

Sermon Transcript from January 10th, 2016
The Reason for the Bible
Pastor Dave Lomas, Reality San Francisco

We started recently a year-long series that we are calling The Year of Biblical Literacy, and there are many goals in this year. But, the basic goal is this: to know the Bible as you read through the Bible. That's the basic goal, and we have a lot and I've been sharing them. But, our basic goal is for you to read the Bible yourself. I said last week that most people, especially those people under the age of 30, have not read the Bible cover to cover. And I've found, ministering to San Francisco in just six years, not that long but, the six years I've ministered in this town, I've met some of the smartest people I've ever met and I'm surprised on how many people are illiterate when it comes to the Bible. Like, they just don't know how to read the Bible or they don't read the Bible. They go to church, they're Christian. But, they just don't engage with the Scriptures.

Now, I know that a lot of has know the fundamental answers to the Bible's questions. The answers that you're supposed to know about the Bible. But, I've found that we typically don't get those answers by reading the Bible, we get those answers by an apologetic book that we got in college or something like that. Or a sermon that we heard or something like that. And so, what we're hoping to do is we're endeavoring this year to learn the Bible and talk about the Bible as we're reading the Bible. So, we're reading it every morning. We've partnered with the Bible Project, who's been doing these videos. Have you guys been watching these videos? How helpful are these videos? They're insane.

Oh, and next week, Tim Mackie will be here; the voice of the Bible Project. Next Sunday night, he'll be teaching and then there'll be a lecture no Monday night. Did we know it's a lecture, by the way? We didn't? Okay, great. So, we're reading the Bible every day. It doesn't take that long. Sometimes it takes about 12 minutes, sometimes 20 minutes watching the video and all that stuff. But, we're trying to immerse ourselves in the Scriptures and then talk about them in community groups and then learn how to respond to God through the Scriptures on Sundays. And I can't emphasis this enough: do this year. If it's your first time here, start with this right now.

Just jump into this. Do this year. It will be a daily commitment reading, watching these videos, community groups, lectures, sermons. But, this will be the most – probably – valuable year that you've ever had as a follower of Jesus. Ever. Or, if you're just like, "I'm not really a follower of Jesus, I just go to church right now," this will be the most valuable year that you could possibly have. And we're doing it together. That's what's so fun about it is you can talk to pretty much anyone that goes to our church about this subject. Like, did you read that story today? What is going on with the Bible? It is crazy.

So, last week I talked about the problem of the Bible and, if you haven't listened to that, I highly recommend because this introduction to the series is really important. I talked about the problem of the Bible. Today, I want to talk about the reason for the Bible.

So, 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Paul, writing to young Timothy, one of his protégés, one of the guys that he was mentoring, a fellow elder or pastor that he released into ministry. He says this: **"As for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."**

This is God's Word. So, let's pray.

Lord, I pray that tonight that You would give us ears to hear and hearts to receive the Scriptures. That You would help me. This is so, for me personally, daunting. So, help me. Give me strength and wisdom. I don't want to mess this up. So help, Lord. Be with us and teach us tonight. In Jesus' name, amen.

A couple of months ago Oprah was on Late Night with Stephen Colbert and they were going back and forth sharing their favorite Bible quotes. I think I might have shared part of this story a couple of weeks ago. And Colbert said that his favorite Bible verse was Jesus' command in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, "I say to you, do not worry."

That was his favorite verse. And they joked about it a bit and they were about to

transition when Oprah was like, "Wait, I want to share mine and I want to share what it means to me."

So, she shared. "This is my favorite Bible verse: Psalm 37:4, **'Delight thyself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.'**"

That's a great passage. Great Psalm. And then she said this:

"This is what I take that to mean: the Lord has a wide range of meaning. It means compassion and love and forgiveness and kindness. So, you delight yourself in those virtues where the character of the Lord is revealed. So, delight yourself in love and forgiveness and kindness and then you will receive the desires of your heart."

That's what she says. And then everyone claps. And I remember I was watching this and I was studying, obviously, and getting ready for this whole year. I'm like, "Oh my gosh." I wrote it down really quick. I have – gosh. I have a lot to say about what she just said. But, what this episode does is it brings up all these questions when it comes to the Bible. I mean, it brings up, for me, a lot of questions.

I think the biggest question – one of the biggest questions that it brings up – is what Oprah did to this. She read a verse and she's like, "This is what I take that to mean and this is what I take 'Lord' to mean and this is what I think the verse means and this is what I use it for."

It brings up this question: what is the Bible for? What is the Bible for? I mean, what is this collection of 66 different books, different genres of book, told over a huge period of time that has one unified story, what is it for? What is this Bible for? Is it timeless truth? Is this timeless truth? That's what a lot of people think about the Bible. It's just timeless truth.

Is the Bible where we go to try to find that nugget of truth that we need in the moment? Or you were going to a job interview or we have a big pitch meeting and we need that thing, that shot in the arm; we need a timeless truth. Or is it a "for our life verse?" Like, "My life verse is this verse."

What is the Bible for? Example. This is an example of timeless truth. Imagine you saying, "I have all of these desires in my heart. What do I do with all these desires? What do I do with them and then how do I get all the desires of my heart? Oh, I know what I'll do. I'll go to the book of timeless truths and I'll see how to get the desires of my heart. Oh, look at this. Psalm 37:4 says, 'Delight myself in the Lord and I will get all my hearts desires.' Oh, see, there it is. It's right there. That's how I get my hearts desires is delight myself in the Lord. Oh, and then what is 'Lord?' I think Lord is goodness and love and all these other things."

Are we allowed to do that with the Bible? Are we allowed to go, "I have this question and I'm going to go find this verse and, when I find this verse, I'm going to take that to mean something?"

Are we allowed to do that? Is that what the Bible is for? See, a lot of us come to the Bible looking for particular answers to particular questions. We come to the Bible with questions like, "Can I live with my boyfriend?" Or, "How do I be happy in marriage?" Or, "Can I be gay and be a Christian?" Or, "Can I get a divorce?" Or, "Can I watch Rated R movies?" Really big questions like this.

We go to the Bible for like, "Can I do these things? Am I allowed to do these things? How do I do these things?"

And, when we make the Bible an answer book to all our questions and approach the Bible like that, we make the Bible into something it's not. When we go to the Bible and we're like, "Okay, I have all these questions and I need to find all the corresponding verses to the corresponding answers." When we do that with the Bible, we turn the Bible into something it's not.

Now, here's a caveat. This is an important caveat. There are timeless truths found in the Bible and you will find the answers to most of those questions. But, the Bible is not after answering your specific sets of questions. That's not what the Bible is set out to do. That's not what the Bible is trying to do. The only thing you have to do to understand this – to really get this – is to read Hebrew poetry. You're going to get there in a few months and, when you start reading Hebrew poetry, you'll be convinced that the Hebrew poets actually pose more questions than they answer.

So, if you have all these questions and you're reading the Bible this year, you might come to find out at the end of this year that your questions won't be answered. That you're going to sit in your questions and you're going to sit in the mystery that is God for the rest of your lives. The Bible might not answer your question. See, the Bible is not even answering all our doctrinal questions, let alone life questions.

But, again, another important caveat. Yes. Our doctrine, what we believe as a church, is based on the Bible and must come from the Bible. But, when we reduce the Bible to a set of truths and propositions, doctrinal propositions, we miss what the Bible is trying to do.

Let me give you an illustration. This is a very very – I think it might be a very bad illustration. Like, bad. I mean, this illustration might make you question things. And, you might have emails, and rightly so. They're welcome. So, you can email me at davedealy@realitysf.com. So, shoot an email there and I'll make sure that I answer your question.

So, here's the illustration. It has to do with rap music; hip-hop music. Okay? So, this might break down really fast. Is rap or hip-hop offensive? Yes. Not all of it is good. Agreed? Agreed. Some can't listen to it because it's so bad. Some people turn on and are like, "Oh my gosh. This is so bad I can't even listen to it. I'm a Christian. I can't listen to it."

Okay, fine fine fine. I'm not saying you should listen to it or I'm not saying that it aides you in following Jesus at all. All I'm saying – I'm just saying this – is that even to begin to appreciate it – if you wanted to. Even to begin to appreciate rap music or hip-hop or whatever, you have to know what it's actually trying to do. It's trying to tell a story and it's trying to be provocative. It's using a type of language from the streets and a way of talking that gets the point across in a certain way.

I mean, there's all kinds of examples of this. From Kendrick Lamar's album, "To Pimp a Butterfly," that got nominated for 12 Grammy awards and, earlier this year in an article in the LA Times, he says that he gave his life to Christ in a Food 4 Less parking lot. And he says, "I'm the closest thing to a preacher that many of my audience or my fans have." And, though his word will never be as strong as God's Word, he says, "All I think I am is a vessel."

Now, are his lyrics something that would be played, unedited, on a Christian radio station or Focus on the Family? No. No way. Never. Should you go listen to it? Probably not. If you don't know, just don't. Okay? But, again, to appreciate it, you have to realize what rap is trying to do. Jay Z for example has this song that you might know. It's called, "99 Problems."

"I got 99 problems, but..." – it goes on from there.

Now people, when they hear this song are like, "Oh my gosh. This song is so oppressive to women."

He actually got a lot of heat for this. "This song is so oppressive to women."

Is this song about a woman? No. It's literally about a dog. It's about a literal dog. In his book "Decoded" he says that, before he was famous, he got pulled over by the cops and drugs were locked in his glove compartment. It's actually in the song if you listen to it. And the guy said, "I need to check your glove compartment."

He's like, "You can't unless you have a warrant."

He goes, "Well, I'm calling the drug sniffing dog out – the K9 unit – to come out and smell for drugs."

And he knows that as soon as that happens he's busted. And then that cop gets called away and, as he gets called away, Jay Z drives away and he sees the K9 cop car with his lights blaring driving opposite of him down the road. And he says, "I got 99 problems, but that dog ain't one."

That's what the song means. Now you're like, "Wait, why doesn't he just say that? Why does he use that word? Like, why couldn't he say, 'I've got 99 problems, but a K9 sniffing dog ain't one?' Why can't that be the thing? Why can't it be more literal?"

Again, I'm not advocating for it, but I'm saying you have to realize what rap is actually trying to do. So – and I know this is weird – I'm going to transition right back to the Bible.

So, is the Bible offensive? Are there parts of it that would want to make some modern people stop reading it because it's oppressive or repressive or even misogynistic? Maybe. But, you have to see what the Bible is actually trying to do.

Like, if you're reading through Genesis with us, you might realize that men have all these wives and you're like, "What is up with this? Why is this happening? Why doesn't God say, 'You can't do that?'"

And then in chapter 7 or whatever. Maybe chapter 12 verse 8, "And don't take so many wives. Stick with one." Like, why doesn't it say that, chapter and verse? And I would argue, and even a guy that was an Old Testament narrative professor at Berkeley, Robert Alter, actually argues this in his book on the Old Testament where he says, "Actually, the Old Testament is saying that. But, it's saying that through a narrative story. It's saying that in a sense, because, when you actually read the story of all these wives, it never ends up right. It never ends well."

In a sense, God is saying you can't do that because it doesn't ever work out well. But, in another sense, God is not even trying to do that with these texts. He's trying to work through these very messed up people to bring about redemption to the whole world. That is what He's trying to do. And, what He's doing is He's doing that through this part of the story. So, you have to enter into the text going, "What is the writer, what is God trying to do?"

When you read the Bible as a set of timeless truths or doctrinal propositions, you will quickly find out that the Bible doesn't behave itself. There's like, "I believe it," and you go to read and you're like, "Whoa, what is this whole thing?"

When we look at the Bible as a source book for spiritual comfort or guidance or doctrine, it can make us squirm. Last week I said this is kind of the problem with the Bible. But, I don't think the problem is with the Bible. I said that because I was trying to be provocative myself. But, the problem is not taking the Bible on its own terms. So, it brings us back to this question: what is the Bible for?

So, three things. Three things I want to talk about. They won't take that long. But, this is what the Bible's for: the Bible is for us to know who God is, to tell the real true story of human history from God's perspective and to shape us as a people of God so we can live in God's ongoing story.

This is what the Bible is for. This is what the Bible is getting at. To show us who God is that we might know who God is. To tell the true story of human history from God's perspective and to shape us as a people of God so we can live into God's ongoing story. This is what the Bible is for.

So, point one: to know who God is. Everyone turn their Bible to the very first page. Page one. Genesis 1. Turn there and take out a pen or a pencil or a Crayon or whatever you have with you. If you're into adult coloring right now or whatever. So, take that out and, on the top of the Bible – if you write in your Bible's, if you do this sort of thing. I do – write this: this is a book about God. Write that in your Bible. This is a book about God.

Now, if you were with us four years ago when we started Genesis, I had you do that. Does anyone in here have that written in their Bible because they were here four years ago? Boom! Extra points in Heaven. Anyone else? I'm giving away points tonight. No one? Okay.

This is a book about God. Now, this – and I want you to frame the Bible. The Bible is first and foremost a book about who God is. And look at this. Because you're in Genesis 1, look at the very first few lines of Genesis 1. **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."**

This is a book about God. Genesis 1:3, **"And God said, 'Let there be light.'"**

Genesis 1:5, **"And God called the light 'day.'"**

Genesis 1:6, **"And God said,"**

Genesis 1:8, **"And God called..."**

Genesis 1:9, **"And God said,"**

Genesis 1:10, "And God called..."

Do you see that rhythm? God said and called and said and called and said and called. This is not a book that's particularly or primarily about you, it's a book that's primarily about God. And all of us skeptics – Christians alike, even skeptical Christians – we want to begin the book with all these questions. We have questions of sexuality, we have questions of ecology and of cosmology and, if Genesis 1 is about anything, it says we can't start with the topics and look for answers. We have to start with God. "In the beginning, God."

The Bible is God's self-revelation. The Bible is about God disclosing Himself to us; showing us who He is and what He's like. And what we learn about God from the opening lines of this book is that God is a God who communicates. It's no surprise that God would leave us with a book, that God would inspire and allow through all sorts of different situations for us to have a book, because God is a God who communicates to us. And we see that at the very opening. God uses words and His words mean something; His words have authority.

His words have authority to create and that's why I had you read "and God said and it was." He has this authority with His words to create things. So, He says it and it is. But, not just this, not just the authority to create, He has the loving power to give identity, to give meaning, to give function to something. So, it's important that it says that God said and then God called it. So, God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God called the light "day." So, He gives function and order and purpose and identity to things.

God said in creation and God calls an identity. This is the God who creates. This is the God who gives meaning. This is the God who gives purpose, who gives functions, who gives identity. And this is just page one. This is just the first ten lines of the book. But, if God is a disclosing God or, rather, if the Bible's disclosing or, rather, if God is disclosing Himself through the Bible, how is He doing that?

If you asked me to describe my wife, you're like, "Could you describe your wife? What is your wife like?"

I might use facts. I might say that she is a female, blue eyes, blonde hair. I might say she was born on November 27th, 19... I can't say, in Bakersfield, California. I might say that she likes vegetables and she hates waiting in lines or standing up in front of people to talk. Like, I might just report facts to you. Or, when you ask me "what is your wife like," I could say, "Let me tell you a story. Let me tell you a story about her heart being broken and what breaks her heart. Let me tell you a story about when she couldn't stop laughing. Let me tell you a story about where, during a period of her life, everything made her cry. Let me tell you a story about how a couple of her friends gave her the courage to do something she never thought she could do."

Now we're talking about my wife as a person, not just a set of facts. So, if the Bible is about who God is and it's set up to answer that question, we might want a list of facts. We might want a Buzz Feed of like "Top 10 Things That God Is." But, that's not what captures our hearts and our imaginations. See, we are storied creatures created by a storied God. So, know when there's a book about God that starts with, "Let me tell you a story: 'In the beginning...' or 'Once upon a time, God created the heavens and the Earth.'"

It starts with a story. So, this is an important point to Bible reading. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is a narrative; it's a story. And God is disclosing the truth about Himself through the story of the Bible. It's not only some facts about who God is, it's telling a story and we're supposed to be wrapped up into the story. It's not just systematic doctrine or timeless truths. That's not what it's doing. That's not what the Bible is doing.

Now, another caveat: that does not mean we can make the Bible mean anything we want it to mean because "it's just a story and we just pull out meaning as we want meaning." You can't do that. Not at all. The only way to get our doctrines and truths is to get into the story world of the Bible. So, I'm not saying to you – I'm not suggesting – that this book you cannot find timeless truths in and you cannot find doctrine. I'm not saying that at all. I'm saying that the only way that you find truth and you find doctrine is to immerse yourself into the story world of the Bible and then let the Bible dictate what those things are. Not going, "I have these sets of truths. I need to go to the Bible to find them."

You can't do that. That's not what the Bible is doing. Because, the Bible is first and foremost revealing God. There's a book by Eugene Peterson, who wrote the Message Bible – you might be using that Bible to read through this year – called "Eat This Book."

It's a great great little book. He says this in this book:

"This is a text that reveals the sovereign God in being and action. It does not flatter us; it does not seek to please us. We enter this text to meet God as He reveals Himself, not to look for truth or history or morals that we can use for ourselves. What He insisted upon supremely was that we do not read the Bible in order to find out how to get God into our lives, to get Him to participate in our lives. That's getting it backwards."

Now, what he's saying there, what he means by "that's getting it backwards" is because the Bible, we're supposed to get the life with God. We're supposed to dive into the Bible and find life with God. We're not trying to take the Bible and fit it into our little lives. We're supposed to be immersed in its story. That's what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to, as we're reading it, find our lives in its story, not the other way around. Not going, "Okay, how can this book get into my life?" but, "How do I get my life into God's unfolding story?"

Here's a little example of this: on January 6th this last week, Ashley and I celebrated dating for 21 years. We've been dating for 21 years. We were very young. Gosh, we were seven and... eight. No, I'm kidding. We were young. I just heard my wife laugh. That was cute. We were young. We were – I mean, to be honest, and this is a weird thing to share, but we were very ignorant of God's ways. We were really blatant, gross sinners. I mean, I literally got saved the day before and then we started dating. And we were sitting around our table at home and having dinner on the 6th and we were just reminiscing like, "Oh my gosh. Our first few years of dating, we were just so messed up. I mean, we're still messed up. But, we were really messed up. Like, really messed up."

And then we were like, "Why did God even let us be together or live? Why didn't He go all Old Testament on us right then and there? Why in the world didn't that happen?" And then we just kind of shifted conversation, like it does, and we got to talking about our daily Bible reading. And then we were going, "Oh my gosh. Did you read this part? Okay, Lot. Sodom and Gomorrah. Oh my gosh. This story is crazy."

We're just walking through the story and we're like, "Okay. So, yeah." So, these angels show up and are delivering Lot because they're about to destroy this place that Abraham tried to intercede before, but it didn't really work because there's not that many righteous people there. And he gets to this town and all these men want to rape angels and they're like, "Let us have the angels. We want to rape them."

And Lot's like, "You can't rape my angels. But take my daughters."

And that's the story. Did you read it? It's insane. Okay. So they're like, "Take my daughters." And we're like, "Oh my gosh. Poor daughters."

But then, a few verses later, daughters are like, "Let's get dad drunk and sleep with him so we can get pregnant by him because we don't know if we're going to have..."

And we're talking about it like, "Why didn't God just wipe the whole thing out again?" Like, "Let's do the flood. I said I wouldn't do it, but I take it back. I'm going to do it again."

Like, it is so bad. And then we're talking about this and these things weren't connected. But, all of a sudden, it happened. We looked at each other and we realized that it was just like us. We found ourselves in God's story. Why didn't God judge us when we were young and sinful and so stupid? We're no better than Lot or his daughters. Evil abides in us, too. If our story was written down in Genesis, we would be ashamed to look back. Why did God do that?"

And then we found ourselves immersed in the story. God is trying to redeem. God is trying to redeem. He's trying to save. He's like, "I'm going to deliver you and I'm trying to redeem you."

The reason I wanted to say this is because you guys might feel like there's a huge distance between this and you and you're like, "Oh my gosh. I'm so messed up and all this other stuff and I came to church, but I don't know why I'm here."

God is out there to redeem you. And you're reading the stories and what you're going to find is that this is actually the true story and you're going to find your life in it like, "I'm just like that."

I have moments, like Abraham, where I believe God for gnarly things and I have moments where I'm trying to say my wife is my sister. Like, it's just so weird. That's in the Bible. You're like, "What is that coming from?"

This is what God's saying. The Bible is a story about God. I mean, it's big and it's complex. It's a true meta-story that we find all our stories in. That's the second point. To tell the true story of human history from God's perspective. And what He does is – if you're taking notes, you might want to put in parenthesis "through the lens of Israel" because there is a lens of a family that God is working through here. The Bible tells the true story of who we are and what went wrong and what God's doing about it.

I mean, if you're reading Genesis 1-11, what you should've done after chapter 11 is, very carefully as you're reading that, you should've said to yourself, "Who's going to fix this mess?"

If it went from Adam and Eve and it was great to Genesis 3 and then Noah, you're like, "Let's reboot this thing because everyone's heart is evil always."

And then God's like, "I need to reboot this Earth. I need to cleanse it. It's so filthy. So, I'm going to save Noah."

You're like, "Noah's the guy that God's going to redeem the world with." But then he's drunk and naked at the end of that whole scene. You're like, "That's kind of like Adam and Eve. Naked and eating from the tree. He's drinking from the tree, but it's the same difference. You're like, "Oh, it's the same thing. It's in the human heart."

And then it goes on and you have the Tower of Babel where "we're going to make a name for ourselves and we're going to make a name better than God." And you're like, "Who's going to redeem this? Who's going to save this? How is God going to save this story? How is God going to save this earth?"

In chapter 12, you meet a guy named Abram. And God says, "Abram, you don't know me. I know you. I know you worship the moon, but I'm God. I'm Yahweh. Would you leave your land and your family and follow me? I'm going to give you land and a family. I know you're old and you don't have a family, but I'll get you one."

And Abram's like, "I believe you, God," and he follows Him.

And then you're like, "Okay. This story's rebooting again. This is happening. God's going to redeem the world through this family and it's a family of a guy who doesn't have a family. How in the world is he going to get a family?"

And then it's a really messed up way of how he gets a family. His family is really messed up. But then God redeems and God saves and God redeems and God saves. This is the story. We find ourselves in this story as well. That's what this is there for. In Genesis 1-3, you kind of see this whole thing playing itself out again. So, when you read Genesis 1-3, we find ourselves in the story that we're created by God and for God.

One Old Testament scholar says, "It was God who created humanity and, therefore, only God can reveal to us our identity and function as humans and, without this Biblical revelation, we are lost in a maze of confusion."

I think that last phrase "we are lost in a maze of confusion" pretty much sums up this generation; our world right now. Like, lost in the maze of identity confusion. No one knows who they are. They think, "I'll find it in myself, I'll find it going to school, I'll find it doing this retreat thing somewhere."

Unless through this library of books God reveals who we are and what we're made for, we'll never know. We need this. This is the true story of how God made the world. As we read the Bible, we won't just find God and know God. We will, but we'll also find the true story of ourselves. We'll find ourselves in this story.

Lesslie Newbigin was a famous missiologist and missionary to India. He was ministering to a friend of his, a Hindu, intellectual friend, and he gave him a Bible to read and his friend wrote him a letter back. His friend said this in a letter to Lesslie Newbigin:

He said, "I can't understand why you missionaries present the Bible to us in India as a book of religion. It is not a book of religion. And, anyway, we have plenty of books on

religion in India. We don't need any more. I find your Bible a unique interpretation of universal history, the history of the whole creation and the history of the human race. And, therefore, a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history. That is unique. There is nothing else in the whole religious literature of the world to put alongside it."

This is what he said. It says he reads the Bible for himself. He's like, "Whoa. I'm actually an actual participant in the history of the human race. This is so unique. You're saying that this God created everything and He created me and He makes a covenant with humanity and wants us to live inside that? That is unique."

The third thing the Bible does is it shapes us as a people of God who can live into God's ongoing story. It shapes us. We like to say around here that God is shaping us through our experiences. We say that a lot around here and it's true. God shapes us through our failures and successes, highs and lows, disappointments, our relation. All of this stuff is important to forming the life of Christ in us. All of it.

But, another caveat: our life experiences are not the text for directing the formation itself. Our experiences are not the text for directing that formation. Experiences are important. Emotions are. All that stuff's important. But, it's not the text that drives it. You cannot say, "I am a Christian" and then throw away the Bible and prayer and spiritual discipline and spiritual practice and simply say that God is forming you in your experiences. Because you can easily just say that your culture or your family of origin is forming you by your experiences.

See, again, Eugene Peterson says this:

"The Christian community has always insisted that Holy Scripture that reveals God's ways to us is necessary and basic to our formation as human beings. In our reading of this book, we come to realize that what we need is not primarily informational, telling us things about God and ourselves, but formational; shaping us into our true being. This is the very nature of language; to form rather than to inform. When language is personal, which it is at its best, it reveals. And revelation is always formative. We don't know more, we become more."

We don't know more, we become more. This is what happens as we immerse ourselves into the Scriptures. We know God and we know ourselves and then it forms us into these type of people. See, this year our interest is not knowing more, but becoming more. How will we become more? How will this happen? How will this formation happen? Well, look at our text today.

2 Timothy 3:14. Again, Paul writing to Timothy says, **"Continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures."**

"From infancy you have known the Scriptures." That would have been, to them, the Old Testament. He says, "The Old Testament, as you've immersed yourself in the story world of the Scriptures, as you've been living in that story, it's made you wise to know and to follow Jesus. It has made you wise."

"It makes you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ."

As you immerse yourself in the text, it forms us into a people that are aware of salvation, that are aware of Christ, that see Christ and are formed in the way of Christ. This is what Scripture does. It works on us.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

This is what the Scriptures do. The Bible tells one unified story that leads us to Jesus. That's the point of this whole thing. Paul is saying, "As you're wise, as you know the Scriptures and are immersed in the Scripture, know the Scriptures make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ."

It makes you wise for Christ. Like, you start seeing Jesus. And then Paul says, "Because the Scriptures are God-breathed. The Scriptures are good for us because they're God-breathed."

Literally that word is "in-breathed" by God, meaning that this book has living breath in it. It's the breath of God Himself. God breathes through this text and the Spirit who caused it to be written, who spoke through the different writers in so many ways, is as powerful

today through this text as ever. And with God power, it can transform our lives.

Like I said, we celebrated 21 years of dating but, the day before, I celebrated 21 years of following Jesus. So, I can drink now as a Christian. I was saved by Jesus by reading the Bible for myself for the very first time. Okay? Very first time. I didn't grow up in church and all that stuff. One night, after a really horrible horrible day thinking I want to run away or commit suicide or one of those things, someone gave me a Bible just a few weeks before. I grabbed it and I opened it and I opened it to the middle. I don't know why I did that. I just thought like, "I don't want to start at the beginning. I want to act like I've read this thing before."

So, I start in the middle. It was the book of Job and I thought it was the book of "job." And I'm like, "This is cool. I'll get a job."

So, I'm reading this book and it's a student Bible, so they have all these headings, right? And it said, "When bad things happen to good people." I thought that was me. I'm like, "Oh my gosh. This is the worst thing that happened to me. I'm a pretty good person. Why did this happen to me?"

So, I started reading it and, as I read it, the book of Job – which, by the way, doesn't even answer the question why bad things happen to good people, right? If you get to the end, it doesn't ever answer the question. So, I'm reading it and trying to find the answer to this question, but I don't find the answer. I literally meet Jesus. Like, I'm reading this text and God speaks to me. I'm reading this text and Jesus, not in a physical way – but to me it was really real – showed up to me. He said, "Follow me."

Like, "You go the way you're going and it's going to be death. You're going to end up dead, kill yourself, or your life will be not the way I've made it. Or you can follow me. Follow me and live."

And I didn't have that language. I didn't have that framework. I had nothing. I didn't go to church. I mean, I went to church here and there, but that wasn't part of my world. But God, through this God-breathed text, breathed on me the breath of life. Breathed on me. And I said, "I'm following Jesus."

I got rid of drugs and all the stuff I was doing and I started following Jesus. In verse 16, Paul says that this breathed book might work in our lives to form us and shape us into a people that live into God's ongoing story. It says that Scripture is useful for teaching. It says that Scripture is useful for teaching us. Yes, it is. And what does it teach us? It teaches us to know God, who God is, tell us the true story of human history, and to shape us into a people that live into His story.

It's also for rebuke. Scripture is for rebuke. As we read the Scripture it will, from time to time, inform us that something we've been doing is out of line with God's will. That will happen this year. You're going to read something like, "What I've been doing is out of line."

And sometimes it will be plainly on the surface of the text. It's right there in black and white like, "Oh my gosh." And you'll sense something convict you. You'll sense, "I need to live into this."

Other times we read a passage, we'll begin to hear the voice of God gently or, perhaps, maybe even not so gently telling us that this story applies to an area of our lives. Like, "This is the area of your life that I want to deal with."

This is what it means that the Scriptures are God-breathed and it rebukes us. Sometimes gently, sometimes not so gently. See, when that happens, as it may often do for those who read the Bible prayerfully this year, we do well to pay attention to that. We do well to be rebuked by the Scriptures.

It says Scripture is for training for righteousness. Now, I have one last thing I want to share I think this is really important. It might take three minutes. So, give me three more minutes.

The question of this series is "how can this story be authoritative?" How can the Bible train us for righteousness, form us in this way that we can live into God's story or, as Paul puts it, that the servant of God can be equipped for every good work? How do we do that? How can the Bible, which is made up mainly of story, be authoritative? How is this narrative, how is this Bible authoritative?

N.T. Wright wrote a little – not so little – article called "How is the Bible Authoritative?" In it, he says this. I'm going to explain this, but let me read this to you:

"Somehow, the authority which God has invested in this book is an authority that is wielded and exercised through the people of God telling and retelling their story as the story of the world, telling the covenant story as the true story of creation and, in particular, through God's telling of the story of Jesus."

Now, let me explain this to you. As we read the Bible, as we live into the Scriptures, as we tell and retell this story of God that God is creator of the world, that God is after to redeem what went bad, that He calls, that He gets angry, that He gets sad, that He gets disappointed, when something He created as good goes bad, He has wrath. Like, when we tell and retell this story, the true story, we live into that story and it becomes authoritative.

It's like we're actors and the Bible is the first four acts of the play. Now, it's the true story and our job now is to live into act 5. To improvise. Like, we know the first four acts, now we live into act 5. What we know about the past and what the Bible says about the future. And so, we live in the story world of God and the story world of the Bible. So, what God calls good in Scripture, we call good. What God calls bad, we call bad. What God is after in the world, we are after in the world. What God has revealed in Christ, we make known to the world.

This is how the story is authoritative for us. This is how we live into it. We tell it and retell it and we find ourselves in it and we know that we have a role to play. We are trained for righteousness. We're trained for holiness. And, as this story washes over us, we know that God's story is the true story. And, as we live in it and read it and prayerfully go through it and tell it and retell it, it has authority over our lives.

Let's pray.