

HOLY INSPIRATION! [see Footnote below for history of this article]¹

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The Bible is history's number one bestseller by a factor of about ten. Six billion copies have been sold. It has been Number One every year since records have been kept --- except for 2007, when *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* topped the list, with forty-four million sales. Spectacular as that was, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* dropped to about ten million sales the following year, one million the next, and now probably sells in the hundreds of thousands, if not the 'mere' tens of thousands.

Unlike most bestsellers, however, the Bible actually *increases* sales each year. Currently an average of over 82,000 copies a day are sold. That's 3,400 copies an hour. Someone gets a Bible every second. If we were to include the sales of individual portions of the Bible, such as the Gospels, we would have to multiply these numbers by a factor of 12. ²

Yes, the Bible is a publisher's dream! But how do we explain this phenomenon? On the human and natural level, we can say that the Bible has every subject covered from go to woe and appeals to all peoples, whether male or female, young and old, of all nationalities, over all generations.

You want love and romance, it's here. You want jealousy and betrayal, it's here. You want murder, mystery and mayhem, it's here. You want literature of all varieties ... poetry for the heart, parable to stimulate the mind, it's here. You want culture and inspiration for art and architecture, musicals, operas, songs and hymns, it's here. You want antiquity, ancient history, the machinations of kings and empires, it's here in spades. You want anthropology, genealogy, family trees and origins, it's here. You want adventure over land and sea, it's here, in these pages. You want to know about what's happening in the world, where we have come from and where we are going, it's here. You want rhyme and reason for our existence, it's here. You want , service, sacrifice, philanthropy, it's here. You want God and the Devil, it's here. You want Heaven and earth, angels and demons, worship and spirituality, it's here. You want personal counsel and wise guidance for your day to day living ... how to succeed in life, it's here. You want hope beyond the grave, it's here. Yes, even from a natural and human perspective, no wonder the Bible is a publisher's dream.

ALSO HATED

Now the obvious must be said; not everybody likes the Bible. Throughout history there have been serious attempts to burn it, ban it from whole countries, or from book stores, schools, public and private lives. From time immemorial the Bible has been attacked on many fronts ... "It's a bunch of irrelevant myths cobbled together by ignorant nomadic goat herders huddled around the camp fires at night in the desert" ... "The Bible encourages violence and is immoral" ... "The Bible is unscientific" ... "The Bible is full of contradictions. Full of mistakes. You can't trust anything it says," etc., etc.

So, in spite of fierce persecutions and cynical suspicions, how do you explain the Bible's appeal and success? Surely, there must be an underlying reason why the Bible not only survives but thrives. If I may borrow an expression from Batman's sidekick --- Robin --- the answer is "Holy inspiration, Batman!" The key is holy inspiration. And by that I mean, the Bible claims to be of heavenly, or supernatural origin; it claims to be the very words from God Himself. And it has the record to back that claim up. It makes the astonishing claim that ... GOD HAS SPOKEN.

¹ These are the notes of a sermon delivered in the Hamilton Church of Christ (Life & Advent), New Zealand on Sunday 21st August, 2016. It is the first sermon in a series, *The Bible: Sad Hoax or Solid Hope?* The reader will therefore understand that the style is more for oration than literary purposes.

² These figures are from John Dickson's introduction to his *A Doubter's Guide To The Bible: Inside History's Bestseller For Believers And Skeptics*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2014.

For the moment, I am not asking you to believe the claim. But I am going to set out what the Bible does claim for itself, and you can decide for yourself if the claim is true. We start with what the apostle Paul wrote to young Timothy;

“But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequately equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:13-17).

If I may paraphrase the advice Paul gives to Timothy, it would run like this. “Young man, there are two kinds of voices in the world. Two voices vying for your attention. One voice sits on one shoulder. It’s a voice that yells, deafens. It’s a bad voice, and it belongs to tricky and evil men who want to lead you to ruin. The other voice on your other shoulder whispers in your ear. That gentle voice is the voice of wisdom. Timothy, you know it well. You first heard it when you sat on the knees of your mother and your grandma. They taught you “the sacred Writings”, “the Scriptures”. That’s the voice you should listen to. It will equip you to become what you were born for. Why? Because “all Scripture is inspired by God”.

Paul is making the claim that the “holy Writings”, what every Jew knew as “the Scriptures”, and what we today call the Old Testament, are of Divine origin. “All Scripture is inspired by God.” Let’s unpack this to get its full impact.

Even within the churches today there is a wide variety of approaches to the Bible. I would guarantee that if I quizzed each of you here this morning, I would not get a consensus. If I asked, “Does the Bible have any errors?” some of you might say yes, there are errors. Some of you might say, no, the Bible has no mistakes. If I asked, “Does the Bible contain the word of God, or is the Bible the very word of God?” I imagine there would be a variety of opinions.

ALL SCRIPTURE OR EVERY SCRIPTURE?

“All Scripture is inspired of God”. Most translations follow this (KJV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NASB, etc.). One or two however, read it, “Every Scripture inspired of God is profitable ...” (eg. RV). Can you pick up the subtle difference? Which is it, “All Scripture is inspired of God and profitable” or “Every Scripture inspired of God is profitable”?

If Paul says, “All Scripture is inspired of God”, then the claim is that Scripture in its entirety, every syllable in every word in every sentence --- as Jesus said, every “jot and tittle” right on down to the smallest bit of grammar as given in the original texts --- is of Divine origin. Whether we believe the Bible or not, whether we like it or not, makes no difference to its claim of absolute and entire inspiration.

If however, Paul means the second, “every Scripture inspired of God is profitable”, then there is the possibility that some Scriptures are inspired and others are not inspired. If we translate it, “Every Scripture inspired of God” the claim might be that whatever part of the Bible appeals to us, whatever part of the Bible we might like to accept, well, that’s the bit that’s inspired of God for me. If some parts inspire me, say the high moral ideals then they are God speaking to me. But if some parts don’t grab me, say the miracle stories, well, I can leave them. So this second translation could mean that if some parts don’t grab me, then for me they are not inspired. I decide what’s inspired.

So, did Paul consider some parts of Scripture might not be as inspired as others? Did Paul leave it up to the individual taste? Did he mean to say that the parts I consider to be profitable are inspired, and that those parts I don’t understand or like are not inspired?

WHAT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Furthermore, did Paul just mean the Old Testament writings are inspired? Where do we put the New Testament? Did Paul consider his writings and the writings of the other apostles to be equally inspired by God? Let me briefly answer this. Just turn back a couple of chapters to 1 Timothy 5:18;

For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'"

Paul gives two quotes that he considers to be "the Scripture". Quote 1 is from Deuteronomy 25:4, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." Quote 2 however, is found nowhere in the OT. You won't find, "The laborer is worthy of his wages" anywhere in the OT. But here's the thing. You do find that quote in two of the NT Gospels, in Luke 10:7 and Matthew 10:10!

In fact, these are the words of Jesus faithfully recorded in the Gospels. Behold! Paul considers Matthew and Luke of equal inspiration to the OT Scriptures. And certainly, the apostle Peter (to whom Jesus first gave "the keys to the kingdom") also considered Paul's writings to be Scripture;

"...our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things ... which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

So Peter puts Paul's writings on equal authority with "the rest of the Scriptures". We have it on apostolic authority then, that "All Scripture that is inspired by God" includes the Old and New Testaments. So let's examine this phrase further.

THEOPNEUSTOS BREATHED OF GOD.

When Paul writes to Timothy and says Scripture is "inspired of God", he coins a brand new Greek word. It's a unique word, found only here in the entire New Testament. It's also a word not found outside the Bible in contemporary literature. Paul actually takes two words and glues them together. He takes the word "God" and he takes the word "breathed" and he compounds them, joins them, and coins this new word, *theopneustos*, "God-breathed".

But there is one more critical piece of grammar we must lock in before we get the proper sense. In the Greek language this word *theopneustos* is in the passive voice. Now forgive me for being elementary here, but I don't want to take anything for granted. Do you know the difference between active and passive voices? If I said to you, "John jumped out of the window", John, the subject of the sentence, is doing the action. John himself did the jumping. But if I say to you, "John was pushed out of the window", in this case John, the subject of the sentence, is acted upon by an outside person or force. "John was pushed" means somebody or something else did the action to John. John was pushed is in the passive voice.

Now, when we come to this unique word *theopneustos* it's critical to note it's in the passive voice and must be translated: "All Scripture is "breathed of God". Scripture has been breathed out by God. Scripture is the breath of God! The Bible is produced by the out-breathing action of God.

Now friends, this is the staggering claim. On the positive side, Paul is making it crystal clear that the Bible (in its original texts) is the product of the creative breath of God Himself. Scripture is the out-breathing from God. The Bible is supernatural in origin. It is the breath of God. On the negative side, the Bible does not claim it is of human origin. The Bible is not the product of the impulsive ingenuity or cleverness of man. The Bible claims to be from the Living God Himself. Metaphorically speaking, the Scripture is His very breath.

OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENT

Now, although Paul has coined a new word explaining that the Bible is "breathed of God", the idea is not novel. It comes with rich Old Testament precedent. Hundreds and hundreds of times we read that the message of the prophets originates from "the mouth of God". The prophets said, "Thus says the LORD". Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord came to me saying ..." (Jer. 1: 4). Ezekiel testifies, "The He said to me, 'Son of men, stand on your feet that I may speak with you'" (Ez. 2:1) Hosea begins, "The word of the Lord which came to Hosea ... and

the Lord spoke through Hosea ..." (Hos. 1:1-2). Joel said, "The word of the Lord came to Joel ..." (Joel 1:1). God said to the prophets, "The word has gone out of My mouth".

Jesus himself said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Jesus considered that what was written in the Hebrew Bible are the very words from God's own mouth, that is, His out-breathing.

INSPIRATION OR EXPIRATION?

Which brings us to the next idea. The word "inspiration" --- "All Scripture is inspired by God" --- is really quite misleading. In medical terms, to inspire is to breathe in. To breathe out is to expire. (I know the word 'expire' can mean be out of date. Your milk has past its expiry date. Don't you just love English!)

Paul says God has breathed out from His innermost Being the very Scriptures we hold in our hands. And it ought to be clear that Paul is not saying to Timothy that the Scriptures are a collection of human writings which God endorsed and subsequently put His Divine *imprimatur* on. Paul is not saying men wrote the Bible during moments of inspiration, and so God approved what they had written. The idea is definitely not that men wrote a few words into which God breathed some inspiration.

When we talk about inspiration, we might think of a great composer, such as Beethoven, or Brahms or Handel. We listen to their music and we say "Truly inspiring! What genius! What talent! It lifts me up to another realm altogether." And it's quite legitimate to speak of human genius this way. It is even appropriate to give thanks to God who has given such inspiring gifts to men for the blessing of us all.

True, as I introduced this message, we talked about how the Bible is every publisher's dream. It's truly a thrilling and inspirational book. But let's be clear. Paul is giving us a truth far more profound than that. Paul is not saying the Bible is inspired because God put into its writers great talents and great gifts that inspire us. No. What he is saying is that the Writings have come into being because they were breathed out by God Himself, regardless of whether the human writers felt inspired or not, and regardless of whether the Bible inspires you or not. The Bible claims to have an utterly unique origin. It's the very breath of God. The Bible comes from heaven. That's the claim.³

THE GENESIS CREATION

Let me drive this point home by going back to the very beginning, Genesis 1:1-2,

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters."

In the beginning, in that formless world, the Spirit of God was moving. The Hebrew word for 'Spirit' is the word *ruach*. Depending on which context you find that word, it can be translated 'spirit', other times 'wind', and still other times, 'breath'. What's happening here in that chaotic pre-world? Which translation suits best?

When we read the "Spirit of God" was moving there, we are being told that God's creative Presence and energy was powerfully working. When we are told "the Spirit of God" was there, it's really saying, God was breathing over that dark void, blowing over that formless world. The powerful wind from God was there in creative energy. The Spirit, the Breath, the wind of God, was there in creative force. It's all the same idea.⁴

"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their hosts" (Ps.33:6).

³ The second message in this series, *The Bible: Sad Hoax or Solid Hope* deals with the question of what part, if any, the personality and individuality of the human writers of the Bible played in the inspiration of Scripture.

⁴ To read later Christian 'orthodoxy' that Genesis 1:3 teaches that "God the Spirit", the Third Person of the Trinity is intended, is an unwarranted imposition on the text. We do not read into the text, but out of the text!

There are a number of texts like this one confirming that “the Spirit of God” moving at the Genesis creation is equivalent in meaning to “the breath of His mouth” that brought creation to order. Then, a few verses down, when God forms the man from the dust of the ground, we read,

“He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and (the) man became a living being (soul)” (Gen. 2:7).

God breathed into the man, God blew His breath, God expired His Spirit into Adam. Once again we get the idea of creation, of something new and wonderful, from the mouth of God. God performed the first ‘mouth to mouth’ expiration that brought a new kind of life to the man.

Good friends. Nothing less than this is being claimed in 2 Timothy 3:16. The Spirit of God, the Breath of God, the creative out-breathing wind of God has produced this book we hold in our hands.

So, to come back to our question: Does Paul tell Timothy, “All Scripture is God breathed ...”, or does he say, “Every Scripture inspired of God is profitable ...”? The answer surely is, “All Scripture is God breathed.” Every word, every syllable, every sentence in the original texts, is the living breath of God. This book is not of human origin. It’s a supernatural book, that comes to you and to me directly from God. Well may we say, with Robin, ‘Holy expiration!’

Jesus himself had this high view of Biblical inspiration. He said, “The Scripture cannot be broken”. Jesus said, “Every jot and every tittle” will remain until the present Heavens and Earth pass away. Jesus said, “Every word written in Scripture proceeds from the mouth of God.” “All Scripture is breathed of God.”

HOW PRECIOUS BREATH IS.

Think how precious breath is. If you are not breathing, you are dead. If you are a parent, the breath of your child is precious. What’s the first thing checked when a brand new baby is born? Yes, has it taken its first breath? Is the baby breathing? If not, s/he gets a sharp tap on their bottom! Then, as the baby lies in its crib at night, what do mum and dad do? Right! They look over their sleeping baby and listen for and watch its gentle breathing.

If you are married and you are lying next to your partner at night, you become very conscious of their breathing. Sometimes that breathing can get a little obnoxious. And then you might wish they would stop breathing ... at least till the noise stops! But as your husband or wife lies there, their breathing reminds you of their precious life, and you can thank God for them, for their breathing.

Yes, if you are not breathing, you are dead. In the old days, guess how they checked if a very sick person actually was deceased? Right, they used to put a mirror, or a piece of glass up to the person’s face. If it fogged up, it was a sign of breathing, and they were not yet dead. Breath is the sign of life, breath is precious.

And when we are told this Bible comes from the mouth of God, that it is His breath, we begin to experience His life, His Presence, His power. Given that God is immortal, never dies, cannot die, is eternal, you know that so long as God Himself exists, His word lives and breathes!

PRESENT TENSE

It’s impossible to speak without exhaling. Every word you speak, is carried by your breath. No breath, no word! “All Scripture is breathed of God.” Every time you read the word, hear the word, the Living God is breathing it afresh.”

When you open the pages of this holy Book, get ready for God, the Greatest Power in all the universe, is breathing His life into your soul!

When you get out of bed in the morning, you say, O Father God, I now receive your breath, your word, your Spirit, your life, into my soul! When I am preaching to you the Scriptures, God’s life, the Father’s love, the power of the Spirit of God, is ministering into your soul!

The apostle Peter put it this way:

“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these he has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Pet. 1: 2-4).

When you come across a promise in the Bible, let your prayer be, “Oh God, all of Your promises in Christ are Yes and Amen to the glory of God breathe into me!” When you open this Bible you are holding the living breath of your Creator and Redeemer! Your faith is not resting on the power of men, your faith is not resting on the wisdom of men, but on God Himself.

God says, “I watch over my word to perform it” (Jer. 1:12). Back of this book is the throne of God. Back of this book is the faithfulness of God. He watches over His word to perform it, to make it good to us.

When you take hold of the promises of God, you are letting God release His creative power into your life. Yes, for example, you might feel lonely, but you say, “Father God, You have promised You will never leave nor forsake me. Thank you for breathing Your reality into me now.”

I want to close by telling a true story that illustrates how precious the Bible is:-

THE HEAVENLY MAN: THE REMARKABLE TRUE STORY OF CHRISTIAN BROTHER YUN.

After Mao Tse Tung’s bloody Chinese Revolution of 1949, Christians were beaten, killed, persecuted virtually out of existence. Bibles were banned and burned. To be caught in possession of a Bible, was a capital crime. Bibles became scarce in the land.

But Yun grew up in a home with a mother who had a remarkable faith in Jesus. Yun remembers the time when his father was sick unto death. Things were grim. But lying in bed one night, Yun’s mother heard a very clear and tender, compassionate voice say, “Jesus loves you.” She immediately called her family to come and to pray to Jesus. They knelt down and dedicated themselves to Jesus, and asked him to heal their sick husband and father. The father miraculously was healed of his terminal cancer. The family experienced what may be called nothing less than revival. And although it was illegal to hold Christian meetings, they invited friends and relatives to their house so they could share the good news.

This miracle planted in the young Yun a desire to know Jesus and to serve God with all his heart. But there was a problem. There were no preachers. And there were no Bibles. All that little group could do was recall an occasional text or a few words the missionaries had spoken years before. Yun himself says all he knew was the Jesus had healed his father and warmed his own heart.

He would ask his mother if there any more words Jesus had left and spoken. Could he please read some more of Jesus’ words? Only a few of the very oldest people could even remember what a Bible looked like. The Word of God was scarce in the land.

Yun was so hungry for a Bible. Seeing his desperation, his mother remembered an old man who lived in another village. This man had been a pastor before the Cultural Revolution. Together Yun and his mother started out on the long walk to find that old pastor. When they eventually found him, they said, “We are desperate to see a Bible. Do you have one?”

The old pastor immediately looked fearful. This man had already spent 20 years in prison for his faith. He looked at Yun and saw he was so young and poor, with tattered clothes and bare feet. He felt compassion, but still did not want to show Yun his Bible.

Yun says he could not blame the old man. Nobody was allowed to read any other book other than Mao’s little Red Book. If caught with a Bible, it would be burned and the owner’s whole family would be severely beaten in the middle of the village.

The old pastor simply said to Yun, “The Bible is a heavenly book. If you want one, you’ll need to pray to the God of heaven. Only he can provide you a heavenly book. God is faithful. He always answers those who seek him with all of their heart.”

Yun says he “fully trusted the pastor’s words” And when he returned home, he brought a stone into his room and knelt down on it every evening for prayer. He had just one simple prayer: “Lord, please give me a Bible. Amen.” At that time he did not know how to pray, but he continued to pray for more than a month on that stone. But nothing happened. No Bible appeared.

Yun went back to that pastor’s house again. This time he went alone. He told him, “I’ve prayed to God according to your instructions, but I still haven’t received the Bible I want so much. Please, please show me your Bible. Just a glance and I will be satisfied! I don’t need to touch it. You hold it and I will be content just to look at it. If I could copy down some of the words I will return home happy.”

The pastor saw the anxiety of Yun’s heart. But he said, “If you are serious, then you should not only kneel down and pray to the Lord, you should also fast and weep. The more you weep the sooner you’ll get a Bible.” Yun went home, and every morning and afternoon he ate and drank nothing. Every evening he ate just one small bowl of steamed rice.

But he cried like a hungry child to his heavenly Father wanting to be filled with His word. For the next 100 days Yun prayed for a Bible, until he could bear it no more. His parents were sure he was losing his mind. Looking back many years later Yun said this was the most difficult thing he’s ever endured (and you should read the rest of his story to see what that statement means).

Suddenly, one morning at 4 a.m., after months of begging God to answer his prayers, he received a vision from the Lord while kneeling beside his bed. In the vision Yun was walking up a steep hill, trying to push a heavy cart in front of him. He was heading towards a village where he intended to beg for food for his family. He was struggling greatly, because in the vision he was hungry and weakened by constant fasting. The old cart was about to roll back and fall on him.

Then he saw three men walking down the hill in the opposite direction. A kind old man with a very long beard was pulling a cart load of fresh bread. Two other men were walking on each side of the cart. When the old man saw Yun, he felt great pity and showed him compassion. He asked, “Are you hungry?” Yun replied, “Yes. I have nothing to eat. I’m on my way to get food for my family.”

Yun wept because his family was extremely poor. They had so little to eat, and for years they had to beg for food from friends and neighbours. When the old man asked Yun if he was hungry, Yun couldn’t help but cry. He’d never felt such genuine love and compassion from anyone before.

In the vision the old man took a red bag of bread from his trolley and asked his two servants to give it to Yun. He said, “Yun, you must eat it immediately.” He opened the wrapping and saw there was a bun of fresh bread inside. When he put the bun in his mouth, it instantly turned into a Bible! Immediately, in his vision, Yun knelt down with his Bible and cried to the Lord in thanksgiving, “Lord, your Name is worthy to be praised! You didn’t despise my prayer. You allowed me to receive this Bible. I want to serve you for the rest of my life.”

Yun woke up and started searching the house for the Bible. The rest of his family were asleep. The vision had been so real to him, that when he realized it had only been a dream he was deeply anguished and wept loudly. His parents rushed to his room to see what had happened. They thought he had gone crazy because of all his fasting and praying. He told them about his vision, but the more he shared, the crazier they thought he had become.

His mother said, “The day hasn’t dawned yet and no one has come to our house. The door is firmly locked.” His father held him tightly. With tears in his eyes, Yun’s father cried to God, “Dear Lord, have mercy on my son. Please don’t let him lose his mind. I’m willing to be sick again if it will prevent my son from losing his mind. Please give my son a Bible!” Mum and dad knelt weeping together, arm in arm.

Suddenly, Yun heard a faint knock at the door. A very gentle voice called his name. Yun rushed over and asked through the locked door, "Are you bringing bread to me?" The gentle voice replied, "Yes, we have a bread feast to give you."

Yun immediately recognized the voice as the same one he had heard in the vision. He quickly opened the door and there standing before him were the same two servants he had just seen in his vision. One man held a red bag in his hand. Yun's heart raced as he opened the bag and held in his own hands his very own Bible!

The two men quickly departed into the still darkness. Yun clutched the new Bible to his heart and fell down on his knees outside the door. He thanked God again and again. He promised Jesus that from that moment on he would devour God's word like a hungry child.

Later on Yun found the names of those two men ... Brother Wang and Brother Sung. They had walked from a far away village. They told Yun how that Bible had come from an old evangelist who had been so persecuted that he had nearly died while being tortured.

About three months before he received his Bible the evangelist had received a vision from the Lord. God showed him a young man to whom he was to give his hidden Bible. In the vision he saw the house and the location of Yun's village. But like many Christians, the old evangelist had placed his Bible inside a can and buried it deep in the ground, hoping for a day when he could dig it up and read it again. But despite his vision, it took the evangelist a few months before he decided to obey what the Lord had told him to do. He asked two Christian men to deliver the Bible to Yun. They walked all through the night to reach Yun.

From that time on Yun fully trusted the words in the Bible were God's words to him. He always held that Bible. Even when he slept he laid it on his chest. He devoured its teachings like a hungry child. Every day from morning to late evening he would read the Word of God. In the fields he had it wrapped up and every opportunity would sit and read. It wasn't easy, because he only had three years of elementary education. Furthermore, because the Bible was in old Chinese script, and Yun had only learned the simplified Chinese characters, he had to get a dictionary and painstakingly look up each character one at a time to advance through the Bible.

Finally he finished reading the whole Bible. So Yun then started to memorize one chapter per day. After 28 days he had memorized the whole Gospel of Matthew. He read through the other three Gospels before proceeding to memorize the Book of Acts. Yun began to experience the power of the Holy Spirit more and more as he literally ate the words of God. A deep revelation of the love of God flowed into his consciousness. One night, after he had memorized Acts 12 and as he lay on his bed, Yun suddenly felt someone tap him on the shoulder and Yun heard a voice, "Yun, I am going to send you to the west and south to be my witness."

Yes, Paul said to Timothy, the Bible is a heavenly book. All Scripture is breathed of God. Back of this book is the Throne and the faithfulness of God Himself. In fact, later Paul wrote to Timothy,

"Hold the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13).

When Paul instructs Timothy to hold to "the sound words" which are in Christ Jesus, the word he uses is the word from which we get our modern word "hygiene". We all know how important hygiene is. Failure to practice sound hygiene can lead to disease, sickness, and ultimately to death. Failure to hold to the words of Paul who is following the words and the faith of Jesus will lead to spiritual sickness and weakness for the individual. It will also lead to a church community being open to all kinds of pathogens, which bring spiritual disharmony, and death.

Let's therefore determine to daily breathe in --- that is, to inspire, the expired Scriptures --- so that the hygienic and life-bringing words that proceed from the mouth of God Himself, might infuse His creative life into our very souls. Through Jesus Christ His Son and our Lord, Amen.

