

SHEMA – it's the Greek word for hear. And the Greek word for obey.
When you listen to somebody in authority over you, obedience is assumed.

Three responses: **Rebellious – Reluctant – Reflexive**
I want the reflex of my heart to be one of obedience to God's Word and his voice.

Jesus capped off the greatest sermon of all time, the Sermon on the Mount, with this principle of SHEMA. **“Anyone who hears – SHEMA - my teachings and follows it is wise.”**
And he likens it to building a house on a solid foundation. But even when we've started building on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ, there are often proverbial rooms of our heart and areas that are less than reflexive. Many of us still have rooms that need renovation and conversion. Emotional. Social. Moral. Intellectual. And more. This series is about being reflexive to God in every room and square foot of our lives.

Shema diagram. (Affective, Intellectual, Moral, Sociopolitical, and Religious Conversion)

These five conversions draw us into Shema, and close the gap between our listening and our obeying in every facet of our lives.

In its simplest definition: to “convert” means to turn. We often think of this repentance as directional and 2 dimensional, like on a map, we do a 180. That's justification.

But what we often forget is our call to sanctification... looking more like Jesus.
This takes a lifetime of what Gelpi calls “ongoing conversions”

Rubik's cube... three dimensional.

Because white technically isn't a color you could say the rubiks cube has 5 colors.

Five colors to turn the cube until we align.

Similarly there are **five conversions** we step into and turn in as we grow in this life...
hopefully into a more complete image of Christ.

Philippians 2 says:

*“**Work hard** to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.
For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”*

Philippians 3 says:

*“I focus on this one thing... I **press on** to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”*

Nowhere is Paul assigning human effort and hard work to salvation. Yet there's **working hard**.
There's **pressing on**. But for many in the modern Church with our ideas about grace, we'd say chill, Paul... stop pressing, that's works righteousness. Jesus did all that already.

This is because we understand the **gift of grace**.
But we fail to understand the **grit of grace**.

“God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.”

That’s why tonight it’s the ultimate and preeminent conversion – **Religious Conversion.**

We start here because we need the Holy Spirit’s power in our lives to desire and do what pleases God across all areas and all other conversions.

Begins with making a vow of devotion to Jesus and confessing God’s right to have authority over every aspect of my life.

Hebrews 4:12 - *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it pierces even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

Why are there times where it feels more mundane than anointed? Why does it – dare I say – feel more dead than it does alive?

I’ve shared this quote from the theologian Scott Swain before when preaching on scripture:

“Because Scripture is the supreme locus of God’s self-communication in the world, Christians are ‘people of the book.’”

But being a people of a book – a printed paper Bible – has it’s pros and cons.

See, we have to remember books as we know them are new to human history.

And as we are in this series SHEMA, based on the Greek word for “hear,” we have to remember the Bible was long received audibly, it wasn’t read.

Listening and reading aren’t one and the same. In fact, they are vastly different.

Listening is an interpersonal act, while reading is me, myself, and I.

When I’m listening the speaker is in charge.

When I’m reading me - the reader is in charge.

When I read a book I look down on it. I can close it. Take it places. Shelf it.

But when I’m spoken to or taught I sit under and receive that teaching.

Too often I come to the Bible like a dead body, a cadaver I stand over to inspect and cut into.

If I approach the Bible like a cadaver, guess what – it’ll feel dead .

But Hebrews says we’re the body, and the Bible does the work of inspection and evaluation and healing... **IF** we will place ourselves under it as one does when spoken to by one in authority.

What happens when we learn to SHEMA and listen again?

Conversions. The ongoing conversions that make up sanctification.

Psalm 40:6 – in the Hebrew text, where the verb means dig, and the passage literally translated reads: ***“ears you have dug for me”***

It’s the same word used in Genesis 26 when Isaac redug the wells of his father Abraham that the Philistines had filled with dirt.

And I believe the enemy loves to fill our ears much the same way. Hustle and bustle. Coming and going. No time to pause. To the point where our hearing is reluctant or rebellious instead of reflexive. Or – even worse – we don't think God is speaking at all.

But God wants to open our ears, dig them out to SHEMA his voice again.

In verses 7 and 8 after God digs out his ears we see: **the word becomes personal.**

Personal pronouns flood the text... *your will, my God, your law, my heart...*

Again reading can be impersonal, but listening is inherently inter-personal.

Remember, in reading the reader takes charge, but in listening the speaker is in charge.

We see the Word doesn't just become personal for David, it becomes authoritative.

*I take joy in doing your will, my God,
for your instructions are written on my heart.*

What happens when we SHEMA? We find life, conversion, and deliverance.

In Verses 9 and 10 David speaks of

"The good news of your justice." and "Your faithfulness and saving power."

This a powerful picture of transforming SHEMA that we get in Psalm 40 and it's why Jesus would say again and again in the Gospels: **"whoever has ears, let them hear."**

While everyone in the crowd had ears to listen, Jesus doesn't assume everyone will Shema and reflexively obey. Because some were listening like the religious leaders were – receiving every utterance to stand over it and dissect it to see if it lined up with their own teachings and worldviews. But those with an ear to SHEMA? They would posture & position themselves under His teaching to receive and obey it as authoritative. Giving Him authority over every aspect of their lives.

This positioning under Jesus as authority is crucial tonight in light of **Religious Conversion** *which begins by making a vow of devotion to Jesus and confessing God's right to have authority over every aspect of my life.*

This isn't just transactional – authority handed down.

It's relational, like a father and their child.

It is God initiated, relationship with us graciously made possible through Jesus Christ.

Religious conversion is taking personal, spiritual responsibility for my end of relationship with God, and we step into this through a vow of devotion.

Get this because this is what so many in the church today miss – *in conversion we don't just turn from sin and into some freedom that is an absence of restrictions and authority.*

For example - when God set the **Israelites** free in **Exodus** so **"that they may worship me"**

That Hebrew word for worship means to serve. To obey as a servant does a master.

Exodus is a story about a transfer of power from one master to a new and infinitely good one.

Maybe it's one reason God met them at a mountain like Sinai to reveal himself.
It's a picture of how we are to look up to Him, and place our lives under his revelation.

And in the New Testament when Jesus spoke of this religious conversion in his famous conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 he speaks of being born again.
And in this conversation he spoke of the Holy Spirit giving birth to spiritual life.

But what does this conversion look like lived out?

I want to look at the life I know best... my own.
And then the life of a young man in the Gospels – the Rich Young Ruler.

When vs. Whether

Jesus compares the conversion experience, being born again of the Holy Spirit, to the wind.

The conversion experience may be a gentle breeze in the cool of day, a tender experience as we faithfully and reflexively receive Jesus at his Word.

OR - the conversion experience may be a tornado of wind that turns the terrain of your life upside down.

In my life, it was the latter.

At 21 and I had constructed a life full of habits and attitudes that needed to be blown away.
As a result, I can point to **October 10th of 2005** as the night I experienced religious conversion.
But for some people, they can't think back to a "spiritual birthday," one moment of deliberate commitment. They can't remember a time they didn't love and trust Jesus as Lord. I've known people who didn't have a dramatic conversion experience. And that shakes their assurance, not being able to point to a moment.

But I've told people as a pastor... much more important than "**when**" you experienced conversion is "**whether**" you've experienced conversion. Whenever you kicked off your journey of following Jesus, most important is whether you're currently following.

Not always first, but foremost.

Religious conversion isn't always first and foremost, because it doesn't always happen first.
But religious conversion is key and pivotal because without it the rest of our conversions fall short.

Somebody who comes to Christ and a religious conversion late in life has probably already experienced other conversions in life. What do I mean?

In my life I came to God at 21...

I would say that I had experienced an **intellectual conversion**. Sociology and philosophy religion and other classes at the academic boot camp that is W&M had taught me to take responsibility and test my own thoughts, perspectives and worldview with opposing viewpoints and information.

But before my religious conversion I would say my intellectual one was limited and hampered.
How can I say that? Because at 21 my religious conversion infused my intellect with **FAITH**.

I would also say I had stepped into my socio-political conversion.

In college I didn't just graduate with a bachelors, I graduated from thinking my limited perspective of the present was the standard (which is easy to do in a predominantly white culture).

...I graduated from the limited history I'd learned through high school

...and I graduated from a passive, unreflective acceptance of systems as "the way things are"

If it affects somebody I love like a brother and sister, I'm not going to sit on my hands.

But this conversion too was limited and hampered without Jesus.

In Christ my sociopolitical conversion was infused with meaning –**reconciliation**.

Religious conversion is foremost because it infuses and fills all other conversions with life and meaning.

*it adds to your intellectual conversion **faith**.*

*it adds to your socio-political conversion the ministry of **reconciliation**.*

*it adds to your affective and emotional conversion **hope**.*

*it adds to your moral conversion **love**.*

It is said of **St. Anthony** that when he heard a reading of Matthew where Jesus told the rich young ruler, "*If you want to be perfect, go and sell everything you have and give the money to the poor*" that Anthony – a wealthy young man himself- immediately did exactly as Jesus instructed. He became one of the earliest desert fathers and monks.

Talk about a reflexive Shema moment!

But what a contrast to the **Rich Young Ruler** himself, who in his moment of reluctance upon hearing the same words of Jesus, chose rebellion.

And the young man's greeting is - "**Good teacher**"

By all appearances he is a man who had an intellectual conversion, as he's looking to engage with and wrestle with Jesus' teaching.

As Jesus begins his reply to the Q "what must I do to be saved" by listing five commandments. "*to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.'*"

He speaks to the five that pertain to love of neighbor but not directly to love of God.

A good and moral person can do all of these and still live separated from God.

The man replies - "***All these I have kept.***"

It seems this man had experienced a moral conversion, as he'd built the disciplines that allowed him to keep these commands.

But we're all called to religious conversion. Living under the authority of God in Jesus Christ. And Jesus zooms into what was at the center of his life and throne of his heart – his wealth.

The Rich Young Ruler's question: **HAVE I CROSSED THE BOUNDARY?**
Jesus' chief concern: **AM I AT THE CENTER?**

The Rich Young Ruler was operating from a bounded set. There was a boundary to cross, step over and you're in, and once you're in progress is optional. You've punched your ticket.

But Jesus wants to be the center of your life that you never stop working toward.

We too often think of a religious conversion as limited to a moment at an altar.
A moment of transaction rather than a beginning of a relationship.
God sees it as relationship that much like our marriages - doesn't end at the altar, it begins there.
It's a journey we go on for the rest of our lives as He is at the center.

Like a doctor who has to prescribe a radical surgery or life change for the good of the patient, this rich young ruler needed a radical transformation... a transplant at the center of his life.

The problem? The young ruler wanted to hold onto the scalpel.
HE didn't want to sit under God's authority and change. He couldn't let go.
Only a religious conversion -- positioning myself under the loving care of God... changes me from the inside out.

For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, you won't cut it.
Laws seek to change us from the outside in.
Only God can restore us from the center. Inside out.

Rubik's cube - originally designed by a man not named Rubik with a magnet at the center.
It was a bum design that wouldn't hold up and didn't take.
What's at the center matters. If it isn't God, it won't hold up.

It takes religious conversion.

Begins with making a vow of devotion to God and confessing Jesus' right to have authority over every aspect of my life.