

THE CHURCH

Irrelevant, Dangerous, or Necessary?

1 & 2 Timothy Discipleship Guide



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Series Introduction

With each passing day we are given more bad news in our complex and chaotic world. Information that used to take weeks or months to reach us is available in an instant, and we barely have time to catch our breath before we're alerted again. Our attention is diverted, drawn, sold, and bought on a global scale, and we're overwhelmed not just by what's out there in the external world but by our response to it all.

So where does the church fit in all of this? Is the church irrelevant? Is it dangerous? Or is the church, with all of its blemishes, shortfalls, and failures, the necessary and beautiful epicenter of God's activity in the world?

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a regular man on an irregular mission wrote two letters describing the church as "the household of God", "the church of the living God", and "a pillar and buttress of the truth". That man was the Apostle Paul, and his letters to Timothy stand today as two explorations of the necessity of the church.

As we study 1 and 2 Timothy, our prayer is that God will awaken you to the beauty and necessity of His family, the church, and that the gospel will motivate you to help this family be as helpful, healthy, and holy as God desires, because the church is the irreplaceable focus *of* and vehicle *for* God's redemption. The church is where God gathers His beloved children to love, nurture, instruct, discipline, and give refuge. The church is where the true gospel is held high, protected, and passed on. In the church, we find those whom the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit redeemed from sin and death: undeserving sinners who are made new and adopted as God's kids.

Art Explanations

1 & 2 Timothy are two letters sent by the Apostle Paul to his protege Timothy, a young church leader assigned to help the church in Ephesus grow in health and holiness.

These letters were meant to be read to the entire church because they contain God's cross-cultural instructions related to the structure, leadership, and organization of the church, which is God's household.

The art contains three main stamp images that each represent a different assessment of the church in our culture: irrelevant, dangerous, or necessary.

IRRELEVANT



The image of a phone book stands as a representative of something that is considered irrelevant.

The phones represent Paul's emphasis on what we speak and how we should speak.

"67" represents a date suggested by some scholars for the writing of 2 Timothy. 67 AD is roughly 30 years after Jesus' resurrection.

DANGEROUS



The imagery here is of a wolf along with warning signs and money. Some outside of the church may view the church as a predatory, dangerous institution only out for money and power.

For believers, the wolf represents the dangers of false teaching and false teachers, who are called wolves by Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

“1/2” represents 1 & 2 Timothy.

NECESSARY



The imagery here is of a heart, which represents every person's need for a working biological heart and a new heart, which is God's gift to us in salvation. This new heart comes through the proclamation of the gospel, represented by the open book.

“33” represents the traditional year of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, and the continuing of the mission of the church after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Background on 1 & 2 Timothy

Paul wrote two letters to a young leader named Timothy who was helping a church in one of the ancient world's largest cities: Ephesus.

One of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World" - the Temple of Artemis (or "Diana") - was in Ephesus. This fact gives us a peek into the city's spiritual climate in Timothy's time: the worship of a false god like Artemis wasn't just a theological issue for Ephesus; the worship of Artemis brought business to the seaport community.

But when Paul proclaimed the gospel in Ephesus, it had a negative economic impact, because "no Artemis worship" = "no Artemis merch sales" (read about it in Acts 19:21-40).

Nevertheless, a church was planted and Paul eventually sent Timothy there to help bring back good doctrine and renewed passion for holiness and worship. He then wrote to Timothy to lay out how Christian churches ought to be organized and how Christians, based on the gospel, should behave, for the glory of God and His Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

3 Steps for Bible Interpretation

1. Observe the Text¹

This is the key step in interpreting the Bible, yet it's the one we most often skip. Instead of trying to immediately interpret the passage, observe it.

Here are some questions you can ask while observing/reading the Bible:

- What are repeated words or ideas?
- Who is writing? Who is talking?
- Where is this passage taking place?
- Are there contrasts? Comparisons? Lists?
- What figures of speech are present?
- What verbs are used? Are the actions past, present, or future?
- Are there quotes from other parts of the Bible? Where are these quotes from?
- Are there words that indicate a mood, tone, or emotion?
- Are there any linking words such as "but", "therefore", "because", etc.?
- What are the roles and actions of God in this passage? What about the roles and actions of people?

¹ Portions of this section are adapted from Matt Smethurst's article, "How to Study Your Bible in 2020", www.thegospelcoalition.org

2. Investigate the Context of the Passage

Here are some questions you can ask while investigating the Bible passage:

- Does the surrounding context clarify any confusing words or phrases?
 - *It's best to examine the "nearest" context—other verses in the same chapter or other chapters in the same book—before consulting "farther" passages or outside resources.*
- How would I write this passage in my own words?
- Why did the biblical author write this particular passage?
- Why did the author feel it necessary to include this passage?
- Is my interpretation consistent with what I noticed in the observation stage, or have I made leaps based on prior assumptions?
- Do other passages of Scripture help me clarify or expand upon my interpretation?
 - *Let clearer Bible passages help you understand less clear Bible passages*
- Where does this passage fall in the unfolding history of the Bible?
- How does it fit within the Bible's story as a whole?

3. Application

Here are some questions you can ask while trying to apply the Bible passage to your own life or to others:

- What's something I learned about God? (His character, His plan, His priorities, His promises)
- What's something I learned about myself? My neighbor? The world?
- What's the sinful condition on display in this passage?
- What aspect of human sin or brokenness is most obvious?
- What aspect of God's grace is most obvious?
- How does the gospel - the news of what God accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to reconcile sinners to Himself - affect my understanding of this passage?
- How do I need to change my thinking or living based on what I've learned?
- How should I be praying in light of this passage?
- Is there an encouragement or promise here that I need to meditate on?
- What implications does this passage have for the way I engage my unbelieving friends?
- How does this passage apply to my brothers and sisters in Christ? How does it speak to our life together as a church?

Week 1

TRAINING & PRACTICE

1 TIMOTHY 4:6-16

Note to Leaders:

Some weeks in the Discipleship Guide for this series contain multiple Text and Application questions. Please do not feel pressured to rigidly follow this outline or answer every question. Ask the Spirit to lead you as you facilitate the discussions in your group.

Here are 6 questions you can ask of any passage in 1 and 2 Timothy:

1. What is the context of the original audience (i.e. where are they, what difficulties might they have been experiencing, what relationship did they have with the author)?
2. Why did this matter to the original audience?
3. What are some similarities and differences between us and the original audience?
4. What is the text calling us to be, do, or know?
5. What does this passage say about God?
6. How does this passage point us to Jesus?

MAIN POINT

True, Jesus-focused doctrine is enough to mature us into godly, active servants of Jesus. Our maturing, like Timothy's own maturing, takes intentionality on our part, so we - *together as the household of God* - must give attention and effort to learning, trusting, and applying all that Scripture reveals to us.

GROUP INTRO

What kind of "spiritual exercise" do you find easiest - prayer, evangelism, Bible study, fasting, fellowship, etc.? Why is that easy for you?

TEXT

1. Take some time to simply read and observe the passage, doing your best to notice any action words. What action words does Paul use?

Leader help: We want to help one another slow down and observe the Bible before trying to interpret it.

Significant action words: put, followed, train, toil, strive, set, believe, command, teach, devote, reading, practice, immerse, keep, persist.

2. What do these actions words tell us about following Jesus?

*Leader help: Words like “followed, train, strive, devote, persist” show us that following Jesus takes **communal effort**. As we saw in 1 Tim. 3:14-16, the church’s effort is empowered by the gospel. Our godliness comes from our relationship with God.*

3. Where does Paul tell Timothy to set his attention and effort? Why?

Leader help: Good, biblical doctrine and godly conduct - these matter both for our present lives and for eternity with God, and they bring health to the church that is far more valuable than simple physical fitness. Timothy’s commitment to these things will also help him and the Ephesian Christians persevere in their faith (this is what Paul means in verse 16).

4. In verse 6, Paul tells Timothy to keep presenting or teaching “these things” to his brothers and sisters in the church. What are “these things” and why are they so important for Christians?

Leader help: Most scholars think Paul is referring to everything he has written to Timothy in chapters 1-4 so far. Paul has essentially been describing what good, biblical doctrine, healthy church organization, and the true gospel all look like, with 1 Timothy 3:14-16 being the central highlight.

This is a good opportunity to recap and review what has been learned so far in 1 Timothy.

APPLICATION

1. This passage is a great reality check for all of us
 - following Jesus takes serious, Spirit-empowered effort. What promises do you see in this passage that could help us continue to put in our own effort?

Leader help: If you have difficulty finding some promises, see the following verses -

Verse 8 - "the life to come"; this world is not all that there is and if we trust Jesus, following after Him in faith and obedience, we can look forward to eternity in a new creation.

Verse 10 - "we have our hope set on the living God"; God is not dead or distant, He is living, active, and attentive. He sees our difficulties and has compassion on us and will one day save us from the presence of sin and evil.

Verse 16 - "for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers"; Paul doesn't mean our actions reconcile sinners to God, he means that putting in effort to understand, apply, and share biblical doctrine is worth it because it helps us persevere in our faith.

Verse 8 - "godliness...holds promise for the present life..."; our relationship with God and the effort it takes to follow Jesus is very beneficial for the here and now. We can be freed from crippling shame or the desire for human approval as we grow in our knowledge of Jesus and the gospel.

2. What biblical truths about Jesus need more of your attention, trust, or living out? For example - if you're someone who has a high view of God's holiness and majesty, maybe you need to spend a few weeks studying the incarnation of Jesus and trusting His nearness.
3. In America we sometimes put too much separation between our spiritual lives and our day-to-day, physical lives. How can you put God's promises and commands into practice in your day-to-day life? How can we as a group help you with this?

PRAYER

Praise Jesus for living out the perfect godliness that none of us can.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Philippians 2:5-8

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one specific truth about God that you need to spend more time and effort understanding and trusting.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 16:7-8

Confess to God your own areas of laziness and apathy and ask Him to give you new passion for Him.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 1 Thess. 5:12-14

Week 2

FOR ALL GENERATIONS

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-16

MAIN POINT

The church is not a place you go or an event you join but a family brought together by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God wants us to tangibly care for one another, especially those amongst us who are vulnerable.

A church that is a community of honor, care, and generosity for all generations is a church that glorifies God, who is "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows" (Ps. 68:5).

GROUP INTRO

Has someone in the church ever cared for you as if you were their family? What sticks out to you from that experience?

TEXT

1. Context is key to understanding and applying the Bible. Using a study Bible or Bible commentary, describe some differences between how the elderly and vulnerable would have been cared for in ancient Ephesus and how they're cared for today.

Leader help: In Ephesus there would not have been protective nets like retirement plans, savings accounts, or nursing homes, so Paul's instructions in this passage would have been more obviously important. Some today may not know that the church must apply Paul's teaching here and care for those who are truly widows. Caring for widows was the first task of Deacons in the early church (Acts 6:1).

2. Read verses 1-2. How is the church presented or described in these instructions? What makes the church different from other organizations or clubs you can join?

Leader help: The church isn't just described as a family, it actually is God's family. Nobody simply chooses to become a member of God's family, God adopts His children by grace through faith in Jesus.

3. In verse 4, Paul says that the Christian children of widows can *please God* by caring for their vulnerable family member. What does this tell us about God's character?

Leader help: This shows He's attentive and gracious, and especially protective of those who are vulnerable in society.

4. Read verse 8. How does refusal to care for a widowed family member show someone's denial of the Christian faith?

Leader help: Genuine faith has outward evidence that looks like obeying God.

James 1:27 tells us that true Christianity includes caring for the most vulnerable amongst us: orphans and widows. If we refuse to do good to our own family members who are widows, we're showing that we don't actually share God's concerns, a sign that we're not actually born again (see also 1 Peter 1:22-23 and Jesus's words about widows in Mark 12:40).

5. Why do you think Paul includes official qualifications for widows in verses 9-10?

Leader help: In order for the church to remain a community of honor and generosity there has to be clear leadership and organization. These qualifications provide the church with clarity and wisdom so that those who truly need help are helped.

APPLICATION

1. Are you someone who has opened up to the church like they are your family? If yes, what led you to do this? If *no*, do you know what is stopping you?
2. Throughout this passage, Paul is assuming that the Christians in Ephesus *know and care for* the vulnerable among us. How can our honor, care, and generosity toward the vulnerable show God's character to the world?
3. From this passage we see that *God cares about our care* for widows. This month, how can we as a group offer family-like care for someone in our church who is truly a widow?

PRAYER

Take time to praise God for His care.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Matthew 6:26

Pray that our church would be a caring family.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Acts 2:44-47

Pray for widows, that God would give them protection, strengthen their hope, and bless them with joy.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 68:4-6

Week 3

WITHOUT PARTIALITY

1 TIMOTHY 5:17-25

MAIN POINT

God takes the health and holiness of His family seriously, including the health and holiness of elders.

The Lord wants faithful elders to be honored, including the honor of paying those elders who work hard to teach the Bible. And He wants those elders who are found guilty of sin to be rebuked in the presence of all.

All of this is to be done without sinful bias because partiality has no place in the family of God.

GROUP INTRO

Who in your life has helped you to better understand and apply the Bible? What has been the impact of that person's help?

TEXT

1. According to these verses, what are elders responsible for doing in the church?

Leader help: Elders rule or direct & guide the church; elders preach and teach; elders carefully and patiently develop and train future elders (Paul hints at this in verse 22); elders do their best to resist and avoid joining in the sins of others.

2. How does God want the church to treat elders?
Why?

Leader help: God wants us to honor elders with respect and with pay, as well as avoid partiality (or having a bias against/for certain elders). Respecting elders involves trusting and encouraging them, praying for them (especially since they sometimes face false accusations), and obeying them as long as they're following Scripture.

3. Paul wants the church to operate based on the Bible's teaching. Compare Paul's instructions in this passage to these other Bible passages, then answer the question:

1. Hebrews 13:17
2. Deuteronomy 25:4
3. Luke 10:7
4. Deuteronomy 19:15

- Why is it important that Paul's instructions here are derived from or consistent with the rest of the Bible?

Leader help: It's through His trustworthy, unchanging Word that God provides us with wisdom, power, joy and hope - instructions from the all-knowing, eternal God are always going to be better and safer than man-made strategies.

4. How is rebuking sinning elders in the presence of the church helpful for the health and holiness of the church?

Leader help: There is nothing more destructive than sin. Elders who are willing to publicly rebuke fellow elders show that they trust and honor God, love their fellow elders, and love God's people. Public rebuke of sinning elders is an act of protection for the church and also a warning for anyone who may be tempted to sin or actively engaged in sin.

APPLICATION

1. How are you doing at publicly honoring your elder(s)? How can we help one another grow in this area?
2. What benefits have you seen of your elder(s) laboring in preaching and teaching?

Leader help: It may be helpful to remember together that the faithful preaching of the gospel gives the gift of eternal life, something that's worth more than all the money in the universe.

3. Our culture continues trending toward a more negative view of authority in general and pastors in particular. How can we help those around us see the goodness, safety, and necessity of pastors?

PRAYER

Thank God for your pastor(s).

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Hebrews 13:7,17

Ask God to forgive you for the times you've failed to honor your pastor(s), and ask for His help to obey Him in this area.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 1 John 2:1-2

Ask God to continue giving your pastor(s) the power and desire to live in holiness and ask Him to protect the church from unrepentant leadership.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 1 Peter 5:1-9

Week 4

SLAVES

1 TIMOTHY 6:1-2

Leader help: [Click here for an online commentary.](#)

MAIN POINT

For Paul and the early church, proclaiming the gospel was more important than trying to eliminate the sinful institution of slavery. Therefore, they encouraged Christian slaves to remember their primary identity and mission; as God's children on God's mission, they should serve well so that God is honored and the gospel can spread.

GROUP INTRO

Leader note: *read this week's intro aloud.*

This week's passage includes instructions to slaves (the word translated as "bondservants" could be translated as "slaves"). We must remember that in Paul and Timothy's time slavery was much different than the evil African slave trade. We must also remember that slavery is ultimately a product of sin. As one author writes, *"The instructions in the Old Testament and 1 Timothy that speak of slaves are addressing specific circumstances..."*

surrounding slavery at a specific time. When we understand this concept, we see that biblical instructions concerning slavery do not imply biblical approval of slavery. Slavery is not God's ultimate design."²

TEXT

1. Briefly explore God's perspective on slavery, by taking turns reading the following passages.

What do you notice?

1. 1 Timothy 1:8-10
2. Colossians 4:1
3. 1 Peter 2:18-21
4. Exodus 21:16
5. Galatians 3:28

Leader help: Although all slavery is a product of sin, God wants those enslaved to embody a humble, submissive spirit as a way to honor Jesus and display trust in God's wrath. Additionally, in the family of God, all people - slave or free - are to be equal and valued with no favoritism or partiality.

We also see that the African slave trade was evil in God's sight - 1 Timothy 1:10 calls enslavers "ungodly" and "unholy" and Exodus 21:16 shows God's hatred of kidnapping, which was a central component of the African slave trade.

² David Platt, Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, page 102.

2. According to this and other Bible passages, what must be the higher priority for Christians: individual freedom or God's honor? How do we know?

Leader help: We know from this and 1 Peter 2:18-21 that God comes first, even before our own personal freedom and comfort. Here we see Paul taking the opportunity to tell slaves not to pursue freedom or get respect, but to put God first by honoring their masters.

3. Let's put ourselves in Paul and Timothy's shoes: Christianity was a new faith in the Roman Empire and it wasn't respected or officially recognized by the government. So how would revolt or disrespect by bondservants bring dishonor to God and hinder the spread of the gospel?

Leader help: This kind of behavior would have made Jesus appear to be someone who didn't inspire humility, love, and forgiveness but disrespect and revolution. It would make it difficult for Christians to befriend others, which would also impact the spread of the gospel. Paul earlier in this letter said that we should pursue quiet and humble lives so that the gospel can spread (1 Tim. 2:1-6).

4. According to verse 2, what should motivate a Christian bondservant's hard work and humility for a Christian master?

Leader help: The fact that they both belong to God's family. If God loved these masters enough to save them, then the bondservants must love them enough to work hard and humbly.

It's worth noting that this verse may have also been used by God to convince Christian masters to abandon slavery altogether.

APPLICATION

1. In your own life, what are some actions or attitudes you struggle with that might bring dishonor to God's name or negatively effect your ability to evangelize?
2. Can you think of a time when humility, hard work, and respect might open up an opportunity for you to talk about Jesus? How can you step into that opportunity?
3. Do you value your own individual freedoms more than the honor of God and the spread of the gospel? How would you know whether or not you do - what kind of actions or attitudes would you look for?

4. How can we help one another put God's honor and the gospel before our own preferences and comfort?

PRAYER

Thank God for His grace toward you even though you deserve the same condemnation as every slaveholder.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Romans 3:9-18

Thank God for using His Word to inspire Christians throughout history to work toward abolishing slavery (Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Hannah More, William Wilberforce).

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Confess to God the ways your actions and attitudes have dishonored Him or hindered the spread of the gospel.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Romans 2:23-24

Week 5

THE SECRET TO BEING CONTENT

1 TIMOTHY 6:3-10

MAIN POINT

Leaving Jesus and good doctrine leads to destruction, not spiritual health. Likewise, craving wealth is jumping into a painful, evil, and destructive trap. Therefore, anyone who teaches you to look outside of Jesus and His Word, and anyone who emphasizes wealth, should be rejected.

In contrast, the way to true health and wealth is trust in Jesus and contentment in what God gives. This trust in Jesus brings more wealth than we could ever get because it comes with the promise of "great gain".

GROUP INTRO

If you're a Christian, what have you gained by following Jesus? This could be something emotional, relational, spiritual, or physical.

TEXT

1. Read 1 Timothy 6:3, then read 1 Timothy 1:3. Throughout this letter Paul has shown the church in Ephesus good doctrine/teaching - what are some examples from 1 Timothy of this good doctrine/teaching?

Leader help: Jesus is the only Savior and Lord (1:1-2); Jesus came to save sinners (1:15); There is only one God (1:17); We need a mediator between us and God and Jesus is the only Mediator (2:5); Only qualified men can be pastors/elders (3:1-7); Jesus is saving all kinds of people globally (4:10); The church is God's and we serve His purposes (3:14-15).

2. What would happen to the church in Ephesus - and our church today - if someone who "has an unhealthy craving for controversy" (verse 4) was tolerated or allowed to lead?

Leader help: There would be relational destruction in the church - quarreling, envy, dissension, slander, etc. (verses 4-5). Since our relationships are so important to us, this would make life in the church miserable, and therefore make the mission of the church ineffective.

3. Why does Paul say it's best to resist and reject a desire for wealth?

Leader help: Desiring wealth is a trap, and this desire leads to all kinds of destruction, even sometimes being the very thing that leads people away from Jesus (see Matthew 6:24). Craving wealth is also foolish and unnecessary since trusting Jesus brings great gain.

4. What does Paul mean when he says that false teachers believe "godliness is a means of gain" (verse 5)?

Leader help: Paul is describing how the false teachers in Ephesus looked like followers of Jesus but were actually doing "ministry" for money. This still happens today with false teachers like Kenneth Copeland, Joel Osteen, Paula White, Bill Johnson, and Benny Hinn.

APPLICATION

1. Do you find yourself more often content in what God has given or wanting more/wanting something else/wanting something better? Why?
2. Are there any doctrines/teachings in 1 Timothy that you personally doubt, don't understand, or emotionally wrestle with? How does God invite us to deal with such doubt, misunderstanding, or internal conflict?

3. What are some warning signs that we're discontent or craving more money/possessions? How can we humbly and lovingly help one another repent and run from this trap when we notice it?

Leader help: Jesus's reminder in Matthew 7:3 is a wise place to start.

PRAYER

Confess and repent of your materialism and discontentment.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Matthew 6:19-24

Praise Father, Son, and Spirit for any specific doctrines/teachings in 1 Timothy that have helped or encouraged you.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 119:9-11

Ask God for His help to not only be content but to be someone who helps others, including unbelievers, toward contentment in Jesus.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Philippians 4:19-20

Week 6

UNTIL THE END

1 TIMOTHY 6:11-21

MAIN POINT

Fighting for the church to be healthy is worth it because Jesus will one day return, fulfilling all of God's promises. Until that day, our hope must remain grounded in God, who is eternal, for everything else is fleeting and uncertain.

GROUP INTRO

In this week's passage, Paul states that God "provides us with everything to enjoy."

In your own life, what has God provided that you really enjoy? How can your enjoyment of those things help you grow in gratitude toward God?

TEXT

1. Read 1 Timothy 6:11. When Paul says, "flee these things", what "things" is he referring to? Remember: Community Group is a safe place to get the answers wrong!

Leader help: Paul is likely referring to the false teaching, craving for conflict, desire for wealth, and love of money from 1 Timothy 6:3-10.

2. What truths about God do you see in this passage? How do you think these truths would have helped Timothy as he tried to help the church in Ephesus?

Leader help: God is an immortal, sovereign, holy giver of good gifts and provider for His people. Knowing this, Timothy would likely be strengthened to have hard conversations, preach the truth, and be assured of the hope of eternal life in perfection.

3. Christians live based on what Jesus *did* in the past and what Jesus *will* do in the future. From this passage and other Bible passages, what has Jesus already done? What will Jesus do in the future?

Leader help: Jesus became a man and lived a life faithful to God. Even when He could have defended Himself in the presence of Pontius Pilate, Jesus allowed Himself to instead be condemned and killed in our place. Jesus also resurrected from the dead - we know this because Paul reminds us that Jesus will one day physically return to give eternal life to those who trust Him, and wrath to those who deny Him. See also 2 Peter 3:8-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:3-10.

APPLICATION

1. Notice how Paul describes the biblical God: immortal, sovereign, invisible, and generous in His giving and blessing (verses 13, 17). When you think of God, do you have these characteristics in mind? Why or why not?
2. Look at the characteristics in verse 11. Do you feel burdened or encouraged knowing God wants you to pursue these? How can we pursue these characteristics without growing discouraged, burdened, or self-righteous?

Leader help: Paul's strategy is to first remind Timothy of his identity: "man of God". We can pursue these characteristics joyfully and freely when we remember that we're not identified by our sin, failures, or shortcomings, but by God's unchanging love for us. We're new and we can say "yes" to these things, asking the Spirit for help. Additionally, Paul "charges" Timothy to this new life by reminding him that God is always present and is a giver (see verse 13).

3. Why will the "appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" be an incredible day for those who trust Him? If you're a Christian, what do you look forward to about that day? If you're not a Christian, what questions do you have about Jesus or His return?

PRAYER

Confess your doubts about God's goodness. Ask Him to help you know how good He truly is.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Luke 15:3-7

Thank God that we are declared righteous in His sight by faith alone, not by how good we are at pursuing righteousness and godliness.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Luke 18:9-14

Ask God to fuel your hope in the return of Jesus.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Revelation 22:20-21



Background on 2 Timothy

Paul wrote the two letters we know as 1 and 2 Timothy to his friend and “child in the faith” Timothy and the churches he was helping in one of the ancient world’s largest cities: Ephesus.

One of the “Seven Wonders of the Ancient World” - the Temple of Artemis (or *Diana*) - was in Ephesus. This fact gives us a peek into the city’s spiritual climate in Timothy’s time: the worship of a false god like Artemis wasn’t just a theological issue for Ephesus, such worship brought money to the seaport community. So when Paul proclaimed the gospel in Ephesus, and it had a negative economic impact (because “no Artemis worship” = “no Artemis merch sales”; read about it in Acts 19:21-40), the gospel and those proclaiming it were likely labeled as “unwelcome”.

Nevertheless, a church was planted, which Timothy was then sent to help. This second letter has one dominant emphasis: in the face of all the adversity he’s facing, Paul wants his dear friend to *endure*. And surprisingly, Paul is writing about endurance from prison, knowing that his own death is rapidly approaching.

Week 7

SINCERE FAITH

2 TIMOTHY 1:1-7

MAIN POINT

Sincere faith in Jesus is a gracious gift from God that strongly binds us to others who trust Jesus. Therefore, we can take bold steps for God, knowing we're not doing so without Him and His people.

GROUP INTRO

In this passage, Paul highlights the fact that his friend Timothy is rooted in his faith because he grew up in an environment that valued and honored God.

In your life, what habits, traditions, or routines - whether in your family, the church or somewhere else - help you value and honor God?

TEXT

1. Read the passage. We can grow used to biblical words like “grace” and “mercy”, so slowly read Paul’s greeting: *“Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Through faith in Jesus:

- We have God’s undeserved goodness (grace)
- We have God’s compassion in our need (mercy)
- We have complete reconciliation with God (peace)
- God is our attentive, loving Father
- We belong to Jesus’s people, and He’s our Master

Which part of Paul’s greeting sticks out to you or impacts you emotionally? Why?

Read again: *“Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

2. What does Paul mean by the words “sincere faith”? Where else in the Bible can we look to understand what genuine faith is?

Leader help: One theologian defines sincere faith like this, “Saving faith is faith that not only knows and comprehends the facts about the gospel of Jesus Christ but also trusts in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone for salvation.”³

Other passages that help us understand sincere faith:

Luke 18:9-14; Romans 4:20-24; Romans 10:8-13

3. How would you describe Paul and Timothy’s relationship to one another? Why would this kind of relationship be important for both men as they follow Jesus?

Leader help: These men share a profound friendship built on the gospel. There’s trust, personal knowledge, emotional investment and sacrificial love.

This kind of “knowing and being known” is crucial because following Jesus is hard as we face spiritual attack, our own sinful desires, and a world opposed to God.

4. 2 Timothy is the last letter we have from Paul before he was executed in Rome. Knowing this, why is he highlighting Timothy’s sincere faith and reminding him what God has given him?

Leader help: Paul is basically asking Timothy to carry the gospel forward so that Jesus can be known and trusted not only in Ephesus, but across the world. And he knows this will be difficult at times.

³ J.V. Fesko, The Doctrine of Saving Faith, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/doctrine-saving-faith/>

APPLICATION

1. It takes trust in Jesus to let other Christians get to know you - the good and the bad. What do you find difficult about being known, even in your sinfulness? What are some helpful ways for us to get to know one another as we follow Jesus?
2. Timothy was taught about God in close relationships. Will you commit to telling others about Jesus this month?
 1. For those of you with a close relationship with an unbeliever: How will you introduce Jesus to one person?
 2. For those of you without a close relationship with an unbeliever: How will you pursue one person who doesn't know Jesus?
3. Where in your own discipleship do you need more courage, spiritual power, love or self-control? How or where might God be inviting you to receive that?

PRAYER

Ask God for strong, trustworthy friendships with other Christians and for the courage to be known.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer:

1 Thessalonians 3:11-12

Thank God for those in your life who told you the gospel and helped you better know God.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Ephesians 2:8-9

Ask God to save those in your life who do not have sincere faith, including those who may think they are Christians but do not show sincere trust in Jesus.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: John 17:20-21

Week 8

NO SHAME

2 TIMOTHY 1:8-18

MAIN POINT

Despite the suffering Christians can face for following Jesus, we can follow Him without shame by trusting that, through Him, the grace and power of the triune God have been freely gifted to us.

GROUP INTRO

In this passage Paul reminds Timothy of biblical truths to help Timothy keep following Jesus. In your own life, when has someone helped you follow Jesus by reminding you of truth? Why did that help you?

TEXT

1. What is “the testimony about our Lord” that’s referenced in verse 8?

Leader help: Testimony = the gospel message - Jesus the Messiah died like a criminal on a Roman cross in our place and physically resurrected from the dead. Timothy could have been tempted to be ashamed of the gospel for 2 reasons: (1) To die on a cross was a very shameful way to die and (2) The resurrection would have sounded just as unlikely then as it does today.

2. What does Paul say God has done, is doing, or will do?

Leader help: Saved from wrath (verse 9), called Paul and Timothy into ministry (verse 9), gave grace through Jesus (verse 9), abolished death and brought immortality (verse 10), appointed leaders for His church (verse 11). God also guards the gospel so that His people always have it (verse 12) and He continually empowers Christians to believe and guard the gospel message (verse 14).

3. Why does Paul say he is suffering and how does he respond to this suffering?

Leader help: Paul is suffering because a selfish Emperor was recently elected and his Netflix subscription just went up in price (NOT).

Paul is suffering because of the message he was proclaiming - the gospel. The reality of Jesus dying for sin and resurrecting as Lord confronts us with our own sinfulness, our need for salvation, our inability to save ourselves, and the worthlessness of our own righteousness - this makes proclaiming the gospel a sometimes difficult experience. Paul's response is trust in Jesus and a certainty that all of his work proclaiming the gospel and discipling others wasn't in vain.

4. How is immortality brought and death “abolished” (or “destroyed”) by the gospel?

Leader help: See 1 Corinthians 15:20-26. The gospel message is what God uses to reveal someone’s need for salvation, how God has saved them, and what kind of God He is. As the Holy Spirit causes the person to be made new, they believe this message and the person is united to Jesus and thus given the gift of immortality.

Death is God’s judgment upon all humanity for our sin. But if you believe the news about Jesus, then Jesus took death for you so that, instead of being separated from God forever, you’re united to Him forever. Death continues to be a reality for us until Jesus returns to bring the new creation, where there is no more death.

APPLICATION

1. Imagine if Jesus didn’t preserve the gospel and let it instead disappear from history. Where would you be without the gospel?
2. How do you tell the difference between suffering because you proclaimed the gospel and suffering because you aren’t respectful, humble, and gracious?

3. Paul tells Timothy (and us by extension) to “guard the gospel”. What are some modern lies about Jesus, humanity, or salvation that we need to guard against? How can we lovingly do this together?
4. In what ways does your fear of suffering or shame impact your willingness to tell others the gospel? What are some truths from this passage that God’s given you to comfort and strengthen you?

PRAYER

Admit your own fears about suffering for the gospel or ways you have resisted following Jesus and ask God to make you unashamed of the gospel.

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

Thank God for everything that this passage says He has freely given you.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Romans 5:1-6

Ask God for 1 specific opportunity to tell someone the gospel, and to help you believe the promises in this passage.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Colossians 4:3

Week 9

DISCIPLES MAKE DISCIPLES

2 TIMOTHY 2:1-7

MAIN POINT

Unlike those who deserted Paul, Timothy is exhorted to live a life of persevering discipleship by God's grace. This means putting the mission of Jesus first and believing that God will reward his hard work.

Christians today are also called to persevering discipleship, not in our own faith and power, but through humble dependence on the Lord Jesus.

GROUP INTRO

Part of this week's passage is about keeping our focus on Jesus's mission.

We all have distractions that pull our attention away from discipleship - what is your single biggest source of distraction right now?

TEXT

1. To get a better grasp of verse 1, read the verse in the following translations: **ESV** (English Standard Version), **NIV** (New International Version), and **NLT** (New Living Translation). Why would Timothy need strength and how is Timothy told to get this strength?

Leader help: Following Jesus and discipling others is difficult relational work; it can take years to see just a small amount of progress in ourselves and in others' theological understanding, character, and trust in Jesus, and we can experience frustration, hurt, or even betrayal. Timothy, like us, needed God's strength to keep discipling.

Timothy is told to get his strength through his relationship with Jesus. Through Jesus, God empowers us for His mission.

2. Why does Paul instruct Timothy to entrust doctrine to faithful men and not faithful women or faithful children?

Leader help: In this specific context, Paul is exhorting Timothy to disciple godly men who are or will be serving as elders. God wants doctrine to be authoritatively taught in the gathered church by qualified men only (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7). However, broadly speaking, all Christians are responsible for helping each other know and understand good doctrine in their local churches as they're led by qualified elders (see Colossians 3:14-16 for example).

3. Paul uses 3 metaphors in this passage to help Timothy persevere in his discipleship. What's the takeaway from the first metaphor, the soldier (verses 3-4)?

*Leader help: Soldiers in Paul's time, much like today, had to have a single-minded focus - they couldn't get distracted by anything that wasn't related to their mission. Likewise, Paul wants Timothy to have **a single-minded focus on discipleship** - seeing people know, love, and follow Jesus.*

4. What is Paul's focus in the second metaphor, the athlete (verse 5)?

*Leader help: Athletes submit themselves to training so they can win the prize, and this training takes self-discipline. Likewise, Timothy is called to have **self-discipline** as he follows Jesus and helps others follow Jesus. And just like the athlete, a heavenly reward awaits those who submit to Jesus and His training.*

5. What is Paul's focus in the third metaphor, the farmer (verse 6)?

*Leader help: Most people in Paul's time would spend a large amount of time growing and harvesting their food, which would have taken a lot of time, patience, and hard work. Likewise, Timothy should prayerfully seek **a willingness to work hard and trust God for results**.*

APPLICATION

1. One of the most spiritually destructive things in our culture is our almost limitless access to distractions (our phones, TVs, work, social media, etc.). How have you seen distractions keep you from obeying Jesus's commands such as "go...make disciples" and "love your neighbor as yourself"?
2. How might the ways you spend your time, money, and energy change if you give more attention to Jesus and His mission (discipling others, evangelizing, etc.)?
3. Why do you personally pursue distractions instead of wholeheartedly giving yourself to Jesus and His mission? What does repentance look like for you?

Leader help: Be sure to bring your group back to the reality of God's grace and the gospel. 1 John 4:10-11 reminds us that Christianity isn't about our dedication to God, but His dedication to doing good for the undeserving. God calls us back to Himself out of our distraction for our good, not to crush us or shame us.

4. God promises rewards to His people for obedience.⁴ Read Matthew 16:27. How can looking ahead to the return of Jesus and the reality of heavenly rewards help you persevere in following Jesus?

PRAYER

Admit the distractions in your life that seem to have a strong grip on you. Ask God to help you set these things aside for the better, more fulfilling life available on mission with Jesus.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Matthew 6:19-21

Thank Jesus for His unfailing obedience. Praise Him for His great love for you.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: John 10:11

Ask Jesus for the help to persevere in discipleship, even when relationships in the church are painful.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 118:5-7

⁴ A good resource on heavenly rewards can be found at <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2023/02/heavenly-rewards/>

Week 10

THE UNBOUND GOSPEL

2 TIMOTHY 2:8-13

MAIN POINT

It's easy to neglect who Jesus is, what He's done, and what He's promised. This neglect of Jesus leads to a selfish life. But a life which has Jesus and the unbound gospel as the focus is drastically different and leads to eternal glory.

GROUP INTRO

In this week's passage Paul gives Timothy powerful motivation to thrive in difficult ministry.

Share about a time in your life when someone's reminder kept you going (during a marathon, big work project, or something more serious). Why did the reminder motivate you?

TEXT

1. Paul calls Timothy to remember the gospel in verse 8. Why does Jesus's resurrection matter? Or, to ask it another way, how is Jesus's resurrection motivating or empowering?

Leader help: The resurrection shows God's power over death, the defeat of sin and the devil, and God's faithfulness to His promises; it also shows that God can sovereignly use awful evil for His purposes; the resurrection also proves God has accepted the sacrificial death of Jesus in our place, and we therefore stand before God holy and righteous.

2. Why is it significant that Jesus is "the offspring of David"?

Leader help: This shows that Jesus was truly human, so He can deal with our struggles with true compassion and empathy. It also shows that He is the true king of God's people, coming from the lineage of Israel's greatest king, David. It also shows, again, that God is always faithful to His promises.

3. How is the gospel "not bound" and how can this be an encouragement to all of God's people?

Leader help: The gospel is itself powerful and God uses the good news to bring life to spiritually dead sinners. It's not limited to any single messenger. As long as the message can be communicated, people can be saved. This should encourage all of us by proving that someone's salvation doesn't depend on a "perfect" presentation of the gospel.

4. Paul states that he endures everything for God's elect, a.k.a. those whom God freely chose for salvation. This tells us that God works through our evangelism to save unbelievers. Where else in Scripture do we see how necessary evangelism is?

Leader help: Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 1:16-17; Romans 10:9-14

5. Verses 11-13 contain both encouragement and warning. What encouragement do you see? What warning do you see?

Leader help: The encouragement is that our dying to ourselves and our continuing trust in Jesus leads us into eternity with Him, where we will reign with Him over all creation.

The warning is debated. Some believe that verses 12-13 are essentially repeating what Jesus Himself said in Matthew 10:32-33. As one pastor states it,

"These statements appear to be parallel...'If we deny Him' is parallel to 'if we are faithless,' and 'He also will deny us' is parallel to 'He remains faithful.' God is faithful not just to extend blessing to those with genuine faith but also faithful to His warnings."⁵

In other words, God is faithful to His own words, including His warnings. We must take New Testament warnings seriously. However, we must remember that our salvation, endurance, and security aren't ultimately about us, they're about God and His faithfulness. The basic warning here is to keep trusting Jesus, no matter what.

⁵ Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy, page 169.

APPLICATION

1. When do you find yourself most tempted to hide your trust in Jesus? How could this passage help you the next time you experience this temptation?
2. Jesus defeated our greatest enemy, death. What's hindering your trust in Him at this point in your life and what do you need from the rest of group?
3. What do you think God is calling you to endure right now so that someone can hear the gospel? It could be a difficult job, chaos at home, or something else.

PRAYER

Pray for God to bring one situation into your life this week where you can tell someone the gospel, and ask Him to give you all you'll need for that situation.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: John 16:7-8

Surrender your doubts, fears, and exhaustion to God, asking Him to help you accept your weakness and limitations.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Week 11

THE LORD WHO KNOWS

2 TIMOTHY 2:14-26

MAIN POINT

All Christians are given amazing purpose: pursuing holiness together and proclaiming the one true gospel. Although this is hard work, we're empowered by the Lord who knows and loves us.

GROUP INTRO

NHL coach Jim Montgomery is known for being positive and encouraging, even when he needs to correct his players.

Has there been a time recently when you unknowingly dropped the ball or just didn't do something right and someone gently corrected you? What kind of impact did their gentleness have on you?

TEXT

1. Who is the “them” referring to in verse 14 and what’s Paul asking Timothy to tell them?

Leader help: “them” = those responsible for leading and teaching, but the principle — not arguing and focusing instead on Jesus — applies to all Christians. Paul’s basically saying that, before God, Christian leaders must be exhorted to not waste time fighting and arguing over words when we have God’s Word and we’re commanded to share it.

2. Two false teachers are mentioned in verse 17. What were these and other false teachers doing in the church? How did their actions impact others in the church?

Leader help: There are references to their actions throughout this passage: they were fighting/arguing (verse 14), engaging in irreverent babble, etc. which was relationally destructive to the church.

3. Read verse 15. Why is correctly proclaiming the “word of truth” (aka, the gospel) so important for the church? What Bible passages help us see the importance of correctly proclaiming the gospel?

Leader help: The proclamation of the gospel is how God chooses to save sinners, so eternity is on the line. Not only this, but intentionally teaching false doctrine has dire, eternal consequences. See Romans 1:16-17; Romans 10:8-11; 1 Peter 1:22-25; 2 Peter 2:1-3

4. In verses 24-26 we see that Paul expected opposition to the one true gospel he proclaimed. How is he — and all Christians with him — exhorted to respond to that opposition?

Leader help: Our first response must happen before we even experience opposition - pursuing righteousness, faith, love, and peace with other Christians (verse 22). Then we keep ourselves away from foolish debates and arguments (verse 23). Then we're empowered to respond with patience and gentleness, knowing that the devil blinds unbelievers so that they can't spiritually "see" how good Jesus is. God does the saving, we do the proclaiming.

APPLICATION

1. In your own words, what is "the word of truth", aka, the gospel? Remember, Community Group is a safe place to "get it wrong" - if you struggle to explain the gospel, this is the best place to practice.

Leader help: the gospel is the good news that Jesus, God in the flesh, lived perfectly in our place, suffered and died under God's wrath for our sins, physically resurrected from the dead — defeating our sin, the devil and death — and ascended to heaven where He rules as King. Not everyone will explain the gospel in this way, but it's important for us to be able to explain that Jesus, truly human and truly God, lived perfectly, died for us, and resurrected from the dead.

2. There is no greater purpose than doing what God wants us to do, yet our passion for His work comes and goes. How would you describe your current attitude toward God and His work? How can we pray for you?
3. As you think about the gospel, what truth about God is most amazing to you?
4. Christians are commanded to flee foolish arguments and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with other Christians. What's this look like in your life? If you aren't participating what's currently stopping you?

PRAYER

Thank God for His undeserved love and for making it known that He knows you.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 139:1-6

Pray for one another, asking God to help you know how amazing and worthy He is.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 1 John 3:2-3

Admit any discouragement, distractions, or unbelief that you have about God and His work.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 32:5

Week 12

MAIN POINT

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-9

God reminds us that as false teaching and moral decay expand and increase from the time of the first Pentecost until the return of Jesus, He'll still be at work in the world to save sinners through His church.

GROUP INTRO

This week, Paul gets detailed about the kind of sins we'll keep seeing until Jesus returns. To help us study the passage with humility, we'll look at a parable.

Read Luke 18:9-14. What sticks out to you from this parable?

TEXT

1. How would the clear descriptions in verses 1-5 have helped Timothy and the church in Ephesus stick with Jesus and the one true gospel?

Leader help: Paul's descriptions are concrete reminders to Timothy and all Christians everywhere that false teaching isn't just "differences in opinions" - it's dangerous, sinful, and corrupting; lies about Jesus and what the Bible means do serious, ugly damage. Reading what the results of false teaching are would've helped the church stand firm on the gospel.

2. According to verses 1-5, instead of loving God and His Word, what will some people grow to love? How do these disordered loves show up today in our culture?

Leader help: People will love themselves, money, and pleasure.

3. What is God's solution to the moral decay described in this passage? For help, read Jude 1:17-25.

Leader help: God calls Christians to continue holding to the Bible, helping one another by remaining in honest, vulnerable, and caring community, praying, showing mercy, and trusting that Jesus will not let His sheep stumble away from Him.

4. In Paul's time there was a legend which stated that Pharaoh's magicians (who opposed Moses in Exodus 7:8-13) were named Jannes and Jambres. What are some similarities between the ministry of Moses back then and the ministry of Timothy in Ephesus?

Leader help: Moses was obeying God's word by leading God's people out of slavery and into worship. Likewise, Timothy is leading God's people out of slavery to sin through the preaching of the gospel, helping people be free in Christ, and helping the church worship God rightly. Both Moses and Timothy faced opposition to the truth of God's promises and warnings, and they faced opposition to God's power.

APPLICATION

1. When you see or experience the kind of sin described in this passage, how do you typically react? What's a Jesus-honoring reaction look like?
2. Instead of cowering, venting rage, or closing off from the world, how does Jesus want us to interact with the sinful world around us?
3. What are some ways that this kind of evil has personally impacted you? How can Community Group step in to help you?

PRAYER

Confess your own sin and evil to God, especially any sin the Holy Spirit may have revealed to you through this passage.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Ephesians 5:8

Ask God to embolden, encourage, and empower you and your church to stand firm in the gospel and avoid evil.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 1 Corinthians 9:25

Admit to Jesus how sin has harmed you or how your sin has harmed the church and ask Him to bring forgiveness, healing, and holiness.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Deuteronomy 32:39

Week 13

"GOD-BREATHED"

MAIN POINT

2 TIMOTHY 3:10-17

Christianity, far from being a solo adventure, involves knowing and being known by leaders who follow Jesus. Godly character and dependence upon God's Word are the evidence that a leader follows Jesus.

GROUP INTRO

Share about a time in your life when a leader (a teacher, parent, pastor, etc.) didn't simply pass on information but lovingly got involved in your life. How did this shape you?

TEXT

1. Aside from godly character, what separates Paul and Timothy from the people mentioned in verses 2-5?

Leader help: Paul has been transformed by Jesus, who gave him the desire to live a godly life, and Timothy was introduced to Jesus in his childhood, being shown from Scripture who God is. But those who don't trust Jesus are enslaved to their love of self, money, and pleasure. And Paul and Timothy don't just know the Bible, they depend upon it and have been transformed by it.

2. What sections of this passage show that Paul and Timothy knew each other well? What does this tell us about Christian discipleship?

Leader help: Timothy knew Paul's character by witnessing Paul's responses to his suffering. And Paul knew Timothy's story - what his childhood was like, who played a key role in his life, how he came to know Jesus. This tells us that trusting, honest relationships are central to Christian discipleship, and that our discipleship isn't just about information or surface-level fellowship.

3. Why, according to this passage, can we depend upon Scripture?

Leader help: Scripture is "breathed out by God" and is Jesus-centered (Paul regularly used the Old Testament to preach about Jesus - see Acts 26:22-23 for example).

The basic message of Scripture is that God saves sinners through His Son Jesus. This fact reveals that God is trustworthy, holy, and gracious. And the fact that all Scripture is "breathed out by God" basically means that God, by the Holy Spirit, worked through the human authors of the Bible to give us all that we need to know Him through His Son. 2 Peter 1:20-21 also shows us why we can trust Scripture, and 2 Peter 3:16 shows us that the apostle Peter, a leader commissioned and sent by Jesus Himself, considered Paul's writings authoritative Scripture.

4. What are some truths about God that we learn from this section of 2 Timothy? How would these truths have helped Timothy continue to depend on God?

Leader help:

1. *God is a powerful, gracious rescuer (verse 11)*
2. *God gives us safe relationships in His church for our good (verses 10, 14-15)*
3. *God is present and He communicates with us through His Word (verses 15-16)*
4. *God is interested in giving us the joy that comes from living righteously (verse 16)*
5. *God empowers us to obey Him (verse 17)*

APPLICATION

1. In this passage we're shown what it looks like to follow Jesus together: sharing in the highs and lows of life. What makes finding or maintaining this kind of trusting relationship difficult for you? How does God help us with our mistrust?
2. According to verse 12, following Jesus closely will inevitably bring pain into our lives. Where can we go to receive help to persevere through this pain?

Leader help: There are several places we can go - God Himself (in prayer), Scripture (to remind us that pain isn't permanent), safe relationships in the church, godly leaders.

3. This passage tells us that God's Word does amazing things *for* us and *to* us. Describe the grace you have experienced in your own when hearing, reading, or studying the Bible.

PRAYER

Thank God for the faithful leaders in your life who have helped you follow Jesus.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Acts 20:28

Worship God for wanting to communicate personally with you, and for giving you the Bible.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 2 Peter 1:3-4

Admit any mistrust, fear, or shame that hinders your relationships with other Christians, and ask God to help you know His love at an even deeper level.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 56:3-4

Week 14

"HOW TO END WELL"

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-8

MAIN POINT

We all can hold to, hope in, and make known the Word of God, even as false teaching spreads, because Jesus is present with us now and will one day return.

GROUP INTRO

Who in group has completed something that took lots of effort over a period of time? Tell us about your experience and what you learned about God and yourself through that process.

TEXT

1. Take some time to look back at 2 Timothy 3:14-17 - how is the Word described? What is Timothy now instructed to do with the Word in 2 Timothy 4:1-2?

Leader help: The Word is described as "sacred writings", "Scripture", "breathed out by God", and "profitable". Timothy is commanded to always be ready to preach (meaning "herald" or "declare") and teach (explaining what you declare) the Word to others with patience, realizing growth in holiness takes a long time! He is also to reprove, rebuke, and exhort/encourage.

2. Why would it be destructive to seek and find teachers who basically tell us what we want to hear rather than submitting to leaders who teach us the Word?

Leader help: Even after being saved by Jesus and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, our sinful nature (or "flesh") is something we must battle against - and our flesh would love to stop being challenged, corrected, rebuked, etc. by the Bible. But if we give into the flesh, we'll only bring destruction to ourselves and those we love (see Galatians 6:8; Romans 6:12-14). The Bible is the living and active Word of God, and God uses it to transform, renew, and shape us (see Romans 1:16-17; Hebrews 4:12).

3. Picture an ancient Greek athlete finally finishing a difficult race and receiving a crown that tells the world they've won. That's the picture Paul has in mind when he mentions the "crown of righteousness." Who receives the "crown of righteousness"? Why will they receive it?

Leader help: Every genuine Christian will receive this crown by faith alone in Jesus alone. Those who genuinely look forward to and will celebrate the return of Jesus are those who have been saved by Him. We won't receive it because we're strong, faithful, obedient, or good, but because Jesus is strong, faithful, obedient and good. As one author writes, "A sure evidence of saving faith is having your heart set on Christ."

4. If someone believed that only pastors or church leaders should tell others the good news of Jesus, how would you respond? What are some Bible passages that might bring clarity to this?

Leader help: The apostle Peter reminds us that all Christians are considered God's "priesthood" - and it was the job of every priest to help people know, love, and follow God. The same is true for us if we've trusted in Jesus.

Part of Timothy's job of preaching and teaching would have been helping Christians under his care do evangelism in their own lives. See 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9; 1 Peter 3:14-15.

APPLICATION

1. We are all capable of doing what's described in verses 3-4. When do you feel like avoiding God, the Word, or other Christians? How will we as a group help one another stay close to Jesus, His Word, and healthy Christians?

Leader help: We often feel this way when we've sinned or been sinned against and are feeling the weight of shame, guilt, or fear. The gospel - that Jesus willingly died the death we deserve and defeated all of our guilt and shame in His resurrection - can empower us to allow ourselves to be truly known and helped.

2. When you read that Jesus will return as a righteous judge, do you feel comforted, threatened, or hopeful? Why?

3. Although it's not always comfortable, healthy Christian leaders will make sure that we are reproofed and rebuked when we most need it. Have you experienced this in the church? What good came from your experience?
4. What in your life right now gets in the way of you being sober-minded and ready to declare the gospel?

PRAYER

Declare to Jesus why you look forward to His return, and ask that He come back quickly.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Revelation 22:20

Ask God to help you to continually submit to His Word and to ask for help when you fail to do so or are struggling to do so.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 121:1-2

Admit to Jesus where you're feeling weak, guilty, ashamed, or distrusting. Ask Him to show you how to navigate these things.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 119:105

Week 15

"CHURCH HURT"

2 TIMOTHY 4:9-15

MAIN POINT

Following Jesus and being a member of the church brings us good, but not painless, relationships. By remembering the promises of Jesus, we can continue to follow Him and remain present with His people even when we're hurt by them.

GROUP INTRO

In this passage, Paul, who is about to be executed, asks Timothy to quickly come visit him.

In a time of suffering, who would you want by your side? Why?

TEXT

1. In these verses Paul highlights several people. Get to know Paul's relationship with some of them by reading the following passages, then answer the question below.

1. *Tychicus* - Colossians 4:7-8
2. *Mark* (author of Mark) - Acts 15:36-39
3. *Luke* (author of Luke and Acts) - Philemon 23-24
4. *Titus* - Titus 1:4

After getting a glimpse of Paul's relationships with these individuals, how would you describe his life as a disciple of Jesus - difficult or easy? Why?

Leader help: We could summarize Paul's ministry life as difficult, and this is what Jesus said about Paul's ministry in Acts 9:15-16. Paul experienced lots of relational loss as he and his fellow disciples tried to be faithful to Jesus. However, despite the difficulty, following Jesus was made possible because Paul didn't try to do it alone, and he didn't run from conflict.

2. Even though Demas was once a “co-worker” with Paul, he’s now “in love with this present world.” Read Romans 12:2 and 1 John 2:15-17. In these passages, what’s meant by the word “world” (or “present age”)? How is “loving the world” the opposite of hoping in Jesus?

Leader help: “World” or “present age” in these passages refers to the sinful, cursed reality around us where we experience temptations which lure us away from God and His promises. While Jesus promises temporary suffering and eternal joy, the world offers temporary happiness that ends in destruction.

3. How did the love of God empower Paul to keep following Him, even with interpersonal sin and painful opposition?

Leader help: Knowing God’s sovereign, free acceptance and love empowers a person to trust God’s goodness even when life hurts, and this love also empowers a person to live humbly, asking for help, admitting wounds and weaknesses, and confessing sin. If we don’t have to earn God’s favor but already have it, we are truly free.

APPLICATION

1. What role do other disciples in our church play in your life? Do you seek their advice, prayers, support? Are you asked by others for this?

2. Paul's experience of relational pain helps us see that pain is, unfortunately, something we will experience in our fallen world, even in the church. Read 1 Peter 4:12. When you experience pain in the church, are you shocked or do you expect it? Why?
3. Jesus also experienced relational pain - His disciples betrayed and abandoned Him and He experienced the rejection of God so that we never have to. How does the fact of Jesus's human life and suffering help you to own sin, seek reconciliation, or admit wounds?

PRAYER

Praise Jesus for becoming a man and choosing to experience relational suffering.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Hebrews 4:14-16

Admit to God where you need His help forgiving, showing mercy, or pursuing reconciliation.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Proverbs 10:12

Ask God to help you and your group pursue Jesus together, humbly, and passionately.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Romans 15:5-6

Week 16

"THE LORD WHO RESCUES"

2 TIMOTHY 4:16-18

MAIN POINT

Because Jesus loves His people, He will see to it that we have the strength needed to endure as we pass the gospel on to those who do not yet know Him.

GROUP INTRO

What has God shown you or taught you through our study of 2 Timothy?

TEXT

1. This week's study is a leap into the middle of a paragraph. How would you summarize the previous section (verses 9-15)?

Leader help: Paul is highlighting various individuals who have partnered with or resisted him and the ministry Jesus has given him. Though Paul has had much help and some relational pain, it's ultimately Jesus Himself who will stay by his side until the end.

2. Where in this passage do we see some similarities between Paul and Jesus?
Differences?

Leader help:

Similarities include:

Jesus was arrested and tried.

Jesus was deserted by loved ones.

Jesus had a heart of mercy toward those who abandoned Him.

Jesus was confident in God's plan.

Jesus did all that He did for God's glory and our good.

Differences include:

Jesus was not rescued but rejected by God on our behalf, so that we never have to face God's rejection.

Jesus was ultimately condemned though He was completely innocent.

Jesus was not strengthened by God but abandoned, being treated as the worst sinner on the cross so that we could be given His righteousness by faith in Him.

Jesus both proclaimed the gospel and is Himself the gospel - there is no Christian message if Jesus is not the center of the message.

3. How can Paul state what he does in verse 18 when he is fully aware that he is about to be executed?

Leader help: This shows Paul's faith in the promises of Jesus and the results of Jesus's resurrection. Since Jesus resurrected from the dead, he has conquered death for all who trust in Him, guaranteeing us an eternity in a new creation. So for Paul, "to live is Christ, to die is gain" (see Philippians 1:21-24).

4. What's the message that Paul mentions in verse 17 and what's it look like for that message to be "fully proclaimed"?

Leader help: The message is likely the full gospel proclamation that Jesus lived a sinless life, died on the cross where He was taking God's wrath against our sin, resurrected from the dead to conquer death and sin, and will one day return. If Jesus's life, death, and resurrection are not proclaimed then the message is not proclaimed.

APPLICATION

1. What about God makes you want to say from the heart, "To Him be the glory forever and ever"?
2. When, if ever, have you experienced the Lord's rescuing power? Describe your experience.
3. Paul was obviously not afraid of dying. How do you honestly feel about your own death? Why?

4. Name one person in your life who needs to hear the full gospel message. How can you bring up Jesus with this person?

PRAYER

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by thinking of and expressing as many good things about God as you can.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Psalm 150:1-2

Ask God to save specific people in your life who do not trust Jesus as Lord and Savior. Ask God to give you courage and creativity in telling this person the full gospel message.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: Colossians 4:3