

# Bible Sunday

## Sermon



**‘All Scripture is breathed out by  
God and profitable for teaching,  
for reproof, for correction, and  
for training in righteousness’  
2 Timothy 3.16 (ESV)**

## 2 Timothy 3.14-4.5 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup>and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. <sup>1</sup>I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup>preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup>For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup>and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. <sup>5</sup>As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.

This sermon has been written by Krish Kandiah. He's a supporter of Bible Society and works with us as well as being Director of the charity Home for Good, an academic, author, columnist, national and international speaker. For each point he makes, Krish has included a personal story, written in *italics*. Feel free to quote Krish in each instance, replace it with your own story to illustrate the point, omit it or a mixture these. There is also information about how Bible Society illustrates each point which is written in bold and grey. We'd like you to include these but if there is limited time, they too can be omitted if necessary. All references are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

### Introduction

The final phone calls made from those on board the hijacked flights on 11 September 2001 make harrowing listening. Some are from flight attendants asking for help from their airlines' bosses. Some are from passengers desperately trying to get information, or explaining how they are going to mount some kind of resistance. But above all, they are deeply touching – an attempt to pass on love and reassurance. In the face of death, it seems that letting our loved ones know how much we care for them is a high priority.

I wonder who you would call if you knew death was coming?

Who would you send your last letter to? And what would you write?

The apostle Paul had to make that same decision. Aware of his impending execution, the great apostle, in yet another prison cell, picks up his pen to write one last letter. He does not write to the authorities to beg for his release, or to churches asking them to pray and protest. Paul has more urgent priorities than his own survival. Paul writes to Timothy, a young church leader he has been mentoring, and his letter is full of love, of hope and vision too. The whole letter is worth reading and savouring as it sets a standard for Christian relationships. In Paul's last words we get to see his first principles. But today we are homing in on the main thrust of Paul's argument, the pinnacle to which his letter has been building. The letter is directed at young Timothy, but Paul has in mind the future of the church. Paul calls Timothy to:

- Hold on to the truth that was passed on to him through his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1.5 and 3.14-15)
- Be bold enough to preach faithfully even when doing so will be unpopular (4.2)
- Fulfil every aspect of God's call on his life (4.5).

But these directives to Timothy are for the benefit of all Christians and all of them have to do with the irreplaceable role that the Bible is to have in our lives.



Today [is Bible Sunday and] we celebrate the way that the Holy Scriptures have played an irreplaceable role in the church's worship ever since Jesus commissioned his disciples to take the gospel to the nations. Paul gives us five reasons in this passage to make sure we take the Bible seriously for ourselves and also consider how we make sure it is made available to everyone.

- Scripture makes us wise for salvation (3.15)
- Scripture brings us intimacy with God (3.16)
- Scripture is God's means of our development and growth as Christians (3.16)
- Scripture equips us for every good deed (3.17)
- Scripture keeps us on God's path (4.3-4)

### **1. Scripture makes us wise for salvation (3.15)**

*As a child I remember being inspired by the pearl fishermen who would tie a rock to their feet and descend 18 metres under the surface of the ocean looking for pearls amongst the oyster beds. They would hold their breath unaided and unencumbered by oxygen tanks in search of their precious treasure. For me the bottom of the bath tub was as deep as I could go to figure out how long I could hold my breath for. No matter how hard I tried, I never managed more than 20 seconds before I would emerge gasping for air, surprised that I felt so desperate for something so readily available.*

Today access to the Bible is only a click away on a smart phone. Additionally most of our homes have multiple copies of the Bible in print format and in multiple translations. In the western world we have easy-to-read, easy-to-access versions of the Bible at our fingertips. But because it is so easily available, it is possible that we undervalue it.

Perhaps Timothy was in danger of taking the Bible for granted. Since his childhood, Scripture had always been part of his life. Paul reminds Timothy of his rich and privileged heritage, because he wants to leave a legacy in the life of Timothy and the life of the church that will carry on into the future.

Jesus is the only way that women and men, boys and girls can be reconciled with God. Jesus' death on the cross only makes sense if, as the earliest church proclaimed: 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4.12). Jesus alone is the way that we can be saved from sin and experience life in all its fullness, yet scripture is essential to our salvation because how else will we know about Christ?

Even in his own earthly ministry Jesus was constantly referring to the Old Testament scriptures, quoting them, explaining them, showing how his life, death and resurrection were fulfilling all that the Scriptures foretold (for example: Matthew 5.1 and Luke 24.27). In the same way the earliest church went about preaching scripture (Acts 2). Paul spells out to Timothy that vital to his faith was the sacred writings faithfully passed on to him by his mother and grandmother.

Those of us who are parents or grandparents need to hear the challenge here – just like Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois, we have a part to play in helping our children or grandchildren to know and love Jesus through the scriptures. In fact we all have a responsibility to help those we love to hear and be inspired by the Word of God. It is often said that Christians are the only Bible some people will ever read. We must live, act and pray so that this is not true. We need to excite and inspire people to hear or read the scriptures so that their minds and hearts might be opened to the beauty and wonder of the gospel. Paul in his letter to the Romans makes it very clear: 'So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.' (Romans 10.17).

**Bible Society is keen to help us in this important role. They provide children's Bible story books like The Seriously Surprising Story, all about Jesus revealing the Old Testament to his friends on the road to Emmaus or Open the Book equipping us to share the Bible with school children.**

## **2. Scripture brings us intimacy with God (3.16)**

*These days sorting through the day's post is a tedious chore. Invoices, circulars and catalogues are really nothing to write home about. But 25 years ago, before Facebook, Skype, Instagram or even emails, it was a different story. With the love of my life away on a study abroad programme, I lived for the sound of letters falling onto the hallway's hard flooring. Handwritten on ivory paper, everything about each letter mattered, the content, the punctuation marks, the scent on the envelope, the style of the writing. Without those letters our relationship would not have been kept alive, we would not have lasted the course, and we most likely wouldn't be married today.*

Knowing that God has breathed on Scripture means we should cherish it, value it, hunger for it, devour it. Loving God is the first and greatest commandment and Scripture is an irreplaceable part of loving God, because the more we know God, the more we will love him. Without regularly listening to God through his word, we will not grow in our love and intimacy with him.

All Scripture is breathed out by God (or God breathed). In Paul's day the term scriptures definitely applied to the Old Testament. But then in 2 Peter 3.16 while telling everyone how hard it is to understand Paul's writings, Peter explains 'There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.' Peter refers to Paul's writings as Scripture. That means the same standards of authority and reliability that were taken for granted about the Old Testament are true for the New Testament too. But we miss something important about the nature of Scripture if we just focus on the technicalities of the inspiration of scripture. The fact that all Scripture is God breathed is also a beautiful turn of phrase. God has breathed his spirit of love into the words that have been faithfully preserved, translated and printed for us. Scripture is God's message of love to us that we might know him intensely and intimately.

**For over 200 years, Bible Society has been faithfully translating, printing and distributing the Bible both here and abroad.**



The printing press in China has produced over 100 million Bibles and that is only just scratching the surface of demand for the scripture as people desire intimacy with God.

Does Scripture feel like a dry and dusty book to you or does it captivate you like a long awaited love letter? To rekindle a heart habit of reading and relishing Scripture, perhaps you can take some time this week to revisit parts of the Bible that in the past have been especially meaningful to you. For many people there are Psalms that have a special significance, or perhaps the gospel accounts of Jesus. If regular Bible reading has become difficult, why not revisit these parts of the Bible and as you read them, pray that God would give you a fresh passion for his word?

**If you are struggling to get back into a book, why not try The Bible Book Club on Bible Society's website? For every book of the Bible there are notes to help you get into it, and even a section marked 'anything tricky'.**

### **3. Scripture is God's means of our development and growth as Christians (3.16)**

*I was out shopping for cooking utensils for my son as he set off for university. We ended up at a Swedish furniture store that does a magnificent sideline in cheap domestic products. I couldn't resist the bargain bundle of 7 different essential cooking utensils. I am not sure how as an adult in their mid-forties I have managed to live without some of the utensils that were included in this 'essential' bundle. Somehow it has never crossed my mind to buy myself a pasta server or a potato masher. Perhaps it is because I have a perfectly good large spoon and large fork that have done the job well enough for long enough.*

To be honest, many of us struggle to see the usefulness of much of scripture. Although Paul tells us that 'All Scripture is useful', we have gotten by perfectly well without really utilising the story of Esther, the Old Testament food laws or the book of Jude for our spiritual development. But I would encourage you that unlike whoever decided what would go into the IKEA culinary bundle, the God who collected, superintended and breathed his Spirit into scripture understands us better than we know ourselves, loves us enough that Jesus would die for us and so when he tells us that 'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness', he can be trusted.

*I did not know how important the book of Ruth was in my life until I was sat on the floor of a refugee's shack in the Bekah Valley speaking with a young widow who had to live through tragedy and disaster and was now scraping a living by harvesting grapes for a local farmer. I did not know how useful the Proverbs were to me until I was at university trying to figure out how to make good decisions in a hostile environment. I hadn't grasped how powerful the Psalms were until I was out of my comfort zone, in a workplace bullying situation and wrestling with my mental health. God has inspired the whole of Scripture and all of it is useful. We need to give ourselves to its study, its meditation and its memorisation.*

**As you might imagine, Bible Society has something to help you with that too. The Bible Society app gives you a daily reading, meditation and reflection each and every day of the year.**

#### **4. Scripture equips us for every good deed (3.17)**

*I am pretty sure that my fascination with gadgets was ignited by being taken as a child to see every James Bond film at the cinema by my Dad. There was always the classic scene early on in the movie where Q brings Bond the tools of his trade. A watch with a sonic pulse, a car that can be driven via a smart phone, a pen that has a bomb inside it, radioactive lint that you could place on someone you wanted to track or X-ray glasses. I would make a careful note of each of the gadgets realising that the film would not be over until every one of those gadgets had been deployed in order to save the world.*

Paul wants us to know that scripture is not just useful for our coming to faith, or even just for our growing in faith – he also sees scripture as essential equipment when it comes to serving God in the world. God expects us to do good, and Christians are supposed to make a positive impact in our world demonstrating the mercy, grace and compassion of God to those in need. We will be empowered and equipped to do this through the God-breathed scriptures. Reading the Bible should inspire us to serve God more wholeheartedly but it should also equip us to serve with wisdom and humility. The more you serve in the world, the more you realise the wisdom of scripture. The more you read scripture the more you are motivated to serve in the world. It is a virtuous circle.

**Pastor Liu in China has been receiving training aided by Bible Society, helping him to teach his congregations for many years. He ministers to over 6,500 Christians, due to a lack of theologically trained ministers. His testimony of scripture equipping him to serve his church inspires and challenges us at the same time.**

#### **5. Scripture keeps us on God's path (4.3-4)**

*It was such a thick fog and it had descended so quickly. I was crawling along the motorway with my fog lights on and making slow progress. I felt claustrophobic and lost, but knew I couldn't just stop and wait it out. I had to keep going. The lines demarking the lanes suddenly became a lifeline. They showed me each metre of the road one at a time, helping me navigate the bends, avoid collisions, and – eventually – to get to my destination.*

Paul is spending so much energy commending the importance of scripture to Timothy because he realises that a time is coming for the church when it will be very difficult for the church to stay faithful to God's path. He predicts a time when instead of seeking the truth, Christians will let their own desires be the filter for what they hear, distracted by false teaching. Paul imagines a time 'when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths' (4.3-4).

It is easy to understand why it may be tempting to evaluate teaching based on whether we like the way it sounds, or whether it meets our expectations, entertains us or exonerates us.



In our media-saturated society we are exposed to so many messages, marketing interventions and the bombardment of how so many people want us to think about life through the continual broadcasting of social media. Yet in the fog of information overload we experience on a daily basis, scripture functions like the lines on the motorway, it keeps us on the path of following God.

What are the ways that you can weave the reading and meditation of scripture into your daily routine so that you are constantly able to check your life direction is staying faithful to God and not being diverted off course by the information overload we live in?

### **Conclusion**

Paul has written an impassioned plea to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy. We have been able to eavesdrop on this intimate communication because from the time of the earliest church, Christians recognised the Spirit's breath behind these words. We have been given ample reason to pay Scripture close attention if we want to be wise for salvation, drawn closer in intimacy with God, equipped to serve God and stay faithful to him. These are surely priorities for all Christians.

But like the lines on the side of a motorway, a handwritten letter in the post, or the very air we breathe, we can easily take the Bible for granted. But around the world, Christians do not have the Bible so readily available to them in a language they can understand. If we are to show love to our brothers and sisters, we need to make sure this lifeline becomes available. There is still a huge need for Bible translation in the world and so why not consider what part God might be asking you to play in making the Bible available to them?