

There's No Place Like Home

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on the *The Bible: Our True Home* by Bishop Matt Whitehead
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God-Given Revelation is the fifth and final value of *The Free Methodist Way*. Bishop Matt Whitehead describes beautifully why submitting to Scriptural authority is our way. More than that, it feels like *home* to us. As a group, read through the article and engage with the writing by discussing and responding to the questions along the way.

Open in prayer.

The Bible: Our True Home

One of my most cherished possessions is a red hardcover NIV Bible. You might expect a bishop to say that, but it is true. This Bible is so special because it was read over the course of a year with me in mind. One of the many legacies of my mother's life is that she read a Bible every year for several years focusing on different members of our family. Then, at Christmas, she would give it to us as a gift — and what a gift! You see, over the course of that year, she wrote notes and thoughts with us in mind. She has been gone for over a decade now but seeing her insightful comments and wise counsel in my Bible is like having a conversation with her. This is one of the things she wrote in my Bible:

“One day after walking with the Lord for many years it occurred to me that our true home on earth is the Bible. Its pages are so familiar, its truth so pure, its light so bright that it illumines every part of our lives. I am glad our home is transportable everywhere.”

I'm not sure if you have thought about that before, but I believe my mother was correct — the Bible is our true home. This true home is the source of growing in grace to be more like Jesus and living in fellowship with God and one another. As my mother so beautifully said, it is pure, light, and illuminating. In purity, it is holy, and, in light and illumination, it is revealing. The Bible is God-Given Revelation, and it is the fifth value of [The Free Methodist Way](#).

1. Have you ever read through your Bible? Share about your experiences.
2. Would you consider reading your Bible through in the same way Bishop Matt's mother did — with a particular loved one in mind — and give it to the person as a gift? How might this change the way you read Scripture?

God-Given Revelation is not just an idea; we Free Methodists know it's our way. We view all five of our values (Life-Giving Holiness, Love-Driven Justice, Christ-Compelled Multiplication, Cross-Cultural Collaboration, and God-Given Revelation) as one whole, each value bringing necessary balance to the others. In a time of rising polarization in our nation, we resist the pull toward both fundamentalism and theological liberalism — not out of a spirit of compromise, but from a radical commitment to what Wesley called the middle way. This middle way calls us to listen to one another with love and grace while staying grounded in the authority of God's Word and the historic teachings of the church.

We live in a culture where we need to be clear about our commitment to fully align our lives and our movement on the unshakable foundation of God's Word. We hold unwaveringly to the conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. As with any foundation, it is necessary to the strength and stability of our movement. Without our strong foundation, we will crumble.

For that reason, I want to share with you reminders of our beliefs about the Word of God. I'll also share thoughts about the very nature of God's Word and why it is critical that we are unified — of one mind — in how we approach and interpret Scripture in our day.

Free Methodists take the Scriptures seriously. Our [Book of Discipline](#) makes this clear:

The Bible is God's written Word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. It bears unerring witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word. As attested by the early church and subsequent councils, it is the trustworthy record of God's revelation, completely truthful in all it affirms. It has been faithfully preserved and proves itself true in human experience.

The Scriptures have come to us through human authors who wrote, as God moved them, in the languages and literary forms of their times. God continues, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to speak through this Word to each generation and culture.

The Bible has authority over all human life. It teaches the truth about God, His creation, His people, His one and only Son and the destiny of humankind. It also teaches the way of salvation and the life of faith. Whatever is not found in the Bible nor can be proved by it is not to be required as an article of belief or as necessary to salvation. (§108 of the 2019 Book of Discipline)

1. "We resist the pull toward both fundamentalism and theological liberalism." Discuss these two terms that Bishop Matt uses. Define them in your own words and talk about why being pulled into one or the other is not advantageous for us.
 - a. Theological Fundamentalism

b. Theological Liberalism

2. Observe the section in italics from our Book of Discipline. What statements stand out to you that reflect we are a people who take the Scriptures seriously? Why did they stand out to you?

3. Talk about ways you as individuals and as a church could take the Scriptures more seriously.

While these statements from our Book of Discipline clearly demonstrate our commitment to the authority of the Scriptures, we also must admit that biblical illiteracy is at epidemic proportions not only here in the U.S. but around the world. Thomas Schirrmacher, the newly elected secretary-general of the World Evangelical Alliance, made this sobering assessment in [an interview](#) with Leah Marie Ann Klett of The Christian Post: “The biggest crisis facing the evangelical, global church today is the growing lack of biblical literacy worldwide.”

According to the [“State of the Bible 2020”](#) report released by the American Bible Society and the Barna Group, U.S. adults who say they read the Bible daily dropped from 14% in 2019 to 9% in 2020.

Biblical illiteracy is a serious issue because anyone not grounded in the foundation of God’s Word begins to interpret societal issues, cultural trends, and even

issues of church practice and discipline through views of the very culture and society with which the Bible often clashes. As Wesleyans, we believe that being grounded in God’s Word is essential for life in Christ and service in God’s kingdom. Paul makes this clear in his admonition to Timothy:

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

I want to encourage you to embrace six vital truths about Scripture. As you read them, I also pray that you will see why it is equally vital that we renew our commitment to interpret culture through the lens of Scripture and not the other way around as we dwell in our true home — the Bible.

1. To what degree do you think biblical illiteracy might be an issue in your own church?

2. What can your church do to emphasize biblical literacy in the lives and families of your members?

Scripture can be trusted:

Trust is so important! How do you feel when you're around someone you know is trustworthy? Aren't we filled with confidence when we know that we're safe to speak openly and truthfully, knowing the other person has our back? Our God is trustworthy, and God's Word can be trusted.

The Bible is not just a collection of human thoughts — it contains God's higher thoughts and ways ([Isaiah 55:8–9](#)). The Bible helps us know how to follow Him. If we trust God, then we know His Word “has our back.” It may conflict with our thoughts about things, but that is the beauty of it. The Bible is our guide for a holy life that reflects Jesus.

The Scriptures came from God's heart as He guided and inspired human authors in different contexts and circumstances to reflect God's great story:

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20–21).

The wonderful reality is that the *intent* of God is made known even through the variety of biblical writers. As we trust the Scriptures in our day, it is vital that we trust God's intent and not our own. Though we may be passionate about various issues, we must trust God's Word as being our true home — that His intent is given primacy. Passion is best framed in the truth.

1. Do you trust Scripture? Before quickly answering, pause to truly reflect that question. Do you really trust Scripture?
2. Read Matthew 6:14–15. Do you trust this Scripture? What would be an indicator of trust? What might be an indicator of distrust?
3. What do you think is God's intent for us in Matthew 6:14–15? How often do you consider God's intent for you as you read Scripture?

Scripture is our foundation:

Paul reminds Timothy that the Bible is our foundation. As I reminded us earlier, the purpose of a foundation is to provide support and stability for all that is built upon it. Paul tells us that our lives are “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:20–22).

Foundations, and how we build upon them, are critically important.

When [Alexander and Adelaide Hall](#) on the campus of Seattle Pacific University was being renovated, the contractor discovered that the building itself had never been properly attached to the foundation. Although construction standards were very different when the building was erected in the late 19th century, the lack of a binding connection to the foundation could have had disastrous consequences.

As the [classic hymn](#) of the church says:

*How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

Our teaching and doctrine are built solidly on the foundation of the Scriptures. Writing in 1887, B.T. Roberts pens this important truth about this

foundation (as highlighted in Howard A. Snyder’s [“Populist Saints”](#)):

“The Bible is a wonderful book. ... The more we read it, the more we enjoy it. We always find in it something new. It is a field, the fertility of which increases the longer, and the more thoroughly it is cultivated. The more there is taken from it, the more it is capable of yielding. It is a mine which grows richer and richer the more it is worked. We lose interest in other books, after reading them a few times. It is not so with the Bible. ... It was adapted to every period of the world’s history in the past; it is especially adapted to our times.”

Let’s revisit the issue of biblical illiteracy in light of the Bible as our foundation. To what degree is Scripture integrated into our lives? As Moses gave Israel the law from God, he clearly stated how important it was to allow His words to infiltrate their daily living:

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6–9).

How might our lives be transformed if we went against the trend of biblical illiteracy and embraced God’s Word as Moses encouraged Israel?

1. To what degree is Scripture integrated into your family’s life at home? Is Scripture your home’s foundation presently? Why or why not?

2. Discuss this question at the close of this segment of the article: How might our lives be transformed if we went against the trend of biblical illiteracy and embraced God’s Word as Moses encouraged Israel?

Scripture disciplines us:

When was the last time you were disciplined? For most adults it has probably been some time since that has happened.

One of the reasons why we must be people of God's Word is that our thinking and reasoning can be very selfish and self-centered. We need the perspective of God's Word to help us see the world clearly. Do you need that? YES! Do I need that? YES!

As I heard the Scripture read recently in a church service I attended, I was convicted by the Holy Spirit. It felt like the Scripture was speaking directly to me. The Lord knew that I needed to hear that. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17 NKJV). Transformation often is the fruit of discipline.

Is discipline pleasant? No, but as parents we understand that parental discipline leads to our children's self-discipline. The goal of disciplining our children is that they would be able to monitor their own behavior. So it is with us. It is good that we mature and grow, but always remain tenderhearted toward the Word of God. If we lose the capacity to be convicted, we risk becoming numb to the Word. It's essential that we avoid what the Bible calls a "calloused" heart (Isaiah 6:10, Matthew 13:15, Acts 28:27) or "seared" conscience (1 Timothy 4:2).

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

1. Regarding discipline from the Word of God, Bishop Matt says, "If we lose the capacity to be convicted, we risk becoming numb to the Word. It's essential that we avoid what the Bible calls a 'calloused' heart (Isaiah 6:10, Matthew 13:15, Acts 28:27) or 'seared' conscience (1 Timothy 4:2)."

a. What is a calloused heart?

b. What is a seared conscience?

c. How does a love for Scripture safeguard us against those two conditions?

2. Think of a time Scripture disciplined you. Can you briefly share about how you benefited from it?

Scripture corrects error:

We who have come to Christ should know and understand how Scripture corrects error. Why? Because our faith journey usually begins with an encounter with God's love that is so pure and holy that it reveals to us our own sin. The very idea that we need the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ is a clash of the power of holy love hitting sin head-on.

But it doesn't stop there. The Scriptures are the foundation to correct error in the church. From cover to cover — the Old (First) Testament and New (Second) Testament, the Bible calls us out of error and into alignment with God's truth. It is so hard to know what error looks like today, isn't it? The landscape of faith can look so confusing and complex. You and I are bombarded every day with conflicting voices and, when they begin to resound in a sort of echo chamber, we can wander into deception.

It is important to say that the Free Methodist Church cannot be all things to all people when it comes to interpreting Scripture. Our Book of Discipline reflects the wisdom of many generations who have come before us. As they read the Bible, considered the whole of Scripture regarding issues of sin and holiness, salvation and grace, life in Christ and ministry in the world, our Book of Discipline emerged as our interpretive lens. It will not be — and indeed has never been — a one-size-fits-all document.

So how do we know what truth is and what error looks like? By reading and studying the Bible for ourselves and working out our beliefs in the company of trusted sisters and brothers in Christ. There is a significant difference between hearing a message as we attend church and reading the Bible on our own. *Information* is acquired as we study the Word of God, but correction happens when we allow the Word of God to study us. That is why understanding how the Bible is unified and what God is saying to you daily as you read His Word is a transformational experience. It is like the difference between being the passenger in a car or being the driver. Passengers usually don't pay close attention to the route being taken, and they're not as observant to the potential dangers around them or even the road signs. If you're the driver, however, you are keenly aware of what is happening around you, and you are ready to respond to potential dangers or hazards.

But the correction of Scripture is not just for individuals, it is for the body of Christ — the church. The Bible shows how God speaks to both individuals about their sin and to the whole community of His people about their collective sin. Because of this, we reject the notion that truth is relative and personal. Free Methodists embrace common truths that are essential to our lives as disciples of Jesus.

1. What is the difference between wisdom and information?
2. How would you define *discernment*?
3. Wisdom and discernment are both needed to reveal truth from the Scriptures. It has been said, "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it!" Try to think of something from Scripture that, if taken out of context, leads to misinterpreting truth.
4. Bishop Matt says, "correction happens when the Word of God studies us." Describe in your own words what you believe that to mean and if you have ever experienced that.

Close in prayer by reciting this passage of Scripture together as a group.

“I obey your precepts and your statutes, for all my ways are known to you. May my cry come before you, Lord; give me understanding according to your word. May my supplication come before you; deliver me according to your promise. May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees. May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous. May your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts. I long for your salvation, Lord, and your law gives me delight. Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me” (Psalm 119:168–175).