

Don't Stop Reading

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 10 through 17. This is the word of God.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured.

Yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 29] Amen. All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

May God bless the preaching and hearing of his word. Amen. Amen. As many of you know, I just returned from schooling, a year of schooling at our denominations, Pastors College.

The Pastors College is aptly named. Its sole purpose is to train and equip men for pastoral ministry and their families for all that goes into them.

So, around this time last year, our family was preparing to move up to Louisville, Kentucky for the next year, where we would spend going through this program, this Pastors College.

In the PC, the Pastors College, there are 36 weekly classes that range from biblical theology and soteriology, which, frankly, I had to look up what that word meant before I took that class.

[2 : 44] And classes on marriage, evangelism, church history, and, of course, multiple Bible classes. Days were spent in lectures, and evenings were spent reading or studying for weekly exams or writing a paper.

And every week, there would be a new class, and I'd start the process over again. Not only was it a fire hose of information, but we were constantly meeting in small groups as well.

It was a cohort of guys and their families. The men met. The women met together. Families and community groups. It was an intense year, but I'll spend the next five to ten unpacking.

But our very first class was a foundational class on Scripture. This class undergirded the entire year.

Now, our first class could have been on any number of things. There's a number of things that are of utmost importance that you get right. Things like the nature and character of God the Father. The person of Christ.

[3 : 52] The work of the Holy Spirit. Salvation. Atonement. Creation. All these things are immensely important that we get right in our understanding.

But the foundation had to be Scripture. As we begin to study who God is, we have to realize that the main way, the primary way, that God chooses to make himself known is through a book.

God is a speaking God. And so the source of all our theology, its origin and the final authority in our lives, has to be the Holy Scriptures. Now, honestly, I loved almost every one of those classes.

But my favorite ones, most often, were the ones that took me deeper into his word. And my favorite assignment all year, it seems strange, was when we were required to spend four hours in isolation with the Lord.

It's a strange assignment. However, this was not merely time spent waiting for God to speak. It wasn't some mystical straining to hear his voice.

[5 : 05] We were instructed to enter that time with a plan and a Bible. The Lord has spoken through his word. And he continues to speak through his word.

So as I spent that time, that four hours, slowly reading through Romans 1 through 8, I stopped at various intervals and prayed for people. I worshipped the Lord spontaneously for the things that I was reading.

And I reflected on the course of my life. In some ways, it was surprising that the Scriptures illuminated my own heart. We shouldn't be surprised, but it helped me know myself better.

As one theologian said, we cannot attain clear knowledge of ourselves unless we first gaze upon the face of the Lord. The vision of the Pastors College comes from Paul's first letter to Timothy, when he wrote in 1 Timothy 4.16, Watch your life and doctrine closely.

Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. Watch your life and doctrine closely. How you live and what you believe.

[6 : 23] These twin priorities, life and doctrine, must go together. And as we read the Scriptures and understand its teaching, our beliefs are molded and shaped, and godly change happens as we obey.

I've heard someone say that the Bible begins to read us. And so we cannot keep watch over our lives. We cannot pursue godliness apart from God's Word.

In Paul's day, false teaching was the primary danger, primary enemy to the church. As Scripture was distorted, godliness was affected.

In our day, false teaching remains one of the biggest opponents to the church. When the culture around us says that what we feel about ourselves is the source of authority, and we can adopt that same thinking very easily.

Rightly handling the word of truth is as relevant as ever. In fact, Paul argues in our text today that building our lives on the Bible is a matter of life and death.

[7 : 30] What we believe and how we believe it affects our lives. So we want to build our lives on the truth of Scripture and let everything flow from that. So the main point of our text today is continue to grow in godliness through God's Word.

Continue to grow in godliness through God's Word. In the structure of our text, which will be the structure of this message, Paul contrasts godly with the ungodly.

And then he describes where the source of our power comes from. So first we'll look at Paul's description of the ungodly. Point number one, the appearance of godliness. The appearance of godliness.

Paul is at the end of his life writing to Timothy. And he wants Timothy to know what is absolutely necessary. What is it that Timothy ought to know when Paul leaves the scene?

What is absolutely necessary in life? What does Paul want Timothy to remember? Or to continue doing? He's writing from a prison in Rome and Paul also reflects on his own life.

[9 : 06] And urges Timothy to follow his example. In many ways, these verses are a warning to Timothy, an exhortation, but they're also a warning and an exhortation to us.

The text begins with a contrast that is drawn from the previous verses. He says, you however. It's obviously referring to the previous verses. Paul says that this is how it's going to be in the last days. He said they're going to become times of difficulty. Verses 3.1. But understand, even though he's speaking in a future tense, that isn't some distant future that he's talking about.

For Paul, and for us, that time is now. The time between Christ's first return and second return.

These are the last days. These are the difficult days in which we live.

And verses 1 through 9 continue with nearly two dozen descriptions of what the world is going to be like.

[10 : 12] What people will be like. But if you notice the first and last indictments, it says that people will be lovers of self and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

At the core of this list is something that's common to all people. Apart from Christ, we don't love God. Instead, we love ourselves.

We love. We love all right. We were made for love, but inherent within us is a misplaced love. And I think the striking comment is in verse 5, where Paul says they have an appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

Throughout the Bible and throughout all of history, we've seen the reality of what some have called a divorce from religion and morality, separating life and doctrine.

Think of all the terrible things that have been done in the name of Christianity. There's an appearance of godliness, but lacking its power. Reform without power, faith without works.

[11 : 19] But it can also be really subtle. These are people who claim to know God. Of this verse, commentator Thomas Oden says, they are deliberately unholy and still go to church.

Covetous and still say morning prayers. Blasphemers and still repeat perfectly the Apostles' Creed. They may be treacherous and still remain on the church board.

Haters of good and still give lip service to God. This is what Jesus calls sheep and wolves in sheep's clothing. Now, we're not the kind of church that wants to be suspicious of every person that walks to the door.

We want to give room for each other's faults and sins. We want to be tenderhearted, forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven us. But this is the warning that Paul gives to the church.

It's a sober warning. Paul says that an appearance of godliness can exist and yet still be missing something. What's missing?

[12 : 29] Certainly described previously, it's this misplaced love. If there's no love for God, there will be no love for his word. There'll be no pursuit of God, no depth, no living under the authority of God's word.

And so severe is this contrast between the godly and ungodly, those who are godly and have the appearance of godliness, that Paul says that all who desire to lead a godly life will be persecuted. There in verse 12. And this is not just a word for the preacher. This is not for the professional Christian. No Christian is excluded.

If we desire to lead a godly life, all will be persecuted. Now, I think at this point, some of us may balk and say, really, all Christians will be persecuted?

Does this mean if I'm not persecuted, I'm not a Christian? And to answer that question, I think we need to look at two things. Why the Lord says this?

[13 : 34] Why does he say this? And what is this persecution? First the why. Why will believers be persecuted? Why is it that Paul says this to Timothy and to us?

I think it's because Christianity offers an offensive message. Christianity offers an offensive message. It's exclusive. Acts 4.12 says there's salvation in no one else.

It condemns all people. Romans 3.23, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And it claims that salvation is in the hands of God alone.

Ephesians 2.8, by grace you've been saved. It's the gift of God, not a result of works. Christianity says that your feelings do not have the final authority.

You don't belong to yourself. You will be held accountable. And that salvation is found in no one else. And ultimately, it's an offer to come and die. It's offensive to those who are living for themselves.

[14 : 40] If we're Christian in name only, if we love ourselves more than God, then when the heat is turned up, we'll throw our lot in with the rest of the culture around us and do whatever is easy.

And watered-down Christianity is an abomination to the Lord. Next, the what? What is the persecution he's talking about? And for Paul, it meant imprisonment, beatings, stoning, and ultimately martyrdom for being a Christian.

But just because most of us don't suffer that kind of persecution, that kind of intensity, does not mean that we don't experience it at all. While there is severe persecution happening all over the world today, ours happens to look different for most of us, at least for now.

We don't get to choose the intensity or the type of persecution. So we can thank God that we live in a nation that is pretty safe to be a Christian this day and age.

The danger, though, is to think that that's the norm. And when persecution does come, we can get squeamish and think that something strange is happening. But on some level, if you're a Christian, the world around you just won't get you.

[16 : 09] It won't understand you. Why don't you go along with the culture? Why are you generous with your time and money? Oh, we won't be perfect, but there should be something in our Christian walk that the world doesn't understand.

Some will be attracted to it. Praise God. Some will be repelled and try to get you fired from your job, slander or gossip about you behind your back.

It may be that people just don't like you because of what you stand for. And for some of us, that may be harder than martyrdom. Just have somebody not like us. The ultimate aim, if our ultimate aim in life is self-service, then will fold when the heat is turned up.

And it's contrary to the message of Scripture that tells us to take up our cross daily and follow Christ. We have to come to grips, I think, with the fact that there's no place in Scripture that commends an easy life.

In verse 13, the Bible says that those who aren't tethered to the Word of God are deceiving others and are themselves deceived.

[17 : 22] We become deceived if we're not regularly gazing into the mirror of God's Word. We begin trusting our own righteousness.

Have you ever driven out toward Etowah, toward Star Mountain? I'm sure most of you have. Many of you have. On a beautiful day, and it's a cool fall day, the humidity is really low, the sky is bright, and you can see for miles.

When you get close to Star Mountain, you can feel like you can see every leaf on every branch of every tree. It is beautiful. But if you were to, for some reason, lift your gaze off of the horizon and stare at the sun for just two seconds, which I would not recommend, especially you kids, then you would realize that the same ability to see earthly things is weak when compared to seeing celestial things.

And so it is in our lives, as John Calvin said, when we limit our gaze to the horizons of this world, we think we see pretty well, and we're content with our own righteousness.

But when we look to the Lord through his holy word, our eyes are dazzled, and we realize we don't quite see as well as we thought we did. And we will realize that he is glorious, and he's calling us to a higher standard.

[18 : 46] We'll despise our own righteousness. Oh, look to God's word to reveal any pretense or a mere appearance of godliness. Let God's word remove any deception in our lives.

That brings us to our second point, point number two, the pursuit of godliness. The pursuit of godliness. Paul now establishes the other side of the contrast with Timothy.

The litany of ungodly behavior in verses two through nine is now contrasted with himself in verse 10. He's saying, you have, you followed me. And Timothy is deeply familiar with Paul's teaching.

That's part of what that verse is saying. You know what I'm going through. And he's deeply familiar with it. He knows his teaching, his purpose in life, and his persecutions. In fact, it was in Timothy's hometown in Lystra that Paul was stoned and left for dead in Acts.

No doubt Timothy was a witness of this and likely affected his life. So Paul looks to the past at how well Timothy has done. And then he looks forward to tell him to continue in verse 14.

[20 : 09] If he's to continue in something, well this implies that Timothy's already been doing something right. And if he's already learned and firmly believed the truth, what does he need to continue doing?

Some say it means that he needs to keep learning and salvation will come to you the more you know. Like that 1980s PSA, the more you know. No, that's not it. That's not what he means.

What Paul is getting at is that we never graduate of our need from God's word. The Lord has given us a treasure in his word that is beyond comprehension. When we forget, God reminds.

When we grieve, God's word comforts. When we sin, his word points to the forgiveness that is in Christ. But listen, the Bible isn't there merely for human need.

It includes that. But the Bible is a written account of God's activity in creation. It details man's fall and his plan of redemption. It recounts the beginning of all things and the end of all things.

[21 : 18] As John Piper says, in the Bible, we meet God. The one who made all things, planned all things, reigns over all things, and who is saving for himself a people from every tribe and tongue and nation on earth.

Hallelujah. Daily study in the word with the help of the Holy Spirit will change your life. I may be preaching to the choir.

So is Paul. But continue. Paul says to Timothy, and he says to each of us, give yourself to the word of God. Our growth in godliness does not happen by accident.

And it begins in the word. As Paul offers himself as a counterexample to those described in verses 1 through 9, he also commends Timothy's family in verses 14 and 15.

and their way of life. One of the reasons Paul exhorts Timothy to continue, he roots it in the way of who he learned it from. It seems that Timothy grew up in a godly home.

[22 : 36] Even though his father was a Gentile, his mother and grandmother were godly Jews who taught him the scriptures. Just like some of you, Timothy has a wonderful heritage.

A heritage that's been passed down. You know, this message isn't something new. We, week in, week out, don't preach new things generally.

Though we want to seek to apply the Bible's truth to our changing culture, these are age-old truths, time-tested. This is the old way that doesn't need to be reimagined.

It's a message that needs to be guarded and handed down. Paul taught Timothy and his own family taught Timothy and they lived out the gospel. Timothy watched them and their lives and it affected Timothy.

A story is told by author Don Carson in one of his books about two men named Dave. One was a Christian friend of his and a graduate student named Dave Ward and the other was a younger student and an unbeliever also happened to be named Dave.

[23 : 51] The younger student, the younger Dave, was inquisitive and asked Dave Ward about his Christianity. The younger Dave came from a fine home. They were a close-knit family.

They did good in the community and he asked Dave Ward, what do you think you've got that I don't have? Valid question. Dave Ward thought for a long time and finally said, watch me.

Younger Dave said, I beg your pardon? Dave Ward repeated what he had just said and then expanded. Watch me. I've got an extra bed.

Move in with me. Be my guest. I'll pay for the food. You go to your classes, do whatever you have to do, but watch me. You watch me when I get up, when I interact with people, what I say, what moves me, what I live for, what I want in life.

You watch me for the rest of the semester and then you tell me at the end whether or not there's a difference. The younger Dave did not literally take him up on his offer.

[25 : 06] He didn't move in with Dave Ward, but he did keep going to see him and before the end of that semester he became a Christian and subsequently a medical missionary overseas.

The author continues, you who are older should be looking out for younger people and saying in effect, watch me. Come, I'll show you how to have family devotions.

Come, I'll show you how to do Bible study. Come on, let me take you through some of the fundamentals of the faith. Come, I'll show you how to pray. Let me show you how to be a Christian husband and a father, a wife and a mother and at a certain point that older mentor should be saying other things such as, let me show you how to die.

Watch me. Paul is saying, you want to know how to live? Watch me. Follow me as I follow Christ. Oh, how much of the Christian life is passed on just by watching. We may not actually say to people, watch me, but believe me, they're watching.

[26 : 24] People are watching. I don't know about you, but I found that story incredibly provoking. If you're like me, my first reaction is to think of all the reasons why I couldn't say watch me.

Is my heart and life consistent enough to be watched? Those of us with a little more gray hair ought to be people who are saying watch me.

I want to be one. Don't you? We can. We should. And those of you who are young in the faith, even if you are older, if your faith feels weak, your knowledge of the Bible and God's truth is weak, don't despise that either.

Weak faith is still saving faith, as Spurgeon said. But grow. Seek to grow in his word and in godliness. By the grace of God, we can and we will continue to pursue godliness through his word. The message of the Bible not only condemns, as we said earlier, but it's the only message that brings life as well. So, Timothy was acquainted with the sacred writings from childhood and then the Bible gives the intended effect of what that's meant for.

[27 : 53] What does it say in verse 15? Which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Salvation.

We see that kind of language, we should always ask ourselves, save from what? Apart from the intervention of Christ, we're exactly what Paul describes in verses 1 through 9.

Go back and read it. That's us. That's us. We are naturally lovers of self and lovers of pleasure. Jesus saves us from ourselves, but in a more fundamental way, Jesus saves us from God himself.

Because of our sin, we're enemies of God. Rebels of a holy, righteous God. We could never work our way out of the pit that we've dug. nothing but the sacrifice of a holy redeemer could ever pay for the penalty that we deserve. It is not in yourself to save yourself.

[28 : 59] We need a savior. It is salvation through faith alone in Christ that brings salvation. Jesus was the one who came and lived the perfect life that we should have lived and died the death that we deserve to die in our place.

faith in him will save. This is the message of the Bible. And in many ways, it is a contrast. That part is also a contrast with verse 7 against those who are always learning and never able to arrive at the knowledge of the truth.

Lies for salvation or always learning and never able to arrive at the truth. There is an ultimate end to the Bible, to Scripture.

It provides answers. I think it's so many times we tend to read or watch or consume material that really doesn't have an end goal.

It's just for the sake of more thought, more questions, more reading. We can't approach the Bible that way. The Bible is authoritative. Each verse has an interpretation.

[30 : 08] God's word points us in a direction toward faith in Christ and toward godliness. And finally, point 3, the power of godliness. The power of godliness.

verses 16 and 17 appear abruptly, as one commentator said.

It's like an anvil dropped in the flow of discourse. It functions almost as a footnote, a side comment, to the previous mention of sacred writings. And there's a few places in the Bible, in the pages of the Bible that help us understand what it is, its origin.

The Bible talks about itself. And this is one of those places. Thankfully, the Bible has an origin. It has a history. And it's faith-building to trace out how we got the Bible we have in our hands today, oral tradition, the Hebrew manuscripts And Greek!

And all these things. But Paul wants us to know that the Bible comes from himself. The Bible The Lord uses human means, but it comes from God. And it appears that Paul coins a new phrase.

[31 : 27] It's what we translate God-breathed. The smart guys say that this phrase is not used anywhere else in Scripture. God-breathed. And it's not found anywhere else in ancient Greek literature prior to this letter.

And it's God-breathed out. It's not as if he breathed into the words after the writers wrote it down. They wrote down. God-breathed on it.

It's authoritative. That's not what that means. Instead, the Lord breathes out Scripture. It is breathed out by God. And yet, Scripture also isn't exactly dictated to the authors.

It's not whispering what it is and they're writing it down. The Lord used each individual personality and the unique fingerprint that they have on the text. And the Lord's breathing out exactly what he wanted to say.

What a wonderful mystery. It's similar to how the Lord uses us today. He chooses, the Lord chooses to use people in unique ways. He uses us in the lives of others.

[32 : 34] Utilizing our gifts, our talents, our experiences. And yet, it's the Lord who's completely at work behind the scenes doing it all.

What a great paradox. I think that's somewhat what's happening here. The Lord's breathing Scripture out. And how wonderful it is that God spoke in such a way that we can understand.

He is, after all, transcendent. Many religions claim, many religions claim that God can't be known. He is too high, too lofty.

God. How could anyone know him? It is audacious that we claim to know God, what he's like, what he thinks, what he loves.

But the Lord has chosen what he wants to reveal about himself. Doesn't he have the power to make himself known, even to his creatures? The Lord breathes out what he wants us to know.

[33 : 33] God has revealed himself in creation, in our moral awareness. We have moral faculties, we're moral beings.

And yet, he's entered the realm of human language and breathed out the Bible. And of all of the revelatory acts, only the Bible is verbal. No other method is as clear.

And though we can know him, we don't know him exhaustively. We cannot know everything about God, but we can know him truly. As the dean of our pastor's college has said, biblical religion is a

revealed religion.

God inspired the scriptures. They are actually breathed out by God. And even though God's revealed himself in a way that we can't comprehend, sin still blinds our desires, our will, our hearts, our minds, every aspect, in fact, of our lives.

Sin blinds us, so much so that we're unable to come to the Lord for salvation. He has to first intervene in our hearts for us to respond. So, when reading scripture, we need our eyes opened to the glory that lies within its pages.

[34 : 52] It's there to discover, but if we assume we can obtain it on our own strength, we're mistaken. In verse 16, scripture says that scripture is useful or profitable.

Not only is it able to make us wise for salvation, but it has a broader utility. Teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.

While this list is not exhaustive of what the word of God can do, one commentator said that it has to do with creed and conduct, life and doctrine.

What we believe and how we believe it. Teaching and reproof have to do with doctrine. What we're to believe and not believe. Both are important.

While correction and training and righteousness relate to right living. How we're to live and how we're not to live. John Stott said, do we hope to overcome error and grow in truth?

[36 : 03] To overcome evil and grow in holiness? Then it is to the scriptures that we must primarily turn. For scripture is profitable for these things.

God has spoken. It's our job to listen. Scripture never pictures a situation where someone rightly interprets scripture but refuses to obey it.

Life and doctrine must go together. Scripture is profitable for this kind of instruction. So, where do you find yourself in need today?

For each of us, there's areas where we need to experience the power of God. Do you need power in raising young children?

Sometimes it's physical strength. Do you need wisdom in discipling teens? Do you feel your weakness in knowing how to be a Christian in the workplace?

[37 : 12] Do you need power to fight sinful desires? How many of us are aware of our tendency towards self-service and need to be transformed by the God of all grace into someone who takes an interest in others?

Open the Bible. Confess your need and turn to Him in the Word. There is nothing, listen, there is nothing that can substitute for your daily intake of God's Word.

It is accessible to you through the power of the Spirit. Do you want to hear God's voice? Read the Bible. Before you approach God's Word each day, pray and ask for clarity.

We need God to understand God. Ask God to help you. It's for you. It's not just for the professional Christians. Daily practice of reading the Bible will change your life.

It's the power station of your life. The Bible's power is the God that's behind the Word.

[38 : 26] The Word of God is not God. Let me be clear, the Word of God is not God, but it is a window through which we see Christ more clearly. John 5, 39 says, you search the Scriptures, this is Jesus speaking, you search the Scriptures because you think in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me.

Everything in the Bible is sufficient and authoritative in your life. In the end, it will make you wise for salvation, pointing you to our Savior and Redeemer, Christ Jesus.

And it will equip you for every good work so that the person of God will be able to rise to any challenge that comes their way. There is sufficiency for Scripture, in Scripture, for every good work for your entire life.

A final thought. Will you consider, I challenge you to consider, reading the Bible for five minutes every day.

Plan for it. If you don't have a daily time in the Word that's scheduled, consider reading it for five minutes. It may seem like a tiny amount.

[39 : 34] It may seem like a lot. It's doable, and the Lord works in that time. Make a plan. If you're not sure where to start, ask one of the pastors. We'd be happy to help you.

Or start in the book of Mark. If you're already doing a ten-minute read in the morning, just add five more minutes. If you're doing 50, do 55.

I challenge you to add an extra five minutes of Bible reading to your morning or your day. Put it on the calendar. Can't wait to hear how God meets us.

Continue to grow in Godliness through God's Word. Let's pray. Let's pray. Oh, great God, you have given us your holy, inspired Word.

Thank you for this gift of your Word. Thank you that you have spoken to us. You've not left us to ourselves.

[40 : 38] We want to cherish your Word. We want to cherish the God who wrote the Word. We ask for help in this, God. Help us to remember, Lord. Help us to see with our eyes as we read each day the God who wrote the Bible for the purpose of relationship.

You wrote this, Father, to redeem Your people, to show the way of salvation, to make us wise for salvation, that we might have eternal relationship with You, God.

You want to make us Your own. Thank You for that. Help us in these next days, Lord. As we plan, would You meet with us through the Word. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com. and that we'll see you next time.