

THINKING CHRISTIANLY

by Ray C. Stedman

The question being addressed by the Apostle Paul throughout his second letter to Timothy is, "How can a Christian survive during stressful and pressure-filled times? In a world gone insane with hate and passion, amidst a race that is destroying itself with moral filth and shameless self-indulgence, in a church which 'maintains the form of religion but denies the power thereof,' how can a Christian maintain his integrity against the current of the day?" When these times of stress -- which the apostle describes so eloquently in the opening words of Chapter 3 of the letter -- come upon us with their pressuring, smothering, overwhelming push to sweep away our faith and destroy all that we believe in, what are we to do?

Paul's answer is two-fold:

First, he says, "Do what I have done. All through my ministry I came up against those kinds of pressures." What the apostle did is quite evident:

1. "Continue teaching the truth," he says; then,
2. "Live righteously in action and attitude by the power of the God who indwells you"; and
3. Third, "Trust the Lord Jesus. The battle is the Lord's, not ours."

The second part of Paul's answer, "Saturate your mind with the Scriptures. Let your thinking be controlled by the Word of God" -- is what we will be looking at today. Here are the apostle's words:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:14-16 {RSV})

The emphasis of that passage upon the written Word of God is inescapable. It is impossible to follow the model we looked at last week unless we also do what the apostle tells us to do here, which is, saturate our thinking with the word and the thoughts of God. We evangelicals have often been accused of being Bible worshippers. Some have accused us of having a "paper Pope," i.e., settling everything by the Word of God and indulging in bibliolatry, the worship of the Book itself. But that is far from the truth. We do revere the truth that the Book teaches us, and we honor the channel through which it comes, but we worship only the God whom the Book reveals. We ought to take to heart John Wesley's great word about the Bible:

I am a creature of a day. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God. I want to know one thing: the way to Heaven. God himself has condescended to teach me in that way: He has written it down in a Book. O, give me that Book. At any price give me the Book of God. Let me be a man of one Book.

That summarizes beautifully the Christian view of the Scriptures. The Bible is the Book which points the way to God, which opens the mind of God to us and thus enables us to think God's thoughts after him.

In the passage before us the apostle outlines, first, the process by which the Scriptures lay hold of our minds. He says to Timothy, "Continue in what you have learned." That is the first thing to do with the Bible -- learn what it says. Timothy had only the Old Testament, and, perhaps, just a few of the books which we call the Old Testament. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark might have been circulating then. He probably had most of the letters of Paul, because this is the last of them. Timothy was with him when he wrote some of those, so he

likely preserved them for his own reading. But he had the written Word of God; and Paul commends him here that he has learned what it had to say.

That requires repeated reading. You cannot learn what the Bible has to say by reading it through once. There must be repeated, perhaps even daily, exposure to the written Word of God. The case for Bible reading is very simple put: There is no other way by which you can be exposed to the thinking of God except by reading the Word of God. The Bible is not in tune with secular philosophy. It is different than all the other books in the world because it is a compendium of the thoughts of God about human life. God is the ultimate realist. In the Bible he has condescended to give us his thoughts on everything about ourselves, about the world in which we live, the times that come upon us, about the morals and ethics of our behavior.

The Bible exposes us to what Paul calls in First Corinthians, "The secret and hidden wisdom of God, ... [which] none of the rulers of this age understand; for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory," {cf, 1 Cor 2:7-8 RSV}. Think of that. If the leaders of thought of the Lord's day had understood the thoughts of God they would not have made the terrible mistake of putting to death the One who is truth himself. Because the world does not know what is in this Book, it makes abominable mistakes. That is why it is so important that you expose yourselves to the Word of God.

I want to point out two things that this will do for you:

First, it will drastically alter your own thinking. You cannot read this Book without being changed. You will think differently about yourself and others; you will regard your husband, or your wife, and your children in a totally different way. You will regard the frantic pursuit of wealth and pleasure, which the world goes in for, in a different light. You will make decisions on a totally different basis.

This Book will drastically alter the way you behave. I could tell you stories by the hour of how individuals started to read the Bible and had their whole outlook changed, sometimes within a short time.

There is, for instance, the true story of the mutiny on the *Bounty*. A group of British sailors on the ship H.M.S. *Bounty* mutinied in the early part of the nineteenth century, seized the ship and fled to the island of Pitcairn in the South Pacific. There they hid from British justice for many years. But they were such a community of cut-throats that their life there was desperate and dangerous. They were so debauched and degraded that they started killing each other off, until it looked as though their colony would only last a few years before it would be destroyed by their own debauchery.

Then one of the mutineers, Alexander Smith, found a Bible which his mother had placed in his trunk. He began to read it, and soon his own life was changed as he came to know the Lord through the Book. He taught it to the others and rather quickly life on the island took on a wholly different cast. When the mutineers were discovered, they were found to have an almost ideal community. There was no jail because there was no crime. They were godly people, every family among them transformed by the power of the Word of God.

That is the amazing quality of this Book. There is no other book in all of history that has that kind of a record. When you start reading your Bible you will find your thinking changed. You will be enabled to live realistically, to adjust to reality, to detect the confusions and the illusions of the world around and to correct the things that are destroying humanity.

The truth of the Bible leads to life, not death. Anybody who believes that truth, and acts on it, will become enriched. Life becomes peaceful, calm, and joyful even in the midst of trouble. The Bible invariably imparts an inner strengthening to those who live by it, as we read in the well-known passage from Proverbs:

**My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion;
let them not escape from your sight,
and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.
Then you will walk on your way securely
and your foot will not stumble.**

**If you sit down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden panic,
or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from being caught. (Prov 3:21-26 {RSV})**

That is part of the heritage of those who learn to understand and read the Bible. That will take some time. You cannot understand the Bible by putting it on the coffee table. Even putting it under your pillow will not work -- it does not soak into the mind that way. You have to open it and read it.

Let me suggest what may perhaps be the most helpful thing in making that possible -- turn off the television. Our generation is being robbed of great opportunities to learn the truth of this amazing Book by the continual flood of entertainment offered on television. It is so easy to sit in front of the TV and keep yourself occupied with entertaining ideas and thoughts -- sometimes very boring entertainment too -- when this Book lies ready at hand to open you to realities that will never forsake you. You know, in Glory I do not think we will remember even a single television program, but heaven is built around the precepts and principles reflected in this Book, and it will go on for all eternity. So I want to urge you to read the Bible, and read books that explain the Bible. Fill your mind with the Scripture. That will steady you in the times of stress like nothing else will.

Then the apostle points out a second thing. Not only did Timothy learn these things, he believed them. Paul says,

... continue in what you have learned and have fully believed, {2 Tim 3:14b RSV}

Timothy acted upon what he had learned. You do not really believe something until you practice it. James says, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves," (Jas 1:22 {RSV}). It does not do a bit of good to say you believe the Bible from cover to cover, like some people do. (I don't do that -- I have some trouble with the maps in the back!) Do what it says. Practice the truth, act on it, take it to heart. The process begins with the mind being instructed, then the heart being fully convinced, then you practice what you believe.

I do not know what it was that may have helped Timothy, but I am sure that when he read a statement like, "Lie not one to another" {cf, Col 3:9}, he was careful to watch his words and stop lying, if that was what he was doing. When he read, "Bless those who persecute you" {Rom 12:14a RSV}, he realized that even though he, like everyone else, felt anger rising within him and he wanted to strike back when he was mistreated, that was the wrong thing to do. The Word of God taught that it was necessary for him to lean on the grace of God, to pray for people and find a way to do something good rather than evil in return. When he read, "Freely you have received, freely give" {Matt 10:8b KJV}, he was encouraged to be generous, to help others with what he himself had been blessed with instead of holding it to himself. When he read, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" {1 Jn 2:15a KJV}, he knew that it was time he stopped pursuing all the pleasure -- mad things which others were pursuing, to give himself to being available to meet the needs of others and to teach the Word of truth. Thus he believed, he put into practice, what he was taught.

The apostle suggests two factors here which helped Timothy believe the Scriptures:

First, the Scriptures came to him, Paul says, through certain loved and trusted people "Knowing from whom you learned it," Paul says. One of the things that makes believing the Bible much easier is when it comes to us through people we trust. In Timothy's case, his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois were the channels by which he was taught the Word of God.

Being of Jewish background, I am sure they followed the exhortation of Deuteronomy 6, where Moses taught the people how to teach their children. Moses did not say to have a classroom in the home where children learn something by rote. Rather, he said, teach them

- ❑ When they rise up (when they get up in the morning),
- ❑ When they sit down (at mealtime), and
- ❑ When they go to bed at night.

Those are the teachable moments. Reflect out of the experiences of their day truth from the Scriptures that will lock itself into the hearts of young children. What a powerful impact this mighty apostle made upon Timothy! He never forgot what he had learned because it came through one whom he deeply respected, one whom he saw had answers to the difficulties and problems of life.

The second factor is that this came to Timothy at a very early age. "From childhood you have learned this," Paul says. Parents should not miss that emphasis. It indicates that childhood is a wonderful time to get the truth of the Scriptures into a young person's heart.

As a young boy, 10 or 11 years old, I was given many memory verses in Sunday School and Daily Vacation Bible School which I had committed to memory. I remember those verses yet today. A child's mind is easily impressed, not only with Christian truth, but with all kinds of truth. When I was a freshman in high school, I memorized the Preface to Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" in the original Old English. I can still say it. I am not going to bore you with it this morning, but I can bring it up any time I want to. (Although I have not found many occasions when Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" seemed to exactly fit.) But it is there when I want it, and so are the memory verses which I committed to heart as a young boy. I grant you they are in the King James Version, so I have to clean them up sometimes to get the thee's, thou's, hath's and hath not's out of them. They are hard to say and people have a hard time understanding them. I wish somebody had had me memorize verses from an RSV -- a Ray Stedman Version! Unfortunately I had to work with the King James. But the truth was there; that is the point. What a wonderful thing to have learned from early childhood the truth of the Word of God through those most precious and trusted.

The third thing the apostle comments on is the result of learning and believing the Scriptures. Notice what he says (Verse 15):

... and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. {2 Tim 3:15 RSV}

The effect of the Scriptures is to save us, to transform us, to keep us from the downhill slide that is evident in every life not in touch with the Word of God. I do not think there is a person in this congregation this morning who, looking back upon his life, is not aware of the fact that all his dreams, ideals, and hopes were not realized until he began to walk according to the light of the Word of God. Everybody starts out life with certain hopes, dreams, and ideals, but unless he has the guiding of the Scriptures, inevitably he will find himself not moving toward, but away from the high ideals with which he began. That is the certain fate of those who do not have the guideline of Scripture. But Timothy had, and it was transforming him, delivering him, saving him.

It was not, of course, the Scripture that saved him. The Bible itself does not save anybody, but the Scriptures are able to bring us to faith in Christ Jesus. He is the one who saves us. The Jesus who saves is the Jesus who is revealed only in the Bible. The only way we can come to know this Redeemer, this Savior of men, this One who can deliver us from the bondage of our own selfishness, is revealed in the pages of the Scriptures. That is the uniqueness of the Bible. In it you will find revealed a Person, and he will become even more real to you than the Book itself. That is the wonder and the glory of the Scriptures.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, for years pastor of the great Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, used to illustrate in this fashion the way some people approach the Bible. He would tell of imagining himself renting a room in a resort hotel in which there was a window which looked out on the beauty and the vast expanse of the ocean. He would imagine himself sitting in that room, writing a letter to a friend who had never seen the ocean, and saying,

My room looks out through a window onto the ocean. Let me describe it to you The window is about 4 feet high and 6 feet wide, and it is covered by a pane of glass which is exactly 3/8" thick. I have taken some parings and scrapings of that glass and had them analyzed, and find that it is a very fine grade of glass, the best you can buy. In fact, I am attaching to this letter a research article on the kind of glass this is, where it is produced, what kind of sand it is made from, the process by which it is manufactured, and how it is finely spread out in open form and put in a window like this. I find that the window is locked into place by a

substance that is called putty. It is a most unusual substance. It is very pliable at first, then it gets harder as it is allowed to dry. It is made of a strange chemical substance, and I have attached to this letter a series of research papers done on putty. If you read it through, you will understand the high quality and high grade of this putty. I have also attached a series of studies on the art of putting glass into windows, and the kind of training it takes to be a window installer, etc., etc., etc.

The folly of all that talk about the window, of course, is that nothing is said about what he could see through the window.

Many people study the Bible that way. They focus on all the details of the Book and fail to see the One whom the Book reveals. They fail to look through the window to the great ocean of Jesus Christ himself, the Son of the Living God, the Savior of men. They fail to understand who he is, that he has come to dwell within us, to fill us, to strengthen us, and to deliver us, to forgive us and guide us through life, that all power in heaven and earth is given unto him. There is no point in reading the Bible unless you see whom it points to. "I know," Paul says in Chapter 1 of this letter {Verse 12}, "whom I have believed" -- not what I have believed. The glory of this Book is that it brings us face to face with Jesus Christ himself.

How did the Bible develop this amazing quality? Paul's answer is in one remarkable phrase: He says, "All scripture is inspired by God." Unfortunately, the word *inspired* is exactly the reverse of the word that should be there. Inspired comes from a Latin word, *spiro* means to breathe, and *in* means "in," so it means "to breathe in." But that is exactly what God did not do with the Bible. He did not breathe it in. He breathed it out. The Greek word means, "breathed out from God." What we ought to say is "All scripture is outspired by God" -- breathed out from him. Peter says virtually the same thing: "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Spirit of God," {cf, 2 Pet 1:21 KJV}. Genesis tells us that God created man by heaping up a pile of dirt and breathing into it, out from himself, the spirit of life, and man became a living being. The wonder of this Book is that is what God did with the words of it.

Many are struggling with this today. They say, "We know how these words came to us. Sinful and fallible men who are just like us wrote them down, so their words are no more trustworthy than ours." The answer to that is in this phrase. Just as God breathed into the dust of the ground and made it be a living, vital person, so he breathed into the words of men the Spirit of vitality and life. So these words have a unique quality about them: Whenever a heart is touched by them it moves toward life. That is the quality of the Word of God.

According to the apostle, that means the Bible can do four things for everyone who reads and believes it:

First, it will teach you: it is "profitable for teaching." The Bible will instruct your mind about things that no one, except God, knows anything about. It will tell you things about yourself, what can happen to you, and what will happen to you, that only God knows.

Everybody wants to know these things. For instance, everyone wants to know what lies beyond death. You will not find a magazine rack today that does not have displayed on the front page of some magazine an article entitled, "New Evidence For Life After Death," or words to that effect. People are hungry to know that lies beyond. They are asking "Is this all there is? Are we just going to fade away and crumble into dust, or is there something beyond?" The human mind has been questing in that area all through history. But there is only one Book that will tell you the answer to that question. It tells about One who came back from the grave and told us what is beyond. He demonstrated in ways that can never be denied, or explained away, that he had returned from death. Thus this Book becomes a reliable guide in areas we know nothing about.

What about angels? This Book will instruct you.

More important than that, it will tell you what is wrong with this crazy mixed-up world of ours. Why do we act the way we do when we know it is wrong? What is this strange power that grips us, this evil tendency that permeates all of our civilization, where we want to destroy one another, to bomb each other out of existence? Why can't we do anything about it?

Why can't we educate it away or legislate it away? This Book will tell you the answers. The Bible has the

power to teach men what they cannot otherwise know.

Second, the Bible has the power to reprove. The word is really *convict*. How many of you have had the experience of reading the Bible and becoming aware that something you had been doing all your life, something you did not think was wrong at all, was the reason why you yourself were hurting or were hurting others? The Bible suddenly made you aware that, in order to be free, you had to change, you had to commit yourself to a different direction. That is called *conviction*. The Bible has tremendous power to point out to people the areas of wrongdoing in their lives.

But more than that, the Bible never does that without setting you on the right path, correcting you and making you walk in ways that lead to life. The amazing testimony of this Book is that, when taken seriously, it leads people to freedom and to life; while those who follow the principles and practices that this Book warns about are always led to degradation, to enslavement, to a narrowing and limiting of the joys and the beauties of existence. That is a marvelous record that is universally true.

Finally, the Bible is for "training in righteousness." That phrase suggests that the Bible has the power to finely tune you, like a skillful coach, to enable you to walk day by day in a more righteous way; and righteousness always leads to peace. So the Bible is able to train us, to lead us along into ever-expanding experiences of righteous living.

The one thing that the Bible will make you is described in the closing words,

... that the man of God [that includes women as well] may be complete ["perfect" is the idea], fully equipped for every good work. {2 Tim 3:16 RSV}

In other words, this Book is sufficient to do this. It does not need psychology, or philosophy; it does not need special higher education. Although these things are proper in themselves, and can supplement in many ways some of the things the Bible teaches, they can never replace it.

The Bible does not need any of that in order to produce a man or woman who is "whole"; that is the word. The world is constantly looking for the secret of wholeness. Everyone wants to be a "whole" person, healed of all his inner conflicts, able to cope, able to handle life. That is exactly what this Book is provided for. It is the Book that goes with man. It is the instruction Book that will work out all your kinks and quirks, and enable you to be a whole person as God intended you to be, through faith in the Lord Jesus whom the Book reveals.

I do not know anything more exciting than this Book. I have been studying it for over 40 years, but I never pick it up without a sense of excitement that I am going to see something fresh and new in this amazing Book which never gets old. So I commend to you the reading of the Bible. If your mind and heart are saturated by the wisdom of this Book, it will steady you, and hold you through any time of crisis as it brings you into daily contact with the Lord of the Book.

Dr. Emile Caillet, who died last year, was for many years a professor at Princeton Seminary. In his youth he was a total unbeliever. In fact, he vehemently opposed any kind of faith. He fought in the French Army in World War I, and the terrible pain of human life and death around him confirmed his conviction that there was nothing in religion that could satisfy men. But he longed to have something that would help him in times of difficulty, so he compiled a notebook which he called, "The Book That Would Understand Me." Whenever he ran across a quotation that struck fire in his mind he would copy it down in his book. Still a young man when the war was ended, he sat down one day to read the collection that he had put together. As he read it, his heart sank. He saw that since it came from himself, it had no power to minister to him in times of pressure and stress; it seemed flat and empty.

About that time a remarkable thing occurred. Purely by accident, one day his wife wandered into a courtyard she had never seen before. She realized she was in a Huguenot church, and she saw an old man sitting at a table. For some reason, unknown to her, she walked up to him and asked, "Do you have any Bibles in French?" Without a word, the man picked up a Bible from the table and handed it to her. She was afraid to give it to her husband because he had ordered that religion not even be mentioned in their house, but she finally

told him of this unusual experience. He said, "Give me the Bible. Let me read it."

For the first time in his life he began to read the Bible. He started in the Gospels, which fascinated him. For many hours he read through several of the books of the Bible. Finally he put it down, and, bowing his head, he said, "At last I have found the Book that understands me." He opened his heart to the Lord and became a Christian. Ultimately he became a professor in a seminary. He bore testimony to his dying day that he never varied from that view of the Bible: "This is the Book that understands me."

That is the testimony of many.

I trust that this passage will encourage us to discover this Book.

As I travel around America, and around the world, I am troubled that, in church after church today, the congregation is biblically illiterate. They are evangelical churches, but they do not know the Bible; they do not know the great truths of Scripture; they have never realized the radical counterculture movement that this Book represents. As a consequence they are drifting down the broad way that leads to perdition, along with all the rest who do not believe the Book at all, because they know nothing about it.

I hope and pray that this congregation will not be that way, that we will be men and women who cry out, like John Wesley, "O give me that Book. Above all else let me have the Book of God."

The glory of this Book is that it can instruct the mind, touch the heart, and lead us unto full salvation.

Prayer

Our Father, we thank you for this amazing Book. We hold it in our hands, we have it in our homes, but we confess to you how infrequently we open it up and let it speak to us. Help us to cease those practices, to turn off our televisions and our radios and let this Book minister to our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; that we may know him before whom one day this whole world will stand, and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. We ask in his name, Amen.

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