

# OpenTheo

## Diligently Considering God's Word



### Message For The Young - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of studying the word of God in order to gain wisdom and spiritual growth. He encourages Christians to live a consistent Christian life and to meditate on God's word, as it is essential for personal and ministerial growth in Christ. By understanding and delighting in God's word and identifying what truly matters, individuals can make changes in their lives and avoid placing idols above God.

### Transcript

Alright, well, you have come this morning to hear a 15 point sermon. Fortunately, it's not all going to be in one day. I've already worked on some of these points in two previous messages, and I'm not going to finish it off even now.

This is a 15 point sermon that takes at least four to six hours to give. Today, I'll not give that much of it, because we have other things that we've attended to, and we have more to attend to after the service, as we'll be fellowshiping in the fellowship meal afterwards. However, these 15 points all come from one book in the New Testament.

They come from 2 Timothy. Some time months ago when I began this, it was my intention to give, I thought, in one message, a much briefer treatment of the same material, and I entitled it A Message For The Young, because I'm not very imaginative in thinking of message titles. And as it turned out, it's gone on for many messages.

Now, there are some people here who are not very young, and actually I've heard that some have said, well, you know, do we need to have so many messages just to the young? I mean, us older people need something too. I can't quite understand the mentality that would ask that question, because almost everything we've said is as applicable to the old as to the young. We need to realize that someone doesn't have to be speaking directly to us in order for us to learn something.

I have learned a great number of things by eavesdropping on people's conversations that I wasn't even involved in. Of course, when you're teachable, you look, the Bible says the ear of the wise seeks wisdom. And so it's like we need to always have our ears open to see, even if somebody else has been addressed more directly, that maybe there's

something there for us.

Solomon said that he once walked by a field that was, he said, the field of a sluggard. It had been poorly maintained. The rock wall was dilapidated.

The place was overgrown with thorns and thistles. And he says, I saw in my mind received wisdom. And he says, I understood wisdom and understanding.

He says, I saw I learned a lesson. He says a little sleep, a little folding of the hands to sleep. And so shall your poverty come upon you like an armed man.

Now, that's a teachable ear. No one was even talking. He just saw a broken down wall and a field full of weeds.

And he received something from the Lord from it. And so I hope that although, you know, whenever we read anything in the epistles, we're actually eavesdropping on somebody else's conversation. Paul didn't really write his epistles to us.

He didn't even know us. He didn't even know we would be reading them. We're reading someone else's mail.

But when we actually read it, is that right? Is that a federal offense? We got a postmaster here and a couple other. Well, maybe that's why Christianity is outlawed in so many places, because we routinely read other people's mail. But the fact is, the ability to eavesdrop, the ability to hear a conversation that's going from one person to someone else, and we're not even in the loop and to gain wisdom from it is really what we have to do if we're going to gain anything from this.

And that's why we're reading the epistles, because we realize that Paul was writing to Timothy in this case, not to me, not to anyone in this room. But that doesn't mean that there's nothing there for all of us. So although the the message began as a message to the young, really what it's turned into is simply lessons from Second Timothy.

We've just through the whole book, I've selected 15 points which have been going over some of them each time I've been up here. And the only way in which we could call it a message to the young is that Timothy was young, young enough that Paul had to exhort him, let no man despise your youth. And so it was a message to a youth, a Christian youth.

But none of us, actually all of us except for Howard Althea here, at least by comparison with them, are Christian youths. And you know, Steve mentioned that if you younger sisters, which is all of you, would want to come over to Althea's house, they could learn a great number of valuable things, including how to be a good wife. But Paul said in Titus chapter two that the older women should teach the younger women these very things.

And so in Second Timothy, we have actually an older man teaching a younger man certain important things. And that's what the body of Christ is there for the older folks. Paul was Paul the aged when he wrote this.

It was the last letter he ever wrote, as far as we know. So it was as he got as old as he got before he wrote this letter. He was about ready to be executed, actually, when he wrote it.

But I'd like to look at a few more of the lessons in the letter. And we got into chapter two last time I was here. Really doesn't matter if you were here or not.

All of these lessons stand alone on their own merits. We're looking at Second Timothy chapter two, and I like to read verses seven and 15 to make this point. Second Timothy two, verse seven says, consider what I say and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

And then in verse 15, he says, be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Now, both of these statements in the same chapter tie together one basic thought, and that is that Timothy was being exhorted to devote his attention to thinking about the word of God. In verse seven, it was actually the word of God that Paul was writing to him at that time.

Consider what I say. Paul says this letter, this epistle and God give you understanding all things. This word considered is something I would like you to contemplate here.

And then in verse 15, he said, be diligent to present yourself. Now, the King James study to show yourself approved unto God. And it's often because of the King James rendering, it's often been used as a text in favor of maybe formal theological training or just Bible study.

In fact, the word in the Greek means be diligent and study was just an old English word that meant to be diligent in 1611 when the King James translated. So when they they start the word study in there in 1611, it didn't mean what we mean by study. It meant to people that the word meant in English be diligent.

So we are ripped off of the only verse we ever had that told us to study. But we still have the main idea here to be diligent to show ourselves approved and God rightly dividing the word of God certainly requires study or at least again, consideration of the word of God to be a workman in the word of God. Now, not all are to be preachers of the word of God.

That's my understanding. I grew up in a church where basically the conviction was passed down to the congregation from the pulpit that all Christians should be preachers in some sense or another. I guess that works out well if you have only in your congregation people who are indeed preachers, but not all are called to be preachers.

Paul said God gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and some teachers. Not everyone is called to a full time ministry in the word, but all Christians are called to a full time life of application of the word so that whether they are articulate enough to express in words to a non-Christian or not what their beliefs are, they are declaring their beliefs by their life in all respects. Now, when I was growing up and I had the impression pounded into my head in the church I was raising that you need to be evangelizing everyone you see.

In those days, I bought that completely without ever even wondering if that's what the Bible said, but in those days if someone said, well, you can preach in other ways besides preaching, you can preach in other ways besides words, you can preach with your life. I always thought there was kind of a cop out because I always felt like that was someone saying, I'm too cowardly to preach to my friends, so I'll just live the life. But see, back then I didn't understand because the church I was raised in didn't tell me what it really meant to live the life.

I thought what that just meant was I'll behave myself and I won't say anything to anyone about God, but I'll be a witness just by not cheating my employer or just because I don't blaspheme when the other people are blaspheming. But there's more to living the life than that. If you live a consistently Christian life as described in the scriptures, it will preach volumes.

It will get probably more attention than you'd get standing on a soapbox and shouting to passersby on a street corner because people have learned, at least in the cities, to ignore such people who stand on soapboxes and shout on the street corners. Believe me, I've seen it many times, but there's no really excellent way to ignore a life that looks like the life of Jesus Christ. And that involves a lot more than just not cursing and not laughing at the dirty jokes in the office and not smoking cigarettes and things like that.

I mean, a lot of people don't realize how all-consuming it is to be a follower of Christ. And the only kind of following of Christ that makes a difference at all is that which is all-consuming. It makes no brownie points with God for you to give God half of your life.

And in order for you to give Him all your life and to make sure that all that you do, all the choices you make in your life - shall I go to college, shall I not go to college? Shall I get this job, that job, or no job? Am I called to be a missionary or to do full-time ministry and not take a job at all? I mean, am I supposed to marry or not marry? Am I supposed to marry this kind of person or that kind of person? All the decisions we make need to be governed by the revealed will of God, which is in the Scripture. Now, Paul indicates that Christians ought to be - at least Timothy ought to be, and he was a Christian, and I think we all ought to be - studying, or at least contemplating, considering, as is the word Paul used in verse 7, becoming able workmen in the Word of God. Now, I would put all that into one other word that's not in the passage but is elsewhere in Scripture, and that is

the word to meditate on the Word of God.

This statement, consider what I say, and the Lord give the understanding in all things, is really kind of like a promise of God, and think about that. Paul didn't say, if you have trouble understanding the Scripture, get a four-year seminary education. You know what, I know a lot of people who've had four-year seminary educations, and they don't understand the Scripture.

It's obvious. When you listen to them preach, they just don't – they know what their professors told them to know. But they would have been much better off had they simply done what Timothy was told to do, just to consider the Scriptures, just to turn it over in your mind.

Think hard about it. Meditate on it. The word meditation means to roll it over in your mind again, to turn it over and to think about it again.

Many times preachers have likened this to ruminating a cow or a goat chewing the cud, how that they chew their food for a while, they draw from it certain nutrients, they swallow it into one of their many stomachs, and then later on they bring it back up and chew it some more and draw some more from it. And they keep doing that until they've gotten about everything you can get out of it. And that's what you do mentally when you meditate on the Word of God.

You hear the Word of God. You think about it. Maybe a time comes that you can't really think directly about it before you have to attend to some other business, but you bring it up later and think about it again.

I love doing the kind of work that is brainless work. That's not what I do for a living, but I used to. Back when I used to support myself in the ministry by manual labor, I used to do so with janitorial work.

It's my favorite kind of work because it doesn't take any brains. Now, let me take this back. There are some janitors here who are scientists at cleaning things.

I wasn't. I was just an ordinary floor scrubber and window washer and things like that and toilet cleaner. And I loved it because I was making the money I needed to feed myself, and I didn't have to think about anything except the Scriptures.

And that's all I thought about throughout my youth, throughout my teenage years, throughout my early 20s and so forth. When I had to support myself, it was so rich. It was so satisfying.

And some people say, well, Steve, you're a Bible teacher. Of course you'd meditate on the Scriptures. What do you think? That's what Bible teachers are required to do.

I was doing it before I was a Bible teacher. That's why I'm a Bible teacher. I didn't meditate on the Scripture because I was a Bible teacher.

I became a Bible teacher because I meditated on the Scriptures from my youth. And any young person here can't just look and say, well, Steve's a preacher. Of course he meditates on the Scripture.

I'm not going to be a preacher so I don't have to do that. Well, maybe you don't have to do it for the same reasons, but you need to do it. Whether you're going to preach it or not, you need to live it.

And for you to live it, you need to have it not only understood with your mind, it needs to nourish you because you are what you eat, of course. Right? When you eat food, it becomes part of you. When you meditate on the Scripture, the nutrients there, the spiritual nutrients come, and they build you up in the most holy faith.

And they make you spiritually something of a better quality than you were before. Now, meditating on Scripture is what I think Paul is talking about here. When he says to Timothy, consider what I say.

You know, I've just written you some Scripture here. Now, I don't know if Paul would have called his own writing Scripture at this point. Peter called Paul's writing Scripture, but I don't know if Paul did.

But Paul just said, here, I've written you something important, something from the Lord here. Now, I want you to be considering this and allow the Lord to give you understanding in this, in all things. And then, of course, down in verse 15 he talks about the word of truth probably referring to the Gospel, though he might have been referring to the Old Testament Scriptures here in verse 15 where he says that you need to become a skilled worker who need, if not, to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

All evangelicals I know like that verse about rightly dividing the word of truth. And they all are sure that their denomination is the ones that do it. But, and I can't really say I'm the one who does it, right? But I would say this, I have certainly seen some workmanship that was pretty shoddy.

I've seen some workmanship that ought to have been a shame because they gave out an exposition of the word of God and it was very clear they had not been diligent. It was very clear that they were just repeating what they had heard from their training or whatever. They had not really considered it and had the Lord give them understanding in it.

And this is the promise of God. If you will devote yourself to listening to the word of God in your head, turning it over in your mind whenever you have nothing else you have to

be doing with your mind, God will bring more nutrition to your soul from it. It's something you meditate on.

Everyone remembers, I'm sure, Psalm 1, which it says of the godly man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly and who does not stand in the way of sinners, does not sit in the seat of the scornful. That man, his delight is in the law of the Lord. That's the written scriptures.

His delight is in the law of the Lord. And in his law does he meditate day and night. Day and night.

At every opportunity, he's thinking about the scriptures again. He's meditating on the scriptures again. And what happens to him? He's like a tree planted by rivers of water.

Now, I liken meditation to a cow chewing the cud, drawing nourishment from it. This is another image that's not too different. A tree planted by rivers of water is, of course, in that place where it can draw through its root system all that it needs because there are rivers of water nearby.

And even in droughts, when everything else dries up, the rivers are the last to dry up. And even when the rivers dry up, there's water beneath the riverbed longer than there is anywhere else. And that tree that's got its roots there is going to be making it through the famines.

Remember, it says in Amos 8 and verse 11, that, behold, I send a famine. God says, not a famine of bread, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. There are in many places in the world, and there are in many times in our lives, where it's not easy to find the word of the Lord.

In that very same passage in Amos, it says that young men will faint and young women will fail because they'll run all over the place just seeking the word of the Lord, and they won't be able to find it. It's not saying that Bibles won't be available, although there are places in the world where they're not. In fact, it could happen here.

We may someday have a hard time finding Bibles, too. But it's not even that. A lot of people have Bibles, and yet they never have the word of the Lord come to them, even as they read it.

It just reads like a newspaper. There are dry times. There are dry times when you can read your Bible and get nothing out of it.

Now, if you don't ever have those dry times, then I apologize. I don't want to misrepresent your spiritual life. That is true of my spiritual life, and it's true of most people that I know.

But if you have made a habit of meditating on the word of God, then you are like a tree with roots that go deep. And you can make it through the dry times without slipping, without shriveling. It says you'll be like a tree planted by rivers of water.

It says that He brings forth His fruit in His season at the right time. The fruit comes, and the leaves do not wither. That spiritual life does not dry up, and whatever He does shall prosper or succeed.

And so this is a promise of Scripture to those who do what? Who delight in the word of God and who meditate on it day and night. Now, Paul is telling Timothy, this is going to be essentially one of the most important things for you as a young minister, because he was a minister, but also as a young man. I can say this, that even before I was a young minister, I was a young man, not much earlier, but nonetheless, I needed, and I need now, the refreshing and the nourishment that comes from the word of God.

And that refreshment doesn't come just from hearing a sermon like this on Sunday morning. It doesn't come from having a cursory five minutes with God, you know, reading a verse or two from Daily Bread or something in the morning and going your way, unless, having done so, you bring those Scriptures to mind during the day. And how do you meditate on Scripture? I mean, how do you profitably bring those things to mind? Okay, what do you do? Just put it in your mind again and let it sit there? What do you do with it? Well, you chew on it.

You try to say, okay, you say things like, okay, the word of God that I read today or that I heard the other day said whatever. Whatever it is. Obviously, it says many things and depends on which Scripture you're thinking about.

And you ask yourself questions like, well, how does this apply to me? What does this tell me about God and His nature? Why does God say this kind of thing? What are His concerns? What is His heart? How does this impact the things I'm already doing? Does this give me guidance to change direction about anything? Or does it encourage me in what I'm already doing? What meaning could there be in this verse that I have never heard or thought before? Let me think about each word in the verse. Let me go over it and see if there's some word there, some concept that I've always been told it means something. But maybe it could mean something else.

Maybe God has something more there. Now, let's face it, you've got to be kind of fascinated with the word of God to even do that kind of thing. But that's just the point.

You need to become fascinated with the word of God. To be diligent, to become a workman in the word of God. That doesn't need to be ashamed.

To rightly divide the word of truth. You cannot do that without giving time to it. And you probably will never give time to it unless you are like that man in Psalm 1 who delights in



it.

His delight is in the word of the Lord. And in His word he does meditate day and night. You will not meditate day and night on anything that you don't find delightful.

If you're in love with somebody, you'll think about them day and night. Because they are your delight. If you're eager to build a house or to buy a certain kind of car or to get a certain job or something, and your focus is on that, you'll be thinking about it all the time because that's where your delight is.

Now, how then would you delight in the word of God? How would you meditate in the word of God? Your mind will, by default, always go back to thinking about whatever you most delight in. You might say, well, I frankly don't find the word of God that interesting. I don't get that much out of it when I read it.

Well, that is a problem. And I'm not saying there's some kind of real pat answer. You just do this one little thing or these three things and you'll fix it all and you'll become a spiritual giant overnight.

All I can say is this. You do need to, if you don't delight in the word of God, you need to reassess your priorities. Because obviously the house or delight in, everybody has something that matters most to them.

And you want to know what it is? It's whatever you're thinking about all the time. That's what matters most to you. Whatever's on your mind all the time.

Now, if you identify what matters most to you and it isn't God and it isn't His word, then you need to maybe consider whether maybe there's an idol in your life. There's something that matters more to you. And why should it? What kinds of things would remedy that? Well, one is to begin to reflect on the relative value of the word of God versus whatever else it is that you're idol in your heart.

You do love that which you see the greatest value in. You might say, I see the greatest value in God. But if you really are more fascinated with other things, you don't.

You're just saying it because Christians are supposed to say that. You're just dutifully saying the Christian cliches. The thing that has captured your heart is the thing that you value most.

That you see the greatest value in. Now, how can you remedy it if God isn't in that place? Well, you might think about eternity. That always helped me.

I mean, if my automobile gets a big dent in the side because of something I did carelessly or someone else did carelessly, I parked it. I got a new car several years back, a little car. Back when I lived in Oregon, I parked it.

I usually didn't park it overnight at the school that I was leading. Usually drove it home. But one night I parked it overnight there and went home in our other car.

And the only time I parked it overnight there, someone coming out of a 7-Eleven across the street sideswiped it and took off and left it with the front fender all dashed in. Couldn't close the door properly and stuff. Now, when things like that happen, it's a disappointment, to put it mildly.

But, you know, that's not the kind of thing that really gets me riled up. Because I look at a car, even a new car, and say, okay, the thing is dented up. It's going to cost me many hundreds of dollars to fix this.

And it did. But a year from now, what will it matter? You know, will it matter to me that I spent \$500, \$600 to fix this car a year from now, 10 years from now? When I'm an old man looking at my great-grandchildren, am I going to care about this car? Obviously not. Well, what am I going to care about then that I could care about now? Or better yet, what about a thousand years from now? Or a million years from now? What is going to matter to me then? Whatever it is, it is something that's worth mattering to me now.

Because what I'm doing a million years from now, or what my state is a thousand years from now, is going to be determined by the decisions I make now and the things I set my heart on now. A lot of people think they're going to be setting their hearts on the things of this world, and then when they die, they get to be instantly spiritual for all eternity. The Bible says, Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof, but he that does the will of God abides forever.

Imagine setting your heart on something, and then you die, and it stays here and you go on. And you have to live the rest of your eternity without that thing your heart was set on. It would be a great disappointment if you get there under those conditions.

Hell, even a greater disappointment. And we need to realize that all that matters now, is what will matter a thousand years from now. What will not matter a thousand years from now, barely matters at all now.

And if our heart is set on something that won't matter, even two years from now, ten years, a hundred years, a thousand, a million years from now, if it won't matter then, it doesn't matter now. That's one way you can get yourself reoriented to valuing the things of God. Because really, only the things of God will matter a thousand years from now, to you.

Whatever else captures your imagination and your heart, it's not going to last. It's not

going to be there. It won't be important then.

And if you make that your pursuit in your life, there will come a time when you're laying on your deathbed, whether young or old, if you're fortunate enough to be one of those who has a deathbed, because you might die suddenly before that. But if you happen to be fortunate enough to be lying on your deathbed someday, and looking back at the things you devote your life to, there's only one thing that will prevent you from having deep, deep regrets about your whole life. And that will be that if you can look back and say, I devoted myself to following Jesus Christ wholeheartedly from the day I knew of Him, till the day that I died, you'll never have regrets about that.

Anything else, you will, if you have any sense. Some people die without any sense, and therefore without any regrets. But they wake up real quick after they're gone.

Because then suddenly you know everything. I mean, what Jesus said, many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many works in your name? And you say, I'll profess to them, I never knew you. Can you imagine? People who believed themselves not only to be saved, but they believed they were serving God, prophesying, casting out demons, they were doing all this in Jesus' name.

They didn't just believe they were saved. They thought they were useful to God. And yet, in his opinion, all that time, unbeknownst to them, he didn't even know them.

He wasn't acknowledging them. They weren't his. There must have been something else more important than him.

You might say, what could be more important than God to someone who's out prophesying and casting out demons? I don't know. One's ministry reputation, maybe? I don't know. Maybe the money that some people make in this kind of stuff? I really don't know what would motivate someone to do those things if they didn't love God.

There are folks out there who are doing all those things, who, I don't know their hearts, but God does, and he says there's going to be a lot of them, that he doesn't know them. Now, when you stand before God on the day of judgment, and he says, this is what you were all about during your life, what will you want him to say? What will you, if he says, in my judgment, sir or madam, the most important thing in your life was X, what would you want X to be on that day? Well, that's what you better make X to be now. And you better believe you're going to want that to be God.

Now, if your whole heart is given to God, and that's the only sensible way to be, then, how does that translate into a love for the scripture? Well, let me just say this, how could it not translate into a love for the scripture? If you're in love with someone, you've got a set of letters they sent you, aren't you going to cherish those things? Aren't you going to

want to read them and re-read them, see if you can get any hints about how they feel, and what you might do a little differently to please them and so forth, from whatever they may have written may give you some clues, and you're going to be searching through those, well, depending on how much you love them, but if you really love someone, if your heart is captivated with someone, if you have anything they've written that reveals their heart to you, you're going to be poring over those things and seeking to modify anything you can in your life to adjust to making that person happier. That's what love does to people. And if you love God, you'll have that attitude toward the Bible.

How could you not? Well, there's one way that you could not, and that is if you're not sure that the Bible is the Word of God. If you don't really know that the Bible is the Word of God, you might love God and still be a little bit, you know, of two minds about the Scripture, not really eager. And we live in a time where the veracity of the Word of God is definitely under attack, even in the churches, even in the evangelical churches.

Now, I grew up in evangelical churches, and I spend my time, when I'm not here, in other evangelical churches. When I'm not here on a Sunday morning, I'm in an evangelical church somewhere else, usually preaching, but sometimes listening. And what I have found is that even churches that say they believe that the Bible is the Word of God don't act like it because they preach from something else.

They very seldom preach from the Word of God. And while they're saying one thing with their mouth about their technical belief about the Word of God, that the Bible is the Word of God, they demonstrate that it really isn't that to them because they think something else is more interesting to preach about, whatever the latest pop psychology is or whatever. I mean, something other than the Word of God really captivates them.

And it's no wonder that congregations who sit under such things, they get kind of uninterested in the Word of God. They might love God, but the Word of God, it doesn't connect with them. I love God.

This is His Word. I love His Word. Because that missing link is there.

Is it His Word? Let me just say this. Scriptures are the Word of God. And even though it has come to be unfashionable to think that in our society, we have to remember that the fashions of thought in our society come and go like the seasons.

And the Word of God abides forever. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. Jesus said, Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

You had better acquire for yourself an investment in that which will not pass away even after heaven and earth do. And that is the Word of God according to Jesus Christ. I could give you several hours of apologetics if I wanted to take the time and try to prove to you

the Bible is the Word of God.

That's not important. All I need to tell you is that Jesus spoke of His words in this way. He said, It is the Spirit that gives life.

The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life. If Jesus said His words are spirit and they are life, that's all I need to know.

That's all it takes to fascinate me with them and to devote me to the study of them and the meditation on them. And I would think that would be true of all of you who love the Lord. Timothy loved the Lord.

And Paul simply, I'm sure that a word to Timothy was sufficient on this matter. Consider these things, Timothy. Be diligent about acquiring a mastery in the Word of God so that you can be a workman that will not need to be ashamed.

And let me encourage you younger people too. Because we're in a changing world. Society is changing very rapidly.

This century is, who knows what it's going to bring that didn't come in the previous century. Almost nothing didn't come in the previous one. I mean, just the changes in society are happening so rapidly these days that I'm sure that a young person may think, well, what should I choose as a career? The thing that's really kind of hot today that people are making a lot of money at, it may not even be on the scene 20 years from now.

You know, if I go into computers right now, well, what's going to be instead of computers as we know them today 20 years from now? Something so far above computers that I'd have to go back to school and learn all over again. What career should I choose? I can't answer that for you. I don't know what career you should choose.

But I'll tell you one thing. There are choices you can make in your life that you may regret 20 years from now. This was a poor choice.

It was really hot and everyone was into it 20 years ago. But now I've got to retool, retrain, change careers in the middle of my life. But I'll tell you, we'll not have any regrets.

If whatever else you do as a career is peripheral to your life. Now, this is something that many people do not. They've never thought of that your career could be peripheral to your life.

Your career is just what you do to keep soul and body together. Your career, all you need to do. All a career needs to be is something to keep you and your family fed and clothed.

That's all you need. You don't need investments. You don't even need to own property

necessarily.

I'm not saying you can't. I own property. But you don't need to have gadgets.

You don't have to make a lot of money. You don't have to have money in the bank. I know.

I've lived for this many years without it. I mean, I have some. It's not like I don't have a bank account.

But there's never been anything very significant in it. And I happen to know you don't need any of that stuff. What you do for a living is just that, to keep you living.

After that, it's of no value of any eternal matters. It's peripheral to life. It's just what you do to stay alive.

Your life is what you're devoted to. And let me urge you young people. If you devote yourself to God and to the meditation of His Word and to the conformity of your life to His will and His Word, it doesn't matter what you do as a career.

It doesn't matter if you have to change careers four times, five times in your lifetime. It doesn't matter. You can always go flip hamburgers and keep food on the table if you have to.

You might have to live in a car, one that's not yours that's in a junkyard. But you can stay alive. And I'll tell you what.

I'd much rather stay alive living under a bridge. Not that I've ever had to do quite that. But I'd rather stay alive living under a bridge or even die living under a bridge having been able to devote the real stuff of my life to seeking God, seeking His Word, knowing His Word, and living His Word.

I cannot say to you, I don't have words... I'm not eloquent enough. I don't have words powerful enough to convey to you how important that is to me to get across to you. You will never regret time that was spent meditating in the Word of God.

It is never wasted time. Now, Paul urged Timothy to give time to that and diligence and so forth. Let's look at another passage here.

I'm not going to go very late. But in the same chapter, let's look at verses 16 and 23. Verse 16 says, Now, both of these passages tell us to avoid something.

And both of them have to do with conversation. Profane and idle babblings increase unto more ungodliness, and then foolish and ignorant disputes. Now, not all disputes are foolish and ignorant.

I mean, there are disputes that are... there are fights worth picking. There are times when it's important to defend the truth. Paul disputed in the streets of Athens in Acts chapter 17 with the philosophers.

There are times when you need to stand for the truth and dispute. But there are a lot of disputes that simply are fruitless. Most of them are the disputes that have separated Christians needlessly for the past about 500 years since the Reformation.

Before the Reformation, everybody just... almost everybody just toed the line with the establishment church and there weren't too many disputes. And then once in a while, someone would dispute the church and then he'd get burned at the stake and then the dispute was solved. But the... after the Reformation... after the Reformation, there came a freedom.

After... well, not in Luther's time, but after that, a generation or two later, there came a freedom of conscience that had not been known before, where people could actually join whatever church they believed in. And if they didn't believe in any of the ones, they could start another one. And that really set off a chain reaction, which has resulted in there being over 4,000 Protestant denominations right now today.

And if you don't like any of them, you can start your own. And most of these have started because of what I would call ignorant and foolish disputes. Now, I'm not saying the issues they divided over weren't interesting issues, maybe even important in their own way.

But none of them were important enough to divide the body of Christ about. And, you know, one thing I love here... I was talking to someone who doesn't come to this church, who lives in the area last night, and I was asking... he's a Wesleyan, that is, he's an Arminian, he's not a Calvinist. And he goes... he went to several churches around here before he settled where he is, and some of them he didn't stay at because of their particular Calvinist slant was different than his.

And he ended up at a church, I won't name which it is, and I asked him last night, I said, well, how do they do with your Arminian beliefs? He says, well, that denomination he says I'm in decided that they will not divide the body of Christ over this matter of Calvinism and Arminianism or over the issue of tongues and so forth. A lot of issues that the church has divided over over the years. So their denomination has just taken an official stand that they will not take a hard line on those issues.

And as he told me, I thought, that's really wonderful, and I really appreciate the fact that the church I attend here has taken that approach too. It's not that these issues aren't important to some people, they are. But they're not important enough to divide the body of Christ over.

And some people just love to dispute until everybody is argued into submission to their way of thinking about everything. And if they can't do it, they'll split off, and they're divisive. You've got to be able to recognize when a fight is worth picking and when it's not.

Most of them aren't, at least with other Christians. What Christians fight among themselves about are usually not things worth fighting about. They may be worth discussing.

They might even be worth debating. A debate doesn't have to be ornery. A debate can simply be a presentation of evidences, and that can be very educational.

I'm all for that kind of a debate. But disputes, feuds, rivalries, ill feelings toward people who have a different view, and the insistence that I have to make them see it my way, that is very rarely fruitful. The only fruit it produces is more denominations.

And if proliferation of denominations is good fruit, then I guess that's fruitful. But it's not what I believe is good. You need to recognize that... Well, how will you know the difference between a foolish dispute and an essential dispute? I guess that's the question you have to ask.

How do I know if a particular dispute is foolish or essential? I guess everyone's going to have to make up their own mind about that. I'll give you my own thinking based on what Paul said. Paul said, well, Jesus said, when the disciples, two of them, James and John, came to Jesus and said, we saw some men casting out demons in your name, but they don't walk with us, so we told them to stop.

And Jesus said, well, don't forbid them. Because no one who's casting out a demon in my name will quickly turn around and speak evil of us. He said, those who are not against us are for us.

Now, I know you're familiar with the scripture where he said, those who are not for me are against me. Jesus said both things. But the point here was that when it came to dividing those who were friendly toward Jesus, the apostles wanted to kind of exclude these people over here.

These people were obviously friendly toward Jesus. I don't know if they ever met him or if they'd just seen him or whatever. But Jesus said, don't forbid them.

Now, it makes me think that Jesus doesn't have such a long list of particulars about things that he insists upon as far as doctrinal conformity or whatever, as we sometimes do. And I really wonder what he does require. I heard someone say a couple weeks ago, I heard someone say of another man in Christian history that he hated God and hated God's word and hated God's people.



And I went up and talked to this speaker who said this about this particular individual. I said, I don't know everything about the man you're talking about, but I've read something of his. And I never had the impression he hated God or hated God's people or hated God's word.

I just wondered, you may have read more of him than I have. What have you learned of him that makes you say such a thing? Because he seemed to me like he was a Christian man. And the speaker said, well, he couldn't have held such and such doctrines that he held unless he hated God and hated God's word and so forth.

Well, the doctrines that the guy held, the guy was not a Calvinist and this particular speaker was. And because the man in question was not a Calvinist and held some other views he disagreed with, he said he hated God. That's not a very responsible way to assess other brothers and sisters.

There are brothers and sisters who disagree profoundly with us on many issues. That doesn't mean they hate God. Jesus said, by this all men will know that you're my disciples, not that you hold this doctrine of view, that doctrine of view or some other doctrine of view, but that you love one another.

That's the issue Jesus said. Now, that doesn't mean doctrine is unimportant. I don't want to just, you know, suggest that the church should become some doctrinally amorphous blob that doesn't stand for anything in particular.

But I do believe what we should stand for most of all is loving the brethren and recognizing there's a lot of brethren that we could be tempted to dispute with, but we don't need to. They may differ from us and we might even be convinced and maybe rightly so that their doctrines are much farther off mark than our own. But even if that is true, they might love Jesus more than we do.

And who's the better for that? Well, I know who don't, who I think their doctrines are quite mistaken, but they follow God at least as well as I do, maybe better. Well, then what's my assessment of them to be? Well, I can't, you know, I can talk with them about doctrinal differences, but this shouldn't arise into a dispute. It'd be foolish to do so.

Anyone's views that do not lead them to stumble in their walk with God, that doesn't mean we can't offer correction to them. We should always be prepared to talk about the truth. And I mean, I'm always eager to talk to people about things they disagree with me about, but it's one thing to say, let's sharpen one another.

Let's see whether you've got better arguments than I do. Let's see if you can bring me over to your side or I can bring you over to mine by breeze in the heavens. I love that kind of thing.

I love to talk like that. But when it's all been said and done, if that guy loves God enough

that his views are not stumbling him from following Jesus Christ, I don't even care if he comes around in my way of seeing it. It's not hurting him to believe what he believes now.

And if God wants him to change, God knows how to get to him. He knows his address and phone number. So, I mean, it's not for me to make everybody conform to whatever it is I call orthodoxy.

And that's a hard concept for some people to swallow. Some people are so into what they call orthodoxy and some define it so narrowly that they can hardly fellowship with anybody except themselves. I think they say, you know, God, there's no one who's right on but you and me.

And I sometimes wonder about you. There's one other thing I wanted to bring up. No, I won't even do that.

I'm not going to take any more of these points today because it's getting time for the fellowship meal. And by the way, much as I love the word of God, man does not live by the word of God alone, but also by bread. Both.

But I suppose just these thoughts are the ones I would like to leave with you. It's not a kind of sermon that begins somewhere and goes somewhere and ends somewhere. At least not this time, but somewhere it ends.

Somewhere I'll take some of these more points. But let me just remind you of these exhortations Paul gave to meditate on the scriptures. Make that your meditation day and night.

And avoid foolish, unnecessary conversations and disputes. There is a Christian man I know in this community. He seems like a good Christian to me for the most part.

Though I very commonly see him in public places sitting among scoffers and blasphemers. I don't know him to be a scoffer or a blasphemer. I've never heard him scoff or blaspheme.

And I don't hold it against him. It makes me wonder why he enjoys such company. But I don't know that maybe he's evangelizing these people.

I'm not really in on their conversations. It's just that many places I go, he is there. And the people he's with are cursing God loud enough for everyone in the room to hear.

And he's sitting among them. Now, I can't tell you that he shouldn't be there. Maybe he is evangelizing these people.

All I can say is this. If he is not, he's in the company of conversation that is very corrupting. And it is so easy for images, words and thoughts to lodge themselves in our

minds.

Both good and evil, but especially the evil ones. That we need to avoid those kinds of defiling conversations as much as we can. And young people have not learned this by experience.

Like some of us older people have. But that's why we have sermons for them. You can learn from other people's experience.

A wise person will learn from other people's experience. A fool has to learn from his own mistakes. And there's no reason why the child of any Christian family ever has to fall into the category of a fool.

Because you know the word of God. You're hearing it. And so let me urge you to set your mind upon the word of God.

Day and night. To meditate on it. And to be enriched and to be planted like a tree by the rivers of water.

And bearing fruit and not withering. And also to avoid those things, conversations that can lodge in your mind. Things that take your mind elsewhere.

Off the important things. And that divide unnecessarily. You and another brother.

Any dispute you have with somebody else that caused you to go away loving them less than you did before you had that discussion was a fruitless discussion. Because the fruit of the Spirit is love. And it is possible, entirely possible, discussions where you differ with other people about issues.

And to love them all through it. And love them as much when you left. Maybe even more so.

Because you understand where they're coming from a little better. They may not agree with you any more than they did before. Or you with them.

But now you understand where they're coming from. You can appreciate them a little more. But anytime you're in a discussion that after you walk away from it, you're hot.

You're angry at them. You respect them less. You love them less.

You want to avoid them more often or whatever. That discussion was foolish and fruitless. And we need to become aware of that.

Because we're in discussions with people all the time. We need to become discerning about what the fruit is of the time we spend with folks. Let's pray and we'll dismiss the meeting.

Father, Father, this isn't the kind of message that followed a logical outline and concluded in some logical conclusion. But it's just, I suppose, just a series of exhortations. I pray that these exhortations, insofar as you have sent them to us, would find lodging in our hearts.

I pray for young people. I pray for old people here, Father, that they might, if they do not already possess, obtain a delight in your word, a delight in your law. To see there the means by which we come to get to know your heart, your mind, your expectations and requirements of us.

And that we might delight to do it and to meditate on it. I pray, Father, that you'll help us when we speak. And when we're involved in conversations, that we might let no profane communication proceed out of our mouths.

But that which is useful for edifying. That which can edify and to minister grace to the hearers, Father. And that we might also associate ourselves as much as possible with those whose conversation ministers grace to us.

I pray as we go from here to the tables where we'll be eating and where we will be conversing. I pray, Father, that our conversations might minister grace. It might be edifying.

I pray that we won't sense that we're out of church now and we're at the banqueting table. And now we can put aside our obligation to be edifying. I pray, Father, that you will help us in our relationships to provoke one another.

To love and good works. To edify one another. To see growth.

Not the kind of growth that many churches are seeking in numbers. But we don't wish to reject that either. But we do desire to see the growth in the cells and the members of the body of Christ.

The body might become strong. Might be useful. Might be a witness to this community.

And I ask that you would accomplish these things because we cannot. In Jesus' name, amen.