

THE CHURCH

Irrelevant, Dangerous, or Necessary?

1 & 2 Timothy Discipleship Guide



Series Introduction	3
2 Timothy 3:1-9	4
2 Timothy 3:10-17	8
2 Timothy 4:1-8	12
2 Timothy 4:9-15	16
2 Timothy 4:16-18	20
2 Timothy 4:19-22	24

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, 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 own 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, sin, and failures, the necessary and good 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 and the churches in Ephesus stand today as two explorations of the relevance, safety, and necessity of the church.

2 Timothy 3:1-9

MAIN POINT

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

2 Timothy 3:10-17

"GOD-BREATHED"

MAIN POINT

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

2 Timothy 4:1-8

"HOW TO END WELL"

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

2 Timothy 4:9-15

"CHURCH HURT"

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

2 Timothy 4:16-18

"THE LORD WHO RESCUES"

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

2 Timothy 4:19-22

"GRACE BE WITH YOU"

MAIN POINT

Paul - the great church planter who suffered beatings, imprisonments, betrayals, and even snakebite - concludes his last letter with humility, encouragement, and grace, reminding Timothy and the Ephesian church that God will continue to work all over the world.

GROUP INTRO

As we end 2 Timothy we're going to commit to hand-writing a letter of thanks and encouragement to one Christian who has impacted us.

Who will you write to this week and why?

TEXT

1. Take a moment to think about the context of Paul and those to whom he is writing: Christianity is still new (about 30 years old), no cars, no phones, etc. Knowing this, what's significant about Paul mentioning different disciples in various areas that are hundreds of miles apart?

Leader help: This shows us the power and influence of the gospel, as well as the impact of Paul and those who came to faith in Jesus: their prayer, faithfulness, and hard work helped people all over the ancient world come to know Jesus.

2. How did Paul, Timothy and the other early Christians remain faithful to the Lord Jesus?

Leader help: They admitted their needs to God and regularly asked for His help and for help from others; they did not try to follow Jesus alone; they were aware of their own weaknesses and wounds and helped one another bear burdens; they kept the promises of Jesus at the forefront of their minds.

3. Why is Paul including updates about various other disciples in this letter to Timothy and the Ephesian church?

Leader help: To remind Timothy and the Ephesian Christians that they are not alone and that the gospel has spread across hundreds of miles, across various different cultures, and to encourage them to remain faithful to Jesus.

4. When Paul uses the word “grace” in verse 22, what’s he mean? Where else could we look in Scripture to understand all that’s meant by this word?

Leader help: Grace basically means God’s unmerited favor. It is His undeserved goodness given to sinners in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Passages to look for better understanding of grace:

John 1:17

Acts 20:24, 32

Romans 3:23-25

2 Corinthians 8:9

APPLICATION

1. What doctrines/teachings from 1 and 2 Timothy have impacted you the most? Why?
2. How has God challenged and shaped you through our study of 1 and 2 Timothy?
3. Are there changes to your own life or discipleship that you’ve made or plan to make in light of what we’ve learned about Jesus?

PRAYER

Thank God for all that He has given us in 1 and 2 Timothy.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: John 17:17

Pray for the person to whom you will be writing a letter of thanks and encouragement.

Biblical passage to guide this prayer: 1 Corinthians 16:23-24

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Biblical passage to guide this prayer:

