

Welcome

I love movies of all kinds - I'm really not picky. But one of my favorite things is when movies mash up genres. I don't know if y'all have seen the trailer for this new thriller, but it's coming out at Christmas (you know, assuming theaters are reopened). I love the idea of a thriller at Christmas - it takes two ideas that don't usually belong together and makes a provocative movie out of them.

I want to show you the trailer: [[Elf Thriller trailer](#)]

Okay so, that is obviously not a new movie coming out. It's the beloved, hilarious, musical Christmas comedy *Elf* recut as a thriller.

Which, in and of itself, is pretty hilarious. But, at the risk of ruining the joke by explaining it, I want to ask *why* recut movie trailers like this one are so entertaining.

First, this only works if you've seen *Elf*. If you don't know the silly, heartwarming tone of the original, then this is at best a curiosity. Second, it matters that all the footage in the trailer is from the actual movie. Nothing's made up here - it's all about *how the story* is told.

And, for our purposes today, here's what really matters: this trailer works because it messes with genre conventions. You know that *Elf* is a comedy. But you *also* know that this trailer is a thriller. How? It's the music, the camera cuts. The tone. There are a dozen cues that tell you you're watching something *scary*.

The reason this trailer is *funny* is because we have an intuitive sense of genre. We know when something is supposed to be funny or scary or educational or romantic. No one *taught* us these things, exactly. We didn't take a class in genre. We just learned it by being exposed to the genres.

And our expectations of a genre lead us to interpret, even to judge as good or bad. For instance, I don't know how many of you remember the romantic comedy *The Break-Up* (2006) starring Vince Vaughan and Jennifer Aniston but it's about a couple who, well, breaks up. And at the end of the movie, *they stay broken up*.

A lot of people didn't like this movie (even though, if you've ever been through a break-up, it rings really true). Why? Because the *genre* of romantic comedy is, well, a comedy. They're supposed to end with a wedding, not a (metaphorical) funeral.

Today, we're going to begin a journey through Scripture together. Over the summer, we're going to explore the different genres of literature we find in the library of faith we call the Bible. And we're going to learn how to read these ancient genres of literature such that we can hear God's voice speaking to us, inviting the Spirit to transform us.

Message

We just finished a series on the Holy Spirit, and each week, we highlighted a different spiritual practice that helps us make ourselves available to the Spirit's work in our lives. If there's one spiritual practice that pretty much everyone knows they *should* be doing, but honestly struggles with, it's probably reading the Bible. And it's not because we don't like to read (well, not for most of us). No it's because the Bible is an intimidating book. So this summer, we're going to explore how to read Scripture.

Our goal is not to get smarter (though we don't have anything against smart people). No, our goal is to understand better how Scripture is an essential component in our transformation. So let's start with what the Bible *is*, and how it shapes our spiritual lives.

The author of 2 Timothy said it like this:

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. 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 corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. -- 2 Timothy 3:15-17

So Scripture gives us wisdom (that's important). Scripture is "inspired" (also important). It teaches us, and God uses it to equip us to do every good work.

So first, what does it mean that the Bible teaches us wisdom?

We should be careful right out of the gate, because a lot of us mistake knowledge for wisdom. And when we think of the Bible, we think of it like that textbook - the Bible has a bunch of facts in it we need to learn. How many verses can I quote from memory? How many commandments do we have to remember? What were the names of the 12 tribes? What about the 12 disciples? How fast should I be able to find Amos? Ezekiel? Hezekiah? (Just kidding that one's not even a real book of the Bible!)

Now, knowledge isn't bad, but it's not the same thing as wisdom. Have you ever met someone who's really smart, but doesn't have any common sense? That's sort of the difference between knowledge and wisdom. An even better way to think about it is that knowledge is about specific things - it's depth, while wisdom is more broad. For instance, knowing how to rebuild an engine and put it back in a car takes a lot of knowledge (it's certainly something I can't do). But being able to diagnose what's wrong with a car that won't start is more of a wisdom problem - you have to know not only specific facts about car processes, but be able to feel your way through the quirks of this particular car.

At the risk of wildly oversimplifying, knowledge is like science, and wisdom is like art.

So the Scriptures are less of a knowledge book and more of a wisdom book. The goal of the Scriptures isn't to make us all ancient Near Eastern historians. It's nice if you can name all 12 of the disciples, but that's not the *goal* of Scripture. What is the goal?

To give us wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting Jesus.

In keeping with that, our denominational statement on the Bible says essential that:

We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith. -- Church of the Nazarene Article IV of Faith

A lot in there, but right in the middle: ...inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation...

The Bible is wholly trustworthy when it comes to teaching us what we need to come into a relationship with God.

[**Inspiration Spectrum**] But how does that work? That's where that word "inspired" comes in. When Christians use the word 'inspired', we can mean a whole bunch of different things. On one end, you have what theologians call "verbal inspiration" or "divine dictation". Essentially, it means that the Bible is 100% the work of God, that God decided each and every word that's in the Bible. The human authors had no agency beyond writing down whatever God wanted. Folks who follow this view say the Bible is God's word, and we have to follow it to the letter, no questions asked. Because, after all God said it, so that settles it.

At the other end of the spectrum is what we could call "theological insight". This view is that the Bible is 100% a human book. It's written by people, with all of our prejudices, insights, failures and successes. The authors of the Bible are particularly insightful, spiritual people, but they're still people, reaching for the divine and putting in language that made sense to them. These folks will warn that the Bible should be read with a grain of salt. After all, we're in a different culture, a different world, than the Biblical authors, and we can't expect what they wrote to be applicable to our context today.

Obviously, these two perspectives are the ends of a spectrum, and most of us are going to want to figure out where between them we fall. Is the bible 90/10 God and human? 50/50? 30/60? But one of my favorite Biblical scholars, Peter Enns, suggests that trying to find where we fall on the spectrum is the wrong approach.

Go back to 2 Timothy - that phrase "inspired by God". The Greek there is literally "God-breathed", and it's the same phrase used in Genesis when God creates humanity by breathing into our nostrils. Enns suggest we fold that spectrum over on itself. Is the Bible inspired by God? Yes, 100%. Is the Bible a product of humans and human culture? Yes, 100%. Enns looks to the Incarnation, when God became human, for our model for the Bible. Jesus wasn't half-god, half-human like Hercules or one of the other Greek demigods. Jesus is fully human and fully God. 100% of both. So too, Enns, insists, is Scripture.

The Bible is inspired by God to bring us into a life of faith. The goal is not knowledge, but wisdom. So, how do we read the Bible not for *information*, but for *transformation*? That's a complex question, so we're going to take our time this summer and explore the Bible genre-by-genre.

Why?

Because the Bible isn't a textbook; it's a library. Our version of the Bible - the Protestant bible - has 66 different books by dozens of authors. The oldest bits are more than 3,000 years old, and the most recent date from less than 100 years after Jesus' resurrection - so we're talking about a collection of documents that span more than a millennium. The Bible was written in three different languages. In different cultures, by authors in wildly different economic circumstances. Big pieces of it were transmitted orally for hundreds of years before being written down.

[Image: Library vs textbook] And here's where we start to get into genres: imagine walking into a library to find a book. If you're just browsing, you might look for the signs on the shelves telling you what section you're in: fiction, non-fiction. Sci-fi, biography, comics and graphic novels, mysteries, cookbooks, and so on.

The genre tells you a little of what to expect from each book in the section - if you're in the biographies and you pull out a cook book, you're not going to say, "Oh, this is the life story of an apple pie!", you're going to think, "Huh, this book has been misshelved."

Our understanding of genre shapes our expectations for meaning, and *meaning* is what we're after when we read Scripture. We want to know: what did it mean *then* so we can hear what the Spirit is saying to us now.

So we come to the Bible. A library, not a textbook. A library with so many different kinds of books in it. There're histories and biographies. There're letters and apocalypses and poetry and wisdom collections. There's even folklore and mythology. All of it a carefully crafted and faithfully preserved library, passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years.

That's beautiful, isn't it?

It's also, still, pretty intimidating.

So during this series, we're going to explore each genre of Biblical literature. We'll learn what the key features of the genre are, and how to read each genre. The goal? Not that we'll get smarter. The goal will be to hear better what the Spirit was saying to those ancient readers so we can hear better what the Spirit is saying to us.

This summer, we're going to read Scripture together. We're going to practice, share our insights with each other. Express our surprises, our struggles, our confusion and our clarity.

We're going to read the same passages each week. We'll read them together. On our own. And we'll share in the journey of growing in wisdom. We'll learn together what it means to walk in the way of Jesus, to receive his rescue and become his people!

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] Scripture invites us to this practice at the heart of faith.

1. When in the last week have I spent time in Scripture?
2. What has kept me from reading Scripture in the last week?
3. Why might I be tempted to avoid Scripture this week?
4. How can I make space to read Scripture this week?

Assignment + Blessing

Meditation with 2 Timothy 3:15-17