

I want to start this morning with an apology.

On behalf of preachers everywhere, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for the times that we've taken the narrative of scripture and distilled it down to a memorable phrase. I'm sorry for the times that we've glazed over this passage and only heard Paul tell Timothy that all scripture is God breathed – and taken from that a licence to cram as much head knowledge and memorized bible verses down your throats. I'm sorry for our insistence on knowing and our lack of insistence on being.

I'm sorry for the times that ministers have focused so much on the context that the text gets buried.

And I confess, over this last week I wrote and rewrote this message three times – focusing on the various ways it could be translated and what that means, or the historical connection of this passage with Reformation Sunday. After all, as Augustine says, *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda, secundum verbum dei*.

I apologize, because all of this missed what seems to be the fundamental message of this passage – the words that Paul has been screaming throughout the centuries: The Christian life isn't primarily about information, but about formation.

Let me clarify: It's not that information is unimportant or that it doesn't matter. But rather information is one part of the equation that Paul urges Timothy to seize. Paul is writing broadly with principles that he envisions the young apostle applying to those he will mentor down the line, and so on and so forth. As a result, Paul is at once writing to Timothy but also to you and me as well. And in that he seeks to convey the principle aim of a life of discipleship: completion for a purpose. The goal is making Paul, Timothy, you and me and every single person who has ever lived or will ever live – complete and equipped for every good work. Whether you are a Minister, an engineer, a doctor, or a shoemaker: God has invited you into his mission and set before you good works that he wants you to be prepared for.

And that starts with informing your mind.

Continue, urges Paul, **in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 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.**

This is the part of the passage that Presbyterians like. We're good at knowledge. Not long ago, Presbyterians could boast that we had more degrees per capita sitting in the pews and more doctorates in the pulpits than any other denomination in Canada. Knowledge makes us feel

safe. It tells us the rules that the universe plays by, and lets us know how we can win. Knowledge is what let us invent fire, the wheel and the internet. It put us into space and revealed the scope and grandeur of the universe – and it lets us know the God who ordered all of it in a personal and intimate way. Knowledge lets us know the stories of how God has acted in the past, to find ourselves in the trajectory of grace and ultimately, knowledge gives us the ability to trust that the God who has been faithful in the past is faithful in the present and will be faithful in the future. Paul says we need that understanding. Our minds need to be informed, but we need to continue in what we've learned.

We need to become lifelong learners. Your discovery of God doesn't stop when you graduate from Sunday School. If you want to be complete and equipped for the work that God is calling you to, then a commitment to continually be informing your mind has got to be essential. The reality is stark though. The Canadian Bible Society reports that as of 2013, only 14% of Canadians read their Bible outside of Church at least once a month, half the number it was in 1998. 14%! And this matters to us because if we want to promote ourselves as a missional church then we need to be equipped for every good work. We can't fall down on the first step. This church should be brimming with Bible Studies and small groups of people reading the Bible together. Every program we run, every team we're part of should be first about being in the word together and then about the work that we're here to do. Choir practice should be a Bible Study first. Session Teams should start with the Bible, then be about the business. Heritage Seniors should be about the Bible first, then about the Fellowship. Parents, we're glad your kids are in Sunday School, but teaching them the Bible isn't our job; it's yours. Our job is to give them a community of Bible readers to be part of. Here's the brass tack: If we claim to be a missional church; if everything we do is about joining God in his mission in the world and we're not brimming though with opportunities to study the Bible together, then we're probably only being 14% missional.

But Paul says, as important as it is to inform your minds, it simply can't stop there.

Preach the message, be ready whether it is convenient or not, reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and instruction.

Secondly, find the love in what God is calling you to do.

I don't know much for an absolute certainty, but this I know: we won't do much whether it is convenient or not, unless love is involved. We will take care of family members who are inconvenient, whether because they are sick or because they find themselves at one or the other end of the spectrum – and we do it because we love them. My dad loves golf. And I realized he took the game a little more seriously than I did when I first noticed he carried an umbrella in his bag. If there's even a chance of rain in the forecast, you wouldn't catch me

walking through a field chasing a stupid little white ball with a stick. But that's the difference between me and my dad. He loves Golf, whether it's convenient or not. I have friends who take the most amazing photographs. But to get them they have to hike up into the alpine of some absurdly steep cliff. But ask them about it, and they'll tell you how much they love it.

Love makes us do some crazy things, and so Paul tells Timothy that the only way he is going to be complete in the work that God is setting before him is if he can find the love in it. Preach the message. Do what you do. Live your life. Let the song inside of you sing. Let all of it happen for no other reason than that you love doing it.

The first thing they tell you in Seminary is that if you can serve God in any other way, do that instead. Unless the passion for preaching and leading in worship grabs you and won't let you go, find the way that God is calling you to serve him and do that. Because it's just as valid, and just as important. And if you don't love what you're doing, all God is ever going to get from you is your shoulders shrugged, "fine". So, find what you love doing to the glory of God and do that.

And watch as God transforms your heart.

Augustine said that at the root of all human misery, the root of sin itself, is love disordered. The key, he said, was in getting the right love to the top and watching the rest of the loves fall into place.

Serve God out of love, and watch as everything else falls into place. Love God – serve him in the way that he has wired and called you to serve him, and watch as you begin to treat those around you with a deeper sense of love and compassion.

Informing your mind

Transforming your heart

And finally, Paul says completion for the work God has called you to requires reforming your hands

You, however, be self-controlled in all things, endure hardship, do an evangelist's work, fulfill your ministry.

Act like somebody is watching.

Act like you have something to prove.

Act like you have a message to share.

And in doing that, find your ministry fulfilled. Find yourself complete.

How you act matters. It doesn't matter what you know, because if it doesn't translate into action – no one is either going to believe you or care to believe you. In the Gospel of Mark, there is a story about Jesus healing a man confined to a mat because he's been lame from birth. With a crowd gathered around, Jesus says to the man, your sins are forgiven. The crowd is understandably shocked. After all, they were expecting a miracle and only God can forgive sins. But Jesus does something remarkable. He says "Which is easier? To say your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up and walk? But so that you know I have the power to do the more difficult, let me do the easier. Get up, take your mat and walk." The message of that story is clear: Talk is cheap. It's easy to say what we believe, or to confess what we know. But the more powerful reality is can we put it into action? Does our head communicate with our hands? Or do we buy into the myth that the knowledge we've been given is somehow just for us?

By the same token, it doesn't matter what you love if what you love doesn't translate into action. I can tell Beth that I love her, and I can even be telling the truth – but if I don't show her that I love her, to quote Paul elsewhere, "I'm a clanging symbol and a noisy gong."

And this is where the rubber hits the road in Paul's challenge to Timothy. This is where it gets hard. Because this where completion moves from the personal to the interpersonal. This is where formation stops being about me and what I can become and starts becoming about you and what we can become. And truthfully, that's a scary premise because it means we lose part of our control. But it is nonetheless as important to the image of completion that scripture calls us to.