

“Discover Your Long-Lost Story”

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Series: *Half-Truths* Week 4 *God Said It, I Believe It, That Settles It*

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We are deep into summer and one thing I used to love about summer is camping. We don't camp much anymore but I miss it. I love hiking in the woods, boating on a lake, cooking over a fire, gazing at the stars. One thing, however, I do not relish is the middle of the night. When I'm camping there is always one deep philosophical question that keeps me awake at night: do I go or not go? After all, if I leave my tent I might meet up with a skunk, a bear or Jason. I might find there is no paper when I get there. Worst of all, when I arrive it may be the deep pit of despair. Years of these midnight runs led me to formulate Hoglund's Third Law of Camping: An outhouse is always too far when you need it and too close when you don't.

The Israelites went on a very long camping trip – 40 years to be precise. With thousands of campers on this trip and thousands of years before the invention of indoor plumbing, they needed some guidance on how to handle this delicate duty. Moses says,

Designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself. As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement. For the Lord your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you. (Deuteronomy 23:12-14)

You probably didn't know that is in the Bible. I bet you never heard a sermon about that passage from Scripture. In his book *Half-Truths* Adam Hamilton says this obscure law on toilet training was actually a hot topic in the 1880s. Some pastors felt it was against God's Law to put restrooms in church buildings.

Since churches were understood as God's house—places, like the Israelite encampments in the wilderness, where God was with the people—then the same rules about where people could relieve themselves must apply. So it was not unreasonable, based on that text about a very different time and place, to argue that God would find it unholy and indecent for believers to go to the bathroom inside God's house.¹

If you think this is extreme and ridiculous, consider the people who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were a Jewish group called the Essenes who interpreted the Bible more strictly than the Sadducees, Pharisees, Jesus' followers and all other Jews. Based on this passage the Essenes argued there should be no toilets in the holy Temple *and* the whole holy city of Jerusalem. Imagine an entire city without restrooms. In their scrolls

¹ Adam Hamilton, *Half-Truths: God Helps Those Who Help Themselves and Other Things the Bible Doesn't Say* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016)

they specified the place to relieve yourself should be 300 cubits outside the city walls. That's one and a half football fields. It gets worse. They were also strict about not working on the Sabbath. All Jews believed if you walked too far on the Sabbath it was work. So the Essenes, who said the toilets should be 300 cubits away, also believed you could not walk more than 100 cubits on the Sabbath. You do the math.

The Essenes in the 1st century and the preachers against plumbing in the 19th century would agree with this week's half-truth: "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." Like all half-truths – it has the ring of truth. We all believe the Bible is God's Word. Yet when someone makes this vow they claim they take God's Word, the Bible, so seriously, there is no need for debate or interpretation. God said it. That settles...even when it applies to where we go. They say other Christians pick and choose which parts of the Bible they follow. They choose the nice verses while avoiding the tough ones.

While this cliché seems simple and straightforward, the reality is much more complicated. All Christians pick and choose which passages they will follow or quietly ignore. There was a time when the Bible was used to justify slavery. I don't think any Christians would make that case today. Churches today are divided over whether women should be in ministry and over the issue of homosexuality. Both sides appeal to Scripture.

All Christians must interpret the Bible. You can't avoid it. The Bible was written a long time ago in a Galilee far, far away. The minute you open and read it your mind starts interpreting it into your culture, customs, and concepts. It reminds me of the little girl who heard in the Psalm 23 "The Lord is my shepherd" and thought God was a dog like her German shepherd.

Jesus interpreted the Bible. The Bible of His day is what we call the Old Testament. The New Testament was not yet written. As I mentioned before there were several Jewish groups in the 1st century: Essenes, Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots and Jesus' followers. Each group followed the interpretation of its leader, priest or rabbi. Jesus had great respect for the Bible. He starts the Sermon on the Mount:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18)

Jesus then follows this unconditional endorsement of God's Word with His interpretation. Six times He says, "You have heard that it was said...but I tell you..." (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). These are His interpretations of the Law. Jesus was more strict than most Jews on some issues such as divorce (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-9) and more lenient on other issues such as the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-3:6; Matthew 12:1-14; Luke 6:1-11).

His Apostles interpreted the Bible. In Acts 15 there is a conference in Jerusalem to decide if Gentiles – non-Jews such as me and most of you – should be allowed into God's Church and Kingdom. Because of the resurrection of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, these Jews declare God wants them to set aside the Law and the religious

practices that defined them as Jews for centuries. Now they worship God on the first day of the week instead of the seventh. They say Gentile Christians do not need to keep kosher laws, make sacrifices in the Temple or practice circumcision. These are radical departures from what God said in the past in His Word. God said it. They used to believe it. Now everything is unsettled.

So what's the best way to approach God's Word? The problem lies not with the Bible but in us and our attitude about the Bible. Here are two extremes to avoid.

1. Don't Treat the Bible as an Idol. The Bible is the Word of God but it is not God. Fundamentalists believe the Bible is as perfect as God. Their faith is built on the foundation of the Bible rather than on God. Why is this a problem? Any discrepancy or inconsistency, any conflict within the Scriptures or conflict with science or history outside the Scriptures is a threat. It rocks the foundation of their faith. So these discrepancies and conflicts must be denied, avoided or explained away. Let's face it: God used humans to write the Bible. God did not override their humanity. They were fallible human beings with their own limited understanding of the world. So are we. Years from now people will laugh at what we say is true. The authors of the Bible were as human as we are. This points to the other extreme to avoid.

2. Don't Treat the Bible as Idle Chatter. Since the Bible was written by humans, many today treat it as merely human. Liberals view it as a collection of inspiring thoughts with no more authority than the Quran, the Bhagavad Gita, Shakespeare or the Declaration of Independence. So when you come across a teaching in the Bible that you don't like you treat it as idle chatter by dismissing, avoiding or explaining it away. You say it's a product of that culture or time period and not valid today. So one attitude views the Bible as too divine, the other as too human. What's the best attitude?

Treat the Bible as fully divine *and* fully human like Jesus. The Bible says that Jesus is the Word of God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-2, 14)

When the Word of God walked the earth as Jesus He was limited by a physical body. He needed food, water and sleep. He willingly limited himself to a first century world view in order to communicate with us. He was fully human and, at the same time, fully divine. It's a mystery we can't completely explain but we deeply believe. The same is true of the Bible. It is fully human and, at the same time, fully divine. In spite of whatever discrepancies and limitations we see in Scripture, this fully human story is also fully God's Word to us. The Bible is the Word of God because it is the one true way to know the Word of God who is Jesus. It's not an idol we worship or idle chatter we water down. The Bible is a life line. It's the way our spirits breathe.

The word “spirit” in Hebrew and Greek also means “breath” and “wind.” Just as we need to breathe physically, we also need to breathe spiritually. The question is: What do you take in when you spiritually inhale? Your spirit, like your lungs, is a vacuum. It must take in something. The tragedy of our age is we don’t breathe in God’s Spirit.

The Bible is the only way to know His will and to live His life. God’s Word and God’s Spirit are the oxygen for our spirits. If we don’t breathe from God’s Word, we will unconsciously breathe in the second-hand smoke of consumerism and materialism. These tell us to be self-indulgent, self-centered and selfish. When you breathe in pollution you get sick. The same is true when your spirit breathes in pollution. Every day I hear another story of spiritual sickness. We are told if we have things or if things go our way we will be fulfilled. Parents, who would not think to allow their children to live in smoke filled rooms, are completely unconcerned about the pollution their kids spiritually inhale from all the devices they have. Long ago the Apostle Paul predicted it would be this way:

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power (2 Timothy 3:2-5).

It doesn’t have to be this way. God wants to breathe His Spirit into you, your children, your grandchildren.

To begin with: **Breathe Daily**. I don’t have to tell you to physically breathe. You do it automatically. You’d die if you didn’t. Yet many can’t seem to find the time to breathe spiritually from God’s Word. You automatically breathe spiritually from TV, cell phone and ipad. Why not take some of that time and breathe daily from God’s Word? That’s what Paul told his assistant Timothy to do.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

‘Continue breathing Timothy’ Paul says. ‘You’ve known God’s Word since you were a kid. The Scriptures lead to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. You can’t help anyone if you are spiritually gasping for breath. Breathe in God’s Spirit through the Bible.’

To every couple who wants their child baptized I say, “The best way to help your child grow in his/her relationship with God is if you grow in your relationship with God.” You will not be any spiritual help to your family and friends, classmates and coworkers until you read and apply God’s Word. Breathing in the Scriptures each day gives you faith, hope, love, joy and peace to share with them. Set aside time each day to read a portion of the Bible. Fill your spirit with the breath of God.

Next **Breathe Deeply**. You cannot stay free from one bad influence without adding a good one. God wants to keep on filling you with His Holy Spirit. Prayer and Scripture are the best place to breathe in God's Spirit. Paul continues,

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

How does God inspire the Bible? He breathes through it. Many people wrongly think God inspired the Bible long ago and He's done. Yes He inspired the writers who spoke and recorded His Word. But He continues to breathe through the Bible to you. The Bible is not an oxygen tank. It is a continuous lifeline. God inspires the Bible and He inspires you through the Holy Spirit. So God works in two directions – through the Scriptures and through your spirit. That's why the Scriptures, despite being written thousands of years ago, still speak directly to you.

Breathe deeply. Let the Word of God work its way down into every corner and cranny of your soul. Let it touch and cleanse the disease and sickness of your spirit. Let it teach and correct, train and equip you to live God's way.

Finally, **Breathe Dependently**. Paul writes to Timothy,
I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. (2 Timothy 1:5)

Timothy depended on his mother Lois, grandmother Eunice, Paul and believers in the churches to support him. It's popular today to say, "I want to have my own private relationship with God. I don't need organized religion or the institutional church. I don't need anyone." They're right. We don't need organizations or institutions. But we do need each other. Why do we treat faith differently than everything else? We don't say, "I'm going to get my food all by myself," or "I'm going to earn my money by myself." Even farmers and self-employed workers must rely on others.

God breathes through His Word and through His people the Church. You will never fully breathe in God's Spirit unless you join with other believers. You must become part of God's family. Take a step and put down roots in a congregation and a growth group. Why go through life without others to cheer you on? Get into a Growth Group this fall and depend on others to help you breathe.

I visited my Dad and Mom a little over a year ago. He was still relatively healthy at the time. He gave me a simple, white three ring binder – the kind you might buy at a Back to School sale. I soon learned this unattractive and unadorned notebook contained a treasure beyond my imagination. On its spine my Dad scrawled in marker "Hoglund Story." Inside is the history of my Dad's ancestors in Sweden complete with photographs. There is a translation of my Great Grandfather's diary when, as a young man in 1890, he traveled from Sweden to San Francisco and back again. It contained the

genealogy of my Mother's family which details how they fled to America in 1896 to escape genocide. And in the final section my Dad wrote his autobiography, complete with pictures, from his birth to my parent's marriage over sixty years ago. I used portions of his words in the message I gave at his graveside service last Memorial Day.

Why is this so precious to me? This isn't just some dry collection of history. This is my long lost story. The more I read it, the more I discover myself. The Bible is God's story. It is also your story. Read it daily and discover yourself

That's why those oxygen masks drop from the ceiling. To live is to breathe. We've all been doing it since birth. In CPR the technical term for breathing air into a patient is "inspiration." It literally means to put breath into someone. You watch for the lungs to fill, the ribs to expand, the chest to rise. If the patient dies it's called "expiration" – literally, the breath has gone out of them for good. A friend once told me of a frightening full asthmatic attack. When his airway closed up he could not, at first, even take in the medicine from his inhaler. We all need air. God designed us to work this way.

The Lord also built into each one of us the need to breathe in His Spirit. In both Hebrew and Greek, the words translated as Spirit and Holy Spirit also mean 'wind' and 'breath.'

Liana Ennis is a high school student who found a Breathing Buddy.

I felt there was a vacancy in my life. I wanted something more. One day I was sitting at lunch with Kerry Philips and a few friends. Kerry, being the awesome Christian she is, would talk about Jesus and how much she loved Woodside. I realized God had just opened a door for me. Kerry invited me to join her one Thursday night and I agreed! Youth group helps me grow in my relationship with Jesus. I am surrounded by other people who also strive to grow in their faith. Our small groups are filled with meaningful, relevant, and eye-opening discussions which also solidify my love for God. We really take apart the Bible when discussing each chapter. The time for small group flies by too fast! Finally, our service projects give me a chance to put my faith into practice, to recognize Jesus in our surroundings and to be light in dark situations. Once I learned that, I knew my love for God and Jesus was solidified.

Kerry was a Breathing Buddy for Liana. So were the other youth group teens and all the youth group advisors and so are you when you give to God's work at Woodside.

When God created the first human, He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). Yet life is more than just having air in your lungs. You can do CPR all you want on someone who's expired and it will not change a thing. God puts breath in your lungs and spirit in your life. That's what makes you alive.