

The Purpose of Scriptures

2 Timothy 3:14-17
July 11, 2021

First Presbyterian Church
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Contemplating the power of God's word, 5th century monk Abba Poemen said, "The nature of water is soft, that of the stone is hard. But if a bottle is hung above the stone, allowing the water to fall drop by drop, it wears away the stone.

So it is with the word of God. It is soft and our heart is hard, but (those who hear) the word of God often, (they open their hearts) to God," respecting and accepting God's word as a transformative presence in their lives.¹

Do you embrace the word of God as a transformative presence in your life? Today we begin a four-part sermon series on 1st) the purpose of scripture in our lives, 2nd) where it leads us, 3rd) how to prepare for that spiritual journey, and 4th) (sermon will be on) what to expect when we arrive.

The Apostle Paul, before giving Timothy the encouraging words we just heard, writes this about what Timothy – and we – can expect in the world around us, saying, "... People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!" says Paul.

And then he tells how we can avoid becoming like them, becoming such hurtful, tragic people ourselves. He says, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Paul knows that Timothy was raised by a good Christian mother named Eunice. So he points to her as the foundation of his faith. But we know that not all of us have someone like Eunice as the foundation of our faith.

¹ Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, rev. ed., Cistercian Studies 59 (Cistercian, 1984), 192, Abba Poemen #183.

For those who don't have a solid Christian upbringing to rely on when things get rough, we all have some origin of our faith to look back. Wherever and however you first came to believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, that's the place to look when temptation takes hold, when anger strikes, when fatigue sets in, when problems overwhelm, when selfish impulses pull at you, when complacency has you sitting on the sidelines.

Think about it. What do you look to as the origin of your faith life, your spiritual journey? For some it is the family, growing up in the church. For others it was a friend or acquaintance along the way. Some people remember turning to faith amid a tragedy in life, and then being lifted up into the loving arms of Jesus.

However it was for you, I guarantee you scripture is the true source of your faith, and it is scripture that can lead you back to a firm foundation in life. God's word is a powerful place to stand when the world is pushing in on you.

I have visited Ed Hatcher several times since his care facility began allowing visitors. The first visit, I told him about our zoom service for the National Day of Prayer, which he enjoyed hearing about. The next visit, I showed him video of the baptism of Bill and Judy's great-grandson, Milo. He just loved that. The third visit, I told him about the life of the church – our wonderful Summer Forum on Elijah, the kids and adults cleaning up Waterfall Park and then having a picnic, and the Communion Service we had that Sunday. He really enjoyed hearing that news. And then last Monday, when I visited Ed, I took him home Communion. This was the first time the Deacons and I took Communion to our homebound members since the pandemic, since Ed had his stroke. I've never seen anyone so touched, so overwhelmed, receiving Communion, receiving the Lord, receiving the living Word of God.

When the world is pushing in on us, that is the most powerful place to stand, in the assurance of Jesus Christ, as revealed to us through scripture. When the Apostle Paul tells us to "continue in what (we) have learned and firmly believed," he's showing us the only sure place to stand amid the struggles of this world: the word of God.

Paul then tells us that "all scripture ... is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...." In other words, the true power of scripture comes from it's abilities meet us where we are and lead us to where we ought to be, whether we realize where that is or not.

A young graduate from Harvard was so excited just thinking about heading off toward a successful career. He gets into a taxi and the cabby cheerfully asks, “And how are you on this lovely day?” “I’m in the class of 2021, I just graduated from Harvard, and I can’t wait to see what the future has in store for me.” The driver looks back, shakes the young man’s hand, and says “Hi, I’m Mitch – class of 2010.”

We can’t always rely on the promises this world gives us. We need a more solid foundation to stand on than worldly wisdom. We need God’s word to guide us. Scripture is useful for teaching, says Paul, it has something new to show us. So, if you don’t know where to turn, turn to scripture to show you something new, something you haven’t thought of.

Paul also says that scripture is useful for reproofing. In other words, it can show us where we’ve gone wrong. If you don’t know how things got so out of control, look to scripture for where you got off track, for how to avoid making the same mistakes over and over again.

Scripture is useful for correction, says Paul, because it can guide us forward, show us how to respond to what’s happening right now. Finally, Paul says scripture is good for training, it can prepare us for what’s ahead, help us to achieve our God-given goals. There’s not a day that goes by that we can’t benefit from learning something new, seeing the errors of our ways, being guided forward and equipped for success. That’s what scripture can do for us, for you.

That’s what the Apostle Paul wants us to remember, always. Paul knows that we live in a world that, while honoring the Bible in superficial ways, it would really rather have the Bible remain closed. As one commentator observed, “A closed Bible has certain advantages. You can place your palm on a closed Bible and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God, ” or to do your duty as an elected official.

“You can position a closed Bible in the center of the coffee table as a token of God’s presence in your life – and, as you dust around it, you can feel like you have something to believe in.” “A closed Bible will never challenge you, nor cause you to ask questions, nor make you think. It will confirm your prejudices. It will allow you to believe pretty much whatever you want to believe.” That’s what a closed Bible will do for you. But if we want the teachings, the insights, the guidance, and the blessings the Bible has to offer us, we have to open it.

Scripture is a gift from God designed to teach you about Jesus Christ, show you where you've gone wrong, guide you in the way of Lord, and equip you to bless the lives of others as a child of God, as a follower of Jesus.

Looking at even one verse of scripture each day gives you a powerful place to stand in this world. Don't believe me? Try it. Cyndi has prepared a verse-a-day activity sheet as part of our summer reading. The ushers have a copy for each and every one of you.

Take it with you on your way out today, and begin to see how scripture can change your life, one verse at a time. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Great and faithful God, your Word stands as a beacon of truth that is timeless, sure and trustworthy. We thank you that your Word is new each time we read it, that it remains relevant no matter how the world changes, that it's a reliable witness to your ongoing presence and activity in our lives.

Thank you for bringing us together to hear your word of life and hope. You know our lives in their deepest recesses. You have not forgotten us. You love us, and again and again you reach out to us.

Through the suffering and death of your Son Jesus Christ, you took our darkness and fear upon yourself in order that we might know light and joy.

We do feel the lightness and joy of being together in worship of you, O God. And we pray your presence upon those who have not gathered in worship today, and especially those who are unable to be in a place of worship.

Be with all our members of concern who are homebound or in care facilities. Knit them together with us in Spirit this day. Be with those battling illness and disease, that they would feel your comfort and healing touch.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who taught us to prayer, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**