

Paul and Timothy: Passing the Torch

What You Gain By Reflection

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

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Good morning, men. Welcome to Man in the Mirror Bible study. We're doing this series, **Paul and Timothy: Passing the Torch**. This morning we're going to talk about the spiritual discipline of reflection. Before we get going we want to welcome all the guys that are joining us online and call out all the guys who are walking in front of the camera. Remember that? So we have men all around the world, literally all around the world, who are joining us and we want to welcome them this morning. So would you join me on the count of three and giving them that very warm rousing Man in the Mirror welcome that only you can do. On the count of three. One, two, three. Hoo-rah. So guys, we're honored to have you with us.

Title of the message. **What You Can Gain by Reflection**. And so a study was conducted at the University of Virginia. They got a group of male and female volunteers and asked them to sit in a room for 10 to 20 minutes and not say anything or do anything, but just spend time in reflection, thinking, happy thoughts or whatever. They took away all of their devices, cell phones, phones, iPhones, watches, pads, whatever. And they only had two rules. You couldn't get out of the chair and you couldn't fall asleep.

And then they showed them a button that they could press, that would shock them. And just to practice, they had each of the volunteers press that button and they were shocked. And then they asked them if they liked that or not. And they said, "Oh no, that was terrible." And they actually found out that they were willing to pay, most of the volunteers were willing to pay, not to be shocked again. It was a pretty serious shock. Then they put the volunteers into the room And here's what they found. After 12 minutes, 70% of the men couldn't sit there for 12 minutes before they shocked themselves. Even though they had just said that they would be willing to pay not to be shocked again, and 25% of the women. Pascal said this. He said, "All of humanity's problems stem from a man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." I guess that's a bit of hyperbole.

THE NEED FOR INSIGHT

First thing I want us to talk about is this need for insight. Our text today is 2 Timothy 2:7. Paul, now, has told Timothy a number of things he's told Timothy to fan into flame the gift that he was given to not be ashamed of Paul's sufferings, to join him in suffering, to keep the pattern of good teaching, to guard the good deposit, to be strong in the grace that he's been given, to entrust these things to other people. And then he used three secular metaphors we saw in the last message. One was the soldier to not get entangled in civilian affairs, for the athlete to play by the rules, and for the farmer to be hard working.

And so now we come to this text and Paul says to Timothy, "Reflect on what I'm saying," reflect on what I'm saying, "for the Lord will give you insight into all this or into everything." So it's fascinating. What then is the problem that reflecting solves? Why do we need insight? And the answer is that we are surrounded by sacred things. Every day you and I are walking around in a physical bubble that's constrained by our line of sight. And so every day we are walking around in this physical bubble, but there are all around us, sacred things that are happening.

There are all of the greatness of God's glory, his majesty, the spiritual gifts, the callings of other people, the promises of God, the character of God, his majesty, all of these things are all around us. When you walk through a room, you literally, when you walk through a room, you're walking through a physical bubble, but you're also walking through a spiritual realm in which angels and demons have to part so that you can walk through the room, because there is a spiritual world also that we don't see. We have a spiritual myopia and we can overcome that if we can figure out how to pierce the veil and see through this physical bubble.

There is a story told about Elisha in 2 Kings. You don't need to look there. If you want to look later, you could write down 2 Kings chapter 6. The king of Aram is leaving the Arameans to defeat the nation of Israel. But every time the king of Aram leads his troops out to fight against Israel, Elisha warns the king of Israel and he's not able to find him. And so one day finally, the king of Aram gets really irritated and wants to find Elisha. So he actually finds him and surrounds him with the horses and chariots. And the next day, when servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariot that surrounded the city where Elisha was. And he says, "Oh no, my Lord, what shall we do?" And Elisha said, "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And then Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." And then the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he looked, and he saw the hills full of horses in chariots of fire all around Elisha. We live in a world filled with sacred things. We are surrounded by sacred things all the time.

So the goal, then, of Paul telling Timothy to reflect on all of the things that he's been told so that God, not so that Paul can give Timothy insight, but so that the Lord can give Timothy insight into all these things. And so the goal, then, is to see the temporal things from the eternal perspective. That's the goal. So what is it that this morning you are wrestling with? What is the problem that you are dealing with that seems insurmountable, inexplicable, beyond comprehension?

The goal of this instruction that Paul is giving to Timothy today focuses on this, the goal of seeing temporal things from an eternal perspective. In Matthew chapter 16, Jesus is telling the disciples all about the things that he's going to be betrayed and handed over and crucified and so forth and so on. And what does Peter say? "Lord, that will never happen to you. Not as long as I live," because he is looking at things from a temporal perspective. In fact, Jesus says in Matthew ... I wasn't planning to go there, so it might take me a second. He actually says in Matthew 16:23, he turned to Peter, he says, "Get behind me, Satan, you are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the concerns of men, but merely human concerns," because he was seeing things from the perspective of the physical bubble and he was not looking behind the veil.

And so today what we want to do, is we want to pierce that veil. We want to take a box cutter and cut the veil. So here's the Big Idea for the day. **The only way to understand what's really going on is to give God the time to show me.** The only way to really understand what's going on is to give God the time to show me. Take the time to reflect. You will not see what's really going on if you are so consumed with the physical bubble, the line of sight bubble that we have, that you don't go behind the veil because you've taken the time to do that.

THE DISCIPLINE OF REFLECTION

So how, how do you do that? We do it by practicing the discipline of reflection. The discipline of reflection is taking the time to peel back the veil. It's taking the time to see the matrix. It's taking the time to notice that there's an elephant in the room. It's like getting password to the Pentagon. You get to see everything. You get to see everything when you take the time.

The Big Idea today, again, is this. **The only way to understand what's really going on is to give God the time to show me.** It's going to take some time. And so, what I want us to focus on are some personal tactics that you can use.

PERSONAL TACTICS

So most of this message today is going to be about application, practical application. Practical tactics, personal tactics that you can employ. There are three guiding principles for me, personally, that I find I constantly go back to over and over again. This is before we get to the specifics. The first one, something that was said by George Bernard Shaw. So George Bernard Shaw was a famous 20th century writer was famously witty and was known to be able, with that famous wit, to evoke the ire of people on both sides of almost any issue. He could make everybody mad. He was so witty. He said this, he said, "Few people think more than two or three times a year. I have made an international reputation for myself by thinking only once or twice a week."

And so the idea is taking the time. Most people are very busy in the physical bubble. They don't take time to think about the world that is surrounded by sacred things. They don't have the goal of seeing the temporal things from the eternal perspective, and so they get stuck only thinking two or three times a year. And so the idea of thinking maybe once or twice a week is a clever idea. So I think about this all the time. The other thing I think about all the time is something that Francis Bacon said. He said, "Reading maketh a full man. Conference maketh a ready man, and writing maketh an exact man." So reading's how we fill up. Conference, getting together, our small groups that we meet here, getting together in communities of church, conferencing together makes us full. And then writing maketh an exact man." And I'm going to show you a couple of examples of this when we get to the practical part.

And then the third kind of guiding idea for me in this whole area of reflection is this, routine is your friend. Routine is your friend when it comes to practicing reflection. Routine, taking set times. Okay. So I want to spend the rest of the time together on personal tactics and I've listed a number up here and there are many, many different personal tactics to practice the spiritual discipline of reflection. I'm just going to tell you some of the most important things that I do personally.

So you can either, you could adopt something, you could adapt something, or perhaps this will trigger in your mind some innovative way that you could practice the spiritual discipline of reflection. The first, and I think the most important, perhaps, at least in terms of its temporal priority is prayer. And that is coming to [inaudible 00:15:00] Jesus often withdrew and went to lonely places so that he could pray. When it comes to prayer, rote prayers and rabbit trails. Rote prayers and rabbit trails. Rote, R-O-T-E, rote prayers. I have six different rote prayers that I pray through each day and then rabbit trails. I don't necessarily, when I pray the Lord's prayer, I don't necessarily just pray it all the way through. I might stop at the phrase, "Give us this day our daily bread." And then I might think about some kind of a need. And I might think about that for four or five minutes before I come back to the prayer. But for some reason, the Lord's always allowed me to come back to the place of the prayer where I left off, but the idea of praying, and then having some set prayers that are important to you, but then also allowing the Holy Spirit to trigger different thoughts.

So I do a lot of praying when I hike. My typical length of a hike is about four hours. And I cannot begin to tell you the number of times where I have not said amen until I'm 50 minutes or so before I'm done with a hike, because what I've done is, over the course of the whole hike, I've gone through these six rote prayers that I have, and I go off on rabbit trails, or I actually see a rabbit and I start thinking about that. I think about the majesty of creation. One of my rote prayers is, "Lord, I worship you in the beauty of your holiness and the majesty of your creation and the unconditionality of your love and the generosity of your salvation and the mystery of your providence." And it could take me an hour to go through that prayer. It can take me sometimes an hour. Well, if you've got an hour, you're out on a hike, but otherwise you just pray the prayer, right?

Second is reading. I have one basic reading goal. I read all kinds of books. I read lots of articles every day, but I have one reading goal. I read through the Bible from cover to cover once a year. I use different reading plans. I finally found a reading plan that sort of suits my personality. It's a five day a week plan.

So it breaks the Bible down into 200 and whatever, 260 readings. Is that right? Yeah. Well, anyway, five days a week for 52 weeks. So it allows a couple days for being here at the Bible study or my wife's irritated with me and we need to talk about that. Well, maybe it's four days a week. I don't know. Anyway. So, but here's the thing I don't micromanage it. I don't worry. I'm not legalistic. I don't fret about if I'm exactly on schedule. I just know that by the end of the year, I'm going to have read through the Bible. I'm in my 35th year of doing that. So if you want to practice just the spiritual discipline of reflection, prayer and reading are two of the most powerful things.

And then meditation. Meditation could be on the word itself. I did not put up scripture memory here, but I put that in the category for me of meditation. One of our members, 90 plus years old, passed away recently and his favorite verse was Psalm 1:1-3. "Blessed is he who does not stand in the counsel of the wicked or walk in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight, his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law, he meditates both day and night. He will be like a tree planted by springs of water whose leaf does not wither."

And so anyway, the point of it is memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture. Psalm 139 happens to be my favorite Psalm, 139. He knows every word you speak before it forms on the tip of your tongue. He knit you together in your mother's womb, but then at the end, search me, oh God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts, point out any offensive way in me and lead me in your everlasting way to meditate, to meditate on scripture.

But it's also, it can be like, maybe you have a work situation. Maybe you're like me. You're a broken boy. I tell you what. So I, from time to time, I don't actually, I made it vow at an early age. I don't need you, okay. But I need you. And so I don't need anybody to encourage me. I get a lot of encouragement, but the thing is that my closest associates, it's funny, the people that I'm closest to don't really think I need to be encouraged. And so sometimes I get into kind of a little mood because I don't feel like I'm getting any love. All right. But the thing is through meditation, I can think through that, I can pierce the veil between the physical world, the physical bubble, and I can get into the heavenly realms and here's the thing. As soon as I bring that to God in prayer, and the Lord reminds me of the things that he said to me in the past.

He has said to me, on two occasions, "You have been faithful. Stay the course." I've heard that two times in the last 20 years, "You've been faithful. Stay the course." And so I was literally this morning thinking about this encouragement issue. And I took it to God and God reminded me, "You've been faithful. Stay the course." So I don't need any human encouragement because I'm practicing the spiritual discipline of reflection and through meditation, one of my personal tactics, I've defeated the enemy. You see, these are weapons. These are spiritual weapons.

Sermons. Oh my gosh. I have learned so much by the preaching and teaching of God's word. I love hearing good message. Now this is kind of the way I'm wired is I'm a student, I'm a contemplative. I'm interested in this kind of thing. You may have a different way that you connect with God, but I connect through truth of God's word. And I love it. I love it when somebody takes a scripture and shows me an insight that I had not seen before. I remember in seminary, I know this is true because I got a little article written about me when I was in seminary. And that this was one of the quotes in the article. "Men are looking for insight, not information." That's been one of my big ideas the whole time. Men are looking for insight, not information. And Paul says, reflect on these things and the Lord will give you information. No, the Lord will give you insight. And one of the ways to get insight is through sermons.

Small groups. This is conferencing together, which makes us full. There are some things that are done in community that just cannot be done any other way. I know that God is real because I just saw him in you. In my little bubble over here sometimes maybe ... I remember RC Sproul, the famous is theologian RC Sproul, who was my main systematics theology professor in seminary. He came as a guest speaker one time when we were first getting started here at the Bible study. And he told the story that

sometimes he's walking along and he says, "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, what am I doing? Is this even true? Am I just kidding myself?" And he goes, like Colombo, he goes, he always does. He goes like Colombo. And then he just says, "I go back to the basics. And I remind myself, I reflect, on the first things that Paul had talked about in the scriptures and the witnesses and the death and the burial and the resurrection of Jesus."

When we're in small groups, we can remind ... You can do that on your own, of course, but when you're in small groups together, you can remind yourselves of these first things as a tactic of reflection. And then also public prayer, too, just praying out loud together. The power of talking together, conferencing together, sharing, seeking the counsel, giving counsel, praying together, being in community, small groups. It's interesting, small groups, that was really what the church was in Acts. It was really small groups, right? But then the church got big, big, big, big, big, big, big in 1675. Philip Jacob Spencer, I think is his name, wrote a book and he basically brought back the idea of small groups. For centuries small groups had kind of gone away and we'd got into big churches, but in the late, I guess, late 17th century, he reintroduced the idea of small groups. We're actually standing on the shoulders of that pietistic movement, which reintroduced small groups back into the body of Christ. There's power in these small groups.

And then creation. And so, oh my gosh. Oh, creation. So listen, go take a walk, go take a hike, go take a paddle, go sit in your lawn chair. I don't care, but just ... Creation is such a, for me personally, I get so much out of being in creation. Just seeing, just trying to just picturing how many human hours of labor it would take to take down this mountain that God has put there. But I tell you what is really freaks me out. My friend, one of my best friends, nighttime friends is Orion. I don't know about you, but it's almost every time I look up, I see Orion. I see those three little hazy stars right there. Did you know, did you know, that it would take 13 million years for the light from the nearest star of Orion's buckle to reach the earth. 13 million years.

I'm looking at light that is at least 13 million years... Oh, I tell you what, the majesty of creation is one of the ways that I break through the veil, I break, out of the bubble. I crack the bubble. Here I am. I'm all wrapped up in my own little problems. I'm like a little baby chick inside an egg. And all of a sudden I peck, peck, peck and the shell falls away. Oh my gosh, where has all this been before? Well, it's been there the whole time. You just didn't see it because you're so wrapped up in this physical bubble.

Journaling. Journaling is, for me, something that's precious. I actually have several different journals, but one journal in particular, I call my calling journal. I call it my calling journal. And so I started this journal on June 1st, 1992. So 30 years ago, there are now 96 single spaced type written pages in there, 36,000 words. And every time I have some kind of an insight from God or some direction about my life or something that I feel like I need to do, something God is saying to me, some way the Spirit ... I make an entry in there. So sometimes it's one line. Usually it's two or three sentences every now and then it's a little bit longer, but I've kept this journal. I started, as I said, 30 years ago, but I actually went back and recalled five or six major things that had happened before 1992.

So my calling actually started sometime in the mid 1970s according to my journal notes. I had been having a cup of coffee with my wife in our first home. I spilled a cup of hot coffee in my lap. And I went into the shower and I was wailing. I was wailing and my wife was concerned and she came and she said, "What's the matter? What's the matter?" She said, "Are you injured?" I said, "No, it's not that." But the pain had triggered something in me. And in my mind, I had this vision of this multitude of suffering faces. That's all I saw, was this multitude of suffering faces. And it just appeared to me. And I was just weeping, just weeping and weeping and weeping. So I wrote that down. Now isn't that precious that I have that, in terms of being able to practice the spiritual discipline of reflection, to get insight, for the Lord to give me insight into all these things that Paul has been talking about. So I encourage you to journal, start a journal, start a calling journal, or just any way you want to do it. Email files, to-do list

files. I've got all those things. I like to write things down because then I can go back to it later and it reminds me, it reminds me.

And then the last tactic that I use is fasting. Okay. So I have fasted one day a week for the last 10 years. Huh. That's interesting. It's a simple thing. It's a 24 hour fast. I typically skip two meals. I keep working. So I drink a couple of protein shakes, but I do a 24 hour fast. And usually I've got an extra day in the bank so that if something comes up. I don't break it up, but I've never missed it. And what got me started doing this, is I started praying for young men and women who are de-churched or unchurched and they're parents because they're the ones who are aching. And so I have a list of 72 young men and women that I've been fasting and praying for 10 years. Now, the list has changed because a lot of these young people have come to the Lord or back to the Lord and they're doing great now. And then I've added new ones along the way.

I also pray for you. I also pray for table leaders. I also pray for donors. I pray for board of directors. I pray for a number of friends, and then there's some specific men that I pray for. There's some specific women, there's some specific children that I pray for. I got several hundreds of people that I pray for each week. It's a way, when you fast, what happens and those of you probably most you tried it, but what happens is that you do slow down. You do slow down. You can't help but slow down. And you become aware that you've slowed down. And then secondly, you're hungry and you become aware that you're hungry and you can use these things to turn your heart, your thoughts to God, to the sacred things that are all around us to satisfy this goal, if you will, of thinking about spiritual things.

Big Idea today is this. **The only way to understand what really going on is to give God the time to show me.** So I encourage you to think about whatever it is that's eating at you, whatever you're wrestling with, you're suffering, crack out of the shell, peck your way out of the shell, cut the veil, whatever the right metaphor is for you. Do that, and see through the discipline of reflection all that God is doing in the world, all the sacred things, and understand that you are surrounded on the hills with horses and chariots of fire. Let us pray.

Our father in heaven, our Lord Jesus, our Holy Spirit. Come Lord Jesus. We invite you into our hearts and into our lives today. Lord help us to take the time, make the time, want to take the time, but not just all of that, Lord, to actually do the time to reflect on your goodness, your greatness, all your glorious, your majesty, power, dominion, your promises, your gifts, your characteristics, your attributes, the fruits of your Spirit, all of these things, the first things that Paul has talked about, all of these things of fanning into flame our own gift, entrusting the things that we've heard to other people, guarding the deposit, not being ashamed of other believers who are suffering, suffering ourselves willingly. All of these things, God, we pray that through the discipline of reflection that we would reflect on all these things so that you, Lord, can give us insight into all these things. We make this prayer, Jesus, in your name and your sake alone, amen.

Amen.