

SOUL FOOD - The Things You Need To Know About Your Bible - Pt 9

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HOW GOD'S WORD DOES ITS WORK

2 Timothy 3:13-17 - "...while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, *deceiving and being deceived*. [14] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] 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. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

We've seen in the past two studies that it is very important to have your life shaped by the right examples. The **power of a great example** is the first of two forces designed to make ordinary people - young in years, just like Timothy - strong forces for the extension of God's mighty kingdom in this dark world.

Paul's concern in this text is obvious. The underground tendency is to carelessly allow our lives to be hollowed by **bad examples** rather than **good**. That's why Paul, in verse 13 of our text, reminds Timothy that the bad will only get worse in this fallen world. **Bad** people are essentially **weak** people. They have reached their state by choosing the path of least resistance. The wrong crowd will always tempt you to think you are out to lunch if you don't walk within their plans. There is always tremendous **pressure** to conform to the wrong spiritual shape in this world. Paul says Timothy, and **all** who want to be godly, must constantly resist that pressure.

Of course, Jesus said the very same thing: **Matthew 7:13-14** - "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [14] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

The **wide gate** accommodates everyone. But it only leads to **destruction**. The only entry point into real life - eternal life - is a **narrow gate**. Fewer people take it. In other words - and this is **unbelievably important** - if you judge the value of a lifestyle simply by its **popularity** - by the **number of people choosing it** - you will make some terrible mistakes that will cost you your soul. In this world, the general rule of thumb for spiritual safety is, start with a natural **suspicion** about the direction of the **crowd**.

So Paul tells Timothy to **seek out and cling to good examples**. Don't just **go mindlessly with the**

applauded values of the surrounding culture. The power of a great example, while not quite enough in itself, is a tremendous boost for godliness.

Now Paul moves on to the **second great producer of godliness** in our lives - the **power of the Word of God**. And I love reading **verse 17**. It's the goal of this whole passage - **"...that the man (and woman) of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."**

Whenever someone promises that result - becoming a **"man of God,"** or, **"woman of God,"** I'm immediately interested. Paul is telling Timothy that there is a way to be a **man or woman of God** in perilous times. There is a way for a young person to **rise above** his or her environment. I **want** to be a man of God because those very words are used to describe **Moses, David, and Elijah**.

Now, if you're like me, there is something in your heart that says, "Sure, that's sounds nice. But God, you've got the wrong person. I'm just not in that league."

And perhaps you're not - **yet**. But that's the whole point of this passage. God has something very powerful - a **divine instrument** - to make you into something you can't even imagine yet. Please hear that. I don't care how messed up your life is right now. And I don't care how hopeless you think your future is. God has an amazing **plan** and an amazing **instrument** to transform all that. God wants to use His Word in your life - not just as an instrument imparting **information** - though it all **starts** on that level - but as a powerful tool for **transformation** and **change**.

- 1) **PAUL WANTS TO DRIVE TIMOTHY TO LOOK AGAIN, MORE DEEPLY, AT SOMETHING HE ALREADY KNOWS, BUT NEEDS TO REDISCOVER ON A DEEPER LEVEL**

2 Timothy 3:14-15 - **"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] 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."**

I hope I can put some fresh sparkle on these ancient words. I already pointed out some of the dangers Paul said the church would face in increasing measure as the last days drew near. One of these dangers is clearly flagged in this very letter:

2 Timothy 4:3 - "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...."

"Timothy, people will always want something more flashy than just continuing in the Word. People will always think that **something more** is needed if they're really going to be powerfully alive in Christ. People will always think something **deeper** is needed if they're really to be set free from the bondage of dominating habit and sin."

And I've been around long enough to see that Paul was right. The hardest thing to do well is just **continue**. And so Paul calls all of us freshly back to the Scriptures. I know we all **believe** the Scriptures. I know we all **revere** the place the Scriptures should have in our faith. But I don't mean that. I want us all to reawaken our hearts to **embracing - valuing** the Scriptures **as God's primary means of making us into all He wants us to be**.

Paul didn't just make this up. He learned this truth from Jesus Christ, God the Son. Listen - Jesus made continuing in His Word the **single - the sole ingredient** - to being His disciple and living a life free from the power and bondage of sin: **John 8:31-32 - "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, [32] and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**

Hear this plea from the Lord of the church. Never have anything to do with any teaching that makes holiness more complicated than that. That's what Paul is calling Timothy - a pastor - back to in this passage. You see, we rarely take for granted **brand new** ideas. But we frequently take for granted **very old ones**. More spiritual power is lost by **neglect** than by **rebellion** - **Hebrews 2:1 - " Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it."**

How much time have you spent in the Word this week? Or, putting it slightly differently, if somebody clocked your time - measured the moments you rose early or stayed up late - just to **feed your soul with the Scriptures** - would they conclude that **you felt the study of the Word was the key ingredient to all that you valued and cherished most in your Christian walk?**

Would they get the impression that you looked at the ingestion of the Scriptures as your **one and only hope** of being all God was calling you to be in this world? Or would they conclude you could easily postpone, skip, or just totally do without it.

That's the issue of passion and hunger for the Word that Paul wants to keep burning warmly in young Timothy's life. "Just keep going Timothy. You don't need something **new**. You don't need something more **special**. Let all the bandwagons keep rolling on by. Just **continue** - just **keep on** - in the same old Word. Don't let the passing of time numb your mind to how crucial this is to making you into a man of God. Because that's what's at stake - **becoming a man or woman of God**. And there is no other way to get there!"

Motive is everything. You and I will dig into the Word more if we remember **why** we are called to it in the first place. A sense of **purpose** is needed to fuel the **discipline**.

Do you remember the famous Peanuts cartoon where Snoopy has to come to terms with this whole issue of purpose? Linus has just thrown the stick. Snoopy is just about to run after it. Then, in a meditative moment, Snoopy stops, sits, and in a burst of revelation says to himself, "I want people to have more to say about me after I'm gone than 'He was a nice guy... he ran around chasing sticks.'"

Don't live your life chases sticks. There's a **purpose** to life and there's a **process**. The goal is to make you godly. That's the purpose. In the next few weeks we're going to look at the specific **process** of divine activity through the Scriptures producing godliness. But first, Paul gives two general blessings coming to those who will commit to continuance in the Word:

2) **ONLY THE SCRIPTURES CAN MAKE US WISE UNTO SALVATION**

2 Timothy 3:14-15 - "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] 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.**"

Perhaps Paul was thinking back to the Psalmist who said, "**....the testimony of the Lord is**

sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7b). No person is wise who misses out on what is most important. There is knowledge a-plenty to be gleaned from dozens of sources. But stay in the Scriptures because only they can give you wisdom for dealing with sin, death and eternity. Only the Scriptures can steer your heart in the direction of Jesus Christ and salvation.

Your own five senses can inform you of your world, current events, the philosophies of the day, and how to make money. But it takes **revelation** to lead us to Christ Jesus and life eternal. These things are too important to just be **guessed about**. You can't be unsure or foggy about them.

And here's another truth we simply must lock up in our memories. ***Our minds won't naturally maintain devotion to unseen things on their own.*** We need the Word to prime our appetites. We get **earthbound**. Jesus said it was possible to **gain the world** and **lose the soul**. Nothing but the ingested Word of God can supply and nourish wisdom for salvation.

3) **ONLY THE SCRIPTURES CAN MAKE OUR LIVES PROFITABLE IN THE TRUEST SENSE**

2 Timothy 3:16 - “All Scripture is breathed out by God **and profitable** for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness....”

Catch Paul's heart in these words to Timothy. Soon he won't see Timothy anymore. He **loves** Timothy. He's obviously **concerned** about Timothy. **Perilous times** are coming. They're here for you and me too. Naturally Paul wants to leave his very best advice for his beloved young Timothy.

So, from prison cell, Paul scratches out his final words - ***“Timothy, I know you are educated in the Scriptures. I know you've studied them since you were a kid. But Timothy, remember those Scriptures are still profitable to you. Never forget - never underestimate their value. They will work in your situation. You will be fine without me as long as you have them.”***

And to hook Timothy's attention, Paul uses that word, **“profit.”** That's a word that immediately grabs even the most selfish person's attention right away. Profit is what makes the world go round. Profit is what you have **left over** after you've met all the **obligations**. Profit is the **surplus**

- the **gain** - the **inflow** that remains that is greater than the **outflow**.

So everybody is interested in profit. We don't want to face the demands of life with bare cupboards. We want to **thrive**. We want to feel there are **resources** for the daily grind. We all want to **multiply** our lives in fruitfulness. And if we have any wisdom at all, we want, more than anything else, that our **soul** will prosper.

So Paul tells Timothy the Word brings **profit**. In your soul - in your marriage - in your work - in your walk with Jesus - in the ministry God gives you to do - **only the Word - the Word ingested - the Word memorized - the Word continued in - the Word obeyed with prayerful diligence - only the Word will bring real profit.**

So the two agents for spiritual transformation are still the same - a **great example**, and a life **immersed in the Word**. Next week we'll look at the exact **process** - the **way the Word will bring profit into our lives**.