

**September 30, 2018**  
**How Do I Know God?**  
**2 Timothy 3:1-17**

When I began this vocation, I had the opportunity to be a “solo pastor” or to be an associate. What would have been the advantages of going solo? Being in partnership? There were real advantages to choosing to learn from a wiser, experienced pastor.

As a society, we value flying solo – the self-made person. We devalue age, experience, and wisdom; we celebrate youth, innovation, and experimentation. In some things – like setting up your new smartphone – this is great. But in many life skills older mentors have much to offer: we can glean great wisdom about living with God, relationships with other people, ethics and morality, finances, and how to make major life decisions from those who have “been there and done that.” If I can learn from someone else’s mistakes and not have to make them all myself, why wouldn’t I choose to do so???

Let’s think about some of the BIG questions of life. Who is God? How do we get to know Him? We can go solo and make our mistakes. Or we can come alongside some wise mentors who have both written about and lived out this question.

A wise pundit once observed, *“God is not who you think He is; He is who He says He is.”* God is who He says He is ... that’s a good place to start. So who does He say that He is?

***1. The best starting place – the Bible***

The best starting place is the Bible – which we believe is God’s Word. As a church we affirm the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada’s Statement of Faith which says that, *“The Holy Scriptures, as originally given by God, are divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.”* This would be a common affirmation among most Christian churches.

God chooses to tell us a lot through the Bible about Himself: His character, His purposes, and His wisdom for us. So ***if*** the Bible is God’s Word to teach us, ***if*** it is one of the key ways we really can get to know God in a much more personal and complete way, ***if*** it really is not simply a random collection of human documents but God’s words to us, ***if*** it really is the creator’s guide to how to live well in creation ... ***then*** of course we read it all the time. Right? If not, why not? Perhaps we just get lazy; perhaps we find it hard to understand; perhaps we figure we know it all already; perhaps we think it just isn’t relevant; perhaps \_\_\_\_\_. (what else?)

Have a listen to these words from Paul to a young man he is mentoring, Timothy. Could this be relevant in 2018? *“Don’t be naive. There are difficult times ahead. In the last days, people are going to be self-absorbed, money-hungry, self-promoting, stuck-up, profane, contemptuous of parents, crude, coarse, dog-eat-dog, unbending, slanderers,*

*impulsively wild, savage, cynical, treacherous, ruthless, bloated windbags, addicted to lust, and allergic to God. They'll make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they're animals ... These are the kind of people who smooth-talk themselves into the homes of unstable and needy (people) and take advantage of them; (people) who, depressed by their sinfulness, take up with every new religious fad that calls itself "truth." They get exploited every time and never really learn"* (2 Timothy 3:1-7 *The Message*). It sounds pretty timely, doesn't it?

The Bible is incredibly relevant. God's desire is to make His truth plain to everyone, everywhere, for all times. He wants us to understand who He is and what His will is.

That doesn't mean the Bible is always simple. The Bible is a library of 66 books – written over hundreds of years by many different authors from many different backgrounds. They tell an overall story of God's purposes in the world and consistent, coherent ethics, but they're often expressed through stories, metaphors, and personal experiences. These make it more personal, relevant, and timeless. It can also mean some parts of the Bible are challenging to understand because culture has changed. We have to put in some effort to try to understand what the text meant in its time, what the BIG truth in a passage is, and then apply it to our circumstances today. That can take some work.

There are all sorts of resources and commentaries to help (the internet can be helpful, but do know anyone can post anything online, and not everyone online is necessarily a good resource – note Paul's comment about some of those "smooth-talkers" out there). A newer translation is very helpful (especially one with notes). The Bible was not originally written in formal language with fancy words and precise grammar. It was written in the street language of the day, the language of the playground and the marketplace, so that ordinary people could easily understand it.

Sometimes we just get lazy and don't want to put in the effort.

Don't get too bogged down on parts of the Bible you can't figure out. Mark Twain once said, *"It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me, it's the parts I do understand."* There's a lot of straightforward wisdom we can certainly put into practice. If something really does confuse you, talk with a wise friend or one of the pastors ...

## ***2. Good mentors***

Back in the beginning God said, *"It is not good for the man to be alone"* (Genesis 2:18). We were created for community – with God and with one another. In community, we can learn a lot about God, too. We can even find help from godly mentors with some of those troublesome bits of the Bible we may struggle with.

Paul encourages his young friend, Timothy: *"You know what I teach, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is. You know my faith, my patience, my love, and my endurance. You know how much persecution and suffering I have endured ..."* (3:10-11). There is a lot of value in getting to know people who have been walking with Jesus

for a long time. Older mentors have much wisdom to share. For Timothy, Paul can be a tremendous source of encouragement and wisdom. He lived in the world in which Timothy lived, faced the challenges Timothy faced, endured the difficulties Timothy would endure. Why wouldn't Timothy want to learn from him? Paul certainly has credibility. He had experience. And wisdom.

Ultimately a person like Paul points us to **his** mentor, Jesus: *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 11:1). For every wise mentor, Jesus is our great example, teacher, and wisdom. Good mentors lead us to Jesus, again and again.

Godly wisdom is perhaps what we need more than anything else today. Biblically, a wise person is one who can distinguish what is true and false, what is important from what is trivial, and who acts appropriately, righteously, like Jesus, in all circumstances. It's more than just right knowledge, it's right knowledge-in-action. *"To know is not to be wise. Many people know a great deal and are all the greater fools for it. Wisdom is the right use of knowledge"* (Charles Spurgeon). One commentator said, *"Through knowledge man has learned to travel faster than sound but shows his lack of wisdom by going faster in the wrong direction."* There are many knowledgeable people, but few truly wise ones. Wisdom comes from knowing God, knowing His Word – and doing it.

### ***3. How can the Bible and mentors help?***

Paul counsels Timothy, *"Remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you (mentoring). You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus (the Bible)."* (3:14-15)

The Scriptures are ...

- *useful to teach us what is true;*
- *make us realize what is wrong in our lives;*
- *correct us when we are wrong;*
- *teach us to do what is right;*
- *prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (3:16-17)*

Note the purpose of God's Word – to help us have wisdom about right and wrong, but also to prepare and equip us to make a difference in our world. We live it out.

We do live in a culture where (to summarize 3:1-5) people love only themselves and their money, are boastful and proud, scoff at God, are ungrateful, consider nothing sacred, are unloving and unforgiving, slander others, have no self-control, can be cruel and hate what is good, betray their friends, are reckless, puffed up with pride, love pleasure rather than God, and even act religious but reject God. God's Word can help us see things for what they really are. And we are challenged to do what is right and good.

Try personalizing 3:16-17: *"The Holy Scriptures are able to make **me** wise to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is*

*useful for teaching **me** what is true, making **me** realize what is wrong in my life, correcting **me** when I am wrong and teaching **me** to do what is right. God can use His Word to prepare and equip **me** to do every good work."*

#### **4. Getting to know Jesus**

We began with the questions: *"Who is God? How do we get to know Him?"*

We are focusing today on the Bible and wise mentors. The Bible is one tool. It is a wonderful tool, a precious gift from God. It helps us get to know God – Jesus – in a personal way. The Bible is a fantastic starting point for getting to know Jesus – but it is not the be-all and end-all. The Bible is not God. It is tool to get to know God. We don't worship the Bible as our personal Saviour and Lord. We love, worship, and serve God. We love, worship, and serve Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible leads us to Jesus, and *"Jesus is God spelling Himself out in language that people can understand"*(S.D. Gordon).

Wise mentors are also great. But again, they (should) point us to Jesus; they are not Jesus themselves. Paul was careful to point Timothy on to Jesus.

The real goal of our lives is to get to know **Jesus** in a personal way. There is so much more to growing in this personal relationship with Him, including:

- getting to know Him through prayer as we talk with Him and spend time with Him
- worshipping Him
- spending time in community with other people. ...

We need all of these strategies (and more) to really get to know Him.

Paul writes to Timothy, *"A time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths"*(Eugene Peterson translates it this way: *"You're going to find that there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food – catchy opinions that tickle their fancy. They'll turn their backs on truth and chase mirages"*) (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Pretty relevant, isn't it? We need wisdom. That wisdom comes through getting to know Jesus, especially through His Word.

What do we do? Paul says: *"Keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News about Jesus. Carry out the ministry God has given you."*(2 Timothy 4:5)

The Kingdom of God needs you to keep a clear mind in every situation, to work at telling others the Good News about Jesus, and to carry out the ministry God has given you. Take advantage of the Bible. Seek out wise mentors. Live the adventure.