

The Book That Changes Everything [2 Timothy 3:16-17]

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Big Idea: The Bible isn't just a book you read; it's a book that reads you.

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// **INTRODUCTION** [College – being “*in the Word.*”]

There are a lot of people who are in the Word, but not *really* in the Word. Here's what I mean... ***The Bible isn't just a book you read; it's a book that reads you.***

When we began this series, I started with these words from Jesus.

²⁴“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. ²⁵Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. ²⁶But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. ²⁷When the rains and floods come, and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.”
[Matthew 7:24-27]

Two builders. Two houses. One storm. What separated them wasn't their expertise as builders or their passion. What made the difference was their foundation. ***Jesus said HIS teachings, HIS words are the bedrock that will hold when the storms of life hit.***

For the past several weeks, we've looked at the WHO of our faith. WHO God is... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. WHO Jesus is... both fully God and fully man. WHO the Spirit is... not an it or a force, but a person living inside every believer. ***Today, we're going to look at the HOW.***

HOW do we know any of this?

HOW do we know what's really true when “truth” in the world seems to change every six months?

Here's the answer... ***God didn't leave us to figure it all out on our own.*** He spoke, and He made sure we would have His words forever with us.

Today, we're going to look at Holy Scripture, the Bible. We're going to examine what it is, why we can trust it, and why it has authority over your life, whether you acknowledge it or not.

But before we get there, I want to address something. For a lot of people, and I don't mean just atheists or skeptics outside the faith. I'm talking about people who've been in church for years. ***The Bible can be something they believe in theory, but in practice, they pick and choose.*** They'll read and post passages that encourage them and affirm their positions on cultural issues, but then conveniently skip the texts that challenge their thinking. They treat the Bible like a practical resource, but not an authority in their life. They'll go grab it when they need something, but put it away when they don't.

That's not faith IN the Bible. That's USING the Bible, and there's a big difference.

// THE FOUNDATION

While our primary text today is 2 Timothy 3:15-17, I want to begin by going to the OT because the idea of God's Word being our foundation for life started long before Paul ever wrote those words to Timothy. ***God's people have always understood that His Word is the bedrock for life.***

Look at what the Psalmist writes in Psalm 119...

¹⁰⁵*Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path. [Psalm 119:105]*

This is a great picture for us. ***God's Word is a lamp for our journey through life.*** Notice the writer doesn't say His Word is a floodlight that shows you ten years down the road. He says it's a lamp, giving you enough light for the next step. That's exactly what the Bible does in our lives. It doesn't necessarily give you a strategic 5-year plan. ***It gives you what you need for where you are right now.***

This is not just an OT idea; Jesus Himself took a position on Scripture that we should pay close attention to.

There's a moment in Matthew 22 where a group of religious leaders called the Sadducees come to Jesus with what they think is an unanswerable theological

trick question. What's important here isn't necessarily the theological issue, but rather HOW Jesus responds. He ***doesn't appeal to His own personal authority***, though He had it. He ***doesn't even reference religious tradition***, though that was important to Him. He goes straight to Scripture.

²⁹Jesus replied, "Your mistake is that you don't know the Scriptures, and you don't know the power of God."

³¹"But now, as to whether there will be a resurrection of the dead—haven't you ever read about this in the Scriptures? Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said... [Matthew 22:29,31]"

He then goes on to directly quote a passage from the Book of Exodus written some 1,400 years earlier. But Jesus uses present tense language for something God said over a thousand years ago.

Here's what I want you to see... ***To Jesus, the written Word of God [Scripture] was the living voice of the Father.*** It wasn't history or an ancient text to Jesus. It was the living voice of God. ***If that's how Jesus related to Scripture, I believe that's how His followers should.***

// WHAT THE BIBLE CLAIMS TO BE

I want us now to turn to our primary text for the day, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. ***I'd like us to consider what makes the Bible true and trustworthy.***

^{16a}All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. [2 Timothy 3:16a]

The word "inspired" here is a key word when it comes to explaining what the Bible is. In the Greek, Paul uses a word that literally means "God-breathed." ***God breathed into EVERY word of ALL of the Bible.*** Think about that for a minute. God didn't whisper a few ideas to some writers and just let them take it from there. The Bible doesn't contain a few of God's words within it, and then it's up to you to dig deep and discover them. Paul says ALL of Scripture carries the breath of God.

Peter writes something similar in his second letter...

²⁰*Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, ²¹or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God. [2 Peter 1:20-21]*

Let me help us understand this idea. ***Picture a sailboat for a moment.*** Those on board the boat didn't create the wind. They can't control it or manipulate it. But they do navigate it, work with it, and the wind then takes them where they need to go.

That's a simplistic picture of what happened with the human authors of the Bible. Moses wrote like Moses. Luke wrote like Luke. Paul wrote like Paul. Their personalities come through in the style of their writing. Yet, they were carried by the very breath of God. The words are both fully human and fully divine. If that sounds familiar, it should because it's the same thing we said about Jesus a couple of weeks ago.

We hold to this belief about the Bible...

The Old and New Testaments are inerrant as originally given, verbally inspired by God, and a complete revelation of His will for our salvation.

That phrase "inerrant as originally given" is really important. We're not claiming that every copy ever made was flawless – scribes made occasional mistakes in copying. What we're saying is that the original text God breathed out was without error. ***And I'm about to show you that you can have amazing confidence in the fact that the Bible we read today is a faithful reflection of that original.***

All of this isn't a new idea. Augustine affirmed it. Aquinas believed it. Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Spurgeon... every major voice of orthodox Christianity throughout history has stood on the inspiration and reliability of Scripture.

Let me tell you why you can trust the Bible we have today...

Some of you have heard or read things that have caused you to question the reliability of the Bible. Maybe some of you have been challenged by a skeptical friend, a class in college, or some documentary on Netflix.

Maybe, you've heard things like this...

- *"The Bible has changed over the years. It's basically a game of telephone across 2000 years."*
- Or even, *"the Council of Nicaea voted on what went into the Bible."*

You need to understand why you can confidently trust the Bible. Let me give you a few reasons.

Wesley Huff is a PhD candidate in NT manuscript studies at the University of Toronto. He's one of the most accessible and credible voices on this subject today. He's been interviewed by Joe Rogan, Steven Bartlett, and many others about the historical reliability of the Bible. You can find him on YouTube, Instagram, and many other platforms. Seriously, check him out. He is amazing at demonstrating how the manuscript evidence for the NT is absolutely overwhelming.

- Today, ***there are roughly 25K manuscripts of the NT in existence.***
 - The second-best-represented ancient document is Homer's Iliad, which is around 2K.
 - For figures like Julius Caesar or Plato, we're talking about a handful and sometimes even fewer than 12 manuscripts.
 - ***Yet, we teach these in every university without a second thought of their reliability.***

If you trust Homer's *Iliad* or Julius Caesar, you have FAR MORE historical reasons to trust the NT. The evidence isn't even close.

So, what about the biographical accounts of Jesus? They were written closer in time to his actual life than comparable accounts of almost any other person from antiquity. Paul's letters were written just years after Jesus' crucifixion. By the way, written by a man who had personally been involved in the persecution of

Christians before his conversion. That's exactly the kind of source historians find most credible.

What about the Council of Nicaea? They did not vote the Bible into existence, though it's a popular myth. The canon was recognized, or affirmed, by early Christians who had already been using these documents for generations before the council ever met. The council didn't create Scripture; it acknowledged what the church already knew.

The bottom line is you are standing on firmer historical ground with the Bible than you have ever realized.

[Wesley Huff's series – "Can I Trust the Bible?"]

A quick word about Bible translations...

I know some of you have questions about different translations of the Bible... KJV, NIV, ESV, NASB, and the one I mostly teach from, the NLT. ***What's the difference, and which one is right?***

There are basically two approaches to translating the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew. Some translations, like the ESV or NASB, try to stay as close as possible to the original words and structure. We call this "*word for word.*" Others, like the NIV or NLT, prioritize translating the meaning and thought of the original text. We call this "*thought for thought.*" Scholars call the difference formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence.

Both are legitimate approaches to translating the Bible by serious academic scholars who believe in the authority of Scripture.

Here's what's important to know... ***Not one of the major English translations of the Bible changes any core doctrines of our faith.*** What you hold in your hand is trustworthy.

What's the best translation? The one you actually open up and read.

One last thing before we get to what the Bible actually does in our lives. This is important as you read and study the Bible.

The Bible was not written to you. It was written for you.

What do I mean by this, and why is this important?

- When Paul is writing to the church in Corinth [Corinthians], he's writing to a specific community of people in a specific city, dealing with specific problems in a 1st-century Roman world.
- When Moses writes Genesis, he's writing to a people who have just come out of Egypt, who need to understand who their God is and where they came from.

These texts were not addressed to 21st-century Americans. They weren't written with Pittsburgh in mind.

However, because the words are God-breathed and Spirit-carried, every word was written FOR us. It transcends every culture and time. This is unlike any other ancient document. You don't read the *Iliad* and expect it to be relevant to your life today. But this book? ***It speaks into your marriage, your work, your anxiety, your grief, and your questions about who you are and your purpose in this world.***

This is also why reading the Bible well matters. Not just reading it, but understanding who it was originally written to. **Context always matters.**

- *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* by Richards and O'Brien
- *The Bible Project* [YouTube]

// WHAT THE BIBLE DOES

I want to go back to 2 Timothy and our text for today because Paul doesn't just say what Scripture is, he tells us what it does. This is where doctrine moves from being abstract to practical for daily living.

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and *is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.* ¹⁷God uses it to *prepare and equip his people to do every good work.* [2 Timothy 3:16-17]

Paul says ***the Bible is useful, and then he lists four things that it does:*** teaches us what is true, makes us realize what's wrong in our lives, teaches us to do right, and prepares and equips us. Teaches us... Rebukes us... Corrects us... Equips us...

TEACHING – tells you what is true.

Unlike what we hear in our world today, everything you FEEL is not necessarily true. Truth is not what the algorithms of your social media say is true. The Bible tells us what the truth IS. ***Every single area of your life has something to learn from the Bible...*** relationships, identity, sexuality, money, priorities, how you treat people, and what you put your hope in.

REBUKING – shows you where you've gotten it wrong.

This is where it gets uncomfortable. The Bible does NOT just affirm you. It should also correct you. ***If your entire approach to reading Scripture is to find encouragement and feel good, you've domesticated the Word of God.*** You've turned it into something it was never meant to be. A book that only tells you what you want to hear isn't the Bible. ***Let me ask you... When was the last time you were convicted by something you read in the Bible?*** If it's been a long time, you might be reading it wrong.

CORRECTING – shows you the way back.

Here's where God's grace comes in. He doesn't just expose the things that are wrong in our lives. ***He shows us the way back to truth.*** Rebuking isn't meant to crush us; it's meant to restore us. There's mercy even in the hard passages that point out our sinfulness. They exist because God cares about where you are going.

EQUIPPING – shapes our life.

Here's the lifelong journey of building a firm foundation. Not just one emotional moment or response to Jesus, but a daily, consistent engagement with Scripture that shapes who you are over years and years. ***It's not just reading the Bible once; it's letting the Bible read you over and over again.*** So much so that the way you see people and the way you respond to suffering and joy all begin to look different.

The writer of Hebrews says...

¹²For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. [Hebrews 4:12]

The Bible is ALIVE and POWERFUL. It's not passive. It comes after you. It sees things in you that you didn't see in yourself. It highlights areas within you that you've been avoiding. It pierces places that no friend, therapist, or self-help program ever could.

Which brings us to the idea I want you to remember...

The Bible isn't just a book you read; it's a book that reads you.

The Bible tells you who you are. It has a voice, and that voice is God's. Which means that you don't get to decide which parts apply to you. ***You don't get to build a version of Christianity that skips chapters you don't like.*** You don't get to construct a faith that only affirms your preferences.

// PRACTICAL APPLICATION

When was the last time you opened your Bible and let it say something you didn't want to hear?

Not to find a verse that made you feel better. Not to win an argument with someone. ***But when was the last time you opened the Bible to be shaped by it?***

Some of you haven't read your Bible in weeks, maybe even longer. You feel guilty about it. Know that I'm not sharing this to pile on, but rather to help you take one step closer.

Some of you read the Bible regularly, but if you're honest, you read it the way you do social media... scrolling and looking for what resonates with you and skipping over what doesn't.

Some of you are in a really difficult season right now, and you're not honestly sure if the Bible has anything to say about what you're going through. Your faith is there, but it's really being stretched.

And others of you have read the Bible for decades. You have verses memorized, and you know all the stories. The danger for you isn't neglect but rather familiarity. You know Scripture so well you've stopped letting it surprise you.

Wherever you are, remember, ***the Bible isn't just a book you read; it's a book that reads you.***

As I close, let me give you four practical steps in reading the Bible...

1. Come to it with submission, not just curiosity.

There's a difference between reading the Bible to evaluate it and reading the Bible to BE evaluated by it. ***It's all a matter of how you approach Scripture.*** What is your heart's posture when you're reading it?

Before you open your Bible and begin reading, try this simple prayer. ***"God, I'm not here to bring my opinions or agenda today. Show me what you want me to see."*** Then read and allow yourself to be challenged. You'll be surprised at what a difference it makes.

2. Let it speak before anyone else.

When something challenging happens in our lives, most of us respond by calling or texting someone. Maybe we Google it or see what ChatGPT has to say. We look

for input from every voice available. And we do this all before ever opening up God's Word.

What would it look like if the Bible were the first voice you went to? Not the only voice, but the first one. Let God's Word set the table before everyone else pulls up a seat.

3. Read it in community.

The Bible was not written to be read in isolation. In fact, for most of history, God's Word has been read and consumed in community, not in the privacy of our own homes. It wasn't until the 1600s (400 years ago) that the Bible was even readily affordable and available to the average person.

The Bible was written TO communities of faith... letters to churches, wisdom for congregations, poetry to be sung together in the temple. Only recently have we turned it into a private, individual exercise. Yet we wonder why it feels dry and disconnected when we read it.

- When you read together, you can wrestle with difficult passages and gain understanding through different perspectives.
- You're held accountable to actually do what you've read. Over time, you're not just informed by the Word; you're formed by it.
- ***Join a small group or Bible study.***

4. Don't wait until you understand it all to obey what you already know.

You don't have to resolve every theological issue before you can stand on what you already know is true. Yes, there can be some really confusing parts of the Bible. However, you already know enough to take the next step.

Let's go back to where we started today. Two builders face the same storm. The same wind, rain, and flood, but a different outcome for each of them. The difference wasn't talent, passion, or even sincerity. It was WHAT they built on.

Jesus said the one who listens to and follows his teachings is the one whose foundation will hold. ***This book is God-breathed, historically grounded, Spirit-carried, and inerrant as originally given.*** It is the foundation that withstands the storms of life. It held up through Roman persecution. It endured through the Reformation. It has sustained through every generation that has tried to silence it, water it down, or explain it away.

It will hold for you, but you must build on it, open it, and submit to it. ***Let it read you.***

// PRAY/BENEDICTION

¹⁶Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. ¹⁷And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. [Colossians 3:16-17]