

“Jesus loves me, this I know...” You should be able to fill in the rest. It’s so basic to our Christian faith that this bedrock truth—namely, the Bible is God’s perfect and inspired Word given to mankind—it often gets neglected and we don’t take the time to consider it as carefully as we should. Paul knew that young pastor Timothy was fully acquainted with the sacred writings, or the Holy Scriptures, really those terms mean the same thing. Yet despite that confidence in Timothy’s knowledge about the Bible, the Apostle still found it necessary to write in this epistle a careful outline of how to use the Bible, that is, how Timothy the pastor, as well as you, the Christian, are to put the truth of God’s Word into practice in your life and vocation, whatever that may look like for you. It would be my recommendation for you to read the entire chapter 3 of 2 Timothy, better yet, the whole letter itself would really open your eyes, so I commend it to you. Here are a few things I would like for you to look for and consider as you read:

First, while it is true that our perfect and certain knowledge of God can come only from the Scriptures (that’s what the Reformation motto *Sola Scriptura* refers to), Paul reminds Timothy to consider also those people in his life who had taken the time and care to teach him the faith. In chapter one of this letter, Paul puts forward two by name: Timothy’s grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. They exhibited great faith, probably endured great hardship and suffering, and made it a priority to teach the same faith thoroughly to their little boy. From childhood, Paul says, actually I would say the translation “infancy” is better, from

infancy, Timothy was taught to trust in Jesus, the true Author and Perfector of faith. Think of the people in your life who took the time to introduce you to Jesus, get you familiar with the letters, the basic building-blocks of His story, extending from His birth at Christmas, through all His miracles and parables, to His death and resurrection at Easter. They could have been your parents, pastors, Sunday School teachers, a future spouse, an engaging mentor or close friend. They led by words they said and the actions they did, and it made an impression on you. They led you into the same grazing field of the Word that nourished them. They introduced you to the Divine Service where the Word is put into real action, joining up with Water, Bread, Wine, and even welcoming hospitality—that should not be downplayed, either. The Bible, in a class by itself, made all the difference of course, but Paul reminds us we should also never forget the people who opened that Bible to us. Their memory of a faithful witness could inspire a further testimony on your part that would in turn make a similar impression on someone else in your life.

Secondly, Paul calls attention to the Bible’s true source—it’s found in God’s own breath. This unique word does not show up anywhere else in the Greek or Hebrew Bible, it’s an adjective literally meaning “God-exhaled,” but has been often simply translated as “inspired.” Scripture is inspired, no doubt about it, but the picture of God breathing it out is more dynamic than if we were to make the mistake to think of God’s Word as merely an inspirational, but inert truth that sits around and doesn’t do anything. Anyone can sound inspired, or

inspiring, but only Jesus is the true God who had a genuine human breath, and in, with and under that breath was God the Holy Spirit, the giver of forgiveness in the Absolution, the one who is actively speaking to us as we are reading, to ourselves or to others, the Holy Scriptures.

Third, this God-breathed Word is profitable for something. No matter how much, or even if it's just a little, time invested in reading, studying, meditating or praying, your Lord promises a generous return on that investment. Search diligently for its meaning, look up the words, find other passages that might shed more light—all of it will reap some benefit, and it won't always be something you can perceive at that very moment. Listen to the Word being preached to you in Church, even if it's something in the Bible that you're already familiar with. There's always a new application to discover, a new sin to confess, a new Gospel truth of forgiveness to relish and gain new life from. Trust the Word, it will not return to the Lord empty, but it will accomplish what He desires it to do.

Fourth, the Bible is meant for teaching. It has a content that must be learned. It is not a magical entity or good luck charm sitting there on your shelf or living-room table. Merely by its presence is it not intended to help you, though I do know the story of the guy whose Bible in his chest pocket stopped a bullet from killing him. Nevertheless, God chose to speak in our human language so that we would learn certain facts written down about Him, find out from our Bible all that He has done, and use that knowledge to become “wise for salvation.” We are to take the knowledge that Scripture gives, and apply it, so that we fully understand that because Jesus died in my place, I do not

perish, but have eternal life instead. The violent Soviet takeover of many Christian churches burned Bibles and executed pastors, but the Word lived on in the memories of the people who heard that Word, prayed and sung the liturgy, and passed it on to their children, and now we see the Church, including Lutheran churches, thriving in those former Soviet regions once again.

Fifthly, Holy Scripture is useful for reproof. Now, here is something very attractive to our human nature! I like it when I can use the Scripture to tell people they're wrong! It's my opportunity to really put them in their place and I can maybe assert some control over them for my personal benefit.

Or, for you it may be the other way around. I'm afraid of reproofing my friend or loved one. I know that the Bible says what they are doing, or how they are living, is wrong, but I'm just supposed to love them and let the wrong they do be an issue between them and God. Either way, we are exposing the fact that we need God's Word the Bible to reprove us as well! God's Law condemns you when you fail to trust in Him and look for some advantage for yourself, whether that advantage is bringing your neighbor down or it's avoiding the conflict of having your counsel rejected and they go ahead in their sinful path and perhaps they've burned their bridge with you for good. When the breath of God's mouth crushes you like this you desperately need the next thing the Scriptures are useful for:

Correction! Yes, dear Christian saint who is also a condemned sinner—the Bible that points out you have a problem, is the same Bible that also has your solution! Contrary to your inner mind's advice, you cannot

correct yourself, you need God to bring you back with His precious Word, His forgiveness of your sins. Jesus lifted the burden of all your wrongs with the Father, and with His resurrection you are pronounced totally right. That correction that was earned long ago by Jesus and what He did in a far away place, that correction has been brought to your ear now by His Word, sealed upon you in your Baptism, which is Water combined with God's Word, and it feeds you with His Body and Blood, joined by Jesus' Word to be in, with, and under bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar. When you seek correction from the Holy Scripture, look no further than the Word of Absolution, the forgiveness from the pastor as from God Himself. Correction is not about your efforts to do better; it's all about Jesus who did everything for you, and gave you His written Word as the never-ending fountain of that forgiveness.

Finally, those sacred writings of God, delivered through the Prophets, Evangelists and Apostles, is profitable for your training in righteousness. An excellent example of that training is given in our other readings for today—prayer is one facet of your training in righteousness, using God's Word to make you stronger in your faith. Praying on the basis of God's promises to you is like Jacob wrestling with God face-to-face. When you pray, you pin your loving heavenly Father down to what He has promised you, despite whatever you are struggling with, and He is absolutely delighted to have you prevail over Him in the struggle. As Jacob said, I will not let you go until you bless me.

That's also what the poor woman did with an unjust judge who didn't really care about her, but gave her satisfaction anyway. Your

chances with Almighty God are even better than hers! Do you persist more arguing with customer service after you've received a faulty product, than you do when you pray to your Creator who actually wants all good things for you? Don't lose heart anymore! Be fully equipped and complete. Gain confidence when you pray during those times when it seems our Lord is slow to respond. Remember that when you pray, confess your anxiety and reticence to trust God, and rejoice that Jesus claimed the prayer victory for you when He died on the cross and rose from the dead. You are forgiven and blessed, and armed with the training offered you in the Holy Scriptures, which are chock full of Divine promises, you will not let go of Jesus, for He will continue to bless you, even through the toughest phases of your life's training.

There you have seven things about God's Word, the Bible, that you can take home with you this week as you put this special treasure of the Reformation to work in your daily life: remember those from whom you learned the Scriptures, confess them to be God's own breath, be confident that they are useful for the Lord's own work and they are profitable for teaching you, for reproof, correction and for your ongoing training that lays hold of Christ's righteousness that He earned for your sake. Your struggling with God in prayer will not turn up empty, but will be rewarded with your forgiveness and peace with your heavenly Father, together with all the other blessings He has in mind for you now and forever.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.