

Making Room for Children and Youth

2 Timothy 3:14-17

As most of you know, we're in the midst of a building expansion project that we're calling "Making Room." The idea is that as we need to make room in our facilities for people far from God, for children and youth, and for worship/prayer, we also need to make room in our lives for the same. [You can check out last week's message on "Making Room for People Far from God" on our web site if you missed it.]

Today we're going to talk about "Making Room for Children and Youth" - both in our facilities and in our lives. In terms of facilities, we devote more space to our children's ministries than any other ministry in the church. One reason is the sheer number of children here on any given Sunday morning: we typically have around 140 children on site on Sunday mornings (75 elementary, 45 preschool, 20 nursery). In Phase 1 of the building expansion we plan to add another large room on the southeast end of the building; that will allow us to have three large-group meeting spaces for elementary ages. Eventually we expect to offer children's classes in two hours on Sundays - effectively doubling the space available.

The other reason we devote so much of our facility to children's ministry is because Sunday morning is the primary time children are in the building. Adults and youth can gather at different times during the week, but children are primarily here on Sunday mornings. That demands large amounts of space at one time.

The youth currently have one large room at the very south end of the building and one other medium-sized room (The Blue Room across from the nursery). The youth space probably won't change with Phase 1. When we build a larger worship center in Phase 2, this room (our current worship center) will become youth ministry space; the addition at the front of this room will be a game/recreation room that can be closed off from the larger room. This room will also be used for Alpha and other large gatherings, but it will be primarily youth space.

All that to say that we're planning to make quite a bit more room in our facility for children and youth. Today I want to communicate why we think that it is very strategic and vital that we make room both in our facility and in our lives for children and youth. Our text is 2 Timothy 3:14-17. In this passage Paul challenges Timothy to think back to his childhood/youth and remember the two primary influences in his life: the Scriptures and people. Here at Faith we want to provide the context in which our children and youth can benefit the most from these same two influences.

Context. In 2 Timothy 3 Paul is helping Timothy anticipate how difficult and challenging it will be to remain faithful to God and faithful to his calling as a pastor in Ephesus. In verse 13 Paul summarizes his point by saying that "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Timothy lived in a world in which some would increasingly live in ways that are opposed to God. By contrast, Paul writes this in verse 14:

14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,

Paul is able to appeal both to the spiritual truth that Timothy had learned AND to the influential people from whom he had learned them. Let's consider each of these influences.

The Foundation of Scripture. Paul challenges Timothy to continue (or remain) in the things he had learned and become convinced of. Timothy was probably around 40 years old when Paul wrote him this letter. Over the years Timothy had not only "learned" spiritual truth; he had also "become convinced of" certain things. In other words, Timothy had developed rock-solid theological and spiritual convictions.

Timothy's experience was in stark contrast with those Paul described earlier in the chapter who were "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (3:7). Timothy had come to the place where he had a settled knowledge of the truth; the truth wasn't merely something that his mother believed or that the people at the synagogue believed. He had come to the place where he had become convinced of the truth. He now needed to stay/continue/remain in that place.

This is the place we want our children and youth to end up, isn't it? We eventually want them to come to the place of spiritual maturity in which they "own" their faith. It's not merely their parents' faith or their church's faith. They need to become convinced of the truth of Scripture so that they can thrive spiritually in a world in which people are going "from bad to worse."

In verses 15 through 17 Paul mentions that the foundation of truth had been laid in Timothy's childhood.

15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Ever since Timothy was a child he had known "the sacred writings" (which was a way that Greek-speaking Jews commonly referred to the OT - Knight, NIGCT *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 443). Since childhood Timothy had heard about God creating the heavens and the earth, Abraham being called to settle in Canaan, Moses leading the people out of Egypt, kings such as David and Solomon, prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. Timothy understood the sacrificial system of the old covenant. Paul's conviction was that such Scriptures give you a type of wisdom that prepares you for salvation. That was certainly Timothy's experience. When Paul arrived in Lystra and explained that Jesus' death was the once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin, Timothy believed. The Scriptures had prepared him to experience salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

In verse 16 Paul broadens his focus to talk about the profitability of Scripture in general:

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The term translated “inspired” means (literally) God-breathed. The imagery suggests that the Scriptures have come from the mouth of God. This is consistent with the imagery of the Scriptures being the “word of God.” Being God-breathed, the Scriptures are true and authoritative. “All Scripture” referred to the Hebrew bible in Paul’s day. Since the New Testament writings now have the same status as “Scripture” (see 2 Peter 3:16), we understand that both the Old and New Testaments are “God breathed.”

As well, all Scripture is “profitable” in several different ways. Scripture is profitable for **teaching** - it instructs us in what is good and true. Scripture is profitable for **reproof** - it confronts things that need to change in our lives. Scripture is profitable for **correction** - showing us the correct way to think and act. Finally, Scripture is profitable for **training in righteousness** - equipping us to live out our righteousness in everyday behavior.

There’s obviously overlap in these four terms, but the net result is clear in verse 17: *so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*. That’s the picture of a person who is prepared to live his/her life in a way that honors God. You’re not continually caught off guard and clueless in terms of how you should live and what you should do. Based on the foundation of Scripture, you’re equipped to live your life to the glory of God.

Just like Timothy, we want the children and youth at Faith to be formed and equipped through the Scriptures as Paul described. This is one of our “core values” at Faith:

We value biblical truth. We recognize Scripture as our authority for salvation and life. We seek to be formed by the Scriptures both corporately and individually.

It’s not enough for us to be a church that teaches the facts of the Bible or even the theology found in the Bible. The Pharisees in Jesus’ day taught the Scriptures accurately. But Jesus told the crowds (Matthew 23:3), “. . . all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds. . .” Every church has its inconsistencies, but there shouldn’t be a Grand-Canyon-sized chasm between what we teach our children and youth and how we live our lives. We avoid such hypocrisy by accepting the Scriptures and our authority and by being formed by the Scriptures ourselves.

For example, one of the basic truths that is communicated to our elementary aged children is that *we should treat others the way we want others to treat us*. It’s rather easy to tell children how **they** should live out the “Golden Rule”: share with your brother, be patient, etc. The concept is really simple. But we also need to be people whose lives have been formed by this same Scripture (Mt 7:12). We need to be people

who bless those who curse us, who are patient when wronged, who are eager to forgive. If we as parents and teachers have been formed by the Scripture in this way, there's integrity and power when we teach our children to "treat others the way you want to be treated."

One more comment before we look at the second influence in Timothy's life. . . Some children and youth will whole-heartedly accept the Scriptures and the truth about Jesus Christ. Others won't accept it during their growing-up years. But even then, the Scriptures have the potential of bearing fruit years later. As parents and as a church we are sowing "good seed" in their lives that can germinate and take root years later. I remember hearing one young man describe how when he was living a very rebellious lifestyle and when he was running from God that Scriptures he had learned kept coming to mind. Those Scriptures went with him wherever he went and eventually brought him back to God.

Notice in verse 14 how Paul also reminds Timothy of ***The Influence of Others***. After appealing to Timothy to remember the truth he had learned and become convinced of, Paul tells Timothy to recall the people who had influenced him spiritually: *knowing from whom you have learned them [the things he'd become convinced of]*. The implication is that Timothy would find strength in remembering that the truth had come through specific people whom he respected. Who were these people? We know of at least three people. Back in chapter 1 Paul mentioned the influence of Timothy's mother and grandmother:

5 For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that *it is* in you as well.

Timothy's father was a Gentile (Acts 16:1), but his mother and grandmother were Jewish. They both had "a sincere/unhypocritical faith" that they had passed along to Timothy. Timothy was blessed to have a believing mother and grandmother who lived out the type of faith that Timothy would eventually own for himself.

Paul was another person from whom Timothy had learned spiritual truth. Paul had brought the message of Jesus to Timothy's hometown of Lystra. Timothy ended up traveling with Paul for many years (maybe 15?). Timothy learned spiritual truth from Paul in a very comprehensive way. Look at 2 Timothy 3:10–11. Paul mentions nine ways that Timothy had "followed" His example and life. Timothy followed Paul in the sense that he imitated his life.

10 Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!

Having travelled around Asia Minor with Paul, Timothy had the benefit of seeing him in all sorts of real-life situations. Timothy was probably a teenager when he first started traveling with Paul. He not only heard Paul's teaching; Timothy saw Paul's life. Paul mentions, for example, that Timothy had seen him endure persecutions and sufferings. He got to see how Paul prayed when his life was threatened; he got to see Paul recover physically and emotionally from the things he suffered. Twenty years later Paul was able to remind Timothy of these experiences.

We want the children and youth here at Faith to be able someday to remember both the spiritual truth they have learned and become convinced of **AND** the specific people who have invested deeply in their lives. This should happen in the home, but it should also happen in the larger body of Christ.

As we make room in our facilities for children and youth, we also need to make room in our lives to invest deeply in children and youth. This investment can take place through the formal children's and youth ministries, but also through relationships that develop naturally.

I talked with my daughter Rose about her experience growing up in this church - especially when she was in high school. She was part of a Bible study lead by Anna Gfeller. She remembers what they studied (the book of James). But the thing that made the biggest impact was the way Anna shared her life with her. Anna would talk about things she was praying for, things she was struggling with, etc. Rose said that before she got to know Anna "walking with God" was sort of a vague idea; but being around Anna brought a lot of clarity. She got a tangible feel for what it might look like to walk with God as a young adult. Brenda and I are forever grateful that Rose can look back and remember "the things she's learned and become convinced of" **as well as** remember someone like Anna "from whom she learned them." [My other daughter looks back with great affection on the person who invested deeply in her life as well!]

As you think about your life and the impact you will make beyond your own family, is it possible that God would want you to invest deeply in the lives of children or youth?

We don't actually need (or want) every single adult here to make this type of investment in our children and youth. You may be called to invest deeply in other ways and in other places (life group, Alpha, etc.); that's really fine. Some people for whatever reason don't really do well with kids. I had a Sunday school teacher like that when I was about ten years old. Things were going so badly in our boys' Sunday school class that Mr. Mauldin decided that we (the boys) would vote whether he should be our teacher. If he lost he was going to resign on the spot. I really didn't want him to be our teacher, but I felt so bad for him (and for his son who was in the class) that I voted for him to stay. He won by one vote. That vote was one of the long-standing regrets of my life.

My point is not everyone can or should enter into this type of ministry. But I think we can safely assume that God wants **many** of us to make this type of investment in the lives of our children and youth. Approximately 60 people serve in CM each Sunday;

around 20 to 25 in YM. We don't really have pressing needs right now, but I'd like you to consider whether God might want you to invest in children and youth in the future. The main thing is a willingness to share you life: to develop relationships, be appropriately honest and transparent so that they can see another example of what it looks like to walk with Christ. They don't need to see perfection; they mainly need to see redemption.

This type of investment has to flow from a deep conviction in our lives; it shouldn't be the type of thing you do out of guilt or even out of obligation. Our vision is for this to flow from the lives of people who gladly and eagerly sacrifice time and energy for children and youth.

What I'm describing is really a basic expression of Christlikeness. Jesus became one of us, invested his precious time and words in the lives of people who didn't really deserve it. Ultimately His investment involved sacrificing Himself on the cross to pay for our sins. When we sacrifice time and energy in order to invest in the lives of children and youth, we're simply imitating our Lord. We're talking about something that's extraordinary and sacrificial, but something that's also a normal aspect of following Christ.

Here's a question I'd like for you to ask God - perhaps repeatedly over a period of time:

A Prayerful Question: *God, are You leading me to "make room" in my life so that I can influence children and/or youth for Jesus Christ?*

If we ask this question honestly, we'll always be in a great place in terms of people to invest in children and youth. Since God is very willing to lead, we mainly need to be willing to be led.