

## Sermon Transcript from 29<sup>th</sup> June 2025 – Heather, Bible Society

### References - Psalm 11:9-16 & 2 Timothy 3:10-17

#### Sermon TLDR

This sermon passionately **advocates for consistent engagement with the Bible**, drawing on personal anecdotes and the work of the Bible Society. It highlights various initiatives like "Open the Book," which introduces biblical stories to primary school children, and the creation of public displays and gardens inspired by scripture. The speaker stresses **the Bible's transformative power**, urging listeners not just to read it but to **internalise its teachings** and allow them to shape their lives and actions, citing a Chinese pastor's resilience during persecution as an example of this profound impact. Ultimately, the message encourages **active participation in spreading biblical literacy** and living out its principles.

#### Link to the Start of the Sermon (on YouTube)

[https://youtu.be/cFvEB\\_15l5U?t=1735](https://youtu.be/cFvEB_15l5U?t=1735)

#### Sermon Transcript

[Heather opens in prayer]

Let's pray.

Father, indeed we thank you that your word is God breathed, that you gave the word, the words, the scriptures to the many writers of the Bible. And we pray now that as we think about those verses, as we think more about some of the things Bible Society is doing.

That you would help us to hear you speak to us. Lord, we ask that you would encourage us where that is what we need. That you would challenge us where that is perhaps what we need this morning.

Lord, above all, we want to hear from you. So, we ask now that you would be with us and open your word to us in Jesus name.

Amen.

I'm hopeful that all of you have been given a magazine as you came in this morning. If not, there might be one somewhere near you.

Now I often warn people that I was a teacher for many years and they say yes or you can tell. Which means I like to know that people are engaged and so I will refer to some of the articles in this magazine.

It was great because this actually landed on my doorstep this week. So this is the brand-new magazine. The previous one is out on the table out there, please do feel free to take both and other things. Anything on the table out there can be taken. And I know as you look at this and as we think about it these stories that you will find them encouraging.

We offer the Bible to the world. That's what Bible society has always been about.

And increasingly, especially in our own society, in our own culture where many people don't even have a Bible in their home anymore, we want to bring the Bible to life, to help people to engage with the Bible.

We've just heard in our reading about one young man, Timothy, and one of the great things that we learn about him is that his grandmother and his mother were people of faith and they had passed the scriptures on to him. As you can see there that he had learned from a child.

Now for some of us that may well also be our own experience and we thank God for that. It is my experience. But increasingly today there are many many children and young people who have no one in their families who can pass on the message of the Bible. They have no experience of engaging with the Bible. And that is why programs such as Open the Book, as you saw there on the video, are so absolutely vital in bringing the Bible to life in our primary schools.

There's an article, in fact, on page 10 here, The Lion, the Lounge, and the Legacy. And uh it gives you examples and some of the stats there. It is amazing now over 3,000 schools, primary schools have an open the book team. Do you have open the book here? Not in this area at the moment, but that's something that that might that if you want to know more, I can tell you more about that.

Open the book has been going for 25 years and it's been an amazing tool to introduce Bible stories not only to the children but actually also to their teachers and the stats are really encouraging; nearly 10,000 storytellers. These usually come from churches, local churches who come together to form a team.

Where I live in Fleet and Church Crook, we have six or seven I think perhaps now open the book teams going regularly, usually every fortnight. Some of the schools only want us every half term. But what an opportunity. It's storytelling. It's not preaching. Wouldn't be allowed to do that in schools, but it's storytelling. So, just this Thursday, we went into our local school with my team and we were telling the story of the unforgiving servant and the whole theme of forgiveness and that forgiveness is available from God and that we also uh should forgive others.

And the children listen. They get engaged. They take part and as I said so do their teachers listen and the amazing thing now is that Bible society has been able to share open the book a bit exciting there all over the world the very first country overseas to take on open the book was Ghana and that's actually now seven years ago and that's very exciting for me because in 2008 I think it was my first Bible society trip.

I remember very well going into schools with the Bible Society of Ghana and talking to them as well about open the book and saying how amazing it would be to do it in schools. Now sure that was nothing to do with the fact that they eventually did it but it was for me that is so encouraging and uh there are now 15 countries, some in in South America as well, countries like Albania, all over the world where open the book is now available. So the Bible is out there in our schools.

Let's have a look again at the verses that we heard from Timothy. Having talked about the godless times in which they were living, In the early verses of the chapter, Paul reminds Timothy of the persecution and the sufferings that he's had to endure. And yet, he's also able to affirm that the Lord has rescued him, that God never abandoned him.

And Paul also warns Timothy of those who are set on deception. And it's in this context that we read the verse, but as for you, I can't see it from this distance. Read it out: *"Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of because you know those from who you learned it and have from infancy you have learn known the holy scriptures to able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."*

I was told that one of the key reasons why it is so important that believers in China can access a Bible for themselves in a format and a language that they can understand is because there are many heresies around and you can read also in the magazine about what's happening in China. If you do not have even if the pastor maybe does not have the whole Bible then it's easy to deceive and be deceived and to be confused about the truth if there is no way of reading the Bible for yourself and checking what it says.

And whenever I've been involved, I've been to China three times now and involved in Bible distribution. I gave the Bible to these people. It is incredible to see experience the joy for the first time that that they

receive their own Bible in their language. The gratitude and I'm a little younger there because it's about 10 years ago. I think that was probably the first person that I gave a Bible to in China. A lady who was in her late 70s nearly 80 had been a believer she told me for decades but had never had her own Bible.

It's something that we take for granted, isn't it? But it is so so important. And as some of you will know the beginnings of Bible Society and the story of Mary Jones walking for 26 miles to get her Bible over the Welsh mountains. Still people today, and I met some in China who have walked for hours to get a Bible.

Really, whenever I see this, I have to say it really not only moves me but it challenges me to how perhaps casual we are about our Bibles and we take them so much for granted for these people and for many others that I've met in many countries the Bible is a precious gift we have so many Bibles but are we committed to regularly engage with scripture not just on a Sunday but during the week.

And it's interesting to see from that that verse in Timothy about the reliability. How does Timothy know that what he's received is true? How can we know that this is reliable?

Well, we read there he can know because it's been passed on from a known and trusted source, Paul himself, as well as Timothy. 's own family. And because it's based on the Holy Scriptures, which of course for Timothy would have been the Old Testament, a Jewish boy like Timothy would have formally begun to learn the scriptures from the age of five. Imagine that by heart. And even before then, he would have been taught at home by Eunice and Lois, his mother and his grandmother.

So that brings us to the question, why?

Why is it important to cultivate a regular Bible reading habit?

Why are the scriptures so important even if we've read them many, many times?

Why continue to have Bible studies?

Well, let's look again at what Paul says. You have known the Holy Scriptures since you were a child. They are able to make you wise for salvation. Or as the message puts it, there's nothing like the written word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. In other words, if we want to get to understand salvation and then live our lives as a disciple, we need to be fed by scripture to be daily reminded of his love, his care for us, to know his purpose for our lives.

When I worked at Bible Society, our team leader introduced us to a book by Eugene Peterson. You've probably heard of him because he wrote the message. And the book is called a rather unusual title, *Eat This Book*. In other words, don't just snack casually on bits of the Bible that you may be like. or that maybe reinforced your own prejudices. Get stuck in. Go beyond the milk. Move on to solids.

A metaphor used by Paul several times. And this is what he says. Christians feed on scripture. Holy scripture nurtures the holy community as food nurtures the body. Christians don't simply learn or study or use scripture. We assimilate it. We take it into our lives in such a way that it gets metabolized or changed into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus' name. Hands raised in adoration of the father, feet washed in company with the son.

This is the outworking of the word of God being in our lives. lives actually changing us. I like I like that that image of feeding. If you don't eat regularly, you know what happens? You get starved. You can't function properly. And the same is true when we think of the Bible.

And in the very next verses, in verses 16 and 17, we're told scripture is inspired or breathed by God. And it's useful. Now, we could look at each of these in turn but just put them together for the moment. Teaching, rebuking, correcting, instructing, teaching the truth, correcting faults, instruction for right living. All the directions that we need for following Christ are here.

Now, we know that it's not always an easy read. We often have to work at it. But that's exactly why it's so important that we come together to wrestle as it were with the Bible especially with the harder bits and that's why Bible Society is very keen to provide resources for Bible engagement to bring the Bible to life.

Some of you might have done the Bible course anybody come across that yeah that's just been updated rewritten and launched last week a great way, an eight week or eight session course to take people right through the Bible to have an overview of the Bible to help people to truly feed on it.

There's lots of other courses. This one we did in our church this year and this is again an eight week course on the book of Romans which as you know is pretty meaty in terms of scripture and it's actually set in Rome. which I think is great.

So, the guy is the same guy who wrote the Bible course. He takes you to the various places that Paul was writing about um even to the cell where Paul was held when he was imprisoned. Really brings it to life and helps us to actually make sense of that of that scripture.

I like this cartoon [*Heather refers to an image on screen*].

I don't if you can read each of the words, but this is what it says...

Why study the book of Numbers? Now, that may or may not be your favourite book in the Bible. Can't say that it's mine necessarily. 36 chapters of self-centred people who whined every time they didn't get their way. Why don't you give us something relevant? Enough said. People essentially are still the same. And even these books that were written thousands of years ago can continue to speak to us today.

There are so many ways in addition to open the book that Bible society is seeking to bring the Bible to life. Have any of you seen um the life of Christ at Wintershall? No. Trafalgar Square on Good Friday. No. Well, there you go. There's a challenge to you that we often talk in society about taking the Bible out into the public square. Well, you don't get much more public than Trafalgar Square. So, every Good Friday, Trafalgar Square is transformed into the set for the life of Christ. And uh the last week of Jesus' life is played out dramatically by the Wintershall players.

Just about 10 days ago, at Wintershall, which is near Guilford, the other side of Guilford, uh I think it's a 4-hour production these days. Thousands of school children go to see the life of Christ and it's so powerful dramatically played out. Even the crucifixion is played out and the miracles you know people remember what they see don't they?

It's so important and Bible society unsurprisingly partners with Wintershall to do that. They do a nativity too with live animals including the horses and the donkey and the sheep etc at Wintershall. It's an important way to bring the Bible to those who probably will never go into a church but need to know the message of hope that the Bible brings.

I don't know if any of you ever go to the Chelsea Flower Show. Uh may have. Anybody ever been? A yes. No, you win on both counts. [Two-for-one] for the first and probably the only time Bible Society did a garden in the sanctuary gardens and it was based on Psalm 23 and thousands of people engaged with scripture because they saw that Psalm come to life and every person who um who actually came to the stand was given a little leaflet.

I've got one somewhere where we will see, anyway I can show you later. And on it, it not only had all the names of the plants, [but it also] had the 23rd Psalm. So, literally, they went away with scripture. And it's such a powerful thing. And again, there is an article in the magazine that's where I put the leaflet. This is this is what they took home with them, including Psalm 23. It's on page 12. And the idea is that people, churches particularly will be inspired if they've got a garden or land to do their own either Psalm 23 or another scripture actually through the means of a garden. We know that we are a country of gardeners in this land. And so this is another means to help people engage with scripture.

So I'd encourage you to have a read of that article as well. I have been at a church and when I went back to it, they said, "We took that up. We've got a garden. We're encouraging the community to come in to engage with scripture."

There are so many ways in which we can be creative and be imaginative.

But in all of these things, the goal is that people will come to engage with the Bible and through that will engage with the God of the Bible. So, The challenge, what is a challenge to us? If we value the Bible for ourselves, we need to read it. Yes. But also to live it, we also need to be able to share its message.

To be able to, as Peter said, give a reason for the hope that is within us. And I like this quote. The Bible is about transformation rather than information. Yes, it does inform, but the end result should transformation. I like this quote as well by an ex-archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams he famously said, "You may be the only translation of the scripture that people read."

It's a challenge, isn't it? So many of our friends and neighbours don't have a Bible or are not coming to church, but we are the living letter. Says that also in the New Testament and my final story. I could go on and on as you probably realize, but don't worry, nearly there comes from China. And I want to introduce you to this pastor, Pastor Bao, who um I met several times. Interestingly, Pastor Bao and my ex-colleague Sandra are standing in front of a Bible bookshop on a main street in Nanjing in China.

Pastor Bao had just qualified as it were trained as a pastor in the 1960s when the communist government took over and many of you will remember and or have heard about it when the Bible became a banned book when churches were closed where people could be imprisoned simply for owning a Bible. And so he told me how all his theology books, his Bible, his Bibles were taken away. He and others than his family were sent out to work on the fields in the countryside for 10 years. Just imagine that 10 years. Some of that time he was also in prison.

And when I said to him, "So, how did you survive as a Christian?" And I will never forget this. He looked at me and smiled. and he said, "Do you know Psalm 119?" So I said, "Yes, yes." He said, "Let's have a look at it." And we read together those verses that we read earlier on. And that that verse, "I've hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

And he shared with me how as a child, bit like Timothy, his mother had taught him scripture and he had learned it. Don't know when I was a child we used to learn scripture as well and perhaps we don't do that quite so much now. And he said so even though I didn't have a physical Bible with me I still had God's word in my heart and that is what kept me going.

That was an incredible challenge to me and still is.

If we didn't have our Bibles, our videos, our apps, if they were all taken away would we have enough scripture in our hearts to be able to feed on it?

And the second time that I met him I mean he was then probably about 70 early 70s anyway and he said I have asked the Lord to give me back those 10 years and I want to spend the next 10 years in teaching others the Bible and he was going around to all sorts of areas in China doing exactly that. Now that is about 10 years ago.

So, I don't even know now if he's alive. I've lost touch. But you know that's a challenge to me as well.

I think you know sometimes when we retired, we think you know well I haven't had chance yet to stop. But you know am I still going to do this? Am I skilled going to run this kids group, this and whatever [else]. Actually, you know there's no retirement officer in God's kingdom.

God calls us and he calls all of us even if we are housebound to pray and to share with those around us. So, Pastor Bao continues to be an incredible uh inspiration to me.

So, a final verse from Colossians chapter 3... “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

So, thank you for your support for Bible Society, and I hope that what I've been able to share by what you've seen and heard will encourage you, but also that we've all been challenged to commit, to continue to commit to regular engagement with the scripture, not just because we're told to or we think it's going to earn us sort of brownie points with God, but because we know it's a key way if we spend time with God to get close to him to become more like Jesus, to learn to do what Jesus did.

So, can I encourage you to take that home with you? It's the beginning of July this week, so it would be the perfect time to take the prayer in action. The new one starts at the beginning of July and it's not it's not a sort of a massive load of information but just ideas and a focus to pray.

Maybe that's something you could commit to do. Maybe you could commit to give regularly.

Bible a month is the regular giving scheme and there are so many ways in which we can be involved in sharing what God has done for us with others and in sharing the good news of the gospel.

Amen.