

Two Ways to Grow (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Big Idea: We need two essentials to grow: godly examples and God's Word.

If you've been with us over the past few weeks, we've spent a lot of time looking at how *not* to live. The letter in the Bible we've been studying has been telling us clearly that being part of a church isn't enough. You can be part of a church and still be led astray by false teaching. So, for at least three sermons now, we've been paying attention to Paul's warnings: don't follow false teachers. Don't be sucked in by their arguments. Don't become somebody who's ashamed of the gospel.

That's all good. We need warnings. We need to be told not to do things that might harm us: don't touch hot stoves, don't run onto the street, don't eat mushrooms you find in the forest, and don't follow false teachers. All good advice. All important information we need to know.

But at some point we need positive guidance too. We need to know what to avoid. We also need to know what to pursue. We need to avoid negative things, but we need to pursue positive things too.

And that's exactly what Paul gives us in this passage.

The two things that he outlines in the passage we just read are essential for all of us. If you are going to grow, if you are going to honor God with your life and fulfill your purpose as a human being, you need both of the things that Paul mentions in this passage. They're both essential. You can't live well if you're missing either one of them.

What are they? Godly examples and God's Word. Let's see how Paul explains it.

First: Godly Examples (3:14-15)

Paul writes:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings... (3:14-15)

Paul had something that only some of us have enjoyed: a godly parent. In chapter 1, Paul had written, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well" (2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy's father was Greek, but his mother as a believer, and so was his grandmother. Timothy learned about God as a child from a godly parent and grandparent.

Side note to parents: don't miss the opportunity you have to disciple your children. One of your most important ministries is to disciple your children.

Timothy Dalrymple, the new president of the magazine Christianity Today, was the NCAA's top-ranked gymnast as a sophomore at Stanford until a broken neck ended his career. In God's providence, that disaster opened up opportunities for him to deepen his faith and also earn a Ph.D. at Harvard.

While lying on his back with his broken back, looking up at the ceiling, Timothy had plenty of time to think.

He says that even as a child "I had a philosophical bent and spent a lot of time thinking about all sorts of ultimate questions, especially the question of whether there

is some sort of existence beyond death. I don't know which one I found more terrifying, that there would be some existence or that there would not."

When asked what helped him to grow in his faith, philosophical questions gave way to a personal relationship and example.

"The example of my father," Dalrymple replied, "not only a pastor but a genuinely loving, faithful, righteous person, helped. I saw in his life something undeniably true that I couldn't explain away."

We need examples, and parents have a unique opportunity to serve as a godly example for their children.

But Timothy didn't only learn from his parents. Paul tells Timothy to continue in what he learned, "knowing from who you learned it." Paul expands the circle from his mother to others, probably including himself.

I'm like Timothy. I learned the gospel from my mother, even though my father wasn't a believer. But I also learned from others: from Mrs. Holman at my church; from Mr. Taylor, my Sunday school teacher; from Tony, my youth group leader; from Stan, a professor. When I look at their lives, I understand what it looks like to follow God faithfully. When I consider their lives, I see examples of what it looks like to live well.

We need godly examples. It's one of the reasons God has given us the church. We need to get up close to others who live godly lives so we learn how to live godly lives as well.

Let me encourage you to look for examples. Keep an eye out for people who model what it looks like to love God with all of their hearts, and follow their examples. It's why we need the church. We're meant to live in super-tight community. God never meant for us to live the Christian life alone. He put us together so we could learn what it looks like to live in community, so we could get up close and see what godliness looks like when it's lived out up close.

What positive things do we need to pursue if we're going to live the way God intends? This is the first: godly examples. Find people who sets a godly example for you, get up close to them, and learn from them.

Here's the second essential we need:

Second: God's Word (3:15-17)

Paul writes:

and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (3:15-17)

This book is unlike any other. It's a huge book – actually, a collection of books – written by many authors over hundreds of years, and includes history, poetry, and some other kinds of writing that are uncommon today. It's the bestselling book of all time, with an estimated 5 billion copies sold and distributed.

Even if you're not a believer, you need to understand the Bible to understand culture. MTV political correspondent Tabitha Soren says, "No matter how secular our culture becomes, it will remain drenched in the Bible. Since we will be haunted by the Bible even if we don't know it, doesn't it make sense to read it?"

But the Bible helps us to do more than understand culture. Paul says in this passage that the sacred writings "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." He's referring in this passage to the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the

Old Testament. He says that if we're going to learn what we need to be right with God, we need Scripture. We can't guess our way into a relationship with God, but God's Word gives us what we need.

I mentioned that there's no other book like the Bible. Paul mentions two of the ways that the Bible is unique.

- **Its origin.** "All Scripture is breathed out by God..." (3:16). In other words, Scripture originates with God. Human authors wrote the words of Scripture. As [one commentary](#) says, "God occasionally gave visions or dictated words to a writer (Jer. 30-31). He could even write the words himself (Ex. 31:18). Ordinarily, however, the Lord used the skills he bestowed on Scripture's human authors." The end result, though, is that God moved the writers of Scripture. He's behind every word. What's written in this book is exactly what God wanted written, exactly what he wanted us to know. No other book is like that!
- **Its value.** Its origin makes it unique, but so does its value. It's "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (3:16-17). It teaches us what we need to know. It corrects us when we go wrong. It trains us not just to know the right things, but to live the right way. Only God's Word can do this.

That's why Martin Luther could say, "The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me." There's nothing else like the Bible.

That's why we make such a big deal about the Bible. The most important words that we hear each week are not my words or the words that any of us speak, but rather the words that we hear from Scripture. "Every gathering, setting, situation, and rhythm

encounter the words of Scripture read, heard, believed, loved, and obeyed" ([Matthew Kruse](#)).

That's why we want you to make a big deal of Scripture in your life as well, to make a habit of reading it and listening to it, memorizing it. Our dream is that you will live a Psalm 1 kind of life:

*but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

*He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.*

In all that he does, he prospers.

(Psalm 1:2-3)

What are two essentials we need to grow? Simple. We need godly examples and God's Word. Look for those. Pursue them. Plunge headfirst into grace groups this Fall. Get to know someone you admire in this church and watch their lives. Build a Bible reading habit in your life. Show up hungry and expect to be fed by God's Word every week. Because those are the essentials we need to grow. Let's get at it.

Father, thank you for the salvation we have in Jesus, the hope for sinners. Thank you that he has made it possible for us to be saved as we repent and turn to him. Thank you for the Scriptures, which show us the way. And thank you for the people who have taught us the Scriptures and show us what it looks like to live by them.

Help us to grow as we keep following godly examples and as we dig deeper into your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.