

**+ 2 Timothy 3:14-17 + Whose School Do You Attend? +
+ 17th Sunday after Pentecost: Back to School Sunday + 11 September 2016 +**

Hazelton-Moffitt Elementary School. St. Paul's Lutheran School. St. Peter's Lutheran School. Sage Valley Junior High School. Northwestern Preparatory School. Luther Preparatory School. Martin Luther College. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. While a couple of those names might have some meaning for you, I would guess that the vast majority of them mean nothing to you. Yet for me, each one of those schools has a special place in my heart because each played some role in shaping who I am today.

Where did you go to school? I'm sure you could come up with your own list of places of education, and schools of higher learning that played a role in shaping who you are today. Typically when you attend or have attended a school, there's a certain amount of pride in being part of that school. Maybe you're proud to wear the school's jersey on the playing field or represent the school in a competition. Maybe you're proud to have attended a school because of the education and experience you gained there. There's a reason why high schools and colleges have alumni associations—groups of graduates who are proud of the school they attended and interested in continuing to support their school.

No matter what school you attend or have attended, that school doesn't just impact your life. It shapes your thinking, your attitudes, your habits. You typically start attending that school with little experience and a great need for growth whether that's as a kindergartner or a freshman, but by the time you finish that school, you've grown considerably in ways you didn't expect. In so many ways, attending school is a blessing from God even in spite of the groans from returning students and the cheers from their parents this past week as a new school year began across the region.

This morning we're going back to school, but our focus isn't on how to get through the first week or first month of a new school year. No, with the start of a new school year for young and old here at Cross of Christ, we're stepping through the doors not of an elementary or middle or high school or college or university, but through the doors of God's school to another new school year of learning at his feet through the study of his Word.

As you get ready to start a new school year, you have a number of questions you want to have answered. When does school start? What supplies do you need? What will you learn? What can you expect from your teachers? How will your time in this school shape your life? The Apostle Paul helps us answer similar questions as we pass through the doors of the Lord's University for a new school year with our Lord Jesus.

While today is Back to School Sunday here at Cross of Christ and local students went back to school earlier this week and college students started a couple weeks ago, when does school start with the Lord? While the actual start date varies from believer to believer, consider what Paul writes to Timothy, ***"...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..."***

Earlier in his letter, Paul had thanked God for two faithful "teachers" in Timothy's life—his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. They had faithfully taught Timothy the basics of God's Word. While it was common for a Jewish boy to begin studying the Old Testament at age 5, Lois and Eunice started much sooner. They enrolled Timothy in the Lord's University as an infant. As they snuggled their little guy, they rocked him to sleep with the Psalms of David. As he got older, they taught him about the Lord who rescued his people with great miracles, but would someday send the Messiah, who would save his people from their sins. All his life these faithful women taught Timothy to watch for the coming Christ. Later Paul taught Timothy how Jesus was the Savior who fulfilled all those promises.

When were you enrolled in the Lord's University? When did school start for you? Perhaps it was in infancy when your parents carried you to the font where you were washed clean of your sins and welcomed into God's family through Baptism. Perhaps it was when you were a child or a teen and someone shared with you a Bible lesson you had never heard before—a lesson about a Savior named Jesus who left heaven to be born as a child like you, yet came to pay the full price for every sin, every disobedient act, every selfish failure that you have ever committed by sacrificing his life for you on a cross and then rising from the dead. Perhaps it was when you were an adult and you received an invitation to visit a church and you heard some amazingly good news—forgiveness and peace and hope through Jesus with no strings attached. Perhaps you even enrolled in a Bible Information Class to find out more about what the Bible says. No matter when you started school in the Lord's University, he has blessed it.

Yet even if you started school with the Lord in infancy, you have a big challenge. King David once sang, **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** (Psalm 51:5) Inside of you is a rotten, self-centered desire to stay away from the Lord’s University, to stay away from the Lord and his Word. Inside of you is a rotten, self-centered desire to do what you want, to go after what you want, to think you can do it yourself or to be so lazy that you don’t even care what the Bible says. Unfortunately, that rotten, self-centered desire has been with you since you were conceived. That self-centered sinful nature wants you to find wisdom anywhere else except the Word of God, but Paul makes it clear why you need that Word.

When you’re heading to school, you need school supplies—pencils, pens, notebooks, a computer or tablet, but when you attend the Lord’s University, the only “school supply” you need is God’s holy Word. Paul explains, **“...The holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”**

While your selfish sinful nature would much rather have you find wisdom anywhere else, the Word of God is the only way you can grow in true wisdom. That Word is holy. That means it’s without error, without mistake, without contradiction. Jesus himself says, **“Your Word is truth.”** (John 17:17) It is the holy, unadulterated truth not just when it talks about how God saved you from sin and death and hell through Jesus, but even in its historical and geographical details. We know this because that Word is **“God-breathed.”** Now that’s a strange word for us, but Paul is telling us that the Bible is God’s Word and came from God himself. Yes, he used human writers to record it, but it is his Word alone. The Apostle Peter explains, **“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”** (2 Peter 1:21) The Bible is God’s Word in its entirety.

Have you ever purchased a school supply at the beginning of the year, but never or rarely used it? For example, I recall purchasing a math compass for drawing circles. In grade school, it wasn’t a tool that I used regularly. Instead it usually ended up in some dusty, back corner of my desk. Sometimes you and I can get caught doing the same with God’s Word. Even though it’s the only source of real truth, we let our Bibles gather dust. We don’t bother to crack our Bibles open—and they do crack without use, but unlike unused school supplies, we end up depriving ourselves of a source of knowledge, of personal and relevant application, and of wisdom all of which comes from God himself.

Remember what Paul told Timothy. **“...Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”** The wisdom that comes from the Word of God is like no other “wisdom” you’ll find in this world. Philosophy and science can help us consider and answer many questions as we look at how God has designed our world, but they both fall short of adequately explaining our God, his unconditional love for us, and the Savior he sent to rescue us. History can be useful, even beneficial as we see the rise and fall of nations and see God’s hand guiding history, but history falls short if we do not view it as “His Story.”

As great as human and worldly wisdom can be, the wisdom that comes from the study of God’s Word far surpasses even the most brilliant minds who have ever lived. Why? All of that wisdom, all of that knowledge is limited by sinful humanity’s inability to think outside of ourselves and to grasp who the true God is and what he has done for us. Yet in God’s Word, the curtain is pulled back and we see not just a holy and almighty God, but a God who loved each and every one of us so much that he sent his only Son to save us through faith in him. That wisdom has changed hearts and lives eternally, and that Word does the same for each and every one of us.

As with any school situation, you also want to know what you can expect from your Teacher and from those who serve as his teachers in the church. Here’s what Paul tells us, **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”** The Word of God is useful for providing instruction on the will of God and the way to heaven, for refuting error, for pointing out sin and why it is sin, for correcting error and reforming your way of life so even your behavior and habits are in line with God’s will. Above all, God’s Word is useful for **“training in righteousness...”** All of this is vitally important because we live in a world of so many voices, each vying for the allegiance of your heart and mine. So we need to sit at the feet of the Teacher of teachers—Christ Jesus—and gain eternal wisdom from him.

So how will lifelong enrollment in the Lord’s University shape your life? Well, that wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus that you gain through the Word of God leads you to being thoroughly equipped for every

good work. God wants you to be fully equipped for the tasks he has prepared for you—a life of willing, loving service to him and your neighbor. So he uses his Word to train you, equip you, and guide your life until you arrive in the glories of heaven.

That also means that we can never graduate from the Lord's University on this side of heaven. As students young and old enrolled in the Lord's University, God is equipping you for a life of "continuing education" with the Lord and his Word. Your study of God's Word does not and cannot stop.

Whose school do you attend? While you might not be enrolled in school right now, you and I are enrolled as students at the Lord's University for a lifetime of learning and "continuing education" in his Word. Just because you've completed Confirmation Class or Bible Information Class doesn't mean you've graduated. No, your study of God's Word doesn't stop whether you're 2 or over 102. So may the Teacher of teachers—our Lord Jesus—bless you as you continue learning and living as his students. Amen.