

## Explore the Word

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December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Good morning. It's good to be with you today on this last Sunday of 2019. There was a moment this week where I was looking around, asking Carla, "So is January 1st the end of a decade or the beginning of a decade?" And I started trying to figure out how to count all of that and she set me straight on where we are, we are ending a decade. It's great to be able to worship with you in this room. We thought for a long time that our first Sunday in this space would be the 1st of January, and I'm really thankful to the Lord and grateful that he's allowed us to be able to get in during Christmas. For me personally, I think for our church family, this helped us celebrate Christmas in a unique way together as a church family. I was just sitting there for a moment thinking this is the seventh time, when you count the multiple services and Christmas Eve services, that this is the seventh service that we've had in this room. There's a lot of tweaks and adjustments that we're still making. Some of you are in your seventh different place sitting in this room, perhaps. Some of you are moving around and looking for that spot, and I hope one of the things that you'll notice is that there's room for you to invite some people to come with you. Especially as we head into January, don't miss the opportunity to invite people to come worship in your new church space. There's nothing wrong with that. It's an opportunity, an easy conversation. You know what's going to happen when you get here, that the word is going to be preached and people have an opportunity to be loved on and embraced and taught the word. We have opportunities as we head into the new year to invite people.

We have a lot of different things, from air to sound, the lighting, where we sit, and we're still making adjustments so if you see something that we're missing, I'd love to know about it. There's a lot more doors getting into this room and out of this room than we've had before, so there's a lot of things that we're learning as we get used to the new space.

I want to ask you to open your Bibles to Second Timothy. Second Timothy. I'm the worst about starting a project only to discover that I don't have everything that I need in order to complete the job. Sometimes I discover that the trouble with this is that if I don't have everything that I need to complete the job, I wind up not finishing the job. Or if I try to finish the job, I use things that were never meant to be used for that job, and it winds up being a whole lot less than what it was originally intended to be. When you start using keys and coins as screwdrivers and using wrenches and rocks for hammers, you can wind up with a project that doesn't look anything like what you set out for it to be in the beginning. It's not just with building things, perhaps with cooking as well. Maybe in the last few days, you started a recipe only to find yourself on Google, trying to figure out what you could possibly substitute for sage or two eggs or vegetable oil. Surely, there's something in this cabinet that would substitute for what I'm missing. Long term, that's not that big a deal, on a building project or on a recipe. It's really eternally when you get perspective that it's not that big a deal. But if you try to build your life and you try to build your eternity without the things you need to complete it, that can be disastrous. So this morning for a few minutes, I want to invite you to look with me in second

Timothy, and I want to try to set us up as a church and as wholehearted followers of Jesus Christ to be fully equipped with everything that we need to make life and eternity work.

Much of the trouble that you may face in 2020 and the next decade could be attributed to trying to do life without what's required to complete it. Second Timothy chapter three, I want to begin reading in verse 10.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,

This is the apostle Paul speaking to Timothy, who was pastoring a church in Ephesus. He calls to Timothy's mind the example that he had lived in front of him. Verse 11,

<sup>11</sup> my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. <sup>12</sup> Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, <sup>13</sup> while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God <sup>18</sup> may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Last year, I stood before you on this last Sunday of the year, and I called you to engage the word in 2019. It was one of the most encouraging hours that I've spent in worship with our church family, primarily because of what happened in the next few weeks. After that Sunday was over, I'd received a stack of commitment cards that were at least two inches thick when you pressed them down. Hundreds of our church family last year committed together to engage the word of God in the year ahead. For some of us that meant reading the Bible entirely through in some particular pattern or path. For some that meant reading certain books of the Bible or reading through the New Testament a certain number of times or reading the Psalms or Proverbs, but there was a plan committed to by hundreds in our church family. As I bring that up, some of you may be thinking right now that you didn't get it done. Don't be discouraged by that. Would you consider and think about even if you did not finish the plan that you committed to, is it possible that in 2019 you read more of the word, that you engaged in more of the word on a consistent daily basis than you have in many years past? Perhaps that is where the victory is.

Today, I want to come back to a similar subject as we start heading toward 2020. I want to call you not to engage the word. I want to ask you today to make a commitment, as we had toward a new decade, to explore the word. I'm asking you to change the word just a little bit. To explore the word of God in the year ahead, to engage the word. In a sense that that word engaged means a meaningful connection. It means meaningful contact. It means to be involved with or connect with. As you look back over the last 12 months, you could say, I have been

involved in connected with God's word in a fresh way. I've loved hearing the testimonies. I've gotten emails, I've had face to face conversations. I've gotten text messages from people who've said, "I finished my plan early." "I'm going to finish by the end of the year." Expressions of gratitude of what God's done in their heart as they have been engaged in the word.

What's different about exploring the word? Engaging the word maybe means to be involved with or connected with or have contact with. To explore the word, I believe, takes it a step further. It's more intentional. It's more in depth. Perhaps it takes a slower pace. To explore something, by definition, means to travel in, to travel through with a purpose. To travel in or to travel through something in order to learn, in order to discover, in order to examine or discuss or evaluate. And so I'm asking you to think this morning as we finish out this year and head toward a new year to see what the spirit of God would have you do to explore the word in the year ahead. I don't think there's anything we could do that's more important, more valuable to our spiritual life than just to be in God's word.

Perhaps over the next few weeks a lot of people will unpack sermons and messages that would be some grand, maybe needed 2020 vision. Big things, big projects, big goals for the new year, new decade. Maybe you have something you'll do over the next few days headed toward January the first that will be five goals, five great things. And that's awesome. I'm standing before you this morning to say all of those things are just going to fall by the wayside if you don't start with the life giving word of God. The gospels teach us about building on foundations that fall when the storms come in life. The foundation we're told that will withstand the storms of life is for us to build on the word of God. So whatever your goals are, whatever your dreams are, whatever your vision is, whatever your plans are, they've got to start with being built on the foundation of the word of God. According to second Timothy chapter three, the end result of going to God's word and filling our life with God's word is for us to be complete. For us to be equipped with everything we need to do good work. And when you look in second Timothy three, notice with me beginning in verse 16, the authority of the word comes from the source of the word. Verse 16 it says, "All scripture is breathed out by God." It's not just any book. This isn't just one of three books that you got for Christmas. This isn't just an Amazon top seller book. This is the book that's unique to any other book. It is God's word breathed out by him. The authority of this word in our life, using this as the rule for our daily action comes from the source of the word and it is God's breath. It is God's word.

Notice the impact of the word he says, "All scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable." Just prior to that in verse 15 he says, "You've been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." It's the benefit of the word. It's the impact of the word. The authority of the word is that it comes from God. The impact of the word is that it can make you wise for salvation. Do you realize that reading this book can change your life for eternity? This book is so alive, these words are so true that the reading of this word can lead you to believing that Christ is the Savior, your sins being forgiven, and your eternity spent in heaven with King Jesus. Does that really happen? Last Sunday we watched a video from Jonathan Mosley and his testimony. You remember the scene in that video where he went to a guy being baptized in a feed trough. The guy that was being baptized in the feed trough was being baptized because he had read the word of God and came to a

point in his life where he believed that Jesus Christ was the son of God. That's the impact of this word.

It can make you wise for salvation and notice the benefits of the word. He says, all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable. He gives four ways that the word is useful or profitable. It's profitable for teaching. The word is profitable for reproof and correction and training. There's a little bit of difference in each one of these words. When he says this word is useful or profitable in our life, he first says for teaching. That means that what you read right here as a teenager in this book, that it shows you what is right. The word of God tells you what is right. When you're looking at life and you're trying to figure out, "How do I do life?" "How do I do my teenage years?" "How do I do my college days?" "How do I do retirement?" You read the word. And in the word we are told, we are taught what is right. This is where we get our doctrine. This is where we get truth. This is where we find out what is right in life.

Then he uses the word reproof. He says, the word of God is useful for teaching, it tells us what is right. Then it's useful for reproof, that means that this book tells us what is wrong. This book tells us what is wrong. So when you read Old Testament and New Testament, you're finding out what is right. It teaches us. You're finding out what is wrong, it reproves us. And then third, it says it's useful for correction. You read the word of God, you're told what's right. You're told what's wrong, and he says it's useful for correction. What is that? It means the word of God tells you how to make what's wrong, right. What an incredible resource. How am I going to do 2020? I don't know what's ahead. How are we going to do 2020 as a church? How are you going to do 2020 as a dad? How are you going to face the climate of our culture as a mom, as a parent? How are you going to handle your first year of college? We don't know what's ahead, but we have this book. We have the inspired word of God that tells us what is right, that tells us what is wrong, and then as we read it, we find out how to make what's wrong in our life, right. It corrects us.

The original Greek word there for correction was the word that meant to set something up straight. Something that's fallen over, something that's blown over, something that's out of place. It's the word that she used to take what's out of place, what's fallen over, and to set it back up in its right place. In the springtime in the nursery business, the number one job that you face every morning when you arrived at work was to walk through the greenhouses of container plants and find every plant that had been blown over in the wind during that day. And for about two hours in the morning, you just have people walking through container plants, reaching and grabbing them and standing them all back up that had fallen over in the wind. When we face storms in life and we feel like we're being wiped out or blown over, we've headed down a different course. When you read the word, you find out what is right, what is wrong, and you find out how to make what's wrong, right.

Then training, the word of God is useful for training. How does that work? When you read the word of God and you take it into your life, when you explore the word that means that the word of God being useful for training tells you how to make what was wrong, that is now right, stay that way. You've got some habits in your life. You say, "Pastor, this 2019 has been awesome because there were some strongholds in my life up into this year, but I've defeated them, I've won. I've won the battle." "I'm winning, Pastor, in the area of pornography. I was so

defeated by that for years, but 2019 was the year that I've broken free from that and I've got that wrong in my life, right." Do you know how to keep that right in your life? It's to stay in the word. Amen? Some of you, this is the testimony of your life that you know that the battles that you faced in the past, maybe battles with alcohol or battles with pornography or battles with depression or battles with to be tempted with envy over what other people have. You look and you say, you know what? God has reproved me. God has corrected me. God has changed me. Listen, if you're going to train your life for godliness, you've got to stay in the word. And when you train your life in the word of God, when you're faced with temptation, you're ready to respond with a win. You're ready to respond in the right way because you've trained yourself for that. You don't know what's ahead for 2020. You don't know what's going to go on in parenting or living or financial situations. You don't know what temptation is going to walk right into your path. Psalm 119, a verse there says, "Thou word I have hidden in my heart that I might not" What? "Sin against you." You didn't know you're going to need it, but when the temptation came, the word was there and you won.

I've been fascinated this year by the quarterback play of Joe Burrow for LSU. It's fascinating to me to see someone perform at such a high level. It was an intriguing story yesterday when he just seemed like he was playing little league on a football field. He was just slinging that ball around. There was a little clip that showed a competition that the LSU players had with the Oklahoma players of shooting three point basketball shots. Did some of you see that? Well, guess who won the three point shootout? Not only can you throw for 500 yards and score eight touchdowns, the dude one the three point shoot out. Now here's the rest of the story. He hadn't picked up a basketball in two years, and he wins the three point shoot out. Why was he able to do that? Because in high school, not only could he have signed a division one scholarship to play football, he also could have signed division one scholarship to play basketball. So in his life, all of his training to play basketball, even though he hadn't used it in two years, still allowed him to step up and win. And what I'm saying to you is as you read the word and you explore the word, you hide things in your heart that you don't know you're going to need. But when it comes up, the word of God is useful for teaching reproof, correction, training. What's the result? The result is that you will be complete, that you'll be equipped for every good work.

What an awesome place to be. It's the picture of a rescue boat that goes to save a life, and when that rescue boat gets to that person, can you imagine that person's drowning and you see the rescue boat coming and the rescue boat gets there and says, "We're going to save you! Where's the rope? Oh, we forgot the rope. We'll be right back." You go get the rope. You come back and you have the rope and you say, "Wait, we don't have the life jacket. Let me go get the life jacket."

They're not equipped. He's saying if you hide the word in your heart, explore the word, engage the word, you will be equipped for everything you need for life. You know what the word of God is? It's mama's purse. Equipped for everything you need for life, and he's offering that to us here and he's challenging Timothy to equip your life with the word of God. Well, what you need is a plan. And I want to offer some things to you. If you have your phones with you, you may want to take some pictures of the screen, and we're going to publish this and in the days ahead. I want to offer to you a plan that could be used in the year ahead for exploring the

word. You may have your plan, stick with it, stay with it. That's awesome, but here's a plan if you need one. This past year I read the Bible chronologically through, Old Testament and New Testament. This year I'm excited about a new plan I believe God's put in my heart, and maybe some of you would want to take this journey with me. You can divide God's word up, the 66 books of the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament into 12 categories, and over the next 12 months. I want to read a book a month from each one of those categories. Let me show you the categories. Can you look at those with me?

These are the categories of the word of God. 66 books of the Bible. You can divide them up into the law, history, poetry, wisdom, major prophets, which just means the books, the prophets that were longer winded. They're just larger, that's why they're called major. They're longer, they're not more important. The major prophets, there are four of those. The minor profits, there are 12 of those. That's the shorter text in God's word. That's the old Testament. Those are the major literature genres of old Testament scripture. And then New Testament, you have gospels, church history. And I've divided these up in this way, Letters to churches by the apostle Paul and then letters to others, pastoral letters, those were letters written to pastors. And then last, prophecy. Those are 12 categories of the word. And over the next year, each month I've selected one book to read from each one of those categories and not just read it, but to explore it, to delve into it and maybe read through these books several times during that one month.

And next slide, we'll show you a 12 month reading plan. And this is what I'll be using for the next 12 months. Again, you could use this and read along with me, but for January I'll be reading through Genesis, February: Matthew, March: Nehemiah, April: Acts, May: Song of Solomon, June: the book of Romans, July: the book of Proverbs, August: the book of Hebrews, September: Isaiah, October: Titus, November: Malachi, December: Revelation. There's some bouncing back and forth, an Old Testament book, New Testament book. Spending more time, not reading as much scripture verse wise, but spending more time with smaller passages of scripture. Maybe this would be helpful for you to think about a plan that you might use in the coming year. Well, what do you do when you read it? Here's how you can work the word into your life. I want you to just follow this with me. How do you read a passage? What I do with Genesis? Here are five ways to just work in the word of God, to explore the word of God.

Number one, check the context to see what's around it. Who's the author, who's the audience, what was the purpose of writing? Check the context. Number two, chase the references. If you use a study Bible, there'll be references to other passages of scripture. Let scripture interpret scripture. Chase the references to those verses, those chapters. Are those verses quoted from the Old Testament? Are these verses applied in the new Testament? Chase the references. Number three, challenge your heart. Where am I in this? Holy spirit, what do I need to see? What do I believe about this? What am I struggling with here? What's exciting to me? Just challenge your heart about what you're reading by inviting the Holy spirit to do his work as you read. Number four, choose a truth. Choose a truth. I'll walk away from this chapter, this verse today, what's something that God is really impressing on my heart from this passage of scripture. Number five, change your ways. What needs to change? When I read second Timothy chapter three and I check the context, I see it was Paul writing to a pastor named Timothy. When I chased the references, I want to look and see if there are other places that

the Bible speaks about the importance of scripture. I'm going to challenge my heart. I would say, what do I believe about the word? How am I using the word? How is it teaching and reproofing me? Choose a truth. May the truth would be that if my life is going to be complete, I've got to stay in the word. Change my ways. Maybe I need to get up earlier. Maybe I need to read more. Maybe I need to journal some. Maybe I need to apply the word and let it direct how I make decisions. I hope this would be helpful to you as you explore the word in 2020. I honestly say I cannot imagine anything that would be more helpful, more useful to your spiritual life than to make a fresh commitment today to explore the word of God.

I want to ask my wife, Carla, to come and join me on stage for a few minutes. I want to talk to her in front of you about her Bible study and her exploration of the word. I think maybe there's been one other time, but I think you're experiencing something here maybe for the first time in 19 years. I've persuaded her to come join me.

You all know Mrs. Carla. Things just got really a lot better looking up here, didn't it? Here's why I've asked Carla to be right here in front of us. First of all, we need to hear stories. We need to hear testimonies of how God's word is used in people's lives and people's discipline. I don't know anyone more disciplined in their intake of the word of God than Carla. It's enriching for our family, it's so helpful for me as a husband. So I'm just going to talk to her a little bit. Let you kind of overhear some of her story and should talk to you. But Carla, you have been a student of the word for a long time. Even when we first started dating, you were a student of the word. But this past year, you've made a commitment to read the word and I want you to tell us, tell me about what your commitment was and what your plan has been this past year for reading the word.

Carla: So this year I loved the challenge that Carlos gave us last year to maybe read through the Bible in a year or to pick up a new plan, something different. So I began praying about what would I do that would be different than what I've been doing in the past. So I began to kind of just look around and find a plan that fit me. I couldn't find a read through the Bible in a year plan that really fit the way I want to read the Bible, so I went looking for a two year plan. So I'm on the two year plan, and I did a two year chronological study so I'm not finished. When December 31st rolls around, I'll be at First King 17, I think. I'm about halfway through the Old Testament. And then I guess next year we'll do this rapid, I'll get the new Testament by maybe July. So that's what I've done.

Carlos: So a two year chronological reading through the word. I'll just be honest with you, there's a part of me that says, if I've spent the last 12 months just reading from Genesis to first Kings, I'm like drying up or something. I don't know. I mean that's a lot of a lot of laws, a lot of names, a lot of, "Son of this person" and, "He begat" and all of that. But that's not been that way for you. What's been your experience of just reading those books?

Carla: It's been remarkable. I think that because it's a two year plan it was bite sized pieces to me of the Old Testament. So it was maybe one to two chapters a day at the most which was doable. Even when I was walking through the "begats", you get up in the morning and you know, "Great, I'm still in Leviticus" or I'm in, you know, that part of Genesis where so and so begat so-and-so. Just all of all of those, what we would consider maybe dry passages. I knew

that that's what I was doing that day, and so I just went at it with, "Why did he put this in here?" "Why is this here, Lord, why did you do this?" And even in those days he would teach me things. I read the names. I'm kind of a strong little person and so I was bound and determined. He wrote it, I'm going to read it. And so I read the names. I mean, some of them, you know, you could never pronounce. But even in that, even in those days, I remember specifically one particular day and I'd been three days into some really dry literature. And the Lord just reminded me that he knew their names and he knows my name.

Carlos: I've heard you say over the last few weeks that you have a new favorite book of the Bible, you think. Tell me what kind of this new excitement in that book of the Bible.

Carla: My new favorite is Second Chronicles 31 and 32. I could not get out of them. In fact, I got behind for a few days because I didn't want to leave them. I was just overwhelmed. It was just so many things I felt. You know, because of trudging through some of the days that weren't so exciting or revealing, I said it was days and days of some dry stuff that finally yielded an "a-ha" moment. But then I get to some days where it's just more than I can handle in a day. And when I got to chapter 31 and chapter 32, I learned so much. I saw the schemes of Satan in Sennacherib, King of Assyria. The way he came at the children of Israel to try to trick them. I was like, "Oh my gosh, he does that to me." And then I saw the faithfulness of a wholehearted follower in King Hezekiah or in King Josiah. Just to watch their life and see what someone does in the face of insurmountable odds. And yet they just held tight to the God that they knew about. Remember, they knew so little compared to what we know now about God, but what he knew about God he was holding on to, and how he just stood fast and was faithful and feared God. I just learned so much from that.

Carlos: A lot of thoughts come into our mind about schedules and when we're going to read and how we're going to read. I witnessed this, but I just would ask as far as your schedule, it'd be easy to say, maybe you get around to doing that at 9:30 in the morning after everybody's gone on or at 11 o'clock at night. Talk a little bit about your schedule and how you do that?

Carla: Well, our life has changed a bit. We only have one child at home. And when you go from five to four to three to two to now one, well it is a lot different in the morning. There's only one kid to get off to school. The difference is now that I also leave. Because I now go to work, I have to do everything before I go. For me, I know the sinner that I am and that I cannot step into a day without spending time in God's word. I used to be a night owl and so really nighttime used to be the best time for me to read the word, but I was just stumbling all through the day and I just needed a reminder before me every morning. I needed to get up earlier in order to make that happen, but it's not too bad. I get up at six. That's not that early. He's up at like, 5:00 AM, sometimes 3:30 in the morning, you know, so that's not a big deal in my house. The lights are already on and there's coffee brewing, so it's easy. So I get up at six and I have plenty of time, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, before the rest of the house is moving and before I need to get ready to go myself. So it's not been bad and it's really, really wonderful.

Carlos: So that time winds up being 30 to 40 minutes like that in the morning. Well, I just, I wanted you to hear a little bit of a testimony as someone who's walking through a plan and for you to be thinking about how you in your life could make some choices, some decisions.



Whether it's a teenager or an adult or retired or you're full speed in the workforce, just walk out of here thinking today about how you're going to explore the word of God. It is useful, profitable for teaching, reproof, for correcting, and for training. And it equips us for every good work. Let's bow. Let's pray together.

As you bow before the Lord, I just want to know right now, heads bowed in this room, if the spirit of the Lord might be moving on your heart and mind to make a fresh commitment to explore the word of God in the coming year. Maybe you're not sure yet what plan, maybe the plan I've offered or some other plan, but I wonder if you would register this commitment before the Lord this year by standing in this room. A commitment that I can see, a commitment that the Lord can see, but with just heads bowed right now, just want to ask you, would you rise to your feet if God's moving on your heart to make a fresh commitment to explore the word.

That's good. Thank you.

Let's all stand. Let's all stand to our feet. Father, before you today, I pray that our hearts would hunger and thirst more and more for your word. I pray, Father that supernaturally you would give us the ability to hide your word in our heart and Lord, that we would be taught, reproof, corrected, that we would be trained by your living word that you have breathed out for us, your children. Father, I pray that the schemes of the enemy would not prevail, that he would not steal our food, that he would not hinder us from feasting at your feet. Lord, let our new year, let our new decade be guided and guarded by your word in everything that we do. Please do equip us and complete us for every good work in Jesus. We pray these things in your name. Amen.