

Read the Bible for life

Union conference focuses on biblical literacy

By Samantha Adams '13



UNION'S INVESTMENT IN Biblical Literacy

David Platt sees biblical literacy as two important steps: knowledge of God's word and then obedience to it.

Platt, a nationally known author and pastor, was keynote speaker at the Read the Bible for Life Conference hosted by Union's R.C. Ryan Center for Biblical Studies in April.

"You can have all the Bible knowledge in the world and still miss the point," Platt said. "What we're after is not information – that's not what biblical literacy is about. Biblical literacy is about transformation, where people are obeying Christ."

Platt is pastor of the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Ala., and author of the book *Radical*. Nearly 700 people – largely pastors, students and Sunday school teachers – attended the conference, which was part of the "Read the Bible for Life" biblical literacy initiative begun by George H. Guthrie, the Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible at Union.

Guthrie was bothered by statistics that said only 16 percent of regular church attendees read the Bible every day and 25 percent of regular church-goers do not read the Bible at all. In response, he wrote a book, *Read the Bible for Life*, and created corresponding church curriculum to assist congregations in developing biblical literacy.

Platt presented three plenary addresses, and Union faculty members hosted eight breakout sessions. In his plenary addresses, Platt spoke about reading the Bible as a story, teaching the Bible as Scripture and obeying the Bible as servants. He stressed the importance of seeing the unity of Scripture.

"The purpose of the Bible is to reveal who God is and how God redeems God's people for his kingdom," Platt said. "We want to know the overarching story of Scripture. If not, we will get into the tendency to break up the story into fragments that apart make no sense."

In his final session, Platt focused on obedience to the Bible,

saying that in the Great Commission it's clear that God desires obedience to his word, not just knowledge of Scripture.

"We must teach people to obey everything he has commanded," Platt said.

Referring to the story of the rich young ruler in Mark 10, Platt said Christians should read and teach the Bible for radical obedience by saturating their hearts with the gospel. While taking the Jesus' call to radical sacrifice seriously, Platt said such sacrifice can only arise from awareness of God's radical grace.

He stressed that obedience should be the overflow of amazement at God's grace in Christ. "We must be drawn by grace, not driven by guilt," he said.

Ray Van Neste, director of the Ryan Center at Union, said the theme of "Read the Bible for Life" matched the Ryan Center's objectives.

"Our hope is for (the attendees) to be challenged and encouraged to read the Scriptures well," Van Neste said. "We want to see renewal in the church;

it's going to begin with a renewed attention to the Scriptures."

Dan Tankersley, who attends Rosebower Baptist Church in Paducah, Ky., said he came to the conference because he has been burdened for God's church to get into God's word. He said he was particularly interested in Platt's second session, in which he focused on teaching the Bible.

Tankersley said he wanted to apply what he learned from Platt to better teach the Bible to men he is instructing in his hometown.

"When people get into the Bible, it starts transforming their lives," Tankersley said. "I wanted to be better prepared to express more from Scripture."

Amy Burchman, of Second Baptist Church in Union City, Tenn., described the conference as

"the most inspiring yet humbling event I've ever been to."



George Guthrie

Audio from all of the "Read the Bible for Life" sessions can be downloaded on the Union Audio Project at www.uu.edu/audio