

# Holding Fast

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] are these, in the Anglican world, are these short prayers written hundreds of years ago, and we have one for each Sunday of the year. So we pray these each week, and Sean Fraser's going to come up after I've preached, and he's going to read this collet, he's going to pray this collet for us. So each Sunday of Advent, what we're going to do is we're going to explain the collet, and then we're going to look at the scripture that unpacks it. You got that? Super easy. So let's start with the collet. So this week's collet, it's just a cracker. So it's printed in your service sheets on page 7 in the bold there. Let me read it to you. It says, Blessed Lord, who caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and the comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the

Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen. That is a cracker, isn't it? Now, you might know that collets have a certain structure to them. These prayers are sort of a bit of a structure, and the structure in its simplest form is quite simple. First thing you do in these collets is you say something about God. You say like a quality of God. And then the next sentence is normally you pray something based on that quality of God. And then the next bit is you name the desired result of that prayer, and then you sort of close it off in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Okay, so for our one this week, the structure is pretty simple.

It starts off, bless the Lord, he calls all holy scriptures to be written for our living. Okay, so God made the scriptures to be written. That's the God quality. First line. Then the next line is help us get stuck into the scriptures. Help us to get into them. And then the desired result is that would be people who hope in Jesus. So that's a great prayer. That's a fantastic prayer. Malcolm Guy, who is an Anglican priest and poet who visits Vancouver often, actually, and teaches at Regent, he loves this column, loves it.

And he made this observation about it. And he names this middle line here. He says, Here, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. These are five glorious verbs, deepening as they follow one another in intensity of engagement. And he's right. So the trajectory with these words here, here, read, mark, learn, inwardly digest. The trajectory is greater and greater engagement with God's word. So this is what we're praying for. This is what we pray, and it's a great prayer.

But the goal is not so that we become, and I don't know what the word is here. You might know. I don't know. The goal is not that we, we're not praying that we become like biblicists or bibliogists or biblions. I don't know what the word is there. I'm making things up now. But it's the end goal is not that we just know the Bible well. That's not what we're praying. The goal is that through the word, this is the prayer, that through the word, despite what's happening in our life, we hold on to Jesus.

[ 3 : 2 9 ] We hold on to Jesus. See, this is why we, this is why we love the Bible. We love the Bible, not because it's great literature, although it is great literature. We love the Bible because it points us to Jesus.

Jesus. So imagine you're in love with someone, and you keep a photo of them, say, in your wallet. This is my wallet. Here we go. Here's a photo of my wife. In there, right there. She looks gorgeous. Now, let's say I go away on holiday for like a business trip or something, and I pull the photo out, and I say, I've been away for a week, and I go, I love you, Amy, and I kiss the photo. That's very sweet, isn't it? But I can tell you, it is a poor substitute for the real thing, for the real thing. Look, we love the Bible, but the Bible is not Jesus. We love the Bible. It is God's word, and it's fantastic, and the best thing it does is it points us to Jesus. Okay, so that's the colic. That's what the prayer is. We inwardly digest it so that we would hope in Jesus, not so that we would know this great piece of literature. Okay, so that's the colic, week two. Now, the colic is grounded in a couple of key scriptures. Key scriptures. Let's look at one of them, and then one we're going to look at is 2 Timothy 3, 14 to 17. So 2 Timothy was written by Paul, the apostle Paul, to a younger minister called Timothy, who was in a place called Ephesus. And Paul's main message to Timothy in this little section here is, stick with it, Timothy. Stick with it. I know it's really tough for you right now and what you're doing, but stick with Jesus. And one of Timothy's big dramas was these false teachers, what we call false teachers in his church. And the false teachers, what they were about was, it wasn't so much there is no God. The teachers were all about innovating. They loved innovation. They loved advancing these new theological ideas.

So I'm giving you some background before we get into the text. Okay. They loved advancing these theological ideas. They loved arguing theological things, but they were kind of like, if you know something about Greek rhetoric, they were like the sophists. Okay. But so they loved arguing stuff, but never landed anywhere. Never landed on something and said, no, no, this is it. We'll sort it out. So in verse seven, so early on in this, in this chapter, verse seven, Paul describes these guys like this. He says, they were always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. So they just sort of sit on the fence ideologically.

They wouldn't come down either side. See, their interest was just in exploring lots of theological novelties and having debates and it shipwrecked their faith and it, and it shipwrecked the faith of others around them. And these guys today, we might think they're brilliant because they're so open-minded. And of course, that's a quality we really admire in this culture, being super open-minded. Chesterton, who was a 19th century, what would you call him, a humorist and writer, Christian guy, he rows against this idea of being just really, really open-minded. Here's what he says. It's brilliant. He says, merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind as of opening the mouth is to shut it again on something solid. I think that's brilliant. So that's what these false teachers did. They just didn't land anywhere.

[ 7 : 35 ] They lived in this sort of ambiguity and they just wanted to drag people into that space with them and it just, it shipwrecked people's faith. So this was a great challenge for this young pastor, Timothy, in Ephesus, having these guys all around him. And all of that that I just said is to explain the first four words of our scripture. Paul has been talking about these troublemakers and then in verse 14 he says to Timothy, but as for you, I love those kind of lines. Paul says, I know what's happening over there with those folks, but you, as for you, you will live differently and you will teach differently. And then Paul gives the only command that he gives here. Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.

Continue in what you have learned and firmly believe. That's verse 14. That's the imperative. Timothy, continue in what you know is true. So I've been introducing my kids to Star Wars and it's just been brilliant. And I have some of my biggest marriage debates with Amy about what's age appropriate. And so I literally wait till she's away and watched Star Wars movies. It's like, she's not here right now. It's okay. So you remember A New Hope, they assault the Death Star and they're in the trench run. And this one guy is in the trench and he's complaining about being too close or something. And he wants to pull out. And the other guy says, I think his gold leader says, stay on target, stay on target, stay on target, stay on target.

Do you remember this? Do you remember this? That's what Paul is saying here. That's it. Stay on target, Timothy. Keep going. It's tough. And it is tough. It's tough being a Christian sometimes, right? It's costly. People might think you're regressive. But stay on course. Stay consistent to your convictions. Have confidence in the gospel. Now, why should Timothy do that? And this is where Paul moves on now. Paul gives Timothy two reasons why he should stay on target, stay on target, stay on target. Why he should do that in the midst of all the stuff going on around him. He gives him two great motivations. And the first one is, he says, think about your history. And then he says, think about the Bible. So that's the structure for the next 10 minutes. Think about history.

Think about the Bible. This is why you should stay on target. So verse 14 and 15. Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from who you learned it, and how from childhood you've been acquainted with the sacred writings. So Paul is saying, you can have confidence in the gospel. Think about who you learned it from. Now, Paul, as Timothy's mentor, is talking about himself, but not just himself. Verse 5 of chapter 1, right at the start of the book, right at the very start of the book, let me read this little thing to you here that Paul says to Timothy. He goes, I'm reminded of your sincere faith, a faith which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now I'm sure dwells in you as well. Isn't that wonderful? This faith that's been passed down through these incredible women in his family onto him. Paul says, Timothy, stay on course. You can trust the gospel. Why?

Think about the people that taught it to you. Your mother, your grandmother. Do you trust these people? Have you seen their lives transformed? Yes. You can trust the gospel too. Folks, if you're feeling a bit shaky in terms of your faith, I want you to think about the believers that you know and love in your church and in your family. You know these people. They believe the gospel. It's real.

[ 11 : 53 ] It's transformative. Let that carry you. Let that carry you along. Let that encourage you. Now, let's move on. Okay. So Timothy, I said, gives two reasons to stay on target, stay on target, stay on target. The first is he says, think about whom you got the gospel from, who you learned it from. And now the big one, he says, now I want you to consider the scriptures.

And it was the scriptures that Timothy's grandmother and mother taught him in childhood. And Paul says a few things about these scriptures. He says, one, that they are God's words and two, that they are profitable.

In other words, they're useful. So let's just spend a couple of minutes on that before we finish up. Okay. So the first thing Paul says about the Bible is verse 16. All scripture is breathed out by God.

So Paul is talking about its origin. He's saying that the Bible is not just inspiring, although it is inspiring. The Bible is not just inspiring. It's inspired. The Bible is not just a record of what religious people thought about God. The Bible is God exhaling, exhaling, like we breathe out and make words. God breathed out the Bible. And when we read it, God's words are heard.

So we read it expectantly. And we read it asking the Holy Spirit to speak to us. Now, as you know, in the back of your mind, you might be thinking, yeah, but like people wrote it though, right? And of course, of course people wrote it. It's God's words written through people. So that means you don't turn off your brain. You use your intellect and you intelligently pay attention to all the cultural historical stuff in there as well. But Paul's main point is that God breathed out one book. He wanted it all in there. All scripture is breathed out by God. He wanted it all in there.

[ 13 : 56 ] So we read it all. See, the false teachers, if you read the whole through the whole book, would see that that that there's false teachers, they would pick and choose the bits of the Bible they liked. But that's not the way the Bible lets us approach it. It's all God's words, all of it. And it's this priceless gift to us. I mean, we just hear so much commentary in our life, don't we? So much commentary through news and advertisements and social media. We have never been so inundated with information. And what do we trust? What do we trust in all of this?

Folks, in the Bible, God has spoken. We can trust that. Okay, so that's the first thing that Paul says about the word. The second thing is, oh, well, I'll read it to you. All scripture is breathed out by God, point one, point two, and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, that the man and woman of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. So the Bible is not just inspired. It's also useful. The Bible is a very practical book. It's practical because of what it is. And there are these four really great words here, teaching, reproof, correction, and training. The Bible points us to Jesus. And we need to be taught how to follow Jesus, though. The Bible does that. We need correction in our life. We need to be constantly shown that we are more influenced by secularism than we realize. We need the implications of discipleship spelt out to us in every aspect of our life, whether it's money or sex or vocation or, you know, just all our general relationships. All of us, we want to be growing in our love of Jesus, and we want to grow as disciples. And God has given us His Word. So we're not floundering, not wondering how to believe, how to act, what to think.

And if you're convinced by all of this, and you don't have a daily habit of Bible reading, we do want to help you. You remember in the fall, we produced these great little prayer booklets that were about this big. That was an evening service initiative, and we printed about 600, and they were gone in about two weeks.

So Bree and Joel and Audrey and myself have worked on a new one with new readings. We're going to print about 1,300 this time, I think. As well as the prayers, they have short daily Bible readings to encourage us in this practice. So look out for it. It'll be available in a couple of weeks. Folks, I want to finish up here. Let me say something really sort of simplistic. It's very difficult to have friendship with God without speech. It's very difficult to have friendship with God without speech.

But through the Bible, God's spoken. So we can know Jesus, and we can know what it means to follow Him. So let's determine to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it. Because there are so many voices speaking into our life. And how do we determine what to listen to?

[ 17 : 37 ] And there's lots of great voices. But I want you to remember these words of the Apostle Paul who says, in spite of all of the stuff coming in, you know, for you. But as for you, you will listen to something different.

I mean, what else have we got, right? What's the other option? The other option is educated guesses on how to live and what is truth. But no, as for you, followers of Jesus, we have God's words.

What a precious gift. Get into it. Amen.