FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

BIBLIOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Word of God

UNIT 2: THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson 3

THE BREATH OF GOD, THE DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION

What We Mean When We Say "God-Breathed"

Key Text: 2 Timothy 3:16–17

> *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*
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> **2 Timothy 3:16–17, NASB 1995**

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Introduction

In our first two lessons, we have established the logical and theological foundation for everything that follows. We have seen that Bibliology, the doctrine of Scripture, is the doctrine before all doctrines, the epistemological ground upon which every other Christian teaching rests. We have seen that the God of the Bible is not a silent deity but a communicating God, whose speech flows from His eternal, triune nature and finds its supreme expression in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. We have seen that God chose to inscripturate His revelation, to commit it permanently to writing, so that His truth might be preserved, transmitted, and received by His people across all ages and nations.

Now we turn to the central question of this unit: "How" did God produce this Book? If the Bible is indeed the Word of God, by what process did the eternal, infinite, holy God communicate His truth through the pens of finite, fallen, and culturally situated human beings without distorting, corrupting, or diluting it? The answer to this question is the doctrine of "inspiration".

The word "inspiration" has been so overused in popular culture that it has lost nearly all of its theological force. We speak of "inspiring" music, "inspiring" speeches, "inspiring" athletes. In every such usage, what we mean is something that elevated human creativity, stirred human emotion, or stimulated human achievement. But when the Christian church confesses that Scripture is "inspired," it means something altogether different and immeasurably greater. It means that the Bible is not the product of human genius, however elevated. It is the product of divine action. It is not a book that has been inspired in the way that Shakespeare was inspired to write his plays. It is a book that has been "breathed out" by the living God.

In this lesson, we will define with precision what the church means by the inspiration of Scripture, examine the key biblical text that establishes the doctrine, explore its scope and extent, distinguish it from related but distinct doctrines, and address the most common misconceptions that have distorted and diminished it. This is foundational territory. Get this right, and every subsequent doctrine will have a firm foundation. Get this wrong, and the entire theological edifice begins to crack.

I. THE DEFINITION OF INSPIRATION: THEOPNEUSTOS, "BREATHED OUT BY GOD"

The theological doctrine of inspiration is grounded in a single, remarkable word. The apostle Paul, writing to his young protege Timothy, declares:

> *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*
>
> **2 Timothy 3:16–17, NASB 1995**

The word translated "inspired by God" in the NASB (or "breathed out by God" in other translations) is the Greek adjective "theopneustos" (θεόπνευστος). It is a compound word, formed from "theos" ("God") and "pneo" ("to breathe"). The word occurs only here in the entire New Testament, and this rarity alone signals its theological weight. Paul coined or deployed it deliberately to make a very specific claim about the nature of Scripture.

The critical observation, one that B. B. Warfield demonstrated definitively in his landmark essay "Inspiration", is that the word is not "passive" but "active" in its force. Theopneustos does not mean that Scripture was the product of a human experience of divine inspiration, as though the writers were seized by a kind of religious ecstasy and produced elevated writings. Rather, it means that Scripture is "breathed out" by God, that the Scriptures are the product of divine expiration. The action moves from God "outward", not from human authors "upward". God did not breathe into the writings; He breathed them "out".

The imagery is striking and intentional. In Genesis 2:7, God breathed ("naphach") into the nostrils of the man He had formed, and the man became a living being. The breath of God is creative and life-giving. Here in 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul draws on the same imagery: the Scriptures are the product of the divine breath. They carry the imprint of the God who breathed them out. This means that when we hold a Bible in our hands, we are holding something that came from God Himself, not merely a record of what human beings thought about God, but the very Word that God breathed out for our instruction, our correction, and our salvation.

II. INSPIRATION AS THE ACT OF GOD, NOT THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HUMAN AUTHOR

One of the most consequential distinctions in the doctrine of inspiration is the difference between "what God did" and "what the human authors experienced". Historically, many liberal and neo-orthodox theologians have defined inspiration primarily in terms of the subjective religious experience of the biblical writers, as a heightened spiritual sensitivity, a divinely elevated consciousness, or an unusual degree of religious insight. On this view, what makes the Bible "inspired" is not something objectively true of the text itself, but something subjectively true of the authors who wrote it.

This understanding is fundamentally mistaken, and the error is not merely technical. It undermines the entire edifice of biblical authority. If inspiration refers to the subjective experience of the writers, then we cannot know

what parts of the text reflect genuine divine communication and what parts reflect merely human perspective, error, or cultural conditioning. The text itself becomes an unreliable mixture of the divine and the fallibly human, and we are left with no fixed norm, no authoritative word from God.

The biblical doctrine of inspiration, by contrast, locates the divine action not in the psychology of the authors but in the "product" of their writing. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors in the act of writing that what they wrote, the very words of the text, constitutes the Word of God. This is what Peter means when he writes:

> *"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."*
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> **2 Peter 1:20–21, NASB 1995**

The key verb here is "moved" ("phero," φέρω), which in its passive form carries the sense of being borne along, carried, or driven by an external force. It is used in Acts 27:15, 17 of a ship being driven by the wind, the ship is not dead, it is not passive in the sense of being inert, but it is being carried along by a power greater than itself, a power that determines its course. In exactly this way, the human authors of Scripture were "moved" by the Holy Spirit. Their faculties, personalities, and capacities were fully engaged. But the Spirit was the ultimate directing force, ensuring that what they wrote was precisely what God intended to say.

This means that the doctrine of inspiration is ultimately a claim about the "text", not merely about the "experience" of its authors. The Bible does not merely contain the Word of God, to be identified and extracted by careful critical scholarship. The Bible "is" the Word of God, in its totality, in all its parts, and in the very words of the original autographs.

III. THE THEOLOGICAL MEANING: DIVINE EXPIRATION, NOT HUMAN ASPIRATION

The doctrine of inspiration is, at its theological core, a declaration about the "origin" of Scripture. It answers the question: Where did this Book come from? And the answer is not "from the religious genius of Israel's greatest thinkers" or "from the inspired imagination of the early Christian community." The answer is: "It came from God". It was breathed out by the One who breathed life into the first human being, the One who created the heavens and the earth with His word, the One who spoke and it stood firm (Psalm 33:9).

This is what separates the Christian doctrine of Scripture from every human theory of religious literature. The Quran claims to be divine dictation through the angel Gabriel to Muhammad. The Book of Mormon claims to be a translation of divinely preserved golden plates. The writings of Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, and countless other religious founders claim a divine origin of one kind or another. What makes the Christian claim distinctive is not the claim to divine origin itself, but the "manner" of that origin and the "evidence" that confirms it, evidence that we will examine extensively in later lessons.

For now, the theological point to fix firmly in mind is this: Inspiration is a "divine" action, not a human achievement. When Paul says that Scripture is theopneustos, he is making a claim not about the exceptional quality of the human authors, but about the nature of what the Holy Spirit produced through them. The Bible is not the result of human beings reaching upward toward heaven in their most luminous moments of spiritual insight. It is the result of God reaching downward, breathing out His truth through human instruments, and producing a text that is, in the fullest and most literal sense, the Word of the living God.

IV. THE SCOPE OF INSPIRATION: EVERY WORD OF THE ORIGINAL AUTOGRAPHS

Having established what inspiration is, we must now address its "extent". How much of the Bible is inspired? And to what level of precision does inspiration extend?

The historic Christian answer, grounded in the testimony of Scripture itself, is that inspiration is both "verbal" and "plenary", extending to the very words of the text (verbal) and to all parts of Scripture equally (plenary). We will examine this in detail in Lesson 4, but let us establish the foundation here.

A. Verbal Inspiration: The Very Words

Jesus Himself teaches verbal inspiration when He declares: "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18, NASB 1995). The "smallest letter" is the "yod", the tiniest character in the Hebrew alphabet. The "stroke" ("serif" or "tittle") is the smallest distinguishing mark between similar letters. Jesus is affirming that inspiration extends all the way down to the minutest details of the text. The Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35). The authority of the text is inseparable from the precision of its words.

Paul makes a similar argument when, in Galatians 3:16, he builds a significant theological conclusion on a single grammatical detail of Genesis 22:18, the fact that the word "offspring" ("sperma", seed) is singular rather than plural. "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ." This kind of argument would be meaningless if inspiration extended only to general ideas. Paul is reasoning from a "word", indeed from the number of a word, because he is confident that every word of the inspired text is exactly what God intended it to be.

B. Plenary Inspiration: All Parts Equally

Plenary inspiration means that inspiration is not concentrated in some parts of the Bible and absent from others. We are not free to divide Scripture into "inspired" spiritual sections and "uninspired" historical, genealogical, or cultural sections. All Scripture is theopneustos, not merely the parts that speak explicitly of God, or the parts that seem particularly elevated and profound, or the parts that conform to our theological expectations. The genealogies are inspired. The ceremonial laws are inspired. The narrative sections are inspired. The poetry and wisdom literature are inspired. The apocalyptic visions are inspired. The whole Bible, in all its parts, is the product of the divine breath.

This does not mean that every part of Scripture is equally "relevant" to every situation, or that every genre of biblical writing functions identically, or that every section carries the same kind of theological weight for Christian application. But it does mean that there is no part of Scripture that we may dismiss, ignore, or treat as merely human, because the Spirit who breathed it out breathed out all of it.

C. Inspiration and the Original Autographs

The doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration applies to the "original autographs", the manuscripts as originally written by the inspired human authors under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit. We do not claim inerrancy for every subsequent copy, translation, or printed edition. Copyists have made errors; translators have sometimes struggled; no printed Bible in any language is identical in every detail to the original autographs.

However, this does not constitute a crisis for the doctrine of inspiration. The manuscript tradition of both testaments is remarkably reliable, and the science of textual criticism, the careful comparison and evaluation of thousands of extant manuscripts, has enabled scholars to recover the original text with an extraordinarily high degree of confidence. We will examine this in detail in our lessons on textual criticism and the transmission of Scripture. For now, the key point is this: the doctrine of inspiration tells us "what God did" in the production of the original text. The doctrine of providential preservation tells us "what God has done" to ensure that this text has been faithfully transmitted to us across the centuries.

V. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSPIRATION AND REVELATION

Inspiration and revelation are closely related but must be carefully distinguished. Failure to distinguish them has led to significant theological confusion.

"Revelation" refers to God's act of disclosing information, truth, or Himself to human beings. It is the content of what God makes known. As we explored in Lesson 2, revelation came to the prophets and apostles through various modes, theophanies, dreams, visions, prophetic utterance, and supremely through the incarnate Son.

"Inspiration", by contrast, refers to the process by which God ensured that revelation was accurately communicated and recorded in writing. Inspiration is the mechanism by which revelation became Scripture. It is the act of the Holy Spirit that produced a written text that is both fully divine in its origin and fully reliable in its content.

Not all inspired writing involves new revelation. When Luke researched and compiled his Gospel (Luke 1:1–4), or when Paul recalled his personal circumstances (2 Timothy 4:13), they were not receiving new divine revelations. They were writing from memory, research, and personal experience. But the Holy Spirit so superintended their writing that what they recorded is exactly what God intended, free from error, and authoritative as Scripture. This is why inspiration cannot be reduced to revelation: not every inspired passage communicates new information about God, but every inspired passage bears the character of the divine breath.

Conversely, not all revelation resulted immediately in inscripturation. God gave revelation through many prophets whose words are not preserved in canonical Scripture. It was God's sovereign purpose to inscripturate certain

revelations and not others, for reasons that belong to His wise and inscrutable will. What was inscripturated, the sixty-six books of the Bible, is the permanent, authoritative, and sufficient written record of God's revelation to His people.

VI. THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY (1978): HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND KEY AFFIRMATIONS

In 1978, at a gathering in Chicago, Illinois, more than 300 evangelical scholars, pastors, and church leaders produced a landmark document that has become the standard definition of the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy: "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy". The statement was produced in response to the growing confusion within evangelical Christianity about the nature and extent of biblical authority, and it remains one of the most important theological documents of the twentieth century.

A. Historical Significance

The Chicago Statement was not produced in a vacuum. By the 1970s, a significant number of evangelical institutions, seminaries, and denominations had begun to drift from the historic affirmation of full biblical inerrancy. Some were affirming "infallibility" while denying "inerrancy", the claim that the Bible is reliable in spiritual matters but may err in historical or scientific details. Others were adopting various forms of "limited inerrancy," restricting the Bible's truthfulness to matters of "faith and practice" while allowing for errors in peripheral areas. The Chicago Statement was the evangelical church's formal response: a clear, comprehensive, and carefully nuanced affirmation of the full truthfulness and reliability of Scripture in all that it affirms.

B. Key Affirmations

The Statement is organized around a series of Articles of Affirmation and Denial, short, precise theological propositions that affirm what the church has historically believed and deny the errors that have threatened it. Several of the most important include:

Article VI: Affirms that Scripture in its entirety is the Word of God written, and therefore of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches.

Article IX: Affirms that inspiration extends to all of Scripture and to all of its parts, so that the whole of Scripture in the original autographs is without error.

Article XI: Affirms that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses. It denies that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions.

Article XII: Affirms that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, and deceit. It denies that inerrancy is negated by the biblical phenomena of lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, or the use of hyperbole, round numbers, or variant selections of material.

The Chicago Statement's great contribution was to define inerrancy with precision and nuance, affirming that inerrancy is entirely compatible with the full humanity of Scripture, with its use of everyday language, its variety of literary genres, its cultural situatedness, while insisting that these human dimensions do not introduce error into the divinely breathed text. We will return to the Chicago Statement in greater detail when we take up the doctrine of inerrancy directly in Unit 3.

VII. COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT INSPIRATION

The doctrine of inspiration has been misunderstood in several recurring ways. Addressing these misconceptions is essential for a clear and faithful account of what the church actually believes.

A. Misconception 1: Inspiration Equals Mechanical Dictation

The most common misrepresentation of the doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration is the charge that it reduces the human authors to mere stenographers, passive secretaries who took down divine dictation without any engagement of their own faculties, personalities, or perspectives. On this caricature, verbal inspiration means that God whispered every word into the ears of the prophets and apostles, who simply transcribed what they heard with no contribution of their own.

This is not what the church has believed, and it is not what Scripture teaches. The inspired writings bear unmistakable marks of genuine human authorship. Isaiah's poetry is majestic and elevated; Amos's prose is earthy and agricultural. John's Gospel is meditative and theological; Mark's Gospel is fast-paced and action-oriented. Paul's letters reflect the mind of a trained rabbi and careful logician; Peter's letters reflect the directness and warmth of a fisherman-turned-shepherd. Luke's prologue (Luke 1:1–4) explicitly describes the research process he undertook before writing. These differences of style, vocabulary, and perspective are not problems to be explained away; they are evidence that God worked through the human authors organically, employing their full humanity, not bypassing it.

The doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration affirms that the Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that what they freely and naturally wrote was precisely what God intended. This is not dictation; it is something far more mysterious and glorious, a concursus, a running-together, of divine and human action, in which the full humanity of the authors is preserved and the full authority of God's Word is maintained.

B. Misconception 2: Inspiration Equals Illumination

Some have confused the doctrine of inspiration with the doctrine of illumination. Illumination is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit by which He opens the minds and hearts of believers to understand and receive the Scriptures. Every Christian who reads the Bible with genuine comprehension and spiritual profit is experiencing the illuminating work of the Spirit.

But illumination is not inspiration. Inspiration was a unique, unrepeatable, and completed act of the Holy Spirit by which He moved upon specific human authors to produce the canonical Scriptures. Illumination is given to all believers in every age. Inspiration was given only to the biblical authors and resulted in the production of the authoritative text. When the canon of Scripture was closed at the end of the apostolic age, the work of inspiration

was complete. The Spirit continues to illumine the text for every generation of readers, but He no longer inspires new Scripture.

This distinction has enormous practical implications. It means that no subsequent religious teacher, preacher, prophet, or visionary, however gifted, however devout, however influential, produces writings that carry the authority of inspired Scripture. The canon is closed because inspiration has ceased. The Spirit now illumines what has already been breathed out; He does not breathe out new revelation.

C. Misconception 3: Inspiration Equals Mere Human Genius

At the opposite extreme from the mechanical dictation theory is the view that "inspiration" means nothing more than an exceptional degree of human religious genius, the same kind of heightened creativity and spiritual sensitivity that produced the works of Homer, Shakespeare, or Tolstoy, only to a higher degree. On this view, the Bible is "inspired" in the way that a great piece of music is "inspiring," and the word loses all of its theological content.

This view is flatly incompatible with the biblical testimony. The biblical writers did not present themselves as exceptional religious geniuses sharing their elevated insights about God. They presented themselves as the "mouthpieces of God", authorized and compelled to speak and write what they had received from Him. The prophetic formula "Thus says the LORD", occurring over 3,800 times in the Old Testament, is not a literary convention or an expression of religious confidence. It is a claim to divine authorization. The prophet was not offering his own best thinking about God; he was delivering the very words of the living God. To treat this claim as an expression of merely human genius is to fundamentally misread what the prophets and apostles claimed about themselves and about the text they produced.

Key Text: 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NASB 1995)

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching,

for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

so that the man of God may be adequate,

equipped for every good work.

Theological Terms and Definitions

Inspiration (Theopneustos)	From the Greek theopneustos (2 Timothy 3:16), meaning "breathed out by God." Inspiration is the supernatural act of the Holy Spirit whereby God so moved upon the human authors of Scripture that their writings are the very Word of God, free from all error in the original autographs.
Verbal Inspiration	The doctrine that the inspiration of Scripture extends to the very words of the text, not merely the thoughts, ideas, or concepts of the authors. Every word of the original autographs was superintended by the Holy Spirit.
Plenary Inspiration	From the Latin plenus ("full"). The doctrine that inspiration extends to all parts of Scripture equally, not merely the spiritual or doctrinal portions, but every section of every book of the Bible.
Concursus (Concurrence)	The theological term for the simultaneous action of the divine Author and the human author in the production of Scripture. God is the primary author; the human writers are secondary authors. Their personalities, styles, and faculties were fully engaged, yet wholly superintended, so that the result is both fully human and fully divine.
Superintendence	The work of the Holy Spirit in guiding, directing, and governing the human authors of Scripture so that what they wrote corresponded exactly to what God intended. Superintendence does not imply mechanical dictation but the organic working of the Spirit through human faculties.
Dictation Theory	The erroneous view that God verbally dictated the biblical text word-for-word to the human authors, who served merely as passive secretaries. Verbal-plenary inspiration does not require dictation; the human authors were active agents whose personalities and styles were preserved even as the Spirit ensured inerrancy.
Illumination	The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit enabling believers to understand and receive the Scriptures as the Word of God. Illumination is distinct from inspiration: inspiration produced the text; illumination enables the reader to comprehend and embrace it.
Original Autographs	The original manuscripts of the biblical books as produced by the inspired human authors. Inerrancy applies to the autographs. Though the autographs no longer exist, the manuscript tradition has preserved their content with remarkable fidelity.
Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy	A landmark theological document produced in 1978 by over 300 evangelical scholars and church leaders, affirming the inerrancy, infallibility, and full authority of Scripture. Its Articles of Affirmation and Denial remain the standard definition of the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy.
Theopneustos (θεόπνευστος)	The Greek adjective used by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16, commonly translated "inspired by God" or "God-breathed." The word comes from theos ("God") and pneo ("to breathe"). It describes Scripture as the product of divine expiration, breathed out from God, rather than the product of human genius or elevated religious experience.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the Bible is not a human book about God but the very Word God breathed out through human agents. This belief is not a leap of blind faith; it is a theologically grounded conviction supported by the internal testimony of Scripture, the witness of the Holy Spirit, and a rich body of confirming evidence that we will examine in subsequent lessons. The doctrine of inspiration is the foundation of every other claim we make about the Bible, its authority, its inerrancy, its sufficiency, its clarity. To weaken inspiration is to weaken everything that rests upon it.

Every Christian should be able to articulate, in simple terms, what the church means by inspiration: that God, by the Holy Spirit, so moved upon the human authors of Scripture that what they wrote is the very Word of God, extending to every word of the original text, and therefore fully authoritative, fully trustworthy, and fully sufficient for all that He intends it to accomplish.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

If the Bible is indeed what it claims to be, the breath of the living God committed to writing, then our posture toward it should be one of reverence, not familiarity; of attentiveness, not casualness; of hunger, not indifference. The infinite, holy God, who could have remained in the splendid silence of His own self-sufficiency, chose to breathe out His truth for creatures of dust. This is an act of staggering condescension and grace. And our response should be proportionate: a deep, abiding, growing love for the Word that God breathed out for us.

Ask yourself honestly: Do you read the Bible as though you were holding the breath of God in your hands? Do you come to it with the reverence and expectation that befits a word from the Lord of the universe? Or has familiarity dulled the wonder? Let this doctrine, that God breathed out these very words, kindle in you a fresh awe for the Book that sits on your shelf or rests on your table. It is not an ordinary book. It never was. It never will be.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

1. Handle the Scriptures with care. Since the Bible is the inspired Word of God, it deserves our most careful, most attentive, most disciplined reading and study. Superficial engagement with the text is not consistent with the conviction that it is theopneustos. Slow down. Read carefully. Return again and again.

2. Trust the Scriptures completely. The doctrine of inspiration provides the foundation for complete confidence in the Bible's truthfulness. Where the Bible speaks, on any subject it addresses, we may rest the full weight of our faith upon it. It will not give way.

3. Receive the Scriptures humbly. If the Bible is the Word God breathed out, then our role is not to sit in judgment over it, evaluating which parts seem credible and which parts we're inclined to doubt. The creature does not sit in judgment over the word of the Creator. We receive it, we study it, we bow under it.

4. Proclaim the Scriptures boldly. Understanding that inspiration guarantees that the Word of God is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16), we proclaim it with confidence. The authority of our proclamation is not derived from our eloquence or insight. It is derived from the fact that we are handling the very breath of God.

5. Defend the Scriptures faithfully. In a world that increasingly dismisses the Bible as merely human literature, as a culturally conditioned collection of ancient religious texts with no binding authority over the contemporary mind, the church must know what it believes and why it believes it. This series is designed to equip you for exactly that task.

D. *For Every Season of Life*

"For the new believer:" You hold in your hands the breath of God. This is not a collection of human wisdom, however profound. This is a message from the One who made you and the One who redeemed you. Come to it expecting to hear His voice, because you will.

"For the long-time believer:" Perhaps the wonder of Scripture has faded under the weight of familiarity. Let the doctrine of inspiration recover it. You have not merely read a good book. You have sat under the teaching of the living God. Let that truth restore the awe.

"For the one wrestling with doubt:" The questions you are carrying are not new. They have been asked by serious thinkers for centuries. But the evidence for the inspiration and reliability of Scripture is vast and compelling. This series will walk you through it. Stay. Wrestle. You will find that the Word can bear the weight of your doubt and emerge stronger on the other side.

"For the one in suffering:" When everything else feels uncertain, the inspired Word is your anchor. Because God breathed it out, every promise in it is His promise. Every word of comfort is His word of comfort. He does not retract what He has breathed. His Word stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before beginning this study, how would you have defined "inspiration" in relation to the Bible? How has your understanding of the term been sharpened or corrected by what you have studied in this lesson?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17. What is the context of Paul's statement about Scripture being "breathed out by God"? Who is he writing to, and why is the reliability of the Scriptures important in that context?
3. The word theopneustos is a compound Greek word. Break it down into its two component parts. What does each part mean, and what does the combined word assert about the nature of Scripture?
4. Read 2 Peter 1:19–21. What does Peter say about the origin of prophecy? What does the phrase "moved by the Holy Spirit" (v. 21) tell us about the role of the human authors in the production of Scripture?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

5. The lesson distinguishes between inspiration and revelation. In your own words, explain the difference. Why is it important to maintain this distinction?
6. Explain what is meant by the term concursus. How does this concept help us understand how the Bible can be both fully divine and fully human without being a mixture of infallible divine content and fallible human opinion?
7. Why is it theologically significant that theopneustos is active in its force (God breathed "out") rather than passive (God breathed "into")? What difference does this make for how we understand the nature of Scripture?
8. The lesson identifies three common misconceptions about inspiration: mechanical dictation, identification with illumination, and mere human genius. Which of these misconceptions is most common in your experience, and why is it mistaken?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

9. If the Bible is truly "breathed out by God," what posture should we bring to it when we read it? Are there ways in which you approach Scripture that are inconsistent with the conviction that it is the very breath of God?
10. How does the doctrine of inspiration provide confidence in evangelism and proclamation? If you know that the Word you are proclaiming is the breath of the living God, how should that affect the boldness and the humility of your witness?
11. The lesson argued that inspiration has ceased with the close of the apostolic age. What practical implications does this have for how we evaluate claims to new prophetic revelation today? How would you respond to someone who claims to have received a new word from God?
12. Read Psalm 119:97–99. The psalmist's love for the Word produced wisdom, understanding, and insight. How does a robust doctrine of inspiration fuel the kind of love for the Word that the psalmist describes? What connection do you see between what you believe "about" Scripture and how deeply you love it?

Prayer Focus

Spend time in prayer as a group, thanking God that He is not silent, that He has breathed out His Word for our instruction, our correction, and our salvation. Thank Him for the marvel of inspiration: that the infinite God stooped to work through finite, fallen human beings to produce a text that is fully His. Ask the Holy Spirit to illumine this Word as you study it, to kindle a deeper love for it in your hearts, and to protect you from every attack upon its authority and truthfulness. Pray for those who doubt the inspiration of Scripture, that the Spirit would open their eyes to the glory of the God-breathed Word.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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