

Be Prepared!

A sermon based on 2 Timothy 4:2.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I was out hunting with Bob this past week. And I got to tell you, hunting with Bob is always an experience...always an adventure. Last year, Bob, James and I were hunting on the other side of the Tanana, which meant taking Bob's boat, going down the river, going up one of the sloughs. And we got stuck...not once...not twice...three times.

And I quickly learned how unprepared we were. I didn't have the proper equipment to stand in the water at a level any higher than halfway up my legs to help push the boat off the gravel bars. I didn't get a crash course in running Bob's boat, which almost resulted in Bob and James being stranded in the middle of the river. We didn't have the equipment to tow the boat out of the water when it wasn't working properly, but thankfully the military police showed up at the right moment and helped us out. We didn't have dry wood to start up a fire that night as we pitched out tent in the cold and dark and rain. Makes you want to go hunting with Bob, right? Oh, it's always a blast.

You know, it's times like that where you think to yourself, "I wish I was more prepared." Needless to say, this year we learned some lessons.

"I wish I was more prepared." You don't only find that out when you're on a hunting trip...or when you're stepping onto the airplane for a couple weeks of vacation after staying up all night doing your last minute packing but realizing you missed a couple big items...or when you get to class or stand up in front of your boss and realize you can't remember half of your presentation.

As believers, every day, we step into situations where God wants and expects us to do what's right, to speak his truth, to give an answer to others for the hope that we have. Like, when a friend comes wanting to rant about what so and so is doing, but it's just a bunch of gossip. Or, when a close relative passes away suddenly and, at the funeral, everyone else is just so broken and devastated. Even when someone tells you, "Oh, our churches are pretty much the same," when in reality, they're not...not even close. When a co-worker challenges you on what you think about Bill Nye and his support of the theory of evolution. Again, situations every day where we need to be prepared.

Are you? Or maybe a better question...are you as prepared as you should be?

A pastor shared how he called up a friend to wish her a happy birthday. She didn't answer, so he was going to leave her a message. At the end of the answering machine message, she said something unusual, "And don't forget to floss."

Now, she worked at a dentist's office, so maybe it wasn't as strange as you'd think. And the pastor, he said he was excited to hear that because he loves to floss. He flosses like 3-6 times a day; it's one of his favorite things to do.

Not really. He had to go looking for his floss and confirm he actually had some because the truth is, he didn't floss regularly at all. He felt really convicted.

Is that how you approach God's Word? There have been any number of my sermons where it seems I could tack on at the end, "And don't forget to read your Bibles."

How does that make you feel? If you're doing the Daily Bible Readings emails, and you missed a day or two of the readings, and your solution is to simply skip ahead to the reading for the day, but you feel a little guilty passing over what you should have read?

Or, you lay down your head on your pillow at night or tuck your child into bed and realize you didn't get to devotions, and you're frustrated with yourself.

Or, you find yourself in one of the situations I described a few moments ago, and it you're at a loss, like, "I don't know what to say. I know God's Word has the perfect word of comfort for the devastated. I know God's Word can help me talk about differences in religion. I know God's Word has an answer for Bill Nye, the Evolution guy. But I don't know what that word is." Do you ever feel embarrassed when that happens? I've felt that way.

What do you do when you're embarrassed? What do you do when you're encouraged, "Be in the Word so you can be prepared," and you're not, and you're feeling convicted?

Maybe in keeping with our flossing analogy, when you're at the dentist and they ask what you're doing for your teeth, and you haven't been flossing as regularly as you should. Do you maybe fib a little, "Oh, I floss every day, when it's maybe once a week at best." But hey, even 3-4x/week sounds better to the dentist than "I only do it when I remember, which isn't often." That would be embarrassing.

But think about it...who's really being affected when you're not being honest? Your dental hygienist doesn't get bonus if you're flossing every day. In fact, you probably give them job security if you're lying and have bad teeth. It's you who are affected because your teeth aren't as healthy as they can be. You're the one who may end up having to pay a lot of money to get them fixed later on.

Isn't the same true with God's Word? You could tell me, "Pastor, I read my Bible – or I'm doing devotions – every day," when in reality you aren't. Or, "I know I haven't been to church lately, but I've been keeping up in my Bible and praying a lot." I've had people say that to me. And it sounds good on the outside (and I hope and treat it as if it's true), but, if it's not, who's faith in Jesus is really being affected? And it's not only the health of your teeth at stake. It's your faith in Jesus, which God tells us only grows stronger through Scripture itself.

Going back to the recording on the pastor's friend's answering machine. Do you know why she ended with "don't forget to floss"? It wasn't so that the pastor would feel convicted for his lack of flossing. It's because she knows how good flossing is for you.

When Paul says, ***"Preach the Word. Be prepared in season and out of seas; correct, rebuke, and encourage...For the time will come when people 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...But you, keep your head in all situations,"*** his ultimate intention isn't to embarrass you for how poor you've been at being in God's Word and being prepared from God's Word. God doesn't leave his Word so we're left with a feeling of conviction but because he knows what's in there is good for us. He wants us to get the very best things he has in store for us.

And here's what God has in store for you in his Word. Wisdom. And not just any wisdom. Listen to the Apostle Paul's words, ***"From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation."***

The greatest wisdom God's Word shares with you is the good news of salvation. We know it well. It's the news of God's grace in Jesus, who lived the perfect life in our place, who died on the cross in our place...for our sins, who rose from the grave to secure our final salvation. We read through Scripture and we hear that good news time after time after time. That good news doesn't convict us; it lifts us out of the depth of our sins and assures us of our forgiveness through Jesus. If you know that and believe that, you have true wisdom. And, by the grace of God, we do!

But we don't want to settle there. Again, Paul encourages us to ***"be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, encourage."*** We need to be prepared to answer questions, correct misunderstandings, comfort those who need encouragement. And what do we need for that? A pastor once reminded me, "A firefighter doesn't bring balloons to fight a fire."

We need the right tool. We have the right tool. Now it's time to be equipped to use this tool. I've heard people say before, "I know I should be better at this. I know I should be in God's Word more." Now it's time to put the talk aside and to prepare...to know God's Word better.

Here's a start. I have this for all of you today. You can find it in your mailbox. You can find it in the back of church. God's Yellow Pages. If you're going through a particular struggle or temptation, or if someone you know is, here are some passages to check out under an assortment of topics.

There are our email Daily Bible Readings. Stick with them for 3 years and you'll read through your entire Bible. It also gives you a couple of other daily devotional options. If you're interested, talk to me. I will get you subscribed.

Bible Classes. We have Bible classes covering different subjects at different times for different groups of people. What a great way to grow in your knowledge of God's Word...through study of his Word, whether that's Sunday mornings, Men's Bible class, Women's Bible class, Bible Information Classes, starting up in October, another midweek Bible Class, that I'm hoping to get going in the new year, Sunday School for the kids. You have options to take your Bible education seriously and get prepared. Thank God for those opportunities.

You know, after my hunting adventures with Bob, I've learned an important lesson. For that, you can't ever be over-prepared. Have too much food (in case you stay out a few extra days) or too many matches (if the wood's wet) or too many pairs of dry wool socks (when you have to trudge out in the rain). Every hunting experience reminds me I can always be better prepared.

Our life experiences are the same. We can't know too much of God's Word. We can't ever be too prepared when it comes to able to correct, rebuke, encourage with Scripture. May God keep you ever mindful of that truth and move you to be in his Word...and if you are, to be in his Word more. Friends, "Don't forget to floss!" Amen.