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Well, good morning. If you have your Bibles, you can open them to *2 Timothy, chapter 3, verses 16 and 17*. If you don't have one, there is one in back of the pew in front of you. That is our gift to you. And you're going to want to take it—especially after today's message—because we are talking about how God works in you.

Last week we looked at a foundational—in fact all of these messages are pretty foundational—but the kind of foundation that you have to have.

Even in professional sports, we all know that the fundamentals—the fundamentals—are the things that make a team great:

- When you block
- When you tackle
- When you execute plays

And so what we are talking about are the fundamentals. One of my favorite Vince Lombardi quotes is at the beginning of every season he would take a football, gather his team around, and he would hold it up and say, “Men, this is a football—this is a football.”

And so I want to tell you today: Church, this is a Bible—this is a Bible. It is a very, very, very, important book to us. It's more different than any book that you've ever read in your life. In fact I read. I like to read. I read a lot of books. When I want to escape:

- I read cowboy books (or)
- I read books about hunting (or)
- I read books by Jack London like the things that he wrote about up in the Klondike

And I can escape for a while, and my life is different for a while, and I'm in there with the character.

The difference between a good Jack London novel or any little cowboy novel that I might read is that for those moments, I escape and I become somebody that I am not. But when I read the Bible, I can be transformed into somebody that God desires for me to be, that I am not right now. And that transformation, it never goes away.

And so I want us to look at the Bible this morning and I want to see how God works in you through the Bible.

GOD AT WORK IN YOU...THROUGH THE BIBLE

The first thing that we need to understand is that—

THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD TO US

It is God speaking to us. It's everything that we need to know about God this side of Heaven. Because God—there would not be libraries enough to fill up everything about Who God is and what all His thoughts are. This is what we need down here in order to know how to be right with God, how to be saved, and then how to live our life until God decides to take us to Heaven one day.

So, *2 Timothy, chapter 3, verses 16 and 17*:

¹⁶ Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us the truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. ¹⁷ Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks that [God] has for us.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (The Message)

I just love that verse. I love that translation. I think that's in *The Message*. I love that, because it really shows for us what the Bible is all about. It's God speaking to us. But not just speaking facts to us, God is interacting with us, and changing our lives through the Bible.

Just a couple facts about the Bible—number one, this verse says it's God-breathed.

THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD TO US...

(1) GOD-BREATHED

God breathed means this is something that's coming out of the very breath of God. When we breathe, when we speak, it's not like God speaking. But God is using this illustration of speaking—of God-breathed—these are His words that are coming out of His heart; they're coming out of His mouth. And the difference is—

I read this statistic a couple of years ago. It kind of blew me away. It says the average American tells 200 lies per day. Now I know there [are] probably no average Americans here. However, I have known some above-average Americans in my life. And that's based on 10,000 words a day. So there is some good news, guys, in the fact that women use a lot more words than we do. We're at least limited to the amount of lies we're going to be telling, right? Not that that has any implication in here.

It's God breathed. It comes out of God's mouth. God used human authors (as you saw just a moment ago in the [introductory] video that we looked at) and God—

- Through their experience with Him
- Through their vocabulary
- Through their background
- Through their culture
- Through whatever they did as a living

—He used their experience in life, their IQs, their very words, and He breathed into them. So it would be like they were the ship that had sails, and God breathed on those sails, and that ship went where God wanted it to go.

These are God-breathed words, and God doesn't lie. Does He record lies in the Bible? You better believe He does, because He wants us to see our hearts. But He doesn't lie; He is always telling the truth. This is the only book I know that tells the truth about man—uncut, undiluted, unadulterated truth right here. And so God wants us to know this is the Bible. He's speaking to us. It's God-breathed. It was verified by the teaching of Christ.

THE BIBLE IS GOD’S WORD TO US...

(2) TEACHING OF CHRIST

Jesus, in *Matthew, chapter 4, verse 4* [NKJV], said: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but [by] every word that” comes out of “the mouth of God.” He was saying: As food is important for you to survive, so is every word that comes out of the mouth—that is breathed out by God; that is inspired by God.

In *John, chapter 10, verse 35* [NIV], Jesus said this—this word— “[the Scripture] cannot be broken.”

In *Matthew, chapter 5, verse 18* [paraphrased], He said Heaven and earth will fade away one day and God will bring in a new order—but not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the law. In the Hebrew language, they use tiny/little jots and tiny/little tittles—little dashes and little dots. And he said those smallest ones—I had a professor one time that measured one to tell us—under a millimeter in length was a dot. And He said that little dot won't pass away out of the Word of God.

And so Jesus, teaching us, says the Bible is important.

THE BIBLE IS GOD’S WORD TO US...

(3) THE BIBLE

The Bible itself—more than 2500 times in the *Old Testament*—says, “thus says the Lord.” Over 500 times in the *New Testament* it claims inspiration. The 66 books that are in the Bible [are] all unified though written over a time period of over 1500, some believe up to 2000 years. And the Bible tells us (for itself): it is unique even in its factual accuracy. In other words:

- This is not a book of science, but when it speaks scientifically, it's correct.
- It's not necessarily a book on marriage, but when it speaks about marriage, it's correct.
- It's not necessarily a book on history, but when it speaks about history, it is correct.
- It is a book about the plight of man; which is sin and its cure, which is Jesus Christ.

And anything that God needed to tell us about it, He factually put it in this Book and every one of those facts [is] true.

Now, from time to time people rise up and say: Oh, that couldn't be true. We're going to try to prove the Bible wrong. And time and time and time again, people with different theories and different interpretations have tried to prove the Bible wrong; but—

- Every time there is a turn of the archaeologist's spade, there is something the Bible spoke about.
- Every time that accurate history is unveiled, there is something the Bible spoke about.
- Every time [that] science finally comes to its senses and says: Oh yeah, this is what now we believe about a certain thing—the Bible is found to be true

Bernard Ramm is a theologian and he says this—and a Bible scholar—and I quote:

A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession {has been} formed, the inscription {is} cut on the tombstone, and {the} committal {is} read. But somehow the corpse never stays put.

Bernard L. Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1953

Do you know why you can't kill the Bible? You can't kill God. Do you know why the Bible never fades away? God never fades away. None of His words fade away because God is eternal and this Book is eternal.

Now, what do we do with the Bible? Those are great facts about the Bible. But the Bible isn't just a book that is God-breathed and God's Word to us. But He gives us this because the Bible is to be lived.

THE BIBLE IS TO BE LIVED

There's a famous Baptist preacher by the name of Charles Spurgeon. Someone asked him: Dr. Spurgeon, aren't you going to defend the Bible from the infidels and those [who] don't believe that the Bible is the Word of God? And this is what he said [paraphrased]: The best way to defend a lion is to let it out; it will defend itself. And that is precisely what we need to do to the Bible. The Bible is its own best defense.

So how do you let the Bible out? You let the Bible out by living out the Bible. The best testimony to the inspired property of the Word of God—and that it is God's words—are human lives that are transformed, not just by coming to Christ (which is a miracle in itself); but every day being transformed by the power of the Word of God. The Bible is a powerful book, because God is a powerful God, Who wants to work in you.

This is what *James* says in *chapter 1, verse 22 and 23*:

²² But don't just listen to God's word. {Like you're doing right now, which is a good thing to do. This is like step one: you've got to listen to it; you have to read it.} You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.

James 1:22 (NLT, 2004 edition)

²³ For if you just listen and don't obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. ²⁴ You see yourself, walk away, and {you totally} forget what you look like. {—when you walk away}

James 1:23-24 (NLT, 1996 edition)

Now this morning when I got up and I looked in a mirror, guess what I had? I had bed head. If I were to look in a mirror and see I have bed head and then put my clothes on and leave and totally forget that I have that bed-head and didn't comb my hair; then what would I look like when I got here?—like a bed head.

[You'd say:] Dude, did you just roll out of bed?

[I'd say:] Uh-huh, I did. How did you know?

[You'd say:] You have bed head.

[I'd say:] Oh, I forgot—even though I saw it in the mirror.

If I woke up and I had Mount Vesuvius floating on my head somewhere, I wouldn't say: Oh my gosh! I have a giant zit. I hope that doesn't gross anybody out; and [just] turn around and forget and come to church. No!

When you look at yourself and something isn't in order, what do you do? You put whatever is not in order in order again.

When a healthy Christian looks into God's Word and they see what's going on in their life and how God says things ought to be, you do something about it. You just don't store up facts; you go for a life transformation. How do we read the Word? Do we read the Word in order [to get] information or for transformation? Information or transformation: are we reading because we want to know more or because we want to become more?

Now let me ask you something. Do you live your daily life based on information or do you live your daily life based on relationships?

Hopefully you're living based on relationships or you're a computer. A computer's sole existence [is] information, information, information. What's the reason [for] our sole [existence]?—to be in relationship with God and to be in relationship with one another.

When I write my wife love notes, I'm not giving her the facts. I've got something in mind, a purpose behind that love note (that we just can't talk about this morning): I want to deepen our relationship and I want her to know and I want to draw her closer to me. How do I do it? I write it down and I put it in a card and she reads it. She doesn't look at it and say: Oh, that's a nice fact. No, she doesn't. She says: Yes, I cannot wait until he comes home, because we have a relationship. The information that we share between one another isn't just about facts, it's about deepening a relationship.

Now God cannot be reduced to a formula of you—

- Praying a certain amount of time (and)
- Reading the Bible a certain amount of time (and)
- Memorizing some scriptures a certain amount of time

That in and of itself—divorced from the wanting of a relationship—is a robot that has information that they can spit out, but has no heart and no life transformation.

So let's look at it.

THE BIBLE IS SOUL FOOD

That's what the Bible is. Just like we need bread for our bellies, we need the Word of God for our souls.

Now I've recommended this book to you before, and I may have read this story (I think) a couple years ago. But I'm going to read it again because it drives home the point and you need to buy this book. It is by Eugene Peterson—it is the man that authored *The Message*—and it's called, *Eat This Book*. All right? Now I'm going to read this story.

He talks about his grandson, who was 7 years old at the time. He had just received his first *New Testament* at his church. His grandmother picked him up and they were going to have a picnic lunch. Then after the picnic lunch in the park, they were going to go to the museum for a special children's exhibit. And so he's sitting down, he's eating his sandwich, he's chattering non-stop ever since he had left church, and he's just downloading on Grandma all the things that have been going on. Then all of a sudden after lunch was over, he shifted away from the conversation. He goes into his little bookbag and he pulls out his—

...New Testament that he had just been given by his pastor, opened it, held it up before his eyes, and proceeded to read, moving his eyes back and forth across the page in a devout but uncharacteristic silence. After a long minute, he closed the {New} Testament and [returned] it [to] his bookbag; {and he said} "Okay, Grandma, I'm ready—let's go to the museum."

His grandmother was impressed. She was also amused because Hans cannot yet read. He wants to read. His sister can read. Some of his friends can read. But Hans can't read. And he knows he can't read, sometimes announcing to us, "I can't read," as if to reinforce our awareness of what he is missing.

So what was he {really} doing, "reading" his New Testament on the park bench that autumn Saturday?

*...
Hans on that park bench, his eyes moving back and forth across the pages of his Bible, "reading" but not reading, reverent and devout but uncomprehending, honoring in a most precious way this book but without awareness that it has anything to do with either the lettuce and mayonnaise sandwich he has just eaten or the museum he is about to visit, oblivious to his grandmother next to him: Hans "reading" his Bible.*

Eugene H. Peterson, from the
*Preface, Eat This Book: a
conversation in the art of spiritual
reading*, Wm. B. Eerdmans
Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 2006

It goes on to say it's "a parable" a lot like the way we read our Bible. Sometimes we can read and we don't understand or we read only to get it done because we know this is a Bible. How can we read to where it means something to us and it actually is helpful to us?

The Bible is meant to be ingested inside of our soul. I love what *Ezekiel, chapter 3, verse 2*, says—in *The Message* it says this:

² As I opened my mouth, he gave me the scroll to eat, {God's Word—His Bible—he gave me the scroll to eat} ³ saying, "Son of man, eat this book that I am giving you. Make a full meal of it!" So I ate it. It tasted so good—just like honey.

Ezekiel 3:2 (The Message)

Spiritual reading is what we need to be doing. It's what people centuries before us called *Lectio Divina*, [Latin] spiritual reading of the Bible. Reading that enters our souls as food comes into our stomachs and it spreads through our blood and it goes into our nerves and it refreshes us and strengthens us and allows us—much like that food—to have love and passion and holiness inside of our life when we ingest that Word.

We ought to be participating in the reading. We ought to receive God's Word when we read it and when we hear it. So that they become a part of our life, just like our beating heart is a part of our life. Just like the routines that we have in the morning are a part of our life. In our rhythm and in what we do in our life, the Word of God is such a part that we begin to see it—

- As we practice prayer
- As we act in ways of obedience (and)
- As we love people

It is soul food and as soul food—and any food—

FOOD MUST BE EATEN

You have to eat the food. You've got to come to the table and then you have to literally put a fork in the food and start feeding or you're going to die; you're going to be malnourished.

God wants us to read the Word, to put the solid food inside of our mouth. *1 Peter* says: Now that you've been born again, long for that pure spiritual milk, just like a baby does [*1 Peter 2:2* (paraphrased)]; then when you grow up, start chewing on the meat [solid food], he goes on to say. And the book of *Hebrews* says: man, you need milk again when you ought to be eating meat [*Hebrews 5:12* (paraphrased)].

God wants us to eat the Word—not just a puppet just (kind of) getting information [that is] de-personalized from a relationship with the Bible, a relationship with God, and a relationship with other people. But [instead pray]: God, change me—

- How do I get close to You?
- How do I get closer to other people?

- How do I stop this stuff in my life that You say (in the Bible) is destructive? —help me here.

Now here's what we need to do: *God at Work* is not just a theme of some messages that we have put together. *God at Work* is what God wants to do through your life and God wants to do through our church.

When we understand the Bible, then we are going to be able to recognize how God works and when He is at work in our life. If not, when bad things happen, here's what you're going to say: Where is God? He's been working the whole time. But if you don't know how God works, you cannot recognize, you can't join God, and you will be greatly discouraged when difficulties come in. God is always at work:

- In the good and in the bad
- In the light and in the dark

God never stops working. But you've got to know how He works. You've got to know how He works. And so in order to do that, we've got to read the Word of God.

FOOD MUST BE EATEN...

READ THE WORD

Wouldn't it be great if all of us as a church—whether on Fry Road or here on Jones Road—that we could know: This is what God is doing. How do we do that? We all have to be on the same page. We all have to know: this is how God works.

So here's what we're going to do this year. Ready? Starting Monday morning, we're all going to read the Bible together in a year. Now, here's how you can do that:

- Go to our Web site, www.TheMETonline.org [and select Regular at TheMET]
- Select [The MET @] Jones or [The MET @] Fry campus. This is the opening page when you come there [indicating the illustration on the side screens]. All the way down to the bottom [are] the *Reading Plans*.
- Click on the *Reading Plans* and this is what you're going to see.

You are going to see *YouVersion [Reading Plans]*—how you're going to read the Bible. Every day the readings will be brought up to you. There's even a journal that you can write on. You need to send it to other friends. If you say: I don't want to do it in a year; I want to do it in four days—there are other reading plans—that one is not on there. But if you go all the way to the top right hand corner, it will say *Reading Plans*.—I started this—you can read through the *New Testament* in 30 days.

But if we as a church on Monday morning or Sunday night (whenever you want to start but don't let Monday go by without starting)—we are reading God's Word together. Read the Word. You've got to eat the food in order to get the nutrients. You've got to read the Word.

Secondly, food's got to be digested.

FOOD MUST BE DIGESTED

Soul food has to be digested. (I mean) when you eat— You know, I have a bad habit: I eat really fast. I think it comes from growing up a little bit poor with a lot of brothers. I knew—man!—the faster I scarf [eat ravenously] the more I get. Literally, I could probably eat a full meal—I guarantee you—probably less than ten minutes. I mean just slam it down just as fast as I can. Everybody is still (you know) putting salt and pepper on their food and I'm done.

So I've been intentionally—

- Wait, wait, wait (and)
- Enjoy the meal
- Enjoy the company that's at the meal (and you know)

—just take a longer time so I can just digest the meal and enjoy it a lot more.

That's what reading the Bible is like. You've got to read the Word, but then you've got to meditate on the Word.

FOOD MUST BE DIGESTED...

MEDITATE ON THE WORD

You have to break it down. You have to give it some time. You have to understand. You have to spend some minutes thinking about what you've just read.

There's a great verse, *Isaiah 31:4*. It's a great verse because [of] how this word is used in *Isaiah* and how the word is used in *Psalms 1*.

In *Isaiah* it says: "As a lion growls...over his prey." [*Isaiah 31:34 (NIV)*] It's a lion gnawing on its prey. He took something down, he's gnawing on it, and you can hear him. He's not growling because he's trying to make everybody afraid or get people away from his prey or trying to intimidate anybody. It's like when a cat purrs. A cat purrs [it means]: Yeah, this feels good; I'm feeling good. When that lion growls over his prey [it means]: Oh man, yeah! This is very good and I'm savoring it and it's getting now into my very being and I'm really enjoying this.

Well in *Psalms 1* when he said, "Blessed is the man who...meditates" on his Word "day and night." The word *growl* is the same word that *meditate* is [in the original language of the Bible].

So here's why I'm saying: Be like a dog on a bone when you're with this Word—and I mean enjoy it; take some time.

Okay, here's what's going to happen. You're going to start that plan tomorrow and you're going to look and say: Man! That's three chapters I've got to read. Don't freak out! Read the chapters. When that happens, something's going to pop off the page. When it pops off the page—and you'll know what I mean when it pops off the page—grab that one and say:

- Okay, later on I'm going to meditate on this.
- I'm going to take some time and I'm going to think about this verse.
- I'm going to say it over and over again.
- I'm going to wait on God.
- God, what are You trying to tell me?
- Is there something else that I need to read?

You're going to be growling and gnawing on the bone of the Word of God, sucking out the marrow of the Word of God.

You've got to read the Word. You've got to meditate on the Word. Then you will be energized by the Word.

FOOD ENERGIZES US

Doesn't it? Doesn't food just kind of—(you know) you may be down and you may be lethargic and all of a sudden—man!—your eyes are brighter now because you've eaten some food. And you're ready to go and the second half of the day is coming—you've had a great lunch.

So how do we energize ourselves? How do we energize our life based upon the Word of God? Well the way you do it spiritually is you pray the Word of God.

FOOD ENERGIZES US...

(1) PRAY THE WORD

The Scriptures that are read and prayed are our primary and normal access to God.

- Well, how do I talk to God? Read the Bible.
- What does God want me to say? Read the Bible.

As you read the Bible and as you pray to God—

- The Bible is God's Word to us
- Prayer are our words to God

—isn't that a relationship?

If I kept writing my wife these notes and I never heard anything from her, what would you think I would think? I'm in deep trouble somehow. What's going on? I've written you, I've talked to you, and you don't talk back to me. How come we're not—ready, you guys—communicating? Why aren't we communicating?

Yes, God speaks to us. But it's a relationship—not a one-way, a two-way. God wants us to speak to Him. All of these Scriptures speak to us. The ones in the Bible that show how we can speak to God are found in the *Book of Psalms*. If you've never read the *Book of Psalms*, you are in for a shock. You know how you feel sometimes:

- Where's God?
- Why did this happen to me?

- I can't believe that those bad guys get good things; and I'm a good guy and I'm getting bad things.
- Why is their family so great and mine's so sorry?

Do you ever hear things like that said? Probably not at this church or (you know) in your family, but I'm sure you have. Do you know why that is?—because that's real life. In real life stuff happens that you don't understand.

When you go into the *Psalms*, here's what you're going to hear:

- They're saying: yes we will obey You, God
- But they are also arguing with God about what God wants them to obey
- They are also complaining because they have to obey
- They are also lamenting, not obeying
- They're also praising God
- They're also denying God sometimes
- They're also declaiming God
- They're thankful to God
- They're singing to God

On one page they accuse God of betraying and abandoning them; on the next they are turning cartwheels of hallelujah because of how God has delivered them. That's life, that's life.

So when you pray you don't have to pray these unreality prayers. You can pray reality:

God, my marriage is bad. My job sucks. How do I deal with this? Why are You blessing everybody and You're not blessing me, God?

And you tell Him how you feel and you open up the Bible and He tells you how He feels and what He's doing. You pray the Word of God.

Now, here's another thing we're going to do. We need to pray. Some of you don't know how to pray. You know how I learned how to pray? I listened to other people pray. I did. How did the disciples learn to pray? They heard Jesus pray. They said: We want to pray like You.

This weekend—starting Friday night—we're going to have a *Prayer Summit*. We're coming together as a church, and we—as pastors—are going to teach you how to pray. And we're going to pray together, and we're going to understand what it means to come into the presence of God and how we can do it on a daily basis. And you'll get some great helps so that when you walk away from the *Prayer Summit*, you'll know how to have a vocal relationship with God and what prayer's all about. So if you've ever wanted to pray—if that was one of your New Year's Resolutions—or you just want a deeper walk with God, the *Prayer Summit* starts Friday night. You need to be there. We'll do it Saturday and then it'll culminate Sunday morning in a message here.

And then finally, you've just got to live the Word.

FOOD ENERGIZES US...

(2) LIVE THE WORD

Isn't that the very purpose of the Bible? The very purpose of the Bible is to obey God and live it. It's to live the Word of God. The Word and life are, at root, the very same meaning. If I want to live the life that God has designed for me—if I want to be me, I've got to be me. If I've got to be me in all of God's glory inside of me, I got to read the Bible. I've got to obey the Word of God. And I have to live the Word in order to experience the life that Jesus talked about when He said "abundant life."

Okay, let's finish up. What's the evidence of a well-fed soul?

EVIDENCE OF A WELL-FED SOUL

How do you know somebody is nourished well?—well, they look good. (You know) their nails and their hair are healthy. Their complexion is healthy. They don't have jaundice. They don't have jaundice—not jaundice—scurvy. They've been eating the right stuff (you know). They're not malnourished. Their bellies aren't distended. They are healthy and they can function in life.

Well, how do you know your soul is healthy? How do you know you have a well-fed soul?

EVIDENCE OF A WELL-FED SOUL...

(1) OBEDIENT TO GOD

You're obedient to God. And I know it's a struggle to obey God. But when you're healthy you obey God. You obey God in doing what is good; and then when you do bad, you obey God dealing with the bad.

¹⁷ Now that you know these things {Jesus said}, you will be blessed if you do them.

John 13:17 (NIV)

—If you do them.

Now when you come to my house, you'll find primarily two types of magazines. Number one: you're going to find fishing magazines everywhere—everywhere. None of my pictures will be in them, but you'll find fishing magazines everywhere. The second thing that you're going to find are motorcycle magazines everywhere. Now you can come to my house and you can read all those fishing magazines, and you can read all those motorcycle magazines; but it doesn't mean you've ever ridden a motorcycle or you've ever been fishing. Fishermen fish. Motorcycle riders ride motorcycles.

And you—if you are going to be in the Word, the proof of that is that you obey God. That's what you do. So when you read the Bible it's not [that] we're saying: What does this mean? But we

ought to be saying: What can I obey? God isn't difficult, folks. It's a pretty simple process if we will obey.

So number one: You obey.

Number two: You speak words that bless.

EVIDENCE OF A WELL-FED SOUL...

(2) SPEAK WORDS THAT BLESS

James, chapter 1, verse 26 says this:

²⁶ If anyone considers himself {a} religious {person} and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is {say that with me} worthless.

James 1:26 (NIV)

How do you talk to one another? What are the words you use inside of your home? When you drove up here, how did you talk to your family? How do you talk about people that are with you and how do you talk about people that aren't with you? What do you speak about when it comes to people? Are you a gracious, merciful, loving, encouraging, positive person? Or [is] what comes out of your mouth bitterness and anger and defamation and gossip and slander.

No, the evidence that I'm in the Word is that I know God knows everything about me—but look at these great things that He says to me in spite of [and] in light of everything that I am. He encourages and is positive toward me and works with me; and therefore, I should do the same thing with others.

I'm going to tell you something: God never gossips about you. He always talks to you straight to your heart. He doesn't tell anybody else about you. He tells you about you. Speak encouraging words.

The third thing is: We have a heart of compassion

EVIDENCE OF A WELL-FED SOUL...

(3) HEART OF COMPASSION

Religion that God, our Father, accepts as pure and faultless is this:
to look after orphans and widows in their distress...

James 1:27 (NIV)

Do we have compassion? When you saw all that stuff going on in Haiti, what did your heart do? Serves them right—(you know) that silliness that Pat Robertson said—because they went to voodoo. Guess what, guys? We had a hurricane not too long ago. Was that because we're doing voodoo? This is the Bible belt. I mean I'm telling you disaster happens to the just and the unjust.

And God says: Look, no matter who they are, are you compassionate when you see people who are suffering and have nothing? You ought to be.

Why?—because God, who sees us who suffer and have nothing in the case of righteousness is moved with compassion and He sent His Son to die for us. Now, was it our fault that we're in what we're in?—you better believe it was. But that didn't matter to God because He is a compassionate, loving, Heavenly Father.

EVIDENCE OF A WELL-FED SOUL...

(4) LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

Do we have love for the Church? Do you love the Church? And when I say the Church, I mean people. Buildings are not churches. Properties are not churches. Churches are people who have accepted Christ and have the Spirit of God inside of them and have set them apart to say: We want to follow Jesus Christ.

Look what He says in *1 Peter, chapter 1, verse 22*:

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth {That was one of our issues, wasn't it? We have to obey the truth if we're in it—by obeying the truth} so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

1 Peter 1:22 (NIV)

Do you love the Church? There is an invisible, worldwide Church that you know exists because there are dots—little visible places just like this—here on Jones Road, there on Fry Road where people gather together and say: We love God and we love one another. And we're going to hold tightly to the Bible and we're going to hold tightly to one another because we don't want to lose either one of them.

And then finally, do you have life in Jesus?

EVIDENCE OF A WELL-FED SOUL...

(5) LIFE IN JESUS

Do you have life in Jesus? One of the ways that you know that your soul is healthy is you've got life from Jesus Christ.

Now listen to what the Bible says in *John 20:30 and 31*:

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. {There's a lot that Jesus did that never made it into the Scriptures. Now listen to what he says.} ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the

Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30-31 (NIV)

And so the greatest test for us is: When I read this Bible, does the life of Christ well up inside of me? Do I have something more than a physical existence down here and a mental assertion that there is a God and there is a Church and there is a Bible; and I'm full of the facts? Or do I have something that is so uniquely relational with God?—that I have what Jesus is talking about when He says: Whoever believes in Me shall from his inmost being spring up wells of living water. [*John 7:38* (paraphrased)]

Do I have the abundant life that Jesus talked about?—I have come to give you life and give it to you abundantly [*John 10:10*]. Do I have that inside of my heart? If my soul is healthy and I am in the Word, I have those things. I have those things.

And so the question this morning (as we close) is simply this: Do I have life in Jesus? Do I have that? And is it shown—as I go into the Word—is that confirmed to me by my obedience, by what comes out of my mouth, by the compassion that I have for people, by the love that I have for the church and so many, many, many more? Does that confirm the fact that I have life in Jesus? There are evidences of that.

Let's pray together as our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed. If you're here this morning and there's no evidence in your life that you have the life of Jesus—you've never been changed. And when you look into the Bible it's just confusion and just a bunch of muddledness, you need life in Jesus.

And when Jesus comes into your heart—

- Your eyes are opened
- Your mind is opened
- You begin to understand the things that are written in those words (and)
- The very things that we talked about become true in your life.

And just like I said last week, the starting point is: you have to have a relationship with Jesus, which is now confirmed by the time that you have [spent] in the Word.

So if you don't know Christ this morning, I'm going to pray a prayer like I do every Sunday. And this is your opportunity to have life in Christ. This is your opportunity to get forgiveness, to start all over again, [and] to get the do-over.

As our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed, if that's you and you want life in Christ this morning, let me just ask you to pray silently this prayer as I do aloud:

Dear God, I've been coming to church. I've even listened to the Bible. I've even read it a few times, but I don't have life in Jesus. And so I ask You, Jesus, give me life. Forgive me of my sins. Come in and totally transform me.

Our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed. If you just prayed that prayer, would you just put your hand up in the air right now—just right up in the air? Good. Yeah. Yeah. You're not alone; all over the building you put your hand in the air. And in a moment, when we take our offering, I want you to take that little slip of paper that I said was on the end of the right side of that bulletin. I want you to check the box, "I just prayed to follow Christ." And if you let me know who you are, we'll give you valuable information that will be a big help to you.

And for the rest of us, the Church—those of us that know Christ—this is our prayer.

Dear God, help us to be in the Word and the Word to be in us. Let there be evidence that our soul is well-nourished. And as we read the Bible together, Lord, this year bring us together to see how You work so that we can participate with You and we can see great things, great and mighty things that we never knew; but we're going to understand because we're in Your Word and we're praying together. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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**To them God has chosen to make known among the
Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is
Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

Colossians 1:27
(New International Version)

Legend:

(words in parentheses) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[words in square brackets] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{words in curly brackets within indented quote} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*