

The Transforming Influence of Scripture

2 Timothy 3

This morning we continue our sermon series on “The Word.” We’re seeking to come to a place both individually and corporately where the Scriptures have their rightful place in our lives. We are using a grid for spiritual transformation (or any type of transformation) that Dallas Willard has developed called VIM, which stands for Vision, Intention, and Means. The idea is that if you genuinely want to see a transformation in your life - to the point where you’re actually living differently - you begin with a vision for what this transformation might mean in your life, then you make it your intention to pursue that transformation, and finally you employ effective means that will lead to the desired transformation.

This process begins with a vision for what the Scriptures might mean in our lives. Last week we saw from Deuteronomy 8 how desperately we need God’s Word. If we really want to live (and not merely exist) we need everything that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Our desperate need for God can fuel our vision for the Word.

Today we are going to continue thinking about our vision for what the Word might mean in our lives. We are going to consider a passage that explicitly tells us what God wants to do in our lives through the “written Word” - the Scriptures. Our text is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What we find there is that ***Being “God-breathed and profitable” Scripture can have a transforming, equipping influence in our lives.*** We’re saying that rightly received, Scripture can actually shape and transform our lives. Through Scripture we can become the people that God wants us to be.

Lily Tomlin once say that when she was a child she used to think, “I want to be somebody!” But she adds, “Now I realize that I should have been more specific. That’s a great point. Every single one of us is becoming somebody; for better or worse, each one of us is being spiritually formed. In 2 Timothy Paul says that the Scriptures have the capacity to shape and form us into the people God has called us to be.

This may or may not be your current experience with Scripture. Actually, if my unscientific survey is at all representative, most of us at Faith aren’t experiencing Scripture this way. But whatever your current experience, it’s important to “hear” what this passage teaches so that you can begin to allow Scripture to do in your life what God wants it to do.

Context. In 2 Timothy 3 Paul is helping Timothy anticipate how difficult and challenging it will be to remain faithful to God and faithful to his calling as a pastor in Ephesus. In verse 13 Paul summarizes his point by saying that “evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Timothy lived in a world in which some would increasingly live in ways that are opposed to God. By contrast, Paul writes this in verse 14:

14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,

Paul is able to appeal both to the spiritual truth that Timothy had learned AND to the influential people from whom he had learned them. Timothy was probably around 40 years old when Paul wrote him this letter. Over the years Timothy had not only “learned” spiritual truth; he had also “become convinced of” certain things. In other words, Timothy had developed rock-solid theological and spiritual convictions.

Timothy’s experience was in stark contrast with those Paul described earlier in the chapter who were “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (3:7). Timothy had come to the place where he had a settled knowledge of the truth; the truth wasn’t merely something that his mother believed or that the people at the synagogue believed. He had become convinced of the truth. He now needed to stay/continue/remain in that place.

In verse 15 Paul mentions that the foundation of truth had been laid in Timothy’s childhood.

15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Ever since Timothy was a child he had known “the sacred writings” (which was a way that Greek-speaking Jews commonly referred to the OT - Knight, *NIGCT Pastoral Epistles*, p. 443). Since childhood Timothy had heard about God creating the heavens and the earth, Abraham being called to settle in Canaan, Moses leading the people out of Egypt, kings such as David and Solomon, prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. Timothy understood the sacrificial system of the old covenant. Paul’s conviction was that such Scriptures give you a type of wisdom that prepares you for salvation. That was certainly Timothy’s experience. When Paul arrived in Lystra and explained that Jesus’ death was the once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin, Timothy believed. The Scriptures had prepared him to experience salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

In verses 16 and 17 Paul makes a very bold, visionary statement about Scripture in order to motivate Timothy to continue to experience its transforming influence.

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The term translated “inspired” means (literally) God-breathed. The imagery suggests that the Scriptures have come from the mouth of God. This is consistent with the imagery of the Scriptures being the “word of God.” “All Scripture” referred to the Hebrew bible in Paul’s day. Since the New Testament writings now have the same status as “Scripture” (see 2 Peter 3:16), we understand that both the Old and New Testaments are “God breathed.”

The truth that “all Scripture is inspired by God” has many implications for how we approach the Bible (e.g., it’s true, it’s authoritative, it’s w/o error in everything it affirms). But the primary thing that Paul emphasizes in this text is that because Scripture is God-breathed, it is “**profitable**” when it comes to transforming our lives. This is what we’d expect from God, isn’t it? We wouldn’t expect that God would inspire writings that were good but impotent to change our lives. No, we’d expect that whatever proceeds out of the mouth of God is actually profitable in the sense of being “valuable, beneficial, and useful.”

When Paul writes that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness,” he probably isn’t saying that every single passage of Scripture accomplishes all four of these things. Different passages of Scripture have different functions in our lives. But taken together - as a whole - “all Scripture” accomplishes this four-fold benefit in our lives. This is why it’s important to spend time in all different portions of Scripture, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

As we consider these four ways that the whole of Scripture is profitable/beneficial, I want you to consider **what your life would be like if we actually experienced these benefits**. In other words, allow God to give you a vision for the person you could become if you experienced what Paul describes here.

Scripture is profitable for **teaching**. The content of Scripture teaches or instructs us in what we need to know about God and about our relationship with Him. We need to come to the Scriptures with teachable hearts and a willingness to learn what it intends to teach. Sometimes this will require that we set aside what we want the Bible to say or what we think the Bible says - and hear what it actually teaches. In our self-centeredness and arrogance, we tend to think that “God is basically a bigger version of me,” that He thinks like me and almost always agrees with me.

But Scripture will teach/instruct us differently **if we’re teachable**. Think, for example, of a recent time when someone mistreated you: someone insulted you by what they said or did, someone took you for granted, someone accused you of having motives that you really didn’t have, etc. How did you respond? Commonly, when somebody mistreats us, we respond by mistreating them. Sometimes we respond by insulting them; other times we simply withdraw and withhold our friendship; other times we talk about them to others (slander); other times we simply rehearse over and over in our minds what the other person has done, fantasizing about the nasty things we might say or do to the other person in the future.

But Scripture teaches a way of living that is almost exactly the opposite of what I’ve described. For example, listen to 1 Peter 2:18-25.

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. 19 For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is there if,

when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Here's a list of some of the things that this passage teaches:

- We find favor with God when we suffer for doing what is right.
- Jesus is the ultimate example of how to suffer unjustly.
- God calls us to follow in Jesus' steps of suffering unjustly.
- While being crucified, instead of uttering insults and threats, Jesus entrusted Himself to God.
- Even when we suffer unjustly, we have a "Shepherd and Guardian" of our souls.

Can you imagine what your life would be like if you responded like Christ when it comes to being mistreated? Can you imagine the influence you would have on others (both those who believe and those who don't yet)? Can you imagine what your family would be like or what this church would be like if we all responded this way? The fact that Scripture is profitable for teaching should fuel our vision for seeing God use the Word in our lives.

The second and third benefits of Scripture are complementary: Scripture is profitable for **reproof** and **correction**. Reproof (or rebuke) involves confronting things that need to change in our lives. The Scriptures will point out things that aren't compatible with the salvation we've received. And the Scriptures are also profitable for **correction** - showing us the correct way to think and act. This is what the Holy Spirit does as we receive and reflect on the Scriptures. (See John 16:13.)

A couple of weeks ago I was reading Romans 1 and came across Paul's statement, "God . . . is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request. . ." Paul's example of ceaseless prayer on behalf of the Roman believers really rebuked me; his passion for the Roman believers convicted me of how weak and sporadic my prayers had been. I find that the reproof of God isn't condemnation; God wasn't saying to me, "You worthless excuse for a Christian!" The reproof of God can cause deep sorrow/grief, but it's only a prelude to correction. Paul's words prompted me to pray fervently for a couple of people and situations that I really care about. I experienced reproof and correction in a very simple, but unmistakable way that morning.

If you are in the habit of receiving reproof and correction from Scripture, it will not only be life-giving for you; it will also be incredibly life-giving for those around you. In

marriage, for example, our sin and selfishness comes to the surface; there's just nowhere to hide in marriage. Who you are will eventually be on display and will affect your husband, wife, children or whoever you live with. But imagine how much comfort (and even security) it would provide others if they knew, "My husband/wife is consistently receiving reproof and correction from Scripture. . . his/her sinfulness is consistently being confronted. . . I don't have to 'play Holy Spirit' in his/her life. . ." It's not that we never need to be corrected by other people, but if we're consistently being corrected by God through the Scriptures, the dynamics are completely different.

Finally, Scripture is profitable for ***training in righteousness***. The Scriptures train or equip us to live out our righteousness in everyday behavior. The sense here seems to be that Scripture isn't merely pious platitudes. Scripture can equip us for real-life righteousness. It's not so much that the Bible gives us a detailed set of behaviors for every situation (the Bible isn't like the manual in the glove compartment of my Honda). It's that the Bible gives us perspective and insight into how we should live our lives.

There's obviously overlap in these four terms, but the net result is clear in verse 17: *so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*. "Man of God" was how Paul referred to Timothy; of course this applies to every believer. Paul is saying that if we allow God to use Scripture to teach, reprove, correct, and train us, we will be adequate and equipped to do the good works that God wants us to do. Instead of continually being caught off guard and clueless in terms of how you should live and what you should do, you are prepared and equipped to live your life to the glory of God.

Next week we're going to look at a specific example of the profitability of Scripture: how Scripture can shape the way we speak (what we say and how we say it). We'll see that the Scriptures provide a tremendous amount of teaching about what we should and shouldn't say, the effect of our words (for good or evil) in the lives of others. Scripture provides lots of reproof; many Scriptures confront a way of using words that is incompatible with being saved by grace. And the Scriptures also provide correction; numerous Scriptures explain the correct way to use words. We'll also see that the Scriptures are profitable for training in righteousness, equipping us to be used by God more fully through the things we say (or don't say).

Consistently receiving Scripture is really a matter of submission to God. When we consistently, over time allow "all Scripture" (the whole of Scripture) to teach, reprove and correct, and train us in righteousness, we are allowing God (by His Spirit) to shape and form our lives. We invite ***God to be God in our lives*** when we allow Him to do whatever He wants to do through the Word.

I need to point out that it's possible to spend time with the Bible and remain unchanged. It's possible to use Scripture for our purposes instead of allowing God to use the Scriptures to shape and mold us. The Pharisees in Jesus' day would be the poster boys for this wrong approach to Scripture. They were the Bible experts of their day. . . but they completely missed God (see John 8:38-39).

You may remember the movie or the book *The Stepford Wives*. The men of Stepford, Connecticut decided to turn their wives into robots because they never wanted their wills to be crossed. The Stepford wives were beautiful and compliant, but the marriages were anything but intimate or personal. In *The Reason for God* Tim Keller points out that many people have an approach to the Bible that's akin to wanting a "Stepford God." He says that if we pick and choose what we read and believe in the Scriptures. . .

You'll have a Stepford God! A God, essentially, of your own making, and not a God with whom you can have a relationship and genuine interaction. Only if your God can say things that outrage you and make you struggle (as in a real friendship or marriage!) will you know that you have gotten hold of a real God and not a figment of your imagination. So an authoritative Bible is not the enemy of a personal relationship with God. It is the precondition for it. (p. 118)

I think Keller "nails it" in what he writes. When we talk about the Bible having its rightful place in our lives, we're really talking about **God** having His rightful place in our lives. The challenge of our passage today is to allow God to teach, reprove, correct, and train us so that we will be adequate and equipped to live out our calling. And God does these things through the Scriptures.

It's important to take the long view, to consider the transformation that can take place over time as we receive the Scriptures through teaching, through personal times in the Word, through spiritual conversations with others, etc. I received an email this week from someone at Faith who likened our intake of Scripture to eating. Here's a portion of what she wrote:

. . . I tell people that reading the Bible is like eating. Most of the time, our food is just so so, enough to get by, but not really that exciting day in and day out. Every now and then we have a wonderful feast. If I were not nourished by the day in and day out stuff, I could not touch the feast. I would be emaciated. But since I am nourished daily, when I am presented with a feast, I can savor and enjoy every last morsel. The same is true with our daily reading [of Scripture].

Many days, I feel like I am accumulating knowledge, nothing too personal. I read in pure faith. Occasionally, I have a break through and many of the disconnected pieces in the Bible and my life come together and make sense. It gives me a sense of purpose and connection with God that gives meaning and enjoyment to me.

When we take this "long view," we consistently place ourselves in a position to be nourished and equipped by the Scriptures. Instead of feeling like, "I **have** to read my Bible if I want to be a good Christian," we begin to think, "Through the Scriptures God speaks to me and equips me to live the life He's called me to live."