

Series: Convictions That Define

Sermon #1: The Bible

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Kevin Maurice --- January 31, 2021

Good morning, church! I'm so excited to be here with you today because I have the privilege to teach on a conviction that defines who we are as the body of Christ. Go ahead and join me if you would; please open up your Bibles to 2 Timothy. We'll spend most of our time this morning in 2 Timothy chapter 3.

Now, for the past month, Pastor Matt has been leading us through this series called "Grace Forward" – and we've talked about growing in maturity in faith – becoming more like Christ in all of life, focusing on growth in body, soul and spirit. And we discussed our philosophy of ministry and the importance and critical value of having and being a part of a Christ-minded group. And Grace, I'm telling you – if you've been listening and watching and paying attention this past month, if we would embrace this, if we would get in shape as Matt has talked about in body, soul, and spirit, it will change our lives. It will change our lives, not just as individuals, but who we are as a church.

And last Sunday Matt mentioned that this year we're going to be taking a few intentional, specific weeks looking at the core, the very heart, of Grace and who we are, because there are convictions that guide us. For us as a church, as believers, there are the things that matters most, that are our foundation. And so today, I'm very excited, because we're going to look at one of these convictions.

A Conviction That Defines Us: The Bible

Let's journey together now to 2 Timothy chapter 3. Who is Grace Covenant Church? What is a conviction that defines us? Starting in verse 14 – **“Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know from those whom you learned it,¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you**

wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the person of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. – 2 Timothy 3:14-17

A conviction that defines Grace Covenant Church is the Word of God. It's the Bible. Here at Grace, we will preach the Word. We will teach the Scriptures. That's who we are. And this passage reveals so much to us about God's Word. And so, today, we're going to study three truths about the Bible--three truths about Scripture and our conviction about what this book is—three truths about God's Word.

Truth #1: the Bible is God-breathed

The first, it's clear from this passage, the Bible is God-breathed. The Scriptures are breathed out by God. Now, the original language of 2 Timothy, the language that this was first written in, was Greek. And the Greek word here says that all Scripture, every Scripture is *theopneustos*. *Theos* is the root word for God, and *pneuma* is the root word for breath. The author is clear in this description that the Bible is exhaled out by God; God-breathed.

The point is, this is not a human book. It was written by human beings, yes, as they were directed, as they were moved by God. Each book of the Bible reflects the human author's personality, their vocabulary, their cultural context, their upbringing and even their writing style. But the act of writing itself was stirred by God.

And you see this throughout the Scriptures: there are over 3,000 times that the Biblical authors use the phrase, “**The LORD says...**” / “**God says...**” / The prophet Jeremiah tells us about his own writing, that God says to him, “**I [God] have put my words in your mouth.**” – **Jeremiah 1:9**. The Bible is God-breathed. And this means that the Bible is unique. It's uniquely trustworthy and authoritative. Because God is trustworthy, His Word to us is trustworthy. Because God is authoritative, then His Word to us is as well.

The Bible is this library of sixty-six books. There's the Old Testament, originally written in Hebrew; there's the New Testament – written in Greek. There are historical books, biographies, there's poetry, there are songs, there are books written by poor farmers and fishermen, and there are books written by kings. But our first and essential truth of the Scriptures is that the entire thing, the entire book, the Bible is God-breathed. God used human authors to

write these books and He was so intimately involved in this process that they wrote exactly what He wanted.

One of the clearest expressions of this was written by one of the biblical authors and one of Jesus' disciples – a man named Peter. In the book of 2 Peter he tells us, “**Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by that prophet's own interpretation. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, although they were human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”**
– 2 Peter 1:20-21

Now, let's just pause there for a moment. And if you're a Christian, if you are a follower of Christ, you may have heard this passage before; you've likely heard this truth before. I think a lot of us get this. But if you're anything like me, I think it's easy to forget it. But this truth is so important. We cannot remind ourselves of this often enough, so please hear me, church: **When we read the Bible, God speaks**. The Bible, the Scriptures, are breathed out by God and when we thumb through the pages of the Bible, when we swipe through verses on our phones, when we hear the word of God being read, we are stepping into the His presence. **When we read the Bible, God speaks**--because the Scriptures are God-breathed.

Truth #2: The Bible Equips Us for Life

Let's return to 2 Timothy chapter 3 and learn our second truth about the Bible. Again, “**All Scripture is God-breathed ---- and profitable**”—or beneficial or useful—“**for teaching, for rebuking, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the person of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.** – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The Bible is beneficial for teaching, rebuking, correction, for training in righteousness. And those things work together so that the man of God, the woman of God, might be made more and more complete and equipped for the good work, for the life in Christ that God would have you live. That's our second truth this morning – **The Bible equips us for life**.

According to 2 Timothy chapter 3, there are four ways that Scripture does that. And they're all important, they're all crucial for our spiritual lives.

First, the Bible **teaches** – to know God well and to know certain things about Him. The Bible teaches us that. What we believe about God is the most important thing about any one of us. What you believe about His nature – what He is like, what does He want from us, and

whether or not He wants a relationship with us – that will affect every aspect of our lives. The Bible teaches us what we need to know.

It also **rebukes**. And I know, that sounds like a negative word, but we need it. We need that. The Bible rebukes false thinking. It reprimands our misunderstandings of God. It rebukes lies from ourselves, lies from the enemy, lies from the world. The Word of God rebukes falsehood.

And then it **corrects**. Correction is an improvement or a replacement of that false thinking. When we accept the Bible's teaching and its rebuke, we find correction. And this is so important. Because so many of us have been taught things about God through word or action from other people – and those things have absolutely nothing to do with who God truly is.

Because of some of our relationships or lack of a relationship with our earthly fathers, our view of our Heavenly Father is warped and distorted. Because of something a misguided camp counselor or youth pastor said to you decades ago, you're still wrestling with whether or not God could ever really love you and forgive you. And for some of us, our theology, our ecclesiology, what we believe about God and about His Church, it's been so culturally affected and it needs correction. God's Word offers that.

The Bible teaches, rebukes, corrects. And then the fourth thing – it **trains us in righteousness**. The Bible trains us in the right way to live. If you want to grow so that your life increasingly reflects the beauty and the glory of God, then you need the Bible. If you want to get in shape like Matt has been talking about – the Bible is the gym, it's the treadmill, it's the elliptical, it's the weight room.

The Bible equips us for life. And the purpose of God's Word in our lives is that we would be made more and more complete, enabled to do every good work, to live the life that God would have us live. In Scripture, God gives us everything that we need to do that.

You can briefly look with me at how the Bible does this, an example of how it equips us for life. And we can do that by observing Jesus' life. In the New Testament, Matthew chapter 4 and Luke chapter 4, we read about Jesus and He's in the wilderness and He is being tempted by Satan. Jesus is facing temptation – of His flesh, of His mind and of His convictions—who He is. It's this full-court press. And Satan offers Jesus three distinct temptations, all custom-made specifically for Jesus.

And what does Jesus do? Each time that He's tempted, He responds the exact same way: **"It is written..."** God says... / The Bible says... And then, Jesus quotes the Scriptures.

He reflects on and recites three passages from the book of Deuteronomy. He looks the devil straight in the eye and says, "You're wrong. Here's what the Bible says." And Satan leaves. Satan leaves! That is the power of Scripture, that's the power of the Bible in Jesus' life.

And, Grace, we have that power in our lives too! We have that power too. When we talk about growing and maturing in faith in Christ, becoming more and more like Christ in all of life-- the Bible is how we do that. Because if God is really God, and if this book, if the Bible really is His Word, then it has power and it has authority in our lives. It's why our statement of beliefs says that the Bible is our supreme and final authority in all matters about which they speak. Because there's power in this book.

Tim Keller says it this way – **"If Christ is really God, then all the conditions are gone. To know Jesus Christ is to say, 'Lord, anywhere your will touches my life, anywhere Your Word speaks, I will say, 'Lord, I will obey. There are no conditions anymore.'" If he's really God, he can't just be a supplement. We have to come to him and say, 'Okay, Lord, I'm willing to let you start a complete reordering of my life.'"**

In the youth ministry here at Grace, I tell our students, "Please, do not ever simply take my word, something that I say to you, as truth. Study the Bible for yourself." And I'll ask our students to raise their hands, and I'd like for all of you to do this with me, too. Please raise your hands. You at home as well, you can raise those up. And I'll ask our students, "Please, if you graduate from our youth ministry and you don't take anything else away, if you don't hear anything else that we teach you, please remember this: five words, the most important thing I could ever teach you: **WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?**" That's the question. It's five words. What does the Bible say? You want to know about who God is, about who you were made to be, about what the world is like, about how you're supposed to live, how you're supposed to spend your time, your money, how to treat your body, how to live in community? Do you want to know how to be saved? You go to the Book and you ask the question: **WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?**

Truth #3: The Bible Points Us to Christ

Because the Bible is God-breathed and it equips us for life. And then, our third truth about God's Word today is that **the Bible points us to Christ**. The Bible points us to Jesus. Back to 2 Timothy 3:15: "**...you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**" (2 Timothy 3:15) It's the holy Scriptures that are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

You see, The Bible fits together. The Holy Scriptures, the entire Bible, is a unified story that leads us to and points us to Christ. Last year, 2020, was the year of the Bible here at Grace. And we read through the Bible as a church, Genesis through Revelation. And we taught from "In the beginning" all the way to the very last page of the book. And the purpose of that year of the Bible was so that we would see this truth—that the Bible is one unified, collective story about the glory and the power and the redemptive work of Jesus.

In fact, from the earliest days of the Church, the Bible, the Scriptures are how the apostles, how the earliest pastors, how the first missionaries shared their faith and how they helped lead other people to faith in Christ. In Acts chapter 8, one of Jesus' disciples named Philip meets this man from Ethiopia who's reading this passage in Isaiah. And he says to him, "Hey, do you understand what you're reading?" And the guy's like, "No, I don't. I need somebody to explain this to me." And so, "**Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.**" (Acts 8:35) The man puts his faith in Christ, he gets baptized in a creek alongside the road.

The Apostle Paul, this prolific missionary--what was his method for sharing the gospel? How did he go and spread the good news to churches all around the ancient world? Acts chapter 17 tells us that "**Paul went into the synagogues, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. (Acts 17:2-3)**" How did Paul share the good news? He opened up his Bible and he taught the Word of God.

Another preacher, a guy named Apollos, was very popular. People really enjoyed his teaching. How did he preach? He went to God's Word. And he spent his time "**...proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.**" (Acts 18:28) The Bible points us to Jesus.

Because the Bible is the Word of God and it's intended to bring us closer to our Creator and deeper in faith in Christ.

And what that means is that ultimately, first and foremost, the Bible is not a parenting or a marriage book. It's not an advice column. It's not stories of business principles or tales to give us courage or hope. Now hear me out—the Bible can do all of those things—yes, absolutely. It can make you a better parent, businessperson, friend – yes. But of utmost importance, the Word of God points us to Jesus.

A pastor named John Piper says this about the Bible: **“In and through the Scriptures we see the glory of God. What the apostles of Jesus saw face-to-face they impart to us through their words.”**

When I was in college, I had the easiest and coolest job on campus. I worked at the rock-climbing gym which means I got to sit around and climb and study, and then occasionally keep people safe, and give people information, and that kind of thing. And every Wednesday around 7 pm, this guy named Kenny would come and climb. And Kenny and I became friends. Kenny was at UT getting his Masters in Biochemistry; his wife was getting her PhD in Latin. He was a really nice guy and he was incredibly intelligent.

So, every Wednesday for a couple hours we're hanging out. And one day, Kenny asked me, “What are you going to do when you graduate?” I told him that I wanted to go to seminary and eventually work in a church.

And as I say this, a frown crosses Kenny's face. And he said, “Man, if you're a Christian, you probably want me to become one too, huh?”

And I told him, “Yeah, I really would.” I'd actually been praying for this kind of conversation: *Man, God, if you could just open a door, that'd be really cool.*

And Kenny says – “Well, I'm a militant atheist. And what that means is as badly as you'd like for me to become a Christian, I would actually like for you to give up that belief.”

So, we talked for a while about our beliefs and eventually Kenny and I made a deal. I would listen to him explain why he was an atheist and I'd read any book that he wanted me to as long as he did the same for me. We shook hands on our little deal and said, “See you next week.” And throughout that week, I struggled with what I was going to give to Kenny. I thought about what books had really impacted my faith. I asked for recommendations from friends, I googled “What books to give to an atheist”. I started looking at my bookshelf. I thought maybe something

from C.S. Lewis, like *Mere Christianity*—that’s really good stuff. But not everybody enjoys C. S. Lewis’ writing and it’s kind of British. How about this book from John Piper that I really like? But it’s pretty dense and he’s pretty Calvinist. How about Tim Keller? I really enjoy reading Tim Keller. *The Reason for God* had just come out, and I was reading that with some friends.

And I’m struggling with what to do, and, finally, I asked a roommate, “Hey, what book should I give to this guy? What would help him to get to know God?”

And my roommate just looked at me said, “Why don’t you give him a Bible?”

And I thought, *Yeah*.

The next Wednesday, Kenny’s back in the gym and he’s actually got two books for me. He hands me copies of *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins and *Why I Am Not a Christian* by Bertrand Russell. And then he asks me what I wanted him to read. And I handed Kenny a Bible. And the joke’s on him, right? He gave me two books, I gave him sixty-six.

But I told Kenny, I’d read the two books that he brought for me. I just wanted for him to read the book of Mark and then choose any of the other three gospels. And over the course of that semester, the two of us spent every Wednesday climbing together and talking about Jesus, why I believed in Christ, why he didn’t. And y’all, it was hard. Those were extremely difficult, challenging conversations. And I had to remind myself over and over of the power of Scripture. Because the Bible has more power than anything that I could say or try to think of to convince Kenny to become a believer. All I could really do, like Apollos or Paul or Philip, was open the Scriptures and let them point to Jesus.

Because the Bible is God-breathed. It equips us for life. And it points us to Christ.

Application: Read the Bible

This is a conviction that defines us. So, let’s apply this to our lives. And the application of this is simple – **read the Bible**. Read the Bible for yourself. Please, do not let me, don’t let whoever is on this stage, don’tt just let the authors or pastors that you read or the podcasts that you listen to be the only people opening up God’s Word for you. Read the Bible. Study it. And I want to offer three ways in which we can do that.

1. Read the Bible in Humility

The first is to **read the Bible in humility**. Read the Bible in humility. Ask – *What does the Bible say?* Not -- *What do I want the Bible to say?* Let's study the Bible, understanding what we've talked about this morning, that it is God-breathed. Let's read the Bible, knowing that it equips us for life and so, humbly apply it to our own lives before we use it to speak into someone else's life. Let's study the Scriptures, not just as a window with which to look out at the world and judge the world, but as a mirror to remind ourselves of who we were, who we now are in Christ, and who we striving to be, growing to be more and more like him. Let's read the Bible in humility.

2. Read the Bible in Context

Secondly, let's **read the Bible in context**. Context simply means *What does the Bible mean?* --- not *What does it mean to me?* Another way of saying this is when we ask – *What does the Bible say?* – we approach the Bible and we say, *What is God saying here?*

And we do that by seeking to understand the author's intent for the audience, who they were writing to. So, when you read an Old Testament prophet, who was he speaking to, what was the message, and why? When you read a New Testament letter, who's writing it? To whom are they speaking or writing? What's going on in that church or that city?

When you study a passage, read to see what's going on before and after those verses. How does that reading fit into the context of the rest of the chapter, the rest of the book, and the rest of the Bible? Reading in context means considering history, grammar, genre, and even harmony with the other Scriptures. Humility and context is so important when we approach God's Word.

For some time, early in my relationship with God, I used the Bible for what I wanted it to say. I played a kind of Bible roulette where I would open up the Scriptures at random and put my finger down and expect God to have a message just for me from whatever I was pointing at. And so, I would find a verse here or choose a verse there that served me. It was inspirational. I treated the book like a fortune cookie that I could just open up and find something and tack it up on a wall or scribble down somewhere for me.

Years ago, I interned for a youth ministry and I was given the task of designing a t-shirt for the summer mission trip. I wanted to include a Bible verse on the back of the shirt and I wanted

to make sure that it looked cool and it was catchy and original—because that’s the most important thing. And so, I did this Bible roulette thing. I opened it up and I stumbled across this verse and I was so excited – “**Look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed for I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.**” – **Habakkuk 1:5**

Wow. I thought, “That’s great. What a cool verse, this is going to be awesome. It’s going to be the most popular shirt. All the kids are going to love it.” And so, we had them made. But you see, I hadn’t bothered to read the rest of the book of Habakkuk. I hadn’t even read the rest of chapter 1. Because if I had, I would have learned something really important about this passage. Because this verse isn’t some inspirational footnote about what God’s going to do on a summer mission trip.

If I’d read the Bible in context, if I’d just read chapter 1, I would’ve seen that the prophet Habakkuk was telling God’s people that they were about to be conquered, their homes were about to be burned to the ground, their cities are about to be destroyed, and they themselves are about to be enslaved by the Babylonians because the people of God had perverted justice. They had abandoned the law and turned away from God. That is a much less inspirational t-shirt.

I’m wearing this shirt, and someone in our church finally enlightened me regarding my mistake. And I just remember thinking that if I had missed this, had I been missing the message? For so long, what else had I been missing? I was treating the Bible as a justification for me. These words were for me, they were about me, to make me feel good. I hadn’t been reading the true intent of the God’s Word. Because it’s the story of God and His people. And so, God is the central figure, not me.

And so, I began to read the Bible differently--learning to read in context. And once you become comfortable reading and living in the world of Scripture, this book and these stories that may at first seem foreign or strange, they become profound insights into everyday life and what it means to follow Jesus. But we don’t pick and choose what matters; we read the Bible for what it says.

3. Read the Bible in Community

We read in humility and in context. And it’s so important to also **read the Bible in community**. You want to know one of the best ways to learn to read the Bible in context? You

read it with other mature Christians. If you want to read it humbly, you find a group of people who are focused on Christ and who love Him and who care about you, and you read God's Word together. Matt has talked about this for four weeks – get in a group. And listen, that group is a great place to read the Bible. You don't know what else to talk about, you don't have anything else in common? Talk about God's Word together! Remember, the purpose of being in a group is not just to have buddies to go through life with or people to talk parenting with. The purpose of a group and a community in a church is so that we would become more like Jesus every single day, at work, at home, in our marriages, in our kids' lives, with our friends, with our neighbors. Let's read the Bible together in community.

In the Book of Acts, there was this group of people and they're called the Berean Jews. And we're told about this community apart because they did something to set them apart. They did something very special. When they heard about Jesus, when they were first taught the gospel, they came together and they did this: **“The Berean Jews were of more noble character...for they received the message with great eagerness—they received the gospel with great eagerness-- and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” – Acts 17:11**

What would Grace Covenant Church be like if everyone, everyone here, everyone at home, what if every day between Sundays we were entrenched in the Word of God? What would this community be like if we did this – if we spent time alone with God, in His Word, each day, and then we came together on Sunday mornings or in our communities or our men's or women's groups or in our life groups. Wouldn't that affect us? Wouldn't that shape us and change who we are--together?

This is a conviction that we are built upon – the Word of God. And so, church, let's read the Bible--in humility, in context and in community.

And we've got a great opportunity to do this together, starting next week. Next Sunday, and for seven weeks, we're going to be studying the book of Ecclesiastes together as a church.

So, during the next seven weeks—you can start today--let's read the book of Ecclesiastes together. Read it for yourself. Especially if you've never read it before – this is a great time to read the Bible as we study it together on Sunday mornings. If you've read it before, maybe read a new translation. Try reading it out loud or listening to it. You can join me--I'm going to try

journaling. I'm going to try to write out the entire book of Ecclesiastes as I'm reading through it and as Matt teaches us through it.

Let's do this together. Grace, let's spend the next seven weeks together reading God's Word as a church. Would you join us? I'm excited. I really am. The Word of God—it's God-breathed, it equips us for life, and it points us to Christ. So, let's read it together.

Would you pray with me?

God, thank You for who You are. Father, we come before You humbly. God, we thank You for who You are and the gift of Your Son. God, thank You for loving us. God, thank you for giving us Your Word so that we would know You, that we could know You better, so that we could know You well. God, I pray that as we as individuals and as a church approach Your Word, we would learn more and more about who You are and who You created us to be. God, I pray that Your words would convict us; that they would draw us closer to You. And God, I pray for us as we enter the season of studying the Book of Ecclesiastes together. I pray that You would reveal to us truth for us as individuals and as a church. Father, we love You and we praise You. In Your name we pray. Amen.