INTRO.

-- About a decade ago Thom Rainer, the president of Lifeway, conducted one of the largest studies ever of evangelism in churches in America and reported the results in a book entitled Effective Evangelistic Churches. In that book Rainer reports that 88% of those who make a commitment to Christ do so before they are 19 years of age. Rainer also reported that the primary age span when people come to Christ is between the ages of 9 and 14. It's during that 6-year period that 68% of all believers come to Christ. And those percentages have been consistent since the 1930s. All of which means that if we are going to lead someone to Christ, the most strategic time is the childhood and early teenage years.

-- When it comes to teaching our kids about spiritual things and leading them to faith in Christ, many parents think of that as the work of the church. But the truth is that God never intended the church to be the primary place where kids learn to know Jesus. The church, of course has an important role to play, but the primary place that God designed to nurture our children spiritually and to develop their faith is the family.

A good example of that is a prominent leader in the NT church, a young man named Timothy. We learn about the development of his faith in a book that bears his name, 2 Timothy.

2 Timothy 1

-- The NT books named 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy are actually letters written by Paul to encourage and instruct his young assistant Timothy, who was serving as the pastor of the church at Ephesus. Timothy had been born into a religiously divided family with a Jewish mother and grandmother and a Greek father, who appears not to have been a believer. Timothy's mother and grandmother had come to faith in Christ when Paul came to their hometown of Lystra on his first missionary journey. When Paul returned to Lystra on his second missionary journey, Timothy has also become a believer. Paul saw great potential in this young man and invited him to join with him and Silas as they traveled throughout Asia Minor, Greece and Macedonia visiting and starting churches. Eventually, Paul sent Timothy to pastor the church at Ephesus. According to a church tradition, Timothy became the first bishop of Ephesus and was martyred there in A.D. 97.

The foundation for this faithful and productive ministry was laid in Timothy's family. That's where his faith developed and his spiritual life was nurtured.

Cf., 1:1-5

-- Timothy was a third generation believer, and Paul's comments on Timothy's family give us some important and helpful insight into what it takes to pass our faith on to our children.

I. To Pass Your Faith on, You Need to Experience It Personally. (v. 5)

-- The faith that Timothy possessed had first been experienced by his grandmother and mother. Indeed, Paul says that the faith "lived" in them. Their faith wasn't empty, lifeless tradition or ritual. The truths of the faith had found a home within them, in their hearts and minds. You can't pass on to your children something that you don't possess yourself. If you are going to pass faith on to your children, it has to be alive in you first.

-- So when we think about passing faith on to our children, the place that we have to start is with ourselves, and the question that we have to ask is this: Is faith a living reality within me? Has faith in Christ taken possession of my heart and mind?

II. To Pass Your Faith on, You Need to Live It Out. (3:14)

A. 3:14, "Those from whom you learned"

-- "Because you know those from whom you learned"
-- Timothy not only heard the Christian faith talked about, he saw it lived. He had a grandmother and a mother who walked the walk. They had accepted Jesus' invitation and had come to Him and had taken His yoke upon them and learned from Him. They walked with the Lord.

You could say that they “incarnated” the faith. The word “incarnate” means literally “in flesh.” Lois and Eunice “fleshed out” their faith. They lived it out, and Timothy could see it in the way they lived their lives each day.

-- Some parents’ attitude to their kids is, “Don't do as I do, do as I say.” But that will never work. If there's a disconnect between what we say and what we do, if we don't walk what we talk, if we talk one way but walk another, then guess which one will be what ends up being the main influence on our kids - how we walk, what we do.

B. 1:5, “Sincere faith”

-- Paul says that the faith that lived in Lois and Eunice was a "sincere faith," or literally, a faith that was without hypocrisy. The Greek word "hypocrisy" comes from the world of the Greek theater, where an actor would play more than one role by holding a different mask in front of his face. What Paul is saying here is that Lois' and Eunice's faith wasn't play-acting. They weren't wearing fake religious masks. Their faith was authentic and genuine. They were people of integrity - the same on the inside and outside. Their walk was congruent with their talk. The faith they possessed in their hearts and minds was lived out in their lives.

-- If we want to pass our faith on to our children, that's what we need to be as well - men and women of integrity, who believe what we live and live what we believe. We need to live it as much on Monday as we do on Sunday and to live it as much at home and at work as we do at church.

We're preaching faith sermons to our kids every day we live - in how we treat our spouses, in how we use our time, in how we spend our money, in what we do for entertainment, in how we treat other people. Our children are always watching us, and they need to be seeing a faith that is real and worthwhile in our lives before they will want to take hold of it and make it theirs.

III. To Pass Your Faith on, You Need to Teach It. (3:14-15)

-- Passing your faith on is a matter of walking the walk, but it is also a matter of talking the talk.

v. 14, "continue in what you have learned"

v. 15, "from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures"

-- There are two important things for us to notice here.

A. Where Timothy Got His Religious Instruction

-- Timothy received most of his religious instruction in his home. The Bible considers the family to be the primary place where children are to be instructed about God and taught the Bible.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 

Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 

Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

B. When Timothy's Religious Instruction Started

-- In a sense Timothy's religious instruction started when he was born and given the name "Timothy," which means one who honors God. The name indicates Eunice's desire and goal for her son - that he would grow to honor God.

-- Notice that Paul says in verse 15 that Timothy had known the Scriptures since what age? Since "infancy." The word Paul uses here is the same word used by Luke to describe the newborn Jesus as He lay in the manger. But this same word can also be used to mean the preborn child (in either the fetal or even the embryonic stage). It's possible to lay the foundation for religious instruction and spiritual development even during pregnancy by doing things like singing songs of praise and listening to worship music and reading aloud from the Bible. We actually have a Sunday School curriculum for crib babies that does more than child care but continues to lay the foundation for religious instruction with music and songs and pictures and objects and talking to the babies about God.

-- Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley, the founders of Methodism, gave birth to 19 children, ten of whom survived infancy. She homeschooled all of them, teaching them to read at 5 years of age. First, she taught them the alphabet, and then she started teaching them to read the Bible.

C. The Role of "Spiritual Parents" (1:2-3)

-- One other thing I want us to notice here in 2 Timothy is the role of what I'll call "spiritual parents." Look at verses 2-3 in the first chapter.

1:2-3

-- Paul calls Timothy "my dear son." Of course, Paul was not Timothy's father, at least not Timothy's biological or legal father. But Paul was a "spiritual father" to Timothy. Paul contributed to Timothy's
spiritual development and offered spiritual nurture and guidance to this young man.

-- Even if you don't have children, God can use you to contribute to the spiritual nurturing of some child, perhaps a relative or a neighbor. If you're helping in the nursery or in the Children's Church or in a Sunday School class, you can be a spiritual parent who contributes to the spiritual growth and development of a child.

CONCLUSION
Some time ago I got a phone call from a man who told me that he had grown up going to church but had dropped out as an adult. He said that he wanted to start sending his children (ages 10, 12, and 15) to church so they could get some religious and moral training. I told him, of course, that we would be glad to have him and his children come to North Center and that we had Sunday School classes where all of them could learn about the Bible. As I recall, they came two or three times, and that was it. We never saw or heard from them again. The problem was that he was trying to pass something on to his children that he didn't have or really value that much himself. He was trying to tell his kids that spiritual things were important for them but not so much for him. That man could have learned some important lessons from Timothy's mother and grandmother, and so can we all. If we want to pass our faith on to our children, then we would do well to follow the example of Eunice and Lois:

- Experience faith in Christ personally
- Live it out consistently in our daily lives, and
- Teach it in our homes, from the day our kids are born.