

*¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God^p may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. **4** In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (2 Timothy 3:14-4:5)*

Preach the Word

What if I told you I found the silver bullet to fight the many problems that we face? What if I told you I found the secret to sustainability for our church? Get ready to say good-bye to the pressure on the church. Get ready to say good-bye to pressure you place on yourself when you feel like you are not and cannot do enough. Get ready because it's literally simple enough for a baby to learn while also profound and deep enough that there is always more to learn. It affects your inevitable end in this world while directly impacting your life today. Ready for your life to be radically changed? Sounds like a gimmick. It sounds like another click-bait title online or headline in a magazine promising the secret to a happy, fit, successful life. I know it sounds too good to be true and flat-out unrealistic. But this is different. Ready for it? Here it is: Remain in the Word. Preach the Word.

That's it. Don't worry, I have good idea of what you might be thinking. I'm sure it is similar to thoughts and temptations that I've wrestled with myself. They are thoughts and temptations Pastor Timothy seems to be wrestling with as well. Paul knows it too. So the apostle writes this letter to encourage Timothy.

Paul encourages us to remain in God's Word—the Holy Scriptures—that we have learned and been convinced of. He knows how too easily we can wander from it. We know how the once strong desire to start or renew something is quickly wore down by the daily grind. Finding time to do anything can be difficult enough. Putting aside time to be in God's Word is another story especially if being with God's Word even just on Sunday's feels like asking a lot. Why does being in God's house, spending time in His Word, seem like this great sacrifice of time? Sometimes it is simply a priority problem...

Remain in the Word because look at how quickly we forget God's promises. We see all of the problems in the world, in our homes, with family and friends and want to find something to fix it. But then the Word isn't scratching the itch because the problems are still there and real. Instead of relieving the itch, the Word seems to aggravate it when it tells you something you

don't want to hear: no, what you are doing is wrong...trust in God's timing and purpose...pick up your cross and follow me...

Remain in the Word because too easily we seem to think we know enough of it. Jesus' loves me this I know and that's all I want to or think I need to know. Or it might be more that being in the Word can feel overwhelming. Where do you start? There's too much you feel like you might misunderstand. You are afraid you might get something wrong. You feel like you'll leave that studying to the more serious Christians; you're fine where you are at...

But what does Paul tell us to do in the face of world that is turning further away from the Word while it adds more obstacles and temptations to pull you from it? What are we to do in world that is going from bad to worse? Paul admits, "Yeah, that's out there, **but as for you: stay with and remain in what you have learned and have become convinced of.**"

But why should I? This is not just Paul's personal opinion. It's not because he is the resident expert either. What we have here are words breathed out of God's mouth, uttered with his lips, spoken onto paper through human hands and mouths. The same voice that speaks life into being at creation is the voice that speaks these Word in the Bible and gives you life. And in his good and perfect wisdom God has decided *this* is what you need to hear from him.

That alone should be reason enough to remain in the Word. Then on top of that, these written words make us wise for salvation. Through them we know we are saved and it is ours. It's by this Word that he works in us hearts that believe and are convinced this is most certainly true. There isn't a secret code. It's not hidden. It's quite clear. Consider for instance: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Baptism saves you (1 Peter 3:21). These words are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31) For we know in all things God works for the good...nothing in all of creation can separate you from his love (Romans 8). Because I live, you also shall live (John 14:19). Oh, yes, indeed there are parts that are difficult to understand. At the same, these are words one can know from infancy, as a baby—just like Timothy. We can see this as you hear a two year old hum a song and try to sing, "Jesus loves me this I know." You can hear this if you stop in our preschool and listen to three and four year old kids tell you they know Jesus died for their sins and they have a home in heaven. But we don't stop there, do we? No, we remain in the Word, using the clear passages to better understand the more difficult.

Remain in the Word because it's useful: "**for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,** ¹⁷ **so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work**" (16, 17). It's good and good for you. By it and through it God makes us wise for salvation and then send us out fully equipped to carry out His work. He doesn't hold back with his blessings; he thoroughly equips his people with exact the tools you need to do the job.

But this knowledge isn't just something we learn in school and pack away with all the other subjects once we leave. The Bible is not another coffee table book that's more or less a nice decoration. Paul solemnly urges you and gives us this charge: **Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction** (4:2).

But it can be hard not just with ourselves but also sharing it with other people. It can feel awkward, uncomfortable, or unnatural to simply speak about religion or your faith with someone else. Are you embarrassed to be Lutheran or part of this church? Do people know that you are? When you are with your family and friends or they come to visit, do you invite them to come to church with you or is it an excuse to stay home?

Paul is well aware of how difficult it can be. He warns in v. 3-4: **The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.**

So what are we supposed to do? There's a feeling that we need to find the next thing—music, type of service—that will draw the people in...maybe if we just had the right programs, right people, right pastor, then...maybe the message needs to be changed; or at least not share the parts of the message that make people uncomfortable to win us some popularity points. Oh the temptation is very real to think that the church needs to be saying more when it comes to politics, vaccinations, social justice, climate, finances, living your best life, or whatever the hot topic is of the day. That's what so many want to hear.

Jesus knows the temptations too. He faced them in his own ministry. After they tried to kill him in his hometown he turns his attention to Capernaum where people are amazed. He is so popular with the crowds that they try to keep him from leaving them. How tempting that had to have been to stick with the crowds and the seeming success? It had to be more difficult to walk away from that than walking through the crowd who had rejected him. But Jesus insists. **“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent”** (Luke 4:43).

And so that is what he does. He didn't come to win a popularity contest. He came to be God with us and to seek and to save the lost in sin and unbelief. He is the Christ, God's Chosen One, who comes to reveal the Way to the Father is through him. He comes to pull us away from the lies of the devil and the empty promises of success from this world and to reveal to you that he is the Truth. He comes to this earth to do his Father's work: to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.

And here it is: Christ is for us. He turns away from popularity and was **despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering** (Isaiah 53). He becomes a curse for us taking up our infirmities, our sorrows, stricken by God, smitten, and afflicted by him. As he hangs from the tree of that cross Jesus was pierced and crushed for our sins. But here's the

good news: his punishment brings you peace with God. His wounds heal you. His blood purifies us of all sin. You are set free from the worries of this world—God will provide especially for his own. You are set free from the pressure you put on yourself—you are God’s baptized child. Your sins are forgiven. God is with us and for us. Let no doubt enter your mind; the Lord would not let his chosen one see decay but three days after he dies Jesus is raised to life again. The head once crowned with thorns now is crowned with power, rule, and authority ruling over all things for you, for the good of his church. That’s what we need to hear and what needs to be shared.

Paul doesn’t shy away from the fact that people are going to turn away from sound teaching heaping up more and more things that they just want to hear. We shouldn’t be surprised by it either. But as for you, **keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry** (v.5). You cannot control or force anyone to do anything. Instead, be faithful to your own calling that Jesus has given to you; the good work he set apart for you from the creation of the world. Be self-controlled and well-balanced in your life not being tossed or pulled by this world and its temptations. There’s going to be hardships and difficulties; you know that. Remaining in the Word, sharing it doesn’t make them disappear. At the time, I also know that when my devotional life suffers I suffer and it makes things worse. Remaining in the Word does equip you to better handle the hardships. It does help you have a God-pleasing perspective to see the lies and His truth. It does reassure you of God’s promises and give you a foundation to build off from as you patiently wait for Christ’s return.

Do the work of an evangelist—preach the Word. Sharing God’s Word is more than spouting off bible passages; it’s living it. Know Jesus’ love and share it with people who may not love you back. Share it with how you talk patiently with those who need to be reminded what God’s will is for their life. Share it with how you act in your calling of parent, child, grandparent, worker, citizen in society, member of this church. Don’t worry about the numbers in the pew or the numbers in the finances. Our job as God’s people is not to grow the church, be the most popular, or seen as successful. The pressure is off of you. God will take care of it all often despite and in spite of me. He is more than capable. Instead, in Jesus, you are set free to remain in the Word. Preach the Word. Amen.