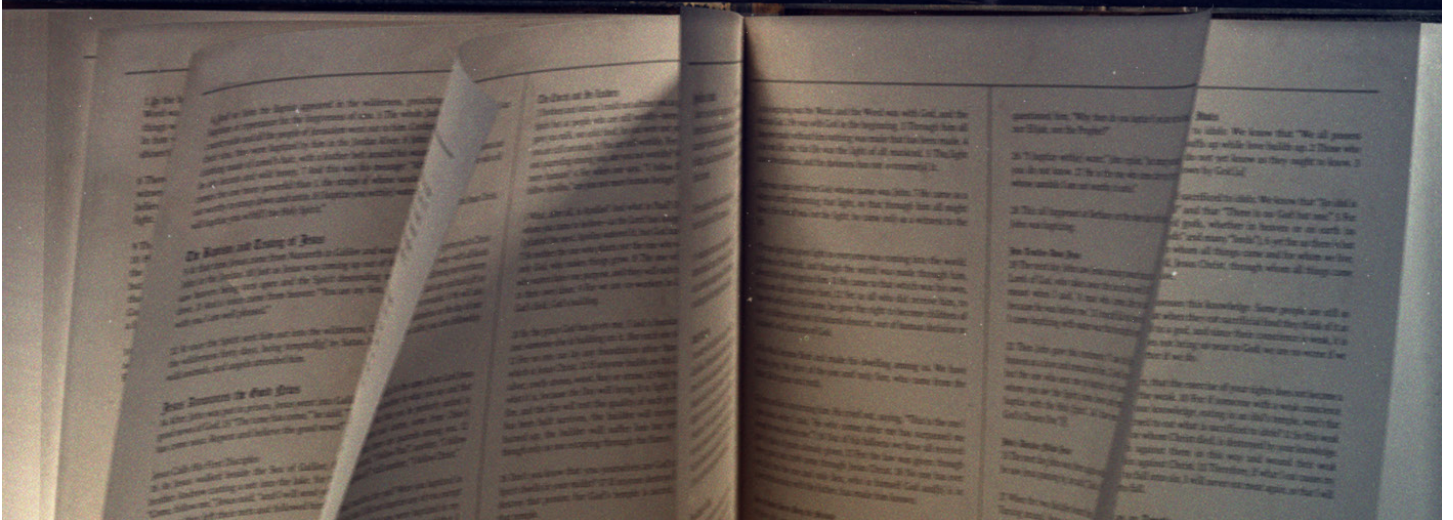


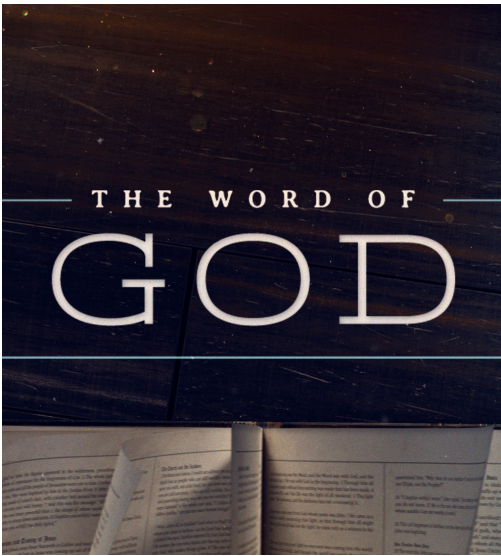
THE WORD OF
GOD



Sermon Growth Guide

November 10, 2024

The Word of God Written



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The Word of God - "The Word of God Written"

2 Timothy 3:10 - 4:4

Key Verse: 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. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Big Idea: The Bible is God's Word, authoritative to the same extent that God is authoritative.

Foundations

For nearly twenty years I've (Michael here, hi!) treasured an inscription a friend encouraged me to write in the front of my Bible, "God's perfectly sufficient wisdom unto salvation." The Bible is more than that, of course, but it's certainly nothing less than this, God's letter to you, to the whole wide world, that He loves you more than life itself, and He came to bring you home, only believe.

Kevin DeYoung writes, in his book *Taking God At His Word*, "God gave us the Bible because he loves us enough to tell us what he thinks and to tell us how to live." Pastor Tim preaches this week, "it is God's kindness that shows us the way to run this creation well, gives us instructions. But it is much more than that. An instruction book gives you the idea that if you do it right, everything will run right. Life isn't like that. What is written here is more than instructions, it is a love letter. Billy Graham would often say in his sermons, 'The Bible is God's love letter to us.' It is not always warm and sappy, but it is an invitation to be in relationship. The Bible is a place to meet with the God who loves you."

God's Word anchors us and shows us the way. And so, so much more! As we host conversation on Scripture this week, begin with checking in with one another and praying for your time together.

Understanding God's Word

Together, read 2 Timothy 3:10 - 4:4.

What stands out? How is Scripture described? What temptations are listed throughout today's passage? What happens to people who are not anchored in the Scriptures? What is Timothy charged to do in chapter 4 verse 5?

Applying God's Word

The Bible is God's Word, authoritative to the same extent that God is authoritative. How can your life be directed even more closely by the Scriptures? How might you effectively build into your da

Witnessing God's Word

Practice answering the following statement with those in your group that a friend or coworker or family member may approach you with: I don't understand why Christians put so much stock in the Bible? It's so old and outdated. (Can you help me understand?)

Sometimes you just need the instructions. I was in Indiana for a day last week and rented an electric car. I needed to get from Indianapolis to Taylor University and back, 180 miles roundtrip. I got in the car; it was 60% charged. I had 160 miles. Long story short, I'm desperately creeping from charging station to charging station approaching the end of my battery life trying to find enough power to get back to the airport on time. That's a good illustration for life. I'll save that for another sermon. But for this one, I finally find a charger and I take the power cord and start looking for where to plug this thing in. I walked around the car three times. I needed the instructions. No, I didn't open the glove box and look for the manual. I looked it up on YouTube. A secret compartment opened up behind the taillight when you held down a button on the dash. I never would have known.

What if the Creator of the Universe left a manual, an instruction book? Some say that's what we have here. The Bible. God's Instruction Book. People outside of the church truly can't imagine why anyone would put so much weight on an ancient book. Isn't it outdated? Isn't it just a pile of ancient wisdom for people who lived a long time ago? Why would you submit your life choices to such a text? We believe we have something more here. We make the claim that this book is actually, to quote the Westminster Confession, "the Word of God written...given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life." The Bible is sixty-six books written by forty different authors across three continents over a period of 2,000 years. It was written by scholars, shepherds, kings and commoners, people we know and people we don't know, mostly men but possibly some women (definitely in the case of a few passages, Miriam's Song, Mary's Song, etc). There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament written in Hebrew and twenty-seven New Testament in Greek, with a little Aramaic thrown in. And for all that diversity, it

speaks with one, univocal, consistent perspective. One voice. How did that happen? Christians believe we have something more here on these pages than ancient wisdom. We have the Word of God Written.

Is the Bible God's instruction book? Kind of. The Creator who made all of this is willing to tell us about it, to have some things put down on paper. Kevin DeYoung writes, in his book *Taking God At His Word*: "God gave us the Bible because he loves us enough to tell us what he thinks and to tell us how to live." It is God's kindness that shows us the way to run this creation well, gives us instructions. But it is much more than that. An instruction book gives you the idea that if you do it right, everything will run right. Life isn't like that. What is written here is more than instructions, it is a love letter. Billy Graham would often say in his sermons, "The Bible is God's love letter to us." It is not always warm and sappy, but it is an invitation to be in relationship. The Bible is a place to meet with the God who loves you.

What sort of relationship do we have with the truth in our world? Do you ever worry about that? Paul was worried about our relationship with truth in Timothy's church. As the pastor, that was something Timothy would need to watch out for. Paul told him, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:12-13) The truth draws fire. Believers in Jesus Christ should not expect to be commended for standing up for God's truth. The world is more accustomed to evildoers and impostors. Truth in this world is defined by the person with the biggest platform and the most power. It is just a cycle of deceiving and being deceived and often the best liars come out on top. It's a game, and it cycles down from bad to worse, until you literally can't believe the gall. Someone who just said something openly, on video, turns around and says

they never said it. From bad to worse, evildoers and imposters, deceiving and being deceived. I would be the worst political advisor. "The most important thing here is that you tell the truth." I better stick to preaching.

Paul was concerned that this same idea would infiltrate the church. It would seep in. "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." (2 Timothy 4:3) The best liar wins and the teacher most willing to scratch the itching ears will be the most popular. That's a problem. And what if that was all there is? What if all there was in the world was people claiming to know the truth, people setting the truth on the basis of being more powerful and having a bigger platform, and there was nothing else? Now you see how much we need the Word of God written. "But 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." (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

We have the Word of God Written, a totally different book from a totally different origin. Where does it come from? "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16) That phrase "God-breathed" is actually one word in Greek: theopneustos. God-breath. God-spoken. God-sourced. The Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, God speaking. God inspired the writing of all these words through all those authors. Peter wrote, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they

were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:20-21) These writings have their origin in God Himself. They are not human writings we find inspiring, they are the Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is how our church says it in our Essential Tenets: "We affirm that the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the virgin Mary also inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit testifies to the authority of God's Word and illumines our hearts and minds so that we might receive both the Scriptures and Christ Himself aright." When the church in history determined which books were part of the Bible and which were not, they were looking for and experiencing this different origin, this single voice, this inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Can we trust it? God's Word? When someone says something, they take in a breath and use their vocal chords to make sounds, words, that you hear because those words were carried through the air on their breath, on the soundwaves produced by the air pushed out of the lungs. Then how do you evaluate those words? You look at their source. Is this person a person of character and integrity? What authority do they have to speak to this particular issue? Are they trustworthy? Have I seen this person lie about this kind of thing in the past? Is this person in a position of authority, vested by others to speak on this topic? These questions all pass through our minds when we hear someone say something, don't they? What if it's God? God has the character; God has the authority; God has the position, the integrity, the trustworthiness. If God is God, then God has the right to say, even if it is something you find hard to hear. And the Word of God is not conveyed on air or breath, but on the conveyance of the Holy Spirit.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16) The Word of God is for teaching. We are instructed by the

Word of God. To open it is to learn something. It is good for rebuking. We don't like to be rebuked, but sometimes it is necessary. What's the difference between rebuke and correction? Correction walks along gently and redirects; rebukes stop you in your tracks. We need both. Do you accept both from the Word of God? And training. One of the things we need to grow in as a church is training. We are pretty good at educating. Training is when we activate, when we try it out, when we put these verses on like boots and walk around in them, and learn and grow along the way. We have this Word of God written. Take it up.

Where do I start? So many earnest efforts at picking up the Bible die on the vine of trying to read it straight through from Genesis to Revelation. Begin with Mark or John, one of the Gospels. Move on to the New Testament letters. Then go into Genesis and Isaiah and keep going from there. Or pick up a Bible reading plan. Which translation? There are so many good English translations now. Which one should I use? They are all good. The Lord can use any of them. But if you want some insight, there are differences. I grew up on the RSV Revised Standard Version which is now out of print; the New Revised Standard Version NRSV reads a little academic and cold. The King James Version in old English was a translation from St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate from the 4th century. It's a translation of a translation from unreliable sources, and the language is hard. One of our kids called it the Pirate version. The Message and the Passion are not translations as much as dynamic interpretations, they wander pretty far from the original text, but can be very moving to read. We use the NIV New International Version here at First Pres. That's what is in our pews. I leaned heavily for years on the ESV, English Standard Version, until a friend recently pointed out that the translation committee took a strong bent against the equality of women.

I think I can show you this quickly without boring you. Look at the difference between the NIV and ESV on this one verse when the curse is being delivered to Eve for her part in the fall: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Genesis 3:16 NIV) "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16 ESV) One points out that the relationship is strained by the fall, but it will get better. The other suggests that a woman will always be wrong and need constant correction from her husband. It may seem like a small difference, but these little things impact a translation. We are committed to the NIV here, even though at times it falls short. For example in Isaiah 52:7, out of desire to be inclusive of men and women they changed the pronoun from him to they: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news." (Isaiah 52:7 NIV) But that loses the foreshadowing of the coming of Christ. These are small things, folks. Honestly. But since you asked...or maybe you didn't...these are the kinds of things that differentiate translations.

The point is to get into the Word of God and take it as the Word of God written. How often? Every day. Like learning a foreign language or a musical instrument, getting into the Word every day keeps you in touch with the world of God's Kingdom. How deep? You will never plum the depths. Keep going in study and meditation as deep as you can go. Alone or with others? Yes. Have your time with the Word alone and study in groups. The written Word of God is a gift. It can change your life. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:17) The Word of God written is a gift. Not just as a special book of truth. It is a place to meet with God, to grow, to change, to be sustained—but mostly, to meet with Jesus. We will hear more about that in the next two weeks.