

5.18.25 Why is it Beneficial to Read the Bible? 2 Timothy 3.16-17
Pastor Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

Do you own a Bible? If you don't, we're happy to give you one. I have a lot of Bibles. I have a Bible my church gave me when I was in elementary school. I have a King James Version of the Bible that was given to me as gift when I was in high school. Neither of those Bibles has any footnotes or introductions to each book or cross references or anything helpful like that and as a result they're not easy to read or follow and I hardly used either one. I have a Revised Standard Version that I first used for serious Bible reading and study at Colby College with Father Paul Cote, the Catholic chaplain on campus who lived in the dorm where I was the Head Resident. I have a New Revised Standard Version that I bought when I began theological school which is the Bible I've read and studied the most. I have a New Living Translation that Cathie Kroeger, a member of BBC who was an excellent scholar, gave me. I have a TNIV from Pastor David Midwood, a mentor of mine and the President of Vision New England who died in 2014. I have an old pocket sized Authorized Version that my mother's father, Rev. John Egner, read and marked up significantly in the 1930's and 40's. I have a New English Bible that my dad's father Rev. Victor Scalise read completely in the last two years of his life in the late 1970's. I have the Bible my mother received at camp when she was 15-years-old. I have a lot of Bibles.

For over 1,000 years, the Bible was only accessible in one language (Latin). Today through the help of organizations like Wycliffe Bible Translators, the entire Bible has been translated to date into 736 languages and the New Testament in over 1600! The truth is the Bible is more accessible now than at any moment in history, there are too many translations and versions to mention as well as Bible apps for your phone, audio Bibles; it could not be easier to read or listen to the Bible than it is today in the United States.

For most of Christian history this was not the case. It took time for there to be copies and translations of the Biblical texts which are written in Hebrew and Greek with a sprinkling of Aramaic. Copying was a slow, tedious, and labor intensive process. For most of the past 2,000 years when someone complained

“the copier’s down” that meant a monk had fallen asleep. So now the Bible is more accessible than ever, there are more Bibles in homes than ever before, the question remains, **is anybody reading it, much less trying to do what it says?** If every person in the United States picked up every Bible they owned and opened and closed them all at the same moment, it would likely create the largest dust storm in US history.

We’re going to think briefly this morning about **why we should read the Bible**. Listen to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, ***“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”***

I’m going to give the short and the slightly longer version of why you should read the Bible. Here’s the short version: **reading the Bible will change your life and help you become more like Jesus**. That’s it! If changing your life and being more like Jesus isn’t motivating for you, you likely won’t be motivated to read the Bible. That’s the short version. Here’s the longer version: if being more loving, kind, just, merciful, courageous, faithful, wise, good, and a better human being is appealing to you; then you have a lot of motivation to pick up the Bible and to read it deeply and well, understanding that **merely reading the Bible is never the goal or end in itself. The goal is spiritual transformation; to become a Christ-like woman or man who is a positive influence in the lives of others and in the world. The purpose of reading the Bible is to change our life** which is precisely why many people – even people who say they have a very high regard for the Bible - don’t read it; they don’t want to change, to be made uncomfortable, or to have their opinions, views, and perspectives challenged.

Let’s look at a few things 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us about the scriptures. First it says that scripture is **inspired by God**. The Bible is ***“a unique source of essential knowledge about the most important things in life.”*** As Dallas Willard put it in his final book, ***“Jesus’ words are the best information on***

subjects of greatest importance to human beings.”¹ The Bible is trustworthy to guide us in life. Psalm 19 that we heard earlier in the service describes a host of benefits that come to us from the Law of the Lord - reviving the soul; making wise the simple; rejoicing the heart; enlightening the eyes; more desirable than gold, sweeter than honey, and there’s great reward in keeping or following them.

Second, the scriptures are useful for teaching – The scriptures are a guide to find, follow, and stay on the path life. Psalm 16 says, “*You show me the path of life.*” Psalm 119, “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*” Jesus in John 14, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life...*” The Bible contains a great deal of wisdom teaching us about the path of life that is best for human beings to follow.

Third, the scriptures are useful for reproof – they tell us, “***you went off the path.***” In a sense they’re like a map, whether an old fashioned map, or any map app, or the voice in your car that tells you after you’ve taken a wrong turn, or headed in the wrong direction, “*Re-directing, recalculating.*” Reading the Bible can do that for us as well. The Bible warns us of behaviors to avoid like an uncontrolled temper, a gossiping tongue, a selfish spirit, or unfaithfulness, and describes the positive behaviors we’re to practice, such as love, kindness, patience, and generosity.

Fourth, the scriptures are useful for correction – they show us how to get back on the path. You may have heard the unfortunate story of 66-year-old hiker Gerry Largay, who vanished on July 22, 2013, when she stepped off the Appalachian Trail in Maine for a biological break and never found her way back to the trail. Sadly, it was revealed that she lived for almost four more weeks and was never found and never could get back on the trail. Her body was found only ten minutes from a dirt path that would have led her to a road and likely being discovered. We all get lost sometimes, we may get off or lose the path, when we do it’s critical to know **how to get back on the path of life**. Part of what contributed to her death is that her hiking partner left in New Hampshire due to a

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Allure of Gentleness*, Harper One 2015, p 19.

family emergency and Gerry made the fateful decision to journey on alone.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, states, *“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.”* If she’d had someone with her for mutual encouragement and correction all Gerry would have had to do was to call out to her partner and they would have easily reconnected and journeyed on safely together.

Fifth, the scriptures are useful for training in righteousness – they show us **here’s how we stay on the path of life**. Training is a key to success in many ventures in life – whether learning an instrument, preparing for a physical challenge like a triathlon or a long bike ride or for having a healthy, vital spiritual life. The scriptures provide us with training for reigning in God’s kingdom.

The purpose of reading inspired scripture for teaching, reproof, correction and training in right living is so that we may be proficient, equipped for every good work, which is what God created us to do. The opposite of being proficient and equipped is being incapable and unequipped which is something I’m familiar with in several areas of my life, how about you? For example, how many of you when you buy a vehicle take the time to sit down and read through the owner’s manual from beginning to end? Only a certain personality type does this. How many of you have bought a phone and thoroughly read any instructions related to it? How about when you’ve bought a computer? Does anyone notice a pattern here? Most of us, when we buy a car don’t read the manual and then we get frustrated because we don’t know how to change the time on the clock or adjust the bass on the radio. We’ll complain that we don’t know how to do something with our phone because we don’t take the time to thoroughly acquaint ourselves with what it can do. And let’s not even get started on how much we don’t know about the computers we use every day because we don’t take the time to become proficient and equipped to use them to their capacity.

The same is true when it comes to the Bible. Most of us simply don’t or haven’t taken the time to read it much less to invest the time to equip ourselves

to learn how to read it for all its worth. Reading the Bible enables us to be equipped for every good work – so we can, ***“lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory”*** (1 Thessalonians 2:12). That’s the verse we have printed on the inside of all our New Member Certificates because it reminds us what we are called to do, **to lead a life worthy of God**. If we’re going to try to do that, we probably should read the instructions.

I want to leave you with a couple of suggestions. If you’ve never read the Bible as an adult, please consider the fact that you’ve heard this message an invitation from God to start reading. Some of us are reading or listening to Nicky and Pippa Gumbel each day. On your own, you can read through the Gospels in 30 days by reading three chapters a day in Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. You can read them a whole lot faster if you choose to – you can read all of Mark in about 1.5 hours, John in about 2 hours, and Matthew and Luke in close to 2.5 hours so in the time it takes to watch a movie, you can read a Gospel. It’s always best to start with the Gospels and the life and teaching of Jesus. Remember **merely reading the Bible is never the goal or an end in itself. The goal is to do what it says; to become a Christ-like woman or man who is a positive influence in the lives of others and in the world. The purpose of reading the Bible is to encounter God and change our life; it’s spiritual transformation we’re after.**

The Book of Psalms, one of my favorite books in the Bible for all it teaches us about the importance of the scriptures as well as how to pray and worship, begins with these words about the value and benefit of making the scriptures central to our life. Psalm 1:1-3, *“Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; **but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.** They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.”*

At the end of my sermon which will be available as always on our church website and printed copies will be at the Info Center later this week, I’ve included seven books I recommend to help you get the most out of reading the Bible.

These are good books that will teach you a lot if you choose to read any of them. If we had enough people interested in taking on the challenge of reading and discussing one of those books in a larger group, I might even be persuaded to lead such a discussion this summer, but it would mean doing some serious reading and thinking and being open to learning and growing. Let me know.

Recently Jill and I walked from the Salt Pond Visitor Center in Eastham out to Coast Guard Beach, and we stood for a few minutes looking at the ocean. Living on Cape Cod we understand the vastness and staggering beauty and power of the ocean as well as the relentless force of the tides. We know the smallness we feel beside the ocean. Countless words have been written about the ocean. We could gather the most beautiful, vivid, accurate descriptions from fisherman, marine biologists and poets. We could read every word about the ocean to someone who's never seen it—and we'd never do it justice. There's no way to adequately describe the ocean in words. You must experience it.

I wish more Christians understood that the Bible, at its most inspired, **is a collection of words about the ocean. They are not the ocean itself. God is the ocean. We don't worship the Bible; we worship the God to whom the Bible points. We read the Bible to have an encounter with God.** *"Come to your chosen passage as to a place where you will have a holy meeting with God."* - Dallas Willard. The words in the Bible point to someone for whom words simply fail. The words are filled with good and lovely things that give us some frame of reference, but ultimately, God is too big to be contained in those words.

Hebrews 4:12 says, *"Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* The Bible is not God. The Bible is a library filled with inspired words about God and who God invites, calls and desires us to be. We can discover the character of God, and the message of Christ and the path we're to walk in its pages and we can become more like the God we worship and the Jesus we seek to follow if we read it and do what it says and allow ourselves to be transformed.

Blessing: Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 24:35, Matt. 7:24 -

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being *"I don't own a Bible and I've never read any of it,"* and 10 being, *"I own several Bibles, I've read the Bible completely, and I continue to read it regularly,"* how would you rate your familiarity with the Bible?
2. When you were first introduced to the Bible? Who shared it with you?
3. What does 2 Timothy 3:16-17 say about the scriptures? Take note of all that you can – there should be at least five things.
4. When we really want or desire something in life, we usually pursue it; whether that's eating when we're hungry or sleeping when we're tired. How can you increase your "hunger" for feeding on God's Word? How does coming *"to your chosen passage as to a place where you will have a holy meeting with God,"* motivate you to read your Bible?
5. When Jesus was tested in the wilderness, he relied on God's Word to sustain him. How can learning and taking scripture to heart equip us for facing life's toughest challenges?
6. In his book on the Bible, *Eat This Book*, Eugene Peterson says *"I want to pull the Scriptures back from the margins of the contemporary imagination where they have been so rudely elbowed by their glamorous competitors, and re-establish them at the center as the text for living the Christian life deeply and well."* How will you seek to make reading, learning, and following the scriptures a greater part of your life?

Recommended Reading to understand and get the most out of the Bible

Eat This Book by Eugene Peterson

How to Read the Bible for All it's Worth (Second Edition): A Guide to

Understanding the Bible by Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart

Living By The Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible by Howard G.

Hendricks and William D. Hendricks

Life With God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation by Richard Foster
with Kathryn A Helmers

Playing With Fire: How the Bible Ignites Change in Your Soul by Walt Russell

Personal Bible Study Methods: 12 Ways to Study the Bible on Your Own by Rick
Warren