

5. The way to continue as a Christian

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to turn to 2 Timothy, you'll find this on page 996 in our big hardback Bibles.

We're returning to 2 Timothy after a few weeks break. And you may remember a few weeks ago we were working our way through chapters 1 and 2. And today our passage is the whole of chapter 3, chapter 3 verses 1 to 17.

So I'll read that now. So 2 Timothy, chapter 3, verses 1 to 17. But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power.

Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

[1 : 30] Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also opposed the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.

But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured.

Yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned, and are firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood, you've 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 competent, equipped for every good work.

[2 : 59] Amen. Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may he add his blessing to it today. Well, let's turn up that passage again, if we may, 2 Timothy chapter 3, on page 996.

And because it's been three or four weeks, I think, since we were last in 2 Timothy, let me begin by giving you a brief reminder of what Paul has been saying so far to his younger colleague and fellow worker, Timothy, in chapters 1 and 2.

Now, the thrust of this letter, in all four of its chapters, is for Paul to say to Timothy, my son, be strong. Prepare to take your share of suffering for the gospel.

Don't be ashamed of the gospel, but keep at your work. Keep at it. I myself am about to be executed. As Paul puts it in chapter 4, verse 6, the time of my departure has come.

But you, Timothy, you must carry on the work and you must not flinch. Now, I don't quite know what goes on in the dressing room at half time at Murrayfield in the winter when Scotland are playing England at rugby.

[4 : 16] But just imagine that it's half time in the dressing room in the Scotland dressing room. And imagine that England are leading Scotland by a score of 10 points to 9.

This is half time. Now, I think the Scottish coach's message to the boys is likely to be something like this. It's do or die time, boys. Go out there and don't spare yourselves for 40 minutes.

Think of William Wallace. And if you don't carry off the Calcutta Cup at the end of the day, I will have your guts for garters. Now, that's a message from the Scottish coach only for the next 40

minutes.

Paul's message to Timothy in this letter is a message for the rest of Timothy's life. It's do or die time, Timothy. Be brave. Be a hardy soldier. Doing the work of the gospel is going to test you more rigorously than you might have imagined.

But do it, my son. Do it. And you'll perhaps remember from chapter 2, verse 15 here that the equipment Timothy uses is not sword and spear, but what Paul calls the word of truth, which Timothy is to handle rightly.

[5 : 29] The word of truth is the message of the gospel, which Timothy must use accurately and with a clear mind if he is to combat the kind of errors that Paul writes about in chapter 2, verses 16, 17, and 18, where he talks about those who swerve from the truth.

So this is a very challenging letter to Timothy. And if we should ask the question, why is Paul writing all this to Timothy when surely Timothy knew it all already, after all the two men had been working together for at least 15 years, why does Paul have to write this to Timothy?

The answer must be that the Holy Spirit caused all this to be written down for later generations like our own, so that we too should be willing to be brave and willing to take our share of suffering as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus.

So this is a letter written to Timothy in the first century AD, but it has very strong implications for us 20 centuries later. Well, now let's turn to this third chapter then.

In the last part of chapter 2, Paul has been contrasting false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus in verse 17 with the true teacher which Timothy must be.

[6 : 42] In the words of chapter 2, verse 15, a worker who has no need to be ashamed. The last few verses of chapter 2 are also teaching Timothy to correct his opponents.

In other words, not to allow their false teaching to go unopposed, but to correct it with gentleness in the hope that God will bring those who hold false views to repentance, to a change of heart and a change of view.

But when Paul begins chapter 3, he moves beyond false teaching and he opens up a window for Timothy on the kaleidoscope of godlessness that characterizes the last days.

So as we look at this third chapter, let's notice three things that Timothy must understand. First, there is a brute fact that Timothy must accept.

Look with me at verse 1. But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. So this brute fact that Timothy must accept is that in this world, in the last days, human life is going to be marked by many kinds of fierce and vicious godlessness.

[7 : 55] And Paul gives Timothy, you'll see, a long list, quite a detailed list of godless behavior in verses 2 to 9. Now you'll notice that Paul speaks of the last days in verse 1.

And you might think that he's speaking here of a period some long way into the future, a period like the 21st century. But he's not. That phrase, the last days or the last times, is used at least half a dozen times in the New Testament and it always refers to the whole period of time between the first coming of Christ and the return of Christ.

So Paul and Timothy in 64 AD were living every bit as much in the last days as we are today. And just in case you feel a little bit unsure about this, let me quote you from what Peter said in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was first poured out upon the church. Peter quotes the Old Testament prophet Joel and he says, this is what was uttered by the prophet Joel. In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

So there was Peter in the year 31 or 32 AD saying, this pouring out of the Holy Spirit indicates that the last days are now upon us. What Joel prophesied and promised several centuries ago is happening in our own day.

[9 : 15] So that phrase, the last days, does not refer to the final decade or two before the return of Christ. It refers to the whole period of history between the ascension of Christ, or Pentecost, and the return of Christ.

So back to 2 Timothy chapter 3, Paul is making the point to Timothy and to us that our era of history, the last days, is going to be pretty horrible.

And you won't have failed to notice the detail that Paul goes into in verses 2 to 9 as he describes godless humanity. And you might want to ask, why does Paul feel the need to mention all these different gruesome aspects of sin?

I mean, couldn't he just have said at verse 2, in the last days there will be a lot of sinful behavior? Why go into this detailed anatomy of human wickedness, rather like a surgeon opening up a badly diseased body and peering at all the corruption inside?

Why go into all this detail? Well, the reason surely must be that Paul wants Timothy to be thoroughly forearmed. He doesn't want Timothy to be taken aback or taken by surprise at the violent, hateful behavior that he's going to encounter in his evangelistic work.

[10:32] This first half of chapter 3 is part of Paul's training of Timothy to be a hardened soldier of Christ who doesn't flinch and who doesn't fall away when the going gets tough.

And let me put it like this, the human heart naturally longs for peace and security and serenity.

Almost everybody in this world wants to live with as little stress and difficulty as possible.

Just think of those glossy magazines that you sometimes pick up and leaf through as you sit in the dentist's waiting room anticipating the drill. Magazines like Country Life or Home and Garden.

Don't you love looking at those beautiful scenes in the glossy magazines? Beautiful, quiet houses set in lovely, well-ordered gardens. You know the kind of thing. You see this 18th century stone-built house made of lovely honey-coloured Cotswold stone surrounded by lovely herbaceous borders filled with delphiniums and lilies.

There are rambling roses climbing up the walls. In the garden there's a happy child throwing a ball for a golden retriever dog. And in the background there's a contented old gardener mulching the rose bushes with well-rotted manure.

[11:45] It's a lovely kind of scene. We love looking at those pictures, don't we? It's not only Christians who have a vision and a longing for peace and beauty like that. Everybody naturally has a vision and longing for that kind of thing.

This is why when we get a new prime minister or America gets a new president, there are always voices lifted up which say, now at last a new era is going to begin.

Peace and prosperity and good order will be pushed forward and poverty and disorder will be pushed back. I have an old school friend, an Englishman, who has spent most of his life in the USA. And I remember him visiting us at our home in 1992, just as Bill Clinton was being elected as the new president. And my friend said to us, you know, I think Bill Clinton is going to be a great president of the USA.

Eight years later, as Bill Clinton was leaving office, this same friend of mine came and visited us again. And he said, you know, Bill Clinton, he could have been a great president.

[12:50] That's so often like that, isn't it? Of course, nations do make advances at times. Good order and prosperity and social justice do sometimes flourish under wise government.

But the truth is that so often the features of verses 2, 3, 4, and 5 get the upper hand. Just look at those again. People will be lovers of self, verse 2, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Now that may be a bleak description of so much in human life, but surely we have to acknowledge that it's true. And Paul is listing these things in all their gruesome detail, almost so as to rub Timothy's nose in the reality of life in this world, so that Timothy should never be able to say, I wish somebody had told me that life would be so tough.

Well, Paul is telling him so that he should be forearmed. One of the most sinister aspects of all this shows up in verse 5, where Paul says that the people who behave like this are actually claiming to be religious people.

Look at verse 5, having the appearance of godliness, but denying the power of godliness to turn their lives around and sweeten them. And then you'll see in verses 6 to 8, Paul mentions a particularly nasty type of religious person, the creep.

[14:28] You see him there in verse 6? People who creep into households, probably at 3 o'clock in the afternoon when the husbands are out at work, and they capture what Paul describes as weak women, women who have not been taught how to distinguish true gospel faith from false religion.

And in verse 8, Paul likens these predators to Jannes and Jambres, who are thought to have been Moses' magicians and advisors in the court. Sorry, not Moses' advisors, Pharaoh's magicians, when Moses was locked in battle with Pharaoh, asking to let the people of Israel go.

Jannes and Jambres were thought to be the head magicians. And the magician, of course, by definition, is a person who seeks to deceive. So in these first nine verses of chapter 3, Paul is saying to Timothy, understand this.

You must understand this, or else you may become a naive, sentimental utopian. You'll be unprepared for the barrage of difficulty and opposition, which is sure to come your way.

That's just the same for us today. Let's not be naive, sentimental utopians. Let's not naively suppose that the world in general is becoming a sweeter or more well-ordered place.

[15:43] We will see advances and improvements here and there, and let's be very thankful for them when they come. But most of human life on planet Earth is, as Paul describes it, in verses 2 to 9.

And the news that we hear every day, which is beamed into our houses, confirms that people are living exactly like this in the last days. So let's not imagine that God is letting us down by allowing us to live in a world like this.

On the contrary, he has told us that this is exactly how it will be. So here's the first thing for Timothy to understand. It's a brute fact about human life and conditions in the world.

And Timothy must understand and accept this if he is to keep going and keep persevering as a Christian leader. Then second, Paul shows Timothy a unique example to follow.

And that is the example of Paul himself. Let me read verses 10 and 11 again. You, however, have followed my teaching. Notice the my's here.

[16:48] You followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch and Iconium and Lystra, which persecutions I endured.

Yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Now, don't you think this is very striking? Here is Paul, without any shyness or embarrassment, holding himself up to Timothy as a model for the younger man to follow.

And the same thought that Paul is to be Timothy's pattern and Timothy's standard is expressed elsewhere in this letter as well. So look back, for example, at chapter 1, verse 13.

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, my teaching. Or look at chapter 2, verse 2. What you have heard from me in the presence of many faithful witnesses, entrust to faithful men who can teach others also.

Or look at chapter 2, verse 8. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel. My gospel. So my teaching is the gold standard.

[18:02] That's what he's saying. And here in chapter 3, verses 10 and 11, is not only Paul's teaching that Timothy is to follow, it's Paul's example in every way, his conduct.

So his behavior, the way he relates to other people. His aim in life, which is to bring the gospel to the ears of those who've never heard it. He says, follow my faith and my patience.

You have to be a very patient person when you're undergoing suffering at the hand of brutal opponents. Follow my love. My love, Paul is able to say. If Paul had not been a man who deeply loved the churches, he would never have dared to draw attention to that quality.

My steadfastness, my profound determination to keep going, whatever happens. And my persecutions and sufferings. And you'll see here that although Paul suffered all over the Mediterranean area, he singles out the sufferings that he endured at Antioch, at Iconium, and Lystra.

Why should he have mentioned those three towns? The answer is that Lystra was Timothy's hometown. It's where Paul first met Timothy. If you're a son of Glasgow, then Timothy was a son of Lystra.

[19:15] Let Lystra flourish by the preaching of your word and the praising of your name. That's what Timothy would have thought about Lystra. And yet Paul had suffered grievously in Lystra.

So why does Paul hold up his own example like this to Timothy? You wouldn't do that for a younger Christian, would you? Neither would I. I wouldn't dare. We'd be far too much aware of our shortcomings as Christians to say to a younger Christian, follow my example.

The point surely is that there is something unique about the Apostle Paul. And he doesn't just say this kind of thing to Timothy. He says it to other people as well. So he says, for example, to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 1, be imitators of me.

It's a breathtaking thing for him to say. But I've only read half of that verse. And it's the second half of 1 Corinthians 11, which helps us to understand what Paul is getting at.

He says, be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Now, of course, it's true that Paul was deeply aware of his shortcomings.

[20 : 24] He describes himself as the chief of sinners or the least of all the saints in some of his letters. But he also holds himself up to Timothy and to all of us as a little mirror image of Christ himself.

Now, speaking for myself, I've come to notice this element in Paul's teaching much more clearly as I've grown older and as I've studied Paul's letters more carefully. The big lesson for us, surely, from verses 10 and 11 is not that we should imitate the example of older Christians, but that we should imitate the example of Paul.

He is saying, I'm a role model for you, just as Christ, as a role model for me. Therefore, imitate me as I imitate Christ.

And this means that if you and I are to grow as authentic Christians, our growth will be stronger and truer if we consciously follow not only Paul's teaching, but also his whole way of life, his conduct, his relationships, everything about him.

Now, it's at this point where I know some Christians will want to say, hang on a minute. Jesus is Jesus, but Paul is Paul. Jesus is perfect and flawless.

[21 : 38] But I'm not quite so sure about Paul. Wasn't he, for example, rather truculent and angular? Do I want to be like that? Well, let me suggest that no one was more truculent and angular than Jesus when confronted by false religion and hypocrisy.

Angularity is sometimes essential to the Christian. Or somebody else might say, wasn't Paul rather anti-women? Do we want to follow his example and his teaching about women?

Now, friends, if you suspect Paul the Apostle in that department, let me lovingly challenge you to study Romans chapter 16 rather carefully. And I think you will have to conclude that Paul greatly valued, loved, and respected the Christian women that he worked with and who were part of his wider team.

Yes, certainly he taught the churches that women should not be in the most senior positions of leadership and teaching. But he wanted and expected Christian women to be active and very much involved in responsible gospel work.

So my plea to any who are a little bit hesitant to imitate Paul's teaching and lifestyle is to keep on studying Paul, both his letters and also that major section of the Acts of the Apostles that runs from chapter nine, which records his conversion right the way through to chapter 28 when he arrives in Rome.

[23 : 01] Isn't Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, isn't Luke saying to us, look at Paul and follow his unique example? I remember when our pastor Willie, Willie Philip, was preaching right through the Acts of the Apostles a year or so ago.

He made the point, and this was very interesting to me, and I'd never thought of this myself before. Willie made the point that Paul's life and work mirrors that of Jesus. So here is Paul persecuted and rejected by the Jews, just as Jesus had been before him.

Here is Paul misunderstood and condemned by Jews and Gentiles, as Jesus had been before him. And finally, here is Paul executed by the machinery of Roman justice, just as Jesus had been before him.

He was a man who poured out his life to bring salvation to many, just as Jesus had before him. Now, of course, Paul's death was not a sin-bearing substitutionary sacrifice, as Jesus' uniquely was.

But Paul's death was still a laying down of his life in the service of God's gospel purposes. So his message in verses 10 and 11 is, Timothy, follow me.

[24 : 15] Observe my footsteps and plant yours in them. Follow not only my teaching, but every aspect of my conduct and my way of life. In short, imitate me as I imitate Christ.

So if we, too, can learn to be conscious imitators of Paul, we shall learn more of imitating Jesus. Let's regard Paul not only as the great apostle and the great missionary, but also as our friend, our mentor, and our example.

Well, now, thirdly, let me just take a little sip of Adam's ale at this point. Do you mind if I take my jacket off?

It's a very strange thing, but you get rather warm when you're standing on your hind legs. And it's difficult with this little thing that's going to fall off my tie. There we go. Thank you.

Right, so thirdly, Paul reminds Timothy in verses 14 to 17 of the chief means of persevering as a Christian.

[25 : 20] The chief means of persevering, keeping going. I'm not going to ask you to put up your hand here, but if I were to say put up your hand if you've ever been tempted to fall away as a Christian or to stop being a Christian, I guess many would say, yes, I've had moments like that.

I'm sure most of you will know somebody who has come to a full stop as a Christian. It does happen, and it's painful and very sad when it does. Now, in a sense, Paul is giving Timothy in verses 14 to 17 some preventative medicine to ensure that that doesn't happen to him.

So look at verse 14. But as for you, continue. Now, Paul would never have written like that to Timothy unless he thought there was a danger that Timothy might not continue.

And why might Timothy not continue? Because of the pressure of opposition. Paul has just been writing of the persecutions and sufferings that he's had to endure.

He's just said in verse 12, indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

[26 : 29] But you, Timothy, in contrast to such people, you continue. Now, it would be very easy for anyone to continue as a Christian if we lived in a world that was well disposed towards the gospel.

But the world is, as Paul describes it in verses 1 to 13. And that verse 12 has a rather chilling certainty about it. So this verse 12 is about your future and my future if we desire to live a godly life as Christians.

Eventually, Paul is saying, we will catch it in the neck if we persevere as Christians. Just look for a moment at the neck of the person sitting close to you, if you can spot a neck.

It may be an old and wrinkly neck in some cases. In other cases, it will be a young and beautiful neck. But if the head attached to it is determined to persevere with Christ, that neck is going to catch it sooner or later.

That is why Paul has to command Timothy in verse 14 to continue. So, what is Timothy to continue in? Well, Paul says, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.

[27 : 50] That is the gospel. Knowing from whom you learned it. That is his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, who are mentioned back in chapter 1 verse 5. And no doubt Paul means himself as well.

And then verse 15, 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.

So, what Paul is saying is, continue in the sacred writings. By which Paul means the Old Testament scriptures, the Hebrew scriptures. For our purposes, of course, it includes the New Testament as well as the Old.

So, the way for Timothy to persevere as a Christian in the teeth of a godless world is to continue in the scriptures. Now, friends, let me quote you a famous verse from the Old Testament.

I'll start this verse. It's quite short. And I want somebody under the age of 20 to raise a hand and complete it. All right? If you're over 20, don't fall asleep. But if you're under 20, listen carefully.

[28 : 53] Man shall not live by bread alone, but... Somebody under 20. Man shall not live by bread alone. Raise a hand if you know. Yeah, there's a consultation going on.

You're over 20. Under 25, then. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by... Yes? Every... Again. Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

That's exactly it. Deuteronomy chapter 8, verse 3. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So, for men and women to live, that is to say, to be thoroughly alive and vital, we need more than bread.

We need bread, but we need more than that. We need the very words of God. When I got up this morning, a few hours ago, I made for the kitchen. I was compelled by instinct, by routine, and by the severe pangs of hunger.

I reached my hand up to the cupboard. I took out the bag of oatmeal and made myself some porridge. Nobody is quite as Scottish as the Englishman in Scotland. I made my porridge.

[30 : 03] I usually find an egg, though I was a bit short of time, so the eggs had to stay. I then got a couple of slices of bread and I toasted them, and I made a pot of coffee. And having prepared my

breakfast, I sat down and ate it with pleasure.

I know that man does not live by bread alone, but I also know that without my daily food, I wouldn't live for very long. We need our food to sustain us. And after this service is over, I shall go home and I will head for the kitchen again.

So we have no doubts in our mind, do we, that we need our daily food if we are to sustain our physical life? But the Bible says we also need every word that proceeds from the mouth of God if we are to sustain our lives as viable Christians.

Every pastor knows that from time to time a church member will come to him and say, Pastor, my life as a Christian is not really functioning. In fact, I can't tell you when I last really sat down and read my Bible.

Now we know that if the Bible is not being regularly devoured, our life as Christians becomes hollow. Our souls become starved and gaunt.

[31 : 15] Jeremiah the prophet, who lived under great pressure as a man of God, he once said to the Lord, Your words were found and I ate them. And your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.

Now just notice that verb. I ate them, I devoured your words because I knew that they would sustain me in the midst of pressure. So to come back here to 2 Timothy 3, Paul is saying to Timothy, continue in the sacred writings because it's they, they alone, that can make you wise.

Wise to understand what it means to belong to Christ and to trust him for salvation. So friends, if we are ever tempted to ditch our Bibles, if you like to close them and keep them closed, if we ever think that our souls will get the nourishment they need from the Glasgow Herald and Hello magazine, let's turn to this passage and be reminded of the only thing that will enable Timothy to survive and persevere in a godless world.

And then Paul adds verses 16 and 17 to clinch his point. If Timothy or we should wonder why the scriptures are so important that we should continue in them lifelong, Paul tells him in verse 16, all scripture, he said, is breathed out by God.

And that word translated breathed out by God is a unique word in the, in the New Testament. It doesn't mean inspired by God. It means expired, breathed out by God.

[32 : 46] When we speak, it's our breath that carries our words out of our mouths into the open air. That's what Paul is saying here. The words of scripture, although written down by human hands on paper, are in truth behind the human activity of writing and publishing.

They are the words of God breathed out by him. The words of the Bible are the breath of heaven. And that's why, to read on, that's why they are so profitable. And you'll see Paul mentions four ways in which they profit us.

They're profitable first for teaching. Our minds are naturally ignorant of God. That's why we need to be taught about him. By nature, we know God as little as we know the emperor of Japan.

By nature, we imagine that we can get to God by being good and trying hard and earning our place in heaven. So we need to be totally re-educated. We need to be taught the truth about God and how we can know him.

And secondly, the scriptures are profitable for reproof. Because we're sinful people, we need to be regularly struck in the solar plexus. Ooh, like that.

[33 : 54] Struck in the solar plexus. Bang. By the reproofs and rebukes of scripture. Let's thank God every time the Bible reproves us for our waywardness. Because it's what we need.

Thirdly, the scriptures are profitable for correction. They're rather like the focusing mechanism on a pair of binoculars. They help us to see the truth about God clearly.

They correct our blindness about God. And fourth, says Paul, the scriptures are profitable for training in righteousness. Training in righteousness.

A Christian person is constantly in training. We're not like an Olympic athlete who'll be training very, very hard for a year or two up to the Olympic Games. But then when he or she reaches the age of 30, they give up the training and become flabby.

We need training in righteousness right the way through life. We don't reach the age of, let's say, 40 or 60 or even 80 and reckon that we're fully trained.

[34 : 53] Not at all. To live righteously, in other words, in a way that pleases God, is very difficult. There are some moral questions that are answered very plainly and clearly by the Bible.

But there are others that are much harder. Sometimes we find ourselves having to choose the lesser of two evils. We need training for difficult life choices of that kind so that we learn how to please God and how to live wisely.

It's the Bible that trains us in righteousness. So, what is the consequence of continuing in the sacred writings and being regularly taught, reproofed, corrected and trained?

Look at verse 17. The consequence is that the man of God may be competent and equipped for every good work. So, the scriptures equip us for every aspect of Christian service.

They are the fundamental, essential equipment that every servant of Christ needs. Now, friends, that's not to say that we aren't allowed other types of equipment or items of equipment.

[35 : 57] So, for example, it's perfectly legitimate for a Christian to have as equipment a mobile phone, a computer, good books, such as you'll find in our book room back there.

It's good for a Christian to have as equipment a mobile phone, a mobile phone, a computer, good book, and a computer. It's good for a Christian to have kettles and frying pans for Christian hospitality. It's good to have cars and bicycles for getting about. It's good, legitimate, and important, and helpful to have a few pounds in the bank to keep body and soul together.

But there is only one piece of essential equipment for the Christian worker, and that is a Bible. And the more dog-eared and broken-backed your Bible is, the better, because it shows how much it's being devoured.

Now, verse 16 is, of course, a famous Bible verse, and you'll always find it quoted in any decent book of Christian doctrine, because it makes the point that the Bible really is the word of God and is therefore authoritative.

Authoritative. But Paul did not include verse 16, because he was teaching Timothy a lesson in Christian doctrine. Paul put that verse in for a much more urgent purpose, namely to keep Timothy going, to show him that it's possible to keep on going as an active Christian, even when the world is throwing the kitchen sink at you.

[37 : 13] And it's the Bible, the nourishing words of God, that will keep us going as Christians today, and particularly in difficult times.

So, friends, let's allow this third chapter of 2 Timothy to strengthen all of us. In verses 1 to 9, Paul is making the point that these last days will be tough.

That is a brute fact, and we need to accept it. We mustn't think that because the world is cruel, God has somehow let us down. There's much that is bad in the world.

We must live with that. Then in verses 10 to 13, Paul holds himself up as the example to follow, as he follows Christ's example. And then here in verses 14 to 17, he's telling us that the secret of continuing as Christians, of being equipped as servants of Christ, is to hold fast the scriptures.

Think of yourself in 5 or 10 years' time. Will you be continuing as a Christian then? Your relationship with the scriptures is a key element in continuing in Christ as a Christian.

[38 : 22] God has given us the Bible to be our constant companion, to be devoured eagerly and hungrily day after day as we walk the long road to heaven.

Well, let's pray together. Amen. But as for you, Timothy, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you've 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 competent, equipped for every good work.

Dear God, our Father, we thank you that your people who have flourished and been strong over the years, strong in the face of difficulty and persecution, have always been those who have greedily devoured the scriptures and have been fortified and strengthened and nourished by them.

And how we pray, therefore, dear Father, that this will be a characteristic of our church and of many Christians in our own day and age, in these last days when life is so difficult.

[39 : 44] We pray that your name will be honoured and the name of Christ will be honoured by the way that we persevere and are sustained by the Bible. Amen.