



**ERSKINE**

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## **Letters to Our Students**

**Michael A. Milton, PhD**

"You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:1,2 ESV).

September 24, 2019

Reference: **What is Your One Sermon?**

My Beloved Students in Christ:

"Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (1 Timothy 1:2 ESV).

Since my appointment to the role of interim provost, I have thought many times that I want, more than anything, to use this servant role *to encourage you*. I have often, in my ministry, sought to realize this vision of mentoring ministerial candidates and other Gospel workers, through the means of a *letter*. The Lord strengthened the Early Church through epistles. While mine are not divinely inspired, I promise that they will be from the heart. So, I am calling this monthly note to you, simply, "Letters to our Students." I want nothing more than to see you benefit, in some way, by God's power, and to be able to share these letters about ministry with you. Maybe you can share them with others.

I hope to write twelve letters on twelve essential features of a sustainable and spiritually healthy pastoral ministry. I begin with an indispensable pastoral quality that will be with you for the rest of your life: *your conversion to Jesus Christ*.

Whether the Lord God called you as a child, or an adolescent, or in adulthood; whether God saved you through godly parents in a Christian home, or by another's testimony in a lonely prison cell, this much is undeniably true: **your call to follow the Lord Jesus is the singular most compelling feature of your ministry**. Without

question, "Christ in you" is the "hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27) for those who need Christ. Yet, that hope is most often conveyed in an incarnational way.

When St. Paul was modeling what a Christian shepherd looked like to young Pastor Timothy, the great Apostle of the Heart Set Free used his own testimony. In this way, Paul demonstrated that the greatest "tool" for church planting and revitalization is the supernatural work of God in a human soul. Read his words in 1 Timothy chapter 1. Consider the power of Paul's disclosure of his life to Timothy and to the church at Ephesus:

"I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 1:12-14 ESV).

Years ago, I learned the truth about the power of "every preacher's one sermon." This "one sermon" is not that celebrated homily you keep in your pocket for wowing the folks, or impressing a search committee. I am not talking about that kind of "one sermon." I am talking about what we see in the life of Paul. Paul had one sermon, that God had saved a violent persecutor of the Church and made him into an ambassador of God's grace in Christ. Wherever he went, the Apostle Paul carried the "one sermon" in his messages. Your "one sermon" *is not* that you give your personal testimony each time you preach. Nor, do I mean to say that you should use personal illustrations each time you preach. I mean this: *that you can never get over the love and grace that God showed to you.* If that fire is burning, deep inside, stoked by prayer and devotion, then every sermon you preach will possess that electrical charge from heaven.

When a preacher is aflame with the love and grace of God in his own life, or a teacher, missionary, chaplain, or evangelist just "can't get over God's mercy," then you can be sure: the Spirit of God will use that experience of yours to "season" your sermons, "salt" your studies, and "sear" the indelible delights of God into your Bible messages.

**What is your one sermon?** Whether you are studying Old Testament, New Testament Greek, Homiletics, or Pastoral Counseling, remember that God called you, first, to be His son, His daughter. You are in seminary because something happened. And that something is that God's eternal love came to rest upon "even" you.

My identity *is* that one sermon in my life. I always know this: that Almighty God demonstrated His unsearchable mercy in saving this filthy sinner and calling him to preach the glorious name of Jesus Christ that I once blasphemed. Why? The hymn writer, Samuel Francis (1834-1925), wrote the reason, and I love to hear it sung in that mysteriously beautiful Welsh tune, "Ebenezer" (Thomas Williams, 1890):

"O the deep, deep love Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free! Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me! Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love; leading onward, leading homeward, to Thy glorious rest above."

"O Lord Jesus: that just makes me want to preach." And that response within us to the unfathomable love of God in *one's life*, is the "One Sermon" that will "light-up" a message, whether from Genesis, Job, Matthew, or Revelation. That is the power of Christ alive in you.

I am humbled and honored to serve you in this beautiful ministry called Erskine Theological Seminary. We are so blessed that you were led here. We want to do our all to invest our very lives in you, so that souls will be saved, lives will be transformed, and the Kingdom of God will come in demonstration of His glory and power.

Commending you to Christ Jesus, I remain

Yours Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael A. Milton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MICHAEL A. MILTON, PhD, MDiv, MPA  
Interim Provost  
James H. Ragsdale Chair of Missions and Evangelism