Good Habits that Build Christian Influence

Third in the series, “A Life of Christian Influence”

# Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

# Key thought: Our spiritual habits have a powerful effect on others.

# Intro:

## Serious discipleship makes a big difference

There is a strong correlation between the kind of disciple of Jesus that we are and the kind of influence that we are going to have for Jesus. Since all of us want to make a difference, we need to look at the kind of disciple of Jesus that we are.

As I was preparing for the sermon this week, I came across an excellent definition of discipleship. I found the quote in a book I recently finished called Holy Habits by Andrew Roberts (p. 19) but the definition is by Roger Walton.

To be a disciple is to hear the call of Jesus, to take up that call and follow him, to let go of everything to engage in God's mission and be transformed in the process.
Disciples Together by Roger Walton p. 6 (London: SCM Press, 2014)

It is a definition that makes us stretch. But it stretches us toward what Jesus said,

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. Mark 8:34, 35 NIV

So being a disciple is serious business. It is at once consuming and transforming.

## Anemic discipleship remains self-centered

One of the key reasons that our discipleship is crucial is that the level of our discipleship will determine the level of our Christian influence. If we are anemic or indifferent disciples, concerned more with our own interests and pleasures than with God’s agenda for us, dabbling only occasionally into the wells of God’s riches available to us through spiritual practices, then we should not be surprised when those who follow after us do not put a high priority on following Jesus. They will not have seen its benefits in our lives.

So, as Paul advises Timothy, he encourages him in some very practical habits that will fortify his discipleship and greatly bolster his influence for Jesus. Let’s dig in and see how these same practical habits can help us.

# Be equipped by the Scriptures 3:15

For the first one, we take up were we left off last week. Last week we pointed out the verse where Paul encourages Timothy to be a workman for God who can correctly handle the Word of God. In today’s passage, Paul also underlines the importance of knowing the Bible and knowing how to use it.

##  Understand the varied uses of Scripture 3:16

In 2 Tim. 3 Paul lists many of the important functions of Scripture as it relates to our influence with others.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
2 Tim 3:14-17 NIV

Let’s explore four effects and influences that the Scriptures have in our lives and through our lives to others. There are more but Paul singles out four here. Paul wants Timothy to understand why knowing Scripture is so important. Here are the kind of differences it makes when you know your Bible and know how to use it.

### God’s Word makes you wise for salvation

Jesus taught a clear connection between the Word and our salvation. In the parable of the soils, when Jesus talked about the seed that fell on the path, he said,

Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Luke 8:12

So, the Word was an essential means to salvation which the devil does not want us to have. The Apostle James wrote:

Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. James 1:21 NIV

So, knowing the Word of God will facilitate our knowing God personally and it will help us show the way of salvation for others as well. This is a key reason why the Sunday School doesn’t just focus on moral platitudes or cute craft exercises. Rather, it teaches foundationally from the Word of God. The more acquainted with God’s Word and its stories children are, the more the Holy Spirit can use that material to help them grow and the more background they will have for understanding more difficult spiritual truths later.

So, Paul is telling Timothy that if he wants to have a strong influence, use the Book of books and use it well. And, if we aim to strengthen our influence, we also must use God’s Book that has power to save, the Word through which the Spirit of God works, the narrative that helps us know about God, learn to follow Jesus, and be saved in the process.

### Teaching

Secondly, Paul tells Timothy that the Bible is the proper source for teaching. Jesus was a teacher, a Rabbi (Mark 6:34, for example). His disciples were sent out to proclaim the Good News which also involved teaching. The way Peter expounds God’s Word as he preaches in Acts two, three and four are good examples for us of the teaching that was involved in the proclamation of the Apostles. Teaching is listed as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the equipping of the church (Rom. 12:7, Eph. 4:11). Paul wrote about the role of God’s Word in our teaching ministry.

Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.
Rom 15:4 NIV

There is something fundamentally sad in the fact that American education started out using and teaching the Bible and now runs away from teaching it. Today, the church believes in teaching the Word of God, but people find it hard to get their children there to be taught for a few minutes during services. But wise parents and grandparents also diligently teach God’s Word at home at every opportunity. Teaching God’s Word strengthens our influence.

### Rebuking and correcting

A third function of God’s word is for correction. Paul uses two words here to cover this, perhaps for emphasis. I think he knew from experience that admonishing is a very hard thing to do. It is hard enough when we are in the position of a parent. It is difficult but doable when we are dealing with a close friend who will hear us out of respect because of the relationship that is well established. But such words of admonition are fraught with trouble in most other interpersonal situations.

However, one place where we should welcome correction is when the Holy Spirit uses Scripture to speak to us. Often the Word of conviction or even rebuke may come to us by the Spirit’s still small voice while we are listening to the preaching of God’s Word. This is why preachers are said to occasionally tread on toes – God uses their words to convict and correct. They don’t know it, but God is using his Word to correct. They are not even aware how God is using what they say. But God is faithful and sends the course corrections that listeners need, that are essential to keep us on course toward the celestial city, our heavenly home.

Christians who are maturing and growing intentionally place themselves in venues, such as good preaching, spiritual retreats, camp meetings, where they might encounter convicting preaching that the Holy Spirit can use as needed. They know that spiritual correction is essential to stay spiritually strong.

Those who accept correction from God’s Word come to highly value the advice that has come to them, even though they may not have liked it at first. They recognize its value. Providing it has been done well, the influence of the sources of correction is increased.

### Training in righteousness, equipping for good works

Our learning of the Scriptures has another big-picture purpose. By them we learn right-living and we are equipped for our future serves to God.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16,17 NRSV

One way to translate the word that the NIV and RSV translate as “training” is with the English word “tutor.” When we have a child that needs a little help in a subject, we connect them with a tutor. In today’s school systems they have other names such as teacher’s aide or reading specialist. The concept is the same, to provide training.

Well, the spiritual concept that Paul is teaching is that we all need a tutor to help us be ready for the good works that God has planned for us. And the Word of God, as used by the Holy Spirit in our lives is the primary tutor. We must have a working knowledge of God’s Word and apply it to our lives in order to be well-equipped for life and service to God and others.

##  Apply the Word daily 3:17

But there is a need for a warning. We must be cautioned against having knowledge of God’s word without personal application. There are many people who can quote God’s Word who don’t believe it or apply in their lives. This does not help. God’s Word is meant to be do its work in our hearts and to be allowed to mold our thinking and actions. As the writer to the Hebrews exclaimed,

**T**he word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.Heb 4:12

God’s Word is intended to help us discern our own motives, measure our own behaviors by God’s standards, and help us glimpse higher possibilities for service. If we don’t allow it to do these things, we are not getting the benefits that God intended us to receive from his Holy Word. So, each day, we ask God to speak to our hearts through his Holy Spirit using the Bible words we have read and the ones we have previously memorized, and God does.

This last week as I was praying, the Lord brought a text to mind from the last Psalm that we had been studying in our Higley Bible study. So, I prayed the Psalm for myself and for each person in my family.

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long. Ps 25:5 NIV

It was one way of applying the verse in my life for that day.

So, the first habit that Paul wants Timothy to strengthen in order to be a strong influence for Jesus is his relationship with Holy Scripture. And we can certainly learn this lesson as well. It will benefit our influence in so many ways.

# Persevere despite hardship 4:5

The second concern that Paul has for Timothy is that he be the kind of person that perseveres in hardship.

## Our wrong assumption

M. Scott Peck begins chapter one of his best-selling book, The Road Less Traveled, with the startling assertion, *“Life is difficult”* (p.15). Peck continues by outlining the situation in which so many today find themselves.

Most do not fully see this truth that life is difficult. Instead they moan more or less incessantly, noisily or subtly, about the enormity of their problems, their burdens, and their difficulties as if life were generally easy, as if life should be easy. They voice their belief, noisily or subtly, that their difficulties represent a unique kind of affliction that should not be, and that has somehow been especially visited upon them, or else upon their families, their tribe, their class, their nation, their race or even their species, and not upon others. (P. 15)

The problem with this attitude is that when we have this attitude, we are gravely tempted to give up on the tasks that we are attempting. We also may give up upon our faith, thinking that it has somehow failed us because our life has not now become easy. The problem is not that our life is not easy. The problem is not that God has failed us. The key problem is that our assumption about the nature of life is wrong. We have adopted the wrong presupposition about the kind of world we live in.

We need to start with the kind of presupposition that Jesus gave us when he said,

In this world you will have trouble! John 16:33

Thankfully, Jesus did not leave us on that note but encouraged us by continuing,

“But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

In Holy Habits, author Andrew Roberts writes,

The pathway of Christian discipleship is one that inevitably involves struggle, sacrifice and suffering for true discipleship is cruciform, cross -shaped. But as faithful disciples down the ages have found, it is also a pathway of wonder, joy and true pleasure. Holy Habits by Andrew Roberts p. 57

By looking at the world with more balanced expectations, as Jesus taught us, our proper attitude becomes perseverance under the troubles that we do inevitably face. So, Paul encourages Timothy to be one who perseveres under difficult situations.

Obviously, Paul has given Timothy an amazing example of this, to which he alludes by mentioning the persecutions that he has endured in the cities of Asia minor, today called Turkey. You can read about it in Acts 13 and 14.

In Holy Habits, author Andrew Roberts writes,

Moments of hardship, doubt, struggle and pain are part of the human condition. They are also an inevitable part of the adventure of discipleship or we follow the one who says, "if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Holy Habits by Andrew Roberts p. 23

##  Continue in what you have learned 3:14

Paul also gives Timothy some quick advice as to how this perseverance should happen. First, Paul tells Timothy that he needs to persevere in his theology. Paul encourages him to continue with the same teaching that he has already learned. The apostles were very aware of the danger that people would get creative with what was passed down to them, so they made a point to encourage those who came after them to pass down what was handed down from the apostles. Paul makes a point to speak of the things he has heard from the apostles (1 Cor. 15:3) and he expected Timothy to do the same. Others had turned aside to myths but Paul wanted Timothy to stick to the truth passed on to him.

##  Be level-headed 4:5

In verse five, Paul instructs Timothy to be sober, or in the NIV, be level-headed. The English Standard Version translates this as “be sober minded.” The idea has to do with not having our faculties compromised with substance abuse such as by misusing alcohol but instead being vigilant and watchful. The best cross reference is probably in first Peter where two words are used for this thought, the second one being the same word that Paul uses in 2 Tim. 4:5.

The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.
1 Peter 4:7

In order to persevere in the work, Timothy needed to be ready for his tasks. He could not do the work God intended if he gave in to temptations of alcohol or other distractions. He needed to have his “head in the game” to use a modern-day idiom.

##  Endure hardship 4:5

Paul encourages Timothy to endure the hardships that will come his way. And we need to have a mindset that is ready to endure some hardships for Jesus’ sake as well.

Jesus said,

‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. John 15:20 NIV

And Paul says in our text,

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.
2 Tim 3:12-13 NIV

He predicts not only that Christians will be persecuted, but that evildoers will grow worse. That is what we see today. We see persecution of Christians around the world growing worse. And we see persecution of Christians beginning here in our own country.

When the Archbishop of Canterbury's middle eastern envoy Terry Waite was taken captive in the Lebanese city of Beirut he was held in the most horrendous of conditions, often on his own in terms of human companionship. In his book Taken on Trust he shares the story of a Christmas celebration that he experienced at midnight on Christmas eve in his cell a few miles from where 'Jesus was born on this holy night.' As he read the Gospel of John the words of the prologue came alive with a profound poignancy. 'the light shines in the darkness… And we beheld his glory… Full of grace and truth.' Jesus was with him in the darkness. He prayed, broke bread and celebrated a simple holy Communion with bread and water. Holy Habits by Andrew Roberts p. 109 (quotes within quotes from Taken on Trust by Terry Waite, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993)

To have a strong influence we will need to be ready to persevere despite hardships.

# **Do the work of an evangelist 4:5**

## Everyone can help others find Jesus

Paul has one more terse admonition for Timothy to strengthen his influence.

“Do the work of an evangelist.” 2 Tim. 4:5

Now this is a reminder that I’m not sure that Timothy wanted to hear and I’m sure that we don’t really want to hear it either. But it is essential that we do if we really want to increase our influence. Think about it this way.

Jesus taught his 12 disciples to be reproducing disciples, that is they were to make other disciples. Today, we are happy to follow Jesus for ourselves and we are hesitant to 6seek to recruit others to follow Jesus with us. But Jesus’ definition of discipleship involved not just learning truth, and learning to pray, but also helping others to come to Jesus.

Our definition of discipleship often does not include that last crucial part and I’m afraid Timothy’s didn’t either. We are happy to attend worship. We believe a disciple should pray, read the Bible, even memorize some of it. A disciple should worship God and serve others. We’re good with all that. But there is something missing. We are happy to be Christian, but we stop short of inviting anyone else to become one! And that short-coming is one big reason why the Christian church in America is dying. We need to recover Jesus’ definition of discipleship.

Now I know that some people have a special gift of evangelism. We need them especially. They can talk to others about God, invite them to church, and help others find Jesus much easier than most of us can. But that does not let the rest of us off the hook. Each of us needs to “do the work of an evangelist” as much as we are able and have opportunity.

## What is that work?

* Sharing the story of Jesus and the Good New about forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name with others.
* Inviting others to church
* Sharing a personal story of how Jesus has made a difference in a situation in our own life.
* Helping people in your community know about your church or one of its ministries.
* Befriending someone for Jesus’ sake and being ready to say a word for Jesus when the opportunity presents itself.
* Preaching or teaching the Good News and asking for response
* Helping to tell the story of Jesus’ life to someone who doesn’t know it.
* Praying for people who need Jesus by name and then asking God to help you take the next step to help them find Jesus.

As you can see, these things have two thing sin common.

* First, the evangelist is reaching out to those who don’t know Jesus in some way.
* Second, he or she is helping to connect or invite them to connect with God’s Word and with Jesus.

That is doing the work of an evangelist. Please don’t stereotype it with some door-knocking formula or beach questionnaire or button-holing strangers on the street. All such methods have been tried, for sure. And God has probably used them, in spite of them. But they are not what the Scripture is primarily talking about. Paul is simply encouraging us to be active in the interpersonal work of helping others to step closer to Jesus. We are to be like the disciple Andrew who is recorded twice as bringing others to Jesus. When we do that in the ways that God leads us to do so, then our influence is multiplied.

## An example you know

I think of a young lady named Kaitlynn Swain. I remember when she was a little child and won our hearts singing alone on the stage of the Christmas play in a sheep costume. She is now a young adult teaching Sunday School at Kirkville Wesleyan Church. She is one of many young ladies who have been or are being mentored as Christian disciples by Kim Ouderkirk whom you met. Now Kaitlynn is keeping the chain going by helping others to learn about and follow Jesus. Remember that the chain began with a lady who took a rural bar-keeper’s daughter named Kim to Sunday school. If you have read Kim’s story in JoAnne’s book, you know that the first time in Sunday School, Kim swore at the other students who picked on her. She did not know about Jesus at all. But the teacher loved her for Jesus and told her of Jesus’ love too. Another faithful lady kept bringing her to church. And today the story is being multiplied many times over through the lives of young women like Kaitlynn Swain. You do not know how God will use your faithfulness in helping someone step closer to Jesus.