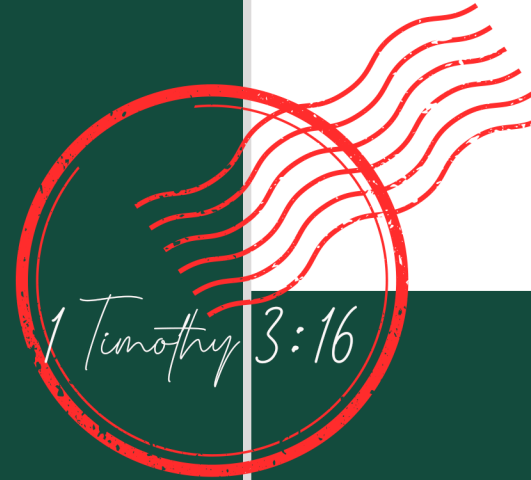


HEAVEN & NATURE SEE

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LIVING STONES CHURCH

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Advent 2022

*"Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:
He was manifested in the flesh,
Vindicated by the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory."
1 Timothy 3:16*

This verse is an early Christian hymn or short creed about Jesus. Here, Paul uses the word "mystery" because, in the past, the gospel was hidden but is now revealed, beginning with Christmas, for all of heaven and nature to see. So how does this connect to the rest of 1 Timothy?

In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul revealed his central purpose for writing this letter:

"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things [2:1 - 3:13] to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."

Then in verse 16, Paul celebrates the source of the very truth-loving, doctrine-guarding godliness he is calling for in his letter: Jesus.

Paul calls this hymn the “mystery of godliness” because it’s the revealed plan of God, fulfilled in Jesus, which *provokes* and *provides* the response of godliness. We tend to think of godliness as “goodness”, being upright and nice people, but true godliness is a thriving relationship with God based on what He has done. Obedience to God that starts with recognizing who He is and what He’s done.

What this means is that Advent can be your fuel for faith in our challenging world.

The world, and us with it, is broken. And despite our best attempts to repair it, relieve it, or find refuge from it, we all suffer. But if we will look to Jesus with the eyes of faith - seeing His willingness to become one of us and live the perfection we couldn’t, His powerful resurrection, the witness of His angels, the unstoppable spread of His fame, the global trust He garners, and the fact of His heavenly rule - we, along with all of heaven and nature, will see His goodness and be empowered to live by faith in Him.

Are you certain of your acceptance by Him? Are you ready to face another day with hope and in obedience to God? You can be, if you’ll keep your eyes in the Word as you live in the world.

Join us in exploring the glorious mystery of Advent as we dive deep into this ancient Christian hymn.

Heaven and Nature See?

In 1719, theologian and hymn writer Isaac Watts wrote the famous Christmas carol, "Joy to the World". The hymn was originally based on a Christ-centered interpretation of Psalm 98, and it was probably verses 4-9 that inspired Watts to write, "And heaven and nature sing."

It wouldn't be much of a stretch to imagine that the Apostle Paul, writing much earlier in church history, may have also considered Psalm 98 when he included in his first letter to Timothy this early Christian hymn:

*"He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory."*

After all, Psalm 98 celebrates the revelation of God's salvation:

*"The Lord has made known his salvation;
he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.
He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness [...]
All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God."*

What we celebrate on Christmas is the beautiful revealing of God's grace in the God-man Jesus, a revealing that all of heaven and nature don't just *sing* but *see*.

The Structure of 1 Timothy 3:16

The title for our Advent series came about, in part, because of the structure of this early Christian hymn. Paul contrasts “heavenly” realities with “earthly” or “natural” realities, showing the massive scope of Jesus’s redemption.

The poetic structure probably also helped Christians memorize these important truths about Jesus. Today, we too can use this to memorize important truths about Jesus.

Lines 1-2

He was manifested in the *flesh*, [earthly]

(Refers to Jesus becoming a man)

vindicated by the *Spirit*, [heavenly]

(Refers to Jesus’s Spirit-empowered ministry & resurrection)

Lines 3-4

seen by *angels*, [heavenly]

(Refers to the fact that angels served Jesus throughout His ministry)

proclaimed among the *nations*, [earthly]

(Refers to evangelism happening across borders and people groups)

Lines 5-6

believed on in the *world*, [earthly]

(Refers to the faith God gives to people who believe the gospel)

taken up in *glory*. [heavenly]

(Refers to Jesus’s ascension and exaltation as King)

In a sense, Paul is essentially telling us that all of heaven and nature see the redemption Jesus accomplished.

Manifested

1 TIMOTHY 3:16

SUMMARY

Every two years, Ligonier Ministries surveys American views on Christian beliefs. This year, Ligonier found that 55% of those surveyed agree with the statement “Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.”¹

Ancient heresies persevere in every generation.

Contrary to this false view of Jesus, Scripture teaches that He is the God-man, both truly God and truly man, and our Advent passage shows that Jesus was worshiped as such from the very beginning of the Christian church. And perhaps just as stunning is the fact that God’s plan - in this passage called “the mystery of godliness” - always involved Jesus becoming one of us.

The wide gap that exists between God and humanity isn’t one that we’re able to shrink with loving acts or travel across on our own virtue, it’s a gap that God Himself bridged by being manifested in the flesh. What did Jesus becoming a man actually *do*? By living perfectly (*down to the smallest details*), dying in our place (*taking all of God’s wrath*), and resurrecting as the first of a new kind of humanity (*defeating death*), Jesus guaranteed every Christian’s eternal, unimaginable joy. When the Lord returns, frowns, tears, and all forms of suffering will vanish and we will finally be freed from the suffocating presence of sin and the devil.

No wonder the angel announced Jesus’s birth as “good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10).

¹ Click the link to see the survey: [The State of Theology](#)

GROUP INTRO

In your opinion, what is it about Jesus that makes Him great?

Leader note: It might be helpful to let a few people give their answer and then point your group back to what the Bible defines as Jesus's greatness. Jesus Himself says that greatness in His kingdom comes through service, and He is the one who leads in this way (see Luke 22:24-27). Revelation 5:9-12 also points out that Jesus is great because the centrally-important aspect of Him serving us is that He shed His blood for us.

TEXT

1. Read 1 Timothy 3:16 together. What stands out to you? Why?

2. Read Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:4-6; and Colossians 2:1-3.

What does the word "mystery" refer to in these passages?

Leader help: "Mystery" is Paul's way of referring to the entire message of the gospel - Jesus is the foretold Savior who brings His people, including Gentiles, back to God. To believe and understand this mystery, a person must be given spiritual understanding by the Holy Spirit.

3. Read Hebrews 10:5-10. According to this passage, why is Jesus becoming a man critically important for us?

Leader help: All humans owe God perfect obedience and all humans fail to give it. Jesus came to perfectly obey God and then die to take away the sins of His people. If Jesus had not been "manifested in the flesh" then our sins would never be taken away.

4. What was Jesus's motivation for leaving the glory of heaven to be "manifested in the flesh"? What does this reveal to us about God's character?

Leader help: 1 John 4:9-10 tells us that Jesus's love for us was His motivation. This shows that God operates on grace, not earning or merit.

APPLICATION

1. In chapters 1-3, the Apostle Paul essentially describes what godliness looks like in the church. Which description of godliness from those chapters is most beautiful or encouraging to you? Why?
2. Out all of the things Jesus said and did during His earthly ministry, what impacts you the most?
3. When do you feel God empowering you to be obedient to Him? How can you fuel your obedience to Him during Advent?
4. How can we know if our hope Jesus's perfect record as a man and not our own sinful or legalistic record? What's present in your life when you're not resting in Jesus's perfection for you?

PRAYER

Celebrate Jesus for becoming a man and never compromising the holiness God demanded.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Revelation 5:9-12

Confess your sinful dependence on your own human righteousness and ask God to free you from this.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Matthew 11:27-30

Vindicated

1 TIMOTHY 3:16

SUMMARY

During His earthly ministry, Jesus said some outlandish, blasphemous, irrational, and illogical things about Himself...if He's merely a teacher, prophet, or sage.

But this isn't the case.

All of Jesus's claims, promises, and teachings have been fully vindicated. How? The Holy Spirit affirmed Jesus's identity and claims throughout His ministry, beginning with His baptism, but the ultimate display was in Jesus's resurrection from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we doubt Jesus's promises, or disbelieve His welcoming grace, or try to dodge His demands upon us, what we really need is a reminder of His vindication. We aren't following a dead shepherd but the resurrected Savior with all power and authority.

Likewise, when we experience ridicule, mockery, or rejection because we've trusted Jesus, we must remember that when Jesus returns He will share His vindication with us. Everyone will see that our faith was not in vain.

This Advent, when the inevitable guilt, shame, and fear come to steal your joy, set your mind on this fact: Jesus was physically resurrected from the dead. Everything He promised is therefore true. He's been vindicated by the Spirit.

GROUP INTRO

Describe a time when God demonstrated to you that your faith in Him isn't silly or worthless. This could be a time when God provided, healed, or gave you deeper trust in the Bible.

TEXT

1. What are some truths about God that we learn from Line 2 (vindicated by the Spirit)?

Leader help: (1) The Spirit is a divine Person, not a force (He actively and personally participated in vindicating Jesus); (2) God wanted there to be no question about the identity of Jesus, which shows His love for His people; (3) Jesus was truly human and depended upon the Holy Spirit for His ministry and vindication; (4) one role of the Holy Spirit is to confirm or verify truths about Jesus, a role He still has today.

2. Throughout Jesus's ministry, how did the Spirit vindicate Him and what was the Spirit's ultimate vindication of Jesus? Why was this vindication necessary?

Leader help: His conception (Luke 1:35), His baptism (Matt. 3:16-17), in His ministry (Luke 4:14, 11:20), and ultimately in His physical resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:1-4).

Why: Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh and Israel's long-awaited Messiah and King and yet He was killed. His death was a Roman and Jewish announcement that He was guilty of crimes and sins. It was also a rejection of the Messiah by the Israelite religious leaders. His resurrection was God's announcement that Jesus is who He claimed to be (the eternal, divine Son of God, Messiah, Savior, Judge).

3. Read Luke 24:36-43. What are some facts from this passage that prove Jesus's physical resurrection from the dead was a historical event?

Leader help: (1) The doubt and fear of the church's earliest leaders is recorded, but if this account was made up, such details would likely be omitted.

(2) Jesus invites His fearful disciples to touch His body. If He "spiritually" resurrected, He wouldn't have a body.

(3) Jesus eats fish in front of His disciples.

(4) These same disciples were later willing to die for their claims that Jesus rose from the dead. They wouldn't be willing to die for something they knew they'd made up.

4. What is the significance of the resurrection? What comfort, power, or hope do we gain from this event?

Leader help: We can trust that everything Jesus said, did, and promised is a reality that will never change.

We also are given the same resurrection power by the same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus. This means we're empowered and changed, being able to walk in obedience to God.

We also have the hope of our own future physical resurrection. We're not waiting to simply die and "go to heaven" - we're waiting for the day Jesus returns and physically renews all things.

We also can have joy in the midst of rejection and suffering, knowing that, although we suffer in this world, Jesus has overcome this world (John 16:33).

APPLICATION

1. How does the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead personally impact you?

Leader help: If your group struggles to connect Jesus's resurrection to their own lives, look together at Romans 8:10-17.

2. How can the reality of Jesus's vindication help you be more confident and gracious when unbelievers mock or reject the Christian faith?

Leader help: We're reminded that it's God's job to vindicate both Jesus and us - not ours. We don't have to be defensive, but can entrust ourselves to God, knowing who we are and to whom we belong forever.

3. Do you often feel the need to defend or hide your faith or are you confident in God's vindication? Why? What are some ways we can grow more confident in the Holy Spirit's resurrection power?

PRAYER

Thank God for both vindicating Jesus and assuring you of all of His promises through that vindication.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 2 Corinthians 1:20

Ask God to forgive you for the times you've been ashamed of the gospel, and ask the Spirit for fresh empowering to boldly proclaim Christ.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Romans 1:16-17

Seen

1 TIMOTHY 3:16

SUMMARY

Though Scripture doesn't supply us with pictures of them, we can be certain that God's angels aren't chubby, tiny-winged babies, but awe-inspiring beings of power. And throughout Scripture, these angels - God's supernatural, spiritual messengers - serve His holy purposes. It should come as no surprise, then, to see angels present throughout Jesus's life:

- *Angels announce Jesus's birth (Luke 1:26, 2:13)*
- *Angels serve Jesus (Matt. 4:11)*
- *Angels strengthen Jesus before the cross (Luke 22:43)*
- *Angels announce Jesus's resurrection (Luke 24:4)*
- *Angels announce Jesus's ascension (Acts 1:10-11)*
- *Angels will join Jesus at His second coming (2 Thess. 1:7)*

Our interest in angels, then, makes sense. In fact, human fascination with angels goes back to at least the early Christian church when some people were tempted to worship them (see Hebrews 1:3-14). Yet the Apostle Paul helps us see the true nature and purpose of angels in this ancient hymn: they weren't created to *get* attention but to *give* it. As incredible as angels may be, their own attention is focused on Jesus, and ensuring that He is seen and known. Jesus Himself made this claim.

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus stated that His disciples would see angels descending and ascending on *Him*. What does this mean? They'd know that Jesus is *the* way to access God. We won't get to God by effort, rituals, experts, or angels, but by faith alone in Christ alone. And the angels witnessed to this fact.

GROUP INTRO

This week we're looking at what it means for Jesus to have been "seen by angels".

Based on your understanding, what do angels do? What's their purpose?

TEXT

1. Take a few minutes to review the structure of 1 Timothy 3:16 together (see **page 6** of this guide). According to this hymn, who has been impacted by the ministry of Jesus?

Leader help: All of heaven and nature - Jesus's redemption impacts angels as well as humans all over the world.

2. What role did angels play in the ministry of Jesus? When did they appear? Why are these appearances significant?

Leader help: Angels announce Jesus's birth (Luke 1:26, 2:13)

Angels serve Jesus (Matt. 4:11)

Angels strengthen Jesus before the cross (Luke 22:43)

Angels announce Jesus's resurrection (Luke 24:4)

Angels announce Jesus's ascension (Acts 1:10-11)

Angels will join Jesus at His second coming (2 Thess. 1:7)

All of this highlights the fact that angels are all about Jesus and serving Him.

3. Read Psalm 103:20-22. How does this passage describe angels? What's their purpose and how does this glorify God?

Leader help: Angels are servants of God and they do whatever His will is. If angels, who are incredibly powerful supernatural beings, serve and obey God, then God must be even more powerful, glorious, and good. Not only this, but much of the good angels do is for the good of sinners, showing God's grace.

4. Though angels obediently served Jesus throughout His ministry, He denied Himself their protection and deliverance as He headed to the cross. Read Matthew 26:50-54. How did Jesus's denial of angelic help guarantee that angels would help Christians today?

Leader help: By taking our punishment on the cross, Jesus purchased not only access to God, but all the benefits of being a child of God, including having the protection of angels whenever God wills for it to be given to us.

APPLICATION

1. If we want to help unbelievers in our lives know Jesus, we have to know our culture. Why do you think our culture continues to be interested in angels and other spiritual beings? How can this interest become an opportunity to talk about Jesus?
2. 1 Peter 1:12 tells us that angels stare at the gospel with wonder. When's the last time you were filled with awe over the salvation Jesus accomplished? How can we grow our awe of Jesus?
3. If someone observed your life for a week would they conclude that you bring more attention to yourself or to Jesus? Why?

PRAYER

Thank God for bringing you into His family and giving you the benefits of being one of His kids.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Romans 8:32

Ask God to forgive you for any self-centeredness you displayed this week, and to grow your joy in Jesus.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 4:7

Proclaimed

1 TIMOTHY 3:16

SUMMARY

Commenting on the fourth line of this verse, one author writes that “Christology develops naturally into missiology”².

In other words, a true knowledge of Jesus grows into intentional acts to make Him known.

Here’s how this works:

When someone is made aware of their situation before God - that they are sinful and deserving of His justice - they crave salvation. At this Spirit-given moment, a person realizes that God has not only provided rescue but *relationship*; He wants this Christ-hating enemy of His kingdom in His family! It’s in this relationship with God that a person who once rejected Jesus then knows Him as the greatest gift in the universe.

But like C.S. Lewis once observed, a person’s pleasure in something isn’t complete until they share it with others:

“I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.”

That game-winning play or incredible song isn’t fully enjoyed until you get to share it. Similarly, Jesus isn’t fully enjoyed until you get to proclaim the news about Him to those who don’t yet know Him. The church’s proclamation of this news is how God always planned to spread His glory to all the nations.

² *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, Philip H. Towner, page 282.

GROUP INTRO

Who first told you about Jesus? What did they say that made you want to pay attention or hear more about Him?

TEXT

1. What does the word “proclaimed” mean? How was Jesus “proclaimed among the nations” and what was proclaimed about Him?

Leader help: Throughout the New Testament, the word “proclaimed” is used almost always to refer to speaking about/ preaching about the gospel of Jesus. The content of this proclamation is that Jesus is the divine long-awaited Messiah who ushered in the kingdom of God, and whose life, death, and resurrection provide the only way to be reconciled to God and delivered from eternal death.

2. In Greek, the word translated as “nations” is *ethnos*, and it often refers to different people groups. When in Scripture was Jesus proclaimed to different people groups?

Leader help: In Acts 2:5-36 Jesus was proclaimed to people from several different nations when the Holy Spirit first descended upon God’s people.

This proclamation happened almost immediately after His resurrection, while eyewitnesses of His death and burial were still alive, which demonstrates the truthfulness of the proclamation. If the disciples were lying in the presence of eyewitnesses, they would have been dismissed.

3. What was the motivation for Jesus's followers, including Paul and Timothy, to proclaim the news about Him? Why'd they proclaim Jesus despite the risks?

Leader help: In both instances, it was (1) Jesus's command to proclaim (see Matt. 28; Acts 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:4) and (2) Jesus's personal love for them and transformation of them.

4. Read Habakkuk 2:4 and Isaiah 45:22. How does the spread of God's glory and salvation connect to the proclamation of Jesus?

Leader help: Jesus is "the radiance of the glory of God" (Heb. 1:3), so as He is truly presented in the gospel by us, and the Holy Spirit is at work in those listening, God's glory is seen by faith, and if the hearer is born again by the Spirit, they are saved from sin and hell.

APPLICATION

1. The central task of the church is to continue to proclaim the gospel. In Galatians 1:8-9, the Apostle Paul makes clear the what should happen to those who knowingly preach a false gospel (he says they are eternally condemned). What are some false gospels or false teachings that you know of? Does God call us to combat these false gospels, and if so, how?

Leader help:

Some false gospels -

(1) The prosperity gospel (God will give you physical, material, and financial prosperity if your faith is genuine)

(2) Moral Therapeutic Deism (Good people go to heaven, God leaves us alone except when we need His help to be happy)

(3) Legalism (We're accepted by God based on our obedience to either His law or man-made rules)

Continued on next page

(4) Antinomianism (God doesn't require Christians to obey Him, we can live however we want)³

1 Tim. 3:14-15 states that the church is called to proclaim and guard the truth, yet Scripture also calls us to avoid useless arguments and to present the truth in a winsome way (see Col. 4:6 and 1 Pet. 3:13-17). We fight false gospels through prayer (Col. 4:3 and 2 Thess. 3:1) and proclaiming the true gospel (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

2. The church should be offering the gospel to all different kinds of people, just as it was in Acts 2. Do you struggle to offer the gospel to any particular group or kind of person? How can we as a group help you repent of this?
3. What are some characteristics of Jesus that make you want to tell others about Him?
4. How does the role you have in our church help the church continue to proclaim Jesus?

Leader help: If anyone in your group feels as if their role is useless or insignificant, 1 Cor. 12 offers encouragement.

Additionally, we all "proclaim Jesus" when we take part in communion:

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

So worshiping with the church is another way we all proclaim Jesus.

³ A good resource on false teaching is "A Field Guide on False Teaching" available from ligonier.org here: <https://www.ligonier.org/store/a-field-guide-on-false-teaching-paperback>

PRAYER

Thank God for the person or people who proclaimed Jesus to you.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Ask God to ensure that you, your group, and your church remain faithful to the true gospel.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Acts 11:23

Ask God to help you be a part of Jesus being proclaimed all over the world, and to spread the gospel where the gospel is met with resistance, violence, and rejection.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 2 Thessalonians 3:1

Believed & Taken Up

1 TIMOTHY 3:16

SUMMARY

As soon as there were disciples, there was disappointment, discouragement, and loss as followers of Jesus experienced God's mysterious providence. The Apostle Paul summarizes his own experiences as a disciple in his letter to the Corinthians:

"Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea [...] in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea..." (2 Cor. 11:24-26).

Yet in the midst of this and all kinds of other suffering, the mission given by Jesus is and will be *successful*. Jesus wins. No barriers, borders, governments, persecutors, or the devil himself will be able to stop the spread of God's glory and true joy through the proclamation of the gospel. As crazy as the news sounds, as hard as life can be, and as fierce as the opposition may get, Jesus has been and will continue to be *believed*.

Both trouble and success were promised those who follow Him:

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Christian, remember this Christmas that your troubles, and all evils around you, have an expiration date: *"This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith"* (1 John 5:4).

GROUP INTRO

Take some time to pray for Christians around the world suffering from persecution:

- That their faith would be strengthened
- That King Jesus would be trusted
- That freedom to worship Christ would be granted
- That deliverance from evil would happen

TEXT

1. Paul tells us that Jesus was “believed on” in the world. What does it mean to “believe on” or “believe in” Jesus?

Leader help: The word means trusting Jesus. To believe on/in Jesus is to accept what He has said (as recorded in Scripture) as completely true and to trust that His life, death, and resurrection were enough for salvation.

2. What event is being referenced by the words “taken up in glory” and why is this event significant?

Leader help: This is a reference to the ascension/exaltation of Jesus. When Jesus ascended (Acts 1:9) it wasn't a ride into the clouds, but a fulfillment of Old Testament passages like Psalm 110:1. Jesus now reigns and rules from heaven as the exalted, victorious King in true human flesh.

Here's why the ascension matters:

- *Because He accomplished redemption and reigns now, we will one day rule the new creation with Jesus (see 1 Cor. 6:3; 2 Tim. 2:11-13; Rev. 3:21)*
- *Because Jesus ascended into heaven, true humanity is united again to God, and we will one day be physically in God's presence*

Continued on next page

- *Jesus is our all-powerful Advocate who ministers from the throne of grace for our good*
- *The ascension is foreshadowed or prophesied about in several Old Testament events, and is therefore another Old Testament promise that Jesus fulfills*

3. Paul introduced this poetic section of his letter by calling it “the mystery of godliness.” How does engaging with the truths of Jesus that this hymn celebrates help Christians live godly lives?

Leader help: As we recognize that our acceptance and sinless eternity with God was permanently secured by Jesus and that we are not alone in trusting Him, we are gradually freed from the power of sin and the pull of the devil’s temptations. The Spirit, over time, presses these truths deeper into the core of our being and transforms us with the reality of God’s grace.

APPLICATION

1. Why do we as human beings struggle to trust Jesus or be comforted by His promises and presence?
2. Why do you, specifically, struggle to trust Jesus and His reigning and ruling of the world?

Leader help: Some people may not recognize their own distrust in Jesus, but we can look for signs of distrust in our lives by paying attention to our thoughts, reactions, emotions, or ways of coping when difficulties, suffering, or loss enter our stories.

3. What brings you the most joy as you think about Jesus resurrecting you and giving you a new body in the new creation?
4. Who will you tell about Jesus this week and when?

PRAYER

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by adopting and expounding upon these words from Psalm 150:

1

Praise the Lord!

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty heavens!

2

Praise him for his mighty deeds;

praise him according to his excellent greatness!

6

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

Everything Created by God is Good

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

INTRO

This week we encourage you to use this Discipleship Guide as a group prayer guide for 2023.

THE TEXT EXPLAINED

If the devil wanted to teach in your church, what do you think his lesson would be?

In this passage, Paul reminds Timothy of the activity the devil has been engaged in for thousands of years: lying. And some of his worst lies are those that paint God as a ruthless leech, a joy-destroying taker. Because the devil is active in the world, we have to expect - and know how to guard against - this kind of bad theology. What the world wants to label as *irrelevant doctrinal differences* Scripture describes as the handiwork of the evil one. Bad theology breeds destruction and, if accepted, eternal death.

The lie described in this passage could be summed up like this: *"You're commanded to abstain from good food and abstain from sex and marriage."* This level of legalism isn't hard to imagine. These liars, motivated by demons, were painting a picture of God that could make the most devoted disciple ask, "Is God good?"

The harm here is in *requiring* a denial of what God Himself labeled as "good". This is the same trick the devil has used since Eden (see Gen. 3:1-5). Contrary to this deception, will you receive what God called good, and enjoy it as you praise Him?

PRAYER

Pray for Personal and Corporate Devotion to God's Word

Paul says that people left Christianity by devoting themselves to lies. This is a very real temptation for us. Pray that you and your church would be devoted to God and His Word instead.

Pray for Faithfulness to God

The power of the devil's lies is his offer of something that sounds desirable. It's unlikely that these false teachers simply said "Don't eat good food or have sex." It's probable that they held out the demonic offer of something (temporarily) pleasurable. What's held out to us today if we'll only sacrifice our faithfulness to Jesus?

Pray for Protection from Deception and Deceivers

God guards His people, and one of the means He uses to guard us is the church. Pray that Living Stones Churches would be a safe place for all who come - a place where lies are rejected, deception isn't practiced, and manipulation is discerned and repented of.

Praise God for His Goodness and His Good Gifts

God is a giver. John 17 is just one example that shows how giving God truly is (try underlining how many times Jesus mentions "give", "giving", or "gave").

Spend time thanking God. Pray that the Spirit would help you be more aware of God's goodness and His gifts in 2023.