

2 Timothy 3:10, 14-4:5 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness. ^{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. ^{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. ^{4:1} 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. ^{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. ^{5} As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Luke 6:45-49 (New Revised Standard Version)

The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house."

In 1965, at the University of Florida, *the Gators*,
one of the coaches of football team noticed that most of the players
were struggling and weary from the heat and absolutely exhausted
too soon, partway through practice & even during their games,
so he asked the team doctor to look into what was causing it.

Researchers discovered that 2 key factors were causing the problems.
1st, fluids & electrolytes lost through sweat, not being replaced.
2nd, large amounts of carbohydrates were not being replenished.
So in the lab they formulated a high carbohydrate & electrolyte drink
to replace key components lost through heavy sweat and exercise.

Soon the Gators began winning more football games,
and word of this **new found magic sports elixir** "Gatorade" spread.
It is now a standard sidelines sports drink almost everywhere.

And what Gatorade is to athletes, the Bible is to growing Christians.
Just as a sports drink can help an athlete perform better,
the word of God will help to nourish and energize our faith,
to spiritually hydrate toward a better & more faithful life
of blessings and service just as the Lord intends for us.

Today, is one of my favorite worship services, here at 1st Pres.
It's when we give our 3rd and 6th grade students their own Bibles.

This is very personal to me. I've gotten to know these children
and I select a Bible passage for each one of them with care,

which is already marked and highlighted in their new Bible.

But the significance of this day goes back even further for me,
because my father's aunt helped me learn to read using a Bible,
and I couldn't wait until I was old enough to have my own Bible.

The Sunday I received my 3rd grade Bible during church stays with me.
Our whole Sunday school class was sitting together,
and when my name was called, I came forward
for Dr. Ewing to hand me my very own new Bible.

I still remember how wonderful and grown-up it felt,
and though I have accumulated lots of Bibles since then,
- that one, still has very special meaning for me.

Soon after I arrived here, we presented Bibles to 3rd and 6th graders.
The next Sunday, one of the older church members,
pulled me aside to speak with me before worship.
She had brought the Bible she received as a little girl to show me.

Jodi wanted to show me how old, worn, and well-used it was,
and then she explained about how it had always been
her companion and guide over so many years of her life.

Seeing her Bible reminded me of a Charles Spurgeon statement,
"A Bible falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't."

Our Call to Worship today (Psa 119) reminds me of that conversation,
O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it
according to your word.

That is what makes receiving and reading the Bible so important.

We believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God in human words,
since God chose to allow human involvement in the writing of it.

In Greek, the word "inspiration" is literally, "God-breathed".
The Holy Spirit involved in both the writing & study of Scripture.
The HS was involved, directing when it was being written,
and HS is involved, guiding when it's being read. **Both.**

Therefore to understand Scripture we need to consult with the Author,
which means that Bible reading & prayer belong together inseparably.
Spurgeon, asked, which is more important, Bible reading or prayer,
replied, *which is more important, breathing in or breathing out?*

The word, "Bible" literally means library. It is a collection that
represents more than 6000 years of writings from various authors.
It is a written record of God's activity and presence in our world,
and the story of God's interactions with humanity - ancient Israel.

In the words of Scripture, and through the stories & other writings,
God's grace, God's wisdom & God's purpose are uniquely revealed.
But there is nothing magical about the Bible in itself.

I could sit in a room surrounded by stacks of Bibles,
or sleep with a different Bible under my pillow every night,
and it wouldn't do a thing to further or deepen my faith.

It is only when Scripture is read or heard, **thought about & lived**
that the Word of God and the Holy Spirit's inspiration will

bring life, hope, truth, healing, joy and transformation,
just as Jesus explains the process in Luke 6, vs. 45.

The good person out of **the good treasure of the heart** produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

The point is not just reading or hearing the words of Scripture,
but it is about building our lives – our words, deeds & attitude
upon the firm foundation so to stand in faith, trust and hope,
or as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 6:19,

Do you not know that your body is a **temple of the Holy Spirit within you...?**

The power of God's word, of the stories, poetry and other writings,
is **that they help us interpret and understand our world,
and make sense of our experiences, thoughts and feelings
by revealing & teaching who we are in relation to God,
and how our experience and theology are connected,**
for we translate Scripture by how we choose to live out our lives.

Several years ago at the text and sermon discussion group,
someone asked, **what specifically fosters spiritual growth,
and how we can improve and deepen our relationship with God?**

Since the questioner wanted to hear specifics.
I told about my own experience, and how God called me from
the business world, to seminary and pastoral ministry...

...and as I spoke and described my story, I realized that
there were lots of small steps and experiences all along the way,
**but that the process really began when I committed fully
to reading at least a few chapters of Scripture each day.**

And then I noticed that whatever insight I seemed to need that day,
**was somehow connected to whatever passage
I happened to have read in the last day or so.**

I also remember noticing that something special was going on ...
**... and I began to experience for myself the power of God's word,
a Presence transforming and influencing my life and living,**
and at the same time my relationship with God
was becoming more real, more sure & personal.

Consistent and disciplined time spent in God's Word also seemed
to feed my prayer life, relationships, and willingness to serve.

**We meet God in the pages of Scripture and discover who we really are,
that we are loved & blessed as we're called to walk in faithfulness.**

Like the pieces of a complicated puzzle slowly fitting together,
as I was guided & driven by Scripture, my life began changing.
My attitude and my motivations were changing along with
my behavior and ways of functioning out in the world,
as my relationship with God also was growing deeper & more authentic.

I also began to recognize that God's grace, insight and love
were being given afresh in ways that I hadn't noticed before...
**... and it all seemed to start happening when I started
spending more quality time with God in Scripture.**

My spiritual growth and development really came down to
two things that were the most important and necessary for

my faith to grow and expand, to be more vibrant & meaningful:

1st, **I'd become more open to God**, which happens through God's Word and there is no substitute for regular Scripture meditation.

2nd, My time spend in studying Scripture and in prayer called me to connect with a faithful community of fellow Christians, which is the Church – the body and family of Christ --

- where other Christians can support and share in our journey,
- where we can come together before God for worship and praise,
- where we can commit and serve, and where we are loved and needed, and can be in authentic relationships with other Christians.

It is through our participation within the community of faith that we can best see & experience the word of God **alive and moving**.

I've learned, that when I make faithfulness in the Word a priority, wonderful and spiritual things start to happen around me & to me, but if I am not diligent, I will gradually cool & slip away.

The important question is really about making that faith commitment.

We can speak whatever wonderful, impressive and pious words we want, but a significant measure of the true depth of our authenticity is, **what does it take to disrupt or throw me off my game?**, and what are the pressures, distractions and busyness, that can cause me to rush or blow off my quiet time, or Bible reading, prayer time & regular worship?

Also, one of the ways we grow in faith is through **the osmosis effect**. Faith can be affected and nurtured by what we observed from the examples of faith we see lived by others of influence... **... their example puts flesh on the Scripture lessons we read.**

That's the point that the Apostle Paul is making to young Timothy. Since Timothy had grown up knowing Paul, he'd seen for himself the truth & veracity of Paul's own life and faith. 2 Tim 3:10, 14-15

Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ... 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.

In other words, holdfast to what you have learned all your life and cling to the lessons and truth of your faith and heritage.

But it's not always easy to live as faithful Christians in this world.

Not really, not if we truly let God's Word and way guide us.
Not if we allow Jesus to influence every aspect of our life
Not if we seek to glorify God in all that we say and do.

And there is also another challenge -**other folks are always watching**-
- our kids, grandchildren, roommates, coworkers, teammates.

Yes, they are observing all the time and trying to decide, to see if our faith makes a difference, and if it's real.

So our call today is to carefully and honestly reflect & consider the faithfulness and authenticity of our own walk with God of our life within this fellowship of faith and the Word...

... and ask, especially as parents & grandparents, friends & members, **is my faith making any discernable difference in my living,**

**and what am I putting out for my children to observe? –
-- for clearly our words and life choices do matter.**

Too often, others can't hear what we say, **over the roar of our deeds.**

**True faith is not a set of facts or the knowledge we learn,
but it's primarily relational, truth by spiritual osmosis.**

Do remember or have you read Ray Bradbury's science fiction novel,
"Fahrenheit 451"... in which he describes a future world
that has outlawed books, so that information comes only
through television, which the government controls.

There are no more printed books.

But there is a group of rebels who live in a remote & hidden colony,
who each one, memorizes one book, essentially becoming that book.

They recite that book, teaching it to the next generation.

In effect they each become, **a living book.**

As Christians who read Scripture, we have the word of God is in us.

We each become, **a living Bible**, a vessel through which God can speak.

We are called to live lives that teach, influence & interpret
God's truth & Good News for the next generations around us
by the way we live & influence, **by our life in this world.**

We are called to be **living Bibles, the words of Scripture alive in us,**

so others can absorb the model of faithfulness they observe in us,

so that through the living of our lives and our spiritual habits,

so the lives we live bear witness of God's grace toward others,

so that the fountain of God's gracious mercy fills us,

and then

overflows splashing out onto a thirsty world.

Living in such a way, that our lives demonstrate before others,

Christian courage, joy, integrity, peace and character,

as signs of hope and promise pointing beyond ourselves

toward the steadfastly-faithful grace & mercy of God,

as evidence that all are loved and precious to God.

Our task as the people of God, as the redeemed followers of Christ?

As we read in Psalm 1 and Matthew 5:14-16

Be like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.