

“Built to Last” (2 Timothy 3:14–17)

What is your most prized material possession? Is there a gift that you have been given that is especially meaningful to you? If your house was burning down and your family was safe, what would you want to run in and take out? If you were relegated to a deserted island, what one possession would you want with you? Three of my favorite possessions are: my glider, my stationary recumbent bike, and my computer. If I had to choose my most valuable material possession, I would choose my glider, which was a gift from my parents when I graduated from seminary. This glider has thirteen years of use and abuse and has traveled over 2,000,000 miles. (It’s a good thing that the frame has a lifetime warranty!) I can’t imagine our house without it.

As valuable as my glider is there is another possession that is even more valuable to me—my Bible. It is through my Bible that I hear God speak directly to me. It is my Bible that feeds my heart, soul, and mind. It is my Bible that is my daily food and drink. It is my Bible provides me comfort and direction in this life and assurance and hope for the next life. Sadly, even though I would vehemently argue that the Bible is my most prized material possession my life doesn’t always show this to be true. Nevertheless, it is the passion of my life to be a man of God’s Word. I know this is your passion is well. As a church, our vision is to transfer truth to the next generation. We have a four step vision strategy: learn the word, live the life, love the body, and lead the world. The first means of accomplishing our vision is to “learn the Word.” If we fail in this first and most important step, we cannot fulfill our vision. In 2 Timothy 3:14–17, Paul states, “*Scripture transforms not merely informs.*” In these four verses, Paul provides two tips that will enable you to be a transformed believer.

1. Remain in God’s Word (3:14–15). In these first two verses, Paul reminds Timothy that the key to Christian growth is persevering in God’s Word. Throughout much of 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul warns Timothy not to be led astray by false teachers. He also urges Timothy to prepare for persecution. The means to avoiding heresy and enduring trials is to stand firm and continue in God’s Word. Verse 14 begins with an emphatic “**you**” (cf. 3:10). Paul is snapping Timothy to attention! He wants young Timothy to know that he is speaking directly to him. This is a helpful reminder to you and me. When the Word is preached, it must be direct and intensely personal! While it’s more socially acceptable to use the word “we” when preaching, “**YOU**” is far more effective. If I use the term “we,” it’s easy for you to think I’m talking to the person sitting next to you. But when I use the term “you,” it’s more difficult for you to evade the Spirit’s conviction. This principle also applies to personal Bible study. When you are spending time in God’s Word, there are two primary questions that you must ask: Lord, what do You want to teach *me* about You? And, Lord, what do You want to teach *me* about me? Always remember, Bible study must be personal. When it is for your personal benefit, it will become beneficial for others.

Now back to 3:14a where Paul writes, “**You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of.**” Please circle the word “**continue**” in your Bible. It is the key word in our passage. It means “to abide or remain.” It is a present-tense imperative (*mene*) that calls for a constant and continual way of life. This means that month-in-and-month-out, year-in-and-year-out, you remain faithful to God’s Word. This may sound like an easy task. I can assure you, it is not; many have failed. Elsewhere, Paul tells Timothy that some have refused to “fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience;” rather they have “rejected [this] and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith” (1 Tim 1:18–19). He also predicts that “in the later times, some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim 4:1). These verses ought to remind you that one of the severest tests of a believer’s character and loyalty is to continue in God’s Word, in the midst of a world filled with false doctrine. It is no small feat to continue in the Word. Yet, God will judge you by how you finish. Are you committed to running the race? Have you made up your mind by God’s grace that you are going to persevere? Will you make that commitment today?

Paul describes the truths he had instructed Timothy to continue in as, **“the things you have learned and become convinced of.”**¹ There is an important distinction between “learned” and “convinced,” for the first denotes content, but the second, conviction. Timothy had not only **“learned”** the truth, but he had **“become convinced”** of it. The important insight to note here is that Timothy checked things out for himself! What he learned he then went on to confirm personally (cf. Acts 17:11). The difference between the things we “learn” and those we **“become convinced of”** is that we hold the former while the latter holds us! Until God’s Word becomes not just something we hold, but rather something that holds us, our Christian living will be anemic.²

In 3:14b–15, Paul provides three reasons why Timothy must continue in God’s Word. First, Timothy must continue in the Word because he learned it directly from the apostle Paul.³ Paul writes, **“knowing⁴ from whom you have learned”** (3:14b). The word **“whom”** (*tinon*) is a masculine, plural pronoun. Therefore, this word can’t refer to Paul alone. Others also taught Timothy. We’ll see whom in 3:15. For the moment, it is critical to understand that you cannot understand God’s Word in a vacuum. You need to take advantage of the knowledge and insight of other believers. Do you have a person in your life who is presently helping you grow in your love for God’s Word? If not, why not? Have you prayed for a spiritual man or woman to come alongside you and help you in your Christian growth? Is there a man or woman that you need to ask to mentor you? Mentoring has changed my life. I have peers and mentors who disciple me in God’s Word. I need this! You do too. If you want to grow and continue in the Word, you must be challenged and led by at least one mature believer. Today, will you commit to finding that mentor? Will you also commit to being a biblical mentor to someone else? Today, will you pray for a Paul and look for a Timothy?

Second, Timothy must continue in God’s Word because he learned it from his immediate family. In 2 Tim 1:5, we read that, before Timothy learned from Paul, he was taught by his grandmother, Lois and his mother, Eunice.⁵ Paul recounts this for Timothy in 3:15: **“from childhood you have known the sacred writings.”** The word **“childhood”** refers to either an unborn child or an infant.⁶ The point being, Lois and Eunice taught Timothy **“the sacred writings”** (i.e., Old Testament Scriptures)⁷ while he was still in the womb or shortly thereafter! These godly women filled his head and his heart with God’s Word. The Christian world owes these two heroines of the faith a tremendous debt of gratitude, for who can possibly calculate the number of lives that have been challenged and strengthened over the centuries because of Timothy and the two letters written to him? Have you expressed your appreciation to your parents or grandparents for the spiritual heritage they have left you? This afternoon, will you call them or write them a card and simply tell them how much you appreciate their legacy?

We must recognize that God can profoundly use the influence of a mother and grandmother to forge a godly legacy. We must elevate and affirm these roles in the church. The Christian mother or grandmother who is committed to her high calling is an awesome weapon in the hand of God, for she is producing polished arrows for His sturdy bow. Ladies, please do not minimize your role. Research indicates that most boys are closer to their mothers than to their fathers. So mothers, take advantage of your relationship with your son. Teach him the Word and help him grow spiritually. Grandmothers, your grandchildren may be more prone to listen to you instead of their parents. Use this to your advantage and teach them the Word of God. Model it before them and speak it into their lives. You will leave a lasting legacy if you do.

Before entering pastoral ministry, a former co-worker and seminary graduate told me that he didn’t want to push his faith on his kids. Instead, he wanted them to come to their own conclusions. Whatever you do, do not make this same mistake. Someone will influence your children and grandchildren. It can be you or it can be a peer that may have a detrimental effect. Your children and grandchildren will be influenced by something. It can be the Word or it can be the media. Like Joshua, we must be bold and courageous enough to say, **“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”** (Josh 24:15).

Third, Timothy must continue in God's Word because it will enable him to make wise ethical choices (3:15b). Paul writes that the Scriptures **"are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."** The phrase **"are able to give you wisdom"**⁸ means "to give the ability to live skillfully." God's Word enables believers to "live life skillfully." The **"salvation"** (*soteria*) spoken of here must refer to more than deliverance from hell, for this had already been accomplished in Timothy (2 Tim 1:9).⁹ Here, **"salvation"** is equivalent to growth and maturity (i.e., sanctification). Paul is saying that the Scriptures have the power to provide life-changing wisdom, which if properly applied will save us from the power of sin¹⁰ and the peril of false teaching (cf. 3:13).

[Paul's first exhortation is to remain in God's Word. This is critical if you are to persevere in your Christian life and ministry. In his second exhortation Paul says...]

2. Train in God's Word (3:16–17). In these next two verses, Paul says that the Bible is both inspired and useful. These verses are the strongest statement in the Bible about itself.¹¹ In 3:16, Paul affirms that **"All Scripture is inspired by God."** He doesn't say "some" Scripture or "most" Scripture; he says **"ALL Scripture."** The word **"Scripture"** (*graphe*) specifically refers to the Old Testament. However, in 1 Tim 5:18 Paul uses *graphe* to refer to quotations from both the Old and New Testaments (Deut 25:4; Luke 10:7). In 2 Pet 3:16, Peter also calls Paul's writings "Scripture."¹² This means that God has inspired every biblical book, including Leviticus and Numbers. Every word and every idea is "inspired by God."¹³ It is worth noting the phrase **"inspired by God"** comes from a single Greek word (*theopneustos*)¹⁴ that means "God-breathed" (see ESV and NIV; cf. Gen 2:7; Ps 33:6). The Scriptures were written by men, but only "as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21).¹⁵ Therefore, God's Word can be trusted unreservedly as the final authority on whatever it addresses.¹⁶ Have you come to the place of absolute conviction that the Bible is God's Word? Think this through very carefully. Don't immediately say "Yes." Are you willing to submit to the Scriptures as the final authority in every area of life and doctrine?

Paul writes that the God-breathed Scriptures are **"profitable"**¹⁷ or "useful" (NIV) for four specific tasks:

- First, Scripture is profitable for **"teaching."** This is a mandatory use of God's Word (cf. Acts 2:42). The Word must instruct us! My greatest priority must be to teach and preach the Word. One of your highest commitments must be to corporately sit under God's Word and let it transform you (Col 1:28). But listening to corporate teaching is not enough.
- Second, Scripture is profitable for **"reproof."** The word **"reproof"**¹⁸ means "to reprove or convict." It is to show us when we've departed from the path of righteousness. The Word of God is a faithful, two-edged sword, which ruthlessly cuts across many of our actions and attitudes (Heb 4:12–13). We must be willing to undergo this divine surgery if the Great Physician would heal us. Woe to the man who never winces under the influence of God's Word, for he has deceived himself about his true spiritual condition. This is the other side of teaching. As believers we must use the Scriptures to expose the errors of false teachers. We must also use the Scriptures to reprove ourselves.
- Third, Scripture is profitable for **"correction."** The word for **"correction"** is a companion of "reproof," but emphasizes the behavioral side of things. For instance, the Scriptures not only say, "He who steals must steal no longer," but adds, "rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need" (Eph 4:28). The first part of this verse may be considered as "reproof," whereas the second part is "correction." The word literally means "to restore to an upright state" (cf. 2:15).¹⁹ The Scriptures not only show us where we've fallen, but also how to get back on our feet. They point the way back to the path of righteousness and seek our quick return. Have you stumbled in your relationship with God? If so, God wants to restore you.

- Finally, Scripture is profitable for **“training in righteousness.”** The word that is translated **“training”** (*paideia*) originally referred to “the rearing of a child.” God’s Word was not given simply to increase our knowledge, but mostly to infect our character and conduct. The Word has its full effect upon us only when it produces a transformed and righteous life. It is worth noting that all four of these words involve a change of life.²⁰ What a reminder: Knowledge that does not change one’s life is useless. How fully functional have you allowed the Scriptures to be in your life? It has well been said that *teaching* tells us what is right, *reproof* tells us what is not right, *correction* tells us how to get right, and *training* tells us how to stay right.²¹

This leads us to 3:17. When all is said and done, what is the ultimate purpose of God’s Word? Paul explains that we are to train in God’s Word **“so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”** Though we cannot see it in English, Paul uses two forms of the Greek word for “complete”: the adjective **“adequate”**²² and the participle **“equipped.”**²³ These two words form a play on words. The adjective **“adequate”** or “complete,” means “to be fit, sufficient, and complete—able to meet all demands.” We might translate the wordplay as “to be complete and completely equipped for every good work.” Note carefully that Paul did not say that God’s Word is adequate for “many good works,” or even, “most good works,” but **“every good work.”** We should not study the Scriptures to simply increase our knowledge or to help us win arguments. We should study the Scriptures so that we will know how to do God’s work in the world. Knowledge of God’s Word is not useful unless it strengthens our faith and leads us to do **“every good work”** (cf. Eph 2:10).²⁴

The phrase **“the man of God”** refers specifically to Timothy.²⁵ Timothy is to immerse himself in the Scriptures so that he is fully equipped. This also has application to you and me. Paul’s expectation is that every person reading this letter will put these truths into practice and become a person super-equipped by God’s Word. God’s man or woman is, first and foremost, a man or woman of the Word. The Bible thoroughly equips us for ministry. This means, on the other hand, that if you do not thoroughly know the teaching of the Bible you are not thoroughly equipped.

Several years ago when I was in Russia, my traveling partner, Dr. Paul Benware, brought some Maxwell House instant coffee. Every morning, he and I would take a packet of this coffee and drop it into a mug of boiling water. Dr. Benware explained to me that I could make the coffee strong or weak. The difference would be found in the number of times I dipped the packet into the water. Since we both like strong coffee, we would dip that packet in the water again and again. The result was that the coffee would permeate the hot water, bringing out all the potential fragrance and flavor. Consider the difference between a strong and a weak cup of instant Maxwell House coffee. The same ingredients—water and coffee—are used for both. The difference is that the strong cup of coffee results from the packet being immersed in the water longer, allowing the water more time to get into the coffee and the coffee into the water. The longer the steeping process continues, the stronger the cup of coffee. In the same way, the length of time we spend in God’s Word determines how deeply we get into it and it gets into us. The longer we are in the Word, the “stronger” we become.

In an interview, Billy Graham was asked this question: “If you had to live your life over again, what would you do differently?” To this question, most of us would expect Graham to say, “I wish I had been able to preach more evangelistic crusades,” or “I wish I would have spent more time with my family.” However, Graham responded, “One of my great regrets is that I have not studied the Scriptures enough. I wish I had studied more and preached less. People have pressured me into speaking to groups when I should have been studying and preparing.” This simple reply is surprising, fascinating, and convicting. This response reminds us of what is ultimately important in life. One day you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. On that day, I would hate for you to say, “I wish I had read the Bible more.” May we take Dr. Graham’s words to heart and be a people who soak in God’s Word.²⁶

Spend time alone in God's Word. This past week, Theo Yu (one of our members), told me that he typically reads through the Psalms every month. He has been doing this for years. Theo is a PK (pastor's kid) with a rich biblical heritage. He is also a brilliant man. Yet, the Scriptures continue to be fresh to Theo because he immerses himself in them every day. This past week, I also received an email from Candra Fisher who informed me that she was taking each attitude/behavior (there are 26) from my Sermon on the Mount Personal Evaluation worksheet and focusing on each one for a week at a time. Looking up the Scripture, meditating on it and then looking/ at other verses (like gentleness) and journal my growth in these areas. These are two great ideas. Will you choose a reading plan and pray this simple prayer: "Lord, as I study Your Word, will you study my life and help me to be transformed?"²⁷ Will you then seek to share with another person the things that God has been teaching you to apply directly to your life? This is the place to begin. As you learn the Word and live the live, then you can and will have the impact God desires you to have.

Seek additional ways to hear and read God's Word. On your commute, could you listen to the Bible on CD or cassette? If you're working at home, would you do the same as you clean the house or fix dinner? Children and teens, can you listen to God's Word in the morning as you get ready for school or at night as you drift off to sleep? Can you download Christian sermons from the Internet that will help you grow in God's Word? Can you find a radio pastor that faithfully teaches God's Word and begin listening to him? The possibilities are endless.

When I was playing basketball, we used an expression, "If you throw up enough mud, something is bound to stick." We meant that if you shoot the ball enough times, eventually one of your shots will go in the basket. This principle *can* also apply to hearing God's Word. The more you read or listen to God's Word, the more likely you *may* be to obey it. How often do you "hear" God's Word? Once a week? Twice a week? Three times a week? The goal must be to hear or read more from God's Word than from the television or the Internet. When this happens, you will find that there is greater potential for obedience. Your mind will be so saturated with God's Word that He will lovingly compel you to obey.²⁸

As a church family, we can also help you. We offer Sunday morning classes, Wednesday evening teaching, and numerous resources to help you learn God's Word. We can offer you Read through the Bible plans. We can recommend Internet sites. We have Bible marathon where a group of people read and heed large portions of God's Word in a single setting. Again the possibilities are endless.

Find the time. You can read through the entire Bible in seventy-one hours. This means in fifteen minutes a day you can read through the entire Bible in less than a year. Only five minutes a day takes you through the entire Bible in less than three years.²⁹

Pray against laziness. The basic difference between Bible reading and Bible study is a pencil and a piece of paper.³⁰

Pray through the Scripture.

Read the Bible for transformation and not just information. Apply the Scripture to your life.

Scripture References

2 Timothy 3:14–17
2 Timothy 2:14–26
Hebrews 4:12–13
James 1:22–25
1 Peter 2:1–3
Acts 17:11
John 14:21, 23; 15:14–15

Study Questions

1. During the course of my Christian life, what particular biblical truths have I learned and become convinced of (3:14a)? Am I still faithful in living out God's Word? What specific areas of my life are marked by perseverance? Where am I presently struggling in my application to God's truth?
2. Who has helped me learn God's Word (3:14b–15)? How have I expressed my gratitude to these people? Read Galatians 6:6. How can I help children (my own, my friends', and my fellow believers') to value Bible reading in a television and computer-dominated society?
3. When did I finally become convinced that the Bible is God's Word (3:16a)? Was there a dramatic turning point in my life when this recognition occurred? In my conversations with other people, how have I explained that the Bible is God's Word?
4. How have I responded to the purposes of Scripture (i.e., teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, 3:16b)? Am I humble and teachable when I read the Scriptures or listen to them being taught or preached? Has the Bible become too familiar to me? What can I do to avoid this trap? How can I grow in my receptivity to God's Word?
5. How has Scripture equipped me in my life and ministry (3:17)? What good works is God producing in me in direct response to His Word? What goals in God's Word do I have for 2009? How can I encourage those in my sphere of influence in God's Word this year? In what ways can I help my church family "learn the Word?"

Notes

¹ The phrase “become convinced of” (*epistothēs*) is only used here in the NT.

² Dwight Edwards, *II Timothy: “Call to Completion”* (www.bible.org, Biblical Studies Foundation, 1996), 46.

³ For a brief overview of Paul’s relationship with Timothy see 1 Cor 16:10; Phil 2:20, 22; 1 Thess 3:2. For a helpful study of Timothy’s career, see William J. Peterson, *The Discipling of Timothy* (Wheaton: IL: Victor, 1980).

⁴ The participle “knowing” (*eidos*) denotes the cause or reason for Timothy’s assurance.

⁵ Acts 16:1 informs us that Timothy’s mother was a Christian Jewess, but that his father was a Greek. This may explain why his mother and grandmother raised him in the faith.

⁶ Gk. *brephos* refers to a child that is still unborn, a fetus (Luke 1:41, 44) or a very small child, baby, infant (Luke 2:12, 16; 18:15; Acts 7:19; 1 Pet 2:2). See BDAG, Electronic Ed.

⁷ Bible commentators point out that the early Church Fathers, Philo and Josephus, used the phrase *hiera grammata* (“sacred writings”) to refer to the OT Scriptures.

⁸ The phrase that is translated “are able to give you the wisdom” (*sophisai*) probably reflects the usage of the Greek OT in Ps 19:7 (“making wise the simple”). This contrasts with the folly and deception of the false teachers in 2 Tim 3:9, 13. See also Gordon Fee, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 279.

⁹ It could be argued that the phrase “which are able” (*ta dunamena*) is to be taken as a past event rather than a present event. In this case, “salvation” would be the equivalent of justification and the new birth. However, Paul is quick to note that this justification did not take place simply because of the Scriptures, but “through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” It is the written Word that points to and points out the Living Word (John 5:39), and it is our faith in the Living Word (Christ) that saves us.

¹⁰ God’s Word has the power to free believers from the bondage of sin. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32).

¹¹ Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 279.

¹² See also 1 Cor 2:13; 14:37; Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Thess 2:15.

¹³ This is true of our English translations to the degree that they reflect the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

¹⁴ Gk. *theopneustos* is only used here in the NT. The adjective *theopneustos* is compounded of *theos*, “God,” and the verb *pneo*, “breathe.” This word provides the base for one of the greatest NT texts on the inspiration of the Bible.

¹⁵ It should be observed that 2 Pet 1:20–21 refers to the authors, while 2 Tim 3:16 refers to what they wrote. Thus the dilemma of whether inspiration pertains to the writer or the writings is seen to be a false issue. See Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology 2nd edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998 [1983]), 244.

¹⁶ It is of no small significance that the first words Satan ever spoke to man were an attempt to deny the trustworthiness of God’s Word: “Has God really said...?” (Gen 3:1). Those today that deny the absolute trustworthiness of Scripture are echoing Satan’s question to their generation and as such, become (knowingly or unknowingly) messengers of the devil himself.

¹⁷ Gk. *ophelimos*: used only here and 1 Tim 4:8; Titus 3:8.

¹⁸ Gk. *elegchos*: used only here in the NT. It is used for the “conviction” of a sinner in the Greek OT (Num 5:18ff).

¹⁹ Gk. *epanorthosin*: used only here in the NT. It comes from the Greek word for “straight.” The New Living Translation renders the phrase, “It straightens us out.”

²⁰ “In six passages (22 verses) Paul urges Timothy to guard or proclaim the Gospel (1:8; 13–14; 2:2, 8–14; 3:10–14; 4:4–5). In five passages (again 22 verses) he exhorts him to endure or watch his life (2:1–8, 15, 22; 3:5; 3:10–14). Doctrine and ethics are allies. Both equip the saints for good works.” See Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work* (New Jersey: P & R, 2001), 57.

²¹ R. Kent Hughes, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway,), Electric ed.

²² The adjective “adequate” (*artios*) is only used here in the NT. The word pertains to “being well fitted for some function, complete, capable, proficient = able to meet all demands.” See BDAG s.v. *artios*.

²³ Gk. *exartizo*: used only here and Acts 21:5. BDAG s.v. *exartizo* 2 classifies as “to make ready for service, equip, and furnish.”

²⁴ Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 281 notes, “Verses such as 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:21; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14 refer to good works. Other passages teach us that we are not saved by good works (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5).”

²⁵ The definite article *tou* (“the”) and the noun *anthropos* (“man”) are both singular. This indicates that Paul has Timothy in mind. This is substantiated by the context that follows in 2 Tim 4:1–5.

²⁶ Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), Electronic Ed. See

Christianity Today, September 12, 1977, p. 19.

²⁷ Thomas Merton once said, “Reading ought to be an act of homage to the God of all truth. We open our hearts to words that reflect the reality he has created or the greater reality which he is. Christ, the incarnate Word, is the Book of life in whom we read God.” Tomas Merton quoted in “Reflections,” *Christianity Today* (4/24/2000).

²⁸ “Regardless of how central or peripheral the significance, the more Scripture we study and memorize—becoming familiar with the very tone and texture of God’s Word—the more the Spirit can illuminate his Word for us.” See Klaus Issler, *Wasting Time With God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship With God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 167.

²⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian* (), 33.

³⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian*, 37.