

Inspired: What is the Bible? Genesis to Revelation
2 Timothy 3:14-16
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I hope you all enjoyed the wintery weather as much as I enjoyed seeing it come your way. For the last two weeks, Minnesota too was in a deep freeze and my only consolation was seeing that well, at least Wabash is getting it, too. During the weeklong winter break, I wonder if some of you took time to reflect. We are, after all, in the New Year: 2014. What is 2014 going to be like? What goals? What hopes? What fears? What friendships will you reflect upon? What commitments will you chose to make?

While Amy and I were home, we had a chance to reconnect with an old friend, a woman from my church who in many ways was like a big sister to me. We sat down for coffee with her and her significant other, a man named Bob whom she recently began dating. What we learned about Bob was nothing short of astonishing. Bob is a recovering addict, though you would never suspect it given his very successful and well maintained appearance. At one point in the conversation the question was asked of him, "How were you able to pull yourself out of your addiction?" And like many 12 steppers, he acknowledged his captivity to drugs and alcohol, his inability to do it on his own, even the higher power. "But I grew up in Episcopal School, I knew the liturgy, I knew the tradition, I had been surrounded by it all my life. I knew about the Bible, what I didn't know was the author. I didn't know the story. I was unable to live fully because I didn't know my own story. And what I discovered in the Bible was that God, by speaking to these various authors who wrote this Bible, was telling my story."

It's all of our stories really, not just those of us who battle addiction. All of us fall captive to sin, our lives get seriously messed up, we find that we need something – or more importantly someone – to rescue us, and then in our moment of deepest need, someone comes to rescue us. The Bible is precisely this story.

But in addition to being a story, the Bible holds claim over our lives. The Bible has something it wants to instruct us by, so in that sense it has a certain authority over us. Now in the 21st century, we are a little leery of things claiming authority over us. But the Apostle Paul says in Romans 15:4 that **What was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.** All of us need endurance and hope in our lives to help us carry out God's plan, and Paul is saying here that the place where we find it is in the pages of the Bible. The Bible was written to offer hope.

There's an old adage seen on church signs that says a Bible that's worn out is an indicator that the owner has a life that is not.

When we read the Bible it refreshes, it encourages, it inspires, it forms us into the people God has created us to be. What I want to suggest this morning is that in the same way you can learn about something like sailing by reading about it in a book, the only way you

become a sailor is by getting in the boat. Reading the Bible puts us in the boat with Jesus and allows the wind of the Holy Spirit to blow into our sails, setting us on a course for life with him.

So over the course of the next fifteen weeks, we are going to study the Bible together. We're going to look at the different movements from Genesis to Revelation in an attempt to give you a better sense of how this book, the most popular and controversial of all time, fits together. We're going to look at the grand narrative because in it we find hope, and in it we can share in that hope.

So today we're going to begin by asking the question, what is the Bible? And to answer it, we're going to look to the book of 2 Timothy, chapter 2. So as you are able, I invite you now to stand with me, and let's read God's word together, beginning at verse 14.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The Apostle Paul is writing one of his final letters from a Roman jail. Second Timothy is known as one of his pastoral letters because Paul is writing to his young protégé Timothy. And what he wants to impress upon Timothy is how important it is for him to stay close to the Scriptures, to be guided and led and nurtured by these writings. And if we look more closely at verse 16, I think there are three very important factors that describe what the Bible is: the wind (the presence of the Holy Spirit), the teacher, and an equipper.

When we read the Bible, we are laying ourselves before the wind of God. In the ESV translation that I read from, it says that the Scriptures are God breathed. But how could this be since each of these 66 books was written by a human author? After all, these books were written over the course of 1500 years, in three different languages, over three continents.

Well, what Paul is communicating by saying that these books are God breathed is that there is a unity of Spirit that flows through these pages. God's Spirit or wind—the Hebrew word is *Ruach*—that blew over the formless void before creation, the same Spirit that conceived of every living thing before it ever came to be, is the same Wind that blew through the minds and hearts of those who wrote this, and it's the same Spirit that comes forth from it when you and I read this book.

What Paul is saying when he says that it is God breathed is that when we read the Bible, we are laying ourselves before the very wind of God that moved and created, and can create and move each of you. It's the power of the Scripture. Jesus himself says that **we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the Word of God.**

The Apostle Peter puts it a different way in 2 Peter 1 when he says that **no prophecy is ever produced by the will of man, but spoken from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit**

As a new dad, there is a tremendous amount of anxiety I find myself enduring these days. What is going to happen to my children? Will I be able to be the dad and provider they need me to be? And it is as if God sent the words of Psalm 46 over me like a gentle breeze, **“Be still and know that I am God.”** There is a God in this world, and thank goodness I don’t have to be it. God is God in my life, God is God in my children’s life, God is God in your life, and that God is sending his Spirit to give you peace and give you hope and give you the promise that the same God who walked in the cool of the evening through the garden with Adam and Eve, the same God who walked patiently through the wilderness with Moses, the same God who staggered his way up to Golgotha carrying the cross is the same God who walks with you now. And we meet him in the pages of the Bible.

The Bible is a book that puts us before the wild and unpredictable wind, that swirls and eddies, and where we don’t know what it looks like, but we do know where it comes from and where it’s going.

Secondly, I want to say that the Bible is a book that draws us close to our teacher or our captain. In verse 15, the Apostle Paul points out that the purpose of Scripture is an encounter with a person. **“You have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”** The person we encounter in Scripture is none other than Jesus Christ. The entire scope of Scripture all points to the person and work of this carpenter from Nazareth. Once we begin to see that everything in God’s Word gets interpreted through that lens, we then start to see the broad arc of salvation that was begun in Israel—as an example for all the world to see—but then is offered to you and me and every person that has ever lived through the life death and resurrection of Jesus the Savior.

The wind, Timothy, that has been blowing you throughout every moment of your life, the wind (Name) that has been blowing you throughout every moment of your life, has been blowing you into a relationship and a knowledge and a deep and abiding trust and experience of the Grace of Jesus Christ. He is the center, he is the captain, he is in the boat with you.

There’s a story told by a minister to college students at a Midwestern college about a young student from Iran who came to the United States, and when he got here he asked where he could find the Christian students. He wanted to know all he could about Jesus. And the staff was startled because this young man was Iranian, he was Muslim. Why did he want to know so much about Jesus? He said back in Iran, he was given a Bible by a missionary, and he was told that this book will save your life.

Not knowing what to make of it, he began to read the book, investigate what it was all about. One day, he got caught in a crossfire and had to escape on his motorcycle. When

he got home, he opened up his backpack and saw that he had been shot four times, but that all four bullets were lodged in the pages of the Bible. And those words came back to mind, “this book will save your life.”

In that case, literally it was the book that saved his life, but he knew there was more to it, that it wasn't the book but the person in the book. He wanted to know, who is this person?

The Apostle Paul is inviting us, no matter how scary and dangerous it might seem, into a trusting relationship with Jesus Christ. Where, ironically, the scarier things get, the more sure and lasting and strong he is. Last week, I had the chance to do something that my family has always cherished together: downhill skiing. And I remember when I was learning how to ski, my dad would tell me the key to downhill skiing is learning to lean on your edges. But that the only way you could find the stability of your edges was by throwing yourself down the hill faster and deeper. The same I think is true of the Bible, that the more you delve into this book, the more you will find the presence of the Spirit and the stability of the savior Jesus.

And lastly, when we read the Bible, it sets us on a course for adventure. There is a New Yorker cartoon that depicts a man standing at the counter in a bookstore and the clerk says “Bible, huh...that would be under self-help.” In their book *The Art of Reading Scripture*, Duke Professors Ellen Davis and Richard Hays note that “in our postmodern culture the Bible has no definite place and citizens in a therapeutic and pluralistic culture have trouble knowing what to make of it.” To which they say, “not surprisingly this approach doesn't not yield a very satisfactory reading of the Bible, for the Bible is not, in fact a self-help book, it is a God-help book. The Bible is about God's action to rescue a lost and broken world.”

I invite you in this New Year, if you haven't before, set out to read through the entire Scriptures this year. What you will find as the Wind of God blows through your reading is the adventurous Spirit of God taking risks with unlikely people, using and employing people who are as rough around the edges as we are for great kingdom purposes. What you will find in reading the pages of the Bible is a supremely loving God who no matter what your past, always has a future filled with hope waiting for you to grab hold of.

Amen.