

Growing Christians

II Timothy 3:16-17

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

II Timothy 2:15

“Do your best to present yourselves to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of Truth.”

Introduction:

A pastor entered a class as the lesson was in progress and asked, "Who broke down the walls of Jericho?" A lad answered, "Not me, sir."

The pastor turned to the teacher and asked, "Is this the usual behavior in this class?"

The teacher replied, "I believe this boy is an honest boy, and I really don't think he did it."

Leaving the room, the pastor sought out a deacon and explained what had happened.

The deacon said, "I have known both the boy and the teacher for several years, and neither of them would do such a thing."

By this time the pastor was heartsick and reported the incident to the Christian Education Committee.

They said, "We see no point in making an issue out of this thing. Let's pay the bill for the damage to the walls and charge it to upkeep. Anyway, our insurance may even cover it. "

Let me give you one more before I begin my sermon:

A New England high school teacher taught a course entitled The Bible as Literature.

Only seniors in the top 10 percent of the class could take this course.

A pre-test was given to evaluate the students' biblical knowledge.

One student defined the Epistles as "wives of the Apostles."

A pastor was so humored by this answer that he shared it during his next sermon.

One of the church members approached him afterwards and asked, "If the Epistles weren't the wives of the Apostles, whose wives were they?"

In Class 201 we teach four sessions on **Growing Christians.**

I'm going to present this to you in two sermons.

The first major point is:

I. How to better understand the Bible.

Let me begin this morning by asking this question:

What is the significance of the Bible in my life?

A. The Word of God is active in our salvation. I Peter 1:23

22-25 Now that you've cleaned up your lives by following the truth, love one another as if your lives depended on it. Your new life is not like your old life. Your old birth came from mortal sperm; your new birth comes from God's living Word. Just think: a life conceived by God himself! The Message

The Apostle Peter wrote that a person is Born Again ***"By the Word of God."***

The Word of God is the tool – it is the agent by which mankind is brought to the knowledge of the New Birth.

And Paul said in Romans 10:17 **“So faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of God.”**

If a person calls on the name of the Lord they will be saved.

Saved from what?

What exactly is salvation?

First of all, the Lord whom we are to call upon is Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 1:21b we are told, **“You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins”** and in Luke 1:77 we are informed concerning Jesus that he came, **“To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins.”**

Salvation to sinners is being rescued from their sins and the resulting consequences of sin, which is spiritual death (Romans 6:23a), or eternity in the flames of hell.

This salvation comes through the “remission” or forgiveness of our sins.

Just as the result of sin is spiritual death, the result of our faith in Jesus is spiritual life, for when we call upon Jesus we receive salvation for our souls.

1 Peter 1:8-9 says, **“Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls.”**

God wants all of us to believe in his son Jesus and to receive salvation.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 says, **“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”**

I want to share with you the Good News that salvation is offered this very minute.

In 2 Corinthians 6:2 the Lord declares, ***“In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”***

Statistics:

George Barna says: Younger Children are 800% More Likely To Receive Christ at an early age than when they grow older:

Barna Research reports teens between ages 14 and 18 have only a 4% likelihood of accepting Christ compared to kids ages 5 through 13 who have a 32% probability.

This challenges the widely held notion that the teen-age years are a prime time for evangelism.

This should prompt churches to reconsider children and youth ministry priorities and strategies.

So somehow the vision should be for all of us to see how important it is for young children to be have the chance to come to Jesus when they are young.

Children and adolescents are most impacted evangelistically by family members, peers and their youth groups.

How many of you here this morning came to Jesus when you were younger than 18? Would you stand?

So the key point here is you must believe what the Bible says about sin, your condition, and God’s plan of salvation in order for you to be saved.

There might be someone here this morning who has not taken that step to know Christ as your personal Savior.

We can stop right now bow our heads and pray for you.

(Stop and Pray)

B. How to hear God's Word Luke 8:18

“Consider carefully how you listen.”

Hebrews 2:1 “We must pay more careful attention ... to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.”

I read about a lady who had a hearing problem.

One day she and her husband were driving from Tennessee to Little Rock, Arkansas.

They were pulled over by a state trooper who asked if the husband knew how fast he was driving.

The wife asked, "What did he say?"

The husband replied, "HE ASKED IF I KNEW THAT I WAS SPEEDING."

Looking at the driver's license the trooper said, "I see you're not from around here."

The husband said, "No we are from Memphis." The wife again asked, "What did you say?"

The husband told her, "I SAID WE ARE FROM MEMPHIS."

The state trooper then commented, "You know, the meanest woman I ever met was from Memphis."

The wife again asked, "What did he say?"

The husband replied, "HE SAYS HE THINKS HE KNOWS YOU!"
How many of you think that you are good listeners?

Have you seen that commercial on TV that shows the husband watching his sports program and the wife is in the kitchen and says to him that she thinks they ought to get a new appliance and he says, "O.K. honey, and she excited and continues on ...

They tell us women tend to be better listeners than men are.

Husbands are notorious for being poor listeners.

We are all familiar with the scene of a husband reading the newspaper while his wife is trying to talk.

His response is "Yes, dear. Uhuh. Mmmm.

Is that so?"

But we all know he's not really listening.

Suddenly she pulls down the paper and says, "Have you heard a word I've said?"

Two men were talking one day.

One of them said, "My wife talks to herself a lot." His friend answered, "Mine does too, but she doesn't know it. She thinks I'm listening."

A Severe Warning is given to us about how we hear the Word of God.

Luke 8:18 ***"Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."***

Listen brothers and sisters in the Lord, God desires to speak to us through His Word.

But how does God speak to us if we are not willing to be in His Word?

He desires to reveal His will to us, and to be actively involved in leading us.

In verses 16, Jesus declares that He came to reveal the truth and not to hide it.

“No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light.”

The warning Christ gives in verse 18 is in reference to hearing that truth and with what you do with it after having heard it.

“Therefore consider carefully how you listen ...”

1. We hear God’s Word with an Open Mind.

2. We resolve our Spiritual Failures.

James says *“Don’t just listen to the Word ... Do what it says.”*
James 1:22

II. How to spend time with God.

What is the significance of thanksgiving and Prayer in my life?

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Matt. 11:28

THANKSGIVING – Your Heart Condition

• *Philippians 4:4-9 (NIV)*

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! [5] Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. [6] Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. [7] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[8] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. [9] Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

***“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”
Philippians 4:6***

This coming Thursday we will celebrate Thanksgiving.

Actually, this verse we teach in Class 201 fits very well right here.

Thanksgiving is much more than a holiday celebration; it is more a heart condition!

It is more than a celebration of food; it is the celebration of faith!

Satan does not want our heart to be free to thank God for His blessings; he wants us to have a heart attack!

Satan doesn't want you to have a celebration of faith but collated arteries of fear and worry.

Our lives are filled with WORRY.

The English word for “WORRY” comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word which means “to strangle.”

This is an apt description of the emotional pain we feel when we worry.

What is strangled is our peace of mind.

There is a way however to recapture peace of mind (and heart and soul!) even in the midst of trials and tribulations, and it involves a process of correct thinking which will lead to correct living.

We need to learn to think differently if we are to act differently!

We can do this by learning to take every thought into captivity.

We can think differently as we develop an awareness of God's presence in our lives and depend fully upon God and His strength to empower us to defend our hearts from worry fear and anything else Satan may want to use to turn our thoughts sour.

Here's how one guy changed the focus of his Thanksgiving:

ILLUSTRATION:

This Thanksgiving I'm thankful ... That there aren't twice as many Congressman and half as many doctors. That grass doesn't grow through snow, necessitating winter mowing as well as shoveling. That there are only twenty-four hours available each day for TV programming. That civil servants aren't less civil. That teenagers ultimately will have children who will become teenagers. That I'm not a turkey. That houses still cost more than cars. That the space available for messages on T-shirts and bumpers is limited. That liberated women whose husbands take them for granted don't all scream at the same time. That snow covers the unraked leaves. That hugs and kisses don't add weight or cause cancer. That record players and radios and TV sets and washers and mixers and lights can be turned off. That no one can turn off the moon and stars.

As believers thanksgiving should not be reserved for one day a year; for that matter we also shouldn't withhold our thanksgiving for "Sundays only."

We should live a lifestyle of thanksgiving.

- Philippians 4:4 (NIV)

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

This is not Paul suggestion for the day!

He wants us to live a joy filled life; a life so full of the joy of the Lord that it splashes out and touches those around us.

Often Paul's comments here are misunderstood in the same way people have misunderstand James; how are we supposed to

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds?” (James 1:2)

Is it possible for anyone to count it ***“pure joy in trials”*** or ***“rejoice always?”***

Surely this is an impossible request in light of all the bad things in life!

However it is NOT pure joy FOR the trials but for the fruit that comes from them as we submit to the work God is doing in our lives.

Likewise, it is NOT ***“rejoice IN EVERYTHING,”*** but ***“REJOICE IN THE LORD ... always!”***

We don't rejoice IN the positive things or even rejoice IN SPITE of the negative things, it is that we ***“REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS.”***

Since the Lord is the constant in a changing universe our rejoicing can also be constant because He never changes.

We lose our focus way too much and think about the wrong things!

As Christians we should not give into worry and fear because the Lord is with us.

If that's not a good enough reason for you then the fact remains that most of the things we worry about anyway rarely come to pass!

ILLUSTRATION:

Coach Jimmy Johnson was asked what he told his players before leading the Dallas Cowboys onto the field for the 1993 Super Bowl. He said, "I told them that if I laid a two-by-four across the floor, everybody there would walk across it and not fall, because our focus would be on walking the length of that board.

But if I put that same board 10 stories high between two buildings, only a few would make it, because the focus would be on falling."

Johnson told his players not to focus on the crowd, the media, or the possibility of falling, but to focus on each play of the game as if it were a good practice session.

The Cowboys won the game 52-7.

Spiritual Application:

Winning the game still requires making blocks and executing plays; there was still opposition to overcome—although the final score may not seem to indicate much difficulty.

But through it all the Cowboys remained focused.

We can't let ourselves be trapped by fear and worry.

Develop a lifestyle of thanksgiving! REJOICE IN THE LORD.

One might ask, "How are we to rejoice and live a lifestyle of thanksgiving?"

• Philippians 4:5-6 (NIV)

[5] Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. [6] Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

The first key is to guard your emotions.

The first place our emotions are seen by the world is in our actions.

Our emotions are on display for the world to see through the things we say and do.

"Let your gentleness be evident to all."

Now if Paul stopped there, then we could all say there is no use; we could just give up and go home, but he doesn't. Notice what he said next, "***The Lord is near.***"

Story:

I had the strangest thing happen to me this past week.
It was on Tuesday afternoon after I got home from visitation.
I had a evening appointment, but I took some time to go outside in the garage.
In my garage and on my driveway there are kernels of corn that I brought in from the farmers field.
I have two totes and 4 - 5 gallon buckets full of shelled corn
As I was sweeping the corn I had something happen that I had never had happen before.
A sparrow walked right into the garage with me and began to nibble at some of the cracked corn.
As I worked, the sparrow got closer and closer.
It was right at my feet.
I noticed it wanted more corn, so I walked over to my work bench and got a hammer and knelt down close to the sparrow and began to crack corn for it.
Now – I'm on my knees with a hammer cracking corn and this sparrow comes right up to where I'm cracking the corn and begin to eat.
I couldn't believe it. A wild bird.
I reached out and touched the birds head and it let me.
Finally after eating, the bird flew up into one of the totes put its head under its wing and went to sleep.
Later when Dru and I came back from our appointment, the sparrow was at the stairsteps waiting for us.
I reached down and gently lifted it up into my hand and it flew out of the garage.

I immediately thought of that song that goes like this, **His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.**

**I sing because I'm happy.
I sing because I'm free.
For His eye is on the sparrow.
And I know He watches me.
Folks, the Lord is near.**

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE!

- Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

God is with you!

He will empower you to live with joy even through the most difficult circumstances.

ILLUSTRATION:

If Christians praised God more, the world would doubt Him less. --
Croft M. Pentz,

NOT ONLY DO WE GUARD OUR EMOTIONS THROUGH THE THINGS WE DO, WE ALSO MUST BE CAREFUL HOW WE THINK!

Paul said, ***“do not be anxious about anything.”***

It's obvious Paul didn't live in the 21st century; we've got lots more to worry about right?

Oh wait Paul wrote this from a Roman prison cell, a real hell hole where many people died because they lost all hope. While Paul was eventually allowed to live in a home, he never regained his freedom; he was constantly under Roman guard – right up until the day he was taken out and executed.

I guess Paul might have had some things to worry about after all; make my worries look mighty small.

How are we to guard our emotions and keep free from worry?

Paul says, ***“In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”***

Give your worries to God.

Notice our prayer is to include thanksgiving!

Our prayer is to include our love to God.

Our prayer is to acknowledge that God is God!

And in our prayer we are to commit our ways totally to Him.

This is not simply thanking God for what he has done, but it is to give thanks for what God is going to do.

By faith see how God is going to work through your circumstances to accomplish His purposes; see God's preferred future and give Him thanks.

Closing Remarks: