

USE THE WORD – TEACH

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God's word is living and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword and cuts as deep as the place where soul and spirit meet, the place where joints and marrow meet. God's word judges a person's thoughts and intentions. (Hebrews 4:12; GWT)

The Bible is thousands of years old, but it is not dead literature. It is living and active today. It is vital to people's spiritual experience.

This living and active Word judges a person's thoughts and intentions. Do not think that you may judge the Word; it is judging you. Humanity lives *"by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). If you are willing, you may uncover your secret thoughts and motives by using the Word of God. God will show you both the good and the bad. And He will show you also what to do about them.

The guiding text for this series of talks comes from Paul's second letter to Timothy. Timothy was his protégé, his disciple, his apprentice in ministry.

Paul warned Timothy about difficult days ahead and advised him on navigating those dangerous waters. At the heart of it, Paul referred Timothy to what he had seen in the life of Paul, what Paul faithfully and repeatedly taught and how he faithfully conducted himself in various situations. He urged Timothy to do the same, to be faithful to what he had been taught down through the years, by his grandmother and his mother and by Paul.

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. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; NLT)

Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful... (2 Timothy 3:16; MSG)

Every part is *God-breathed*. That means it is a faithful revelation of God's heart and purpose, not constructed by men, but revealed by God's Spirit to those who wrote it and to those who read it. It is reliable information and it is effective inspiration.

It is essentially *useful*. It is not meant simply to be admired by those who quote it, but primarily to be lived by those receive it. When taken in this way, it becomes most productive, as God promised.

Isaiah 55:10 *"Rain and snow come down from the sky. They do not go back again until they water the earth. They make it sprout and grow so that it produces seed for farmers and food for people to eat.*

*¹¹ My word, which comes from my mouth, is like the rain and snow. **It will not come back to me without results, but it will accomplish whatever I want and achieve whatever I send it to do.**"*

It is useful in several ways, as Eugene Peterson has captured in The Message:

Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; MSG)

Its ultimate purpose is to “put us together” and “shape us up” for what God wants us to do. This is boot camp. This is graduate school. This is the school of hard knocks. God’s Word is putting you together in His likeness and shaping you up to do His will.

In this series, we are going to examine each of the ways that God’s Word is useful, as Paul described them. The first of these is this: *“showing us the truth.”*

The Word of God teaches us truth (what is true).

Do not imagine that he means every single truth (or fact) that can be known, for that would require more books than we have to date. And that is more information than any one person needs to know. Instead, the Bible teaches us truth—the underlying reality of all things, which is otherwise often hidden from sight. The Scripture teaches you and I how to recognize what is true, to distinguish between truth and error.

When I was very young, I thought I learned truth from my parents, and I would argue with other children that such and such a thing was surely true “because my dad said so.”

When I was just a little older, I began to realize that my parents really didn’t know everything... my teacher did, and I would argue with my parents that such and such a thing was really true “because my teacher said so.”

When I was a teenager it became apparent that my teachers had played me for the fool, but my friends came to my rescue, and I would argue that such and such a thing was absolutely true “because my friend told me.”

By the time I reached my twenties, it was clear that my friends didn’t know as much as they thought they did, and I would argue that such and such a thing was really true “because I knew it to be so.”

I had become my own dictionary and encyclopedia. Things became true or false simply because I decided they were. I needed no reference point outside of myself, and ultimately trusted no one other than myself to determine what was true.

Then I met the Lord Jesus Christ. He shook my world to the core. He unveiled a reality I had never dreamed of, that characterized most of what I previously knew as childish imaginations and figments of my pride.

On at least 55 unique occasions in the four gospel accounts, Jesus declared to his hearers, “I tell you the truth!” Aren’t you glad He does?! Fifty-five times!

I have been feeding on the Word of God for almost forty years, and every year it seems more solid and dependable than before.

A wise preacher said, **“Get the truth and never sell it; also get wisdom, discipline, and good judgment.”** (Proverbs 23:23)

Jesus said, **“Use the truth to make [my followers] holy. Your words are truth.”** (John 17:17; GWT)

Here’s what God Himself said about His words, through the prophet Isaiah (chapter 45):

¹⁹ *I publicly proclaim bold promises. I do not whisper obscurities in some dark corner. I would not have told the people of Israel to seek me if I could not be found. I, the LORD, speak only what is true and declare only what is right.*

²³ *I have sworn by my own name; **I have spoken the truth, and I will never go back on my word:** Every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will confess allegiance to me.*

We may use God's Word, the Bible, to teach ourselves and to teach one another the truth.

Through the Scriptures, we may learn all there is to know about Jesus, who is the living truth.

Jesus said of Himself, "***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.***" (John 14:6)

Apart from Him we cannot even begin a right relationship with God, or be saved. Paul taught that some people are on their way to everlasting destruction, "***because they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them.***" (2 Thessalonians 2:10)

We must be born again by loving and accepting Jesus Christ (the Living Truth) and putting our trust in Him as we follow Him.

Jesus said to those who put their trust in Him, "***If you live by what I say, you are truly my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.***" (John 8:31-32)

To know what is true for ourselves, to discover the ultimate reality of which God is the center, we must live by what Jesus says. It's His "learn by doing" plan. And before you can hope to live by what He has to say today, you must learn to live by what He has already said in the Scriptures.

¹ Peter 1:22 *You were cleansed from your sins **when you obeyed the truth**, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.*

When we get to know the truth in this Biblical and experiential manner, it will set us free! And just what is that freedom like? It is the freedom to love the Lord by obeying Him, and the freedom to love one another by forgiving each other. It leads to the fulfillment of the two greatest commandments given to humankind.

Use the Word to discover the truth. God will use that truth to transform your life.

Jesus said, "***Use the truth to make [my followers] holy. Your words are truth.***" (John 17:17; GWT)

How is this process activated? By searching the Scriptures with a desire to understand God's plan.

Acts 17:11 *And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. **They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.*** ¹² *As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men.*

How is this process energized? By the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us. Paul described this life-long process of salvation as "***a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and through your belief in the truth.***"

The Holy Spirit works with and through the truth (God's Word) to make you the person God wants you to be.

¹ Timothy 2:4 *[God] wants everyone to be saved and to **understand the truth.***

He is not hiding this powerful truth; He is revealing it through the Bible and through His Spirit.

There are some who will contradict this, some who will propose blatant lies that appeal to the desires of our bodies and minds. Paul warned Timothy:

¹ Timothy 4:1 *Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons.* ² *These people are hypocrites and liars, and their consciences are dead.*

³ *They will say it is wrong to be married and wrong to eat certain foods. But God created those foods to be eaten with thanks **by faithful people who know the truth.***

“Faithful people who know the truth” are not taken in by these deceptions. There is freedom and safety in knowing and practicing the truth.

We who know and practice the truth may, in turn, use the Word to teach others to do the same.

According to Paul’s letter to Titus (1:1), he had been “*sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives.*”

God’s objective is that we would teach each other and support each other through the learning curve.

We may even use the Word to teach those who oppose it. There is no guarantee that they will heed and turn around, but it is the loving thing to do.

² Timothy 2:25 *Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will learn the truth.*

The Word of the Lord is useful. It shows us the truth. If we accept that truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10), and put that truth into practice by obeying God and loving one another (1 Peter 1:22), then we will be using the Word in the most productive way, and we will be demonstrating His truth by the way we live.

John 18:37 *Pilate said, “So you are a king?”*

Jesus responded, “You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.”

³⁸ *“What is truth?” Pilate asked.*

A man asked three of his friends to tell him the meaning of truth. The psychologist said truth is what one feels it to be. The accountant said truth is what one needs it to be. The lawyer said truth is what one makes it to be.

People today talk about “my truth” and “your truth” as if truth is relative and completely determined by one’s point of view.

Most people have heard of the Betty Ford Center, in Rancho Mirage, California, famous for its clientele of celebrities wanting to kick chemical dependencies. It is named after its founder, Betty Ford, wife of former President Gerald Ford.

Two years after leaving the White House, Betty Ford was confronted by her family about her alcoholism and her addiction to prescription pain killers. Her son said, “Mother, you are destroying yourself. You are destroying this family, and you are killing yourself. Mother, you are a drunk, you are an addict.” She was infuriated. She told her son that he was being very disrespectful. “How can you say these things to me? I am your mother!” He responded, “I can say it because it is the truth.”

This was the catalyst for her own recovery and the establishment of the clinic.

The truth isn't always pretty; the truth isn't always painless; the truth isn't always welcome. But the truth is real and lasting, and that's what it takes to make changes and bring freedom.

¹ John 3:18 *Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; **let us show the truth by our actions.*** ¹⁹ *Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.*

Herein lies our confidence in life (and in death). Those who know the truth, as it is in Jesus, and show the truth by their actions, can shake their fears of living and of dying. Here again is the freedom of which Jesus spoke, a freedom that is rooted in the Word of God.

God has given you His Word. Make it useful. Use it to learn the truth. Use it to teach the truth.