

The Importance of the Bible

The entirety of this book is built on two premises. The first premise is that God is real and that He “created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The second premise is that the Bible is the “inspired” word of God and must be used as the foundational instrument upon which all truths are to be evaluated.

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

These are huge assumptions! In Appendix A: “The God Thing,” I explain some aspects of the journey that led to my acceptance of these two assumptions. If either of these two assumptions is difficult for you to accept, I suggest you stop here, read through “The God Thing,” and then pursue whatever journey God might lead you through as you seek assurance that these two assumptions are valid. If you do not wholeheartedly accept these two assumptions, the argument for everything that follows is weakened and, therefore, of less value to you. Because confidence in the reliability and validity of Scripture is vitally important, I’d like to address the issue here, albeit in much less space than the topic deserves.

Two significant reasons exist for accepting the Bible as the basis for establishing truth. The first is the need for an objective source of truth from which the validity of arguments and reasoning can be evaluated; the second is the incredible power of scripture. I’ll argue the first point from an intellectual standpoint and the second from an experiential perspective.

It should be clear to every reasonable adult that we are all capable of error. The simple fact that our thinking changes over time (hopefully for the better) is evidence that old thinking is regularly replaced with new thinking, thereby exposing our old thinking as having been considered faulty or wrong in some way. Therefore, we cannot fully trust our thinking and analysis – even of our own life experiences – simply because we are capable of error. We are all likely to often misunderstand or misdiagnose a comment or experience. We are each limited in many ways. Therefore, we need an objective, external source to use as a basis for analyzing and evaluating our thoughts, feelings, and experiences. When you add other people to the mix – because all of us are capable of being wrong – the need for an objective source of truth becomes even more apparent. How can we ever expect to agree on anything of significance without an objective standard for truth? The question then becomes, *what* can be used as the source of truth? Because the Bible is unchanging, tested, and has served as the source of truth for countless millions of people over many centuries, it meets the criteria for acceptance as a source of objective truth.

While the above intellectual argument for accepting the Bible as the singular arbiter of truth might be inadequate, I will also present an argument based on my experiences and the experiences of untold millions of others. But regardless of my argument, you will need to personally deal with the question of the Bible's reliability and validity. ***Just remember, we each need some objective source of truth to protect ourselves from the mistakes we are surely capable of making.*** The identification of such an objective and reliable source is your responsibility.

The Bible claims to be God's inspired Word and possesses the *power* to effect change in people's lives.

2 Timothy 3: ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

Hebrews 4: ¹² For the word of God is alive 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.

The first verse speaks to the Bible's validity and integrity for use as an objective source of truth, and the second speaks to the Bible's incredible power and reliability to bring about significant changes in people's lives. I have experienced both.

Because I tend to be highly rational, I have mostly experienced the transformative power of Scripture to change my thinking. As I have read and reflected on Scripture, the typical outcome has been to challenge my thinking and understanding of truth. Ongoing reflection regularly results in a modification of thinking, which, in turn, results in a change in attitudes and behaviors. However, not being an *entirely* rational creature, I also have emotions that influence my thoughts and actions. Reflection on scriptural truths has also often resulted in changes to my feelings and how I respond to events that trigger emotions within me. I cannot say I have experienced direct *physical* changes due to Scripture. However, recognizing the relationship between mental and physical health, it would certainly follow that applying biblical truths can have physiological consequences. Spend any time interacting with or reading about the experiences of Christians, and you will see that my experiences are like those of literally tens if not hundreds of millions of others.

Consider this one brief example. When I became a Christian, one of my major objections to the idea of religion was the seemingly idiotic statements and behaviors of religious leaders with whom I had interacted in my childhood. One of the first things I encountered in reading Scripture was Jesus calling out the stupidity of the spiritual leaders of His time (see Matthew 23:13-36). Wow! Jesus thought some of them were jerks, too! This one revelation opened up the possibility that God's intent for religion, the Church, and the whole idea of Christianity might be entirely different than I had previously thought and been taught.

This one encounter with Scripture was cathartic and significantly altered my entire mental framework! Many things I had believed to be problematic with religion were validated, and I was free to pursue truth with a new hope that there might be a body of truth within Christianity that I could wholeheartedly embrace. Simultaneously, a whole set of feelings about the Church and my previous religious experiences were validated, and I was now free to pursue truth with my whole heart and mind!

I have experienced countless similar changes in both my thinking and feelings throughout the past 40+ years of my spiritual journey. From both an experiential and intellectual standpoint, I fully embrace both the validity and the reliability of Scripture. Therefore, I readily accept the Bible as the foundational source upon which all truth must be evaluated. However, that doesn't mean that I have no problems with Scripture. I can't say that it all makes sense to me. There have been – and still are – passages that I don't fully understand, as well as some "truths" that appear to be at least somewhat contradictory. But since I know that I cannot rely on myself as the final arbiter of truth, I must *suspend judgment* on those issues, hoping to receive a more profound understanding at some point in the future. In many instances, the development of that deeper understanding has occurred and brought needed clarity, yet I still find some biblical passages perplexing.

As one reads through the Bible, one message comes through loud and clear: God desires to reveal Himself to us. However, God places the responsibility on us to seek Him. He calls us, but we must respond to that call. Consider the following verses, just a few of the many places in Scripture where God calls us to seek Him.

Deuteronomy 4: ²⁹ "But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul."

Proverbs 8: ¹⁷ "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me."

Jeremiah 29: ¹³ "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Matthew 7: ⁷ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

Acts 17: ²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for



him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'"

Let those verses "speak" to you. Allow them to give you the hope and the courage to begin your search to know and follow God because He is reaching out to you. The journey ahead will be arduous at times, but your willingness to seek to know and follow Jesus will lead to fulfilling the deep-seated dreams within your heart. Embrace and enjoy the journey. As you'll discover later, the journey is what life is all about!

If this discussion has been helpful, I'd like to let you know about a book I've written that explores this and other closely related topics in greater depth. The title of the book is: "Finding Meaning, Purpose, and Fulfillment: Making Sense of God, Life, and Success."

My goal in writing this book was to help people better understand how God designed life to be lived and what He expects from each of us. In its broadest sense, God designed life as a journey of discovery with Himself as our guide, counselor, and primary resource. You and I are called to be students of life with God as our teacher!

If you didn't enjoy going to school, let me assure you that having God as your life teacher will be substantially better than any previous educational experiences. God is not angry with you, He is not disappointed in you, and He will never pressure or embarrass you. He is genuinely a kind, loving, and supportive teacher – more so than any teacher, coach, counselor, or parent you have ever known. A big part of your life as a student is discovering how truly awesome God is!

My book highlights the most important life principles God has established, guides readers in building and deepening their relationship with Him, and outlines ways to adjust their life practices to further God's purposes in and through their lives. ***In short, my book addresses one central question: What is life really all about?***

Each of us recognizes that we are responsible for how we live our lives. We each must find answers to the most profound and important questions of life. But what are the most critical questions for which we must find answers?

As I reflected on my life experiences in the months leading up to my retirement from teaching and pastoring, the Holy Spirit helped me realize that everything of value I had ever learned was an answer to one or more of four questions. In my book, I refer to these as the "Four Essential Life Questions."

1. Who Is God?
2. How Has God Designed Life to be Lived?
3. Who Am I?
4. What Is God Asking Me to Do?


What profoundly impacted me was the realization that as I have found answers to these Essential Questions over time, and followed God's guidance to bring my life into alignment, meaning, purpose, and fulfillment have grown in my life. I believe that is how God wants to bring meaning, purpose, and fulfillment into your life as well.



Who Is God?



How has God
Designed Life to
be Lived?



Who Am I?



What is God
Calling Me to
Do?

The Essential Questions serve as containers. The more you fill these containers with answers and align your life accordingly, the more meaning, purpose, and fulfillment will grow. You will experience the “full life” Jesus died to secure for you as you allow God to reveal answers to the Essential Questions and then follow His guidance. The book also provides detailed guidance on how to incorporate the Essential Questions into your daily life.