

Have you ever thought about all the stuff we have to know to function in life? Thinking back over my week I had to draw upon knowledge from the fields of theology, business, history, psychology, sociology, medicine, finance, transportation, politics, entertainment, and more. The amount of knowledge we are required to know can overwhelm us. One of the challenges of living in a world where we are bombarded by information 24/7, is the need to distinguish between what is important and what is trivial...Texas Tech video...

That is a disturbing video on so many levels. The thought that you could graduate from high school and attend an American university and not know about the civil war is shocking. But before you cry, "Shame on you," let me ask you a question. Can you summarize the message of the Bible in four or five sentences? If you have been listening to sermons and attending Bible classes for longer than a four-year university student, could you tell someone what the Bible is about? You may not know Jersey Shore from Harper's Ferry but there are some things we must know if we are going to live out our God-given purpose in Christ.

In our passage today, Paul describes two essential practices that form the foundation for an effective ministry. The first practice is found in vv. 13-14.

**I. Treat the truth like a treasure.** The reason for Paul's confidence in prison is that God will "guard that which I have entrusted to Him until that day." (v. 12). He uses the same word in v. 14 with respect to truth. Guard it from being twisted or distorted or perverted or corrupted. Treat it like treasure of immeasurable worth.

Finding our God-given purpose in Christ is difficult if not impossible unless we possess a pattern of sound doctrine. Ministry has a high truth component. There is a pattern to the truth that is found in the scriptures that must be preserved and passed down from generation to generation. After Jesus' time on earth, the early church began developing a body of fixed doctrine (or teaching) under the care of the apostles that would be faithfully passed on from church to church. This led to the development of creeds that summarized the core truths contained in the scriptures. These creeds were memorized in order to pass them from one generation to the next. The most popular creed which was produced in the 4th century is the Apostle's Creed.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Most churches today don't require catechism where you memorize and recite the creeds in order to become a member. But Paul's words point out how important it is to communicate over and over the pattern of sound doctrine.

There have been other attempts to teach a pattern of sound doctrine that have been very helpful. The Four Spiritual Laws: "Just as there are physical laws that govern the universe so there are spiritual laws that govern your relationship with God."

1. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.
2. Man is sinful and separated from God.
3. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin.
4. We must individually **RECEIVE** Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

Evangelism Explosion summarized the gospel this way:

1. Fact of sin.
2. Penalty for sin.
3. Christ paid the penalty.
4. Must receive Christ.

Here at Fellowship we teach Truth Foundations to our children:

God is good.  
God is in charge of everything.  
God loves us.  
Jesus died for our sin and rose from the dead.

As they get older these truth foundations are worded in a fuller way:

God in three persons in holy.  
God is sovereign over all creation.  
God reveals His love for us in His all-sufficient Word.  
Jesus died for our sin and rose from the dead.

All of these presentations emphasize the same four subjects:

The Purpose of God  
The Presence and penalty of sin  
The Provision for sin  
The Power of salvation

Paul reminds Timothy that the greatest treasure any of us can ever possess is the truth of God's word. No matter what we experience in life, God's word is a "lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path." The Bible is a repository of wisdom, encouragement, guidance, training, discipline

and inspiration. It is a treasure chest of principles that we should value and protect.

But notice where Paul goes next in his letter to Timothy.

Paul tells Timothy about a recent experience that reminds us of the importance of love...vv. 15-18.

**II. Treat the trusted like an Onesiphorus.** Any attempt to serve the Lord by serving people, will bring you into proximity to two types of people; those who drain you of your joy for the work and those who refresh you. Phygelus and Hermogenes are only mentioned here in the Bible but you can bet there was some real drama behind the mention of their name. My guess is they were once close but their relationship eroded over time and P and H bailed on Paul. One of the unavoidable hazards in ministry is keeping people at arm's length because you have been burned by some self-promoting Christians who try to build a following for themselves by opposing you. These two were cowardly and unfaithful to Paul at precisely the time he needed their support, when he was arrested.

Against this dark backdrop Paul mentions Onesiphorus...v. 16. There is a line in *The Little Prince* that goes, "What makes the desert beautiful," said the Little Prince, "is that somewhere it hides a well." Antoine St. Exupry. Onesiphorus was Paul's well.

I have a file on the third floor labeled "Attaboy." I keep dozens of notes and cards and words of encouragement I have received from people over the years. I don't have a corresponding file that says "Jerkface" or some other pleasant title. The amazing thing is that I never look in my Attaboy file, it's enough to know it's there. It's sort of like the little blue box stored in a safe place at the Library of Congress. The label reads: "Contents of the President's pockets on the night of April 14, 1865." That was the night President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.

The box contains five things: (1) A handkerchief embroidered "A. Lincoln"; (2) A country boy's pen knife; (3) A spectacles case; (4) A purse containing a \$5 bill—in Confederate money! (5) Some old and worn newspaper clippings. "The clippings are concerned with the great deeds of Abraham Lincoln. One of them reports a speech by John Bright, a British statesman, saying that Abraham Lincoln is one of the greatest men of all time. That is not news for us who live over a century later. We all know that Lincoln was a great man. But in 1865, the jury was still out. The nation was divided and Lincoln had fierce critics on both sides as he made decisions that he hoped would restore the Union. Remember, Lincoln hadn't read the history books on himself!"

The reality is that everyone needs the ministry of refreshment at times. Even the Lord Jesus, in His hour of agony in Gethsemane, took His three closest disciples with Him and asked them to watch and pray with Him there. If Christ needed it and if Paul needed it, and if Abraham Lincoln needed it then we all need it. God has not only called us to guard the precious truth of the gospel but to minister to the needs of His precious saints. That's part of our God-given purpose in Christ.

Paul's description of Onesiphorus is helpful because it reminds us of how to encourage others.

**Refreshers are consistent. "He often refreshed me."** This was no sudden impulse on the part

of O. He obviously had done this before in Ephesus...v. 18.

**Refreshers are inconvenienced. "He searched for me."** Being a true encourager is not a ministry of convenience. O. had to risk his life. Paul was politically dangerous. Visiting Paul in prison would be like visiting a terrorist suspect at Guantanamo Bay. You would make yourself a target for arrest by doing so. As one author put it, "He went to Rome at a time when every Christian was trying to get out of it." (Albert MacKinnon, cited by Guy King, *To My Son* [Christian Literature Crusade, 1976], p. 34). Paul says (1:17), "he eagerly searched for me and found me." Just getting from Ephesus to Rome was no small feat in those days. But when he finally got to that huge city, Onesiphorus had to look all over for Paul. The prison officials were probably suspicious of anyone trying to track down a prisoner, and they usually weren't noted for their helpful customer service. But Onesiphorus persisted until he found Paul.

Serving others is rarely convenient. Of course, there are times when we have to say no to opportunities to serve simply because we are finite and we have to juggle so many demands upon our time. But we have to resist the selfish mentality that severs only when it's convenient. Usually, it's not!

**Refreshers are selfless. "He was not ashamed of my chains."** Onesiphorus was not trying to win a popularity contest or seeking the approval of men. He was willing to endure criticism and mistreatment in order to refresh a brother in chains.

**Refreshers will be rewarded by the Lord.** He will receive "mercy from the Lord on that day." "That day" is the day of judgment, as we saw in 1:12. If you get involved in the ministry of refreshment, you need to remember that. The rewards will be handed out in eternity. You may or may not see rewards in this life. The world may think you're stupid to sacrifice yourself for others and the church may forget to recognize you at the awards ceremony. But the Lord does not forget. He will be merciful to you on that day.

In one sentence, the Bible writes the biographies of Phygelus and Hermogenes: "they turned away from me." In another sentence, the Bible writes the biography of Onesiphorus: "he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains." How would someone write your biography in one sentence? Do you seek out those in need to minister refreshment? Do you serve selflessly no matter what others are saying or doing? If so, the Lord will reward you in that day.

So there it is: two practices indispensable to living out your God-given purpose in Christ every day. Truth and love; Treasure the truth and refresh the faithful; words and deeds; voice and touch. These two practices embody the whole gospel.

Max Depree's granddaughter was born perilously premature and weighed only one pound, seven ounces. De Pree could cover her entire body under one hand. Though her chances of surviving were a mere 5 to 10 percent, her mother bravely named her Zoe, the Greek word for life. The nurse told Max that his job was to speak tenderly to his granddaughter, stroking her gently with one finger, so that she could learn to connect his voice with his touch. That's our calling - connecting voice and touch, truth and love. If you master those two subjects, you will be useful to the Master and He will reward you on that day.