



WORDS OF LIFE

By Rev. Will Nelken

Growing Dependence

I want to begin by reading part of Paul's second letter to his protégé, Timothy, about God's words of life (2 Timothy 3:16-17):

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip His people to do every good work.

That's a powerful tool! It can

- Teach you what is true
- Make you realize what is wrong
- Correct you when you make a mistake
- Get you back on the right path

It's the tool of God's choice to prepare and equip you (and all of God's people) to do good in His name. Therefore, you need to make up your mind, once and for all, that the Bible is God's Word—the truth.

Yet know this: the Book is not magical. Its words are but the form—that is why they may be translated into every language known to humanity—it is the content,

the meaning, the Spirit behind those words that makes them true and gives them life.

When people think that a particular translation alone, or only a precise quotation is God's Word, their dependence is misplaced. The words of the Bible are a vehicle of revelation; the objective is not to be captive to the words themselves, but to be captured by the Spirit of the words.

As Paul said (2 Corinthians 3:5-6):

⁵ Our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

You will be tested because of the Word. Everyone is. It's the way life works.

It was said of Joseph (Psalm 105:19):

¹⁹ Until the time that [God's] word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested [Joseph].

It is like one segment of Jesus' parable of the sower of seed and the four soils he encountered. The seed sown on rocky soil produced rapidly but was short-lived; it never came to fruition. Jesus explained it in Mark 4:17—

¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

Did you catch that? Why do "trouble or persecution" come? Because of the word.

WAGING WAR

God's words are not only useful for teaching and correcting; they are also useful as weapons of spiritual warfare.

Consider what Paul wrote (Ephesians 6:10-18):

¹⁰ A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.

¹² For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers

and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

¹³ Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. ¹⁴ Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. ¹⁵ For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. ¹⁶ In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. ¹⁷ Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

And again (2 Corinthians 10:3-5):

³ We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. ⁴ We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. ⁵ We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.

For an example, Jesus, after His baptism, entered a period of testing in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-14):

¹ Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where He was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry.

³ Then the devil said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread."

⁴ But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone.'"

⁵ Then the devil took Him up and revealed to Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶ "I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them," the devil said, "because they are mine to give to anyone I please. ⁷ I will give it all to you if you will worship me."

⁸ Jesus replied, "The Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only Him.'"

⁹ Then the devil took Him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! ¹⁰ For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect and guard you. ¹¹ And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.' "

¹² *Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the Lord your God.’”*

¹³ *When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came.*

¹⁴ *Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit’s power.*

Jesus’ overcoming response in each case was to lean on the words of God, applying them freshly and uniquely to the circumstance of His temptation.

This is worship at its best. Not the superficial sing-song of praise music, or the mindless recitation of Scripture passages, but the pragmatic exaltation of God through the application of His words to real life.

If you think first of worship as bands or choirs or congregational singing, you have been misled; you have traded the reality for a superficial expression. Bands and choirs and congregations can surely worship God through music and song, but the music and the song is not the worship.

Worship is a language of the heart, not a sound on your tongue. It is the language of love and devotion that magnifies God above all others—whether it is accompanied by music or not.

In effect, Jesus answered every test the devil threw at Him with a reply like this: “God is greater. God’s words overcome every challenge. They are better than every dream. They are truer than every anecdote. They are wiser than every rationale. I choose to trust God.”

This is worship as warfare.

If you want to overcome the tempter, the deceiver, you must learn to worship God in this way. If music captures your attention, use music to do it; for some, it’s only background noise, or even a distraction. Whatever tool or method (or weapon) you choose, verbally *announce* your trust in God and the power of His words to transform any situation. Even if you pray first, afterward *declare* your confidence in God.

Destined for Victory

Peter warned us clearly (1 Peter 5:8-11):

⁸ Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.

¹⁰ In His kindness God called you to share in His eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, He will restore, support, and strengthen you, and He will place you on a firm foundation. ¹¹ All power to Him forever! Amen.

Stay alert! Watch out! Stand firm! Be strong!

You have an enemy. For any friend of Jesus is an enemy of the devil. And your adversary, the devil, is on the prowl, looking for someone to swallow up. You needn't fear him, for Christ has already defeated him. He's done for. He cannot win.

You, on the other hand, belong to Jesus, the Victor. If you continue to trust in Him, and wield your faith like the Sword of the Spirit that it is, you, too, will be a victor. You have God's promise.

God will restore, support, and strengthen you, and place you on a firm foundation.

Now, let me be plain here, and not sugar-coat the matter.

"Restore" implies that you may suffer some kind of loss, and probably not just an imaginary loss. But God our Creator will restore whatever the enemy damages or destroys, either in this life or the next. That's His promise!

"Support" suggests a disability that requires help—an area in life that you cannot manage on your own. But God will be your support, your crutch, on which you can lean with complete confidence. He has promised to help you.

“Strengthen” reminds us that we have longlasting weaknesses in our flesh, for which we need divine strength. The strength will be His, just as the weaknesses are ours.

This is not a substitution so much as an overlay. But the beauty of this partnership is in the outcome: victory for us and glory for Him. You have His promise.

Your faith in the God of those words is a firm foundation, a solid rock, on which you may stand tall and build your future.

¹¹ “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord (Jeremiah 29:11-14). “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² In those days when you pray, I will listen. ¹³ If you look for Me wholeheartedly, you will find Me. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,” says the Lord. “I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes.”

WHAT ABOUT YOU? Has life got you down? Can you see no way out? Do your hope and courage ebb and flow like the tides?

What is your real relationship with Jesus Christ? Are you on close speaking terms? Does He have your back?

If you’re weary of doing life on your own, come to Jesus Christ today. Turn it all over to Him. Make Him the Leader of your whole life. You can begin by praying this simple prayer with me:

Jesus Christ, become the Leader of my whole life, from this day forward. Take me just as I am, and restore, support, and strengthen me, like You promised. Forgive my sinful self-reliance and selfishness. Fill my heart with Your amazing love and kindness. Thank You for hearing my prayer.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF YOU? Do you realize you’re in a battle for your life?

Don’t just chalk it up to coincidence or bad luck. You have an enemy, because of Jesus, who manipulates behind the scenes. He’s jealous and he’s mean and he’s

loud. But he's a liar, incapable of telling the truth without twisting it. And he's a defeated foe.

In His death on the cross, Jesus disarmed the devil, and when He rose from the dead, Jesus defeated him, once and for all.

YOU are more than a conqueror. Live like it. Act like it. Speak like it. Love like it.

Jesus our Savior has set you free! But not to indulge yourself in pleasures, but to serve one another in love.

Stop acting like the world and start acting like Jesus. That's what the Holy Spirit has come to do in you.

If that is your desire today, pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You gave Your life for me, so I have given my life to You. I am not my own; I belong to You and to Your Kingdom.

I choose to live by faith, not by my physical senses or reason alone. I believe You are God and I trust you with my life.

I will not second-guess Your plan. I will not try to coach You from the sideline. I will not resist You on the field.

Your words are my commands. They are the foundation of my new life in Christ. I have put my hope in Your promises.

I will worship You by trusting You. I will declare Your praise by declaring my trust.

I will not let anything or anyone separate me from Your love. Your love is better than life itself!

Amen.