will, it can change our beliefs. It can change our beliefs about very important things, things that we know to be true, truths about what we would call our essential beliefs about God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, about ourselves, mankind, and everything about us. About sin, salvation, eternity, heaven, hell, all of these very important things. You see, the world has access to our soul where it can change things about us and that's what Paul was concerned about when he was talking about not enduring sound doctrine, but rather wandering off into myths.

So, as we consider that this morning, let's define for ourselves the difference between sound doctrine and myths. We know and we talk a lot about it around here in our **sources of truth**. Our sound doctrine is scripture. It is the Bible. It is the 66 books of Genesis to Revelation, written by mankind, inspired by God.

R.C. Sproul says it should be what guides our belief and our behaviors. We subscribe to *solas scriptura*, which means by scripture alone; we place our faith in the truth, the absolute truth. This is our absolute truth. Again, with our sources of truth, a few weeks ago, Ted brought his us bus back and talked about it. We have our other sources of truth that don't have the priority of scripture, but they are still there, like our tradition and our reason. If you remember, even lower on the chain, is our experience and our emotions. It's very important because we see that our emotions are in that space where they can have an affect on our beliefs. As Paul is encouraging us to not wander off into myths but to hold to sound truth, it's important that we remember our primary source of truth is the Bible.

Our itching ears are driven by our emotions. They are there, but they're low priority; they are not high priority. Notice the contrast in that the ends of the spectrum of truth with scripture and our emotions. Our itching ears are driven by our emotions. And the things that you hear, therefore, have an effect on your soul and I can prove this to you.

[alarm clock sounds] Does that pierce anyone else to the depths of your soul? Yeah. That's funny. Thank you, Katie, please. The funny thing is at the 8:30 service, they were like, "That doesn't bother me; we're getting up early all the time." For the 11:30, that sound doesn't bother them; they're like, "What's that sound?" But for me, I'm an early morning person now, but that was a sound I used to wake up to when I didn't want to get up early, so really that's a painful sound to me.

How about the next sound, Katie? [toddler laughter] See, you all lit up. Your faces just lit up. That's such a happy sound. When our kids were babies and they would cackle, my wife used to say, "Is there any better sound in the world?" It brightens your soul and it makes you smile.

By the way, I want to share with you. Many of you have been along the journey with my wife and me and our family over the last couple of years with a little boy we've been fostering. I get to share with you that, last Thursday, Mason officially became a member of the Brawler family. We want to thank you all for your prayers along the way and for your encouragement. It's a very exciting time for us. We get a couple more years of some toddler cackles in our house.

It's not just sound that effects our soul. Words effect our soul. The words that come in through our ears effect our soul. Like that news I just gave you. That was exciting news, right? It brightened your soul. Sometimes, we hear factual information that's not so brightening to your soul. Maybe the passage of a loved one who has died. That's information that gets into your soul and effects your soul and your feelings. Or maybe a certain diagnosis that you get that effects your soul.

Words of encouragement effect your soul. They lift you up. Words of discouragement and dishonoring words tear you down. Here's where it's important for what we're talking about. Words about truth effect your soul. This is where it can get very ugly and very tricky because our beliefs and our emotions reside in that same place in our being, and the words we hear about truth sometimes don't feel so good, do they? You've heard it said sometimes the truth hurts. There are some things we hear that don't feel very good, but they are in fact true. An example is like the existence of hell, and that some people will spend eternity there. That doesn't feel so good, but that doesn't make it not true.

I told you, to begin with, that this idea that truth is relative... We're seeing people that are letting their feelings adjust their truth. Again, because they reside in the same place: our beliefs and our feelings. We have to remember that it's important that we leave scripture in its place and we leave emotions in their place. But some people are wandering off into myths. I believe that's because they have conceived for themselves a God that doesn't exist because that god is based on their emotions. What happens is a god that you conceive in your mind, based on your emotions, will let you down and leave you confused, but the good news is The God, our God of the Bible is the same yesterday, today, and forever, amen.

My wife is very good at a lot of things and she's very smart. She's smarter than I am. But she's very bad at directions. I've shared this before from the front and she is okay with me sharing it. It's just a thing; she owns it. She's not very good at directions. If I tell her she needs to go east or west on a certain road, she'll say, "Is that left or right?" I'll say, "Are you coming from the north or south?" She says, "Very funny."

Often times, we'll be on a road trip, get off for a pit stop at a gas station, and as we're getting back on the highway, I'll be in the righthand turn lane to go right onto the highway, and she'll say, "Are you sure we're supposed to go right here? I really feel like we're supposed to go left on the highway." My response is always the same. She knows it's coming and it's really kind of almost a playful script that we have. I say, "Babe, I appreciate your feelings, but no matter how strong they are, they are not going to change the direction of true north." Her feelings are not going to change the map, right?

That sounds obvious and simple, but why is it that some people are letting their feelings change the map for them, change what is absolutely true, what is obvious and what is, for Christians, outlined in scripture as our primary source of truth. Scripture says there's a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way to death. In other words, if you feel really strongly that you should get on that highway and go left, but that's all based on your feelings and not on scripture, you could be getting on that highway and hanging a direction exactly opposite of where you're desired destination is.

We have to be careful with this though; this is tricky. Remember, within our soul is the Spirit... If we have received Christ, we have received the Holy Spirit, so the Holy Spirit will move through us, through our emotions and our will and our thoughts. So, the Holy Spirit does move through us, we know that, but sometimes I think we can be quick to attribute something to the Holy Spirit like a gut feeling. You may say, "I've just got a feeling; I know the Lord is prompting me in this way. I feel like the Holy Spirit is moving me to..." I'm here to tell you that if your gut feeling does not line up with scripture, it's not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will not guide you in contrast to the Word of God. So, if your gut feeling is telling you something and you're attributing it to the Holy Spirit and it doesn't line up with scripture, it's not the Holy Spirit. That gut feeling may be last night's chili supper, but it's not the Holy Spirit.

Max Lucado put it this way, "We need to be sensitive to both the verse and the voice." The verse and the voice; what is that? The verse is scripture, our primary source of truth, and the voice is the Holy Spirit. So how do we do that? First of all, the voice. Remember it is said that if you have confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, believed in your heart God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved and you will receive an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It's that moment that you receive the Holy Spirit to move through your soul and to communicate with you.

There is also the verse. The question is are you reading the verse? Are you reading the Bible? Are you getting scripture in? Are you memorizing? Are you studying? Do you know what the Word says? You've maybe received Christ and made that decision... By the way, if you haven't and you want to know more about that or want to receive Christ today, after the service, our prayer team will be down front and they'll talk to you about that and pray with you about that if you want. But once you've made that step, are you reading the verse, are you getting scripture in?

As Scott makes his way up here, I want to close with just an urging to us, Woodland Hills, that we be a people, that we would be a church that endures sound doctrine, that we not turn from the truth and wander off into myths, but within our soul, we have the scripture and the Holy Spirit such that would be founded upon the truths of the Word of God.

Scott McElvain: Thank you, Travis. Can we give a round of applause for Travis? I so appreciate him sharing his sacred echo because it's already resonating with me and my thoughts on what God's been speaking to me. Travis mentioned that those words can affect our soul. There have been some words and information and diagnosis this year that have really gotten to me. So, thank you, Travis, for sharing your sacred echo.

As I expand upon that, I'll start off with simply saying this. This has been the toughest and hardest year of my life, for me and my family. If I could encapsulate what has been tough in an emotion or an expression, I would tell you that it's been fear. A lot of fear in my life this year.

I am on the last leg of my doctoral degree. I finish in five weeks with my classes and start my dissertation in January. I do eight-week classes and in those eight-week classes, I have about two or three assignments, which would generally consist of fifteen, twenty, thirty-page papers. So, every assignment has, when you click submit, in my opinion, the ability to absolutely crush my grade and the whole course at large. There's a lot of fear. That fear of being found out to be a fraud. *Maybe I'm not as intellectually on this level that I need to be to complete this degree.* That fear of feeling like a fraud. *Maybe I shouldn't be in this program.*

I don't know about you, but I often script conversations that I feel like might come. I want to be prepared for them and I'm just waiting for it. Like I'm going to get a phone call and they'll say, "Is this Scott McElvain?" Nobody ever gets my last name right. That's why we go by Mac. "I just wanted to ask you a question. You wrote a 20-page paper and 20 – 30 times, you misused a word. Do you fully understand the difference between there and their?" My gentle response would be, "Absolutely not. Thank you for your time. I'm out of here." Thank goodness for Spellcheck and things like Grammarly. But there's just that general sense of being found out to be a fraud that has, at times, paralyzed me.

The other place... As Travis mentioned, I've received information of dear, dear close friends passing away, expected and unexpected, friends and family. That's not been good; it's done a number on me. I've experienced emotions, been overtaken by those emotions, and generally afraid of how to deal with heartbreak and sadness that I have never experienced before.

He mentioned the diagnosis. I was bitten by a tick a little bit more than a year ago, right here on my stomach. I got him out of there. There was a weird circle hanging out around there a couple of weeks afterwards. I asked my wife, "Nicole, should I get this looked into?" Often the joke in our household... I'm from the suburbs of Kansas City, and she's from the backroads of Alpena, Arkansas. So, you can probably guess what she told me. "Your fine, city boy, it's just a tick."

Well, a couple of weeks later, I had two hamburger patties and, instantaneously, I was dizzy and nauseous, paralyzed in my recliner, sacred out of my mind. Come to find out, that tick had passed on a disease called alpha-gal. I no longer can have beef, pork, or lamb. That's pretty tough for a guy whose favorite restaurant is Billy Bob's Dairyland, so it's been quite an adjustment. Mo Mo Sushi is the new spot because fish is good to go. But it has been literally and figuratively paralyzing. When I go and eat anywhere at a buffet or something that I didn't order, that's always running through my mind. *Did I just eat some bacon? Did I just eat some pork?* And I become anxious and I don't want to eat, and it just begins to cave in on me.

All three of those things culminated in one instance for me. I took a mission's trip with our school to Kansas City. We let our students experience the mall. I found a quiet place in the mall, got my laptop out, started working on a paper. I went and got a cheese pizza, but my fear and my anxiousness were so large. I had just had a friend pass away that I was walking with and all three things culminated in that mall for me. It resulted in me having a full-on panic attack. In the food court, my teacher was consoling me, helping me out. It was loud, loud, loud and everybody's eyes were on me as I am freaking out. Fear had overtaken me, and I was really been in trouble in that moment.

What's been so hard for me is I have generally thought myself to be strong. And I'm a verbal processor and these words literally came out of my mouth. "I'm a winner; I don't struggle, regardless of the circumstance around me and I will overcome them." I had been beat up in that. You see, I have leaned on several things to make me believe that I was strong, one of them being my **experience** and **accomplishments**. *I've done a lot of great things. I've gone through a lot of things. I can win. I'm strong; I can plow through these things.* The next thing. *I'm organized. I'm disciplined. If I set aside enough time, I can overcome this paper. I can be disciplined to eat the right things.* Finally, the last thing. *I'm just strong. I'm going to plow through it. I'm determined. I have grit. I will overcome. I will out wrestle this fear that is paralyzing me right now.*

God is working me over because you know I've done those things and guess what? My feelings after this tough year have still resulted in me being fearful, cast with doubt, and truly exhausted. One of the things I believe God is speaking to me over and over, through this tough year is this. Alone, I am weak. And for somebody that verbally said "I'm a winner regardless..." that's been working a number on me.

My sacred echo comes from Acts 3 and 4. I can't encourage you enough to go read those chapters. I find them to be so enlightening, challenging, and powerful. Peter and John heal a man, the religious leaders of the day throw him in jail for preaching about Jesus, but not before 5,000 people come to know the Lord. They put them on trial, they're questioning them, and Peter and John respond with great confidence and clarity and boldness and they said, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." Acts 4: 13 says these religious leaders noticed something about them. **13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and**

John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. That last sentence... “The recognized that they had been with Jesus.” Quick commentary to note. When it talks about them being uneducated, it means that they weren’t formally, religiously, trained or educated. It doesn’t mean that they didn’t know their scriptures or that they were just kind of willy-nilly. No, these men knew their scriptures; they were some of the writers of the New Testament, but what they recognized was their boldness, clarity, and direction came from and that was being with Jesus. You see, they had a relationship with Jesus.

My mentor, a guy I meet with once a week, told me his nephew accepted Christ. He shot him a Facebook message. And in that message, he said, “Congratulations! You will never walk alone.” You see, this year, I have done my best at alone to tackle the things that have been sent my way: fear, doubt, and exhaustion. And I have forgotten that there is somebody walking beside me. You see, scripture tells us who that person is. And I’m picking two verses of the many that describe who he is. The first one is 1 Peter 5: 7, **Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.** The God of the universe cares for me. I have a tough time wrapping my head around that. I have a tough time wrapping my head around the fact that the God of the universe, Creator of heaven and earth, cares for me.

Isaiah 41: 10 says, **“fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”** Not only does he care for me, but he desires to strengthen me, he desires to uphold me. My point this morning is that alone I am weak, but with Christ, he gives freely his loving strength for our daily needs. I’ve done a really good job at trying to tackle them alone and God is working with me to remind me that he walks beside me, he cares about my fear, my doubt, my exhaustion, and he is wanting to strengthen me.

J. I. Packer and John Piper put a little acronym together that has been really helpful for me and I share it with you this morning. It’s called A.P.T.A.T.

The first one that is something that I have had to really do this year and that is **Admit** that I’m not that strong. Truly, I am weak.

The second one is to **Pray**. Not just talk about it, not just think about it a lot, not just converse about it, but to come before the Lord and pray, “Lord, I need you. I am weak.”

The next one is **Trust**. I think it goes back to a lot of what Travis was mentioning in his sacred echo. We must be people of the Word. We must memorize his promises. Memorizing those two passages alone... “Lord, you care about my anxiety, you care about what I’m walking through right now. Lord, you promised that you would strengthen me.” Praying the promises of God is powerful.

The next one would be **Act**. Guess what? Having discipline, being organized, having perseverance and grit are all things I should not abandon. But they do not provide the strength that I need. Only the Lord can do that for me.

The last one is to **Thank**. To have a heart of gratitude as I’ve walked through this fear because he’s carrying me and strengthening me through that. I want to be thankful.

I didn’t finish my story in the mall and that was kind of on purpose. You see, the paramedics came, they sat down, they took my vitals. I’ll never forget the things that one of the paramedics said to me. He knelt down on one knee, got right on my eye level and said, “You don’t need me. To put you in an

ambulance would actually be worse for you. You are doing this to yourself.” I’ll never forget those words because I never felt more out of control than in that moment. *I am doing this to myself? But I have no idea how to get out of it.* Complete confusion.

I mentioned to you that I am from Kansas City. Thankfully, my dad dropped everything, got in his car, and drove to the mall. He walked in, put his arm around me, and we walked outside of a busy mall. He opened the car door to his little Kia Soul, you know, where I kind of scrunched into and shut the door. The radio was off, and I just remember absolute silence. He walked around the car, got in his side, turned the car on, put it in gear and started to drive.

At that moment, my panic, my anxiety, my fear, they were instantaneously gone. Now did I recognize at that moment in time? I did not. But looking back on it, I realize that my dad, who is an amazing dad. I couldn’t have asked for a better dad. My dad cares for me, he loves me, he’s provided strength and protection for me more than anybody else in this world. And I recognized at that moment that he was in control. I was not. He was in control. I hope you can see how I’m connecting that to my relationship with the Lord.

You see, Matthew 7: 11 even says this, ***“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”*** I try to be a good dad. I try to convey care, love, security, and protection to my own children. The scripture tells us that even though you may have and have been blessed with a wonderful dad who did those things for you, God is infinitely better. He is infinitely more on that track of protection, care, love, and strength. God is working me over and over again, he is reminding me that alone, I am weak, but with Christ, he freely gives his strength for our daily needs.

I don’t know what that fear may be for you right now. I don’t know what that doubt may be for you, but I’m here to encourage you through what God’s been teaching me and that is you are not alone. Not only are you not alone, but you are walking with a God who cares for you and desires to strengthen you.

If you don’t know Jesus, you’ve not placed faith in him, you are exhausted, you are fearful, maybe today is the day that you make a commitment to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal savior that you would never walk alone again. I can’t encourage you enough, after we pray, the prayer team will be up here, and they would love to help you take the next steps if that’s something on your heart. If you do know Jesus, may you be reminded this morning that you are not alone and to lean into him to practice A.P.T.A.T. and continue to put him in the driver’s seat. *You’re in control, Lord. I lean on your strength, your protection, Lord.*

May we as a church body, Woodland Hills, also be reminded that through and in ministry we are weak too. Collectively, we need the Lord to come strengthen us to provide guidance and wisdom. Thank you for listening this morning and I hope that the Lord is speaking through me to you.

Father, we thank you for this morning. We thank you for the opportunity to come and collectively gather and study your Word. Lord, let us be keenly aware of your voice as you speak to us and nudge us in direction. Lord, let us be people of one book and that is your Word.

Let us study, let us memorize, let us know your Word that we might pray, that we might trust those promises, and that we might fight the fear that is surrounding us or invading whatever situation that befalls us right now. Thank you that you do not leave us alone, that you walk by us. We are grateful. It's in your name we pray, amen.