



# Central Peninsula Church

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2 Timothy 3:10-17  
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## Continue in What You Have Learned

SERIES: A Life That Counts: Studies in 2 Timothy

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A few years ago, Charles Swindoll reflected on a very significant time he had with an older mentor:

*There we sat, a cluster of six. A stubby orange candle burned at the center of our table. Flickering eerie shadows crossed all our faces. One spoke; five listened. Every question was handled with such grace, such effortless ease. There was no doubt that each answer was drawn from the deep wells of wisdom, shaped by tough decisions and nurtured by time. Like 40 years in the same church. And seasoned by travel. Like having ministered around the world. Honed by tests, risk, heartbreaks and failures. But, like the best wines, it was those decades in the same crucible year after year that made his counsel invaluable. Had those years been spent in the military, he'd have a chest full of medals.*

*His age? Seventy-two. His face? Rugged as 50 miles of bad road. His eyes? Ah, those eyes. Piercing. When he peered at you, it was as if they penetrated to the back of your cranium. He'd virtually seen it all; weathered all the flack and delights of a flock. Outlasted all the fads and gimmicks of gullible and greedy generations, known the ecstasy of seeing many lives revolutionized, the agony of several lives ruined, and the monotony of a few lives remaining unchanged. He paid his dues. And he had the scars to prove it...*

*There we sat for well over three hours, hearing his stories, pondering his principles, questioning his conclusions, and responding to his ideas. The evening was punctuated with periodic outbursts of laughter followed by protracted periods of quiet talk. All six lost contact with time.*

*As I participated, I was suddenly 26 years old again. A young seminarian. No children. A pastoral intern, existing in a no-man's land between a heart full of desire and a head full of dreams. I was long on theological theories but short on practical experience. I had answers to questions no one was asking but a lack of understanding on the things that really mattered. In momentary flashbacks, I saw myself in the same room with the man 30 years earlier, drinking at the same well, soaking up the same spirit of his style. Back then I was merely impressed... last week I was deeply moved. Thirty years ago he was a model; last week I realized he had*

*become a mentor. Thoroughly human and absolutely authentic, he has emerged a time-warped, well-worn vessel of honor fit for the Master's use. I found myself profoundly grateful that Ray Stedman's shadow had crossed my life...*

*As we said good-bye to Ray, I walked a little slower. I thought about the things he had taught me without directly instructing me and about the courage he had given me without deliberately exhorting me... I found myself wanting to run back to his car and tell him again how much I love and admire him. But it was late, and after all, I'm a 55-year-old man. A husband. A father. A grandfather. A pastor... But as I stood there alone in the cold night air, I suddenly realized what I wanted to be most when I grow up.*

I like that quote, not only because I knew Ray Stedman and can relate with Chuck's feelings, but because I think it captures how Timothy might have felt about the Apostle Paul. As he held in his trembling hands these parchments with the last written words of the aged and imprisoned apostle, Timothy must have had his own flashbacks; memories of nights spent with Paul and a few others, gathered around a fire, listening, soaking in every word like a thirsty sponge. Timothy was now facing challenges of immense proportions in his ministry, but those memories would no doubt keep him fastened to his post.

There is a powerful link in our lives between remembering and continuing. Have you ever talked to an older believer and noticed how certain names and events from their spiritually formative years regularly surface in their conversations? On the other hand, I have a friend who walked with the Lord as a teenager and into his early twenties, but he's since fallen away. I've noticed that he refuses to go back and remember the people and the experiences that meant so much to him in those years. For him to remember is just too dangerous.

### **I. We must continue in the things we've learned (3:14a)**

At the very heart of our text for this week is a command for Timothy to continue on in the things he has learned. Paul says in 3:14: **"You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of,..."**

Remember, Paul has been describing for Timothy what he can expect in these “last days” we’re now living in. Up in 3:1 he said that in the last days difficult times will come. In v. 2 he explains the reason for that: **“For men will be...”** and then he gives 18 traits of evil men. Then he addresses Timothy, **“You, however...”** You’re to be different. You’re to continue in the things you’ve learned.”

We live in a world of such rapid change. We’re bombarded with new information and new products and new ways of dealing with things. It’s easy to think that if we don’t keep up we’re going to get left in the dust. I had a chance this week to spend a few hours at the MacWorld Expo up in San Francisco. I was just looking for some Bible Study software, but I walked into what seemed like a whole other world. They were using a completely different language! And there were some really weird people there; people with black trench coats! But I realized what drew mobs of people to this place was the lure of novelty; the desire to stay on the cutting edge of technology. It’s finding new, faster, better ways of doing things. Sometimes we treat our spiritual lives the same way. We look for the next gizmo that will change everything for us. The next program or book or formula.

But Paul says, “Timothy, you don’t need to learn anything new here. It’s not about novelty or innovation; it’s about remembering the fundamental convictions which have shaped your life.” You don’t have to go to the spiritual equivalent of MacWorld for that. You just go back to what you learned in Sunday School: “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” It’s hard to improve on that. Or how about this one: “The B.I.B.L.E., yes, that’s the book for me. I stand alone on the word of God, the B.I.B.L.E.” Or here’s another, “Read your Bible, pray every day, pray every day, pray every day. Read your Bible, pray everyday, and you’ll grow, grow, grow.”

Now you tell me, can you improve on that? That’s pretty good when you’re five, but it will work when you’re fifty-five too. Is there anything beyond that which we need for life or godliness? Continue on in those things you have learned and become convinced of.

## **II. Remember the work of God in the people who taught us (3:10-13).**

Notice he says at the end of v. 14, **“knowing from whom you have learned them.”** Who is that? First and foremost it was Paul. Timothy had learned

from Paul. Paul is calling to Timothy to remember him. Go up to v. 10 and look what he says:

**“Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”**

He says, “Timothy, remember how you followed me around? Remember when you were cutting your spiritual teeth? You were like a little boy who follows his dad around the garage with his little toy hammer and tries to do everything he does?” Timothy had followed Paul like a son follows a father. This is discipleship - imparting not just truth but embodied truth to a younger believer. Someone once said that truth is caught rather than taught. Timothy had watched Paul and “caught” from him an example what it means to follow Christ.

Paul gives his own list to provide a contrast to the list in vv. 2-4. Is Paul boasting here? Doesn’t this sound a bit arrogant? Would it be arrogant for Jerry Rice, at the end of his career, to speak to a group of young wide receivers and tell them what it took for him to get to where he was? Would it be arrogant for him to say, “I worked hard in the off-season. I watched what I ate. I didn’t carouse around the night before games. I studied my playbook. I spent hours watching films. That’s what it takes to make it in this league. That’s what it takes to be successful.” You see, this is Paul, not just at the end of his career but at the end of his life, reminding a young pastor of what he had seen him do.

Timothy had heard and followed Paul’s *teaching*. He starts there because this was the crux of the issue in Ephesus where Timothy was working. But it wasn’t just his teaching. The next thing on the list, his *conduct* or his way of life, backed up his teaching. He lived what he taught. You could see it in his *purpose* as well. You hang around someone long enough and pretty soon you catch what their real aim in life is. Maybe it’s to please people. Maybe it’s to make a lot of money and have a lot of the fun things money can buy. Maybe it’s to make a name for themselves. In *Peanuts*, Linus throws a stick out for Snoopy to fetch. Of course, Snoopy’s first instinct is to chase the stick. But he pauses for a few minutes and decides against it. He says to himself, “I want people to have more to say about me after I’m gone than ‘He was a nice guy...He chased sticks.’” A lot of people chase sticks. Paul says, “You watched me, Timothy, and you know I never chased sticks.” My purpose was to please Christ, to glorify him, to spread the good

news about Him.” Paul also mentions his *“faith, patience, love and perseverance.”* All of this had to do with his way of life.

And then in v. 11 he tacks on a couple of things he might have left out. He says, “You also watched me suffer. You saw what happened to me at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.” Paul could have mentioned more recent persecutions which Timothy had seen him endure - in Phillipi, Ephesus, and even Rome. But he mentions these three because they would take Timothy back to the infancy of his relationship with Paul. Timothy’s hometown was Lystra. Timothy was there when Paul was stoned. He’d seen the rocks crash against Paul’s head. He saw Paul laying beneath the rubble, blood running down his face. They all thought he was dead. They were practically planning the funeral when one of Paul’s eyes popped open, and then the other, and then he said, “I’m all right! I’m not dead yet. Let’s get out of here!” Paul could say with the psalmist, **“I sought the Lord and he answered me, and delivered me from all of my fears”** (Ps. 34:4). Imagine the impression that left on young Timothy. That’s what Paul wants Timothy to remember, because that remembrance would steel him for continuance.

Finally, he makes a generalization in vv. 12-13. “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. It’s not just for me, Timothy, it’s for you and anyone who wants to live a godly life.” Tell me, do you want to live a godly life? When you wake up in the morning, do you say, “Lord, help me not to sin.” Or do you say, “Lord, help me not to sin very much.” When my daughter and I got on the plane for Albania a few weeks ago I’m glad the pilot didn’t say at the start of the flight, “Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. On our way to Albania my strategy is not to crash very much.” That wouldn’t be real reassuring, would it? Not that at the end of the day we ever really avoid sin altogether, but that shouldn’t keep us from trying. And by the way, if you wonder what godliness is, perhaps we should just go back to Paul’s list - teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance. That’s godliness, and when you live like that you’ll inevitably arouse the antagonism of the world around you. Some will be attracted, but others will be convicted and repelled. On the other hand, he says that evil men and impostors will progress all right - they progress from bad to worse. That’s like saying they will go 100 miles an hour - in reverse! Their so-called progress is regress!

All this is to say that if you’re having a hard time continuing on in your faith, if you’re feeling a bit tired and you would just like to take a vacation from following him, go back and remember a few of the men and women who invested in you. Maybe it was a Sunday School teacher, or a youth minister, or just a caring friend who made the Christian faith something genuine that you wanted for

yourself. Write them a note or pick up the phone.

Chuck Swindoll says, “In a day of tarnished leaders, fallen heroes, busy fathers, frantic coaches, arrogant authority figures, and eggheaded profs, we need *mentors* like never before. Such rare finds are guides, not gods. They are approachable and caring souls who help us negotiate our way through life’s labyrinth without shouting or dictating. Mentors know how to stretch us without insulting us, affirm us without flattering us, make us think without requiring their answers in return, release us without abandoning us. They’re always right there, even though they may be a thousand miles away. They become invisible partners, whispering hope and reproofs on the journey to excellence.”

### III. Remember the word of God and what He has taught us (3:14b-17).

But that’s not all Timothy was to remember. Paul goes on in v. 15 and says:

**“and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”**

I cringe when I read these verses. Why? Because they’re so familiar to us that they just kind of roll off our backs. But I don’t know if I could read more important verses in all the Bible.

Paul says, “Timothy you have been taught the OT Scripture from childhood. Remember how your mother and your grandmother used to sit you on their knee and tell you the stories.” Timothy had grown up in a home where his father was Greek but his mother was Jewish. So his mother and grandmother were the ones who taught him the Scriptures, starting at the age of five, as was the custom in Jewish homes. Someone has said a child’s mind is like wet cement - write in it and you will mark them forever. Some of you had the privilege of learning Bible stories and memorizing Bible verses as a child. Have you forgotten them? No! Childhood is a unique window of opportunity to stamp our children’s minds and hearts with the Scripture. Don’t miss that opportunity. You say, how do I do that? It’s very simple - pick up the Bible (preferably one they can understand), open it, and read it to them, or let them read it to you. That’s it. Read one chapter. It takes about 3 minutes. You don’t even have to talk about it.

Talk about it later when you're driving to soccer practice or waiting in line at the grocery store. Look for teachable moments where you can say, "Hey, that's what we were reading about this morning."

Some of us have that in our memory banks, but some of us don't. The only thing I memorized as a child was the batting averages of the Giants. But, whether or not we grew up being taught the Scriptures we have ample opportunities to learn the Scriptures today. I mean, most of us have 10-20 Bibles in our homes. We have the Women's Devotional Bible, the Recovery Bible, the Student Bible, and the Bible on CD. We have devotional books and reading plans up the kazoo. Now there is a lot of drivel out there, but we have plenty of things to help us keep our nose in the Scripture. Yet the amount of biblical illiteracy in our churches is still staggering.

Paul says several things here that should encourage us to anchor our lives in the Scripture. First he talks about the origin of Scripture. He says it is inspired by God, which literally means "God-breathed." That doesn't mean they were there and then God breathed life into them. It means God breathed them INTO life. They came from him. Despite what the Jesus Seminar people tell us, and despite what the DaVinci Codes say, the whole of Scripture is God's direct speech. Imagine that! You see, God wants to be in relationship with us; he wants to communicate with us. He hasn't left us here to figure out everything on our own. He's communicated to us in a way that's basic to our humanity - through ordinary human language that we can all understand.

Many people view the Bible as a rule book. Others see it as a road map. Still others see it as a love letter. More than anything else, I see it as God's revelation of reality. He wants us to know what is true and real and so in the Scripture he pulls back the curtain and he shows us. He lets us in on the answers to the great questions that have befuddled humanity since the beginning of time. Who is God? What is he like? Why are we here? What's the meaning of life? What happens when we die? What does it really mean to live well? Why is there pain and evil and suffering? How can I experience freedom? Where can I find redemption? These are the questions of the ages. The answers are in the Scripture. All we have to do is pick it up, open it, and read it.

That's why Paul says that not only is it inspired, it's profitable and useful. Scripture is not there just so we can theorize about life; it's meant to help us live life in the most effective and meaningful way possible. That's why he says it's profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. We all need that, don't we? Otherwise we go through life with a distorted perspective on reality and we act accordingly. We go through life and we're like those people who enter a fun house and look at themselves in the mirror, which distorts their image. One mirror shows them at 10 feet tall and 100 pounds, while another shows them as 3 feet tall and 300 pounds. It's a distortion. Unfortunately, that's how most people view life. Left to ourselves, that's how we all view it. And so we need the Scripture to teach us and reprove us and correct us.

When we allow the Scripture to do that, then we can be adequate and equipped for every good work, as Paul says here. That's what we all want, isn't it? We want to be competent. When someone comes to us and pours their heart out in pain, we want to know how to help them. When someone comes to us for counsel on what to do, we want to know how to guide them. The Scriptures do all of that. There is nothing which God has called you to do which the Scriptures cannot equip you to do.

## CONCLUSION

A few years back a movie came out called *Memento*. It's a story about an insurance investigator who loses his short term memory when he sustains a head injury during his wife's murder. He can only remember things by writing notes or taking pictures. It demonstrates how lost we would be without the simple ability to remember. Paul says to Timothy in this passage: "Remember God's work in my life which you followed as a young man. And remember God's word, the inspired Scriptures, which you've known since childhood. And let the work of God and the word of God make you into a man of God." If you and I are going to continue on and become the people of God then we have to let our remembrance fuel in us continuance. Remember the work of God which you saw embodied in someone's life. And remember the word of God which you were taught. Continue in those things. Continue in the things you have learned.

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