

Towards a Theology of Scripture:  
Who am I? Let Me Tell You a Story

Sermon

*Hobart, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013*

*Launceston, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013*

*God must really love us,  
because he always answers with such long stories.*

*(Rachael H. Evans)*

## **Scripture Reading 1:**

### **John 5:31-40**

<sup>31</sup> “If I were to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid. <sup>32</sup> But someone else is also testifying about me, and I assure you that everything he says about me is true. <sup>33</sup> In fact, you sent investigators to listen to John the Baptist, and his testimony about me was true. <sup>34</sup> Of course, I have no need of human witnesses, but I say these things so you might be saved. <sup>35</sup> John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were excited for a while about his message. <sup>36</sup> But I have a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles. The Father gave me these works to accomplish, and they prove that he sent me. <sup>37</sup> And the Father who sent me has testified about me himself. You have never heard his voice or seen him face to face, <sup>38</sup> and you do not have his message in your hearts, because you do not believe me—the one he sent to you.

<sup>39</sup> “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! <sup>40</sup> Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

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<sup>1</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 5:31-40). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

**Scripture Reading 2:**

**Hebrews 1:1-3**

1 Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets.

2 And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe.

<sup>3</sup> The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God

## INTRODUCTION:

### A. GARY DEDDO

#### 1. Has been writing a series of articles on the Bible; entitled, Scripture; God's Gift

- a) The first part of the series came out in a recent letter you received

#### 2. The Bible is such a fundamental part of our Christian lives and worship

- a) So it is important that we continue to grow in our understanding of its nature and purpose

## S.P.S:

### B. WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

#### 1. Is it inerrant and infallible, and if so in what way

- a) Some insist God dictated every word
- b) Many Christian schools for instance insist that teachers sign a document stating they believe the Bible to be the inerrant and infallible, word of God
- c) Australian evangelist, Ken Ham says if you don't believe that Genesis 1 is literally and scientifically true then you make God out to be a liar, and all scripture becomes unreliable

### C. WHAT IS GOD'S PURPOSE IN AND THROUGH THIS BOOK WE HAVE ALL BASED OUR LIFE AROUND?

#### 1. Is the Bible "God's handbook for life", the "manufacturer's workshop manual"?

- a) Is it a health text book?
- b) A book of laws and ethics?
- c) Or is it just a book of interesting sayings ?
- d) Or is it something else bigger and better than any of these?

### D. PRAYER

## BODY:

### II. WHAT IS SCRIPTURE INSPIRED FOR ?

#### A. AS JOHN GOLDINGAY SAYS IN “MODELS FOR SCRIPTURE:

The *fact* that the Bible is inspired provides our thinking with a starting point. The *nature* of the Bible's inspiration we must learn from scripture itself.<sup>2</sup>

#### B. LAST YEAR WE LOOKED AT II TIMOTHY 3:15-17

**1. And saw that the Scriptures are inspired for a particular purpose, but not necessarily for others**

#### II Timothy 3:15-17

<sup>15</sup> You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. <sup>17</sup> It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.

#### C. WHEN WE PUT THESE ALL TOGETHER WE SEE A PATH THAT THE SCRIPTURES LEAD US ALONG

**1. We all need to be taught, to be guided**

- a) To be shown what is right, and where we have gone wrong
- b) We then need to be restored and put back on the right path
- c) Once our new life is begun, we then need to be shown, trained and brought up and led along in the way of our Father

**2. So that as vs 17 continues on to say;**

- a) we can be equipped to know God's righteousness that comes only through Jesus and the Holy Spirit
- b) So that we can grow up, to become the adult sons and daughters of God he wants us to be

<sup>2</sup> John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, Eerdmans, 1994, p. 274

**3. Whatever view or model we have of the Scriptures must hold, this purpose clearly at its centre**

- a) It must encapsulate Scriptures role as leading us to a knowledge of God, and “the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus.”
- b) and guiding and equipping us to be the people God created us to be, in his image

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**III. THE BIBLE AS STORY/NARRATIVE**

**A. PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST USEFUL WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING AND READING THE BIBLE, IS AS A NARRATIVE OR A STORY RATHER THAN A MANUAL OR RULE BOOK;**

1. God’s story, and our story.
2. A family biography, a love story, a story of redemption, a story of relationship
3. Rather than reading separate verses or even books on their own like a manual or legal document, we do better to view and read the Bible as having one big central story,
  - a) with lots of smaller stories that fit, embrace, unfold, explain and reflect the larger overall story
4. And that larger central story is God
  - a) WHO he is
  - b) The story of his relationship with us, past, present and future
5. Scott McKnight has written what I have found to be a very helpful book called; *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*
  - a) He writes;

The Bible’s story has a plot headed in the direction of a *person*. And that same story is headed in the direction of a *community* “in” that person.

The story of the Bible takes the otherness of cracked *Eikons* and directs us toward Jesus Christ, in whom alone we find oneness.<sup>3</sup>

## 6. Scott McKnight's plot of the Bible Story

### The Story of the Bible (Our Story)

Plot	Theme
Creating <i>Eikons</i> (Gen 1-2)	Oneness
Cracked <i>Eikons</i> (Gen 3-11)	Otherness
Covenant Community (Gen 12-Malachi)	Otherness expands
Christ, the perfect <i>Eikon</i> , redeems (Matt-Revelation)	One in Christ
Consummation (Rev 21-22)	Perfectly One

Scot McKnight; *The Blue Parakeet*, p.67

#### **B. WE TEND TO COME TO THE BIBLE WITH A WESTERN MINDSET**

**1. and expect and insist that the Bible conform to our expectations, rather than seeing it in its context**

a) and hearing what it says about itself

**2. One of the first reactions many have to the idea of the Bible as story or narrative,**

a) is to be concerned that we are making it out to be a fairy story, or somehow stripping it of authority, or accuracy and truth

**3. But that isn't the way the people who lived in the times and cultures in which the Scriptures were written viewed it**

a) For them, stories were used as the main way of conveying and preserving important events, truths and concepts

b) In ancient cultures, and even today in many non-western cultures, stories are used to communicate and preserve the history, beliefs and values of tribes and peoples

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<sup>3</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*, Zondervan, 2008, p.75

- c) They were not concerned about chronological order, or accuracy of details, times, places etc.

**4. Throughout the Bible we read how the story of Abraham and the patriarchs, the story of the Passover, the many stories within the greater story of Israel, were all to be repeated and taught, and passed down from generation to generation**

**5. This was done so they would know and remember who their God was**

- a) and all that he had done for them in making them his people
- b) and to lead them to respond in faith to their God, and live and be the people he created them to be in relationship with him, one another, and the world around them
- c) The importance of this is mentioned many times throughout the Old Testament

### **C. JESUS ALSO TAUGHT BY WAY OF STORIES**

**1. Matthew 13 refers back to Psalm 78 and says;**

Matt 13:34 Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without to them without using such parables.

### **D. PARABLES**

**1. Few have trouble believing that the parables of Jesus were stories used to convey vital and profound spiritual truths**

- a) Few at the time or today would be concerned to hear that there was no actual prodigal son, and no lost coin

**2. Similar to the way we interpret parables,**

- a) rather than being concerned about the precise details of locations, dates and material facts of every story in Scripture—the idea is to look beyond the details and see the message that is being conveyed by each story
- b) To see and hear God in and through them
- c) And to be led to Jesus and guided and equipped in being his people



## **E. WHEN WE INSIST THAT SCRIPTURE IS INERRANT WE CAN END UP THREATENING PEOPLE'S FAITH**

### **1. Many people, young and old have lost faith in Scripture when they find evidence that questions the factual details of various Biblical events**

- a) Issues of creation and evolution
- b) Noah's flood
- c) Jonah and the whale
- d) The sun standing still in Joshua

### **2. It is easy to get put off**

- a) or on the other hand to get caught up and overly focused on questions like these
- b) But for both those who are put off the Scriptures, and those who become Bible hobbyists, the central purpose of the Scriptures (coming to know God himself and being led to live in an active relationship with him) is handicapped or prevented

### **3. Scott McKnight writes about people who get caught up in these details;**

...like the person who reads Jonah and spends hours and hours figuring out if a human can live inside a whale—and what kind of whale it was—but never encounters God. The book is about Jonah's God, not Jonah's whale.

### **4. John Goldingay comments on how the stress on inerrancy**

Tends to divert energy from the task of interpreting scripture to a preoccupation with harmonization, which hinders rather than helps an understanding of particular texts.

The history of biblical interpretation suggest that abandonment of a doctrine of inerrancy has often enabled interpreters to come to a more satisfactory understanding of a passage. In contrast, believing in inerrancy has often led interpreters into strange harmonistic exegesis. H. Lindsell in his book *The Battle for the Bible* offers excellent examples, such as the suggestion... that Peter must have denied Jesus six times in order for the Gospel accounts to be harmonized.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1994, p.277

## **5. He adds later;**

The claim that scripture is factually inerrant sets up misleading expectations regarding the precision of narratives and then requires such far-fetched defenses, such as those of Lindell just noted, that it presses people towards rejecting it.<sup>5</sup>

## **F. WHEN WE READ THE BIBLE AS GOD'S STORY**

### **1. Like any good book, we read it keeping the Big story, the main plot in mind**

- a) We don't go worrying about the details of dates, places or scientific facts
- b) We want to know the characters, and what the story is all about, especially its conclusion, when everything is tied together, and we come to understand what it was all leading us to

## **G. THE ENLIGHTENMENT**

### **1. The culture of the modern technological age, especially Newtonian cause and effect thinking that our culture, especially the older generations have been moulded by**

### **2. — leaves people wanting a fix-it God, and a heaven given law book of cause and effect that is factual and effective as a tool for their use on their terms**

### **3. People equate truth with facts and solutions, not with mystery, metaphor and stories.**

- a) And many tend to value historical and scientific facts as more important than spiritual truth and the revelation of God's heart and his loving intent to develop an ongoing, living relationship with us

### **4. Anthony Thistleton,**

"If metaphor, therefore presents *possibility* rather than *actuality* it is arguable that metaphoric discourse can open up new understanding more readily than purely descriptive or scientific statement."<sup>6</sup>

- a) He then adds;

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<sup>5</sup> John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, p.278

<sup>6</sup> Ron Marotta, *The Bible as Improv.*, p.109

The biblical text must be freed to speak to us outside of the medical, mechanical, therapeutic, and self-help texts that permeate our head space.<sup>7</sup>

## **5. Donald G. Bloesch**

The many divisions spawned by eschatological disputes are traceable in part to the inability of humans to grasp the poetic language of Scripture, particularly with regard to the spirit world beyond death and the return of Christ in glory. Instead of bowing before mystery and paradox we want to resolve mystery in a logic that the human mind can master.

...I seek to combat a rationalistic spirit that reduces revelation to propositional truth that elevates rational coherence as the final criterion in theology.

The unfailing source of Christian wisdom is not the objective divine declaration in the Bible--the Bible as it stands by itself—but the paradoxical unity of the scriptural word and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which brings the written Word of God to life in a divine-human encounter.<sup>8</sup>

## **6. T.F. Torrance says the same thing**

- a) **He taught that the idea that the Bible is inerrant or sacred in itself -is an error**
- b) **Because it reveres and sets off the Bible apart from God and his dynamic relationship with his people through Christ and the Spirit**

“we err when we revere Scripture in such a way that it begins to stand above (or even substitute for) God's self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. To insist that the Bible is inerrant tends in this unfortunate direction.”

- c) **He added that inerrancy leads to;**

"...An epistemological dualism...[that] cuts off the revelation of God in the Bible from God himself and his *continuous* self-giving through Christ and in the Spirit, so that the Bible is treated as a self-contained corpus of divine truths in propositional form...[a] rigid framework of belief within which fundamentalism barricades itself" <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Martoia, *The Bible as Improv*, p.111

<sup>8</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, Glory*, InterVarsity Press, 2006, p.14

<sup>9</sup> T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 1982, p.17

**7. He wrote about how we are to use the Bible as God's inspired gift through which he reveals to us the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is uniquely and fully God's Living Word.**

a) According to Torrance...

"This means that our interpretation and understanding of the Bible cannot be established or defended simply by appealing to biblical texts or passages or even biblical concepts, but only through listening to the truths they signify or attest and allowing our minds to be objectively determined by them.

That is to say, biblical statements are to be treated, not as containing or embodying the Truth of God in themselves, but as pointing, under the leading of the Spirit of Truth, to Jesus Christ himself who is the Truth"<sup>10</sup>

**8. In other words, the Bible is God's instrument in revealing himself in Christ through the Spirit**

a) As Gary Deddo writes;

God's personal act of communication is in and through his Son, the Living Word. The whole of the written words of the prophets and apostles direct our attention to the Living Word, Jesus the incarnate Son of God. This Jesus is God's own self-communication, his own self-revelation to us. Jesus does not give us words from God, he is himself God's Word to us.<sup>11</sup>

**H. THROUGH SCRIPTURE, IN VARIOUS TIMES, THROUGH VARIOUS PEOPLE GOD HAS TOLD HIS STORY**

**1. His story of how he has stepped down into our world,**

a) Communing and communicating with people like us, in their place and time,

**2. Through the Holy Spirit he inspired and uses their words and their experiences of him down through the ages to reveal vital truths about himself,**

a) using their stories to tell his story

b) helping God's people today to learn of that same God and respond to him in faith in their own time and place

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<sup>10</sup> T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, p.119

<sup>11</sup> Gary Deddo, Scripture, God's Gift, part 2, <http://update.gci.org/2013/04/scripture-gods-gift-part-2/>

**I. ALL THESE STORIES POINT TO AND ARE CONCLUDED AND FULLY REVEALED AND EXPLAINED IN THE SON.**

**1. Hebrews 1:1-3**

1 Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. 2 And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. 3 The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God

**2. As Gary Deddo writes;**

Jesus is the interpretive key to all of Scripture, for in him we see and hear the heartbeat of God. We watch and hear the motions of his heart and mind, even his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The light we find shining forth from the face of Jesus sheds light on all of Scripture, for in him the God of the whole Bible has personally revealed himself.

So we ought to read and interpret Scripture in a way that through it all, in one way or another, we come to see how it points towards and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Think of this as a process much like reading a murder mystery novel for the second time. The first time through, at the end, you finally come to discover "who done it." The second time through is a much different experience. You can see in a new light how all the clues early on in the mystery pointed to "who done it." You appreciate the clues (and recognize the false leads) even more the second time through. But the clues are not the solution. Their value is how they indicate or are signs pointing to the resolution of the mystery.

This means that central to our study and understanding of the whole Bible should be the person and acts of Jesus. <sup>12</sup>

**J. INSTEAD OF INTERPRETING THE BIBLE, AND UNDERSTANDING GOD THROUGH THE LAW, OR PROPHECY, OR ANY OTHER SUBPLOT**

**1. We read and have our understanding corrected and enhanced through the central plot**

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<sup>12</sup> Gary Deddo, Scripture: God's Gift, Part 3, <http://update.gci.org/2013/05/scripture-gods-gift-part-3/>

a) Every story is a story contributing to but at the same time subservient to that overarching story

b) The story of how God is working to save us through Jesus

**2. We can see all this clearly illustrated by Paul in the way he interprets the scriptures, reading them all in the light of the story of Jesus**

**3. More importantly still, we see how Jesus interpreted the stories of the OT in the light of his story**

a) He showed how they all spoke and pointed us to him

b) That was why they were written and preserved

**K. THE SPIRIT USES THE WRITTEN WORD TO LEAD US TO KNOW AND ENTER INTO A RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST AND HIS REDEEMED COMMUNITY**

**1. With this understanding we embrace the Bible and look to it as Paul admonished Timothy for teaching, reproof and reinstatement, to be fully equipped to live the life of God in Christ**

**2. We don't disregard or disrespect it by faulting it for not being what it never claims to be; a text book, or encyclopedia of facts**

**3. Rather, we see it is a sacred, holy irreplaceable book**

a) To be highly respected, studied and treasured

b) Not discounted because it is not always factually accurate

**4. Goldingay;**

The implicit claim of biblical narrative is to be reasonably accurate, not inerrant, and accepting it in its own terms and on its own evaluation involves accepting it as such and not as purporting to be quite free of error.

In a rationalist, historicist age it is easy to infer that material that is not factually historical cannot be taken seriously. When people come to acknowledge that there is such material in scripture it is easy for them to lose their trust in scripture as God's word, to lose the warmth of their attachment to it as a gracious gift of God, and to abandon their openness to hearing it speak. But there is no need for all this to follow.

Material that is unhistorical is not uninspired. The whole text is God's inspired word. If certain points in Luke are unhistorical, those parts of this inspired Gospel also contribute to an inspired portrait of Jesus that can be effective and meaningful for its hearers. We do not dismiss them because they are unhistorical but let them continue to function effectively and meaningfully to render Jesus for us.

Writers such as Origen were right in saying that we pay attention to the whole, not merely those parts that we believe to be factual.

Each detail, whether historically factual or not, contributes to the true picture that the narrative sets before us and deserves our attention. The whole narrative, including any nonfactual elements, as it is and not as we might expect it be, is God's inspired word, and as such does its work and speaks to us.<sup>13</sup>

## **5. Our focus moves from facts, rules and ways of making our lives better, to a faith relationship**

- a) The Bible points us to God, not itself as its goal and purpose
- b) Not to using him or the Bible for self-improvement or so we can gain mere knowledge
- c) Rather it leads us to a restored life in relationship with him; living in and through Jesus and the Spirit; not to issues of prophecy, history, science and law

## **6. McKnight urges us to understand that our relationship is not so much with the Bible but with the God of the Bible. He writes;**

There is more to the Bible than its subject matter.

The relational approach turns the Bible from facts-only to facts-that-lead-to-engagement with the God of the Bible.”

The relational approach *distinguishes God from the Bible*. God existed before the Bible existed; God exists independently of the Bible now. God is a person; the Bible is paper. God gave us this papered Bible to lead us to love his person. But the person and the paper are not the same.<sup>14</sup>

## **7. Donald Bloesch wrote;**

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<sup>13</sup> Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, p.282-283

<sup>14</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*, Zondervan, 2008, p.85-87

The Bible as a book or compendium of books, can of course, be considered a proximate source of Christian wisdom, but the ultimate source is the living Christ himself who speaks and acts in the power of the Spirit as believers seek for truth hidden and revealed in Scripture.<sup>15</sup>

### **8. Elmer Colyer sums this view up, saying**

Scripture mediates real knowledge of God, but not apart from the activity of the Spirit and faith that arises out of it.<sup>16</sup>

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## **IV. GOD'S STORY—OUR STORY:**

### **A. EUGENE PETERSEN, IN HIS BOOK ON STUDYING THE BIBLE, CALLED "EAT THIS BOOK"**

**1. Rather than treating scripture as a still life from which we extract a theology, he encourages the reader to enter the story and allow the story to transform our lives.**

### **B. THE SCRIPTURES ARE ONLY REALLY EFFECTIVE WHEN WE LET GOD'S STORY COME TO LIFE AS OUR STORY**

**1. When we join in the story, and share in the experience of God along with those who wrote the Scriptures**

a) Miroslav Volf exhorts us to read the Bible personally rather than impersonally

At the receiving end of the reading process is a person living at a particular time and place as a part of a particular community...

I always read the Bible as myself. Indeed, the more I am consciously present as myself in the act of reading, the more profitable the reading is likely to be. And, inversely, the more I profit from the sacred text that tells my story within the story of God's dealings with the world, the more I will truly be myself.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, Glory*, InterVarsity Press, 2006, p.14

<sup>16</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Donald Bloesch's Theological Method*, *Journal for Christian Theological Research* [www.jctr.org] 1:1 (1996) par. 1-88.

<sup>17</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God; Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection*, Eerdmans, 2010, p.36



The Bible is about all of us—about who we are and what has happened or will happen to us, and about what it means for us to live well. Within its story the Bible tells the story of humanity and each person in it..<sup>18</sup>

## **2.N.T. Wright**

The Bible is not an end in itself. It is there so that, by its proper use, the creator may be glorified and the creation may be healed.

...we must determine—corporately as well as individually—to become in a true sense, people of the book. Not people of the book in the Islamic sense, where this book just drops down and crushes people and you say it's the will of Allah, and I don't understand it, and I can't do anything about it.

But, people of the book in the Christian sense; people who are being remade, judged and remolded by the Spirit through scripture.<sup>19</sup>

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## **CONCLUSION:**

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### **C. SO WITH THE BIBLE,**

#### **1. We have not a mere text book,**

- a) a manual or a set of rules or morals to just read and put into practice, like a self-help manual, or a machine directed by a computer program to produce a perfect and identical product every time

#### **2. Much better than any of those,**

- a) including its incarnational condescensional nature, its imperfections, inaccuracies and inconsistencies,
- b) It functions as an effective instrument of God's Spirit in leading us to Jesus Christ, who brings us into a real, living knowledge and relationship with God, Father, Son and Spirit

#### **3. We have a Book revealing the heart and plan of a living, loving God who wants to share his life with us**

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<sup>18</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God; Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection*, Eerdmans, 2010, p. 21

<sup>19</sup> N.T. Wright, *How Can the Bible be Authoritative*, p.25

**A. MY CURRENT DEFINITION OF THE BIBLE IS SOMETHING LIKE THIS...**

The Bible is more than a book, ink on paper. It is an experience. It is God speaking to me through the many and varied voices of his people down through the ages.

As a little child, I sit at his feet, and listen as he starts to speak, he says to us all,

"Who am I? Let Me Tell You a Story," In the beginning...

As the story unfolds, he invites me in faith, to stand up, and walk with his son, and listen to his spirit, and live in his body on earth, and become part of The story, His Story, My Story, Our Story, and hopefully--everyone's Story!

And as I become more familiar with the story, and live the story, I grow in my understanding of God, and grow to be more the human being he created to me. Others hopefully are impacted by the church living the story the story, and are attracted to meet Jesus and become part of the story as well.

**B. PRAYER**