

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Explore the Book - and Make it Yours!

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Introduction: Name that line...

See if you can name the source of the following quotes:

- “My Mama always said, ‘Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you’re gonna get.’”
- “I’ll be back.”
- “I’m gonna make him an offer he can’t refuse.”
- “Houston, we have a problem.”
- “Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works.”
- “With God as my witness, I’ll never be hungry again!”
- “Go ahead. Make my day.”
- “Toto, I’ve got a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”
- “Carpe diem. Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary.”
- “If you build it, he will come.”
- “Yo, Adrian.”
- “I want the truth.” “You can’t handle the truth!”
- “My precious.”¹

There is a currency every culture uses to buy and sell and trade. In America, that currency is dollars and cents.

There is also a currency every culture uses to communicate, and I’m thinking about the communication currency beyond the obvious language - English, Spanish, German, French.

¹ In order, Forrest Gump, The Terminator, The Godfather, Apollo 13, Wall Street, Gone with the Wind, Dirty Harry, The Wizard of Oz, Dead Poets Society, Field of dreams, Rocky, A Few Good Men, Lord of the Rings.

Increasingly, the currency of America’s communication is linked to movies, television, pop music, advertising, and sports.

A shared communication currency links people together as much as a monetary currency does. And I’d like to see a revolution take place where the currency of our communication as the people of God is, increasingly, the Bible.

My vision is that we would be so familiar with the Bible and its teachings, its characters, and its stories that we have a way of looking at the world that is distinctly BIBLICAL.

Now, I’ll take just a moment for a throat-clearing clarification.

I don’t want to see us get bizarre. I don’t envision us all speaking in Elizabethan (i.e. - King James) “Thee” and “Thou” style or quoting Bible verses non-stop.

But while I’m not looking for something that bizarre, I’m not looking for something less radical than that, either. I’m actually looking for something more radical, more substantial. And it is this substantial, revolutionary vision that I would like to talk with you about today.²

Our memory verses for the month of January have focused on the nature of the Bible.

The apostle Peter writes, ***[2 Peter 1:20] But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, [21] for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.***

Those words assure us that what we read in the Bible was not just made up by a bunch of guys who wrote whatever they wanted to write.

² “The Christian body in America is immersed in a crisis of biblical illiteracy,” warns researcher George Barna. “How else can you describe matters when most churchgoing adults reject the accuracy of the Bible, reject the existence of Satan, claim that Jesus sinned, see no need to evangelize, believe that good works are one of the keys to persuading God to forgive their sins, and describe their commitment to Christianity as moderate or even less firm?”

No, the product we are privileged to hold in our hands was written down by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit to write what they wrote.

There is another short two verse passage we're going to look at today. It highlights the centrality of the Bible to our faith as it points to the invaluable aid the Bible is to those who learn to "own" it.

If today you would say that you are not as familiar with the Bible as you wish you were, or that you have stagnated in your interaction with the Bible, or that you really want to "own" the Bible, I think you'll find our time together just the shot in the arm you need.

Near the end of his life, the apostle Paul wrote to a younger man, Timothy.³ This letter, which we call 2 Timothy, has been referred to as Paul's "Last Will and Testament."

In this letter, he talked about the things that were closest to his heart as he faced execution by the Roman government for his Christian witness.

Deep into this intensely personal letter, Paul made reference to the Bible. He assures Timothy and us, right off the bat, that we can trust that the Bible is true.

Why "own" the Book? (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

[2 Tim. 3:16] All Scripture is inspired by God...

When he spoke of Scripture, Paul would have had in mind what we call the Old Testament. He would also have been thinking about his own writings, plus the writings of the other apostles, all of which make up the New Testament.

In this one phrase he tells us what is most important about the Bible. It is inspired by God. Literally, it is "*God-breathed*."

I have read many "inspiring" literary works in my lifetime. We college English majors do love to read!

Since leaving school I've continued to be a reader and have read other inspiring works, both secular and Christian.

The Bible, like other books, is a wonderfully *inspiring* piece of literature. But that is not what Paul is saying here. He is saying that the Bible is *inspired*. And in that, the Bible is unique.

What Paul is claiming is that when the human authors (Moses, Job, King David, Solomon, Isaiah, Matthew, John, Peter and others) sat down to write, they wrote exactly what God wanted them to write.

That is what inspiration means. And we can say still more about inspiration.

By inspiration we don't mean that God dictated what the authors ended up writing.⁴ No. He used the different writing styles and the different personalities of the various authors. And as God breathed into their minds and spirits they wrote truth, His truth, and nothing but His truth.

Now, there are all kinds of reasons WHY we believe that the Bible is inspired. We don't just believe that the Bible is inspired because it claims to be, but it would be another sermon to delve into those reasons.

Let me just say that when the written works of forty plus authors - authors who lived on three different continents and spoke three different languages and came from very different walks of life and whose lives spanned over two thousand years - are compiled into one book, and that one book ends up having an internal consistency on subjects as diverse as God, mankind, Satan, Heaven, hell, sin, and salvation, then that book can justly lay claim to having had a divine Author working behind the human writers to produce an inspired result!

I conclude that the Bible is the written, authoritative, inspired and inerrant Word of God - and therefore **necessary** for the child of God who wants to lead a God-honoring life.

How is it necessary? Paul points out three major areas where the Bible is profitable. First, it is profitable for teaching, for instruction.

³ Paul actually was a mentor to Timothy who helped him mature in the Lord.

⁴ There are examples of actual dictation, as in the transmission of the Ten Commandments or in prophetic writings where we find, "***Thus saith the Lord...***"

Protection and Provision by “owning” the Book (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Profitable for Teaching

[2 Tim. 3:16] All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching...

What sorts of things does the Bible teach us?

History!

We discover so much of the story of early civilization from the pages of the Bible. The Bible gives us insight into the ancient Hittite and Chaldean kingdoms. Egypt is on the Bible’s radar, and so is ancient Ethiopia and Assyria.

The Bible teaches us about the passing of the torch of power from Assyria to Babylon to Media and Persia to Greece and then to Rome.

From the Gospels and Acts we learn about the Greek and Roman worlds of the first century as well as the political landscape of Palestine.

Secular archaeology has confirmed every statement made in the Bible about these great empires. In fact, the stories of the Bible often give a vivid and colorful view of what would have been a black and white understanding of the past.⁵

⁵ The teachings of the Bible have influenced western philosophy, morality, art, music, literature, and education beyond estimation. The teachings of the Bible are the foundation for western standards of law and politics. Philosophers like Rene Descartes to Immanuel Kant were guided by the Bible’s teachings. Even if their works were taken to unbiblical conclusions by future generations of philosophers, these fathers of western philosophy were guided by a generally biblical worldview. I graduated from college with a degree in English. One of my professors told our class, “If you want to understand great literature, read the Bible. Don’t believe it! But read it.” He went on to make the point that the writings of every great English author from Chaucer, to Shakespeare and beyond - up until the mid-twentieth century - was saturated with biblical imagery.

Very interesting factoids

And there is so much more we can learn from the Bible. Among the more interesting things we can learn are these, some of which I just learned this past week:

- Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree.
- Noah’s wife was Joan of Ark.
- God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Montezuma.
- Jacob, son of Isaac, stole his brother’s birthmark.
- Moses died before he ever reached Canada.
- The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.
- David was a Hebrew king who fought with the Finklesteins.
- Solomon, one of David’s sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.
- When Mary heard that she was the mother of Jesus, she sang the Magna Carta.
- Christians are to have only one spouse. This is called monotomy.
- The people who followed the Lord were called the 12 apostles. The epistles were the wives of the apostles.

(Sorry. I couldn’t resist.)

As fascinating as is the genuine history we learn from the Bible, though, the main thing that the Bible teaches us has to do with God and His ways.

The Bible teaches us the ways of God...

There are, of course, some things we would know about God without the Bible.

For instance, we would know that there is a Creator and Sustainer of everything there is. We would know about the power of God. We would know about His eternal nature.⁶

But, without the Bible we would never know about His justice and holiness. Without the Bible we would never know about His love, His compassion, His mercy and His grace.

⁶ See Romans 1:18-23.

Knowing the Bible acquaints us with God and His ways like nothing else will do. And knowing the Bible can come in really handy. It sure did for the apostle Philip one day.

Knowing the Bible came in real handy... (Acts 8)

Philip was given an assignment to travel south on the road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza. On this same road, ahead of Philip but traveling more slowly, was an Ethiopian, a court official of Candace, who was the queen of all the Ethiopians.

Philip ran up and joined the man on his chariot. He was reading from the scroll of Isaiah. The passage he was reading included these words:

***[Acts 8:32] "He was led as a sheep to slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He does not open His mouth.
[33] "In humiliation His judgment was taken away;
Who will relate His generation?
For His life is removed from the earth."***

Acts 8:35 says that Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture preached Jesus to the man.

Philip knew the passage in Isaiah that the Ethiopian was reading. He knew that it spoke of the Messiah. And so he was able to use it to proclaim the Gospel to a man who was seeking God.

Knowledge of the Bible came in handy for Philip. Knowledge of the Bible will come in handy for us, today, too.

Knowing the Bible STILL comes in real handy... (2010)

If you are knowledgeable about what the Bible teaches, you will not fall victim to people who tell you things about the Bible that are not true. Knowledge of the Bible brings discernment.

Knowing the Bible, you will not be susceptible to false claims made about it on late night TV shows, radio shows or the Internet, books, magazines, or pamphlets.

Knowledge of the Bible will enable you to talk helpfully with people who are confused, searching, or misguided in their own understanding of the Bible.

Scripture is profitable for teaching. In addition, Paul says that the Bible is also profitable ***"for reproof and for correction."***

Profitable for Reproof and Correction

[2 Tim. 3:16] All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for... reproof, for correction...

Two models of Christian maturity

The way we often look at a Christian's march toward maturity is as a steady progression. It is the image of growth, and this image is certainly championed in the Bible.

Like children who grow bigger and bigger as they age, we move progressively toward greater and greater levels of maturity, growing from strength to strength.

But there is another way to look at Christian maturation. It is another picture we find all over the Bible. It is a picture of change, making an about face, turning around, repenting.

If my ladder is leaning against the wrong wall, I won't eventually reach the right summit by climbing higher on that ladder. No. I've got to reverse course, climb down the wrong ladder, and then climb up the right ladder.⁷

It is this second model that is in view when Paul says that the Bible offers us help by way of ***"reproof and correction"*** - two much needed gifts when we have started climbing the wrong ladder.⁸

⁷ I am indebted to Todd Havekost for articulating these two different ways of looking at the Christian life and for emphasizing over the years how consistently God uses the second method to conform Christians to the image of Jesus.

⁸ The author of Hebrews adds to this understanding of the Bible as a corrector when he writes that ***"[4:12]...the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit,***

Reproof and correction needed! (Proverbs; Galatians 2)

Proverbs

This is tremendous value in reading the book of Proverbs. Anyone who reads Proverbs thoughtfully will find great gobs of very helpful **correction**.

In one chapter, Solomon will warn against sluggardliness. In the next, he'll warn against a lack of integrity.

At various points he points out the dangers of being disrespectful, unforgiving, mean-spirited, hard-hearted, prideful and selfish. He corrects us when we start to move in those directions.

Galatians 2

And there is a powerful example of **reproof** recorded in one of Paul's letters. He recounts a time when he called the apostle Peter and another early church leader, Barnabas, on the carpet for hypocrisy. He reproved them on the basis of their not being true about what the Bible teaches about the Gospel.

Nobody is exempt from being reproved. Not apostles. Not church leaders. Not me. Not you.

I have personally had reason recently to be grateful for the reproof and correction I find in the Bible.

Reproof and correction STILL needed! (2010)

Just this past week I was reading in the book of James and came across words I've read many times before: **[1:19] Let everyone be quick** (literally "immediate") **to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.**

THAT was a wake-up call in a way it had not been before.

The Bible reproved me for a tendency I have started to notice slowly creeping to the surface in my life, a tendency to be angry.

of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

James 1:19 was just what I needed to hear. And since early this week I've been on my guard against the temptation toward anger. I've been seeking to be tender, not hard, understanding and patient, not quick to fly off the handle. I'm so thankful for that reproof.

In addition to being profitable for instruction, reproof, and correction, Paul also says that the Bible is profitable for training in righteousness.

Profitable for Training in Righteousness

[2 Tim. 3:16] All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for... training in righteousness...

Training for anything

Anybody who wants to excel in anything knows how important it is to train.

- If you want to excel in sports, you work out and train your body.
- If you want to excel in academics, you study and train your mind.
- If you want to excel in the public arena, you train by learning history, oratory, the political process, the law and ethics.
- If you want to excel in business, you train by reading trade journals, learning the latest software, knowing the market, and learning about leadership.

If we will learn the Bible we will find training for the most important game in town. It promises to train us in righteousness.

The Bible trained in righteous living (see Ezra; Nehemiah)

The time of Ezra and Nehemiah was a time of rebuilding after a long time of tearing down. But the work of rebuilding was in jeopardy from enemies without (surrounding hostile nations) and enemies within (apathy, rebellion, syncretism).

In those desperate times, for what did the people of God hunger and thirst? What did they see as their primary need if they were to live well for God? Scripture!

Over and over again in these two books (some fifty times in fact!), the authors make reference to their need for the written Word of God. If they were going to become the people of God they had been called to become, they needed the commandments, the stories, the wisdom contained in Scripture.

And feeding on the words of the Bible, they re-created a culture that flowed straight out of the Bible onto the city streets of Jerusalem.

The people of that era understood that if you want to live well and wisely for God, knowing the Bible is critical. That is equally true for us, today.

The Bible trains us in righteous living (2010)

Learning the Bible enrolls you in God's school for practical righteousness. In the Bible you'll meet men and women who failed miserably and will learn from them what not to do. You'll encounter others who won victories by their faith. Their example will motivate you to imitate their faith and faithfulness.

You will get a work out for your spiritual life as you expose yourself to the entire word of God for training - Law, Gospels, prophecy, poetry, wisdom, and history.

Read it thoughtfully, never forgetting what kind of a book it is, the inspired Word of God. Read it reflectively, allowing it to penetrate.

Over time you will find happening what you've always longed for. Change in character, growth in effectiveness, skill in living. You will become an increasingly loving, powerful person who is being transformed by the truth found in the Bible.

So, here's the whole package.

When we "own" the Book (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

[2 Tim. 3:16] All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; [17] so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

And now, surprise, after all of this time of talking about the importance of knowing the Bible, I am going to issue a warning about two dangers that accompany knowledge of the Bible.

Warning #1 concerns a danger of falling into something terrible with increasing knowledge of the Bible.

Warning: Knowledge (alone) Puffs Up (1 Corinthians 8:1)

[1 Corinthians 8:1b] ...Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

The Bible contains truth that will set us free, that will usher us into the presence of God, that will lead to conviction of sin, and that will guide us to wisdom.

So, why am I recommending warning labels be attached to the Bibles we pick up at Family Christian Bookstores?

The danger of Bible knowledge is that any of us would be tricked into thinking that there is something beneficial, in and of itself, in knowing Bible factoids or in being able to have biblically literate conversations with others who are capable of having biblically literate conversations.

There is the thought in some circles that the more knowledge of the Bible you have, the more godly you will be. Not necessarily so.

If that was true, then Jesus' closest friends would have been the Pharisees (they weren't) and the most godly people in the world today would be seminary professors (they aren't).

The pursuit of biblical knowledge, separate from the passionate pursuit of a life-changing relationship with God, leads to cold, dead orthodoxy, an academic mindset removed from life, prideful arrogance, disdain for those without such knowledge, and a pharisaic love of trivia.

That is one danger that can arise from an increasing knowledge of the Bible.

But, when we approach it for what it really is - the inspired Word of God - well, then it is dangerous in a whole different way!

Warning: Life-Changing Power Ahead! (1 Thessalonians 1:13)

[1 Thessalonians 2:13] For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

The lives of people who “own” the Bible do not remain static. They change. They become the kinds of people Jesus saved them to be.

Yes, it is true that I’ve seen lots of people who know the Bible and who don’t live pedal to the metal for Jesus. But I don’t know if I’ve ever seen anyone live pedal to the metal for Jesus without a growing relationship to the Word of God.

There are wrong ways to go about approaching the Bible, sure. But there is no evidence that it is possible to mature as a Christian without being a person of the Book.

Knowledge of the Bible will give you an understanding of God and His ways, which will prompt worship. A growing relationship with Scripture puts you in line to be reproved and corrected when you get out of line.

The truths of the Bible will impact you, and that impact may take the form of conviction of sin, encouragement when discouragement has set in, a new insight into the character of Jesus or the work of the Holy Spirit, an increasingly passionate heart for people who have not come to know Christ by faith, or the acquisition of a new ministry tool to help others.

Someone will cut you, and you’ll bleed Bible. You’ll see the newspaper headlines from a different perspective. You’ll view movies and TV shows with new eyes. You’ll interact with your friends with Jesus’ love. You’ll deal with the IRS more honestly.

You’ll increasingly think of passages that apply to the situations you face and will gain that most elusive of prizes, a truly biblical worldview.

When you approach the Bible for what it really is - the living and active WORD of GOD - it will change your life.

Conclusion:

For all of these reasons, I am issuing a challenge here at the end of our time together today. I’ll close with two encouragements and one invitation as I urge you to make the Bible your own.

- Encouragement #1: Commit to daily exposure to Scripture

Today is a call to you to affirm the ages long value of daily exposure to Scripture. Gain daily exposure to the Bible, just like you take a daily shower - and for the same reason.

You take a shower, knowing full well that you’ll have to take one again ~~next month~~ ~~next week~~ tomorrow. But your daily showers brings cleansing and refreshment. Daily exposure to the Bible with a view to life change will do the same thing.

No matter what your level of biblical knowledge is today, give yourself six months, two years, five years of consistent exposure to the Bible, and not only will you “own” it, God’s Word will increasingly own you!

- Encouragement #2: Vary your Scripture “touches”

My second encouragement to you today will help you in carrying out the first encouragement. Variety, they say, is the spice of life and variety is the spice that keeps daily exposure to the Bible fresh!

Mix up the way you come to the Bible.

Alternate a month of intense study of a book with a month of fast reading through several books. Take a month to tear apart several key verses, or a series of challenging passages. Then take a month to look at a major Bible character like Abraham, Moses, David, Esther, Ruth, or Paul.

Take time some time to have a “closed Bible” study where you read a passage and then take a walk, doing nothing more than mulling the passage over and over in your mind.

Take time each month to memorize the Bible verses we recite each Sunday morning, and review that verse as you go through your daily routine.

It is my hope and prayer that each of us will increasingly recognize the wonderful gift God has given us in the Bible, and will joyfully run to it in some way every single day.

Finally, an invitation.

- Invitation: Explore the Book

There are numerous settings in which you can gain exposure to the Bible.

Some of them occur outside the walls of our church. These settings range from the official Bible Study Fellowship courses to online courses to correspondence courses to neighborhood studies to learning from solid teaching on the radio.

Any of these can be excellent ways to advance your knowledge of God's Word.

Our church also offers some great opportunities to grow as a person of the Book. There are Care Groups, Sunday School classes, and men's and women's Bible studies. Any of these would be fantastic venues for learning AND for enjoying community and I commend them to you.

And one more venue is starting soon.

Beginning Wednesday, February 3rd, I'm going to be setting up in Community Blend at 7pm for a time of teaching. It is going to be a weekly gathering and we're calling it "Explore the Book."

It is intended for anybody who wants to go deeper, learn, see how the Bible fits together, and own the Book. You are invited!

Through whatever means you decide to pursue, I am praying that we will become a church filled with Christians who learn the Bible, love the Bible, live the Bible and let the Bible loose in our lives!