

Think about how you learn and grow in knowledge. It changes throughout your life because you build on the things that you have already learned. We all come into the world as little infants who know nothing. We quickly learn from our environment and from our parents. We soon enter school and our education continues to grow. We learn by experience and repetition. As we get older we may get training on the job or we may continue on with higher forms of education. Even though we continue to learn throughout our entire lives, there comes a point when we pass on some of our knowledge. This could be in many ways. Maybe as a student we help out a classmate. Perhaps at our job we help the new guy learn his position. It could be that we pass on our knowledge from our years of experience to our children. The pattern is always the same when it comes to learning. First we have to grow in our knowledge before we can instruct others. It is the same with our faith. We learn before we can pass it on. God wants us to carry out the ministry of spreading the gospel. First, God strengthens us through his Word so that we are prepared for this ministry. Then, we go out and instruct others with God's Word.

Part 1: God strengthens us through the Word

Paul speaks of how God started faith in our hearts through the gospel message. He writes in verse 15, "From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." When many of us came to faith we were infants. Our parents brought us to be baptized. The Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts and brought us into the family of God. Even if we were not infants when we came to faith, we were all spiritual infants as far as our knowledge of God and his Word. Whether it was through baptism or through hearing the gospel message for the first time, that was the day when our saving faith started and our knowledge of God and the Holy Scriptures began to grow.

The moment faith was created in our hearts we became wise for salvation. We now know the truth about forgiveness and our way to eternal life. We know that all the promises of God are sure through Jesus Christ. Whether our faith is immature or mature, a brand new faith or a faith that has been nurtured over many years, we are saved through Christ. As we mature in our faith, we learn more about Christ and all that he does for us. We become more and more sure about our forgiveness and our eternal life.

People who do not believe in Christ are ignorant about how they can be saved. They do not realize that salvation is through Christ alone. They do not have the clear gospel message that is given to us in scripture. They are lost because of their ignorance. Before we came to faith we were in the same condition. We did not know how we could be forgiven for our sins. We were lost. Now that we have faith, it is important that we do not fall back into that state of ignorant unbelief. Paul encourages us to remain strong in our faith.

Verse 14 says "continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of." This encouragement tells us to continue in, remain in the faith that we have learned. We need to make the strengthening of our faith a priority in our lives. Through the Means of Grace, the gospel in Word and Sacrament, we are strengthened. We take every opportunity to study God's Word so that our faith may be built up. Our knowledge continues to grow the more we have devotions, the more we study the Word of God, and every time we come to church for worship. As we mature in our faith we receive the Lord's Supper as another way to strengthen our faith. The only way that we can stop growing in our knowledge and in our faith is if we cut ourselves off from God and his Word. It is sinful to deprive ourselves of that needed gospel message. Take advantage of the opportunities that you have to hear that Word. Our faith is strengthened through sermons, hymns, the liturgy, devotions, Bible Classes, and in many other ways.

Look at our Savior. Look at how he lived a life that was always focused on God's Word. As a boy he spent time at the temple discussing God's Word with the teachers. When he was tempted by the devil, he used God's Word to resist those temptations. When he went to the synagogue in Nazareth he read from the scroll of Isaiah and told them that he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. As Jesus went about his ministry he explained the Scriptures and held them in the highest regard because he knew that they were the scriptures that testified about him and his work as our Savior. Jesus always continued in the Word of God. He fulfilled the prophecies by saving us from sin. The message of his sacrifice for us is that gospel that saves us and strengthens us in our faith.

As we are strengthened we serve our Lord. Paul says in verse 17, "the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Word of God is able to equip us in this way because the Word is inspired by God. Therefore we know that it is true and effective. That is also why it can be used in so many ways. Paul said that the Word is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training. We continue to be trained in the knowledge of the Scriptures all the time. Our faith grows. This growth trains us for "every good work."

Being trained for every good work means that the gospel produces fruits of faith in our lives. As we become mature in faith we take all the knowledge that we have concerning God and it becomes our lifestyle. All the truths of scripture work in our hearts and we live a life that is God-pleasing. This God-pleasing life shows our fruits of faith in action. These fruits of faith lead us to apply the Word of God not only to our own lives but also to the lives of others. That is why we

spread God's Word to others. We care for the souls of all people and we want them to experience the joy of faith in Christ. Each of us is strengthened by the Word of God so that we take every opportunity to tell others about the love and forgiveness of their Savior.

Part 2: We instruct others with that Word

In chapter 4 of the reading we hear the encouragement to spread the gospel. Verse 2 states that we "preach the Word, in season and out of season, correct, rebuke, and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction." This encouragement was given to Timothy – a young pastor in training. A pastor's specific role is to be one who preaches the Word of God. The phrase "in season and out of season" could also be translated "when it is convenient and when it is inconvenient." This means that the pastor is always ready to speak the Word of God. He preaches the word even if the message offends people or makes them uncomfortable. The Law of God will make the sinner uncomfortable but the Gospel brings comfort to troubled hearts.

Even though this encouragement was originally given to a pastor, it is applicable for all Christians. We all need to speak God's Word when it is convenient and when it is inconvenient. Sometimes we think that the time is not right to tell others about Jesus. Paul's encouragement to Timothy and to all of us is that the time is always right. It might seem like an inconvenient time to share the message about your Savior but that may be exactly the right time for the Spirit to work in the heart of a person.

It is very important for us to remember the last phrase when we are speaking the Word of God. We speak with great patience and careful instruction. We are patient because some people resist the Holy Spirit. It may seem like the message of salvation is having no impact on their lives. And yet God assures us that his Word is powerful and effective. He says, "so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). The Holy Spirit has an effect on the hearts of people. He produces faith. We simply speak the message and the Holy Spirit does the work.

We teach the Word to others with careful instruction so that they do not get the message confused. Many well-intentioned people fell into false teachings because they got confused about the teachings of the Bible. We instruct others carefully so that their faith is strong and based on the pure gospel of salvation through Christ. Paul tells us in the next verse about people who do not follow the pure gospel.

Paul predicts that "the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. They will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (v3-4). We can see this happening today. People listen to teachers who tell them what they want to hear. Many people like to go to churches which assure them that they are good people or at least lay out easy steps for them to become good people. People turn away from the pure gospel and listen to preachers who tell them how God is going to make them successful and prosperous if they just live in the right way.

People turn aside from the truth of God's Word and follow after myths. Today people think that their "myths" are based on scientific fact and new modern research. People turn aside from the truth of God's Word concerning creation and follow after the myth of evolution. People think that they can become better people simply by following the right program and they ignore the truths of sin and grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives. People are constantly looking for solutions from the "myths" of our world rather than turning to God for the help that he offers.

As we speak to people who are confused by the myths of the world we need to remember to "keep our head in all situations, endure hardships, and discharge the duties of your ministry" (v5). Even though the World will come after us with teachings that are contrary to the Bible, it is important that we are self-controlled. We should not get angry or upset when people attack our faith. We deal with them patiently and use the powerful Word of God to instruct them. We endure hardships from those people who do not believe in Christ. They make many insulting claims directed toward our faith but we know that our sins have been forgiven and our home is in heaven.

As a result of our faith we carry out our ministry – for each of us this involves different things. However, one thing remains the same. Each one of us speaks the Word of God. This can be in word and actions. As we live our lives in a faithful way, our actions are a testimony of the faith in our hearts. As we correct our children we profess the will of God. We tell others about our morals and values. We tell them about the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. Let your light shine in this sin darkened world so that many more may know the love of God.

Conclusion

No matter how much knowledge we have in God's Word, we are all able to instruct others. We have been blessed by God with a faith that trusts in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. We know that eternal life awaits us. There are many people in the world that have no idea how they can be saved from their sins. Many people are confused about the truths of the Bible. Let us use our knowledge of God to spread the saving message of the Gospel to all who need to hear it. It is always a good time to share Christ with people who need the comfort of forgiveness. We know the joy of that comfort. May we all be encouraged to take every opportunity to share that message with everyone.