Doctrine

The Bible

Fairview Missionary Church| Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

October 18, 2026

This morning, as we continue our series on doctrine, we're just taking time to share the foundational truths of our faith-- what is often called the orthodoxy of the Christian faith-- and why we believe what we believe. Today we're going to take some time to talk about this book that we call the Bible. Where did it come from? Can it be trusted? Why is it foundational to our faith and to everything that we believe?

We want to answer those questions for you today. And so I thought that I would do something interesting. I had had a conversation with somebody a couple of weeks ago about artificial intelligence, and it's, of course, all over the news now, and everybody's got their different beliefs about it and what we should be using it for. But after that conversation, I decided that I was going to ask ChatGPT, of all of the religions and faiths in the world, what is the most reliable?

I just thought I would ask it. What is AI going to tell me? Of all the faiths and religions in the world, what is the most reliable? And here is the answer that I received, and let me remind you that these are just the facts. This is not based on emotion. It's artificial intelligence. All right? This was the answer.

"If by most reliable you mean which religion has the strongest overall case that its central claims are actually true, rather than simply which religion has the most followers or produces the best moral teaching, I would put Christianity at the top of the list ." This is what artificial intelligence said. All right? Now, you all like AI. Before, you hated AI. All right?

Now, it did go on to say, "That doesn't mean that Christianity can be proved mathematically, because, of course, faith involves philosophical and historical judgments, but Christianity is unusually testable because it makes specific claims about events in history, especially the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus." So for saying, "Can it be measured?

Can it be tested? Can we at least point to something?" instead of it just being a blind faith, AI says," Yes, there are things that we can point to ." So why does Christianity have such a compelling case compared to all of the other faiths and religions in the world? Here are the four reasons that AI gave me. Number 1: because it is rooted in a historical person.

It's rooted in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and he is regarded by historians, both faith - based historians as well as not - faith - based historians, as a genuine historical figure. Almost everybody believes he actually existed, and that his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate is one of the better - established facts about his life.

So when people want to argue about Jesus, almost all historians would say there was a man named Jesus who existed, and he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Then AI went on to say, "There are also references to Jesus in non-Christian sources, such as the writings of Josephus and Tacitus, which I have studied, and some of you may just be hearing of them for the first time.

But there is mention of this man named Jesus outside of our Bible or our Christian text." The second reason that Christianity has a compelling case is because the Christian message appeared extremely early. Christianity wasn't a legend that gradually developed over hundreds of years after Jesus.

Paul's letters are first-century documents, and 1 Corinthians 15, which many textual critics and historians believe is the oldest letter we have, contains an early tradition concerning Jesus's death, his burial, and his resurrection, as well as his appearances after being crucified that scholars commonly recognize as very early. Why is that important?

It's important because it means that the story didn't change over time. It means from the very beginning, the central teaching of Christianity was based around the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. That wasn't added later to make the story sound better. All right? The third reason that Christianity has a strong case is because the New Testament has unusually strong manuscript evidence.

And this is what we're going to focus on today as we talk about the scriptures. We have these people that are called textual critics, and their entire job in life, what they do for a living, is they try to determine the accuracy of old documents and texts that we have as to their reliability. Can they be trusted, or have they been changed over time?

And according to those textual critics, the New Testament that we possess has a very large number of manuscripts and early fragments of the New Testament, allowing scholars to reconstruct its textual history with considerable confidence. Now, of course, we know that doesn't prove Christianity is true, but often one of the arguments that I run into, and I assume many of you do as well, is the argument that the Bible has been changed beyond recognition from its original form.

That the Bible you and I have is not what the original authors wrote, and according to artificial intelligence, he says, "That's a very difficult statement to sustain." It's just hard to prove that because all textual critics would say, and we'll talk about this as we go on today, that the Bible is the most trusted document that you and I have in history. The final reason that Christianity has such a compelling case is that Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection.

Many other faiths are based on things that can't be tested or can't be ruled whether they're true or not. When you're having an argument or a discussion with somebody, it is often important to establish at a foundational level, "How could I prove what you believe to be wrong?" And they call that, "How is your faith falsifiable? What could I do?" And with many faiths, they say," You can't. There's nothing you can do to prove that my faith is wrong ." Whereas in Christianity, this is perhaps the most important distinction.

Christianity doesn't merely say, "Here are some wise teachings of Jesus. Believe it ." Paul says that if Christ wasn't raised from the dead, Christianity is worthless. That is where our faith is falsifiable. So even AI is recognizing, "Listen, of all the faiths, this one is saying,' Listen, if you can prove this to not be true, then everything we believe is all a scam, and it's not worth your time.

It's not worth your effort.'" So the real question is, which religion makes claims about reality that can actually be investigated, and then what explanation best accounts for the evidence? Now, the one that I want to focus on today is number 3. We're going to talk about scripture. We want to talk about the Bible. Why do we have the Bible as our foundational truth? Why do we put so much trust in the word of God?

As we have been doing, my plan is to read the missionary church's statement on the Bible, what do we believe about it, what do we think that it is, and then I'm going to spend the rest of our time today unpacking that idea. Now, for those of you that have a good memory, this recap of what I am going to do today is a lot of what I said on a message on June 22nd of last year, 2025, in a message called, "Can we trust the Bible?" But so that you don't hurt my feelings, I'm not going to ask the question, "How many of you remember that?" Okay?

Don't raise your hands. I know that we forget, but it's going to be a recap of a lot of what we talked about roughly a year ago. Now, I'm going to ask that you buckle up and you get ready because I'm just going to warn you, I love this stuff. All right? I love talking about this kind of stuff. I get excited because many of you that know me know that I'm not an overly emotional person. Just by nature, I'm more of a logical person.

And so when I get in conversations with individuals about why I believe what I believe and why I do what I do, I love when I can share with them the facts, the data behind why I believe this to be true. Yes, all faith at a certain level just takes a trust or a belief. I get that, but it's not a total blind faith. What I believe to be true is based on scripture, and I think that I have a ton of evidence to say what we have before us is true, and it can be trusted, and it is accurate.

And so that's what we're going to talk about for the next few minutes. So let me pray, and then we'll jump in. Heavenly Father, as we talk about your word, what we call the Bible, the canon, I pray that we would be open to hear the facts, to have a logical conversation, discussion about this document that we have before us. But I would be remiss to say if I don't pray that it goes beyond that.

It's not my desire that people would just come to the conclusion that we have a book that can be trusted. It is my prayer. It is my desire that as we come to that conclusion, that then we would take that next step of reading it and diving into it and allowing your Spirit to do a work in our hearts and in our lives. There's probably many here that already accept it to be true, but I'm sure there are people here that are still trying to figure out whether this whole Christianity thing can be trusted and whether it's for them or not.

And so even in our conversation about the scriptures, I pray that eyes would be opened, that hearts would be ready to hear from you and from your Spirit as you continue to call us to you. We ask this in Jesus's name. Amen. So here's the missionary statement on the Bible. This is our belief about the scriptures.

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, is the written word of God, that it was verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit, and therefore, because of that, is true, reliable, and without error in all it addresses. We believe that the Bible has been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit and transmitted to the present day without any doctrinal corruption.

The Bible forever remains the unchanging and final authority for faith and living. And I need you to know that of the men and women that have spent time and energy coming up with these statements that are our foundational beliefs, that the words are very intentionally used, specific words. And so we're going to unpack this a little bit. Now, one of the interesting things as we're talking about scripture today, this will probably be one of the Sundays that I quote the least scripture. All right?

Now, I don't want to get any emails. Please don't get mad at me. Okay? I obviously love the Bible. That's why we're talking about it. But when you're conversing with individuals about whether the Bible can be trusted or not, do you know what you can't do? Use the Bible to say that the Bible's accurate. They already don't believe it. Now, I am going to use two verses, and so we're just going to read this at the beginning. Okay? This would be our foundational belief as a church. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17.

We believe, as the apostle Paul says, that all scripture is God - breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Why? So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. So what is the Bible? One of the things that I loved doing as a youth pastor with middle school students as we would get together for Sunday school is I would ask the question, "Where did the Bible come from?" And a lot of these middle school students were raised in the church.

They came to church, and I loved when they would answer with things like, "Well, it just floated down from heaven." Right? God just gave it to us. Because when you're raised in the church, you just accept it as a teenager, as a young teen, as a child, you just accept it to be true. And so God must have given it to us. But of

course, we know that's not true. That's not where the Bible came from. So where did the Bible come from? It's important for us to understand that the Bible is not one book.

It is 66 books and letters that have been put together. I really call it a library of books that were put together over 1, 600 years across three continents by close to 40 different authors and in three different languages, Hebrew, Greek, and to a much lesser degree, Aramaic. The authors were made up of kings, teachers, shepherds, and fishermen, just to name a few of the occupations of those that authored certain books that we have in our Bible.

Our Bible, our library, is broken up into two different sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. In total, there are 66 books. 39 are found in the Old Testament, and 27 are found in the New Testament. And when we're talking about their reliability or about the textual criticism of these books, we really have to break it into Old Testament and New Testament. So let's talk about the Old Testament first, obviously called the Old Testament because it was written a lot longer ago.

It is older, so it is the Old Testament. It's important for us to know that the Old Testament was accepted by the early Christians, those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, because they inherited the entire Old Testament from the early Jewish believers, the Jewish scriptures. The Old Testament is from the Jews. Don't forget that Jesus was born into a Jewish family, and the Israelites, the Jews, were God's chosen people through whom he had promised he would reveal himself to the world.

And these were the same 39 books that we have today in the Old Testament are the same ones that they had, that early group of believers. So what is the Old Testament? What are these Jewish scriptures, the 39 books? Our Old Testament is a combination of historical books. These would be the books like 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles. Okay? It is literally just talking about the history of the Jewish people.

It is a history book. Just like we study US history in school, they had Jewish history. That's what that was. It's also made up of prophetic writings. These are prophets that were inspired by God, we believe, and were given a message to share with the people, often to the Jewish people, but sometimes it was to other nations as well. And so we break that up into different sections. And so we have what we call the major prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah. It's important for you to know they're not called the major prophets because they're more important.

Does anybody know why we call them the major prophets? Because the books are longer. That's the only reason. They're bigger books, so they'll be the longer prophetic books. And so, as I said, Isaiah, Jeremiah, we call them the major prophets. But it's also made up of what we call the minor prophets, prophets like Joel and Micah and Malachi. Again, not called minor because they're not as important. They're called minor because their prophetic books are very short, 2, 3, 4, 5 chapters long.

So we have the historical books. We have the prophetic writings. We also have poetry that's made up in the Old Testament. And the longest book in the entire Bible is Psalms. Okay? And that is a book of poetry. It's a book of songs. So that is also included in our Old Testament text. We also have proverbial writings. And all of these writings, the historical writings, the prophetic writings, the poetry, is all centered on the nation of ancient Israel that tell one story.

All of these books together tell one story. And what is that story? It is about a God who created the world, grew a nation, Israel, and began to use that nation to bless the world. That's the story we have in the Old Testament. The Old Testament was composed over the period of 1, 100 years, more than a millennia, from the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, which was completed in about the 15th century BC, all the way to Malachi, the newest book in the Old Testament, which was written in the 5th century BC.

Where do these books come from? Well, the sources include Moses. Of course, it's the official records of Israelite kings and these proverbial writings from wise individuals, kings and people that were part of the

Israelites. So how can we accept these Old Testament books that we have from the Jews? Well, we believe we can trust them because Jesus verified them in the New Testament. He verified that these were the inspired writings of God.

He often would refer to them and point out how he was prophesied about in these Old Testament books and letters. These books were handed down orally. They were communicated from Jewish parents to their Jewish children as well as with parchments that ancient scribes painstakingly copied word by word by word, letter by letter. They did not have the printing press. All right?

So scribes, those that would study to learn how to do this, would copy it word for word, and it was handed down orally from generation to generation. And so we believe that what we have is accurate, again, because Jesus referred to them. And you never hear Jesus say, "Well, okay, but the book that you have that is Genesis, it's been a little changed throughout the years." Right? He says it can be trusted. He quotes from it. This is accurate according to Jesus.

Shortly after the time of Malachi, which is the newest book in the Old Testament, the entire Old Testament was considered a complete canon or inspired text to the Jews. Early in the church, the Hebrew believers recognized God's messengers and accepted their writings as the inspired word of God. So that's the Old Testament. Now, the New Testament is where it gets a little more fun because we have a little more record here.

We have a little more history that we can jump into with the New Testament. It is important for you to recognize the first thing that I want to share with you about the New Testament because there are so many - I don't know any other way to put it - untrue podcasters that anybody can go online and put a podcast. You guys know this, right? Okay? Anybody can go online and say what they're saying is true, and you can look it up, and it's not true, but they still can say whatever they want to do.

It's important to recognize that the New Testament books, the 27 books that we have in our New Testament, were not chosen or voted on by some council. All right? That's not how we got the books of the New Testament. There was not a group of men that got together at some point in history and threw all of the letters and documents that we had during that time period together, and everybody voted, and those that got a certain majority of votes made it into our New Testament. That is not how it happened. Okay?

I don't even know why I have to share this. That comes from a movie, a fictional movie. Okay? The Da Vinci Code. You guys, everybody remember the Da Vinci Code? Okay. That's when it started to get popularized. That is not what happened. Instead, our New Testament, these books, these letters that we have in the New Testament were recognized by the early church way before any of those councils took place, very early on, as the writings of those who were closest to the community surrounding Jesus.

So these letters that were being read in the churches that were started by the apostle Paul were recognized as letters by Paul, letters by other people that were in the community surrounding Jesus so that what we have in our New Testament is the direct connection to the life and teaching of Jesus. These are firsthand accounts of what these men wrote down concerning their time with Jesus.

The apostles, the living witnesses of Jesus's resurrection, and the bearers of divine authority traveled around the churches teaching Christ followers to live consistently within their faith. And these apostles began to write letters to the churches as they naturally would. And these letters carried the same authority as their spoken words. These are firsthand accounts. These men and women that would travel around sharing about their experience with Jesus then wrote these things down.

And because of that, they carried the same authority. At the same time as these letters are being written, some people within the apostolic community recorded the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, writings that became the four gospels that we have today, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Often, when people say, "Well, you only have one book that talks about the history of Jesus. How do we know it's true?" That is not true at all.

We at least have four testimonies of who Jesus was and what happened, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Jesus's disciples also mentored others. And we call these other men the apostolic fathers. Okay? I'm going to list some of their names who then go on to comment on what books did or didn't have a long history of going back to the words of Jesus. So these apostolic fathers could look at these letters and say, "Well, no, that's not true.

That didn't happen at all ." Or, "That was true." Yes, that's exactly what Jesus said because they were mentored by the apostles. This is now one generation removed. Think about a parent and a child, a mentor and a mentee. And so they could go back to the words of Jesus. And so the process of acceptance in the New Testament church involved ensuring, number one, that a book carried apostolic authority. All right? Were these people with Jesus, or did they know people that were with Jesus?

Because we do understand that even orally, things get changed. The second test that it had to pass was, is it generally accepted by the body of Christ at large? Are these letters being distributed, and do we recognize these letters for what they are? The third thing was, is it consistent with the accepted doctrine of the church, with what we know Jesus taught? And finally, did it bear evidence to high moral and spiritual values that would reflect the work of the Holy Spirit?

It had to pass all of these tests in order for it to even be considered. And these are just simply logical tests. Should we trust it, or should we not trust it? Well, if it passed these, okay, it has a shot. And so here's a timeline of the New Testament acceptance of what we have in our Bibles today. The first man that I want to mention as an apostolic father is Clement of Rome. You might recognize his name, Clement. He mentions at least eight books that we have in our New Testament as early as AD 95.

Now, you might think, "Well, that's still a little bit after Jesus." But I mean, that's still extremely early, AD 95. These letters were written maybe 20 years before that, 30 years before that. And he's already saying, "These are recognized and accepted." We have another gentleman, Polycarp. How many of you have heard of Polycarp? They have weird names, by the way. Okay? Not many of you heard of Polycarp. He was a disciple of John. So we're talking about Jesus, John, Polycarp. All right? He probably can be trusted as the message is being shared.

He mentions 15 books and as early as AD 108. Then we have Irenaeus, who mentions 21 books in AD 185. And then we have Hippolytus, or Hippolitus. I don't know how to pronounce these guys' names. All right? He recognized 22 books as early as 170 AD. And the first complete New Testament was recognized in AD 170 called the Muratorian Canon. Now, I say full, but it's not full.

I don't know why we say it's complete New Testament because it didn't have Hebrews, James, or 1 and 2 Peter, or 3 John. Those were not included yet. But in AD 363, at the Council of Laodicea, they stated that only the Old Testament and 26 books of the New Testament minus Revelation should be read in the churches. So very early on, these men are getting together and saying they pass all these tests.

This is what we believe should be used in the churches to teach what we have been believing to be true. And notice it's the 27 books. It doesn't have Revelation, which you can understand why they were a little weird about Revelation. So whenever you guys tell me you need to preach more on Revelation, I'll just say, "Well, we're not sure." Right? It's a little questionable. We're not sure. But it wasn't very much later in AD 393, as well as in 397 when it was confirmed again at both the Council of Hippo and the Council of Carthage, which are just the places they met, they affirmed all 27 books as authoritative in our New Testament.

Now, that happens very quick. That is very early for anything to be adopted in that way. It doesn't leave a lot of room for error. It doesn't leave a lot of room for translational differences or people adding things or adding onto the story or taking things away from the story. And so I want to go back to one of the statements that we have in our missionary church document about the Bible. And I'm going to end with this. I want to unpack this statement.

We believe the Bible has been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit and transmitted to the present day without any doctrinal corruption. What does that mean? Does that mean that we are making the statement that as one scribe copied one text to another text, that he didn't miss a dot or a line? Is that what we're saying? No. We can prove that that happened. We have fragments of documents where we can see, "Oh, he missed a dot there.

Oh, he missed a line." By the way, when I say dot, for those of you that don't know Hebrew, the vowels in Hebrew are dots and dashes in line. So it's very easy to just miss a dot, and it changes everything. Okay? So we're not saying that that didn't happen. The question that we're trying to answer is, how do we know that we have the actual words that the authors wrote and that they haven't been changed or adapted over the last 2, 000 years? Because that's an argument that many people want to have with me as I believe the scriptures.

They say, "Pastor, that has been changed so many times. It's been copied. It's been translated. We have no idea if what we have is the original text." Well, let me just tell you that the last 200 years have done more to answer this question in a positive way than anyone could have ever imagined. As we continue to do more archaeology and more documents are found, I'm just going to give you two examples because that's all we have time for. I don't even have time for that, but I'm going to steal it from you. All right?

In 1895, two gentlemen by the name of Bernard Granfill and Arthur Hunt, archaeologists, found over a half a million papyrus, which is skin that has been written on, in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, that included of those half a million papyrus that they found, it included every book of the Bible, every book, as well as many classical and other religious texts.

And as the textual critics compared what they found in these papyri, they were shockingly close to the text that we had from centuries earlier, which is truly unheard of with any other document. I didn't say it was perfect word for word. Remember, we have slight errors in translating or not in translating, but even in copying. As you look there and then you write, you can make mistakes. But truly unheard of, the minimal amount of changes that were there.

And if that's not enough, one of the greatest discoveries for textual critics of the scriptures came in the 1940s in what have become called the Dead Sea Scrolls. If any of you had the chance to go to Israel, I'm sure that one of the locations you will visit is Qumran. I've been there twice now. I've actually seen the caves where these scrolls were found down near the Dead Sea in Qumran. And as only God could have it, in the 1940s, imagine how these were found for, I mean, centuries.

These clay jars were in this cave right there in Israel. And these two shepherd boys are throwing rocks into caves. And I know if you're like me, before you went to Israel, you're thinking, "Why don't we just go into every cave and find if there's something there?" Okay. There's a lot of caves. Okay. When you go there, you'll understand. And it's a remote area. You're not just going to go around from cave to cave. These two shepherd boys were throwing rocks into a cave. They heard something shatter, and they go in, and they find hundreds of these clay jars. So they immediately talk to the authorities.

The authorities come, and they open these clay jars, and they find all of these documents, manuscripts, fragments of scripture. Now, listen to this. Included in these copies of the Bible, it took some of our earliest manuscripts that we had before that back hundreds of years. So let's say our earliest manuscript was from 400 or 500. It went back hundreds of years further than the originals that we had, getting us closer to the original.

And again, scholars and textual critics were shocked at the continuity of the text. It had not changed in those hundreds of years. And here's the crazy thing. As we have discovered more and more manuscripts and fragments, it hasn't complicated our understanding of the Bible, but it has verified it. As discoveries are made, we aren't getting further away from the original text, but we're getting closer to it.

And this evidence confirms and gives us good reason to trust that what we have is from the original authors. You have evidence to believe that to be true. We have more evidence that what we have in the scriptures is accurate

to its original text than we do of any other document. And yet, I have never once had an argument with anybody, and I like to share this, that William Shakespeare wrote Romeo and Juliet. No one's ever argued with me about that.

Do you know we have more proof about this than we do about that? More proof, more evidence. Yet people still want to come to me, and they say, "Pastor, have you ever played the telephone game when you were younger?" And I'm like," Yeah, I know where they're going with this." Right? Where you share one statement in the ear of a friend next to you, and you can only say it once. And then they've got to remember it and say it to the person next to them. And of course, when you get to the end of that line, the person at the end usually doesn't have a clue what was originally said because it was changed over time.

And they say, "Pastor, that's what it was like with this. This tradition was passed down orally at first. How do we know it wasn't changed or embellished over the years?" Can I just tell you that in the case of scripture, what we have is an original text that was written down and then shared orally thousands of times. Not to mention it was copied thousands of times from the original. Then copies were made of those copies. So yes, we have copies of copies of copies.

But do you know what you can do when we find those copies? You can compare and contrast those copies with one another. And when you do that, you find with amazing accuracy that the scribes copied word for word with only spelling and grammatical errors and with all of the fragments of any section of scripture we have, do you know that nothing changes the theology of the message? That's incredible, by the way.

I mean, even non - faith textual critics are amazed at this. How is that even possible? In fact, it even goes a step further. When we put together all of the manuscripts that we have discovered, we actually don't have 100 % of the Bible. We have 110 % of the Bible. What do I mean by that? What I mean is when you had scribes that were copying one manuscript to another manuscript, even if something was added in the column or if it looked like maybe something was added later by that scribe, the scribe would copy it just to make sure we didn't lose anything.

But then he would make a note on his copy saying, "I'm not sure if this was original ." Does it look like we're trying to hide things here? Anybody have a study Bible? You guys use a study Bible? Do you see those textual notes in your study Bible? We are not trying to hide things. We're still saying, "Okay, we're going to include this verse," or, "We're going to include this section ." But that was not actually in the earliest manuscripts that we have. But we're going to put it here anyway. It might be good. It can be trusted, but we're not sure if it's original.

We're not trying to hide anything at all. This is why evangelicals view the Bible as inspired, infallible, and ultimate authoritative rule in our life. It serves as a supreme rule for our faith and for our practice. And so let me end with one more verse, Hebrews 4:12. As only God would have it, this is the first verse that I memorized. And I only memorized it because I was in this quizzing thing with my church, and we were competing against other churches. And I'm competitive, and I wanted to win. Okay? So that's why I memorized this.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "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 ." So here's what we believe about this book. We believe that it is alive in the sense that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it carries within it the power to transform lives. We also believe that nothing trumps scripture.

It is our ultimate authority on questions of life and faith. It's what I go to first. And if anything contradicts this, I'm going to believe this over that. We also believe that putting our faith and our trust in the scriptures is not a blind faith, but it is based on logic as well as historical evidence. We also believe that with the questions of life, the Bible is where we go to. When we do our tough question series, the very first place that I'm going to look for that answer is scripture to give me direction.

We also believe that the word of God is meant to be read privately. You can read it by yourself at your house. You don't need a pastor there. We also believe that it's meant to be read corporately. We're supposed to study it together in a small group with a life group in a Sunday school class on a Sunday morning that we would open the word of God. Now, here is the truth. This Bible that I'm holding in my hands, it doesn't look great now, but this is the book that actually transformed me into who I am today.

I bought this Bible back when I was in high school. Again, I wasn't a normal high school kid. I don't know many high school kids that go out and buy a Bible. All right? I had saved up some birthday money. And I think this Bible back when I bought this in the mid -' 90s was $75. So that's like, what, $600 in today's money? Is that about what it is? So it was a lot of money. It had gold filigree on the side. That's kind of all worn off now. It doesn't even hold it anymore. Every single page can come out of this if I let it go.

But I started reading this not necessarily because I wanted to learn more about God, but because I had spent a lot of money on it. And I said," You know what? I've never read the Bible from beginning to end, so I'm just going to start reading this book ." And so I started in Genesis 1, which I wouldn't recommend because you get to Leviticus. It's a struggle. And I still have all of my underlines and my notes and my questions. As I read this as a high school student, I don't think that I understood half of what I was reading.

But can I just tell you, as someone standing before you today, it didn't matter whether I understood half or not. This book is alive and active. This book transformed me into who I am today. I caught enough of it that I caught enough of God, and I have been pursuing Him since that point. So what is my encouragement to you today? My encouragement is, get your Bible, open it, and read it. Pray before you open it.

Say, "God, Holy Spirit, reveal your truth to me." Know that it's okay to write in it and to underline it and to make questions and to maybe if God speaks to you, write something down and say, "Oh, that's kind of a cool verse, but I'm not sure I understand this." It's okay. Just dive into it. Read it by yourself. Continue to come to church. Be in a group where you're reading the word of God because I believe that this book is alive. And it truly can and does have the power to transform you.

We're going to close in prayer. There's always people that would love to pray with you on the sides. If you guys want to come to the altar, you can come to the altar for anything. Just love to be an encouragement to you today. Let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, thank You for Your word. Thank You that we can stand on truth in a day and age where truth is hard to come by. Again, I thank You that it's not just a blind faith.

I thank You that we have historical, archaeological, textual criticism that proves that this is true and it can be trusted. So God, would You continue to transform us into Your image that You would receive the praise and the glory and the honor. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.