

# GOD breathed

“All Scripture is God-breathed” 2 Timothy 3:16

2 Timothy 3:16–17: “All Scripture is God-breathed (Greek: *Theopneustos* – *Theos* – “God”; *pneustos* – “breathed”) and is useful . . . for teaching doctrine (Greek: *didaskalia* – “context of teaching”) and rebuking or correction (Greek: *elegmos* – “reproving wrong” and *epanorthosis* – “restoring proper condition”).

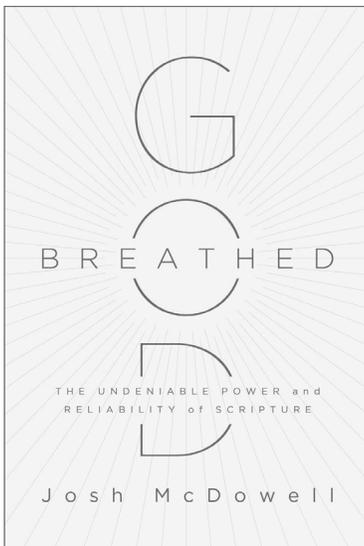
## I. Introduction: The Forgotten Purpose of Truth

WE ALL BEGIN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD BY DECLARING OURSELVES TO BE SINNERS IN NEED OF A SAVIOR. From that moment, we begin our walk with Christ. Thankfully, God also provides several avenues through which we can continue our growth and pursuit of Christlikeness. We have the opportunity to approach God through prayer. We have the provision of fellowship with the body of Christ—His church. We can relate to God through corporate worship. Additionally, God has given us His Word so that we might come to know Him and His desires for our life and ministry.

It is to this provision of Scripture that we want to give our focus. Could it be that, in our efforts to grow and mature in Christ, we are not doing everything we are supposed to be doing with the Bible? Could it be that, even in our best attempts at discerning God’s truth and working to apply it, we have not done all that we need to do with Scripture? Could we have missed a critical purpose of God’s truth?

*“Upon these two commandments depends all the laws and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40).*

There is a “forgotten purpose” of truth that His Spirit wants to make real. It is this forgotten purpose that can serve His longing to restore relevance to His church, exceeding abundance to His followers, and great gospel witness. Many of us clearly see the *rational* purpose of God’s truth. We know that Scripture tells us what we should believe and that God’s Word is our determiner for what is true, immovable, unchangeable, and eternal. For example, Acts 4:12 tells us, “There is no other name under heaven given to



[Click here for a message from Josh on the significance of this \*God Breathed\* book.](#)

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

**“Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . .” (Col. 3:16).**

**Pastor/Teacher:** Take a moment now to reflect on your own journey with God’s Word. Consider your own tendencies to focus upon the rational purpose or behavioral purpose of His truth, but at times missing deep intimacy with the God-breathed Word. Pause now and consider your responses to each of these statements below. Allow the Holy Spirit to impress you with any needed changes. Prayerfully consider which of these statements may be true for you:

I have sometimes overemphasized the importance of “believing God’s truth” by . . .

I have sometimes overemphasized the importance of “behaving rightly” or “doing the right things” by . . .



**W-2** Being a living epistle in reverence and awe as His Word becomes real in my life

**Pastor/Teacher:** Consider having your congregation stand during **this next praise song**. Now consider taking some initiative to fervently love a friend as you celebrate, offer comfort or share an appreciative word. (It’s this relational purpose of deepened love toward others that instructs, and our God-breathed scriptures implore.)

men by which we must be saved.” This boundary of right doctrine lets us know that to claim there is any way to salvation other than Jesus is error or sin.

Most of us are also acquainted with the **behavioral** purpose of God’s truth. We look to God’s Word to tell us how to live our lives. We know that the Bible gives us commands and principles for how to live a life that is pleasing to God and in harmony with one another. Ephesians 4:29 speaks of not letting any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth (reproof), but only what is helpful for building others up (correction). Therefore, to revile, judge, or gossip with our words is to fall outside of the boundary of right living. These are sin.

While these two purposes of truth are critical for life and ministry, they are not sufficient in themselves. God’s Word gives us boundaries for our life and ministry. The Bible defines the limits of sound doctrine and clearly sets the boundaries for what we are to believe. God’s Word also gives us boundaries for how we are to live our life and outlines how we should behave. Yet, we must see that these are boundaries given by God in order to direct our journey toward a relationship with Him and with those He loves.

Many of us, though, get sidetracked on this journey toward a deep, intimate relationship with God. We carefully look to Scripture in order to tell us what to believe and how we should behave, but we miss the opportunity to more deeply know the God of the Bible. As a result, our lives may suffer from a lack of significance and diminished eternal impact for the cause of Christ. Our ministries may be void of relevance and demonstrable impact because week by week, we leave church knowing what to believe and how to behave, but we never take the journey into a deeper relationship with the God of the Bible. Tragically, many of us have yet to experience the **relational** purpose of truth. The relational purpose of truth is this: God’s Word was written so that we might have a loving, intimate relationship with the One who wrote it as well as with those He loves.

### **Experience Scripture:**

*“Since you have in obedience to the truth, purified your souls — fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22).*

Consider several specific ways you could fervently love one another by:

- Rejoicing with a friend over a new job, recent engagement, clean bill of health . . .” (Romans 12:15a).
- Comforting a friend over a lost job, miscarriage, or disturbing health report (Romans 12:15b).
- Appreciating a friend with words that build up in response to their support at a time of need, their acceptance at a time of trial, or their encouragement at a time of struggle. (Ephesians 4:29).

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## God's Truth

To understand God's truth and how it applies to our lives, we must take two basic steps. First, we must understand the truth that God intended for a specific audience within a specific time in history. Second, we must determine what universal truth God is revealing to us right now. The truth of God's Word transcends history, culture, customs, languages, and timelines. So when we attempt to understand what God wanted the people to know who first received his Word, we also want to understand what he wants us to know today in our own lives.

Remember, God's Word is a living document. We can know these things, Paul writes referring to "mystery of God," because "it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For the Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets" (1 Corinthians 2:7, 10).

Paul says that he spoke with words given to him by the Spirit "using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths" (1 Corinthians 2:13). There are truths from the Old and New Testaments that the Holy Spirit wants to apply to our lives. In order to understand the meaning of these truths, our response should be, "God, what do you intend for me to understand from the passages I read and hear from your book? My heart is open. Help me to discover your intended message to me within the context of our loving relationship."

Interpreting God's Word in this way is a fascinating journey, an exciting process of discovery that not only unlocks the truth that God revealed to his people thousands of years ago, but also uncovers what he wants to reveal to you, in your own life, today.

—Josh McDowell  
God Breathed, p. 36–37

## II. Re-hanging the Mirror of God's Word

"Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:23–24).

We can imagine that God's Word is like a mirror that hangs on a wall in our home. We can look into this mirror and see how closely we resemble Jesus. We can gaze into the glass and see a reflection of God's glory as the Spirit works to transform us into the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Just as the mirrors in our home hang from nails, God's "mirror" (the Bible) must hang upon something as well. In dramatic fashion, while answering a question concerning which commandment was greatest, Christ revealed that God's Word actually "hangs upon" two commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37–40). Christ said that all of Scripture "hangs," "depends," or "must be considered in relation to" the way we love God and one another. Every book of the Bible, every command and scriptural principle hangs on the "nails" of loving God and loving one another.

### A. Scripture has both objective meaning and relational significance.

"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40 KJV).

We must not miss the significance of Christ's words in this text. Not only do these two commandments constitute the nail on which the rest of the instructions of Scripture hang, they also provide a framework for the interpretation of God's Word. Christ's words reveal how relevance returns when Scripture comes alive through relationships.

Christ seems to argue for relational hermeneutics (principles of scriptural interpretation) in His declaration about the greatest of commandments (Matthew 22:40). His words suggest this principle of interpreting Scripture: We must both explore the objective meaning of Scripture and encounter the relational significance of it.

We might illustrate this approach to Scripture by exploring the limited number of New Testament passages which contain the Greek word *kremannumi* ("depends" or "hangs"):

- Matthew 18:6—"But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck."

Imagine the scene described in this text. You see a man with a millstone hung around his neck. With this scene in your mind's eye, you cannot focus only on the millstone's objective meaning, for to do so would be to miss the relational significance. Consider the absurdity of reacting to the situation described above by simply asking objective questions about the millstone: "How much does that millstone weigh? How old might it be? Where might that millstone come from?"

Limiting our response to such questions would be to miss the critical significance of what we were observing. The significant issue is that the millstone is hanging around a person's neck! To miss where the millstone is hanging is to miss its relevance entirely. Christ's declaration in the Gospel of Matthew reveals that we face a similar challenge as we interpret Scripture. We often observe its objective meaning but miss its relational significance: God's Word "hangs" upon loving Him and loving others.

- Acts 28:3, 4—"Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake *hanging* from his hand . . ."

In this passage, it is certainly important to notice that a poisonous serpent came out of the fire, but to focus on its length, color, or type would be trivial in relation to the significance of the scene. The significance is found in the facts that the serpent was hanging on Paul's hand, and Paul did not die from the poison. We may gain understanding of the meaning of a text by asking objective questions, but we must go further. We must examine the relational significance of the passage by asking ourselves, "How might this encourage my love of God or empower my love for others?"

- Galatians 3:13—"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is *hung* on a tree.'"

This text reminds us of the precious gift of redemption. Surely it is important to look toward Golgotha and see Jesus of Nazareth, but focusing only upon such objective issues as the age, weight, and physical condition of the man hanging on the tree would be preposterous since the significance of the event is found in the fact that the Son of God was hung on a tree (See also Acts 5:30, 10:39).

Christ seems to argue in Matthew 22:40 that we have not finished the hermeneutic process until we have fully explored both the objective meaning and relational significance of Scripture.



**P-5** Ministering His life and love to our nearest ones at home and with family

**Pastor/Teacher: You might have families and groups of friends gather for this time of prayerful commitment.**

### **Engage Fellowship:**

*"In your freedom, serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13).*

Agree in prayer with other followers that *believing and obeying* Scripture is essential to life abundant, but we are asking for more—that our God-breathed book would be *alive* within us through deeper love with the God who wrote it. Claim the promise of 1 John as you pray:

*"Lord, I yield to Your Spirit within me to be my Teacher. I want my life to be an example to others of 'experiencing Scripture.'"*

### **B. Scripture loses power and relevance apart from its relational purpose.**

Imagine what might happen if you removed the nail that holds a mirror on the wall of your home. That mirror would fall and shatter into pieces as it hit the floor. If you picked up one of the pieces that fell to the ground would you still have a mirror? Yes. But could you see everything as clearly as before? No. Without the nail supporting the mirror, your view would be distorted. Without the nail, you would not be able to see the image as a whole.

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## **A Miracle in Literature**

*There are no other books like the Bible! The writers not only lived in different times, but they came from different walks of life. They were fishermen, shepherds, royalty, priests, prophets, and princes. One was a royal cupbearer, one a tax collector, one a physician, one a religious zealot. They wrote in three different languages Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic and in circumstances as diverse as battlefields, temples, deserts, cities, prisons, and palaces. They wrote on mountaintops, in dungeons, in poverty, and in wealth.*

*It seems impossible to believe such different people could write the same book together. That's the point. They didn't! One would write history, another theology, another poetry, another biography, another prophecy, and some even wrote personal letters. They wrote some of the world's most loved songs and stories. They wrote while in Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Syria, and in Europe.*

*No one ever called a meeting and said, "Hey. Let's write a book." No one on earth had a plan. There were no professional editors. No one got paid. The Bible took at least 1,600 years to write and spanned 60 generations of world history. Yet God was carefully watching over the process as the ages unfolded ... and His Holy Spirit handpicked the people to do the writing. The Bible is unparalleled in literature.*

—Dr. Jeff Farmer

**We Believe**, soon to be published by OBC Publishing, Chapter One, 2015.

The Pharisees seem to have had a mirror that had fallen to the ground. They seem to have only been able to see certain pieces of God's truth. They were masters at picking up one piece of God's mirror and, with an incomplete and distorted view, looking for others who were not living in alignment with that piece. Jesus revealed the disparity between the Pharisees' knowledge and their relationship when He said, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39–40).

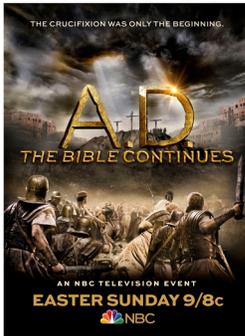
On one occasion, Scripture tells us that Jesus and his disciples were passing through the grain fields, and the disciples began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees asked the Lord, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" (Mark 2:24). The religious leaders were looking for someone who was not living out the command to "keep the Sabbath holy" (see Exodus 20:8–10). Did God command that we observe the Sabbath and give honor to the Lord? Yes. Were the Pharisees correct in their study and knowledge of this truth? Yes. They understood the rational purpose of truth, and embraced the behavioral purpose of truth, but they missed the overarching relational purpose of truth. They neglected to see that the command to "keep the Sabbath" must be interpreted in the context of loving God and loving others.

Jesus responded to the Pharisees by recounting the story of King David and his men. Christ reminded the Pharisees that when David and his men entered the house of God, they ate the consecrated bread because they were hungry (Matthew 12:3–8). Jesus "re-hung" the Sabbath requirements back on the nail of Great Commandment love as He said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

We must not only dedicate ourselves to scriptural knowledge and purity of lifestyle; we must learn to hang all of Scripture on the Great Commandment—loving God and one another. We must do more than memorize Bible verses; we must live them in relationship with God and other people. We must do more than arm ourselves with biblical knowledge and pass that knowledge to others. We must model it and live it in loving relationships. When we equip people with the knowledge of truth, but fail to show them the relational purpose of truth, we may promote a Pharisaical perspective. Week by week, we may be arming saints with a small piece of God's truth and sending them out into the community to look for people who are violating it.



**W-3** Yielding to the Scripture's protective cautions and transforming power to bring life change in me



A powerful testimony of God's Word being alive in God's people begins Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015, on NBC!

This 12-part series, April–June, from executive producers Mark Burnett and Roma Downey, draws upon their popular *The Bible* series, which aired last year. *A.D.* portrays followers of Jesus living out God's Word in the Book of Acts.

[Click here to watch the trailer.](#)

## *Experiencing Scripture*

*"Be it done unto me according to Thy word" (Luke 1:38).*

Join with one or two others asking that His word becomes the explanation of your life. *"Holy Spirit I say 'Yes' to your God-breathed book. Without even knowing all that Your word will ask of me, I yield for it to be true of me."*

## **III. The God-breathed Word Becoming Alive in God's People**

Has the church of the twenty-first century lost the nail that should be holding the mirror of God's Word? Have we lost sight of the two commandments that all other aspects of God's Word hang upon? Could this explain why there is so much knowledge of God's Word, yet so few people who are actually living it out? Could this explain why so many Christians know the truth, yet too frequently find themselves in the same moral and ethical failures as those without a relationship with Christ?

In order to be effective in our efforts to reach the world for Christ, we have to move beyond giving intellectual assent to the Bible, debating over rational beliefs, or assessing standards of behavior, and begin to experience the Word with God and one another.

### **A. The God-breathed Word: What will it look like in our personal lives?**

*"For the word of God is living and active . . ." (Hebrews 4:12).*

This Scripture tells us that the Word of God is living and active, but what is the evidence that God's Word is truly "living" in my life? What does it look like for the Spirit of God to take the Word of God and empower our experience of it?

Taking this journey into a deepened loving relationship with God is an experience because any relationship must be experienced. It involves more than knowledge and dutiful compliance. Our journey in loving the Lord will change our lives in relevant, meaningful ways. Here are some of the benefits of taking this journey toward a more intimate relationship with the God of the Bible:

1. You will live life with an expectancy of actually encountering Him—the One who wrote the Book!
2. You will experience freedom like never before. Your Christian life will move beyond duties and obligations, from "got to's" to "get to's." You will be constrained by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14 KJV).
3. You will be empowered to actually live what you believe. You will find that this power comes not from a doctrinal treatise or a code of conduct, but from a Person!
4. You will express humility instead of pride. Your heart will not be able to fully grasp the wonder of how the Creator of the universe meets you in His Word.
5. You will demonstrate vulnerability instead of judgment. You will be excited to share what God's Word is doing in you rather than pointing to the failures of others.

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

**“Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . .” (Col. 3:16).**

**Pastor/Teacher:** Reflect on one of these five aspects of God’s Word becoming “alive” that is a significant blessing to you.



**W-1** Frequently being led by the Spirit into deeper love for the One who wrote the word

**Pastor/Teacher:**

Do you come today as one who feels accused? Have you experienced the rejection or criticism of others? Do you feel that others are often judging or evaluating you?

Do you come today feeling that you deserve to be condemned? Is there an area of sin in your life that has gone unconfessed or that repeatedly causes you to struggle?

Do you come today as one who is burdened by the struggles of this world? Are you weary because of the stress of this life? Are you tired of problems or discouraged by affliction?

## **B. The God-breathed Word: What Will It Look Like As We Follow Jesus Together?**

- I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8).

Many ministry leaders and followers of Jesus are beginning to change the way they approach God’s Word. Instead of spending time in Scripture primarily as a means of preparing to preach, teach, or lead others, they study in order to know and to love God more intimately. “These leaders seek to know and love God first for who He is and what He wants to do in their lives, and second for what He wants to do through their lives.

- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16).

Do you notice a paradox in this verse? The ministry of effective Bible teaching begins by allowing something to happen “in us.” We must allow the Holy Spirit to work the Word into the soil of our own hearts before fruitful teaching and admonishment can take place. As we set out to study, outline, and interpret the Word, we must also allow the Word to penetrate soul and spirit, to judge the thoughts and attitudes of our heart.

- “We must devote ourselves to prayer and ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4). To “devote” or “give attention to” implies purposeful intent that includes time and focus.

The equipping of the saints for the “work of service” (Ephesians 4:12 NASB), involves each follower of Jesus in a call to serve. In order to effectively minister the Word, we must “serve” others with God’s truth as it becomes more and more the explanation of our life.

## **C. An encounter with Jesus: What will it feel like for us?**

*“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).*

*“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:33–34).*

To each of us who experiences such feelings of accusation and criticism, the Apostle Paul poses the question, “Who will bring any charge against you?” (Romans 8:33). Paul goes on to answer this question with a declaration of truth. He explains that there is only One person with the right and power to accuse, criticize, or condemn: “It is God who justifies” (v. 33). Knowing that we might resist such a liberating truth, Paul asks again, “Who is he that condemns?” (v. 34). Again, we read that there is only One who has the right to condemn us—Jesus Christ, the One who died and was raised from the dead. He has the right and power to judge, but notice what He is doing for those who believe: He is interceding for us (v. 34)! This is why the apostle can say, “There is now no condemnation” for us (v. 1). The only One who can condemn you is praying for you!

Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you into an actual experience of Romans 8:33–34 as you encounter Jesus.

**Meditation:** Close your eyes and form a mental picture of a courtroom. The words Paul uses are legal words. We still use them—“bring charge,” “condemn.” You feel intimidation at your surroundings. You look around and see the faces of people who have spoken against you, been harsh and cruel, or abandoned and neglected you. But who can condemn? Only Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Suddenly, Jesus enters the room. You see His flowing robes, sandaled feet, and bearded face. Rather than taking His place behind the judge’s bench, Jesus stands by your side, slowly eases His arm around your shoulder and gently leads you to join Him, kneeling in prayer.

He’s praying *your* prayer list, the needs in *your* life, and then you hear Him ask, “Where are your accusers?” You glance up and realize that the courtroom is completely empty. Every one of those faces filled with condemnation has disappeared from the room. Each person who brought a charge against you has vanished. Everyone who had responded with neglect or abandonment is gone. He then proclaims, “Neither do I accuse you.” The only One who can condemn you prays for you! The only One, who is equipped to judge, does not. The Holy One of the Universe prays for you!

**Pause** and allow the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with wonder and gratefulness for this Jesus!

“Thanks Father for your incomparable love that empowers Christ to pray for me rather than condemn me. Praise you, Jesus, because there is no condemnation for we who are in Christ Jesus!” The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free!

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## *Cracking the Code of Interpretation*

Cracking the code of biblical interpretation involves a process. In order to be accurate, we must draw out the true meaning of what was written or spoken in a given passage. Our task is not to *create* the meaning; it's simply to *uncover* the original intended meaning. The apostle Peter tells us that "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20 NASB). So, instead of *reading into* a text a meaning we think might be there, we must *draw out* the meaning God intends for us to understand. This process is called *exegesis*.

Exegesis is from the Greek word *exegeomai*, which means "to make known, to unfold in teaching, to declare by making known." This word is used in the Gospel of John when the apostle says that Jesus "has *revealed* God to us" (John 1:18, italics added). The New American Standard Bible translates *exegeomai* as "He has *explained* Him" (John 1:18, italics added).

To properly *reveal* and *explain* the meaning of a passage of Scripture, we engage in the process of exegesis by approaching each passage with the probing questions of a news reporter: who? what? where? when? why? and how? Here's the basic process:

1. We examine the text to understand its grammatical construction.
2. We seek to understand the meaning of individual words—literally, figuratively, culturally, etc.
3. We discover the historical context, such as the identity of the author, cultural setting, timeframe, etc.
4. We examine the message within the context of paragraphs, chapters, individual books, and the entire scope of scriptural truth.
5. We understand the timeless truth applied to those it was written to at the time.
6. We understand how that timeless truth applies to us today.

—Josh McDowell  
*God Breathed*, p. 37–38

