

The Year of the Bible
The Voice of God
Nehemiah 8
Dr. Matt Cassidy --- January 5, 2020

So, it's a masters in theology, masters in Bible, whatever ... so my first semester my first requirement was to go to an Old Testament seminar just like this. As a matter of fact, it was such a priority for our school that three of our professors were Walk Thru the Bible certified instructors. Going through this in the morning --- back then it was an all-day event --- and at the first break, maybe an hour and a half in, I went to the instructor and I said, "How do I become an instructor with Walk Thru the Bible? I've read little passages of the Bible, but now it's all fitting together." After a few hours together, we're going to know the people, places, and events in order, where they happened, and you see this one big story of God's sovereignty. And I was so compelled by all the things I'd seen that "I want to be an instructor with you guys." And he said, "Sure. You've got to graduate from seminary first and you've only been here two weeks. So, do that."

Before I filled out my application to be ordained in the denomination I used to be with, I filled out an application to be an instructor with Walk Thru the Bible. And I served them for twelve years, went around the world teaching the Old Testament and New Testament seminars. It is worth your time. It's worth your time. We've made it so that everyone in the family can attend. If you are married with children, it's not a seminar where one of you stays and the other one takes the kids home and all that. We're going to have it available for everyone in the family, even with childcare. If you register soon, that would be great. The day of the event I think the price goes up by five dollars. I'll tell you more about it in just a minute. But it's all part of a bigger plan for this whole year because we want to start 2020 --- that's just a good round number --- and we just finished up our fiftieth anniversary --- so let's do it again. And if we want to study the Bible, that's the way to do it. Let's just start right here. Let's leave last year behind.

Just this week, maybe a couple of days ago, we were clearing out all the holiday food and the candy and everything, because we said, "Now we're going to start changing our diet again

and go back to the normal thing.” We were literally emptying the ice cream, the Blue Bell ice cream --- “I didn’t like this flavor.”

“I didn’t either.”

“Wait --- what? Now throw it away.”

So that’s out of our house, we’re moving on to something new. A whole new discipline in life, right?

Let me tell you a story. This is the first Bible I ever owned. It is the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs, written in microfiche. I can’t imagine having read this at one time. One of the first things I did when I bought this is I bought a little chunk of leather and sewed a zipper into it so I could take it anywhere and everywhere I went. I was working in construction that summer and I wanted to take it on the job with me. I bought it a month into my conversion, my understanding of who Jesus Christ was in 1980. I still have it because this book, right here --- it changed my life. It changed my life. And the cover has been with me all this time. The Bible inside, not so much.

The story with that goes like this. Several years ago when I was working here I had a rather disturbing call from a distressed woman that lived out of town. I’d never met her and she just called a Bible church in Austin. She wanted me to visit her son who was living out the consequences of a string of really bad decisions and was in jail. He was in a county jail a couple of hours from here and she wanted me to visit him. And I said, “Well, I’ll do that, but don’t get your hopes up.”

She said, “I’ve got to pray that this is his moment, that maybe he’s finally hit rock bottom.”

So, I drove out there. I got there at dark and it was pretty eerie to be in jail at night. And when I talked to the prison guards up front they said that these were not their visiting hours but they would make an exception for me as it was a pastoral visit. So, we kind of went through that maze/labyrinth of giant steel doors banging and opening and closing. And because it was after hours, if you’re thinking one of those prison visits that you’ve seen on TV where you’re face to face and there’s a glass thing between us --- no, it wasn’t that. He said, I’ll give you two minutes, maybe three --- talk through the door.” This armored door with a 3” x 5” slot right here, it’s an overcrowded prison cell behind him. And I’m just talking to him through this little slot. It’s way up here because of ... people ... tall people. Anyway, so I’m standing on my toes for the next

two and a half minutes of my life and the slide was pushed back and we're talking. I'm introducing myself. I'm taking too much time talking and he says, "I think I'm here. I'm done. I can't believe I want to change my life. I really do. I really want to change my life. And I don't how."

And I have ninety seconds left. That's all I've got --- this guard. And I had my Bible with me because I always take my Bible with me. And I feel like the Lord is telling me I need to give him my Bible. And I don't want to give it to him --- *this is my favorite Bible*.

And that's a really bad conversation to have with God. *That's my Bible, by the way. I wrote that book.*

So, I said, *Fine. I'll give it.* And it can actually fit in that slot. So, I was able to do this. So, I asked the guard, "Can I give him my Bible?" And he looks at it and says, "That zipper is a weapon." And I'm thinking, *This is a hard prison. I didn't know that could happen.*

So, I literally tore my Bible out of this cover and put it through the thing. And I said, "Read. New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs. Just read."

That was my Bible for nine years when I turned it over to him. I never saw that Bible again. I bought another one and inserted it in my leather case. Never saw him, never met him --- never saw him again after that. That was it. You can only hope, right?

Six months later I got a seven-page letter from him about all the great and miraculous things God was doing in his life. He said he had read that Bible that I had given him and wore it out --- just wore it out. He bought himself another one and bought me one too. So, enclosed with that multiple-page letter was a brand-new, leather-bound Bible for me, maybe to give out to someone else.

Can you believe that kind of story? Can you believe that? A stranger makes a night visitation to a serial offender and then he reads it. I mean, they're just words, right? Small words on very small pages. And he has a 180-degree radical, revolutionary experience in his life. It changed his life. Just words. But they are some words, right? They are the voice of God. And only God knows how many people have picked up the Holy Writ with an open heart and read it and had their lives changed by it. It happens.

I want to tell you another story about it. If you'll go to Nehemiah chapter 8 I'll show you a grander version of this story. If you don't know where Nehemiah is you should go to the table of contents, because that's how to find Nehemiah. Just words on a page.

Let me tell you the context of this story so you can appreciate what's happened here. This is Israel and particularly, Judah, and they have made a string of bad decisions and because of that, they've served time. Seventy years they were in bondage and exile in Babylon. And now they've been given the opportunity to return. Some people have returned to Israel, Jerusalem particularly, and Nehemiah --- that's why the book is Nehemiah --- Nehemiah has returned to help them rebuild the wall around them. And the wall has just been finished. And they are ready for a pastoral visit.

In comes a scribe, a scholar, and his name is Ezra. He's a priest. And he's going to bring the law of YHWH. Now before we read this, you need to know this so that you can understand the point of the passage. When you see people write in the Old Testament, they'll tell you in many ways what the point of emphasis is by repeating a word or phrases. That's their message. And the message here, because the words are repeated, is this: "the law of YHWH" will be used nine times in this chapter and the word "understanding" will be used eight times. So, keep that in mind, that they're understanding the law of YHWH.

And I'll read it to you. I've found a great translation that's easy to hear. Let me read it. "By this time the people of Israel were settled in their towns. And then all the people gathered as one person at the town square in front of the water gate. And they asked the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of YHWH, as YHWH had commanded Moses for Israel. And so Ezra, the priest, brought the law of YHWH to the congregation. Everyone who was capable of understanding was there.

"Now the scholar Ezra was standing on a wooden platform that they had built particularly for this purpose. Ezra opened the book and every eye was upon him. And as he opened the book everyone stood and all the Levites helped the people understand the law of YHWH while the people stood. And they were listening respectfully. They translated the book of YHWH so the people could understand it and explained it to them as he was reading. Ezra read it, facing the town square, at the water gate, from early dawn until noon in the hearing of all the men and all the women who could understand it. And the ears of all these people were attentive on the law of YHWH."

Nehemiah 8:6

Then Ezra blessed the YHWH, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped YHWH with their faces to the ground.

And so, it says in verse 6, “Then Ezra blessed YHWH, their great God, and all the people answered, ‘Amen.’ And they were lifting up their hands. And then they bowed their heads and worshipped YHWH with their faces on the ground. They were cut to a quick because of the reading of Scripture and they fell down and they began weeping and mourning because of all of the string of poor decisions they’d made and how it grieved God.”

Nehemiah 8:9

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to YHWH your God; do not mourn or weep.”

And so, they’re interrupted by Nehemiah. “And then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra, who was the priest and the scribe, and the Levites, who had taught the people: they all said to the people, ‘No, no, this is a holy day to YHWH your God. Do not mourn or weep.’”

Nehemiah 8:10-12

Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those you have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of YHWH is your strength.” ¹¹ The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.” ¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

“Nehemiah said, ‘No, no, go and enjoy choice foods and sweet drinks and send some of those to those who have nothing prepared.’”

In other words, “Let’s distribute your wealth so we can all have a great time together.”

“ ‘This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of YHWH is your strength.’

The Levites calm down all the people, saying ‘Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.’ And so all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing because they understood the words that were being declared to them.”

That was a great day. They heard the words of YHWH and understood. “The very next day,” it says, “the heads of the families along with the priests and the Levites gathered around Ezra again, the teacher, to give attention to the words of the Lord.”

Nehemiah 9:1, 3

Later, that same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. ³ They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of YHWH their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping YHWH their God.

And then, chapter 9, at the end of the month: “Later that same month” --- at the end of the month, really --- “the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. And they stood where they were and read from the book of the law from YHWH their God for a quarter of the day, and spent the other quarter in confession and worship to YHWH their God.”

Can you believe that story? I mean, we’re not talking about a person now. We’re talking about a corporate culture, a nation here. It begins in ruins and it ends in rejoicing. Ezra and his teaching staff show up and they bring the voice of God. For five hours they’re standing up and they’re hearing this. Their hands are raised and they’re praising God, amen and amen. And then they are cut to the soul about their grievance against God and so they find themselves mourning about that. *And there will be time for that later. Let’s celebrate --- choice meats, great wine, share amongst everyone.* And they all begin to celebrate. They’re worshipping who God is and what He has done for them. Let’s do that. The end of the month ends with repentance, reconciliation with each other and with God.

What a great story! All because of the Word of God, the voice of God. A 180-degree turn on their heels from dirge to dancing. That's the power. Just words? Oh, these aren't just any words. These are the words of God, the very voice of God.

How does this happen? How did this happen in this story? How did it happen in my life when I picked up that Bible? How did it happen to that young man's life in prison? It's in this passage. It says eight times that they understood. They had ears to hear. There's a saying that when the student is ready, the teacher appears. And this group of people, these students --- they were ready. Their ears were ready to hear.

Have the Mind of God ... Understanding

The Bible has the power to change the human mind. No person can live a great life without a great mind. Now, I'm not talking about IQ. It's not about intelligence. It's a great mind that is peace-filled, it is a mind that's surrendered, it is a mind that's overflowing with joy. And how you get a great mind --- just back it up --- you have to have great thoughts. And where do you get great thoughts?

May I suggest Holy Writ? God's voice. We are a product of the thoughts that we cultivate. This is a hard reality, and that is that you and no one else is in charge of what you meditate upon, what you put in your mind. If you want a great life, you're going to have to have a great mind. That's going to have to come from a humble heart saturated by the Word of God. You direct your thoughts. You determine what happens between your ears. We are in an experience of nonstop, never ceasing, perpetual thoughts and perceptions and desires and emotions. They're all swirling around and we have to choose. Will we have a mindset that is finding itself gravitating towards the spectacular nature of YHWH God, a vision of His splendor, His promises, His presence in our life? Or we can be weighted down with guilt or worry or fear or *It's all about me*, discontent. Those thoughts --- they can have their way in our life as well.

Why read the Bible? Because it renews your mind. That's why. It has the power to renew your mind. And if you renew your mind, you'll renew your life. It is the voice of God and it has the power to create. It has the power to create faith, it has the power to create guidance, it has the power to change. It can change a foolish person into a wise person. It has the power to change timid thoughts and a timid person into a courageous person. A discouraged person, a

melancholy, into a hopeful, encouraging person. That's the power that the Word of God has because it is the voice of God. It is the first book you want to read to your children. It is the last book you want read to you on your deathbed. It has that supernatural ability.

If you can understand, if you have ears to hear, if you have a tender heart ... if you understand just your pedigree, your identity, who you are. You are part of the lineage of the King of all kings. You are a child of that king. You've been adopted. You've inherited His righteousness. If you could understand that you have guaranteed inheritance with an eternal presence with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that can change all of your life.

If you read the Bible, you'll see, you'll understand the profound depth of sin in your life and how deep it goes. If you read the Bible, you'll understand that there's an enemy and he wants to destroy you and kind of make a mockery of your faith in Jesus Christ. If you read the Bible, you'll meet Jesus there, the champion of life, the conqueror of death. You'll learn about His teachings. No one has ever taught like Jesus taught.

If you read the Bible, Holy Writ, the voice of God, you'll read multiple eyewitness accounts of His death and His resurrection. It is proof of His promises. That's where you get hope. And is it any wonder why Tyndale, for example, literally martyred his life, gave his life so that you and I could have a copy of this to read for ourselves in a language that we could understand?

And saints throughout the centuries have sacrificed untold amounts of living in poverty, thankless lives, suffering, untold consequences for translating this and trying to get it in the people's hands all over the world. At this point in human history --- there is no book like this. At this point in human history the Bible has been translated to reach ninety-five percent of the languages spoken in the world. Some research said that in America the average home has four Bibles in it. Now watch this --- yet Bible ignorance is at an all-time high. Literacy, Bible literacy, is at an all-time low. We see that all around.

So, here's what we thought. The guys in leadership and some of the ladies who were helping out in making decisions for what we're going to do in 2020 --- we said, *Let's do this. Let's end this Bible illiteracy, at least at Grace. How about in our little village we could be people that know the Bible and understand what it says?* So that's one of the things we're hoping to do. That's what we want to do for the next twelve months, because it could change the way we think. Therefore, it would change our lives. What if our whole church was changed as a result of

that? How do you study the Bible? Where do you start? How do you get going on this? That's what I want to tell you for the plan for the year in many respects.

If you go to seminary, graduate school, to learn about the Bible, here's what they would have. They have a scope and sequence or a big plan for the overall curriculum that you have. This is how you start, the way I started. You start your early years in survey classes. You have an Old Testament Survey and a New Testament Survey. And a lot of times it ends with a trip to Israel. Guess what? We're going to have an Old Testament survey, a New Testament survey, and we're going to end with a trip to Israel. You're welcome to join us. In two weeks, I'll have an information meeting. It helps you study the Bible. It comes alive when you walk there.

At the end of your seminary experience --- you start with the general and you end with the particulars. The last year in seminary you can write your thesis on a single sentence or a single word. But you don't know the context of that until you start at the beginning, the big picture. That's what we're going to do over the next year --- big picture. And we'll start next week.

Big Picture

I want to let you know about some resources that you can get hold of. One of them is --- somebody gave me this maybe two or three years ago, and it's wonderful --- it's a Bible timeline and it is dense with facts and icons and it's easy to understand. I would love to have one of these in my Bible as I read along. It's so creative in many respects and even beautiful that the media department at Grace is using this as a template for our fonts and our colors and everything else. So, we're going to go along with this. This is available in the lobby if you'd like to do that. If you'd like to get that you can buy one of those.

The next big picture thing that we're going to do is next week we'll do the Walk Thru the Bible Old Testament seminar. We want everyone to experience this. So, whatever things might be holding you up, we want you to help us help you come to this seminar next week.

By the way, invite your friends to go to this. If they go to any other church, say, "I'll go to church with you next week; you come this time." If they have a mass or something on Saturday, go to mass with them on Saturday and join us on Sunday. Because so many people don't know the big picture and this is so helpful for that.

Here's what it's going to look like next week. In the teaching time, the thirty-five minutes I get, we're going to go through the book of Genesis. Then we'll go outside, we'll have pizza under the trees, just try to feed ourselves for a little bit, and then we'll come back in here and from 1:00 to 3:00 we'll finish up and get from Exodus to the Book of Matthew. We want everyone to experience this. So, in the auditorium we'll have the adults and the junior high and senior high. Our children's ministry will be doing the Walk Thru the Old Testament. By the end of this they'll know the forty phrases so that they know the people, places, and events of all the major, key issues that take place in the older Testament. You can go home in your minivan and sing along, the whole phrase that makes it all make sense. If you can't afford it, fill out an application here in your bulletin and just put a dollar sign somewhere and we'll figure out a way to give you a scholarship. In other words, whatever it takes, we want you to attend and enjoy this time together next week. Okay?

So, we've got a big picture graphic, we've got a big picture event next week that's going to happen. And then, here's another thing that you need to do. You need to pick a Bible. I would say, pick a Bible. We have a few of those available. There's a children's Bible that I highly recommend. The scholarship in this is amazing. This woman, Sally Lloyd-Jones, she understands speech act theory, she understands the power of good storytelling. And this is such a good children's Bible and so well written, they made one for adults and put a different cover on it. It's called *The Story of God's Love for Us*. If you're brand new to the faith or have children, this is where I'd start, honestly. Great book.

We have a couple of study Bibles for you to look at in the lobby. They're not for sale, but we just wanted you to look at them so that you can buy them online or wherever. But the number one study Bible is called the *NIV Study Bible*. The study Bible is probably the best investment I ever made in my Christian walk and maturity because there are so many things that you don't understand. And usually below the passage it tells you the answer to what is probably your most obvious questions and answers those things for you. It gives you maps and all those sorts of things.

The other Bible that is a great study Bible is the ESV. The ESV stands for a different translation --- it's the English Standard Version. So, I wanted you to look at those. There are some people working those tables that are pretty informed on the pros and cons of those.

If you've been studying the Bible for a while, sometimes when you study the Bible you can kind of miss the fun of the story itself. I would highly recommend an easy-to-read Bible translation like the *Modern Translation* or *The Message* or *Today's Living Translation*. I would highly recommend an audio Bible. In other words, listen to the Bible --- for a couple of reasons. One, there's a lot of reading to be done and I'm not a good reader, and maybe you too. But the Bible was written for the ears, not the eyes. And it's kind of some weird neuroscience stuff, but you can understand and interpret things through hearing that you would miss through your eyes, and vice versa. When the Bible is told, it's told in a story so that the listener could envision things that maybe the eyes could not. I love listening to it. I highly recommend it.

The next thing we have is to pick a plan. If you pick a plan, many Bible apps now have it in audio. If not, you can buy an audio Bible as well. Pick a plan. We have a couple that we'd like for you guys to consider. You go, you download a free app, and then you join in on that, and that would let you read along with all of us as we're all reading along through the Bible. If you don't like technology or it's not a friend to you, we've printed these because I don't like technology and we're not friends. So, this is going to go in my Bible and this will be the route that we go. This is the Bible plan and the Bible reading. Let me just say this ahead of time: reading through the Bible in a year --- it starts off fun. And then if some of you are competitive or just duty-bound, you're going to get behind and then you're going to want to throw the thing away. Forget that. Just whatever the easiest way to get through this, whatever sets you up for limited success. There's a saying: a bad workout is better than no workout. A little Bible reading is better than no Bible reading. If you get behind, let me tell you --- this is just me --- but, if you get behind, there are four times in the Bible that you feel like you're reading a phone book. Skip that part and just catch up. You'll know it when you read it. It's going to read just like a phone book. And you're going to say, *Well, Matt said I could skip this part so I can catch up*. So, if you get behind, you've got four chances to catch up. There's a whole chapter on mold. You can skip that chapter, too! So, just get with the storyline. Whatever works, whatever keeps you in line.

So, you have a Bible, you have a translation, you have a plan. The next thing is to find a time. Pick a time. Choose before you choose. So, are you going to start your day this way or do you want to end your day this way? How about somewhere in the middle? Maybe that works. You choose a time at work when you maybe have a break at ten or three o'clock. You could listen to it on the way in. A lot of us commute for quite a distance. We could listen to the Bible.

Read it in line. So much of our American experience is standing in line. You have a Bible like this or one on your phone, then you can through a lot of the Bible while just reading it while you're in line. Listen to it while you're getting ready. But you have to have a plan. You have to have a time.

The bigger picture is this. The bigger picture is to get the bigger picture and we all do this together. We're going to meet God in this experience, reading through the Bible together and seeing how He's worked in history.

Pray for a Humble Heart

Here's the last point. You have to pray. This is not a human event. Just words --- not these words --- this is the voice of God. And the difference between people who have read the Bible multiple times and nothing happened and the people whose lives are changed, like the stories that we've heard this morning --- they understood. And the word "understanding" is the idea of their hearts and their souls were open to God in their life. So that's why you have to pray honestly and simply. Don't be demanding, some kind of dramatic life change, some sort of epiphany of a new kind of understanding so much, a new way of life guidance. That's not how the Bible is written a lot of ways. That happens and that's a God thing when it does, but mostly it's a story about God that leads to a different way of thinking. And if you change your mind, you're going to change your life. Understanding.

There's a saying that goes like this. "It's not how many times you've been through the Bible, but how many times the Bible has been through you." It's the humble heart. God has done His part. He gave us His voice. We have to do our part. And could I just appeal to you this way? You don't have to come to the end of a string of really bad decisions to have a humble heart. You don't have to go to rock bottom. And it's pretty far down. It's as far down as it needs to be for you. But sometimes you can just look over the edge and say, *I think I've made enough bad decisions*. You don't have to wreck your family, distance your mate, ruin your job, or not have any friends at work. You don't have to go there. You could just have an open heart where you could say, "Dear God, could You just take away from me all of my fear? I live around worry. Could You take away from me my dishonesty, my greed? I am compulsively thinking about me all the time. Could You take those things from me and give me a trust in who You are that would

cause me to have peace and courage? That would give me confidence and so much love that it would spill over into other people's lives?" Wouldn't that be a great trade? Doesn't that sound like a prayer God would want to answer? Yeah, it is. It's not how many times you've been through the Bible, it's how many times the Bible has been through you. And it's pretty simple. It's the voice of God with an open heart. That's what it takes to have a changed mind.

Let me tell you, when you're reading through the Bible --- this is a pretty easy mistake to make, especially these days --- the Bible is not about you. So, the commands and the stories and the personalities, the heroes and the villains, all of that is not about you, it's not about me. It's about God. It is one story and all of the story is pointing toward an empty tomb. It's all His story. It is the story of Jesus Christ. And the bigger story is a love story that's so captivating that when you involve yourself in that story, it changes you. So, the Bible is not --- I mean, there are some big sections that are very practical how-to's --- a lot of Bible is not that way. The Bible is mainly "fix your eyes upon Jesus and see what happens." The Bible is not my story. It is how I fit into God's story and how I play a part in what He's doing. But I can guarantee you this. I mean, who am I? I mean, God would say this. You have a humble heart and you read this book, in twelve months you won't be the same person. You can't be the same person. This will change your mind. And if you change your mind, you'll change your life.

Power to Change

Look at the life of Jesus Christ. I mean, He starts His ministry by quoting Scripture. He's literally fending off an assault by Satan himself with these temptations with Bible passages, just quoting Deuteronomy. He ends His ministry, He ends His life on that cross, and He's trying to find words that could express His soul's anguish at being separated from the Father for the first time in eternity past and future. And he quotes the Bible. And His whole life in between His introduction of ministry and His death on a cross --- everything in between is an expression of the fulfillment of Holy Writ, of the voice of God.

So, let's be part of that. The voice of God plus a humble heart leads to changed mind, leads to a changed life. You want to change your life? You have to change your mind. You want to change your mind? You have to have a humble heart and hear the voice of God, Holy Writ, the Bible.

The Bible does all the heavy lifting. It does its work all by itself. It's all about the heart. The first African to ever be converted, the first African Christian is an Ethiopian that's just reading the Bible and finds Isaiah. It's a prophecy about Jesus and he asks someone, "Hey, what does this mean?" And he comes to know Jesus Christ that way.

There's a book called *The Bible in World Evangelism* and the book is just story after story after story of the Bible just showing up and changing lives. There's a story of a guy pickpocketing someone with a Bible like this, thinking that he's stealing a wallet. He steals the Bible, reads the Bible, and it changes his life.

There's another story of a man in Brazil, Antonio of Minas. He bought the New Testament to burn it. He hated God and religion and so he buys a New Testament, throws it in a fire. It wouldn't catch fire. It really frustrates him. He pulls it out of the fire and it opens up to the Sermon on the Mount. He reads and thinks, *Hmmm ... that's a good sermon*. He keeps reading and the next thing you know the sun is coming up on him and he says, "I believe. I believe it all."

In Chile, a man named Vincente is walking on the beach and up washes pages of the voice of God, the Bible. He starts reading them. He had never read the Bible before. He thinks, *Where is the rest of this?* He finds a Bible, buys it, reads it, and spends the rest of his life going through Chile distributing the Bible so that other people could become like Christ in all of life by reading that book.

People meet God by reading this book with a humble heart. It's different. It's not just words. These are God's words.

So, what about you? What about you? Do you want to change your life? You're going to need to change your mind. To change your mind, you'll have to have a humble heart and let God's words speak for themselves.

We want to be a church of people of the Word, but now just knowing it, but understanding it. So, we want to invite as many people as possible to change their minds so that their minds might be in Christ this year. I'd like to ask you to join us if you want to do that and we'll see what happens when the Spirit of God shows up with His Word in our hearts.

Now I want to ask you if you want to pray with me about joining that.

I found a great compilation of the power of the Word and the mind that I'd like to read. The passage is out of the Bible and emphasizes that a changed life is a changed mind by the power of God's voice with a humble heart.

“ To have the peace of Christ guard your mind, to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, to have the same mind in me that is also in Christ Jesus, to have the mind of Christ Jesus, to set your mind on things above, to have a mind governed by the Spirit that is life and filled with peace, to be anxious for nothing, to be grateful for everything, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, to have His joy in me and that the joy might be complete.” Because our mind is right with God.

Let's pray to that end.

Lord, I'd like to just begin, Father, by saying that as chief stewards of our mind and what we allow in it, that we have neglected the responsibility to care for our minds. We will watch anything and we will listen to everything. And because of that recklessness we do not have the lives that are like they were meant to be, like You, in so many areas of our lives. And we see now the power of our mind and what a gift our mind is from You. And then this other gift --- Your words, Your voice. Lord, let this confession be also a repentance that we will commit to the transformation of our minds, the renewing of our minds by the Word, that it would wash us so that we might be cleansed by it, so we could be presented to You without spot or blemish. We can't do this, but You can. And so, would You renew our minds? Would You do something with our desire and our commitment to read Your Scripture, that we would find You there? That we would find a way to be part of Your story? That we would surrender our lives to Your will? Lord, I'd ask that You would bless this church, that we would be a church that knows Your Word and, better still, that understands it, that we might know You as much as we can this life so that we might enjoy You as much as we can in the next life. We're grateful, Lord, that we are Your children and we have an eternal, everlasting, guaranteed inheritance because of You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.