

Getting to Know Your Bible



WEEK 2

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO ACCURATELY HANDLING THE WORD OF TRUTH

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If It's Breathed-Out By God...

Few passages serve as a better gateway from the words on the printed pages of our Bibles into the realm of practical application than Paul's encouragement in 2 Timothy 3.14-17.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

This is a significant passage of Scripture for a number of reasons. It's absolutely packed with implications and ramifications.

"All Scripture is Inspired by God"

That's how most of our English translations of the Bible render Paul's words to Timothy. The *English Standard Version* quite accurately captures Paul's vivid language as it would have read in the original Greek—"All Scripture is breathed out by God." The implication? Paul didn't make these things up.

In our English language, we have certain words or parts of words that are referred to as *sibilant* sounds—sounds that are formed by storing up a little bit of air and then hissing out that air over your tongue, past your teeth and lips. We hear them as soft "C" and "S" sounds.

For example, say the word *suit* out loud. Don't just read it, say it with your mouth!

The same thing with *sibilant* ... and *sound* ... and *same*. Those are sibilant sounds.

Now, try to say the word *suit* without exhaling. Go ahead, try it!

You can't do it, can you? In order to say the word *suit*, you have to exhale.

We also have what are referred to as *plosive* sounds in English. This word is remarkably close to the word *explosion*, and there's a reason. A plosive sound is a type of mini-explosion off your lips that form "P" sounds, "B" sounds, and "D" sounds.

Say *Peter* out loud and as you do, put your hand directly in front of your mouth.

There was a little explosion of air off your lips, wasn't there? Now try to say *Peter* without exhaling you can't do it, can you? And there's a simple reason. Spoken language is formed as we inhale and exhale. We can't engage in audible speech without breathing.

Now, think about that simple principle as it relates to 2 Timothy 3 of the Bible. Paul wants to make this point abundantly clear. What Timothy received, what Paul wrote to individual Christians and churches all over the world, what has been preserved for thousands of years, what we are getting to know in this study—that was God-breathed. It wasn't dreamed up by Paul. It didn't originate in the mind of any man, but in the mind of God.

That fact coincides perfectly with what Jesus said to his apostles just prior to his death.

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14.25-26)

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” (John 15.26)

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” (John 16.12-13)

This is the very idea of **inspiration**—God will put the sibilant and plosive communication, the verbiage, the nouns and pronouns, the thoughts and expressions into the minds of chosen men. In 1 Corinthians 2.1-5 Paul wrote,

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

And so, Paul is able to make the claim that he does in Romans 10.17—“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Not the words of Paul, but the words of Christ! God communicated what he wanted communicated and inspired men recorded it for all time.

As it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,

what God has prepared for those who love him”—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (1 Corinthians 2.9-10)

Mankind could not possibly concoct the means of his own salvation. Regardless of all our human inventiveness, skill and wisdom, we cannot find or articulate the means of our own salvation from sin. There is no river we can ford, no mountain we can climb; on our own, we are doomed. We need something more.

Among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. (1 Corinthians 2.6-7)

And the ultimate result is that we have an inspired (God-breathed) collection of communications from the Creator of the universe to mankind. “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2.16).

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1.16-21)

Which leads us finally to Paul's words in Ephesians 3:1–5.

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

“What I got,” Paul claims, “I got from the Holy Spirit of God. He prodded me, carried me along, and told me what to write... so I wrote it down. Now, when you read it, you can know exactly what I know about God’s will for your life.” All Scripture is breathed out by God.

“All Scripture is Profitable”

The word *profitable* is defined as “yielding profit; beneficial or useful.” Imagine that as you’re driving down Main Street this week, you see a sign outside of a bank advertising “**10% Profit Guaranteed.**” You stop the car, walk into the bank, and tell the nice lady behind the teller’s counter, “I came for my profit.” She asks for your name, you tell her, and she begins to look confused as she scans her computer screen. She asks if you go by a different name, and you say “No.” She finally says, “I’m sorry, but I’m not seeing any bank account attached to that name.” With a smile you tell her, “I don’t have a bank account here. I just saw the sign—10% Profit Guaranteed—that sounded good to me, so I decided to come inside, and now I’d like my profit.”

We know how that nice teller would respond. “You mean to tell me that you came here looking for your profit, but you don’t have anything in this bank?” The reason for her question is absolutely obvious—you’re not going to get any kind of profit until you invest something!

And with that in mind, remember what the Spirit said in 2 Timothy 3. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable.” Profitable for whom? For those who **invest** in it. You can’t get anything out of the Word of God without some investigation. You can’t get any profit from the Word of God without investing your time and enthusiasm and effort into the things that it says. You’ve got to find out what it says for yourself!

And if you do, you will discover that there is no treasure, nothing that you can acquire or own, nothing that is comparable with investing in God’s Word. The Holy Spirit didn’t make a mistake when he used that word. In what way, practically speaking, is all of Scripture profitable?

“All Scripture is Profitable for Doctrine”

Doctrine simply means “teaching.” Jesus made that point clear as he spoke of the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem in Matthew 15.7-9.

“You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

Doctrine is teaching. All Scripture is profitable for teaching. But teaching about what?

Have you ever looked up at the clouds in disappointment or despair or confusion and asked, “What is this all about, anyway?” “Who am I?” “Why me?” “Why am I here?” “What am I supposed to be doing?” There is good news. God’s Word is profitable. It answers those most fundamental questions. We can study medicine, philosophy, psychiatry, biology and all sorts of other human fields, but we will not find the answers to those bedrock questions. Not in any Encyclopedia or medical journal. Not in any book of human wisdom. Not online. With each of those sources, we are dealing with the limitations of human experience and wisdom.

But God has answered those questions. “Why am I here?” “Who am I?” “Where am I going?” He led Solomon to write in Ecclesiastes 12.13-14,

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Who am I? “Fear God.”

Why am I here? “Keep his commandments.”

Where am I going? “For God will bring every deed into judgment.”

The Scriptures are God-breathed. They identify sin. They teach us what to do about sin. They give insight into the nature of human relationships. They empower us to maintain the kind of faith that is productive of the highest aspirations. They encourage us to persevere in the midst of a dark and dying culture. They guide us along the paths of abundant life. How dare we not consult the God-breathed Scriptures! The Bible is the Book of Life. It’s the textbook for who we are. It’s the recipe. The roadmap. It’s everything we need.

“All Scripture is Profitable for Reproof”

To *reprove* means “to convict.” The Word of God convicts us of sin, but it also convicts us of the existence and preciousness of Jesus Christ. God’s Word masterfully cuts us to the core as sinful creatures. We are rebellious and unholy in the sight of our patient and holy Creator. But it quickly reveals God’s eternal plan to provide a Savior. Having been convicted of our need for such a Savior, we are naturally led to ask, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2.37)

Hebrews 11.1 reads, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The more I learn of God’s revealed will, the more I become intimately acquainted with my own sinful demise. I have wallowed in the mud and muck of my own filth, and there is nothing I can do to rescue myself. Scripture is perfectly designed by God to provide the reproof needed to jolt me to a desperate awareness of my fatal spiritual condition. The only question is, will I invest in the reproof it provides?

“All Scripture is Profitable for Correction”

Correction literally means “to make straight again.” God, in his Word, gives us a means of correction. It reveals the gospel plan of salvation—God’s rescue operation on behalf of his image-bearers. And Scripture is designed by God to be a life-long corrective measure. Living for God as a disciple of Jesus Christ is like keeping your vehicle between the ditches, inside the lines of the highway. Living for God involves making continual, never-ending, little corrective measures that are intended to keep the vehicles of our lives going straight.

If you ever spent any significant time on a large body of water before the days of computers, you probably saw the instruments involved in getting from Point-A to Point-B. Men who wanted to safely travel long distances across the water would use maps and instruments that enabled them to draw (and travel by) straight lines. As they drew the line of their trajectory and compared their present trajectory with their desired destination, they were able to quickly and efficiently discover what adjustments they needed to make in their heading.

Everyone knows that the shortest course from here to there is a straight line. You might discover that you are just 1/8 of a mile off-course. You might have a friend who reasons, "Don't worry about it. We can see for miles." But the wise pilot shakes his head and corrects his course. If you're 1/8 of a mile off now, and you continue on that straight line, by the time you get where you had hoped to be going, you'll be 30 miles from the port.

God's Word is our beacon. Our "True North." Our frame of reference. If we lock on to it, we'll end up where we want to go. But if we turn away from it and pave our own trail, we are guaranteed to get off-course. It may seem like the slimmest of margins in the moment, but it can eventually cost us everything!

"All Scripture is Profitable for Training in Righteousness"

God's Word not only tells me how to correct my course, but how to stay on course. It trains me in "right-way-ness."

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
to keep your righteous rules.
I am severely afflicted;
give me life, O LORD, according to your word!
Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O LORD,
and teach me your rules.
I hold my life in my hand continually,
but I do not forget your law.
The wicked have laid a snare for me,
but I do not stray from your precepts.
Your testimonies are my heritage forever,
for they are the joy of my heart.
I incline my heart to perform your statutes
forever, to the end. (Psalm 119.105-112)

God created his Word with the power to train men and women to walk in the ways that are right, as defined by their Creator. But the principle behind training is the same principle we noted behind investments. In order to get something out of training, you have to put something into it. I can't train for you and you can't train for me. If there is profit that comes from training, it comes only with diligent, hard, personal work.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3.16-17). What's missing in your life? Do you feel complete? Competent? Fully equipped as you face each new day? If not, could the reason be that you aren't taking full advantage of the revealed will of God for your life?

Questions for Growth and Discussion

1. Reread Jesus' promises in John 14.25-26, 15.26 and 16.12-13. In your own words, what is he promising his apostles?
2. Borrowing the language of 1 Corinthians 2.1-5, why is it so important that our faith not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God? Practically speaking, how does that happen?
3. Why did Paul refer to what he was imparting as "secret and hidden wisdom"? (1 Cor 2.6-7)
4. In your own words, what is Paul saying in Ephesians 3.4?
5. In everyday real life, how can we "invest" in the Word of God so that we can expect it to be "profitable" for our time on the earth?
6. Doctrine is teaching. Take a few moments to list some of the significant doctrines from God's Word that have shaped your life. Are there specific Scriptures you can list to show why you believe those doctrines?
7. How have you been reprovved by the Scriptures in the past?
8. Correction literally means "to make straight again." Is there anything in your life that needs to be "made straight again"?
9. Can you rephrase the basic message of Psalm 119.105-112?
10. If I am to be trained by God-breathed Scripture, what sort of attitude do I need to have?