

Applying the Bible to our Changing Lives • 2 Timothy 3:16

When we read the newspaper we all tend to look at the contents differently depending on how it relates to us. Most of us don't really care when cars are recalled unless the recall is for the car we own. We may not pay much attention to articles about typhoons in the Philippines, earthquakes in China, beef prices in Japan or crude oil exports from Russia unless someone we love is in the Philippines, our company does business in the earthquake area of China, we export beef to Japan or we discover that Russian oil production impacts gas prices at our favorite gas station. It makes all the difference when what we read applies to our individual lives.

The same is true with the Bible. Our personal interests focus on the difference the Bible makes to us. But we need to understand that the Bible is not magic. It is not because we own it, carry it with us or even read it that the Bible makes a difference. Some people are certain that if they read the Bible every day their lives will be successful, but if they skip a day bad things will probably happen. They claim empirical proof—one day they skipped reading the Bible and that was the day their pet died, the car got a flat tire and the stock market dropped. This is nothing but superstition. It puts the Bible in the same category as wearing a rabbit's foot, crossing yourself when you're in danger and never walking under a ladder.

Let's take a look at how to apply the Bible to our personal lives. In order to do this there are three key questions to ask when we read the Bible. The first question is "What does the Bible say?" This is the content question. We begin with the actual words of the Bible. While this may seem obvious, many people actually misread the words of the Bible. For example, in I Timothy 6:10 we read, "*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*" Some people read this to say, ". . . money is the root of all evil." In fact, the Bible is often misquoted to say this. The actual correct words are an essential part of benefiting from the Bible.

When we think we know something we tend

to see and hear what we assume we know even if it is incorrect. An example of this is that few people can proofread what they have written or know well. If there are misspelled words we miss them because we know what they are supposed to say. Don't do this with the Bible. Slow down. Look. Listen. Ask and answer the question: "What does the Bible say?"

The second question is, "What does the Bible mean?" This is the interpretation question. Once we know what the Bible says we ask what the Bible means. To interpret the meaning of I Timothy 6:10 we need to read the context in verses 6 through 10:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

The context is talking about contentment. Contentment in life comes from godliness not from riches. People who pursue wealth instead of godliness aren't content in life. If we fall in love with money, that love can lead us into all kinds of evil. This does not mean that money is the primary source of evil—it is *one* of the roots of evil. This does not mean that money and wealth are bad. The *love* of money is what leads to evil.

Question number three is "What does the Bible mean to me?" This is the application question. Generally speaking, any statement in the Bible says only one thing and means only one thing. However, what the Bible says has millions of applications.

It is wonderfully amazing that the Bible can be applied to such a wide variety of people in such diverse situations.

The application of I Timothy 6:10 may be to a student who is choosing a major—to make

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money or to serve God. It may apply to a person getting ready to retire, someone who just received an inheritance, an individual trying to decide whether to file a lawsuit, a rich person who always wants more, a poor person who can't think about anything but getting rich, a generous person who lives to give or a greedy person who always has excuses for never giving. The list is as endless as our names and individual circumstances.

Do you love money? How does this Bible teaching apply to you? In looking again at I Timothy 6:10 (*"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil"*) we must ask three questions: What does the Bible say? What does the Bible mean? What does the Bible mean to me?

The Bible is a fabulous book. It is rich and deep and full. It is God's Word. It is good for all kinds of things in our lives. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Let's take a closer look at this list.

The Bible is good for teaching. It is the textbook for knowing God and understanding life. We should always come to the Bible as students and learners. Expect God to be our teacher and the Bible to be our primary school book. It is amazing what we can learn from the Bible. From the Bible we learn who God is and what we are like. We learn about salvation, about relationships with each other, about marriage, money, business ethics, raising children, forgiving people, about heaven and hell and much, much more. We wouldn't know what God expects of us in these areas if we didn't learn them from the Bible.

The Bible is also good for rebuking. It confronts errors in our beliefs and thinking. We all have ideas that are unorthodox. We all have thoughts and actions that are inappropriate. The Bible is like a plumb line that shows us where we are out of whack.

Don't think of this as negative. Compare the Bible to the golf pro who shows you what's wrong with your swing, the doctor who reports your blood chemistry or the auto mechanic who works on your car. The Bible is good and necessary to keep us straight.

The Bible is also good for correcting. It not only shows us what's wrong with our lives but it also helps to correct and fix what is wrong.

USA Today had an article about addiction to cybersex. Here are some quotes:

"Contrary to popular belief, cybersex addiction isn't a problem restricted to lowlife losers you'd never want to know. (It involves) lawyers, doctors, CEOs and elected officials."

Psychologist Kimberly Young says that, "These are people who go to church every Sunday."

Often those who become involved in cybersex begin innocently but instantly become addicted. "The Net is the crack cocaine of sex addiction." (Kimberly Young)

This is an addiction involving an estimated 200,000 Americans. Men and women are in equal numbers. It impacts peoples' employment, marriages and every other relationship of life. It is an extremely destructive addition.

Those who read the Bible and apply it to their lives not only have such problems pointed out but also get God's help in victory over these problems. This is not to say that cybersex or anything else that needs to be corrected in our lives will be instantly fixed by reading the Bible. It is to say that through the Bible God shows us what is wrong, enables us to find the help we need and gives to us supernatural assistance in correcting our lives.

Number four on our list is that the Bible is good for training. The Bible not only shows us what is wrong in our lives, it also shows us what is right. As Christians we don't want to devote our lives to just avoiding bad stuff; we want to devote our lives to doing good stuff. That is what Christians do. Christians love truth. Christians love what is good, pure, healthy, happy and pleasing to God. The Bible is our training manual for being and doing the best that we possibly can. It teaches us to be kind to others, forgive those who sin against us, help the poor, strengthen the weak and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with those who have not yet believed in him.

The Bible equips us for good works. This is actually a product of everything. Christians are equipped to continually and effectively do good

in a world that has a huge shortage of good works. Good works are all about application. Every one of us faces our own individual circumstances. Some of us are young; some are old. Some are male; some are female. Some are doctors; some are patients. Some are teachers; some are students. Some are employed; some are unemployed. Some are getting married; some are getting divorce. Some have wonderful next-door neighbors; some have obnoxious next-door neighbors. The list is endless. The Bible equips us to do good works in every possible situation we face.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that (we) may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Let’s learn by practicing application of the Bible to our lives. The fourth book in the New Testament is the fourth biography of Jesus in the New Testament. Since the Christmas story of Jesus’ birth had already been told in the biographies written by Matthew and Luke, John skipped the Christmas story. There was no need to explain it. Instead, he began by explaining that Jesus was the Son of God who lived forever in heaven before he was conceived in the Virgin Mary and nine months later was born in Bethlehem.

Early in John’s biography of Jesus, in John 1:12, he explained why Jesus came to earth: “. . . to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” This means that anyone who personally believes in Jesus as Savior will be saved from alienation and distance from God and will become immediately and forever adopted into the family of God. When we become God’s children we are given the special privilege of being in God’s family right now and are guaranteed life forever with him in heaven.

What is the personal application of this Bible teaching and interpretation? It is that we must receive him. If I receive Jesus as my Savior and Lord and believe in his name then I will have the right to become a child of God. The application is that if I do this I will receive eternal salvation. To

apply the Bible is to receive Jesus. I’ve done this. If you want to become a child of God then apply this and receive Jesus and you, too, will become his child.

Later in the Bible the same author, John, raises the issue of continuing sin in our lives and what to do about it. I remember a Christian telling me

that I would be astonished if he told me all the sin in his head and heart. I think he assumed I wasn’t much of a sinner. The truth is that we are all sinners. Look at what the Bible says in I John 1:9-10:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and

just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

It is clear that we are all sinners. Anyone who says he or she is not a sinner is calling God a liar. I John 1:9 says if we confess our sins God will forgive us and totally clean us. The word “confess” comes from the Greek word that means “to say the same thing as.” In other words, if we say the same thing about our sin that God says about our sin we have confessed that we are wrong. Then God will totally and completely forgive and cleanse us.

Application is very personal. What is your sin? What have you said or done or not said or done that God says is sin? Will you admit your sin? Will you tell God? If yes, you have applied the Bible and God will forgive you.

Let’s look at a third example in 1 Peter 5:7. This year has been a year of worry for lots of people including Christians. Terrorism. War. Economic recession. Rising unemployment. Fluctuations in the stock market. It is a good year to read what the Bible says in I Peter 5:7 about comfort: *“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”*

These words are written in a context of difficulty and suffering. They expect us to be responsible to God in our attitudes and actions but recognize that so much of life is beyond our control. We should be humble before God admitting that

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we don't have the power to make life problem-free. Christians must live by faith. We trust God to handle what we cannot handle. We give our worries to God with the absolute conviction that God cares for us.

The application is personal. What are your anxieties? What are your worries? What are you stressed about? Picture your problems and imagine them being handed over to God with the absolute conviction that God loves you and will take care of you.

The Bible is wonderful, powerful, practical, true and supernatural; but we must apply it to our lives or it doesn't do any good.

Recently I heard about a couple with a 13.5% home mortgage on their house. They just didn't have time to apply for a mortgage at a much lower rate. They are paying more than twice the payment they need to pay. A new mortgage could save them tens of thousands of dollars. Their lives would be easier and better if they would only apply.

The same is true for the Bible. People live their

lives missing out on God's best because they don't have time to apply the Bible to their lives. Don't let that be you. Read the Bible regularly. Ask what it says. Ask what it means. Ask what it means to you. Do what it says and receive the wonderful blessings of God.

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Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
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