

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“Opened Eyes and Filled Lives ”**  
**4<sup>th</sup> in the series *The Inspired Text***  
**Ephesians 1:15-18; 3:14-21**

This is our last Sunday in this series we’ve called the “inspired text” and hopefully you’re beginning to see just how fascinating the Bible is!

It’s full of stories of love and betrayal,  
cunning politics and soul-gripping transformation...  
with a lot of hilarious sarcasm and irony.

I mean, there is page after page in here of playful wit,  
and parties, and funerals, and mystery,  
and sex, and war,  
and love triangles, and family drama.

When you read this it’s like a combination of “Game of Thrones,” and “House of Cards,” and “Scandal”  
mixed with “This Is Us” and “Parenthood”  
and just a bit of “Family Guy” and “Seinfeld”.

So when you start to think the Bible is boring, it probably means you haven’t spent much time reading it.

The Bible is fascinating... and I’m trying to help us to see that by all the ways I’ve been talking about it this month:

Maps and metaphors.  
Travail and trajectories.  
Mirrors and windows.

I want you to see all this because as your pastor, I want you to see just how beautiful, and rich, and honest, and alive it all is.

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I started this series talking about inspiration because I do believe that the Bible is inspired. And ultimately, it’s what we must come back to for guidance in our life together, in faith, and in spirituality.

But to do that well means we have to learn to take the Bible for what it is... We have to know what questions to ask.

The way you hear people talk about, or argue about the Bible in lots of churches today would make no sense to the writers themselves... and wouldn’t make any sense to most Christians throughout our history.

- 1) When someone asks if the Bible is inerrant,  
it’s like asking if the lyrics to a U2 song are inerrant. The question itself doesn’t actually make any sense. That’s not what you ask about a U2 song. It’s the wrong question.
- 2) When people fight over whether or not there were a literal 7 days of creation,

it's like fighting over whether or not it was really "the best of times and the worst of times" during the *Tale of Two Cities*, and never actually entering the story.

3) When we focus all our attention on things like whether or not Paul wrote one of the epistles in the New Testament,  
it's like focusing all our attention on whether or not Shakespeare actually wrote Romeo and Juliet, but never actually seeing the play.

So often the church has fought wars over the wrong questions... because we've misunderstood what the Bible is really up to. And what I hope for you, what I hope for us... as a church... is that we can understand what the Bible is really up to...

Because when you do...

it will change you... and move your soul...

and open you up in some profound ways.

And this is what we heard a glimpse of in our Ephesians reading earlier. In this beautiful letter written to a group of churches, we heard this holy longing for the church,

*"I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ... may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened."*

And ***that, my friends***, is ultimately what the Bible is for... That is what the Bible is up to!!

How often have you heard people say that the Bible is about becoming enlightened?

A lot of times you might hear people dismiss the Bible as being just the opposite of that. They'll describe it as petty, and punitive, and small-minded... and certainly there are portions that are petty, and punitive, and small-minded... because it reveals how petty, and punitive, and small-minded we can be. ***That is part of the point.***

But to see the Bible as a whole that way, is to miss the larger point. It means you haven't learned to read it well. It means you haven't learned to recognize the movement in the text... the forward trajectory.

It means we haven't begun to recognize that it is a book of amazing progressive ideas that are being birthed into human consciousness in the Bible....

These beautiful ideals that we still are not living up to today...

that require an ongoing conversion of our hearts and minds....

And it's that on-going conversion that the Bible is actually up to.

The whole point, of the whole Bible... is about the eyes of our hearts becoming enlightened.

In other words, and I'm going to say this three times because I really want us to get this:

**Ultimately, the point of the scripture is to facilitate an encounter with the Divine.**

**At their best, the scripture facilitates an encounter between the soul and God: A holy, mysterious encounter.**

**The Bible is there to facilitate an encounter between the soul and the Divine.**

How often have you heard that?

How often have we taught that?

Not enough. In fact, the Bible is so often reduced...

and Christianity is so often reduced to its lowest level of meaning.

We reduce it to what we can be right and wrong about.

Richard Rohr says, and I think he's right on here, that this is one of the single biggest reasons people have left the church. They've been taught a Bible and a Christianity... that never got them to encounter –  
to encounter holy mystery.

They were taught a Bible and a Christianity that was about right and wrong, good and bad... us and them, insiders and outsiders...  
But not one that took them to a place of encountering God,  
or to a place of encountering their own soul,  
or to an encounter with the Holy.

We just left the struggles in the text behind and jumped to glib answers and simple conclusions... about which you can be right and wrong. And that's the problem itself. We've turned Christianity and the Bible into a bunch of ideas—about which we can be right or wrong—**rather than an invitation to a new set of eyes.**" (Rohr)

*"I pray," Paul writes "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ... may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that..."*

*You can know all the answers? No.*

*So that... you can get into heaven? No.*

*So that... your life will be easy and you won't make mistakes? No...*

*"So that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened."*

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There's this story in John 9, where Jesus and his disciples come across a blind man and the disciples ask if this man is blind because of his sin or if it is because of his parents' sin.

**"Neither,"** Jesus says to them.

In other words, they're asking the wrong questions.

Well, Jesus ends up healing the man but then disappears into the crowd. The whole event sets off a firestorm because you aren't supposed to heal on the Sabbath.

So the religious leaders call the man that was born blind over and ask him all kinds of questions about how it happened and who did it.

The man keeps telling them what happened.

And the religious leaders keep asking more questions because they don't like what he's saying, and they try to get him...

to denounce... his own healing.... to denounce Jesus.

There's this really hilarious exchange when they ask him for the third time and he gets really sarcastic with them. "Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciple too?" he asks, egging them on.

The whole scene turns into this sitcom-like playfulness.

The religious leaders completely lose their cool and they end up kicking the man out of the synagogue.

Later, Jesus hears what happened and finds the man that was healed, and after talking to him a bit has this really mysterious line where Jesus says, "I've come that those who do not see, may see; and those who do see, may become blind."

And it's pretty clear Jesus isn't talking about physical blindness, because someone overhears him and says, "Hey, you're not talking about me are you? I'm not blind."

Here's what Jesus says: "If you knew you were blind, you wouldn't have sinned. But you sin because you think you can see."

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This is so often the problem with how we approach the Bible. We think we can see, and our way of seeing shapes how we come to the Bible.

I mean, most of the time we pull out of the Bible what we already believe. We're not doing it intentionally. It just naturally happens. We find it in what we already think. And make that the point.

But what we *think* isn't the point.  
How we see is the point.

**I pray that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened,**  
Paul writes.

How we see... is what matters...  
how we see the world,  
how we see ourselves,  
how we see the stranger...

But most importantly...how we perceive God at work... in other people... and in our own soul is the point.

We hear it again in the second Ephesians reading this morning. Chapter 3 states, "I pray that you may begin to comprehend the breadth, and length and height and depth of the love of Christ... a love that surpasses all knowledge... so that you might be filled with all the fullness of God."

You see, this is where the scriptures want to take us.  
To be filled.

To encounter a love that is beyond our comprehension.  
So that in the encounter you, yourself... your very *being*, your very *life*, might be filled with the fullness of God...  
so that your soul might be filled with the life of God.

Do you see just how big that is?  
Just how explosive that is?  
Just how much life, and energy, and joy, and movement is in that? "*To be filled with all the fullness of God.*"

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And the way that happens to us is almost always through struggle. That is, in fact, why the Bible contains in it so much struggle. That's why it's a "text in travail" as we've been saying. It's in the struggle itself... that we are filled. It's in the struggle itself that we change, and we grow, and our eyes become open...

We don't change without struggle.

Our hearts aren't opened without struggle.

***New life... Fuller life, almost always comes to us through some kind of struggle.***

Ask any young mom about the process of bringing new life into the world... and she will tell you about struggle... the struggle of nine months of morning sickness and clothes not fitting... of hot flashes and swelling feet.

Nine months of being so hopeful and excited,  
and at the same time terrified and miserable.  
Not to mention the struggle of the birth itself...

And that's just the beginning!

Then the baby is born... the months of sleepless nights, and feeding, and the crying, and cooing... In all that struggle of those early months... is a deep and profound growth between the parent and child.

***One life is filling another life... and it's all happening in the struggle.***

I mean let's be honest, parenting is hard. There is nothing like it that can humble you to your knees...

that can make you love your life in one minute and miserable in the next...

that can make you realize just how petty you really are, and just how impatient you are... and when you see your child throwing a tantrum... or being stubborn...  
you recognize your own tantrums and stubbornness.

And something in you is glimpsing something true... something that needs to be awakened... and named and owned... if you, a 37-year-old parent... is going to grow up yourself.

***You see, human beings come to consciousness by struggle!***

***And so, we will largely remain unconscious, our eyes will remain unopened... if we avoid all paradox, contradictions, conflict, and struggle.***

The Bible is there to invite us into struggle.

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If you don't struggle with it, then you aren't really dealing with it.

Take for example, Jesus saying, "The first will be last and the last will be first." And you're tempted to say, "Well Jesus said it, so I believe it."

No you don't! You don't believe it at all... not on any level that matters... not on any level that is shaping your life...

unless you've really struggled with it... and struggled with it maybe for years...

What I think Jesus actually wants you to do is to be honest enough to say, "I don't think I like that. I don't know if that's true. I mean, how can that be true?"

And you struggle with it, and ask questions of it... and you do that for years... until maybe one day when you're in your 70's and you find yourself saying, "You know what? I think Jesus might be right after all."

Human beings come to consciousness through struggle.

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And what I've been saying this month is that the Bible is a struggling text... a text in travail... 2 steps backward, 3 forward. That struggle does have a trajectory...It's taking us somewhere.

It's taking us to a place of a deeper God-consciousness.

It's a mirror, helping us to see that struggle, deep in our own souls... and along the way it offers us the window into the life of God, and that window is most clear in Jesus... Through Jesus we peer deep into the mystery of God's own heart.

And yes, it is most certainly inspired... The breath of God is blowing through these pages... just as the breath of God is filling you even now.

So if you keep reading this ancient library of poems, stories and letters... the Spirit of God blowing in them will stir the spirit in you...

And through the pages of the Bible,

there will be mysterious and profound encounters...that will happen along the way...

Because ultimately the Bible...at its best, will facilitate an encounter between the soul and God.

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So as we draw this series to a close, let me leave you again with this challenge: Stay with the Bible. Read it and allow it to read you.

Study it... read books about it... and you'll learn not just about the ancient world, you'll learn about your own soul.

Wrestle with it.

Meditate on it.

Savor it...

And not just now or this year... but for the rest of your life.

Stick with it for the long haul.

And in the travail of your own life...

You will be moved to new encounters with the Divine...

and your capacity for God will grow...

And when that happens, little by little... you will begin to glimpse the **love that surpasses all knowledge...** that Ephesians describes..."[and] slowly you will be filled with all the fullness of God."

Amen.

Silent Reflection:

*"You don't have to figure it all out or get it all right ahead of time. You just have to stay on the journey. All you can do is stay connected." ~R. Rohr*

*"Fortunately, we are always being led back to the real center  
to find who we really are,  
to find ourselves in God.*

*God seems both very patient and very productive with  
the journeys back and forth.*

*Such is the pattern of the soul, of history and of the Bible,  
a progress of sorts,  
two steps backward and three forward."*

~R. Rohr.