

## Revering God's Word

### 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5; Hebrews 4:12-13

**Main Point: The true test of our reverence for God's Word is whether or not we do what it says.**

#### Introduction

*(As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.)*

According to a study by LifeWay Research, the number one predictor of spiritual maturity is reading the Bible on a daily basis. In other words, reading and studying the Bible are the activities that have the most impact on spiritual growth. But the study found that only 19 percent of churchgoers read the Bible daily. "While the majority of churchgoers desire to honor Christ with their lives and even profess to think on biblical truths, . . . few actually engage in personal reading and studying of the Scriptures." (See the article, "Study: Most churchgoers don't read Bible daily," posted on [www.bpnews.net](http://www.bpnews.net) September 6, 2012.)

Researchers George Gallup and Jim Castelli concluded that "Americans revere the Bible—but, by and large, they don't read it. ("Why Johnny Can't Read the Bible," Collin Hansen, Christianity Today online, posted 5/24/2010)

- What is your reaction to these research results? Do they surprise you? Why or why not?

- What are some reasons people don't read and study the Bible?

Opinions about the Bible vary widely. Many people view the Bible as an antiquated book and dismiss it. Some see it as an inspiring book but reject the notion of its being divinely inspired and uniquely authoritative. Others hold a high view of the Bible but allow it to have little authority and influence over their lives. We can say we believe in the authority of Scripture, but the true test of that belief is whether or not we do what it says.

#### Understanding

*(Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.)*

Have a volunteer Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

- What similarities do you see between the context of Timothy and the world today?
- What did Paul challenge Timothy to do to face false teachings? Why would an understanding of the nature of Scripture be important for Timothy to combat these teachings?
- What role did Timothy's background play in his commitment to Scripture? How does that inform the way we should treat Scripture in our homes?
- Of the characteristics mentioned regarding Scripture, which is most meaningful to you? Why?
- Why do we need to see the Bible as profitable in all these ways?

God didn't breathe on the Scriptures after men wrote them, but God breathed out the Scriptures. God breathed out of His own mind through chosen men to give us the words we need to know the truth. No other document exists that is God-breathed. This is the reason we approach the Bible with complete trust and confidence.

- Based on this passage, why is Bible study not an option but an essential practice for the Christian life?

Have a Volunteer Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

Imagine how absolutely impossible it would be to drive if everybody decided individually what the standards would be. One group drives on the right-hand side of the street while others prefer the left. One person thinks 50 miles an hour is fast enough, but the car behind is convinced the minimum speed should be 80. What would be the result?

- What are some other examples of people setting their own standard of truth?

In the remainder of verse 2, Paul pointed out how Timothy was to do this. He was to persist in it "in season and out of season." This phrase may also be translated "whether it's convenient or not" (HCSB). The Holman New Testament Commentary explains: "As believers, we need to speak up for the truth of God not only when the situation seems convenient or when we are 'on duty,' but when it is inconvenient. We must live the faith and be available as witnesses to the truth all the time."

- Is this command for pastors only? Why or why not?
- What types of things keep Christians from boldly proclaiming the message of the gospel?

Have a volunteer read Hebrews 4:12-13.

- What similarities do you see in this passage and the passage from 2 Timothy 3?
- How is the Word living and active?
- How is it sharp like a two-edged sword? What is an example from your life when you've experienced the Bible like this?

Regular Bible study is more important than most people realize. Persons who take part regularly in Bible study receive much more than knowledge and insight. They receive the revealing, probing light of God's truth. We must not only read and study the Word of God; we must also let it shape our lives.

### **Application**

*(Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.)*

- How can you enhance your study of Scripture this week? What is something new you can incorporate into your time with God in His Word?
- Should our group consider starting a Bible reading plan together?
- Is there something in your life right now that is not in line with the teaching of God's Word? What do you need to do in order to change that?
- What opportunity might you have this week to proclaim God's Word to someone who needs it?

### **Pray**

Close in prayer, asking God to increase our appetite for His Word. Pray that our group will be better students of God's Word, not just to increase our knowledge but to conform us to His image. Also pray that we will have the boldness to share the Word with other people in our lives.

### **Commentary**

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Verses 14-15. Paul encouraged Timothy to continue in or hold on to what he had learned. The term "continue" is the same term translated "hold to" or "remain" in John 8:31; 15:5-6. It demands more than merely continuing in orthodoxy. It called for a commitment to live and abide in what Timothy had learned.

A primary purpose of the Scriptures is to help us receive salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (v. 15). The Scriptures themselves do not provide salvation, but they point to the Savior who can provide it. The early Christians realized that the Old Testament pointed to Jesus. Philip explained a passage from Isaiah to the Ethiopian as a prophecy about Jesus (Acts 8:30-35). Jesus told the Jews that their Scriptures testified about Him, but they had failed to recognize Him (John 5:39-40).

Verses 16-17. The Bible is God-breathed or inspired by God. Paul did not discount the role of human instruments in producing these books (see 2 Pet. 1:21), but God's role was primary. Inspiration is defined as "the act of God by which He superintended/guided the human authors of the 66 books of the Bible so that using their own individual personalities they composed and recorded without error, His revelation to man in the words of the original." (Daniel Akin, Christian Theology: An Overview)

Paul identified several ways the Bible is useful or profitable for believers. "Teaching" refers to the Bible as the basis of sound doctrine. Because of the prominence of heresy among his readers, Paul emphasized the importance of sound teaching. "Reproof" may refer to both exposing the errors of false teachers (doctrinal) and also showing someone the error of his or her ways (personal). Either way, the Bible shows us our wrongs and leads us to forgiveness and peace. "Correction" suggests that God's Word helps people restore their doctrine or practice to a right state they had forfeited. "Training in righteousness" means the Scriptures act as a disciplinarian that leads people to a holy lifestyle. If Timothy would nurture his life in the Scriptures, he would be complete and equipped for every good work. He would be both prepared and qualified for every task God assigned him.

The Greek word rendered "competent" (v. 17) has the sense of being capable, proficient, or able to meet all the demands placed upon a person. In the Bible it carries the force of a person who, through diligent study of Scripture, has progressed spiritually to being able not only to discern the will of God but also to abide in it consistently. As a result, the complete Christian is fully engaged, either as layperson or leader, in serving God. Whatever God calls complete Christians to do, they are ready to follow God's commands because of their dedication to the study of the Word and their obedience to God's teaching.

## 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Verses 1-2. Paul began by noting the presence of God and of Christ Jesus. Paul did present these instructions as casual advice. He wanted Timothy to take these teachings seriously. Thus Paul stressed Jesus' role as judge and identified his message to Timothy as a charge.

In verse 2 are five verbs that detail what Paul wanted Timothy to do. The first is proclaim the message, which is the basis of the other four actions. Timothy's central function as

Christ's minister was to preach the gospel. Believers can help others avoid being misled into false teachings by persistently finding ways to declare God's truth to them.

By using the phrase "in season and out of season" Paul may have been emphasizing that Timothy should stay with the task whether or not he felt like it. Paul also may have meant that Timothy should continue to teach God's Word whether or not his hearers felt it a convenient time to listen.

The ESV Study Bible notes that "reprove, rebuke, and exhort means the communicating of all that Scripture includes—doctrine, instruction, correction, and encouragement."

Verses 3-5. In these two verses we get a good look at the kinds of problems Timothy faced and the reasons he was discouraged.

The itch to hear something new is not a modern phenomenon. Paul anticipated a time when people would not be receptive to God's message. Rather than listening to sound doctrine, they would find teachers who would say what they wanted to hear. Such an audience would have itching ears. In other words, they would desire teaching merely to satisfy their curiosity rather than to strengthen their faith.

Paul did not sugarcoat his instructions to Timothy. Life as a minister was difficult. Timothy would need to keep his head in all situations. He must be prepared to face hardship. Paul described Timothy as an evangelist, meaning that he proclaimed the good news about Jesus. Every Christian has the responsibility to share the good news of the gospel.

Hebrews 4:12-13

Verse 12. In the larger context of this passage (3:7–4:13), the writer is warning against neglecting God's word by failing to obey Him. He used the example of the exodus generation of Israelites. They refused to believe and obey God and therefore not were not permitted to enter the promised land (3:18; 4:6). We must be faithful to hear and obey God's word. The consequence of disobeying God's word is judgment.

In the Greek text "living" is the first word in verse 12, making it emphatic. The living God speaks His living word. God's word is not confined to a distant past but comes to us now with freshness, power, and clarity. That word is effective or energetic, powerful. His Word causes things to happen.

Additionally, the word of God is active, an emphasis virtually identical in meaning with the term living. God's Word is not something we passively hear and then ignore. It actively works in our lives, changes us, and sends us into action.

What did the writer mean by God's word being a sharp two-edged sword that pierces into the depths of people's beings? One view is that he meant the word's thoroughness. The living word permeates every aspect of a person's being. It affects the whole person. A second view is that the sharp sword penetrates and divides the whole person similar to the way a surgeon's scalpel lays bare the organs inside a person. This view emphasizes judgment. God's word judges the ideas and thoughts of the heart. It reaches into the center of a person's being and correctly perceives motives and intentions.

In light of verses 12-13, the latter interpretation seems to be the writer's meaning. He well may have meant that God's word lay bare in the Hebrew believers any faithlessness, disobedience, and indifference or complacency in advancing toward spiritual maturity.

Verse 13. The activity of God's Word is an extension of the activity of God Himself. The word of God exposes our innermost thoughts and intentions. The Greek word translated "exposed" literally means "to grip the neck," "to bend the neck back" to make bare the throat. We get the English nouns trachea and tracheotomy from the Greek verb. The term was used of wrestlers who seized opponents' necks and bent their heads back, exposing their throats. Basically, the word means "to lay bare to view." It conveys the idea of uncovering something. Here the term emphasizes that God's sovereign power brings a person's whole being into full view in God's eyes. Those who dare to examine their lives in the light of God's Word discover their true moral and spiritual condition.