

Two Questions for Young Christians

In a few minutes, you are going to receive your Bibles and Catechisms. It's a big step. Or it should be. Maybe you're sitting through today like you sit through a trip to the dentist. If that's the case, hang on. It will be over soon.

Best case: today is not simply something to get through. It is the next step on your journey with Jesus. The first step was your baptism, when God the Father adopted you into his family, when God the Holy Spirit filled you with divine life, when God the Son became your big brother. Since that time, every time you've prayed, you've read your bible, you've listened for Jesus's voice, you've come to Sunday School and so on, you have taken steps to get to know Jesus better, to get to know us, your brothers and sisters, better. To grow as a Christian.

Today, when you receive your Bibles and Catechisms, you are beginning a more formal part of your journey, if you choose to stick with it. You'll take your First Communion classes and then move on to Confirmation classes.

All of this together is like learning to walk. When you were babies, your parents carried you where you needed to go and when they put you down you stayed there. Then you started to roll over. Then you began to creep, then crawl and eventually walk. What you are doing, starting today, is learning to creep, then crawl, then walk with Jesus. You are beginning to make your faith your own.

Your parents and family, your Sunday School teachers, your godparents, and your pastor will always be with you, helping you grow in your faith. But from here on, you are going to take more and more responsibility for yourself. It's a big step. And we are so glad you are taking that step!

So, let's take a couple of minutes to look at three verses from the Bible. Here they are:

“But as for you, continue 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. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

When St. Paul wrote these letters, he was an old man. And he knew these would be his last words to his much younger friend, Timothy. Timothy was going to be a pastor on the island of Crete and the letter from which these words are taken is a sort of “final check list for a young pastor.”

But the advice in this letter is good for all sorts of people. Not just young pastors. I've organized the advice under two questions for young Christians. Here's the first question. “What should I do?”

What should the young Christian who's starting to own their friendship with Jesus do? Well, there are three actions Paul gives us here, and I'm going to pass them on.

First, Paul says, **continue** in what you have learned. Think about your best friend. Your very best friend in the whole world. Do you think there will come a time when you will say to that friend, “I have you figured out. I don't need to ever talk to you anymore.” Of course not! Friends hang out.

Friends do stuff. Friends ***continue*** with each other. Continue in your friendship with Jesus. Continue to learn about him, to learn from him, and to grow in your faith. Can you do that?

Then, Paul says, **know** those who taught you. Paul is telling Timothy to remember his mother Lois, and his grandmother, Eunice. They taught Timothy how to be friends with Jesus. Who's taught you? Your mom? Your dad? Your grandparents? Or how about your Sunday School teachers or Pastor Terry or Rev or me? Your friendship with Jesus is not exclusive. Know Jesus's friends who are in your life. People who want your friendship with Jesus to be real and alive and ongoing.

Third, Paul says, **acquaint** yourselves with the Scriptures. Don't take your Bible home, put it in your desk or on your shelf or in a drawer and forget about it. Read it. **Continuing** in your friendship with Jesus means, in part, listening to him and the most important place where Jesus speaks to us in in the Bible. If you run into something you don't understand, talk to one of those people that you **know**. They'll help you.

Reading the Bible is hard! Yep. It is. So's reading any good book. How many of you have read, or are starting to read the Harry Potter books? Those books were first coming out when my kids were little. I read those books too. You know what? Those were hard books. But Calvin and Sara and Hugh still read them. Because they were good. The Bible is a hard book. You will read it all the way through your life, and you'll never have it all figured out. Today, you'll read the Bible the way a Grade Five kid will read the Bible. And that's ok. And as you grow, you'll read it better and better and better. And your friendship with Jesus will get better and better and better. So stick with it.

If you want, maybe after church we can talk about how to start reading the Bible for yourself. I'd love to talk with you about that. So would any of the Sunday School teachers. But for now, let's remember the question: "What should I do?" **Continue** in your friendship with Jesus. **Know** who helps you make Jesus your friend. **Acquaint** yourself with the Scriptures where you will hear Jesus speak.

Now, here's the second question: "Why should I do it?" Why should you continue, and know, and acquaint? Well, let's listen again to what St Paul says.

The Scriptures will **make you wise**. Who wants to be wise? Do you? I do. Maybe someday, I will be. I don't know if any of us will ever have all the wisdom we should have. Wisdom doesn't mean smart. I know lots of smart people who aren't very wise sometimes. Wisdom doesn't mean educated. One of the wisest women I ever knew, my grandma Horner, never got to grade 5. She had to stop school at grade 4. But she was wise. Wisdom means something like being able to make good decisions. When we get to know Jesus in the Scriptures, we learn how to make the most important decisions in life. We become wise.

The Scriptures will make you wise because they are **God-breathed**. That means that God wrote them. They are not the memories of people who lived and died a long time ago; they are not ancient history; they are not religious experiences. The Bible is made up of all those kinds of writing, and more. But all those writings together are God's own words to you. They are breathed out by God. That's why every Sunday morning service begins when the Elder opens the Bible and places it on the altar. That's the Elder's way of saying to all of us, "Shhhh. Listen. God is going to speak."

The Scriptures will make you wise because they are **useful**. For teaching—you'll learn stuff. For reproof—they'll tell you to stop doing bad stuff. For correction—they'll show you how to do right stuff. And for training in righteousness—they'll teach you how to follow Jesus better. So, you're never done with them! We'll always be learning more about Jesus and about ourselves and about how friends of Jesus are to live until we get to live with him forever in heaven. And even then, I think, we'll still have lots to learn, but we'll do it in an even better way. Until then, God shapes us through the Bible. The Bible is a **useful** book.

Last, you should continue, know, and acquaint, because the Scriptures will make you **complete**. Some Bible translators use the word perfect here. The idea is that no parts will be missing or lost or lacking. What on earth does that mean? Well, here's a good way to think about it. Lots of us are doing the final bits and pieces of yard work before winter. And for some of us, that means cutting some grass. How many of you have pushed a lawn mower?

Well, we want our lawnmowers to work well, especially at this time of year. If you have a gas mower at home, you want your sparkplugs clean, enough oil, good quality gas, and nice sharp blades. If you have an electric one, you want your battery charged, your connections secure, and your blades sharp. If your mower is missing some of those things, will it cut grass well? Nope. You'll miss chunks. And it might slow down or stop if the grass gets too thick. Your lawnmower will not do what it has been designed to do.

OK. Just like people design lawnmowers to cut grass, God designed you with a purpose. And that purpose is for you to be his friend forever, as the very best you you can be. But sometimes we do things, and have things happen to us that aren't our fault, that make us dirty. That gum up our sparkplugs or dull our blades or drain our batteries. We're incomplete. We're not fit for the purpose God intended. The Scriptures give us God's remedy to get back on track. Or even better, the Scriptures are the way God lovingly repairs us and restores us so that, when he comes for us, we will be **complete**. We will be ready to do the work he has for us to do now, and later to enjoy forever with him.

Today, you are receiving your Bibles so that you can—as you read it--continue to grow in your friendship with Jesus. So that you can become complete.