

How the Bible Reads Us

Good morning everyone, it's great to see people back after the holidays. My name is Eric and I am a pastor in training here at City Church. If I haven't had the chance to meet you yet, I would love to be able to do that today. So if you've been coming around for a little while, you'll remember that we are just a couple weeks into what we are calling our "Formation" series. If you haven't been around yet, first off, welcome, we are so glad you're here today. I would encourage you to go on our website and listen to the first couple teachings from this series because they'll give a lot of helpful context for where we are ending up today.

But I do want to give a quick summary of some of what was talked about the last two weeks to get everyone on the same page as much as possible as we kick things off this morning. The first week we spent some time talking about how all of us want to change in some capacity, and the reality is we are all changing and our habits have a large impact on shaping us to be certain kinds of people. Then last week, Kent went into detail talking specifically about what the Bible is and what it isn't which leads us into what we're talking about today. Now that we have a better idea of what the Bible *is*, we can talk a little more about what the Bible is *for*. In other words, what it is meant to accomplish when we read it.

So if you've got a Bible with you, go ahead and turn with me to the book of 2 Timothy chapter 3. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be one under the seat in front of you. If you're using one of our Bibles, the page number is going to be up on the screen for you. Also, if you don't personally have a Bible, please feel free to take one of these with you, we would love to provide you with one. We're going to be spending our time in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 14-17. I want to read through the passage in sections, so we can break it up into small pieces and systematically working through each piece. Sound doable? I certainly hope so. So this is the apostle Paul writing to a guy named Timothy who is a pastor and sort of a protege of Paul in the faith. And in what he writes to Timothy, I think we get a really good framework for understanding what the Bible was meant to accomplish in us as a result of reading it. Let's start with verses 14-15:

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.

We're going to circle back around to that last part of that verse at the end, but in this first piece, Paul is telling Timothy to do what? "*Continue* in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have [this next part is crucial] been acquainted with the sacred writings." So it looks like Paul is saying what needs to happen is to continue in being acquainted with the sacred writings. In other words, the goal of the Scriptures is to continue, day-in and day-out, immersing ourselves in them as a pattern in our life.

By way of contrast, I think a lot of us tend to approach the Bible as a food pantry of sorts. So we don't see it as something to immerse ourselves in and become acquainted with over time, but more like something to go to when we feel like we want it or need it. And maybe even when we want it for specific purposes. I mean, think about the way we approach a pantry. "Today I need some fruit, let me grab some of that. I could go for some pasta today, get a little of that. I could go for a little spiritual pick-me-up, I'll grab a couple of these." "Well today I have a question about this life circumstance, let me find something about that." "Today I have a problem that needs solving, I'll find an answer to that." Or maybe it's something like, "gotta win some social media arguments, there's a bunch of dumb-dumbs out here and I need to show them all that I'm smarter than they are, better stock up on a few of these today."

Here's the problem with that: when we approach scripture as an as-needed grab bag, we quickly lose sight of its intended purpose. Instead of looking at the Bible like a pantry, we should really be looking at it more like a pair of glasses. Those of you who wear glasses or contacts, every morning, you wake up, and you make sure to put on your glasses or put in your contacts because with them on, you see everything else more clearly. In the same way, we read the Bible regularly because with our mind saturated in the Scriptures, everything else becomes clearer. Things that were blurry or difficult to understand start to come more into focus. And when you wear glasses, you don't put them on once a week, glance around for a bit, then put them back in a drawer. No, you view all of life through those lenses, that's the only way they do you any good and fulfill their intended purpose. When we start using scripture for its intended purpose, we really start to see how it addresses a pretty frequent push back. When we see it is a lens through which we should be viewing life and ourselves, and we hear Paul say to "continue" as an ongoing thing, we can get out of the mindset of thinking "well I just don't feel like I got anything out of it today," and we can get into the correct mindset of thinking, "what is this accomplishing in me over time?" We can see the bigger picture

and the role that scripture serves in shaping us. And I want to spend the rest of our time today talking through four ways scripture is helpful in shaping us.

Paul is next going to move into describing *why* we should immerse ourselves in and become acquainted with the Scriptures. If you take a look back at the passage, we'll pick up again in verse 16:

*All Scripture is **breathed out by God** [which is where power comes from. Just like we talked about last week, that God is behind the scriptures. And if God is behind the scriptures, the next part of this sentence naturally follows. 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 complete, equipped for every good work.*

We see right here that Paul is saying because scripture is all breathed out by God, it is **profitable**. Meaning that it is beneficial for us to read and spend time in and develop the habit of reading. Now, that doesn't mean it is always helpful in the exact way we *want* it to be helpful in the moment, but it is helpful nonetheless. And next, Paul tells us what it's helpful for specifically with these four ideas and I want to go through them one at a time to try to help flesh out some of the specifics of what scripture is meant to accomplish in us. What scripture is *for*.

Teaching

The first thing we see Paul say scripture is for is for **teaching**. I would briefly define teaching as "instructing in things not already known." Some translations actually do translate this word as "instruction." But the implication here is that it is useful in showing us things we might not already know, that's how teaching works. When you are being taught something, the idea is that we don't already know everything about it. And the bigger implication in my opinion is that teaching almost always takes place over time; it's not fully accomplished in an instant or one-off. If you think back to things that were taught in elementary or middle school, a lot of it probably seemed like you absolutely did not need to know it in the moment, but those things were fundamentally necessary to learn nonetheless. You don't show up to your first day of calculus, never come back to class or study, then ace the final. That's not how teaching works. And the idea of teaching also means that not all the information and content will necessarily have immediate applications. A lot of what we learn serves as the building blocks or

framework that shapes the way we view a bigger picture that could have a huge impact down the road.

I have heard a lot of people say things like, “I just don’t feel like this applies to my life.” And sure, there are certain things we can find in scripture that probably won’t be fully applicable in day to day life, but the scriptures as a whole play a huge role in *teaching* us what a life lived through its lens looks like. I want to caution people against the tendency to view scripture as only having value if it immediately answers the individual questions we bring to it. And here’s why I don’t want people to assume that the questions we are asking are the only things we need to know. I think a guy way smarter than me named Eugene Peterson put it very well. He was a minister and an author and he put it this way:

“We are fond of saying that the Bible has all the answers. And that is certainly correct. The text of the Bible sets us in a reality that is congruent with who we are as created beings in God’s image and what we are destined for in the purposes of Christ. But the Bible also has all the questions, many of them that we would just as soon were never asked of us, and some of which we will spend the rest of our lives doing our best to dodge. The Bible is a most comforting book; it is also a most discomfiting book.”

Which is just another way of saying it’s a book that causes us discomfort. *My wife Sara was in a LifeGroup one time with a woman who was growing in her walk with God. She was learning more and more what it looked like to follow Him. This woman happened to be in a relationship with a guy who was not following Jesus at all. As she was growing and as she and Sara became better friends, the things Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 started to come up in conversations. In verse 14 of the chapter Paul said, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?” Now, Paul isn’t specifically talking about dating in this passage, but this absolutely applies to dating. And as she was growing in her walk with God, and with other believer’s wisdom she realized this described her relationship with this guy and that she needed to break it off. That’s an example of the Bible teaching someone something they didn’t already know or realize before they heard it from the Scriptures.*

I also think we see this personified often in the way Jesus interacted with people throughout the New Testament. Jesus was always asking people questions. They would ask him something and he so often responded with another question that gave people a lot more to think through than they expected. But that’s exactly what scripture does in the

life of a follower of Jesus. It certainly answers some of our questions, but it also causes us to ask quite a few of ourselves. Scripture teaches us over time what it looks like to continue to grow to be more like Jesus. And as we grow and as our framework grows, we grow in seeing things through a constantly maturing lens.

Reproof

The next thing Paul tells us is that scripture is useful for **reproof**. Briefly defined I would say reproof is “helping to discern between good and bad, health and unhealth.” I think a more accurate translation of the original word is “a proof” or “a conviction.” Reproof is really the way Scripture offers confirmation when we’re doing things right, and conviction when we’re doing things wrong. In reality, as we read scripture, we should really be seeing the ways scripture reads us. I think this one in particular is pretty straightforward. A large part of what scripture does in the life of a follower of Jesus is to serve as a “proof.” It helps serve as a “litmus test” of sorts to help us see more clearly how our lives do or don’t align with what it teaches. We get to form habits around diving deeply into scripture and use the scriptures to look at our lives and see if it aligns with what we find. We get to allow the Spirit to use what we find in the inspired words of God to convict us in the areas where we haven’t allowed Him to work and shape us as well as use the scriptures to correctly celebrate the ways we are growing to become more like Him. If we’re not viewing scripture correctly, we’re not allowing it to serve its purpose in our lives.

I know of several instances in my own life where this has been true. One glaring example though is when I worked at a week long residential camp one year. I had a group of sixth grade boys I was responsible for, and there was one in particular who was just awful. Everything I told him to do, he’d just do the opposite purely on principle. He’d sneak out of his room at night, always had an attitude, it just felt like he was constantly fighting against me. So naturally, I was frustrated. I went to the Lord and was flipping through the Bible basically looking for justification for how mad I was and for things I could do to deal with this child because I was at a loss. And the more I dug and the more I prayed through it, I started to feel the Lord showing me that this was exactly how I acted towards God. I would rebel and go against the things he asked of me constantly, and He was showing me through the Scriptures how he constantly chased me down and forgave me and loved me in the midst of it. And it became glaringly obvious that I did not have an ounce of grace for the kid in my group. I was not being loving or forgiving, and I was trying to use Scripture as a justification for my lack of grace.

I think we see in other areas of Scripture just how consistent and accurate it is in providing opportunities for conviction. One of the most detailed and graphic illustrations of the way this happens, I think, is found in Hebrews chapter 4. If you look at verses 12 and 13 it says:

[12] For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. [13] And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

We can see just how vulnerable Scripture describes us when we allow it to work in us the way it was intended. There's nothing more vulnerable than being "naked and exposed," right? But those times are when we are able to see where Scripture is calling us to growth. Listen, some of the most condemning, mean-spirited people out there are people who have spent plenty of time letting the bible teach them things, but no time at all letting it convict or expose things in them. And some of the people that are the most compassionate people you'll ever meet, are people who every day let the bible convict and expose things in them. Over time, letting it do that humbles them, makes them tender hearted towards others because they see themselves as no better than others.

Correction

But one of the most beautiful purposes of scripture is that it doesn't just lead us to conviction and leave us there. No, not at all, it helps lead us from there into the next point that Paul makes which is into **correction**. Correction is the act of restoring to a place of health. Some translations say "setting straight (or right) again." So thankfully, the bible doesn't just **stop** at showing us what we're doing wrong. It actually gives us help and instruction on how to set those things in our life right again. The bible is not a written version of a street preacher, yelling at you about all the sins that you may or may not be guilty of. It does expose areas of weakness, but when it does, the Holy Spirit walks with you through the difficult and often long process of returning things to how they were meant to be—to setting things "straight" again.

I want to give a quick example of this from my own life to help illustrate the point, and also clearly show I am far from perfect. A lot of you might have similar experiences, but when I was in high school, there were a feeling w people that I didn't exactly jive with and frankly made life pretty difficult. They frequently called me pretty hurtful names, they

went out of their way to exclude me from things (and my class only had 18 people so that made an impact), and they would start rumors about me, just to list a few things that happened. I could not have been happier when I finished high school so I could get away. But it didn't end there for me. I had this deep-seated distaste for these people. And I felt so justified in being so against them in my mind. It was so bad to the point where if I saw something on social media about them or their lives and I felt like I was better off, this self-righteous sense of pride would just well up in me. And I remember very clearly one day when I was reading in the book of Matthew and I got to the end of chapter 5. It was a part of scripture I knew well and heard plenty of times, but that day in particular it just broadsided me. Verse 44 says, "But I say to you, love your enemies as yourself and pray for those who persecute you." I could not have been further off in my view of some of the people in my life. I did not have any love for these people, and I had certainly never prayed for them. Quite the opposite in fact, I had literally tried to pray against them before.

So praise God Scripture didn't just say "hey, stop harboring hate towards these people," but it actually told me what to do instead. It helped restore me to the *right* way of approaching these relationships: praying for the people responsible for it. Now, it's not always going to be so glaringly obvious, and reproof and correction might not be served up on a silver platter like it seems like it was in this instance. And it also is not always going to be an easy thing to change. When Paul says scripture is useful in correction, he's saying it's useful in showing followers of Jesus the way they should go and allowing the word of God to change and shape us to continue to grow.

Training in Righteousness

The last thing Paul tells us scripture is useful for in this passage is for **training in righteousness**. In other words, shaping through repetition and endurance. I don't know about any of you, but when I hear the word "training," I immediately think of a long term commitment to some kind of growth. That's what training means, right? When you train for something, you spend specific, consistent time in something to grow in it over time. When is the last time you would say you trained for something by only doing it once or even a few sporadic times? That's not how that works at all. It takes time, it takes discipline, it takes dedication. And there's alliteration there, so you know it has to be true. Let me give you a quick real-world example:

*A friend of mine here at City Church named Hayden was **training** for a half marathon. Now, being the longtime friend that he is and our history of trying to do things together,*

*naturally, he asked if I wanted to join him. Obviously I said no. But he was persistent, both in his **training** and in his asking me to join him on runs. Long runs, short runs, you name it, he asked. And this went on for months. He was repeatedly running longer distances and faster times and I could see the progress he was making in his running. It was because of his **training**. Because that's what training does to us. Consistent habits over time form us into specific types of people. Because of his repetition in running, he was getting really good at running longer and longer distances. And I was getting really good at turning him down. That's because when we **train** in doing something, we naturally become more inclined and more able to do those things.*

My point here is not that I've gotten lazy in the last few years or that I've become averse to running long distances, despite the fact that years of my real world experience have led me to believe my odds of being chased by something are slim. My point is similar to what Kent talked about in previous weeks in that our habits play a huge role in who we are becoming. And the role of scripture plays directly into that. Scripture is there to help *train us in righteousness*. Over time consistently spent immersing ourselves in the truths of God's word, we get to participate in this **training**. And the nature of training is that it occurs over time. It has a propensity to be a slow process, but that does not by any stretch of the imagination mean it is an unfruitful one. There are plenty of other areas in our lives where we do this. We do things over and over again that we get hardly anything out of in the moment. We brush our teeth every day because of the long term benefits (well, some of us). We go to work every day, despite most of us not getting much of a life-changing emotional experience out of it. People feed their kids every day, multiple times a day even, despite not getting much out of it. In fact, depending on the child and their age and cooperation, I've seen it take a lot *out of* people instead. We do these things because we know that participating in them consistently over time will help get us to the place we want and need to be.

I want to take a second now to look at the last part of the sentence we've been talking about in 2 Timothy 3 in verse 17. Paul says the purpose of all this is:

*"That the man of God may be **complete**, equipped for every good work."*

To be made "complete", you need this entire process to take place. You don't just need new information in your brain, you need reproof: you need to see where the things you've learned confirm or expose things in your life the way it currently is. And you don't just need it to expose things in you, you need for it to show you how to set things right again. And you don't just need those things, but you need to participate in it over the long

haul, so that it can have its full effect in your life. This is what it looks like to let the Scriptures form you into a more whole, more healthy, more complete, more equipped human being.

But in order to do that, there is one crucial element that you absolutely cannot miss. I want to end reminding us what Paul says at the end of verse 15. He says these things are “able to make you wise for salvation *through faith in Christ Jesus.*” I really want to appropriately emphasize this piece. Faith in Jesus is what unlocks everything we just talked about. Without an understanding of who you are in Jesus, you won't have the humility required to see the value in learning things you don't already know (or don't think you need to know). Without faith in Jesus, you will have no desire to let the Scriptures convict and expose things that are off in you, because that will be horrifying to do. You will think your identity rises and falls on being right. Without faith in Jesus, you won't have a desire to “set things right” in your life, because you will think you're already right. And without faith in Jesus, you will not stick it out through the long process of training in righteousness. Because you won't see any value in staying in it for the long haul.

But **with** Jesus, we can see more clearly who we are in Him, we can humbly approach Him knowing there's so much we can be taught. We can seek out the ways our lives align with His words for confirmation, or don't align with His words for conviction to spur on correction because in Him we can rejoice in becoming more like Him. And in Him we can joyfully participate in the long term process because we know it is worth it and He is faithful. We see it clearly in Philippians chapter 1 verse 6, and I want to end our time this morning here:

“I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

The goodness and beauty of this relationship with God is something so amazing that I don't want anyone to miss out on it. And based on what we've looked at today, I think the Scriptures are one of the primary ways this relationship grows and develops.

I want everyone to think through your interactions with the bible recently and consider if you're allowing the Scriptures to do these things. Can you pinpoint times that the bible has taught you something you didn't already know? Are you consistently letting the Bible be the Bible, and not to simply use it to reinforce beliefs and biases you already have? Can you recall times that the bible has reprovved you—shown you when things you did were in line with what is good and exposed and convicted you when it wasn't? Are you

allowing the bible to read you as you read it? Can you point to times where the bible has set you back on a healthy, good, correct path? And lastly, are there ways that the bible has encouraged you to pursue and endure even when maybe you would rather not?

If those things are all happening fairly regularly, that's really good—that likely means you have a healthy relationship with the bible. You're allowing it to do what it was designed to do in you. But if there are any of those things that you feel like are **not** present in your relationship with the bible, would you just pray right now, that the Holy Spirit would break down whatever walls you've put up or whatever blindness you have, so that Scripture can do what it was made to do?