

**Analog Church**  
**“God’s Word in the Digital Age”**  
**2 Timothy 3:16– 17, Psalm 119 (selected verses)**  
**Layne Lebo and Jen Souter**  
**April 23, 2023**

**Layne:**

Author Jay Kim’s subtitle to his book, “Analog Church,” accurately describes our focus in this series: “Why we need real people, places, and things in the digital age.” By “analog,” we’re referring to real, material, physical things. “Analog” stands in contrast to “digital,” which consists of electronic or virtual reality. Last Sunday, Pastor Evan and I kicked off this series by explaining why analog church matters in an increasingly digitized world. We emphasized that while churches seek to be relevant to connect and make sense in our 21<sup>st</sup> Century world, relevance can’t replace transcendence. In other words, God and his truth, as revealed perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ, transcend time and space and circumstances. Encountering the presence of Jesus can be lost or dismissed in the quest to be relevant.

I have the privilege this morning of team-preaching with Pastor Jen Souter, McBIC’s kids’ pastor, and our focus is on Scripture—God’s Word. We want to explore with you what it looks like for us to know God’s Word and live it out in the digital age.

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**Jen:**

God’s Word certainly was a value in my family but actually reading/studying it together didn’t exist. I’m not sure why. I am sure there are quite a few reasons for that. With three active, busy girls involved in all things—music, dance, and sports—it was hard to have time for anything else. Reading in general was not an activity we did much as a family, so maybe that’s another reason. And practices like prayer, worship, and service were more of a priority.

However, my parents made sure we went to Sunday school and worship every Sunday, even when we went on vacation. I remember hearing about the heroes and heroines of our faith using flannel boards or sand sculptures. I remember singing songs like “Father Abraham,”

“Zacchaeus,” and “Arky Arky.” Yes, I am older than you might think. My childhood was not in the digital age, but I have fond memories of this time in my life.

Then as a teenager, when I began to own my faith for myself and received my call to full-time ministry, I couldn’t get enough of God’s Word. Daily quiet times using devotionals became an important practice along with attending youth group on Sunday nights. I also attended adult Bible study with my mom, grandparents, aunt, and uncle on Tuesday nights. My pastor growing up loved Paul, so I remember learning about his letters to the churches and his missionary journeys—something that never came up when I was younger. I was inspired!

I was on fire, and you would think going to Messiah College and being a Christian ministries major would only fuel that passion, but I struggled to read and to study the Bible for myself, not just for a class or to write a paper. This season lasted for quite a while until I found “She Reads Truth.” “She Reads Truth” makes it easy to read the Bible every day. Here is what they say: “All you have to do is show up as you are, read with us, and then come back again tomorrow.”

I went through the book of Judges first. I know—interesting book of the Bible to begin with—but as I read about the fundamental problem of the human heart (when we forget Him, forget God, we turn away and begin to worship other gods), it became clear to me how much I need a Savior. How much I need Jesus. I began to see His death and resurrection in a new light.

God’s Word is hard. It’s hard to understand. It’s daunting. We get that. There are tools out there to help guide us along. I am so grateful I found “She Reads Truth.” And men, there is a “He Reads Truth” as well, so don’t feel left out. I encourage you to not give up, keep trying to find the right tool for you, and if you need help figuring out where to start, talk to one of the pastors here on staff. We would love to have that conversation with you.

If I am honest, reading God’s Word daily for me, not just for ministry, is a struggle. It comes, it goes, it comes back again. The times I do open my Bible and read His Word I am still shocked on the new insight I receive or the question God and I need to wrestle with. It’s amazing how living God’s Word is. It motivates me to read it more!

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My parents were committed to ensuring my sister, brother, and I knew God's Word. In addition to going to church on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday nights, we had devotions each night before bedtime. As an active child, I admit that I didn't look forward to these times. Throughout my childhood, I recall my mom or dad calling us in from playing whatever sport was in season after it got dark for our family devotions. During those times, my parents read Scriptures and Bible stories to us, but we also memorized Scriptures, and at times we'd have competitions as they asked us Bible questions.

I loved competition, so those question-and-answer times motivated me. They also prepped me to be very successful in "Sword drills" at church or in answering Bible questions that were posed to me by my teachers. As a middle school and high school student, my competitive nature motivated me to study the Bible hours each week in preparation for Bible Quizzing. I still remember large portions of the Gospels and Paul's letters that I studied and memorized over five years of Bible quizzing.

When I went to Messiah University and became a Bible major—after starting out as a history major—I had a strong foundation in the Scriptures, and professors like George Kimber, David Parkyn, and Morris Sider assisted me in building on that foundation. When I went to seminary, I gained a new appreciation for the deep roots of God's Word, which had been planted in me. I learned that many of my classmates in seminary had come to faith through campus ministries in college, and while they were passionate about Jesus, they didn't have the benefit of the strong Biblical background I was privileged to have. I was thankful then and continue to be grateful to my parents, my church, and Messiah University for helping to ground me in God's Word.

The Jewish people at the time of Jesus read and heard their Bible, the Old Testament, almost exclusively in synagogues, gathered with family, friends, and neighbors. The New Testament writers wrote most of their letters and stories with these sorts of audiences and environments in mind; these were texts designed to be read and heard out loud by gathered people.

I love how Jay Kim describes it in his book:

If people had gone to the trouble of gathering to receive a letter from the apostle Paul or Peter, would it make any sense to read only a handful of lines from the letter and declare, “Good for today. Let’s finish it up tomorrow”? Of course not. The very nature of biblical engagement and the pragmatics of gathering in the early church led to focused and extended communal listening and receiving of Scripture. (“Analog Church,” p. 139)

So how did we get from that to a fast, convenient, and individual exercise? Well, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the printing press placed Bibles in the hands of the masses. For the very first time, individuals had the opportunity to access Scripture regularly. This newfound accessibility and convenience allowed for people to place a bookmark in their Bible and come back to it when they could.

The term “quiet time” was popularized in 1945 through an IntersVarsity booklet. It quickly became a term that Billy Graham began using during his evangelistic crusades. This changed what effective engagement with God’s Word looked like.

All of these things are good, important, necessary, but what changed here in the digital age is we elevate the individual, private reading of Scripture over the communal. We elevate the quick, convenient verse over the entire chapter.

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The three most important words in real estate are: location, location, location. And the three most important words in Scripture are: context, context, context. When we pull a singular verse out of a passage to make a fun Instagram or Facebook post, we may be losing its intended meaning.

Another way of putting it is we “jet ski” across the surface of the Bible rather than “deep sea diving” into its depths. For example, Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (NASB). You might know the verse. This is actually one of my favorites. It hangs in my office. It’s a rallying cry for me. Yeah! I can do all things through Christ.

Let’s see what comes before it, though, because context, context, context. Verse 12 says, “I know how to get along with little, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and

every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering needs.”

Ouch... I need to be content in every situation, not just the good ones. These verses refer directly to Paul enduring hardships as a result of living out His faith no matter what the cost. Following Jesus will cost us something.

I share this example of context because we don't want to be challenged when reading God's Word. We want the encouragement, we want the hope, we want the rallying cry—"Yes, I can do all things"—but we lose something if that's all we get. The intent of the Bible is to both comfort and confront, and yet the tweetable way in which we read Scripture fixates on comfort and tends to ignore confrontation and conviction.

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A recent survey indicated that 25% of all Americans said they had not read a book in the past year. As someone who loves book and is an avid reader, I'm no doubt biased, but I appreciate the caution Kim gives:

Research is showing that people who read linear text comprehend more, remember more and learn more... We are losing our aptitude for reading, since reading requires an ability to concentrate intently over a long period of time, to lose oneself in the pages of a book as we now say. And in losing our aptitude for reading, we are also surrendering opportunities to comprehend, remember, and learn the deeper more complex ideas and realities of human experience. But life is deep and complex, so to lose our ability to engage in these ways is to lose our ability to effectively pursue meaningful, purposeful lives. This is never truer than when it comes to Christian discipleship because the Christian faith has been and continues to be anchored by the sixty-six books of the Bible. ("Analog Church," p. 138)

The Bible—the Old and New Testaments—is a unified story that points to Jesus. Tim Mackie points out that when we read the Bible solely in bits and pieces, it's like paddling around and splashing in the shallow end of the pool. It's fun and we have a good time, but

when we find ourselves in the deep end of the pool, we're unprepared to deal with it, and eventually we'll drown. In other words, is the way we approach Scripture preparing us for challenging seasons we'll inevitably face in life? God's Word is powerful, and He uses it to minister to us when we walk through difficulty.

I still recall a hard place I walked through in ministry shortly after I became McBIC's lead pastor. I was talking with Pastor Dave Hess—the pastor at Christ Community Church—and when I shared what was going on, he shared several verses from Psalm 94 with me as a prayer:

“Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, ‘My foot is slipping,’ your unfailing love, Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.” (Psalm 94:17-19)

The words in our Bibles aren't just ink on a page, they are living and active, God-breathed.

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Stories are important. There's a reason why Jesus constantly spoke in parables to His disciples. And there's a reason why kids seem to gravitate towards story books. Stories allow us to make sense of the world around us, which is especially important for kids. It engages their imagination and builds empathy for others. Perhaps most importantly, stories give children an avenue to appreciate their Heavenly Father and what He has done for them.

Seeing the Bible as one big story is crucial for us in kids' ministry. And this one big story is true and right. That is what separates this story from Walt Disney or Dr. Seuss. It is true. It is right. And we can trust it.

Beginning at two years old, our children get a solid foundation on this one big story. They hear the stories of how God made them, God loves them, and how Jesus wants to be their friend forever. In elementary ministry, we are halfway through our adventure of going through the Bible chronology in three years. We were in the Old Testament for a year and a half, and I would be lying if I didn't say that all of us were ready to be out at about month 9. What I found, though, is that our kids have a greater love and appreciation for Jesus. Many of our kids got to

read and study the Old Testament through the lens of God's Son, Jesus, for the first time. We were able to make Christ connections to Moses, David, and Esther. We gained a new appreciation for the cross after venturing through the pain that our Old Testament brothers and sisters went through. It's powerful being able to see this one big story from start to finish.

Something that is also important for us is that this one big story continues through us. We all have a story, a story that God is writing and wants us to share, so while information is important to us, experiencing God's Word and experiencing this big story is also very important. We want to provide opportunities for our kids to share how God is authoring their story and the joy and suffering that goes along with that. We want them to know that they are not alone, so having consistent leaders who serve each week is important. Having them build relationships within their own grade is important. Information and experience go hand in hand for us.

God's Word is one big story that continues on with each of us, and we want our kids to know God's Word, and then we want our kids to experience that Word.

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As pastors, our staff and I think a lot about how we teach the Scripture to children, teens and adults. Two New Testament scriptures that talk specifically about the importance of the Bible in our lives are 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and Hebrews 4:12.

In 2 Timothy 3:16–17 we read these powerful words: "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."

And Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

In other words, the Bible is essential for our growth as disciples of Jesus. As we interact with God's Word, we're not simply reading words on a page; we're interacting with the Spirit of God who inhabits those words. God's Word shapes our thoughts, attitudes and actions. It provides us with wisdom that comes to us directly from God's heart. It confronts and convicts

us, and it helps us align our hearts with the truth it contains and with the person of Jesus Christ who it reveals to us.

On a personal level, I study the Bible each week in preparation for sermons and various devotional and teaching opportunities, but I'm also committed to reading the Bible in its entirety in my personal times with God, because I want to keep the Bible story—Old and New Testament—fresh in my mind and heart. I've read through the Bible many times in my life—probably a half dozen times from front to back in a year, and my normal practice is to read several chapters a day and make my way through the Bible over 3–4 years. I've also established the practice over the last 10 years or so of listening to the New Testament on CD during Lent.

Preaching well over 1,000 sermons across three decades, I've given a lot of thought to the purpose of preaching. What am I hoping to see God do as I preach? I've landed on two primary goals. First, in preaching, I hope to reveal the nature and character of God, especially as it's revealed to us in his Son, Jesus. Secondly, as I preach, I'm asking the Holy Spirit to align people's hearts and lives with the truth of Scripture and with the life of Jesus.

The longer I serve in ministry the more committed I am to preaching through books of the Bible as opposed to just focusing on topics. The Bible has much to say on topics we encounter every day and have questions about, but too often, topical preaching can become narrow and slanted toward the preacher's pet topics and biases. I find power and depth in allowing the Scripture to guide and direct me as a pastor and us as a church by preaching through books of the Bible.

Another value that is growing in me is having people of all ages from our church family read God's Word in services. I also sense there is power in having our church family read Scripture aloud and responsively during services. We've also been placing more of a focus on encouraging our worship leaders to incorporate the reading of Scripture into our music sets.

I often marvel at the words of the longest Psalm, Psalm 119. In these 176 verses, the Psalmist highlights how essential God's Word is to him. Pastor Jen and I won't read all 176 verses, but we'd like to highlight some of these verses:



## Psalm 119, selected verses

How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.

Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end.

Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.

My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies.

I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.

I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word.

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them.

The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.

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Kim wraps up with these words:

So what must we do to swim in the deep end of Scripture for ourselves and invite, encourage, and equip the church communities in which we serve to do the same? If reading the Bible in the digital age has become about the lure of the digital slot machine, pulling the quick-fix lever to get what we want, then what does it mean to engage the Bible in analog? We must become slow. That's what an analog approach to the Bible is all about. ("Analog Church," p. 151)

I don't know about you, but I don't want to just "jet ski" across the surface of the Bible. I want to "deep sea dive" into its depths. I want to see the coral reef, the sea horses, and sea turtles. I want to understand fully God's big story. I want to be in awe and wonder of this living book. And that takes a slowing down.

Slowing down takes intentionality. It requires us to make space, to pause. I don't know that it's going to be quiet, but I think there is room. Sometimes it's a quiet room. Sometimes it's an active room. The key thing is that there is room. The key thing is there is an opportunity for God to meet and transform.

2 Timothy 1:5 says, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." The Apostle Paul attributed Timothy's faith to the faith that had been passed on to him from his grandmother and mother. I am grateful because this verse could also be said of me. "I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Audrey and in your mother Julie..."

I don't say that to say "look at me." I say that because I want every child, young and old, to be able to say the same thing, and it is going to take all of us. I don't care how young or how old you are; you have an important part to play in the life of our church and in the community of Mechanicsburg.

My grandmother passed in late September at the age of 93 years old, and the first thing she did every day was do her devotions and read her Bible. Every day. She was 93, and she still found that God was revealing new things to her, and she would be so eager to share them with me. Her voice mattered in my life. It still matters. The legacy matters.

Friends, your voice matters to the generations below you. It's important. We need it.

- To the generation of oldest adults in our church, tell us the stories of how God has been good and faithful in your life, how God has become even more real to you in the ups and downs of life.
- To the next generation of adults, don't be afraid to be vulnerable, to be transparent, to share how you are wrestling the deep questions with God.

- To our young adults and teens, our kids need to see you living out your faith, modeling what it is like to love and serve Jesus.
- And kids, we need your wonder, awe, and excitement of Jesus. We need to see you experiencing Him for the first time.

We need it all! Every single one of us is important. Our stories are important. It's going to require us to slow down in order to see and hear. It is going to require us to make space and time for one another. It's truly what living analog is all about.

What commitments will we make today, right now, to pass our faith onto future generations?

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L2—I understand that talking about reading the Bible can seem like a daunting task. It's so big, the words are so small, and parts of it were written as many 4,000 years ago. Rather than thinking about those obstacles, I encourage you to focus on the Bible being the living, active word of God. And it's important to know there are tools that can assist you in reading the Bible. Two books that I've found helpful for me and for others are "Reading the Bible for All Its worth" by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart and "Read the Bible for Life" by George Guthrie. Our plans for this haven't been finalized yet, but as I thought about this sermon and discussed it with our staff, we're planning to preach a series in October and November that focuses on helping people understand the Bible's big story and read it more effectively.