

## FIRM FOUNDATION

January 26, 2020 | Dr. Scott Dudley | Romans 12:1-2, 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5

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Holy Spirit, please do what I cannot do. Lord, I ask that you would use my words to help us get closer to you and be more like you. In Jesus' name. Amen

Well, hello to those of you at the 11:00 service middle schoolers, high schoolers. Also, we've got a lot of middle schoolers and high schoolers away on camp. Great to have all of you, as well as all of you here.

As some of you know, there's a young guy on our staff named Anthony, super talented guy. He helps me buy all my suits. I've told him, I've actually told him he should start a business and charge people to do this, because he's really good at it. You guys don't get to see it because I take the tie and jacket off for these services, but over there I look good. I look so good. It is amazing how ... It would blind you.

Well, on Christmas Eve, during the first service on Christmas Eve, my tie was crooked, so several people went up, not to me. They went to Anthony and they said, "Dudley's tie is crooked. You've got to help him." So he told me about it and I retied the tie, but it still wasn't right. So then he tried to help me, but that's hard to do when it's on someone else. So I took the tie off and gave it to him, he put it around his own neck and tied it, and then gave it back to me to put on. Like what, am I five? I'm like, "I've been tying ties my whole life," but that night I needed a lot of help.

Anthony is my authority on all things fashion. Who or what is your authority on all things life? Because we all like to think, "I'm making my own decisions. I'm my own person, I'm my own man. I'm my own woman." That's not true. We're not making our own decisions. All of us have authorities in our life. All of us are taking our cues on what to think, do, say from someone or something. It's TikTok, or Instagram, or friends, or your boss, or Fox News, or MSNBC, or music, or movies, or all of the above, or is it the Bible, which is God's perspective on everything?

Jesus promises to give us an abundant life filled with courage, and hope, and joy, and a bigger life to lead if we are all in following him and not halfhearted about it. Part of being all in with Jesus

is you make him your authority and let him tell you what to think, do, and say. The primary way he talks to us is through the Bible.

Now, right now, some of you are probably going, "Oh man, the Bible, ugh. I've tried to read it. It doesn't do anything for me. My mind wanders," and I get that. I get that. I mean, the Bible not only seems boring, parts of it are really boring, right? Like the whole last half of the book of Exodus describes the tabernacle in excruciating detail, right down to how many loops to put on the curtains. I mean, oh my goodness, right? Even Moses, who wrote it, must've fallen asleep writing it, like, "Whoa, Whoa. How many loops?" Right? Then there's all the weird words, right? Like Hittites, Jebusites, parasites, termites. What am I going to do with that?

Those things exist, but actually most of the Bible, the majority of the Bible is actually pretty interesting. Like one of my favorite stories about King Eglen, who was so fat that when he was stabbed with a sword, the Bible says quote, "Even the handle sank in after the blade and the fat closed in over it." The word of the Lord, thanks be to God. That's good stuff. You know why that's in there? Every nine year old loves that story, man.

More importantly though, the Bible will change your life. It has changed mine. It is the best thing I've ever read, and I have read thousands of things. It'll change your life. I know it raises a lot of questions like, how do we know it's historically accurate, and what's the right interpretation? How do we figure that out? Great questions, and we're going to talk about that on Wednesday night at The Rest of the Story, so come for that with your questions, your comments, your push backs, your yeah buts. But for today, kind of the main point is in order to have the bigger life Jesus promises, we need the Bible, because scripture is the pipeline through which God's new life flows.

The verse we read today says, "All scripture is God breathed," and what that means is that the Bible is not God, but God talks to us through the Bible and tells us kind of his perspective on everything. If we listened to that and if we follow that, it'll change our lives in a couple of ways.

First, if you take scripture seriously, it'll make you counter-culture. The passage we read today says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." In the English translation, both words have the word form in it. In the original Greek, it literally reads, "Do not conform to the spirit of the age." That is don't conform to the culture around you.

Because see, every day our culture is forming us. Friends, media, family, forming us into the culture. But Jesus was radically counter-culture, and all-in followers of Jesus will also be radically counterculture, conform their lives to what he says in scripture rather than to the culture.

Here's where the thing that people don't like about the Bible is actually its greatest strength. Namely, it doesn't always agree with our culture, right? I mean sometimes it does, but it doesn't always agree with our culture, and we don't like that, but that's its greatest power. It doesn't always agree with our culture, and that means it can critique our culture's values, and priorities, and worldviews, and politics, and all the rest, precisely because it does not conform to our culture.

There's a reason it is the most banned book in history, because it is counter to every culture. It's part of why Christianity grew so quickly in the Roman Empire, because the early Christians were just different, right? The early Christians were more generous in a culture that said you've got to keep everything for yourself. They were more courageous in a culture that said this life is all there is, so you'd better safeguard it. They cared for the poor in a culture that could care less for the poor. It was counterculture, and people were attracted to that, and they did those things because God said to do them in scripture.

A while back, I was talking with a guy in his 20s who's not a Christian, but he is kind of attracted to Christianity because primarily he said he likes the ethic in the Bible that says keep sex only inside of marriage. He's not a Christian. I said, "Well, why do you like that?" Right? He's a young guy. "Why do you like that?" He said, "Well, I don't know. Seems to me that you can't be that intimate and not be bonded to someone very closely. But if that person hasn't promised to never leave you, which is what marriage is, then they might leave and you get hurt, or you know that they might leave and so you hold back some of your heart to protect yourself, and sex becomes less cool because you're not bringing all of yourself to it." I was like, "Would you like to preach at my church?"

Now, we all mess up in all kinds of ways, including sexual, and there's grace, and there's forgiveness, and there's renewal and all of that. But I was just struck by here's this non-Christian attracted to Christianity by something that our culture says is useless, but he, non-Christian, sees life in what the Bible is saying. The old book has more wisdom in it than our culture gives it credit for sometimes. It brings life.

Which brings me to the second thing that the Bible will do. It'll irritate you to transform you. See, Jesus never irritates consumer Christians. Jesus never bothers consumer Christians, because they just assume that Jesus thinks exactly like they do, likes all the same people they like, hate all the same people they hate, and votes the way they do on every single political issue, so Jesus never irritates those people.

But the passage we read today says, "The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." Isn't that a great phrase? Itching ears want to hear. The strength of the Bible is sometimes it tells us exactly what we do not want to hear, but maybe need to hear.

The passage says, "All scripture is useful for rebuking," that is exposing our sin before it wrecks us and other people, "And correcting," changing our behaviors and our attitudes so that we can grow. The thing about that is it doesn't always feel good, does it? Right? That doesn't always feel good, but we need it.

Consumer Christianity is all about keeping middle-class Christians comfortable and happy, and that

means never confront anyone on anything because that might be an uncomfortable thing. But all-in Christians let Jesus irritate them, right? They let Jesus bug them through what he says in scripture so that they can have the bigger life that he promises.

If a coach never critiqued an athlete's performance, that athlete would never grow, right? If Jesus never offends you, you have an idol. You're assuming he approves of everything you think, do, or say. Which is why I hope when you come to this church, you don't always hear what you want to hear. I hope we irritate you sometimes. Some of you right now are like, "Mission accomplished, Pastor." Because we need to hear what we don't want to hear.

When was the last time you changed something that you thought, or did, or a political opinion based on something God said in the Bible? Let Jesus offend you. When you hear something in the Bible or in a sermon that you don't like, wrestle with it. Pray about it. Ask God to show you whether or not it's true. Ask Christians who disagree with you, why and how they got to where they got from scripture, and ask them to explain it to you. Don't just bat it away. When you hear something you don't want to hear, right, like, "Well, you know there's a lot of different ways you can interpret that." You know why that's almost always a lazy cop-out? Because unless you can say precisely how and why something else can be interpreted a different way, you're admitting that you actually don't know that there's a different way to interpret it. You just didn't like what you heard, and you don't want to deal with it, and you don't want to do it, so you're just kind of trying to brush it off. At least be honest with that.

Now, for sure, are there parts of the Bible that are tricky to interpret? Absolutely. There are passages that are hard to interpret, tricky to interpret, yes, yes, yes, but most of the Bible is actually pretty straightforward. Let's just start there. That can keep us busy for a lifetime.

Years ago, I got some emails from a person who was concerned that I never talked about racial reconciliation in my preaching, and we had some good dialogue back and forth. But it kind of just ended with us agreeing to disagree on that topic. Well, years later this thing started happening that when I read the Bible, I just kept noticing over and over and over how often racial reconciliation came up in both the Old Testament and the New Testament both. Not dozens of times, hundreds of times. I just felt the Holy Spirit in that period going, "Scott, you've missed something really big. Like this is a major theme and you've missed it." Just kind of nudging me and bugging me.

Then I looked at how everyone in our culture is angry about this issue, and yelling at each other, and blaming, and shaming, and not listening to each other's experiences, and I thought, "Oh, surely the people of God can do better than this." That was not necessarily a comfortable experience for me, because I'm like, "Now I've got to do something with it," right?

I know for some of you, it bothers you when we talk about racial reconciliation because it seems political, and I get that, but I really could care less. The politics is the problem of this thing. God's people should be the solution to this thing, and if we do it biblically, it is not going to look liberal

and it's not going to look conservative. It's just going to look completely different, completely counter-culture. It's going to look like Jesus. Scripture corrected me.

The Bible will make you counter-culture, irritated, and then finally it'll make you brave because it will remind you who you are in Christ. In the passage we read today, the apostle Paul is talking to a younger man named Timothy and he says this, "You know my persecutions, sufferings, yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But as for you, continue in what you have become convinced of and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures."

He's saying if you're going to be all-in for Jesus, there will be hard times that come with that, and then immediately he thinks of the Bible and he says, "And so you're going to need the Bible to remind you of the promises of God that can bring you comfort, and can make you strong, and can make you brave."

The primary way God makes us brave through scripture is to remind us of who we are in Christ. Paul tells Timothy, "From infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through Christ, through faith in Christ Jesus." All the scripture points to Jesus. The written word always points to the living word, Jesus. The Bible, the Bible will convict us of our sin in our hearts. It will correct us. That's not pleasant, that's not comfortable, but the Bible will never, ever, ever condemn us. It always reminds us that if we know Jesus, he died to pay the price for our sins. We are set free from that, and we are forgiven.

I remember when I first met my high school girlfriend's parents, very first meeting. I was in high school, my girlfriend's parents, and I was not a Christian. Somehow in conversation, her mom started talking about how she was a Christian and started talking about her faith, and so I said to her mom, "Well, I need you to know I'm an atheist. I don't believe in God. I'm an atheist. I hope that doesn't bother you," and she said, "Oh no. It doesn't bother me. I'm not the one going to hell." Okay. Okay, that's not the Bible. That's not the voice of God. Scripture may convict us, but it always reminds us of the grace of God, and the love of God, and the fact that we are forgiven and loved, and that makes us brave.

I actually find it helpful to put my words, to put my name in some Bible verses just to make it more personal. You could do the same thing. So for instance, scripture tells me Scott can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. Scott has not been given a spirit of timidity, but of power, love, and of self control. It makes it more real when you put your name there, and it makes me a little bit braver, because the more that sinks in, the braver I get because I realize that he was in Scott is greater than he who is in the world.

The Bible will make you counter-culture, irritated for your own good, and it will make you brave if, important if here, if we do what it says. If we do what it says, right? See, because Bible doing is just as important as Bible study. Churches always have Bible studies. Why don't they have Bible

doings, right? The point isn't just to sit around and amass a bunch of knowledge, right? It's to do what we know.

The text we read says, "All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that." There's a purpose to this. It's not just get a bunch of knowledge. "So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." It's not just study the Bible. Yes, that for sure, but it's also to do the good works we see there.

When husbands and wives love each other the way the Bible says to, they have very fulfilling marriages. When we serve others the way the Bible says to, it actually gives us a bigger life. The deal is the bottom line is to avoid being conformed to our culture, we need to be informed by the Bible so we can be transformed to be like Jesus. Something is forming you. Is it the right thing? What is it?

I heard a woman talk about how kind of as a part-time job she goes to garage sales and buys things and then sells them again on eBay to make a profit. One day she found a saxophone for \$20 and she thought, "Okay, that seems pretty good deal." She didn't know the going rate for a used saxophone though, so didn't know how much she could get for it, so she called her husband and asked him to look up on eBay how much used saxophones sell for.

Well, he did that and he came back and he said there were no used saxophones on eBay. She thought, "That's kind of odd, but whatever." So she bought the \$20 saxophone anyway.

While she was leaving, this older man walked up to her and said, "I'll give you \$20 over what you paid for it if you'll give me that saxophone." So she thought, "Okay, \$20 profit, that's not bad," so she sold it to this guy.

But when she got home, she discovered that her husband had not logged on to eBay's homepage, but had instead logged onto her page on eBay. Of course there were no use saxophones for sale on her page, right? So then she looked it up and found out that used saxophones sell for around \$500. She's like, "Man, I just missed out on \$480 of profit," as her husband crept out of the house.

This bugged her for days. It just kind of bugged her, so she Googled verses on giving thanks to God. Every time she thought about the saxophone, she would recite one of those verses. "Thank God in all circumstances and the peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds," things like that. Over the next couple of days, those Bible verses kind of helped her put things into perspective. She said, "I even let my husband off the hook."

Well, a few months later she ran into the man that she had sold the saxophone to, and he said, "Thank you so much for selling me that saxophone, because it's rekindled my passion for playing." He said, "I'm retired, and I've been bored, but this rekindled my passion for playing, and now I volunteer to teach kids how to play the saxophone. I'm having a great time. But I could never have afforded even a used saxophone, but you gave it to me for so cheap I was able to have it, so thank you."

The woman was like, "Oh, man. Here I thought I missed out on a blessing, but in reality God was using me to experience a greater blessing by giving this man the saxophone." But she said, "I never would have seen it that way if it weren't for those Bible verses floating around in my head." She became a little more all-in Christian, having an attitude that was transformed by scripture rather than conformed to the culture.

Okay, so let me give some practical steps for how we can make scripture more a part of our lives. I'll give some today. I'll give a few more on Wednesday night, but practically what do we do?

First thing, it requires the Holy Spirit. We can't just pick up the Bible and actually have God talk to us just by reading it. We have to ask every time the Holy Spirit, "Show me what you want me to see in this passage. Tell me what you want me to know, think, do. Speak to me. Holy Spirit, help me to hear your voice through these words of the Bible."

Second, it's one story, and it goes from creation to fall to redemption to restoration. It helps to understand any given passage of scripture if you know kind of where you are in the story. One way to kind of get the whole story in your head would be to go to our website and watch a sermon I gave on September 9th, 2018 called Relentless God where I just preach through the entire Bible in one sermon to help you get the whole story in your head.

Or another way you could do that to get the whole story in your head, I've mentioned this one before in years past, would be to follow the Holly Dudley Bible Reading Plan. When my daughter was nine, she wanted to read the Bible, so I created kind of a condensed version for her. It still was pretty long, but I kind of condensed it out for her. She would read a section at a time and then she'd talk to me about what she'd read so I could make sure she'd actually understood it before she went on to the next passage and next part, and she did that. She finished reading all the main parts of the Bible in just four months. She was nine years old. My daughter. Has nothing to do with this sermon. You just need to know. We have posted the Holly Dudley Reading Plan on our website if you want to get it.

Third, focus on the majors. Every verse in scripture matters, but you know what? If it says something just a couple of times in the Bible, don't get too hung up on it. Stick with the main themes that you see over and over and over again. Those are enough to keep us busy for a long time.

Fourth, it's easier than you think. It's easier than you think. Start in Matthew in the New Testament and maybe just read a chapter or two every day. Don't do a whole bunch. Ask yourself two questions. What does this passage tell me about God? What does it tell me about me?

Then you need to get a good study Bible, and I'm actually going to give some recommendations. You may want to take a picture of the screen if you want. I'm going to make some recommendations to help you do this. First, I would recommend How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth by Gordon Fee, just to kind of give you an overview. Then the NIV Student Bible or the NIV Study Bible. Those

two are different. The NIV Life Application Bible. All of those have great footnotes, notes along the way that can kind of help you understand what you're reading.

The other thing I would recommend is to download the Bible app. It has a lot of different reading plans that you can kind of read through, including read through the whole Bible, but all kinds of other plans around different themes. You can do plans, read through plans with your friends, which is what I'm doing in one of my small groups, and you can leave your thoughts so that everyone else can see. You can have dialogue about what you're reading. It also has an audio feature. You can listen to it when you work out or when you're driving.

Or one other thing you could do would be to listen to or read all of the sermons that we preached from September, 2009 through June, 2010. What's so funny about that? They're amazing sermons. We preached through the whole Bible in a year, and you could kind of start tracking with that.

All of these resources are on our webpage [belpres.org/allin](http://belpres.org/allin). Just click on the resources button at the bottom of the page. Scripture can change your life.

I recently heard a man named Tim talk about being in McDonald's one day with his family. When he was in there, a man and his wife and kids walked in, and the man that had walked in had really hurt Tim a couple of years earlier. He didn't say how, just really deeply wounded Tim. Tim said, "When I saw this man and his family walk into McDonald's, my blood began to boil as I just remembered all the things that he had done to hurt me." He said, "I was surprised that I still had so much hurt inside of me."

Tim and his family finished eating, and on the way out of the restaurant they overheard this man who had hurt Tim and his wife arguing because neither of them had credit cards or money to pay for the food that they just bought, and their kids were fighting, and they were arguing, and they were all stressed out. Tim said, "My first thought was, 'Oh good. He deserves every bit of this, right? He deserves every bit of the embarrassment he feels right now.'" Then he said, "Thank you God for showing me that there is justice in the world."

But then this unfortunate thing happened to him. God spoke to him through the biblical text that he, quote, "Just happened to have read that morning," Romans 12:17. "Do not repay evil for evil. As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. If your enemy is hungry," say like in McDonald's, "Feed him." Dang it. Dang it, right? Just happened to have read that that morning.

Tim said, "I just felt God saying, 'Here's your chance to be free of your bitterness.'" Tim said, "I knew in that moment I had a choice either to obey or to bask in my bitterness," which is like a great phrase, right? Bask in bitterness. So Tim said, "Reluctantly, I reached into my pocket, handed this man who had hurt me some money, and I said, 'Have lunch on me.'" In that moment, he started to cry, because he felt all the bitterness and all ... The minute he handed that guy that money, his enemy, that money, he felt all the bitterness, all the anger, all the hurt, just leave him.

It didn't lead to a full on reconciliation and forgiveness, asking for forgiveness. It didn't lead to that,



but it didn't matter, because Tim in that moment, following the words of scripture, became free of his anger and his bitterness and was a little up more of an all-in Christian because all-in Christians forgive.

He was counter-culture, right? Very counter-culture in our world, in our culture right now to forgive anyone, right? He was irritated at first to be reminded of the truth. He was made brave, because it takes courage to reach out to someone who hurt you, all because God spoke to him through the words he'd read in the Bible that morning preparing him for that encounter later in the day. The Bible is a firm foundation upon which we can stand, and it can change our lives.

I'll close with this. Years ago, my wife and I were in Toronto, and we were at the top of the CN Tower. If you've ever been there, part of the floor is glass, and you can stand on the glass and look straight down to the pavement hundreds of feet below, right? It's very freaky.

I was standing on this glass looking down, feeling a little freaked out, and three boys jumped up on it and started jumping up and down on the glass, which made me step back off the glass, right? Then one of the boys said, "Come on, mister. Jump up and down on it. Don't worry. Look how thick it is. It's okay. It's safe. Look how thick it is." I just thought, "I don't care how thick it is, because I know it was installed by the contractor with the lowest bid. I ain't jumping down on nothing." Okay, scripture was not written by the guy with the lowest bid. It's a firm foundation upon which we can stand.

People so often say, "I wish God would talk to me." He has. 66 books of talking to you, almost a million words telling you and me how to have an abundant life, how much love he has for you and me. Even those boring loops on the curtains in the tabernacle describe his holiness. Those boring genealogies with lists of begets are all about how God knows each one of us by name, including you. Around the world, people are literally risking their lives to read the Bible because God speaks through it and it is a firm foundation.

When we do what it says to do, it not only changes our lives, it can change our world. When we live biblically and not according to our culture, the poor are given a hand up. The dividing walls of hostility come down. The stressed out find peace. The worried find hope. The scared find courage, and the bored live a bigger story. Do not be conformed to the spirit of this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind through God's word to you in scripture.

Jesus, thank you that you are a speaking God. Thank you that you are a God who interacts with us. Lord, help us to read what you have to say to us and help that word come alive in our hearts through the power of your Holy Spirit so that we know that it is your word to us personally as well as corporately. Then Lord, teach us to live out of it so that we can be the people you designed us to be and live the big life you came to give us. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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**Discussion Questions:** Read Romans 12:1-2 and 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5

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1. What does it mean to have our minds renewed (Romans 12:2)? How does that happen? What does that have to do with understanding God's will?
2. According to this text, what functions does scripture have in our life of faith?
3. What do you struggle with when it comes to scripture and what things have helped you in those struggles?
4. What does Paul mean when he talks about people having "itchy ears"? In what ways do you see "itchy ears" around you? In what ways do you have "itchy ears"?
5. In what ways are you being conformed to the world? In what ways are you being transformed?