

*<sup>14</sup>As for you, continue in the things you have learned and about which you have become convinced. You know from whom you learned them <sup>15</sup>and that from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be complete, well equipped for every good work.*

***4** I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup>Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup>For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. <sup>4</sup>They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths.*

*<sup>5</sup>As for you, keep a clear head in every situation. Bear hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry.*

Paul writes this letter to young pastor Timothy during his second imprisonment stint. He knows he is not going to make it out of prison this time. This is his swan song. As Paul pens this section, he does not hold back. In the strongest terms, he implores Timothy to go forward with the gospel message of Jesus unafraid. It's the same fearless call to action that Paul delivers to us. We face a world that desperately needs what we have to share. But as we find out, that does not mean the world is excited to hear the message of Christ.

Before we can do anything though, we have to be trained. You probably skim through the manual or watch a YouTube video about some gadget you just bought before you put it to work. You get training, even if it's just basic instruction, before you start a new job. To use something well, it takes time to master it. The same is true with the word of God.

Look at Timothy. Paul writes, "As for you, continue in the things you have learned and about which you have become convinced. You know from whom you learned them and that from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Timothy was raised by two wonderful believers, his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. These ladies made sure their little boy knew God's word early. Of course, only a few years after his birth, the well-known teacher, Jesus the Christ, was crucified and rose. Timothy's mom and grandma must have heard this message and become early converts to the new Christian Church. With little Timothy in tow, they would hear all about those Old Testament promises in Jesus fulfilled. They would gather with their fellow Christians to praise the Lord of salvation and grow in his truths. This is the environment Timothy grew up in. And Paul credits a lifelong Christian education as the reason Timothy is ready to share the gospel boldly.

Our church too is filled with all kinds of Timothys, people old and young who come to worship Christ and grow in his word. And that is a wonderful thing. Christian education is never complete, no matter how many years you spent in Sunday school, Catechism class, adult Bible class, or Lutheran elementary school and high school. We never get to a point where we say, "I know it all. I can finally put the Bible on the shelf and move on to something else." We can't do it because the knowledge of God is far more than we can ever take in over the course of a lifetime. Even the greatest Bible scholars continually grow as they read through their Bibles cover-to-cover for the fiftieth time. But there's also another reason we never reach the point of being done with God's word. It's because we have that sinful nature which forgets or doubts the promises of God when

hardships come. I can't count the number of times throughout my life when I needed my parents or brothers or my wife or friends to renew me with the promises of God that I had already heard hundreds of times. Again, this growing in God's word is a lifelong task.

But a blessing God has given us is that our church is filled with all kinds of Loises and Eunices as well. There is nothing that moves me more during a worship service than looking out over the congregation and seeing moms and dads or grandmas and grandpas holding their little ones to sing a hymn to the Lord together or when those larger hands are clasped over the smaller hands as the family shepherds teach their sheep how to pray. I'm equally impressed when I see our teenagers sitting in worship, even if some Sundays your parents had to twist your arms a bit to get you to wake up early and come to church. But then I look at our most seasoned members, those who hobble in with canes and walkers, those who display pain and struggle on their faces as they make their way to their pews and settle in. These are the church grandmas and grandpas. Maybe they're even the great-grandmas and great-grandpas. They testify to us that what we're doing is important. They testify that worshipping the Lord and growing in the word is truly a lifetime task.

Friends, take seriously your time in the word, whether it's here at church or in Bible study alone or with others. These scriptures make us wise for salvation. Why? Because they point us to our Savior Jesus. Do not give up your time in the word. And if you are not spending much time in the word, move your schedule around to make time. It will pay off because God tells us that his word never returns empty but always accomplishes his will, bringing people closer to him.

And do not neglect your call to be Lois and Eunice if the Lord has entrusted souls to your care. Share the word with them. Point them to Jesus. And if you struggle with doing this, talk to me. Our church does not exist to do the spiritual raising of your kids for you, but we do exist to assist you in molding young Christians for a lifelong journey of faith.

But the word of God is not just a book of facts. We don't study it so that we can answer Bible trivia questions. Like anything important, we study it so we can use it. What does Paul say is the use of the scriptures? Well, he gives us two lists in this section, and these two lists share a lot of items. The practical use of God's word is to teach, rebuke, correct, train, and encourage. And if you think about those items, they mean that the word is going to bring about change in those who hear it.

When you hear the word of God, you should not expect the status quo. Notice that Paul does not say the word is used to affirm or validate. It's not meant to coddle. It's meant to make people uncomfortable in their sin. It's meant to bring true sorrow over the fact that you and I have not lived the way God expects. This means that when a sermon or reading makes you feel uneasy because it calls out your sin or shows you that your thoughts and ideas are not in line with God's, it's not a bad thing. It means God's law is at work within your heart. It means we are right over the target. But you'll also notice that St. Paul doesn't say that this word is to destroy and ruin. It is not destructive, but constructive. God gives us his word to make clear the wages of sin, but also to show the solution to sin. And that solution is Jesus.

Before we can take this word and apply it to others, we should apply it to ourselves first. Paul tells Timothy here that, "there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths." The world will not always be so appreciative of God's word. Instead, many will turn away from it to whatever scratches their itching ears. Why? Well, I think there are two reasons, one dealing with the law and the other dealing with the gospel. Of course, people will not always like what God has to say about sin when he gets a little too close to the sins they are comfortable with.

But people will also take issue with the gospel. The fact that this is freely given really bothers people who want to insert themselves into the equation, who keep hearing these words of forgiveness and say, “There must be something more.”

I say that we first must apply this to ourselves because often the itchiest ears we know are our own. I’m sure there are teachings from God’s word that bother you, things he labels as sins that you really wish were ok. Maybe you have a huge problem with the sexual sins that your neighbor is committing, but you don’t want those sexual sins that tempt you to be talked about. You want to focus on all the ungodliness of society around you, but you don’t want to be called to account for your failures in your various roles at home. You want all the liars and deceivers in government thrown out, but you want your own lies and gossip to be left untouched.

Friends, you make excuses for your failures. You try to explain those pet sins away by pretending that God wasn’t talking about you when he revealed his will for how humans are to live or you accuse God of making a mistake in giving his commands. Should you be surprised that the world turns away from the word of God to myths and lies? You shouldn’t, because you and I do the same thing. We think we get to overrule God or reinterpret his words in whatever way we want. But we don’t. And if you want a god who teaches everything you believe, then you really don’t want a god. You want to worship yourself. And a life without God will result in a death without God.

Preach the word to your own heart before you apply it to others. Let the full force of the law fall on your head, leading you to hate yourself and despair. And in your despair, take a good long look at the cross. See the God you’ve disobeyed and rebelled against place his perfect Son in the seat of punishment for you. See him forgive by piercing and pouring out the blood of the one who never disobeyed.

This message changes hearts. It leads the proud to lose hope in themselves. It leads the hopeless to put their hope in Christ. And it leads those in Christ to live lives of thankful obedience to the who who’s set them free from sin. Hear the message, friends, and share the message that saves. Amen.