

USE THE WORD – READY

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2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT)

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

God uses His Word. It is a tool in His hand. It is the sword of the Spirit. You may think of this as a weapon of warfare for slaying evil, but it is more often like a surgeon's scalpel, for skillfully excising cancerous habits and debilitating mindsets, and applying divine healing arts.

Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)

¹² For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

We have already seen that God uses His Word to “teach us what is true,” to reveal and “make us realize what is wrong in our lives,” to “correct us when we are wrong,” and to transform us, by teaching us “to do what is right.”

Here, then, is the sum of the matter:

2 Timothy 3:17 (NLT)

¹⁷ God uses [His Word] to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

God uses His Word to get us ready to serve Him.

Let me briefly interject a related theme: You are probably familiar with using the Word to win the lost. It is God's Story, the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. ¹⁷ This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”

2 Thessalonians 2:14 (NLT)

¹⁴ He called you to salvation when we told you the Good News; now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God uses His Word to awaken and win the lost. It looses the power of God to bring conviction and faith to the minds and hearts of lost people. But what we are looking at today is not about winning the lost (except indirectly, as I shall later explain). Today's text is about how God uses His Word in the lives of His own people (those who have been saved).

Now if you are here today, realizing that you need God's forgiveness because of your sins, and you need to be born again—wonderful! Come to Jesus Christ today and offer Him your heart and soul. He will forgive you and cleanse you and begin a new life in you before you can say, “Thank you, Lord. Amen.”

But if you are here today as one of God's children—as most of you are—this message is for *you*, not for “someone else.” God is not finished with you yet! There is a work to be done *in* you, and there is a work to be done *through* you. And God will do it through His Word. So, get hold of your Bible and pay close attention.

God uses His Word in the lives of His people to do two things: to prepare you and to equip you.

Preparation

Baseball player Roger Maris said, “You hit home runs not be chance, but by preparation.”

Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Canada's Prime Minister of the last century, said, “Be ready when opportunity comes... Luck is the time when preparation and opportunity meet.”

2 Timothy 3:17 (NLT)

¹⁷ *God uses [His Word] to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.*

The Father expects you to “*abound in every good work*” (2 Corinthians 9:8; ESV). He has given you all that you need in order to achieve that.

Paul prayed for God's people to be “*filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work*” (Colossians 1:9-10). Are you bearing fruit in good works?

In the same letter (2 Timothy 2:21) that we are studying today, Paul encouraged Timothy: “*If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.*”

“*How can a young person stay pure?*” asked the psalmist (Psalm 119:9; NLT). The answer came back, “*By obeying [God's] word.*”

Paul also urged Titus (3:1; NJB) to “*remind [the believers] to be...ready to do good at every opportunity.*”

There are countless opportunities to do something good, something pleasing to God, but whatever occasion arises will remain fruitless if you are not prepared and equipped by the Lord. You must be prepared inwardly and equipped outwardly in order to succeed in serving the Lord's will.

Inward preparation involves cleansing and reviving your heart (spirit) through the new birth. No recited prayers or acts of sacrifice, or any other religious offering, can achieve the effect of the new birth.

Jesus said, “*I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God*” (John 3:3; NLT). “*So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again'*” (John 3:7; NLT).

Paul taught: “*A person who isn't spiritual doesn't accept the teachings of God's Spirit. He thinks they're nonsense. He can't understand them because a person must be spiritual to evaluate them*” (1 Corinthians 2:14; GWT).

There is no substitute for the preparation of the heart by the Holy Spirit. His preparatory work also touches our minds, for we once were blind, but now we see.

Paul urged, *“Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think”* (Romans 12:2; NLT).

This renewal of the mind and character is largely accomplished by the power of God’s Word, which provides light and understanding.

Psalm 119:130 (NLT)

*The teaching of your word gives light,
so even the simple can understand.*

Reading the Scriptures repeatedly renews your thinking as it reveals how God thinks and responds and acts. Soaking in the presence of God is good if it involves interaction with His Word, because this is how God communicates His heart to you.

Equipping

Inward preparation alone will not work for you. “Impression, without expression, leads to depression.” What you receive on the inside, must be expressed on the outside.

Philippians 2:12-13 (NLT)

¹² *Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.*

Effective expression requires spiritual equipping; that is, the spiritual formation and shaping of your life.

The Book of Hebrews (13:20-21; NLT) offers a benediction, praying for our equipping:

²⁰ *Now may the God of peace—
who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus,
the great Shepherd of the sheep,
and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood—
²¹ may He equip you with all you need
for doing His will.
May He produce in you,
through the power of Jesus Christ,
every good thing that is pleasing to Him.
All glory to Him forever and ever! Amen.*

What is it that we need? How are we shaped to do God’s will? Would you like to understand your own spiritual “shape”?

Spiritual formation (equipping) is the ongoing result of several influences in life, and all of them should be considered when you try to understand how God is shaping you.

Rick Warren captured these five streams in an acronym:

Spiritual Gifts

Heart (passion)

Abilities (skills)

Personality (temperament)

Experience (life)

Spiritual Gifts

Your spiritual gifts include “motivational gifts,” as described in Romans 12, “inspirational gifts” as described in Ephesians 4, and “supernatural gifts” as described in 1 Corinthians 12. None of these lists are exhaustive; they are merely suggestive of the nature and extent of the gifts. And you have some from each group! But there will be one from each group that appears more dominant in each season of your life.

As seasons (and opportunities) change, the dominant (or active) gifts may change also. Learn to flex with this movement, as you follow the Lord’s lead in your life. Don’t assume that you’ve failed God if one gift becomes less active. Instead, study the appropriate passage of Scripture and look for what other gift may be rising to take its place.

Heart

“Heart” refers to what you are passionate about, what propels you forward, what touches your heart (on the positive side), and what you cannot overlook, what makes you indignant (on the negative side). God has shaped the outlook that forms your passion. He doesn’t intend for you to ignore or suppress it, but to pursue it with all your might. Look for appropriate ways to express your passions in the service of the church. An avenue of expression may already exist, or you may need to pioneer something new, with the help of your pastor.

Abilities

You have already developed certain skills—perhaps through education or experience—that can be applied to the service of the Lord. That education or experience may not have been aimed at Christian service, but your abilities inform who you are and what you are capable of, and can likely be bent to serve God’s plan for your life.

Personality

Your personality is another major component in this process. Whether you are an extrovert or an introvert should inform the type of service you engage in, but neither one will preclude your service. God has made all kinds of people and uses all kinds of people in His Kingdom. It is a waste of your valuable time to compare your personality with others’—whether favorably or unfavorably. They cannot be you, and you cannot be them. Your personality is designed to support *your* function in the Body of Christ. So, get to it!

Experience

We can easily recognize how some life experiences have shaped us—for better or for worse. (If any of yours has been “for worse,” begin to trust the Lord to heal and help you to overcome your past experience and turn it into a strength for you and a blessing for others.)

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NLT)

³ *All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. ⁴ He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*

As you begin to put these five elements together you will begin to discover your spiritual “shape” and find the ministries for which you are a “fit.”

2 Timothy 3:17 (MSG)

Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.

You see, it is all about ministry, service—*“the tasks God has for us.”* God has something for you to do—something especially for *you!* We are all called by God to be compassionate witnesses to the grace He has given us through Jesus Christ, but just how each of us will do that will vary infinitely, according to your spiritual shape in the particular season of your life.

It will look differently if you are in the season of the “little children”, or the season of the “young men”, or the season of the “fathers” (see 1 John 2).

Yet, in every season, your Coach (the Holy Spirit) will use the Word to map out your steps, to adjust your shape, and to put into you what you need to be effective for God. So, get off the bench and get into the game. You’re a significant worker, with something positive to contribute.

The local team manager (your pastor) can help you with your placement and training. Just give him a call and tell him you want to serve and ask him how you can get started. He’ll be delighted to work with you!