

What every Christian needs to grow: How to get more from your Bible

Message for Sunday, April 3, 2016
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21, 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and others

Children's Message: There is a group of people who have a contest every year to see who can come up with the best lie (BurlingtonLiarsClub.com). People from all around the world send in their ideas. I like the winning lie from a few years ago: "My grandson is the most persuasive liar I have ever met. By the time he was 2 years old he could dirty his diaper and make his mother believe someone else had done it."

Now these lies are all in fun. Most of the time people tell lies, however, it's because they're afraid of the truth.

The Bible isn't like that.

2 Timothy 3:16, New Living Translation:
All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right.

The Bible is God's message to us, showing us how to live. It is the truth. There are a lot of things that tempt us and tell us to do things that are wrong. But if we follow God's Word, the truth, we will do the right thing.

Message "What every Christian needs to grow:
How to get more from your Bible"

The Bible is the best-selling book in the world. It has been every year, ever since the printing press was invented. That makes 30,000 weeks on the Best Seller list! The Bible Society estimates that 100 million Bibles are sold *every year*.

There are a lot of Bibles out there. Probably most of you have a Bible in your home. But all this doesn't mean the Bible is widely *read*. Let's do a little survey. How many people here spent 30 minutes or more this past week, reading the Bible? *Ask people to hold up their hands. Probably not more than a handful.* How many people here spent 30 minutes or

more this past week watching TV? Or on the internet? *Probably almost everyone.*

Now my goal today is to not put you on a guilt trip about this. I find it's much more effective to encourage people than to scold them.

Note: I usually put some "Next Steps" at the end of my message, some suggestions for how you can put into practice the principles we learn. For today, all the rest of this message is that!

1) I must first accept its authority

The Bible was a collection of 66 books and letters written over a period of 1500 years or so, by at least 40 different authors, including kings, scholars, philosophers, fishers, poets, historians and doctors, and yet it told one continuous, harmonious story from beginning to end.

How was this possible? While there were many people who wrote the books of the Bible, the writers themselves insisted there was only one real Author. Hundreds of times the Bible-writers claimed to be writing God's message to human beings. Here are a couple of examples:

Isaiah 51:15, 16, New Living Translation:
"For I am the Lord your God... And I have put my words in your mouth."

Jeremiah 1:4, 9, New Living Translation:
"The word of the Lord came to me... Then the Lord touched my mouth and said, 'See, I have put my words in your mouth!'"

The Bible writers believed that the inspiration came from God and that they were supernaturally guided so that they wrote the message that God wanted them to communicate. Yet they weren't robots or hypnotized zombies writing in some kind of trance. They didn't lose any of their own human personality in the process. The gospel of John, for instance, is very thoughtful, covering only a few events from the life of Jesus, but going into those events in great depth. The gospel of Mark, on the other hand, is like a TV show, with 30 seconds given to one miracle or teaching before racing on to the next scene.

Yet God was guiding the whole process:

2 Peter 1:20-21, New Living Translation:
No prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophets themselves or because they wanted to prophesy. It was the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak from God.

Do you accept this? Your answer to this will make all the difference in how much you're going to get out of the Bible.

This verse is a good summary of the result.

1 Thessalonians 2:13, New Revised Standard Version:
We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

When a ship is at sea, the captain has to have a standard to go by. All of us have a standard which we use to guide our lives, whether we realize it or not. We may not even be aware of it. But it is the authority that we base our decisions upon.

For the Christian, there is no better authority than the Bible, God's message to us. There are other authorities that people trust to guide their lives, instead of the Bible. Here are four of them.

a) Culture

Culture is an unreliable authority. Have you ever heard this phrase, "But everybody's doing it." That's what I call Facebook morality. Go out and take a poll and if most people are doing it then it must be OK. Does that make it right? No. God says to us in the Bible:

Exodus 23:2, New International Version:
Don't follow the crowd in doing wrong.

b) Tradition

"But we've always done it that way!" That's an unreliable authority. I heard the story of a woman who every Thanksgiving cut off two inches of both ends of the Thanksgiving turkey when she cooked it. Her husband finally asked her, "Why?" She said, "Mom always did it." A year later they were at her mother's and said, "Why do you cut the ends of the turkey?" She said, "My pan was too small to hold a whole turkey."

Tradition is fine, as long as it doesn't become the authority that governs your life—or your church(!).

Mark 7:8, New Century Version:
Jesus said, "You have stopped following the commands of God, and you follow only human teachings."

c) Reason

"Use common sense" is an old proverb. But if people took common sense as their authority, we would have to throw out almost all of Jesus' teachings about how to treat other people. All that nonsense about forgiving people and loving your enemies! Common sense tells you that's just rubbish.

Again, there's nothing wrong with using your brains, as long as you don't make that your ultimate authority.

Proverbs 16:25, New Century Version:
Some people think they are doing right, but in the end it leads to death.

But more than all those others, the most trusted authority today is...

d) Personal feelings

When it comes to choosing between apple pie or chocolate cake, or whether to go out with this person or that person, then personal feelings are important. When we use it as the ultimate authority for making decisions, though, disaster follows.

This is what was happening in Israel when there was no leader to guide the nation.

Judges 21:25, Today's English Version:
There was no king in Israel at that time. Everyone did whatever they pleased.

Read the book of Judges; the result was disaster.

There's only one completely reliable authority for life and that's God's word.

2 Timothy 3:16, New Living Translation:
All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right.

Make a commitment: “I accept God’s word as the final authority.”

2) I must commit to a regular program of Bible intake

Not just Sunday mornings. Begin to read it, study it, search it, think about it, apply it to your life situation, and live it.

Not because you feel guilty for not doing it. Not to please me or to try to win points with God. But do it because you have a priority in your life, and getting to know God is at the top of the list.

It’s not about reading as much as you can. Some days you may read just a single verse, and it makes you stop and ponder and pray.

3) I must put it into practice

In April of 1986, some Soviet engineers were conducting “unauthorized experiments” with a nuclear reactor. To put it more bluntly, they were fooling around with the machine, trying to see how long they could keep a turbine spinning after they took the power off it.

This was a very dangerous thing to do, because this kind of reactor becomes very unstable when the power goes below a certain level. In order to make their trick work, they had to manually override *six* separate alarm systems. One by one the computers halted what they were doing and set off a loud alarm. And instead of obeying the rules, one by one they turned off the alarms and kept going. The result: reactor number 4 at Chernobyl blew up, throwing eight tons of radioactive material into the sky. The land for hundreds of square kilometres downwind became poisonous. Still today, thirty years later, people who continue to live in that region have far higher rates of cancer than anywhere else in the world.

Those engineers knew the right procedure; they just didn’t follow it. In the same way, it’s not enough that we just learn the Bible. We need to follow it.

James 1:22, Today’s English Version:
Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice.

Matthew 7:24, New Living Translation:

Jesus said, “Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock.”

Dwight Moody once said “The Bible wasn’t give to increase our knowledge. The Bible was given to change our lives.”

I want to challenge you to make these commitments. This series is all about helping us grow closer to God, deeper in our faith. This is one step along that road.