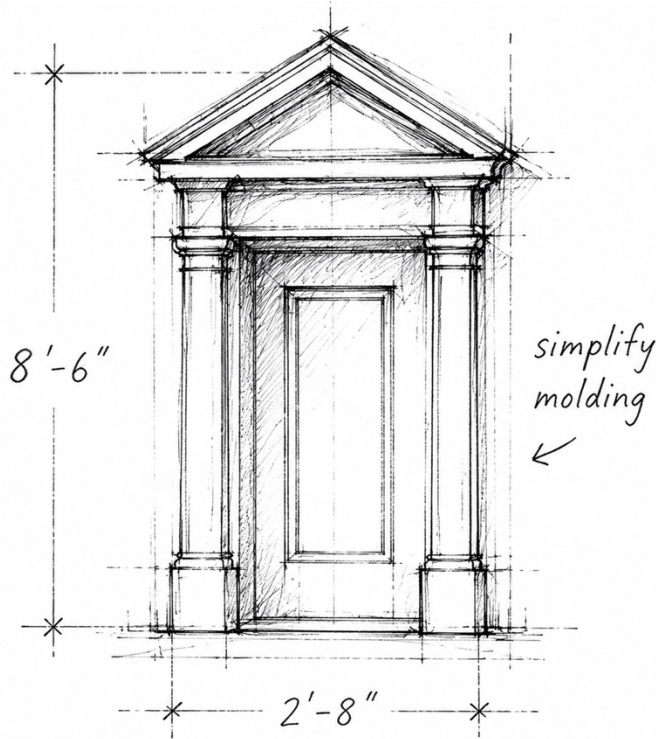


Chapter Five

THE TOOLS OF THE CRAFTSMAN





SHAPED BY TRUTH

Scripture Focus: Acts 18:18-28

The other day, I was hunting for just the right bookshelf. I wanted something large enough to hold the things I love, but not so deep that everything would get lost in the back. I had a picture in my mind of what I wanted, but finding it was another story.

“Why would you buy one when I can make it for more money?” Michael said.

He was joking, of course, but at the same time he was on to something. Michael is a talented craftsman, and if anyone could bring my vision to life, he could.

We talked about giving the bookshelf a classic, vintage feel with corbels and molding. We would order those pieces from Etsy, but the rest of the supplies could come from Home Depot.

The next day, we went to the store to pick up wood, screws, sandpaper, stain, and a few dowels. And while we were there, I discovered that he also needed more tools.

“Do you really need these?” I asked, wondering if he was simply seizing the moment to add to his collection.

But he assured me he did. Each one had a purpose.

So we added a planer, a new blade for the table saw, and a router.

The same is true of the Spirit’s work in our lives. What He uses is never random. Scripture, prayer, fellowship, correction, waiting, hardship, and seasons of uncertainty all serve a purpose in His hands. Some cut away what doesn’t belong. Some steady us when we’re weak. Some gently draw our hearts back to the Lord. And through it all, the Holy Spirit is shaping us into the image of Christ.

Scripture is one of the most important tools He uses. Through God’s Word, the Holy Spirit teaches, corrects, encourages, and guides His people. The Bible does far more than provide knowledge. It reveals truth, exposes what needs to change, and draws our hearts closer to the Lord. Sometimes the Word comes with the force of a hammer. Other times it’s quietly at work in our hearts.

Prayer is another means by which God shapes His people. As we spend time in His presence, our hearts begin to change. We learn to rely less on

our own understanding and more on His wisdom. Prayer teaches us to trust God even when we can’t see what lies ahead.

*As we spend time
in His presence
our hearts begin
to change.*

The Lord also uses other believers. Through encouragement, correction, wisdom, and example, members of God’s household help one another grow. Sometimes a timely word from a trusted friend becomes part of God’s work in our lives.

And then there are the seasons we would never choose for ourselves.

Waiting.

Disappointment.

Trials.

Times of uncertainty.

These can feel more like obstacles than opportunities for growth. Yet Scripture repeatedly shows that God uses these seasons to deepen our faith and draw us nearer to Himself. What feels difficult in the moment often becomes part of His refining work.

This is where faith becomes real.

When Scripture corrects us, we trust the Craftsman.

When prayer requires patience, we trust the Craftsman.

When conviction exposes something hidden within our hearts, we trust the Craftsman, knowing that even His correction is evidence of His love.

When trials test our faith, we trust the Craftsman.

The effectiveness of the process doesn't depend upon our understanding. It depends upon the wisdom of the One who carries it out.

At times, we may wish God would choose an easier path, but we can trust that His work isn't careless. Every detail serves a greater purpose.

And what is His greater purpose?

To shape us into the image of Christ. This isn't a careless or rushed work. It is personal. The Lord knows exactly where we need to be strengthened, softened, corrected, and restored.

Paul tells us that we "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

And as He continues His work of reshaping each stone, love replaces selfishness. Trust overcomes fear. Humility softens pride. Little by little, the character of Christ becomes more visible in our lives.

This is why the Bible reminds us that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Everything the Spirit uses in our lives serves the same purpose: preparing us to reflect Christ more faithfully.

The work He is doing in us is careful, personal, and purposeful. It is custom work, shaped by the hands of a loving God who knows exactly what needs to be formed in us. Every lesson, every correction, every act of surrender, and every step of growth is accomplishing something far greater than we can presently see.

One day, when we finally stand before God, we'll understand that every part of our journey was held in His hands. Every step was drawing us closer to home.

Word Study: God-Breathed

In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul writes: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

The Greek word translated as “God-breathed” is θεόπνευστος (theopneustos). This beautiful word means “breathed out by God.” It reminds us that Scripture is not merely words about God, but words that come from God Himself, carrying His truth, wisdom, and authority.

What a comforting reminder as the Holy Spirit patiently shapes our hearts.

The Word of God is not merely human wisdom collected over centuries. It is living truth given by the One who designed the house itself. Through Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches, corrects, strengthens, and refines the hearts of believers, shaping them into the likeness of Christ.

Little by little, the breath of God continues its quiet work within us, preparing living stones for the home Christ has promised.





Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 carefully. According to Paul, what are the different ways Scripture equips and shapes the believer?

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A Quiet Strength: Priscilla

Spiritual growth doesn't arrive all at once. It often happens quietly, in the ordinary moments that fill our days. A Bible opened while coffee cools on the table. A whispered prayer between baskets of laundry. A conversation with a trusted friend. An unseen act of service offered in love.

These moments may seem small, but they are often where God does His deepest work. Through the steady rhythm of seeking Him, listening to His voice, and walking in obedience, He patiently shapes our hearts and forms the character of Christ within us.

Priscilla's life offers a beautiful glimpse of this kind of shaping.

When we meet Priscilla in the book of Acts, she and her husband Aquila are simply living faithful lives wherever God leads them. They open their home to fellow believers, invest in the lives of others, and devote themselves to the truth of God's Word. There are no grand announcements, no spotlight fixed upon them. Yet beneath the surface, the quiet work of God is evident.

One of those opportunities came in the life of Apollos. Scripture describes him as an eloquent speaker who was fervent in spirit and knowledgeable in the Scriptures, yet his understanding of the gospel was still incomplete. Priscilla and Aquila could have corrected him publicly, but instead they chose a gentler path. They welcomed him into their home and “explained to him the way of God more adequately” (Acts 18:26).

What a beautiful picture of spiritual maturity.

Long before Priscilla helped strengthen someone else’s faith, God had been strengthening hers. Through Scripture. Through fellowship. Through teaching. Through service. Through countless opportunities to listen, learn, and grow, the tools of the Craftsman were quietly at work.

Her story reminds us that much of God’s work takes place through ordinary means. Every time we open His Word, bow our heads in prayer, gather with fellow believers, receive correction with humility, or serve someone in love, the Holy Spirit is shaping us for His purpose.



Faith in Action

Choose one verse from today’s reading and write it somewhere you’ll see it throughout the day. As you return to it, ask the Holy Spirit to use His Word to shape your thoughts, soften your heart, and draw you closer to Christ.

Before the day ends, take a moment to pray over what He has shown you. Ask Him to help you receive His work with humility and trust, even when the shaping process feels uncomfortable.



Read Acts 18:24–26. What do Priscilla and Aquila’s actions teach us about the way God uses Scripture, fellowship, and humble correction to strengthen His people and prepare them to serve others?

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Can you think of a particular tool the Holy Spirit might be using in your life right now—Scripture, prayer, fellowship, correction, waiting, or hardship—and how is He inviting you to respond with trust and surrender?

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The Prayer Closet

Think of one attitude, reaction, or pattern in your life that the Lord has been quietly drawing attention to recently. Instead of ignoring conviction or becoming discouraged by it, intentionally thank Him for caring enough to continue shaping your heart with patience and love.

Father in Heaven,

Thank You for loving me enough to continue shaping my heart. Thank You for Your patience, Your wisdom, and Your faithfulness in every season of my life. Even when I cannot see all that You are doing, I trust that Your work is good.

Forgive me for the times I resist Your correction, grow impatient with the process, or become discouraged by my weaknesses. Help me remember that every movement of Your hand is guided by love and that You are making me more like Christ.

Like Priscilla, help me grow in both truth and gentleness. Keep my heart soft and responsive to the leading of Your Spirit. Teach me to walk in humility, extend grace freely, and encourage those around me.

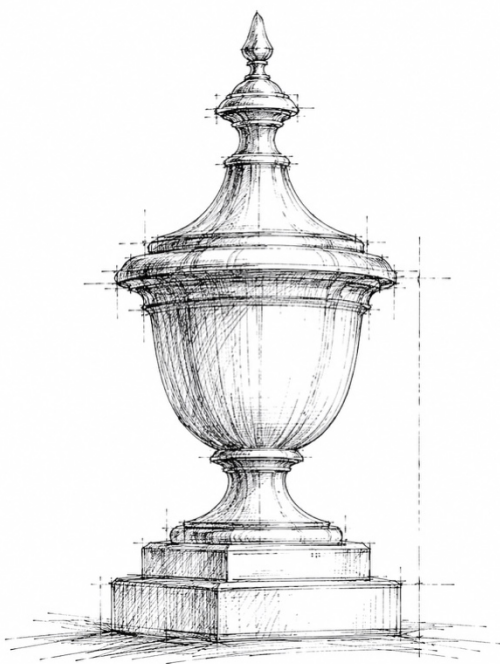
As You continue shaping me, help me reflect Your character more clearly each day.

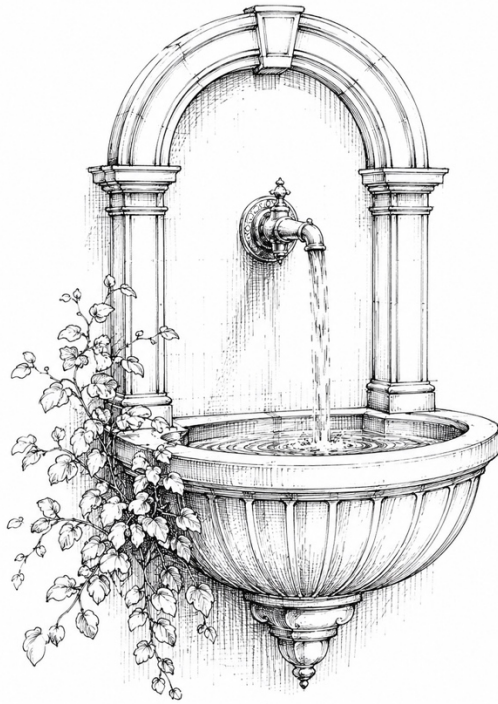
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter Six



SHAPING THE STONES





THE BEAUTY OF REFINEMENT

Scripture Focus: Esther 4

We had always wanted a piano. So when my sister told me that her neighbor was giving theirs away for free, we jumped at the chance to take it.

That is, until we saw it.

Covered in layers of shiny brown paint, the piano looked like someone had spray-painted it with high-gloss lacquer. It was horrific. But it was free, and since we had already expressed our excitement, we felt obligated to take it.

The next week, it was hauled to our house, pushed up the front steps, and placed along a large wall in our living room. There it stood for several weeks, looking worse than we ever imagined.

After walking past that piano again and again, I finally decided I had to find out what was under the paint.

So one afternoon, I rolled up my sleeves, pulled out a scraper, and got to work.

At first, it was hard to tell if I was making any progress at all. The paint was thick and stubborn, and it came off slowly, layer by layer, with plenty of scraping, sanding, wiping, and waiting in between.

But then something beautiful began to appear.

Burled walnut.

Hidden beneath all that shiny brown paint was a rich, beautiful wood I never would have guessed was there. What had looked hopeless on the outside was not hopeless at all. It had simply been covered for a very long time.

And even after the outside had been refinished, the piano still needed attention on the inside. Michael carefully tuned it, one string at a time, until the notes began to ring the way they were meant to sound.

That old piano taught me something I haven't forgotten. Restoration is rarely quick work. It takes patience. It takes care. And sometimes, before beauty is revealed, there is scraping, sanding, and tuning that has to be done.

Scripture gives us another picture of this kind of patient work—the picture of stone in the hands of a craftsman. At first glance, a rough stone may not seem very useful. Its edges are sharp. Its surface is uneven. It may even appear unsuitable for the work ahead.

Yet the Craftsman sees something that others don't.

He sees what it can become.

The same is true of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

The Holy Spirit isn't simply improving us. He is transforming us. Day by day, He is shaping us to reflect the character of Christ and preparing us for the purpose God has planned from the beginning.

And it's important to remember that the shaping begins after the stone has already been gathered.

The Craftsman does not reject a stone because of rough edges. He takes it into His care and then begins His work. Every adjustment, every correction, and every lesson is evidence that the stone still belongs in His hands.

This work doesn't happen overnight.

Nor is it always easy.

The Spirit often works in ways we wouldn't choose for ourselves. He

*The Holy Spirit
isn't simply
improving us. He
is transforming us.*

uses Scripture to reveal attitudes that need to change. He uses circumstances to expose places where our trust has drifted from Him. He uses seasons of waiting to teach patience, dependence, and faith.

Sometimes He allows us to see weaknesses we would rather ignore so that we might learn to rely more fully on God.

At times, the shaping can feel uncomfortable.

We naturally enjoy the parts of our faith that bring encouragement and comfort. Yet the Holy Spirit sees beyond the present moment. He sees what still needs to be surrendered, what still needs healing, and what still needs to be transformed.

Every movement of His hand is motivated by love.

His correction is not rejection.

He shapes us because He loves us too much to leave us unchanged.

What a comforting truth.

When the Lord reveals pride, fear, resentment, selfishness, or unbelief, He is not pushing us away. He is drawing us closer. The very things He removes are often the things preventing us from experiencing greater freedom, deeper trust, and a fuller reflection of Christ's character.

This is where yielding becomes so important.

Yielding to the Holy Spirit means allowing Him to remove whatever does not reflect the character of Christ. Sometimes He addresses obvious sins. At other times, He exposes subtle fears, misplaced priorities, unhealthy attachments, or ways of thinking that quietly compete with our trust in God.

Little by little, the Spirit removes what is earthly so that Christ may be seen more clearly in us.

And this is where faith once again takes center stage.

We trust the Architect's plan.

We trust the Cornerstone.

We trust the Craftsman.

Now we trust the shaping itself.

The Apostle Paul writes, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV).

We don't see it now, but someday we'll see:

How this time of training was a part of our growth.

How this time of waiting was needed.

How these years of uncertainty were all a normal part of progressing into the people God designed us to be.

Word Study: Conformed

In Romans 12:2, Paul writes: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

The Greek word translated as "conformed" is συσχηματίζω (sychēmatizō). It carries the idea of being pressed into a pattern from the outside, shaped by influences that are temporary and constantly changing. The picture is one of pressure from the outside forcing something into a mold.

Paul immediately contrasts this with another word: μεταμορφόω (metamorphoō), translated as "transformed." This word describes a deep inward change that gradually becomes visible outwardly. It is the same word used to describe Christ's transfiguration, when His glory was revealed before His disciples.

What a comforting picture of the Holy Spirit's work within us.

While the world presses from the outside, the Spirit works much deeper. He does not simply adjust behavior or improve appearances. He patiently transforms the heart, renewing the mind and shaping believers into the likeness of Christ.

Every day, the world invites us to think, speak, and live according to its values. The pressure can be subtle, yet constant. But the Holy Spirit is faithfully at work within those who belong to Christ. Through His Word, His presence, and His grace, He continues the work of transformation He began.

And over time, that inward change begins to shine through every part of a surrendered life.



❓ Read James 1:2–4. What do trials produce in the life of a believer, and what does that work lead to? How does this passage challenge the way we view and respond to difficult seasons?

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A Quiet Strength: Esther

Some of God's most meaningful work takes place in the quiet places of our lives.

We tend to focus on what is happening around us—the doors opening, the answers arriving, the circumstances changing. Yet while our eyes are fixed on the visible, God is often doing something deeper within us. Seasons of waiting, moments of uncertainty, and days that unfold in ways we never expected can leave us discouraged. And yet it is often in those very places that God is refining our faith and shaping our character.

Esther's story reminds us of this truth.

When we first meet her, she is a young Jewish woman living far from the land of her ancestors. Orphaned at an early age, she was raised by her cousin Mordecai. Much of her life seemed shaped by circumstances beyond her control. She didn't choose the loss she endured. She didn't choose the palace. She didn't choose the path that stretched before her.

I can only imagine that there were moments when Esther wondered what God was doing.

Years passed.

Questions lingered.

The road ahead remained uncertain.

Yet even when God's hand was hidden from view, He was actively at work. While Esther was simply living the life set before her, God was preparing her for something yet to come. Through loss, dependence, waiting, and circumstances that required trust, He was quietly building the courage, wisdom, and faith she would need.

That preparation became evident when a decree was issued threatening the lives of the Jewish people. Suddenly Esther found herself standing at a crossroads. She could remain silent and preserve her own safety, or she could risk everything by approaching the king on behalf of her people.

The young woman who had once been carried along by circumstances boldly stepped forward in faith, declaring, "If I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16)

When Esther finally stepped forward in faith, she was drawing on lessons God had been teaching her for years. Long before she stood before the king, God had been at work within her heart, preparing her for the assignment He had planned.

What a beautiful picture of His refining work.

Her story reminds us that God often accomplishes His greatest work long before we see the results. The seasons that feel confusing, uncomfortable, or even disappointing are not wasted in His hands. He uses them to strengthen our faith, deepen our trust, and prepare us for the work He has planned.



Faith in Action

Take a few quiet moments today to ask the Lord what He may be uncovering in your heart. Is there a fear, attitude, habit, or misplaced priority He is bringing into the light?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18 slowly, remembering that the Spirit is transforming you into the image of Christ.

Then pray with open hands. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you yield to His work, even when the process feels uncomfortable. Trust that His correction is not rejection, and that everything He removes is making room for Christ to be seen more clearly in you.



 Read Esther 4:13–16. What do Mordecai’s words reveal about God’s providence, and how does Esther’s response show a heart that had been shaped for courage, surrender, and obedience?

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 Is there a part of the Lord’s shaping work that feels uncomfortable right now? How might remembering His love help you yield to Him with greater trust?

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The Prayer Closet

Think of one area where disappointment, waiting, or repeated pressure has been testing your heart lately. Instead of pulling away from the Lord in discouragement, intentionally bring that burden honestly before Him today and ask Him to continue His work within you with wisdom and grace.

Father in Heaven,

Thank You for being faithful to complete the work You have begun in me. I trust that Your hands are guided by perfect wisdom, patience, and love.

Forgive me for the times I resist Your correction, grow weary in difficult seasons, or allow discouragement to take root in my heart. Like Hannah, teach me to bring my burdens honestly before You and to rest in Your care, even when my circumstances remain unchanged.

Help me remember that You are not working against me, but for my good. Through the power of Your Spirit, continue shaping my heart to reflect the character of Christ. Remove anything that hinders my growth, strengthen my faith, and help me walk closely with You each day.

Thank You for Your unfailing love and faithful care.

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In Jesus' name, Amen.

ANSWER KEY

Chapter 5

Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 carefully. According to Paul, what are the different ways Scripture equips and shapes the believer?

Scripture teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains believers in righteousness. Through God's Word, believers are equipped for every good work and prepared to live faithfully.

Read Acts 18:24–26. What do Priscilla and Aquila's actions teach us about the way God uses Scripture, fellowship, and humble correction to strengthen His people and prepare them to serve others?

Priscilla and Aquila gently instructed Apollos with greater accuracy from God's Word. Their example shows that God uses fellowship, biblical teaching, and humble correction to help believers grow and serve more effectively.

Can you think of a particular tool the Holy Spirit might be using in your life right now—Scripture, prayer, fellowship, correction, waiting, or hardship—and how is He inviting you to respond with trust and surrender?

This answer will be different for everyone.

Chapter 6

Read James 1:2–4. What do trials produce in the life of a believer, and what does that work lead to? How does this passage challenge the way we view and respond to difficult seasons?

Trials produce perseverance, and perseverance leads to spiritual maturity and completeness. This passage challenges believers to view difficulties as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles to avoid.

Read Esther 4:13–16. What do Mordecai's words reveal about God's providence, and how does Esther's response show a heart that had been shaped for courage, surrender, and obedience?

Mordecai's words reveal that God is sovereign and able to accomplish His purposes. Esther's response demonstrates courage, humility, and a willingness to obey God regardless of the personal cost.

Is there a part of the Lord's shaping work that feels uncomfortable right now? How might remembering His love help you yield to Him with greater trust?

This answer will be different for everyone.

