

Continue in Your Faith — Rev. Denise Stone

Text: 2 Timothy 3:14—4:5

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When you think of your faith and your knowledge of God and of Scripture – do you have any person or people that come to mind - maybe your parents or grandparents or a favorite Sunday School Teacher? People who first helped you know about Jesus and about church? What memories or feelings do you have about them and the influence they had on you?

Even though my parents did not go to church with me as a child, I can point to them and to many other people as important figures in my spiritual growth. I had a series of Sunday School Teachers that helped me understand the value of studying the Bible. Their examples of how they led their lives made significant impressions on me and how I would lead my life. There was a couple in my first church that basically “adopted” me into their family on Sundays. I sat with them for years during church. They gave me my first understanding of what it meant to be a Christian.

My experiences with those individuals and with the ministers at my church really served to shape my understanding of faith in God. I will forever be grateful to them for the impact they made.

If you have been in church for any length of time, and looking around this Sanctuary, I would guess that many of you have spent lots of time in church, you can probably identify those people who made similar impacts on you and your faith and your life as a believer in Jesus Christ. These were important people to you.

In Paul's letter to Timothy, Paul has reminded Timothy of the people who helped develop Timothy's faith – his mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois. Paul was also a significant mentor for Timothy in his belief in Jesus Christ.

Paul also affirms Timothy in his knowledge of Scripture – the sacred writings mentioned in verse 15.ⁱ

It is important to look at verses 14 and 15 together,

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

You see it is not just academic knowledge or morals that Paul is talking about – it is that through the

examples of faith and knowledge of Scripture that leads one to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Salvation through Jesus Christ is THE point of the things we have learned and been taught.

It is with this background that Paul brings us to perhaps one of the most recognizable statements about Scripture ever made. Verses 16 and 17 say,

¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

The word that is translated in the NRSV as “inspired” can also be translated as “God-Breathed.” Think about the creation story for a moment. When the first people were created, we are told that God breathed life into them. God inspired those words to be written, God breathed life, if you will, into the words of Scripture.

So God breathed the words of Scripture infusing them with life. God did this for what purpose? “For teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” And not just for the sake of head knowledge, but “so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

Scripture serves a distinct purpose – for us to know God more and to serve God more fully.

There are parts of Scripture that are difficult to read or difficult to understand. And sometimes we may find sections, dare I say it, boring. It takes a commitment to read and to learn and to apply the truths to our lives.

An article I read referred to a cartoon that “depicted a young man talking on the telephone, and saying, ‘I think I’ve made one of the first steps toward unraveling the mysteries of the Bible... I’m starting to read it.’”ⁱⁱ

We can never know Scripture unless we read it and study it. Scripture serves as a door or a window that opens us up to the knowledge of God and of Salvation through Jesus Christ. The examples of our parents in faith may be important, but our Salvation is not through them. We are not Christians because our parents were. We are not Christians because we have attended church our whole lives. We are only Christians because of our belief in Jesus Christ.

Through faith in Jesus Christ by the mercy and grace of God our Creator is how we obtain Salvation. And while there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation, the things that we do as Christians come out of our

love and belief in God. “¹⁷ so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

Paul doesn't stop there. Paul stresses that it is through the revelation of God as found in the pages of Scripture that lead us to know and love God, we, along with Timothy, are encouraged to live our lives in faithful service to God.

Paul is encouraging Timothy specifically as a minister to the Church at Ephesus and in his confronting with false teachers there, but Paul is also encouraging us, today, in how we all serve as ministers and occasionally confront false teachers now. Paul says starting in chapter 4, verse 1,

4 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ² proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

When Paul refers to the message in verse 2, he is talking about the Good News of Jesus Christ and of the Salvation that is only available through belief in

Jesus. We, like Timothy are to be persistent – whether the time is favorable or not. We could easily argue that today the time to share our faith is not favorable. The world does not want to look into the mirror provided by Jesus Christ and see who they really are, but we are encouraged to “convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.”

Paul comes to the place of “stepping on toes” in verses 3 and 4.

“³ For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.”

If there was ever a time that this statement was true, one could argue that it is now. There are preachers (many on TV) that preach the prosperity gospel – believe (and send me money) and your life will be blessed and sometimes those blessings will be in dollars and cents. There are others that preach hatred against groups that they disagree with. You can probably add to this list.

Let's face it – we want to hear what we want to hear. We don't want to be confronted with our sins or our failures, we don't want to be told to give of our money or our time to people we don't know (and sometimes to people we do know). More and more it seems that people want to be entertained rather than actually worship God.

On one hand this seems to be truer today than at any point in history. Bear in mind, however, that Paul is saying this in the first century. This is not a new phenomenon. People throughout the ages have struggled with this. We want to hear things that make us feel good about ourselves and our friends and family.

So how do we combat this tendency? As believers, we need to look one more verse further. Verse 5 says, “⁵ As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.”

From the same article I referenced earlier, “This final directive” from verse 5 “covers not only all that Paul has specifically dealt with in this letter but anything else that might conceivably be seen as a part of a vital ministry of shaping the identity of the church.”ⁱⁱⁱ

All who are believers in and followers of Jesus Christ are ministers of the Good News. To be effective ministers of the Good News – we need to know Scripture – not just with head knowledge of Scripture but with heart knowledge of Scripture.

For we all ARE called to “do the work of an evangelist” – and to do that work “with the utmost patience.”

Pray with me...

Lord, your word forms a strong foundation on which to build our lives.

Like a sower, you have planted your truth and your law of love in our very souls.

Watch over what you have planted and nurtured within us.

Find us faithful, O God, that we may take what we have learned and grow to know you.

For you are the One to whom we belong, the One to whom we pray. Amen.^{iv}

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the [New Revised Standard Version](#) (NRSV). New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ "Kindling the Presence of God." *Homiletics*, vol. 28, no. 5, 2016, pp. 52–57.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Kindling the Presence of God - Commentary" *Homiletics*, vol. 28, no. 5, 2016, pp. 52–57.

^{iv} <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4291/worship-elements-october-20-2019>