

**Ruler**

3/4 School Supplies Series

Psalm 1; 2 Timothy 3:14-17

08 15 2010 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

**Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:14-17****Introduction**

*“If I only knew then what I know now.”* (Sigh)—everyone has shared this sentiment. Life rushes by at breakneck speed; and we always feel a day late and a dollar short. Today’s knowledge would have been useful yesterday; and tomorrow’s preparation never seems sufficient. We feel ill-equipped for life’s challenges.

Bumper sticker philosophy gets at the heart of the matter:

- ✓ *Life’s a rat race, and the rats are winning!*
- ✓ *I got my stuff together and then forgot where I put it!*
- ✓ *Just when I figured out all the answers, they changed the questions!*

Somewhere at home, we all have a drawer or file that contains the countless **instruction manuals** that accompany life’s possessions. Owners’ books for toasters, blenders, coffee makers, toys, swing sets, bicycles, games, boats, cars, and more. What we REALLY need is an *Owner’s Manual for Life*. A comprehensive book you could hand a child at birth that contained all of life’s answers.

Many have attempted this publishing feat. Go into any book store—you will find hundreds of self-help books advising how to live a better life. How to succeed in business, improve marriage, raise children, lose weight, succeed financially, love self, and live longer.

People gobble up these types of articles and books. But does anyone really change? Next month someone else will regurgitate the same advice, and people will continue to wrestle with the same problems.

And it’s getting worse. We live in a world of **information overload**. The amount of knowledge is growing at a geometric rate. And even the smartest among us is functionally stupid. No one can know it all.

The result is that people drift through life without a rudder. Or to expand the metaphor to make it more life-like: we hurtle down a whitewater river in an underinflated raft, bouncing out of control through the rapids without a paddle or guide.

**I. God’s Owner’s Manual**

Thankfully, God HAS given us an owner’s manual for life, and it is called the **Bible!** The Scriptures provide timeless guidance and wisdom. God’s Word instructs us in spiritual principles that make sense out of an oftentimes senseless world.

Let’s begin with a very basic question: **“What is the Bible?”** The question can be answered on multiple levels.

- 1) The Bible is a book and a library of books. The Old and New Testaments contain 66 books written by a variety of authors in different times and places. It begins in the beginning with Genesis and ends with the end in Revelation. The Bible includes stories, history, law, poetry, hymns, love songs, proverbs, prophecy, gospels, letters, and more.
- 2) The Bible is also a history of faith of the Jewish and Christian people. The Scriptures record God's relationship with humanity over the course of time. The Biblical stories are our family history. They tell us who we are.
- 3) The Bible is a religious manual that instructs us how to live a moral, ethical life. The Ten Commandments, the Great Command, and other portions of Scripture describe the holy, righteous life.

And all of these answers are true . . . as far as they go; but they do not go far enough. The Bible is more than a book or library of books. It is more than a history of the Jews and Christians. . . It is more than a religious manual. As a people of faith, we believe that the Bible is the **living Word of God**. The pages of Scripture contain God's divine voice. When we read the Bible, we hear God speak to our lives.

Hebrews 4:12 declares: *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

Our Scripture lesson from 2 Timothy 3 today says that *"all Scripture is God breathed."* **"God breathed."** This recalls a scene from Genesis when the Lord created First Man. God knelt in the dirt and, like a potter with clay, molded Adam out of the mud. He laid there as a lifeless, inanimate object. Then God breathed into him life.

In the same way, all Scripture is *"God breathed."* God breathes the Holy Spirit into ink, paper, and binding. The pages of Scripture are animated into God's living Word.

We often talk about reading or studying the Bible. However, this perspective misses a crucial point. The Bible is a living document filled with God's Spirit. Any time we open the pages of Scripture, we are entering into a **conversation with God**.

Like any conversation, it is a two-sided dialogue. We approach the Bible with questions, preconceptions, concerns, doubts, fears, and joys. In turn, God meets us where we are at and speaks to us his Word. In turn, we are comforted, convicted, encouraged, reassured, and challenged.

We might study the Bible, but the Bible also studies us. We attempt to interpret the Bible, but the Bible also interprets us. It's a dangerous thing to open the pages of Scripture because we never know how that divine encounter will transform us.

## **II. Ruler**

Theologians and Biblical scholars describe the Bible as the *"**canon**"* of our faith. *"Canon"* is an old English word that originally came from the Greek language. It originally described a reed or cane that was used as a measuring stick. Today we would call it a ruler.

Today we are continuing our August worship series that is entitled *School Supplies*. One of the staples of any school supply list is a **ruler**. When I was a child,

rulers only came in inches, and twelve inches equaled one foot. This was long before the metric system had been invented!

We used rulers for a variety of purposes. They provided a straight edge for drawing. Plastic rulers could be flexed and used to pop your fellow students. Combined with tape and a clothes pin, they made effective rubber band guns. Oh, and we also learned how to measure objects in feet, inches, and fractions of an inch.

The Bible is our ruler or canon. God’s Word is THE authoritative voice in our lives that informs who we are and how we are called to live. It is not one of many books—it is THE book.

During sermon preparation, it struck me that “ruler” has two different meanings that are both applicable to our understanding of Scripture. First a ruler is a yard stick. The Bible is our ruler or measuring stick. It judges how we measure up and provides a plan for future growth.

But “ruler” can also refer to a king or queen that rules over their subjects. Jesus Christ wants to be the Lord of our lives who rules in all that we say and do. Through Scripture, we discover what it means to submit to God’s authority and live as good citizens in heaven’s kingdom.

2 Timothy 3: 16 continues: “*All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for:*

- ✓ *Teaching*  
Learn God’s Word, will and way for our lives.
- ✓ *Rebuking*  
Convicts us of sin and calls us to holiness.
- ✓ *Correcting*  
Makes right what is wrong—like setting a bone. Canon of all belief.
- ✓ *Training in righteousness*  
Note the imagery of training—the discipline of an athlete. Serious business.
- ✓ *SO THAT the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*”  
“So that” reminds us that Bible study is both an end in itself AND a means to an end—it equips us for every good work.  
Word to World, and World to Word dynamic in the Christian life.

### **III. If All Else Fails . . .**

God has given us an owner’s manual for life. However, we do not always take advantage of the Scriptures. We’re a bit like your average man putting something together. Everyone knows that men are born with the instinctive ability to put anything together. Only if all else fails do we read the directions!

But when we do read God’s Word, it contains the power to transform our lives. Consider these examples:

- ❖ One of the great patriarchs of the Christian faith is Augustine. In his spiritual autobiography entitled *Confessions*, the saint describes the sins of his early life. However, he came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. One day he was meditating in a garden and he heard a voice call, “Take up and read, take up and

- read.” So he picked up his Bible and began to read the Apostle Paul. It led to his conversion to the Christian faith.
- ❖ Martin Luther had a similar experience in the Middle Ages. He wrestled with his faith and the church’s rules. He intuitively understood that salvation did not come from good works. Then one day he read Paul’s words in Romans that salvation comes by faith alone. It was a turning point in Luther’s life that eventually led to the Protestant Reformation.
  - ❖ Centuries later in England an Anglican priest named John Wesley faced the same struggle. He wrestled with his faith, attempting to earn God’s favor. Then one evening he went very unwillingly to a Bible study. The leader read from Martin Luther’s commentary on Romans, and Wesley felt his heart “*strangely warmed.*”

During the August *Business by the Book* program, we discussed Stephen Covey’s practice: “***Put first things first.***” We wrestled with the question: “*What one thing could you do (you aren’t doing now) that if you did on a regular basis would make a tremendous positive difference in your personal life?*”

For Christians, engaging God’s Word on a daily basis would make a tremendous, positive difference in our spiritual lives. During childhood, I learned the song:

*The B\*I\*B\*L\*E, that’s the book for me!  
I stand alone on the word of God,  
The B\*I\*B\*L\*E!*

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was fond of saying, “I am a man of one book—the Bible!” Now Wesley was one of the best read men of his day and a prolific author as well. Yet he could also speak of himself as a person of “one book—the Bible.” The Bible is vital and central to our lives as Christian disciples.

#### **IV. How To**

- 1) Translation you can understand (I use *The New International Version*). We provide three Bibles to church’s children at birth, third grade, and high school graduation. We do so in order to provide a translation that will make sense to them at the various stages of life. Find a version of the Bible that speaks to you.
- 2) A daily time to study—make it a holy habit.
- 3) Where to begin: Mark, Luke/Acts, James, Psalms, Proverbs.
- 4) Under instruction—find a Bible study to join.
- 5) Under instruction—the Holy Spirit serves as our tutor.
- 6) Don’t worry about what you don’t understand—focus on what you do understand! God will give you enough to work on! W. C. Fields was one of the most famous vaudeville comedians of the past century. He was also reputed to be an agnostic at

best and an atheist at worst. During the final weeks of his life, he was hospitalized for alcohol related problems. A friend walked into the hospital room and was surprised to find Fields reading the Bible. When asked why, Fields responded, “I’m checking for loopholes.”

## **V. Results**

When we enter into an ongoing dialog with God’s Word, amazing things begin to occur in our lives. The Lord speaks to us in ways that change us forever. Today’s responsive reading came from Psalm 1. David uses this introduction to the Psalter to describe the person who immerses himself in Scripture.

*“He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
Which yields its fruit in season  
And whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.”*

Later in Psalm 119, David wrote: “*Thy word is lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*” Scripture serves to illuminate and guide our paths. It provides a map through an oft-times confusing world. It teaches us spiritual principles that inform our daily decisions.

## **Conclusion**

The Bible is God’s instruction manual for life. But it is much more than a book—it is the living Word of God. When we open the pages of Scripture, we enter into a conversation with the Lord God Almighty. The Bible possesses the divine power of transformation and change.

If all else fails—or better yet, before all else fails—maybe we need to read the directions.