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## WHFC Summer Part 1 - Steady Travis Brawner

Good morning! Happy Independence Day weekend to you all; good to see you. Welcome here in the Castle, next door in the Chapel, and also Church at Home. We're glad you are joining us this morning. It's good that you are all here with us. My name is Travis Brawner. I'm part of the teaching team here at Woodland Hills and also one of the elders. We do something every week; we take an offering. I've given you the opportunity to cheer even though we're not passing a basket; I just miss it. We have the boxes in the back of the Castle, also in the Chapel, and of course online. If you're watching online joining as Church at Home, you can go to the "Give Online" button and, of course, we are thankful for your generosity. You've blown us away with your generosity. We encourage you to continue to give generously and we're thankful for that.

A couple of announcements before we get into the message this morning. Number one is we have our home group launch coming up that starts this Wednesday and it's going to run through August 5. That's going to be in preparation for our home groups starting up in this fall semester. If you are interested in a home group, this is a good opportunity for you to check it out and participate in a study of Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Life. It's a great study, so we hope you will join us for that. You need to register online. Childcare is available, so you need to register for your childcare as well if you want to participate in that.

Another thing we have coming up is our Essentials Class that's going to be on July 15. It's going to be here in the Castle, although we will be streaming it online live as well, and we'll have it archived for those that want to watch later. This is our class that outlines our essential beliefs. A few weeks ago, Ted did our membership material from the front here. Some folks joined the church and he mentioned that we have our set of essential beliefs, the non-negotiable essentials that we plant our faith firmly in. We're going to be going through those in detail and talking about that. So, right here, July 15, or online. You need to register for that as well online. Childcare is also available for that. If you want childcare, you need to register for that as well.

Today, we are going to talk some about our essential beliefs. We're going to hit some highlights leading up to that July 15 class. We're doing it in context of the message title called *Steady*. That's steady with our essential beliefs. The premise of it is that **being rooted in our essential beliefs can keep us steady in turbulent times**. We believe that this is important because we never know when turbulent times are coming. For instance, it could happen, you don't know. A global virus pandemic could happen. It may cause all kinds of disruption, changing our work and our school and our church and everything that we do. It could happen.

Or, we could face significant racial controversy, where it creates conflict and protesting and counter protesting and even riots. That could happen. But then imagine if both of those happened at the same time. That would be pretty bad, quite turbulent. As long as it doesn't happen in the same year as a presidential election, I think we'll be okay. Because then everything would be politicized, right?

When you hear *steady in the turbulence*, what do you think of when you hear *turbulence*? I think of an airplane because I hate turbulence in an airplane. I don't mind flying. I don't have a fear of flying, but when they come on the overhead and they say we're going to encounter some turbulence, I go, *Oh great, here we go*, because I have a fear. My fear is of falling from a tall height. If you have that, you know what I mean. You hate that feeling of falling, especially when you know you are at 30,000 feet. It's that feeling where the seat just drops out from underneath you and then up and to the side and all over the place. I hate the turbulence.

I'm not afraid to die. I'm ready to be with the Lord, but I hate that feeling of falling, which is why I hate rollercoasters. They are designed to make you feel like you're falling. Years ago, when my wife and I were dating, we were at Silver Dollar City. We hadn't been dating long. We were married 22 years ago, so it has been a while. We hadn't been dating long and we were out there with some of her extended family that I'm meeting for the first time, so I kind of wanted to impress, right? We come up on this rollercoaster that they had at the time. She said, "Hey, let's ride this new rollercoaster." I'm going, *Oh boy*. I said, "You know what? I'm good; you go ahead. If you want to go that's fine."

I'm pretty sure she was pressing me on my manhood because she said, "Well, if you're not going to ride, will you hold my purse while I ride?" I got a little offended and so I said, "Look... it's that... here's... Yes, I'll hold your purse." I stood there with her 80-year-old grandmother, holding her purse as her mother, her aunt, and her cousins filed past me, each handing me their purse. I'm standing there holding their purses while they ride the rollercoaster. But I don't care, frankly; my ego is not big enough to overcome that.

I hate falling and I hate turbulence. You know, boats and cars have turbulence too. Do you know what doesn't have turbulence? A train. I don't mind trains. Trains are smooth; they're steady, right? We're talking about being steady today. There is no quick up, quick down. There is no quick left, quick right. It's steady; it doesn't have turbulence.

Who experienced turbulence is the Apostle Paul. He experienced a lot of turbulence and he talks about it in Philippians 4: 11-13. He said, ***11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.*** And then he summarizes it in Verse 13, which most of us know. ***13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*** "Him" being Christ, of course.

So, why was it that Paul had confidence in Christ and knew that he had strength in Christ? What did he understand? Paul knew the context of Christ in the big picture, the big picture being everything about Christ, before and after and all around him. He understood what we call our essential beliefs and that's why we believe it's so important to understand the essential beliefs.

He understood non-essential beliefs as well. Paul even wrote about some of the non-essential beliefs particularly in 1 Corinthians 10. He spoke of meat that had been sacrificed to idols. He said eat the meat, don't eat the meat; it doesn't matter either way. You're free to do what you want. What does matter is that you take into consideration that the things that you do have an effect on those around you. That was what he emphasized. Is there any application for us today, on Independence Day weekend? As we celebrate our liberty and our freedom, follower of Jesus, you are free to do and speak what you want, but, according to scripture, what God desires is that it's more important to you, in the things that you do and say, to take in consideration that they have an effect on the people around you.

Paul understood the difference essentials and non-essentials. You may say, "Well, Travis, there are a lot of things that I believe about my faith. Are you saying that some of them are not important?" I'm not saying any beliefs are not important, but Roger Olsen said it best I think when he said, *"For the Christian, beliefs matter, but not all beliefs matter equally."* Not all beliefs matter equally. Some are more important that we are settled in them; they are non-negotiable. Some of them are negotiable and we can have discussions and even debates and talk about them, and they can change with time too.

I just want to give them to you in list form as we're talking about being rooted in our essential beliefs this morning. These are the subjects of our essential beliefs. We're going to go through them, but this is just the list for now:

God  
Father  
Jesus/Son  
Holy Spirit  
Bible  
Mankind  
Satan  
Salvation  
The Church  
Eternity

That's it. Those are the subjects our essential beliefs. These have been set for millennia. They've been established over time such that the nice thing for us now, in 2020, is we have full revelation of all these things God desires for us to know about them. In other words, the train tracks have been set, it's settled, the essentials are set.

On the other hand, non-essential can change. Like I said, the subjects that are kind of popular and most spoken of, most debated, most in the forefront can change. Those subject lists will change with time. Even how we feel about them or what we believe about them rather, even more important, can change. For instance, some of the things that we have as our non-essential beliefs with our worship style, our music, our clothing, our food even, wine... Not too long ago, yoga was in the spotlight. These things, this list of non-essentials change over time. A long time from now, a lot of those will probably not be topics of discussion as far as our non-essential beliefs go.

Years ago, a long time ago, a couple thousand years ago, there were things that were non-essential, that were popular, that changed, that we really don't discuss right now because we don't feel a need to. For instance, at the time of the early church, there was a group called the circumcision party. This group was saying, "Yes, you need to follow Jesus, but you also need to be circumcised. You need to get circumcised and follow Jesus; that's the way." They were elevating this issue of a covenant between the Lord and Israel before the new covenant with Jesus. They were elevating this non-essential issue to an essential saying you must be circumcised.

A few weeks ago, like I said, Ted did our membership content and about 130 people joined the church, which is an exciting thing for our church family. Now, what if, in our membership covenant that they signed, it said you must follow Jesus and be circumcised? I don't think we would have 130 people, and all of them would have been women, I guarantee. But it was a non-essential that was elevated to an essential then, that was of much debated discussion, and it's not now. So, you see, our non-essential issues will change over time, but the essentials stay the same.

Now I want to go through these essentials in list form giving you some details about them. Again, on July 15, we're going to have a class right here. We'll be going through these in detail and really diving into them, discussing them in depth, so I encourage you again to register online, get your childcare, and come or watch online. As those of you that are doing church at home, you can do the same thing for this class.

This morning, I want to go through them and cover some things about them, so we understand what we're saying we believe, being rooted in our beliefs. This may feel a little bit scripted and that's because it is scripted. Again, these are unchanging, so this script has been in place for a long, long time about the things that we believe, our essentials.

**God** – Theologians would call this theology proper. There is a God, there is only one God, our God is the one and only God according to Deuteronomy 6: 4. He is both incomprehensible and yet knowable. He is eternal, he is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. In other words, he is all powerful, all present, and he is all knowing. He is the Creator of everything. He is sovereign, meaning he knows everything and has control over everything that he knows. And he exists as three persons in one. Not persons like human beings, but three persons because that's the best description we can have to understand he is three in one. Remember he is incomprehensible. Every description of the Trinity is going to fall short because he is incomprehensible. But we can know him to understand that he is three in one. They are inseparable from one another. They are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Father** – We believe that the Father is co-equal and co-eternal with the son and the Holy Spirit. The Father sent the Son, according to John 6: 39, and he will send him again, according to Matthew 24: 36. The Father is not God alone with the Son and the Holy Spirit assisting him. I think that's important to understand in the common misconception. He is co-equal and co-eternal with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Regarding creation, he spoke things into creation, and regarding prayer, he is the one to whom we pray, according to Matthew 6: 9, our Father in heaven...

**Son** – whose name is Jesus. He also is co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit and is co-eternal. He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a sinner's death, and was resurrected. He is the only way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him, according to John 14: 6. He is fully God and fully man. This is another one of those that is incomprehensible; we can't fully understand that because in our mind we get this two people as one or we get this half person, half God. No, he is incomprehensible; we just need to know this is the best we can describe it. He is fully God and fully man.

**Holy Spirit** – the Holy Spirit is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. He's not just the power of God. In other words, like the skill of a craftsman. It's not the spirit of God that is like the skill of a craftsman, but rather, he is one of the three persons of the Trinity. He indwells every believer at the time of salvation, and he guides and convicts the believer in their life. He is the one who distributes the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the believer for the purpose of building up of the body of Christ.

**Bible** – We believe the Bible is God inspired and written by humans. It is inerrant, it is without flaw, according to 2 Timothy 3: 16-17, it is breathed out by God and written by man and is profitable for teaching, for reproof or correction in training and righteousness. So many things it is useful for. It is our primary source of truth. You've seen Ted's US Bus and in the driver's seat, is the Bible. It's scripture, our primary source of truth. It is not to be added to or taken away from according to Revelation 22: 19. In other words, the tracks have been set.

**Mankind** – Every person is a human being with eternal value, created in the image of God, knitted together in their mother's womb. Very important, every person. According to Genesis 1: 26, we are created in the image of God, every single person. By one man, sin entered the world and therefore all have sinned according to Romans 3: 23. The wages of sin is death, which is ultimately separation from God and that is according to Romans 6: 23. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

**Satan** – We believe that Satan is a real being, that he is a fallen angel. He is the adversary, working in opposition to thwart the work of God's grace. That's his primary goal. He is limited and finite just as God is unlimited and infinite. So, it's important to understand he is not omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent like God is. According to 1 Peter 5: 8, he is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

**Salvation** – We believe that there is only one way, truth, and life to salvation from sin and the separation of God and that is the person of Jesus according to John 14: 6. We believe that according to Romans 10:9, if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. We believe it is faith alone in Christ alone. It is not by works lest anyone could boast according to Ephesians 2: 8, and that you can't lose a genuine faith according to Ephesians 1: 13. We didn't do anything to gain it, Ephesians 2: 8, therefore, we can't do anything to lose it.

**The Church** – We believe in the Church, and the Church is the bride of Christ. It is collectively those who have placed faith in Christ and become a member of the Church of Christ in the kingdom of God through Christ. In practice, it is the local Church, a collection of believers locally. We believe there are five

purposes of the church. We talk about these a lot: worship, fellowship, discipleship, evangelism, and ministry. Church is not a building, a program, or a day of the week.

**Eternity** – We believe heaven and hell exist, that they are real places. The essence of heaven is the eternal and ultimate presence of God. The essence of hell is the ultimate and eternal absence of God. We believe that every person, depending on whether they have received salvation from Christ or not, will spend future eternity in either heaven or hell.

Those are our essential beliefs. They are non-negotiable. We don't sit around as a group of leaders and say, "Have we changed what we think about eternity, have we changed what we think about the Holy Spirit or what we believe, or have we considered this about our essential beliefs?" We will chat about non-essentials frequently, but as far as the essential go, they are set, and they are unchanging.

Why is it that these essentials are so important? Why have these been decided and established for thousands of years even being set and unchanging? Unchanged at Woodland Hills for 18 years. Unchanged for thousands of years in most Christian churches. Why is that?

That's because of the story. Greg Koukl calls it *The Story of Reality*. That means everything that has been and will be is a story. And in the story is the big picture that Paul understood why he could have confidence in Christ, why he found strength in Christ because he understood the character of Christ in the story. As we've discussed the essential beliefs and outlined them for you, I want to tell you the story with the list of our essential beliefs as we follow along.

In the beginning, **God**, who existed before the beginning, created everything. The **Father** spoke everything into existence, including **mankind**, whom he made in his own image. He desired for mankind to stay in righteousness, but **Satan**, God's adversary, tempted him into sin. Mankind fell and the fall and the sin brought the consequence of death, not just a physical death, but a spiritual death, which was separation from God.

The only thing that could satisfy and reconcile the separation was the death of the sinner or the death of one who was sinless and was willing to take the consequences upon himself. So, the Father, in his infinite sovereignty, sent his son **Jesus** to live a perfect, sinless life, to die a sinner's death, and to be raised again, to prove that he is God and that his sacrifice is adequate for our **salvation**, the salvation of mankind.

Jesus then set out to establish his **Church**, setting them forth on the work of his mission to make disciples of all nations and to love God and to love people. He then ascended into **heaven** and sent the **Holy Spirit** to be with us, to guide and comfort and direct us in his absence. Through all of that, he documented everything in scripture, giving us the canon of the **Bible** so we can understand the standard and the primary truth that we have in all of this. Included in that canon is revelation of things yet to come in which we know that the Father will one day send the Son again to reclaim his church, to establish his kingdom, and to condemn the enemy, Satan, to hell and the eternal absence of God where there is no existence of God for eternity, there is no character of joy and peace.

And everyone who does not accept Christ, everyone who rejects the Son and the salvation that he offers, will go to hell there in the absence of God. But, for those that call upon the name of the Lord, for those that receive Christ and receive the salvation that he offers, the sacrifice that he paid, we receive that and call upon the name of the Lord, confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, we are destined for eternity in heaven, in the eternal presence of God, back where the story all started in righteousness with the Lord where there is only the character of joy and peace. There is no pain, no suffering, and there is no turbulence whatsoever.

That's the story. The End. Period.

The wonderful thing about the story is that nothing can change it. There is no amount of turbulence that can change the story. The past is set, the future is set when you know the story. The tracks are there. There is no turbulence. They are not going to come over the intercom and say, "Hey, we're going to have some drops suddenly." It's set. That's why being rooted in our essential beliefs can keep us steady in turbulent times. As Paul understood and knew the big picture and the story and who Christ was and what he meant, he could find strength in Christ. He can do all things through Christ. You may say, "With everything that's going on my works never going to be the same." It doesn't matter; the story doesn't change. "My school is never going to be the same." It doesn't matter; the story doesn't change. "The economy, our church, the way we meet, my sporting events..." Our sporting events may look different the way they are talking about changing things, and they may never be the same. I don't care. It doesn't matter; the story doesn't change. Amen.

Last week, Ted preached and spoke and prayed a blessing over us from the Priestly Blessing from the Book of Numbers and I want to bring another blessing to us this morning out of Romans 15: 13. This has been a big one in our family the past few years. My wife and I printed it out and it's on our dresser. We pray it and we think it and we speak it with our children especially as they are growing. It's Romans 15: 13 - ***May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.***

How does that play out? God, the God of hope, will fill you with all joy and peace in your believing, rooted in your essential beliefs, understanding the story. By the power of the Holy Spirit that we have with us now, that we may abound in hope. He will fill us with hope. The Great Commandment says love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. What we are talking about is believing, loving the Lord our God with our mind, understanding the story, and believing.

I'm going to pray for us as we close. You can stay seated. We're not going to dismiss you by rows as we have here in the Castle or over in the Chapel. If you are home, you can do whatever you want I suppose. I want to say also that we honor that. As we are still working through the controversy of all that people may have opinions about; we honor every decision of those that choose to stay at home and do church from home for now and those that choose to come and any in between measure that you use to gather as a church. We're thankful for everyone here and also everyone that is joining us at home. As you go, we'll remind those that are here in the building and over in the Chapel to still be respectful and distance as much as you can for those around you because we do respect every decision.

As we go, I just want to speak over you. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

God, we love you and we are grateful for the story. We're grateful for all that is behind us and all that is ahead of us. We're thankful mostly that, Lord, you prop us up in your truths, the truths that you've given us in our essential beliefs, that give us that steady track that we can ride on even though everything around us seems turbulent. Lord, so much is coming at us, so much conflict, so much difficulty, polarization, and confusion. We are grateful that we know that we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength, and that is because of his place in the story and what he means to us, what he is to us.

Lord, I pray for joy and peace for Woodland Hills Family Church and all that maybe listening. As we go ahead on this Independence Day weekend, we thank you for the freedom that we have to do and say the things we want, but more important, Lord, that we would be considerate that the things that we say and the things that we do have an effect on those around us.

We love you and we give you praise. It's in Jesus name that everyone agreed and said... Amen.