

The sermon

Intro

Sometimes life's circumstances are overwhelming. And we want to give up.

It could be a human relationship. The wounds are too deep. There's no coming out of this hostility. Why put in the effort?

It could be a health issue. The prognosis is so bad. The restrictions are too much. Why even bother?

It could be a project around the house. I don't have the skills, the knowledge, the tools. The costs are piling up. Just when I think I'm going to make progress I uncover another problem. Why not throw in the towel?

Sometimes the setbacks are crushing. Sometimes the road ahead seems too long. Sometimes the hits are coming in multiple directions. Have you ever been tempted to quit? What keeps you going?

Let's turn to Paul for counsel on how to continue.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: Continue by the encouragement of past faithfulness (3:10-11)

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra- which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. – 3:10-11

Timothy has reason to be discouraged. God's people are being deceived. People are leaving the faith. False teachers have divided the church people. Timothy's been urged not to be ashamed of the gospel (1:8) and to join with Paul in suffering for the gospel (2:3).

Along the way, Paul's reminded Timothy of gospel hope. The power, love, and self-control that God works inside of the hearts of his people (1:7; 2:1). Christ's victory over the grave (1:10; 2:8).

In 3:10-11, Paul encourages Timothy by making note of Timothy's past faithfulness.

- Timothy's followed Paul's teaching. He hasn't revised or denied the gospel.
- Timothy's followed Paul's conduct. He's imitated Paul's behavior.
- Timothy's followed Paul's "*aim in life*." The conversion of sinners. The maturity of saints. The formation and maintenance of healthy churches.
- Timothy's followed Paul's faith. He's trusted in Christ for salvation and ongoing grace.
- Timothy's followed Paul's patience. Timothy's maintained a calmness, a tranquility, in the midst of harsh opposition.
- Timothy's followed Paul's love. Love for God. Love for Christians. Love for non-Christians. Even love for enemies of the gospel.
- Timothy's followed Paul's steadfastness. In the midst of harsh opposition, Timothy's endured. He hasn't quit. He's continued.

Paul notes his own "*persecutions and sufferings*." [See Acts 13:13-14:23]

- In Antioch, lies were told to malign Paul's character and persecution drove him out of town (Acts 13:44, 50).

- In Iconium, attempts were made to stone Paul, causing him to flee (Acts 14:5).
- In Lystra, Paul was stoned by a mob and dragged out of the city after he was presumed dead (Acts 14:19). God indeed rescued Paul from sure and certain death.

Paul endured. Paul continued his *“aim in life.”* Despite past suffering and ongoing threats.

Timothy, be encouraged by your past faithfulness. God has been at work in your life. I’m a witness. God will continue to sustain you in the present distress. That’s what God does inside his people.

Christian, likewise, you need to remind yourselves that God has worked in you. God is at work in you. God will continue to work in you. Be encouraged that the God who has worked in you will continue to work in you. You can continue! God’s grace is sufficient!

Practical question: where am I encouraged by God’s past work in my heart?

Point 2: Continue by pursuing godliness (3:12-13)

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. – 3:12-13

But Paul hasn’t downplayed the suffering. Paul isn’t a health and wealth preacher. Paul isn’t a God has a wonderful plan for your life preacher. Paul’s an up front, following Jesus will make your life hard preacher.

I want to focus on three concepts here: desire, godly life, and persecution.

To desire means to want really bad, to long for. Our goal. What we’re pursuing.

What do we mean by *“godly life”*? Internal devotion to God that leads to outward behavior that’s pleasing to God. A God-centered life.

To desire a *“godly life”* means to long for a life that conforms to Scripture. So there’s room for godly discontentment. We can rejoice in the work God has already done inside us while longing for God to do more inside our hearts. Long for your life to increasingly conform to Scripture!

Direct question. Is this your aim in life? Is this what’s running through your mind throughout the day? Do you have a longing to fight sin? Do you have specific areas where you want to be more godly? Be specific!

We can grow spiritually dull. John Piper has a book titled *When I Don’t Desire God* for good reason. Sometimes we’re controlled by our circumstances, fears, lusts for money, stuff, entertainment, leisure, etc. To the point where godly longings are crowded out. Ask God for help.

Persecution in the New Testament involves mockery, verbal abuse, slander, verbal threats, relational rejection (husband/wife, parent/child, friends), loss of employment, destruction of property, theft of property, imprisonment, physical assault, loss of life.

We Christians in America may not face death (Charlie Kirk’s murder is an exception), but Jesus’ words ring true for us Christians in America.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. – **Matthew 5:10-12**

Jesus highlights the verbal aspects of persecution. Being reviled, or insulted. And people saying evil things about us that are false. Because of doctrines we hold to and moral stands we make, people do insult us. In recent years, stand-up comedians at award shows have felt comfortable blaspheming Jesus. Because of doctrines we hold to and moral stands we make, people do charge us with evil unjustly (“unrepentant bigot” – Louie Giglio, national day of prayer).

If we desire to live godly, we shouldn’t think we’re immune from people’s laughter and anger and rejection. Timothy, we shouldn’t be surprised by opposition! Expect it.

“evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Deceived people, captured by Satan to do his will (2:26), will deceive others. Evil will be a constant, but there will be variation to the extent of evil that some commit. Some acts of evil will be worse than others. Some will mock Christianity. Some will kill Christians. Some will commit theft. Others will commit school shootings. Opposition to God and evil is a given in these last days.

So persecution happens.

Practical question: am I pursuing godliness despite the cost?

Point 3: Continue by gospel reminders (3:14-15)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ 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. – 3:14-15

Timothy learned about God’s salvation from his childhood through his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (1:5). They acquainted Timothy **“with the sacred writings”** = the 39 Old Testament books.

Timothy was firmly convinced by what he heard. Timothy experienced **“salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”** Salvation meaning rescue from the penalty and power of sin. Forgiveness of sins. Violations of God’s commands totally pardoned. He was born again. God gave him a new heart with new desires.

Salvation came to Timothy **“in Christ Jesus”** = through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Timothy found in Jesus a Savior who perfectly kept God’s commands and offered his life as a substitute, taking the punishment that Timothy deserved, so that God could both forgive Timothy’s sin and remain just in doing so.

Application

What’s the Christian life? Continuing in the things we’ve learned and believed.

Christian isn’t simply something we become. It’s something we continue to be. Past faithfulness doesn’t exempt us from the need to continue.

What does continuing look like? We wake up in the morning. As we look out on the day we anticipate, we consider the areas where we might be tempted to sin. Where we’re afraid. Where we’re discouraged. Where we feel insufficient and overwhelmed. In our weakness, we remind ourselves of what we’ve already learned by speaking the gospel to ourselves. I’m unworthy. God forgives. I’m unable. God enables. We ask God for enabling grace. We find ourselves comforted and encouraged in Christ.

On the other hand, we see God’s provision. We see opportunities to enjoy God’s creation. We see gospel opportunities. We see God’s work in and around us. We overflow with joy, praise, and thanksgiving.

Continuing is a daily thing. Continuing is a moment-by-moment thing. We begin by faith. We continue by faith.

Practical question: how am I going about continuing in the Christian life?

Point 4: Continue by confidence in God's word (3:16-17)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. – 3:16-17

“the man of God” is Timothy.

In Timothy's day, Scripture would have included the 39 books of the Old Testament and a select number of New Testament writings. Around the time 2 Timothy was written, we find that Peter regarded Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Pet 3:15-16).

A number of New Testament books hadn't been written yet.

Scripture's use

“profitable” = useful, helpful, yields a practical benefit.

What's Scripture useful for?

“teaching” = the source of our teaching. Provides correct understanding. The facts. The doctrines.

“reproof” = verbal exposure of sin in an attempt to bring about self-awareness of sin.

“correction” = correcting sinful behaviors, moral improvement.

“training in righteousness” = positive instruction for the purpose of forming behavior. Used of a child's upbringing/education.

The idea is Scripture is useful for giving a right understanding of God, ourselves, salvation, the future, etc. And Scripture is useful for moving us from sin to godliness.

What Scripture does to the teacher

“complete” is spelled out as *“equipped for every good work.”*

Scripture is sufficient to make Timothy adequate, capable, competent for the various good works the pastorate requires.

Where Scripture comes from

“All Scripture is breathed out by God” = the entire Bible has its origins in God.

“All Scripture” = the whole Bible and every individual book, every chapter, every sentence, every phrase, every word.

“breathed out by God” = the Greek word translated *“breathed out”* is a compound word (“God” + “to breathe”) = *“All Scripture”* was originated by God.

We get more details in 2 Peter.

knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. – **2 Peter 1:20-21**

The messages of the Old Testament prophets didn't arise from man's will, they arose from God. God moved on the Old Testament prophets in such a way that the words they spoke were the words God wanted spoken. Their words originated with the Holy Spirit, not themselves.

Combined these passages indicate that:

1. The entire Bible has its origins in God's will, not man's will.
2. The entire Bible is God's speech, not man's speech.
3. Being from God, the entire Bible is true.
4. Being true, the entire Bible is inerrant.
5. Being inerrant, the entire Bible is profitable.

So much could be said. The Bible is both human literature and more than human literature. When the Spirit moved on the human authors he didn't remove their education level, personality, etc, but he did initiate and direct and superintend the process.

The Bible is God's word in written form. To read the Bible is to hear God speak.

"God-breathed" extends to the original manuscripts, not modern translations. Modern translations remain God's word to the extent that they're faithful to the original. We should have great confidence given the manuscript evidence. Be confident in your Bibles!

Application

The fact that God has breathed out these 66 books tells us God is a communicator. God wants us to know who he is and what he's done. God wants us to know who we are and what our greatest needs are. God wants us to understand with certainty.

God's an effective communicator. He's able to communicate in an intelligible manner. The blame for any lack of understanding or disagreement lies with us, not with God.

God's also an effective communicator in that God's word accomplishes God's purpose (Isa 55:10-11). God's word converts sinners. God's word transforms sinners. God's word equipped Timothy to pastor in a hard place. Same with us. God's word shines a light on our sin. God's word shows us the way. God's word reaches into our hearts and changes our desires. And righteousness emerges.

The Bible is profitable because it's not just words on a page.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. – Hebrews 4:12

Christian, God's word cuts to our heart and shows us who we truly are for our good! The Spirit didn't stop with carrying along the Bible authors. The Spirit continues to cut us up when we encounter God's word!

What does this have to do with Timothy's situation? Confidence in the divine origin of Scripture combined with confidence in Scripture's ability to equip us today stimulates us to continue.

Practical question: do I trust that God's word can equip me for good works?

Conclusion

We've learned that salvation is found in Jesus. We've learned that following Jesus results in opposition. Discomfort and laughter at the very least. We've learned that God's word alters people for their good.

Maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. How should you respond?

Turn to God's word. Let it expose you for your good! Get yourself a Bible. Start reading it. Start with the New Testament. Read Matthew to Revelation. Pray before you read for understanding. Pray after you read for a heart to follow Jesus. Come here again next Sunday morning. Talk to the Christian near you in the pew. Ask questions.

Salvation in Jesus means forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

On the cross God the Father treated Jesus as if he lived our sinful life. If we trust in Jesus, God the Father will treat us like we lived Jesus' perfect sinless life. Our sins will be forgiven and we'll be given eternal life. Every violation of God's good commands pardoned forever.

This same Jesus rose from the dead, vindicating his promises. Turn from your sin by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. Tell us if you believe.

Christian, continuing can be hard. What do you do? Remember what God's already done in you. Pursue godliness. Speak the gospel to yourself every day. With confidence in its power, turn to God's word every day.