



2 Timothy 3:14-4:4

2nd Message

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DEVOTED TO THE WORD

SERIES: PBCC FAMILY VALUES

There is great importance for church leaders to communicate the driving mission and critical values of the church to the church body regularly, so that everyone can contribute with understanding and knowledge. In other words, so that we all feel like we are on the same team, pulling in the same direction. Who are we as a church? What is our vision? What are our priorities? How do we function? This is why we have devoted four weeks to talk about key family values at Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino, what we are calling our Heartbeat series.

The staff and elders have spent a considerable amount of time talking about these things over the course of the last few months. Since we don't operate with a senior pastor or one charismatic leader who determines the direction and vision, this has not been a quick or easy process. So, what we are sharing in these four weeks is the culmination of much discussion. There are probably many things we are not talking about that you would love to talk about, but the four areas we are discussing are the ones that bubbled to the top.

The phrase we are using to describe the main vision of PBCC is, "knowing Jesus and making him known." As the phrase implies, our vision is two-fold. First, we want people to know Jesus. This doesn't simply mean to know about Jesus or be a church member. Our desire is that folks who come here are on a journey to know Jesus deeply, personally, and relationally. Our vision is to be touched profoundly by the cross and by resurrection, to partake of God's unfathomable riches in Christ, to have an experience of God's grace and love and hope in Jesus. Our vision is to grow into Christ and become mature and complete in him.

Second, our vision is "making him known." Our desire is for people to be so filled with the wonder and love of Christ that knowing him spills out of our lives to make him known in the world around us, both locally and globally, by living an incarnational life, a Jesus-in-our-flesh life. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and now that Word dwells in us through the Spirit and continues to become a living presence. We become active participants in God's work of calling out a people for his name's sake by being a blessing in the world.

The values we are covering in this four-week series include: Life in the Spirit Through Grace; Devotion to the Word; Participation in God's Work; and Discipleship Through Relationships. We began last week with Life in the Spirit. Our value for this morning is Devotion to the Word.

In his book, *Streams of Living Water*, Richard Foster surveys the six streams of Christian tradition. These include the Contemplative Tradition: Prayer-Filled Life; the Holiness Tradition: the Virtuous Life; the Charismatic Tradition: Spirit-

Empowered Life; the Social Justice Tradition: Compassionate Life; the Incarnational Tradition: Sacramental Life; and the Evangelical Tradition: the Word-Centered Life.¹

Clearly, PBC's heritage is the Evangelical Tradition. We do seek to grow and should grow in aspects of the other traditions. For example, next week is Freedom Sunday, which falls in the Social Justice Tradition, and we have tried to incorporate contemplative practices both on Sunday mornings and in small groups.

But primarily we are a Word-Centered Church. The Scriptures undergird everything we do, starting on Sunday mornings and extending to growth groups, discipleship groups, men's and women's studies, intern program, Greek and Hebrew reading groups, and more. In most settings, we are studying a book of the Bible. We have even printed our Sunday messages over the years, which are read and used by people around the world. Devotion to the Word is the most visible value and priority at PBC. Bible is our middle name.

Even though experience and tradition are important, in the Evangelical Tradition,

Scripture has primacy over other writings; primacy over church tradition; primacy over individual religious experience; primacy over the individual conscience; primacy over individual revelations, dreams, and visions; primacy over culture. As the Protestant reformers put it, *Sola Scriptura*, the Scripture alone.²

Why are the Scriptures so important to the life of a church? Why are they a key value at PBC? The text we want to consider this morning is 2 Tim. 3:14-4:4. I want to encourage you to open your Bibles or use the pew Bible to have the text in front of you. Let me read it.

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. (2 Timothy 3:14-16 ESV)

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own

passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”(2 Timothy 4:1-4)

The Nature of the Scriptures

These words were some of the last written by the apostle Paul. They were meant to encourage his young pastor friend and companion, Timothy, with the importance of God’s Word, which he learned from his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois. God’s Word are sacred writings. The word Scripture also means writings. What is so special about these writings? Paul tells us that they are the breathed-out words of God. God used human agents with their individual personalities to write them down. God did not dictate the words, but the words originated from God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. All Scripture is God-breathed, not just some.

What this means is that God speaks. God spoke the creation into existence. He said, “let there be light,” and there was light. God formed man and breathed his Spirit into man, and man became a living being. God continues to speak of his glory and majesty through creation, as David wrote in Psalm 19, our call to worship. God spoke to Moses face to face and some of those words are written in the Torah. He spoke through the prophets to his people Israel.

Then, the writer of Hebrews says: “God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:1-2). Jesus is the living Word of God, God’s best and last word to humankind.

Paul also says that these sacred writings “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim 3:15) God’s word reveals the truth about Jesus and is capable of evoking deep desire and hunger that brings people to saving faith. That is the nature of the Scriptures.

In a talk that Trevor Hudson gave he tells a story about the head of the Bible Society in Zimbabwe. One day this man was on the streets of Harare, handing out tracts containing the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He came across a young, 19-year old man, and he wanted to give him the tract. The young man said he wasn’t interested, that if he took one he would simply use the paper to roll tobacco into cigarettes. But the head of the Bible Society said, that’s ok. Go ahead and take one.

Nine months later the head of the Bible Society met this man at a rally, and he was so surprised. He asked the young man what happened, since he was going to simply use the paper for cigarettes. The young man said, “Well, I smoked my way through Matthew. I smoked my way through Mark. I smoked my way through Luke. But when I came to John 3:16, I stopped smoking.” There was something about the words, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16) that seized this young man and awakened the desire to be connected and know the God who created him and loved him.

We see this in the book of Acts, where we read about an Ethiopian eunuch who was traveling on the Gaza road, reading Isaiah 53. He couldn’t understand what he was reading. But here

comes Philip, and the eunuch asks him who Isaiah is talking about. Philip tells him the good news, and the eunuch is converted

Many of you have heard the story of a tormented Augustine, who was sitting in a Milan garden one day and heard a child’s voice, “Take it and read it. Take it and read it.” Augustine picked up a Bible, turned to Romans 13:13, and came to faith. This is the power of God’s Word.

Here is our doctrinal statement concerning the Bible: The original writings of both Old and New Testaments were inspired by God by means of the Holy Spirit, who chose the words employed. These writings were without error and are of supreme and final authority in the lives of believers in any age. The Bible says everything God intended to say to mankind regarding redemption (1 Cor. 2:12-13; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21).

There are some who deny the supernatural inspiration of the Bible, those who think that the Bible is fallible, and others who think that experience or traditions are as authoritative as the Bible. But we hold the Bible to be the ultimate authority, and sit under this word of God.

The Role of Scripture

Paul goes on to detail the specific role the Scriptures play in the life of the believer. Paul says that they are profitable. In other words, there is great benefit to be gained by reading and knowing the Bible. What are the benefits? First, they are profitable for teaching.

God’s Word is not only inspiration, but also revelation. In other words, God has disclosed things that would not be known otherwise. For example, we know God’s plan and history of redemption, who Jesus is, the meaning of the cross, the hope of life after death, the nature of sin, reality of judgment, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, how the church is to function, and what marriage is all about. These are truths that we would not know through natural means. God did not reveal everything there is to know. There are many things that we wish he would have told us. But he has told us everything we need to know at this time.

Second, the Scriptures have the power to reprove. The idea here is to bring to conviction. How many of you have read a passage in the Bible, or heard a sermon, and suddenly you were convicted that something you had been doing was wrong? Maybe you didn’t even realize that you were headed in the wrong direction, or being hurtful to yourselves or others. Then, upon hearing the truth, you immediately repented and changed directions.

John Stott wrote: “We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior”³

Third, God’s Word corrects or restores. This is the positive aspect of conviction. Scripture guides us into the right path and helps us walk in the ways that lead to life and freedom and joy. We learn how to deal with anger, or find strength in difficult trials. When we walk in ways that seem natural to us, the path often leads to enslavement and limitations. The Bible keeps our paths straight as we come to know the ways of the Lord.

Finally, God's Word is profitable for training in righteousness. The Bible has the power and ability to shape us and transform us into the image of Christ, allowing us to put off the flesh and walk in the Spirit. The Scripture changes the way we think and the way we behave. The end result of all of this is to be complete, equipped for every good work.

Paul might well have had an order in mind for these roles. Teaching leads to conviction. Conviction leads to correction. Correction leads to training. This is the process by which we become sound, whole people. The Word shapes and forms our minds, hearts, and actions. Just as children are trained by parents and teachers, so we are shaped by the Scriptures. There are no other writings that have the potential to do what the Scriptures can do. The Scriptures are a gold-mine, more valuable than wealth, possessions, or power.

Richard Foster writes:

We read the Bible to be fed. We read it to be converted, to be strengthened, to be taught, to be rebuked, to be counseled, to be comforted. As we sit under the Bible for sustained periods, we will be formed by the experience.⁴

This is the reason why God's Word has such a central role in the life of PBC. And so, our primary task as leaders and pastors is to teach the Word. This is not only our heritage, but we are also convinced that it is the Scriptures that have the power to bring people to Christ, change lives, and do the work of transformation. No programs or catchy slogans can have this kind of effect.

Awareness of Dangers

All that being said, we need to be aware and guard against a couple of potential dangers. First, we need to guard against arrogant attitudes. We can think that, since we study the Scriptures in depth, we have it right and are better than other churches or traditions. This is a grave mistake. There is much we can learn from other traditions. For example, we can learn from the rich words of traditional liturgy and other styles of music and worship. We can learn from those who have a rich tradition of prayer practices or hearing the Scripture in different ways. We do believe in the authority and power of the Bible, but we remain humble and open to other traditions.

Second, we need to guard against the Scriptures becoming an academic exercise, hearing and learning the Bible for information only, becoming a mind-oriented church. Many people come to PBC because we do teach the Bible. But sometimes we hear people say that the teaching at PBC is too deep and detailed. And so, what brings some people to PBC leads others away. As a church, we must always find the balance between being relevant to the culture, and at the same time stay true to the Scriptures. We need exposition and practical application.

Here is where I want to say a word about illumination. We always have to be reminded that it is not the words alone that have power, but the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, by which those words penetrate deeply in both our minds and our hearts. This is what we believe can happen through expository preaching and careful teaching of the Word. The power is not in the words we say, or even the teacher, even though some teachers

are more gifted than others. But the power comes through the work of the Holy Spirit, who takes the words of the Bible as they are explained so that they become God's personal words to us.

Over the years, a not uncommon experience is for someone to tell me that what I shared was deeply meaningful to them. I usually ask them what I said. But while they are telling me, I am often thinking to myself that I never said that. That is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit speaking to someone personally.

Evangelicals are often accused of bibliolatry, becoming Bible worshippers. But we don't worship the words, rather, the person who stands behind the words. As we hear the Scriptures taught, we look and listen through the word to the author of life and we worship him. And that is the goal of Bible teaching, to lead to transformation and worship of God. The goal is to hear God's voice and obey. The church at large needs teachers who have this goal in mind and believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this goal. What keeps us from academic dry Bible study is the attitude, as both teachers and hearers, to encounter God and be changed by the Holy Spirit.

Devotion to the Word

Now let me return to the wording of our value this morning and think about the word devotion. Devotion implies faithfulness, constancy, commitment, dedication, even fondness and affection. For example, we might say, "that person is devoted to his or her spouse." We are to be devoted to the Word corporately and personally.

First, we need to be committed to the faithful teaching of the Word corporately. Paul exhorts Timothy: "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." Why? Well, because people will simply want to have their ears tickled. They will want to only hear what scratches the itch. Teachers can fall into the practice of only talking about the things that are easy to digest and make people feel good.

I think we are seeing more and more of this today in churches. Churches are changing their understanding of the Scriptures to adapt to the culture. Churches want to attract numbers, so they employ ways of doing just that. In our culture people are more and more Bible illiterate, and so pastors offer a liquid diet instead of a full meal. As I said before, the church has to know the culture and be relevant, unafraid to talk about important issues. However, we should not be dictated by the culture.

At PBCC, we mostly teach and preach whole books of the Bible. Sometimes we teach a topical series like we are doing now, but mostly we teach through long texts. We seek to teach the whole counsel of God, not just the parts that are pleasant. We don't skip over the difficult passages because they might upset people, even though we might want to, at times. Typically, we set the preaching schedule far in advance. We seek to alternate between Old and New Testament books. We think about what might be good for the body. This requires a great deal of effort. As Paul implies, we patiently keep teaching the truths of the Bible.

And then we need to be committed to the Word personally. Hopefully, over the course of our life in Jesus, we fall in love with the Word and desire the Word more than other things. We don't hear the Word of God only on Sundays. We don't read through the Bible once, but over and over. We saturate our minds with the thoughts of God. We find nourishment for our souls, strength for our bodies, comfort for our hearts. We don't just read a verse for the day, or speed-read a passage before rushing out the door, but soak in a text, chew on the words, and meditate on its meaning.

This is a challenge in our culture, because there are so many things competing for our attention, especially the little device you are holding in your hand. We can't hear God's voice over the louder voices screaming into our ear and distracting our thoughts. Can we turn off our televisions and phones to give sole attention to the Word of God? Maxine Hancock, a former professor at Regent College, talks about sitting around the dining room table as a family and reading the Bible. She was particularly delighted when she finally became old enough to take part in the reading. She fell in love with God's Word as a young girl. We are to fall in love with God's Word, no matter how old we are. We take it into our hearts, saturate our minds, and learn the thoughts of God.

In closing, I would like to borrow a prayer that Bernard used three years ago when he talked about Scriptures, a prayer written by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, for the Prayer Book of 1549.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scripture to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.⁵

1. Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, (New York, HaperCollins 1998)
2. Richard J. Foster, 222
3. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/word-of-god>.
4. Richard J. Foster, 232
5. Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1662.

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