

simple. Here it is in a nutshell: "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). That's not complicated. Jesus says that a little child is able to understand the truths of his Word. We sin. Jesus forgives us. We live for Jesus. That's what everyone in your house—including you—needs to hear over and over again. Sin and grace.

"But I'm too busy." That's the myth that the devil uses in my life. It's been my excuse for not reading my own Bible every day. Does he tell you that too? At a pastors' conference, a pastor said something that's really helped me. It's profound. Ready? "If it's important, do it." What in our days is so important that it keeps us from spending time with Jesus? Life will never get less busy, but that's where priorities come in, right? Learn to make God a ritual in your daily life. Make God something you and your family can't live without. What better way could you prepare your family for real life than to show them how to make Jesus a priority even in a busy life?

"But how? Pastor, I know the Bible's true. I know it makes me wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. I know it's what me and my family need to be prepared for life. But how?" I'd like to apologize for all the times we pastors tell you to read your Bibles without ever telling you how. I'm not a perfect example, but here's how it works for me. I've found that the best time for me to read God's Word for myself is the first thing in the morning before the kids get up and the day starts. If I don't do it then, the urgent things start to push out the important things. I know there're all sorts of devotion books to read, but what I enjoy the most is reading the Bible. If I were you, I'd start with Matthew and read through the whole New Testament, chapter by chapter, just a little each day. You can't prepare your family before you prepare yourself.

Once you establish a habit for yourself, establish a habit for your families and your kids. Don't read to little kids straight out of the Bible. Get a children's Bible with lots of pictures. Read a story after meals. Read a story before bed. Download the Bible App for Kids on your smartphone. Find ways to include Jesus in your everyday routines. "*Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up*" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

So are you prepared? Is your family prepared? The people in South Carolina weren't. They can't go back in time now and stop the flooding that's happening. But I bet they'll make some changes now to be more prepared for the future. You and I can't go back and redo lost opportunities. We can't take back and change the days we've been more concerned about preparing our families for everything other than a life with Jesus. But Jesus has forgiven us, he's given us his Word, and he's made us this promise: "Whether you are an infant, a teenager, a mom, or a grandpa, this book is able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ!" That's what I want for my family. I bet that's what you want for yours. So if it's important, let's do it! Today's the day to start. Be prepared!

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

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¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ²Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Be Prepared!

"We weren't prepared!" How many times did you hear that this week as you watched the news on the flooding in South Carolina? "We weren't prepared!" In some places 24 inches of rain fell in three days. Can you imagine that? We in Minnesota immediately convert that to snow, right? 24 feet of snow. No way! Nobody was prepared for that much water. That's really what makes a disaster a disaster, isn't it? If people had been prepared, it wouldn't have been a disaster. So wouldn't it be great if someone could warn us of the next great disaster so we could be prepared?

That's exactly what God does. He makes amazing predictions in the Bible of what the future will be like. Here, according to God, is one of the next great disasters: "*The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths*" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). There was a disaster waiting to happen. People were going to stop listening to the God's truth. People were going to gather teachers who told them just what they wanted to hear. God's people need to be prepared!

If you think about it, what's the greatest danger for the Christian Church? Satan doesn't walk into churches and say, "Hey, I'm the devil. I'm bad. Follow me!" He "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). What that means is that Satan walks into churches wearing a nice white robe or a nice-looking suit and pretends to be preaching the Word of God. That's why we have to be prepared! The greatest danger for

God's church is when people inside the Christian Church pretend to preach God's truth, but instead, to suit their own desires, they preach what their listeners' itching ears want to hear. Do you see the danger?

Has that disaster come? Is that true today? There is something that has been weighing heavily on my heart over the last two weeks. Two weeks ago, I picked up the Saint Peter Herald and read a story about a new pastor here in town. It gave a nice description of his life and studies, and then it ended talking about this pastor's marriage to his husband and his husband's occupation. Then I picked up the Herald this last week and read another story about another new pastor here in town. It gave a nice description of his life and studies, and then it had this quote: "The Bible itself is not clear, because the Bible is at times contradictory." Two pastors, inside God's church.

Is that what you believe? One common question I get is, "Why are there so many churches? They're all the same, right?" No. There is a difference. There are two Lutheran churches across the street from each other, because there is a difference. There are a dozen churches in the same town, because there is a difference. And it's not a matter of ethnicity. It's not the German church and the Swedish church. It's a difference in the message that's being proclaimed about the Word of God. You always need to ask yourself, "Am I hearing the Word of God, or I am hearing what my itching ears want to hear? A pastor with a husband. A pastor who believes there are unclear contradictions in the Bible. *"The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine."* There is a difference!

But it sounds wrong to say that, doesn't it? We're told it's wrong to say that someone's idea is right and someone's idea is wrong. Except listen to what God tells us about his Word: *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness"* (2 Timothy 3:16). God says that his Word is to be used to teach, but also to rebuke, to correct, and to train. Two contradictory beliefs about God cannot both be correct. They can both be wrong, but they cannot both be true. That's why we need the Bible, to point out the truth! *"The time will come,"* God said. Do you know what he's talking about? He's talking about today! There is a disaster happening right now. People aren't willing to put up with what God says.

So are you prepared? Is your family—your kids—prepared? We prepare kids for everything, don't we? Nutrition, sports, music, education... We fill up their days fuller than kids' days have ever been filled before! But how are we doing at preparing our families for lives as believers in Jesus? How are you preparing your family for a world where churches put up crosses and then lead families away from God? How are you preparing your family to distinguish between what your itching ears want to hear and what God actually has to say? God has warned us about a disaster. Are we prepared?

Timothy was! He was the pastor to whom Paul was writing in 2 Timothy. Listen to what Paul said: *"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have*

known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15). The Bible is not an unclear book filled with contradictions. God promises that the Bible is his Word. He told the men who wrote the Bible exactly what words to use. It's inspired, so it's true! It's the one thing able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus.

That's why, regardless of what any other person or pastor says, I am thankful that when the Bible tells me that Jesus Christ died for me, it is the truth! I am thankful that when Jesus tells me that I'm forgiven—for everything—it's the truth! I am thankful that when God promises heaven to me and all believers in Christ, it's the truth! I am thankful that when God promises that even if all others abandon me, my God will never leave me, it's the truth. I am thankful that God is so concerned about my life that he asks me to live in a certain way for his glory. The Bible doesn't contradict itself! It contradicts me and my sinfulness with God's forgiveness and grace, and for that I am thankful!

As you prepare your family in so many ways, don't forget to prepare them with God's Word. Timothy's family is a great example of that. When did he start learning the Bible? From *infancy*! Don't let anyone tell you that kids can't believe in Jesus! The power of God's Word can work even in the heart of a little child. We get to see that in a baptism this weekend. And do you know who taught Timothy God's Word? His mom, Eunice, and his grandma, Lois. It seems like Timothy's dad wasn't a believer at all, but that didn't stop his mom. So for you moms out there, for you grandmas out there, don't ever stop! Don't ever think you're not making a difference! God's Word in a home always makes a difference.

So we need to shoot down some of the devil's myths. Here's a myth: "I should let my child choose which religion is best for her." You've heard that one, haven't you? Let's test it out. How does this sound: "I don't make my kids get buckled in the car—or eat fruits or vegetables, because I want them to choose for themselves." There are some things kids don't get to choose, because they choose wrong. The devil doesn't sit back and let children decide. He's goes after kids the moment they're born. So does Jesus! He says, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these"* (Mark 10:14). We want to get rid of whatever is keeping kids from Jesus!

As a parent, God has called you to make decisions for your children. He wants you to insist on Jesus. That's not being mean. That's love! Children need to learn from a young age that they aren't in control. That they don't get their way. Because every child is born with a sinful nature. You see it even in little babies. What's the name for the two-year old stage? Terrible twos! God has put you in charge. You know what's best. Your kids don't. So don't let your kids decide. Insist on Jesus and his Word in your home. If kids don't learn that when they're two, it will be hard for them to learn it when they're twenty.

Here's another myth we need to get out of our heads: "The Bible is too complicated." I guess even some pastors think that! The devil has made great use of that myth to keep people out of God's Word. Do you know whom the Bible was written for? You! It's