

Inspired

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

What does it mean to be inspired? That's what I thought as I stared at the blank computer screen, watching the cursor blink, waiting for inspiration to come. Often, when we talk about being inspired, we talk about the arts. We say that a performance was inspired, that everything came together and worked in a new way. We talk about inspiration striking and something new and special being created. Sometimes we say it because there was something that makes us feel inspired, that it lifted our spirits. The key as we think about the Bible as inspired isn't quite in that way.

Years ago, a missionary in Togo was working to translate the Bible into one of the languages there. But he was stuck on how to translate the Holy Spirit. He knew the word for spirit, and he knew the word for holy, and he thought that he could just put those two words together and be done. But those helping him with the translation told him that the word for spirit was used to refer to the spirits in rocks and trees and people, and would either make the people afraid or let them think they could control it. Finally, after describing the Holy Spirit as wind and breath as well, they decided to translate Holy Spirit as God's good breath. It described who the Holy Spirit is and how the Holy Spirit works.

That's really what inspired means. God-breathed. What does God-breathed mean? Here's what we know from elsewhere in Scripture:

- To Jeremiah, God said: "Write all the words that I have spoken to you in a book." (Jeremiah 36:2).
- David wrote, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me and His word was in my tongue." (2 Samuel 23:2)

- Peter tells us that the holy men of God spoke "as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)
- Paul informs us that the things that he taught were expressed in words "which the Holy Spirit teaches." (1 Corinthians 2:13)

God spoke in different ways at different times to the writers of the Bible. But they weren't just robots spouting off words. They knew what they were doing. Each writer used his own mental powers, arranged by his thoughts and arguments, chose his words, constructed his sentences, and retained his own style, and it was all directed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit employed different types of men as His scribes—kings and peasants, fishermen and scholars, priests and prophets—using their unique abilities, learning, and writing styles. The Bible teaches the fact of its inspiration, but not the "how," and there is nothing in the realm of human experience that can fully explain the inspiration of Scripture to us. These are God's words, breathed into the lives of some great men of the faith through the Holy Spirit and recorded in their own styles for our benefit so we can hear God's voice as often as we need.

That's what Paul is reminding Timothy of in this passage. Towards the end of his life, as he's in prison again, Paul is reminding Timothy of how he can keep going. Paul is reminding Timothy of what he can trust and rely on. And that is Scripture, the word of God. The word of God that has been God-breathed, and is God-breathed. The Word of God taught to Timothy from his youth, that he still needs to hear.

But that inspiration, the fact that it's God-breathed, isn't just something that matters in the past, in how the Scriptures came to be. As NT

Wright wrote, "The early Christians believed (and this passage [from 2 Timothy 3] is one of the strong signs of this) the reason the Scriptures were alive was because God had 'breathed' them in the first place, and the warmth and life of His creative breath was still present and powerful."

The Word and the Spirit go together. The Spirit, the breath of God, illumines and makes alive through the Word of God; both written and read, preached and heard. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers through the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1). The Spirit presently speaks or breathes the Word of God which is Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

The amazing truth about the Bible is that it is God's Word, His very words to us. So many people clamor, "I want to hear God's voice" in this world, yet the very place where we can be assured to hear from God is His Word. 90% of Americans have at least one copy of the Bible in their homes, but only 11% read the Bible daily. The Bible is the place where we can hear from God every day. Yet too often we ignore it.

Why is the Bible useful for teaching? As we open the Bible, we connect to the One that created us. As we connect to Him, our identity as redeemed, forgiven, and chosen sons and daughters of the King becomes more real. When that becomes our primary identity, we live to make a difference in this world. That's not only what you and I need more of. That's what the world needs more of, too.

What does the Bible teach you? If this is God's Word, what does God want you to know? All Scripture. Not a piece of it. Or a part of it. Or one of the two testaments. All of it. If I wanted to make sure you got it all, if I read it from

front to back, Genesis to Revelation, out loud, so you can learn it all, how long would that take? I looked it up, and it would take about 75 and a half hours to do that. That'd be a good and noteworthy way to spend the next 3+ days, right?

So, clearly, we can't do that today, but what can we do? We can attempt to answer what the Bible wants you to know...but I do believe it's All Scripture. It's the whole thing. You run into the most extraordinary love story ever written when you read the entire thing.

Martin Luther once said, "There is not a word in the Bible which can be understood without reference to the cross." These are the very words of God written for us. In His book, you find the amazing story of us being saved from sin through Jesus' death on the cross. It's the only true story to discover where you came from, what you are called to do right now, and finally, how, in Christ, all things end well for those who believe and receive this book to be the truth and God's Word.

God loves you so much that not only did He create you for His good pleasure, but when we, His most prized possession, abandoned Him and turned our backs toward Him through our sin, He went to the most incredible lengths to rescue us. He went all the way from His throne room in heaven to take on a humble, obedient, servant posture, willing to die a humiliating and excruciating death on a cross. But because our God is powerful, He wouldn't stay dead. Three days later, when He rose from the dead, He fully paid for your sin. Not only this, but this same God fills you today with the Holy Spirit so that you can live with meaning and purpose and help usher in God's Kingdom now. While it certainly can't be fully realized now, we can get glimpses, and you can be a part of bringing

glimpses...because you are, after all, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

That's what Paul reminds Timothy of, and reminds us of. All Scripture is God-breathed for a purpose. "So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Bible's purpose is not to teach, rebuke, correct, and train us so that it would help us maximize this world or so that we would live a long, happy, and healthy life...it's so that you and I, servants of God, are equipped for every good work. This book, the Bible, is more than words and stories to hear, know, and believe. When rightly translated and read, it is meant to produce a faith that is followed by good works. God's Word works.

So, how does the Bible equip you for good works? The reality is that everybody learns. We are learners. Constantly. Whether we try to be or not. So, it's not a question of if you will learn. You learn every day. But, is what you are learning useful for equipping you to do God's work in this world?

So, how is the Bible useful for my life? How does it equip me for good works? Think about it. It's all in that first line. All Scripture is God-breathed. More than ever today, Americans are struggling with their identity. And when you struggle with identity, you also struggle with purpose. The reason we aren't as connected to our purpose is that we aren't as connected to our Creator.

The Bible is about how we connect to our God, ultimately find our identity, and live purposefully in this world because it is God-breathed.

Every temptation still begins with a question: "Did God really say?" But we have an ever more sure Word, the incarnate Word of God,

God made flesh in the man Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Bible says Christ came into the world to save sinners, fallen losers like you and me. So, what does God really say? He says whatever is written in his Holy Word, ever single jot and tittle of the Old and New Testaments. For the Word of God is living and active, God-breathed, inspired, and inerrant. And in that Word, God says, above all, that he loves you! God says that Jesus died on the cross for your sins. God says your sins are forgiven! God says you have eternal life! God says you are his baptized child, and he will never let you go, no matter how far you run or how hard you try to hide. God says! And that's inspiring.

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