

How To Use This Guide

THE BOOK OF 1 TIMOTHY

This Study Guide is a tool that helps you unpack the book of 1 Timothy. But it can be more than that. We're giving you a document full of possibility. Our goal is to provide you with more than enough content to create life-changing reflection and, if you're using it with a group, discussion. So, feel free to select only those parts or questions that you feel will best help your study of Paul's words in the book of 1 Timothy.

With that in mind, let's preview the guide. The main body of the Study Guide is written as a conversation. We'll offer questions for reflection or discussion in **bold type**. Many of the questions are open-ended. We want you to wrestle with what the Bible is saying to us today. In addition, each session has various sections:

Session Goals

This is the point of each session—the big idea and what we hope those who participate in the study walk away knowing, feeling, and doing differently because of the material. All the teaching, questions, and reflections ultimately point back to these goals. They're there primarily to help structure your study.

Open

This is an icebreaker aimed primarily at group discussion. If you'd like, you can use it as something to ease into the theme of the session and get the reflective juices flowing.

View

We often rush into the interpretation of a Bible passage without really hearing what it says. For this study, we urge you to read the text slowly before you begin the analysis. Drink in the words and images for yourself. Then the video teaching from Dr. Charlie Dates and Dr. James Meeks will make more sense. You'll be able to compare it with your own impressions of the text. Keep your eyes and ears open while watching the video so you can answer the "things to look for" questions.

Discuss

Here's the meat of the Bible study: questions about the meaning of the text. The section usually starts with some "easy-answer" questions that review what the Scripture says. But then there are tougher questions about the why's and how's.

Last Word

This is an opportunity for you to do something with what you've learned. Many of us are very good at internal responses in which we treasure the lessons we just learned. But actually talking with a neighbor? Actually helping someone in need? Keep moving toward the more challenging responses.

Go Deeper

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement a group discussion by providing extra material for study. We've highlighted where each segment could fit in the Discuss section of the Study Guide.

But you can also use these challenges as short devotionals to carry you through the week as you dive even deeper into the text of 1 Timothy. Consider reading one section a day to deepen your study of the book.

Session 1: Introduction

Note to the leader: The first session of this series is an introduction that is lighter on teaching. Because of this, the guide for this session is not as robust as the other sessions. We have provided questions to help your group discuss and think through the themes and ideas of 1 Timothy after watching this introduction.

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main idea: The mentor-mentee relationship between Paul and Timothy shows us how God can use our relationships for the building up of the church.

OPEN

The letter of 1 Timothy is a letter from the Apostle Paul to his young protégé, Timothy. Their relationship serves as a great example of grace, humility, wisdom, and godly leadership. Paul not only considered Timothy a son in the faith, but a minister with the ability to oversee the church at Ephesus, a church Paul started. In this letter, we see how older generations should pass down their wisdom and the heart younger Christians should have as they begin to enter God’s service.

In this first session, we’ll hear from Dr. James Meeks and Dr. Charlie Dates as they reflect on their own mentee-mentor relationship and its unique similarities to that of Paul and Timothy. We will learn just how important our example is for those younger than us and how to thrive as leaders.

Show Session 1: *Introduction* (14 minutes)

DISCUSS

Dr. Meeks and Dr. Dates talked about the unique development of their relationship throughout the years. They didn't apply lessons from business leaders or compare themselves to others. Instead, they devoted themselves to the principles laid out in the book of 1 Timothy. **What stood out to you most about the relationship between Dr. Meeks and Dr. Dates? What part of their story did you enjoy the most?**

Read Acts 16:1–5 and 1 Timothy 1:1–4. Paul met Timothy, a young man with a good reputation and leadership potential, while on one of his missionary journeys. He took Timothy under his wing and intentionally invested in his spiritual and personal development. **Who in your life have you been able to consistently look up to for guidance, or give guidance to? What has this relationship done for your walk with Christ?**

Paul's dedication to teaching and encouraging Timothy developed him into a spiritual leader. Without Paul's guidance, Timothy may have never become a leader at all. Many of us have benefitted from the guidance of older, experienced people in ministry. **What kind of encouragement and advice have you found most helpful from older, more mature Christians? What could it look like to seek out a mentor in the faith if you don't have one already?**

Dr. Meeks said that it would be a tragedy to keep all the wisdom and experience he gained over forty-three years in ministry to himself. The wealth of his wisdom, gained from hard years and a rich relationship with God could benefit Dr. Dates. Our faith journeys are not just for ourselves—God has given us experiences and wisdom that can propel younger believers into early success in ministry and life. **Who has God put in your life that you could share your wisdom with? What could it look like for you to be more intentional about sharing your story with younger Christians?**

When we meet Timothy, his only notable spiritual role model was his mother. While the men in his church spoke highly of him, he needed an older man to step in and spiritually guide him. Many younger people today find themselves distanced from their families because of their faith—they may even be the only Christian in their family. God places each of us into the church so that we can support and be supported by one another. **In what ways has your church family supported and guided your faith? In what ways have you invested in the lives of others in your church?**

The unique investment of a mentor can propel us into new levels of wisdom and a deeper relationship with Christ. They help us avoid common pitfalls, identify areas of growth, and guide us toward long-term habits of physical and spiritual health. **What can you intentionally do this week to find a mentee or mentor?**

DISCUSS

Dr. Meeks started the session by explaining that Timothy was Paul’s spiritual son and protégé, as well as the newly appointed leader of the church at Ephesus. Over the years, the church had deviated from its original mission into false doctrine. Read 1 Timothy 1:3–11.

Paul warned Timothy about false doctrine and misuse of the Mosaic law. He explained that teaching false doctrine not only results in confusion but is against God’s plan. **How does Paul describe the false doctrine he was worried about? What specifically does he say the church shouldn’t pay attention to in verse 4?**

Many people in Ephesus wanted to be teachers of the law but didn’t fully understand it. Not only that, but their use of the law wasn’t loving or truthful. Many younger Christians desire a platform but may not have the wisdom or understanding to handle the Bible in a loving or truthful way. **What are the dangers of putting a young person into leadership too early?**

If you are a younger Christian who desires influence, what areas of your teaching or leadership need to be refined? Who is an older leader who could help you identify where you need to grow?

A church lost in error is a serious issue. But Paul entrusted young Timothy to correct that error. While we may be worried about the inexperience of youthful leaders, we do need to trust them to do God’s work. **What might be the dangers of never trusting younger Christians to lead?**

How might we learn from Paul’s faith in Timothy? What could it look like to trust younger leaders while making ourselves available to them for guidance?

The Ephesian church was wrapped up in genealogies and myths, issues that were distracting them from their mission. While the church in Ephesus feels far away, it can be tempting to get caught in the weeds—fighting and debating over issues that shift us away from the truth and priority of the gospel message. **What kinds of opinions, topics, or ideas can distract us from the gospel today? What sort of confusion can we experience when we spend too much time on unimportant issues?**

Note: If you would like to learn more about the false doctrine that Paul is warning us about, see Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of this study.

Paul says that the goal of his instruction is love rooted in the gospel of Christ. True godly love should prompt us into fruitful action that glorifies God in our behavior, service, and speech toward others—not fruitless discussions, debates, or storytelling. **What could it look like to redirect fruitless conversations to discussions rooted in godly love?**

It is easy to share the truth with others, to hit people over the head with what we think they need to hear. It is difficult to share the truth in love. We should want to do more than critique people—our goal is to love them and see them grow in godliness. **When have you experienced someone sharing the truth without love? How did it make you feel?**

What practices could help us communicate love without dulling the truth?

Being an example in the church doesn’t mean showing off your successes. When Paul shared his testimony, he highlighted his scars,

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imperfections, and faults. Read 1 Timothy 1:8–17.

Paul did not hide behind his accomplishments, but even called himself the “chief of sinners.” He was not showing false humility: his past was marked by persecuting and murdering members of the early church. He became a servant of Christ by God’s grace and his ministry was a display of God’s loving desire to save anyone. **What do you find most encouraging about Paul’s story? What makes his past important for Timothy, and for us, to see?**

Note: If you would like to learn more about Paul’s testimony and how he became a Christian, go to Go Deeper Section 3 at the end of this study.

In verse 12, Paul rejoices and thanks God for his faithful love. Paul did not have to be ashamed of his scars because God loved him. We can be so afraid of judgment or so eager to impress others that we hide our flaws, but Paul shows us that God’s love allows us to be open with our past.

How do you feel about talking about your past?

What is your testimony of grace? What has God saved you out of?

In verses 15–16, Paul declares the gospel, using his own story as proof. His life was an example of God’s patience and love, which is available to everyone. **What has God’s patience looked like in your life? In what situations have you seen the power of Christ in your life?**

Dr. Meeks pointed out that to help the next generation of leadership, we should be just as honest about our defeats as we are about our victories. We should share how God has worked in our lives, what we learned from our failures, and how our success has pointed us back to Jesus. **Based on your previous answers, what experience or lessons do you have to offer younger Christians?**

Paul moves from his testimony to reiterating his desire for Timothy to remain strong. Read 1 Timothy 1:18–20.

He reminds Timothy to recall former prophecies made about him so that he can continue in faith and fight the good fight. Sometimes, making progress starts by simply remembering the truth we know. **What Bible verses or wisdom from a friend do you tend to cling to or hold on to when times are rough? How could you be intentional about recalling the truth during hard seasons?**

Paul explained that he excommunicated two men, Hymenaeus and Alexander, for false teaching. He said they had shipwrecked their faith and he hoped that they would learn to correct their behavior. **Why do you think Paul was so harsh with the two men? What was at stake if he hadn’t corrected them?**

Have you ever had someone point out any errors in your beliefs or action? How did you respond to that conversation?

We have to keep an eye on our doctrine. As we see with Hymenaeus and Alexander, it is easy to gently drift off course into error. **Who in your life has permission to keep you accountable to sound doctrine? How do you combat or confront lies when you hear them?**

Leadership is not easy. Timothy’s ministry began with removing two men from the church. But we don’t have to figure out leadership—or any part of the Christian life—by ourselves. The wisdom and guidance of older Christians can guide us through difficulty, encourage us in times of joy,

and keep us focused on right doctrine in every season. **If you are a younger Christian, what older Christians can you begin to learn from in your church?**

If you are an older Christian, what could it look like for you to begin sharing your wisdom and advice with someone young in the faith?

LAST WORD

The Christian life is communal, blending people of all ages, ethnicities, and demographics into one holy family. We need the wisdom, perspective, and support of other believers. One of the most powerful ways to serve one another is through a close mentor–mentee relationship that prioritizes preparing the next generation to serve God.

You don't have to be a superstar Christian to get a mentor—we all need the wisdom of older Christians. You don't have to be an incredibly successful person to be a mentor—some of the most powerful stories are those full of failure and scars. We simply need to trust God, stick to sound doctrine, and commit to one another.

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GO DEEPER

1. Weekly Reading Plan

You might not be able to cover every verse of 1 Timothy during your group session. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of 1 Timothy so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Day 1: 1:1–4

Day 2: 1:5–11

Day 3: 1:12–15

Day 4: 1:16–20

Day 5: *Read the entire chapter.*

2. What is false doctrine?

For many Christians, the phrase “false teaching” or “false doctrine” can mean multiple things. With so many church denominations, ideas, and opinions about what the Bible says, we can be tempted to attribute false doctrine to any issue we disagree on, even issues that do not affect the essentials of our faith. But the false doctrine Paul was referring to in 1 Timothy 1 was very specific and turned people away from the gospel.

The word “doctrine” comes from the Latin word *doctrina*, meaning “teaching.” False doctrine refers to false teachings about the faith. **What in your view are some examples of false teaching?**

In 1 Timothy 1:3–6, we learn more about the false doctrine in Ephesus. The problem seems to be that elders in the church were adding tradition and myths to the Bible, altering their understanding of the law of Moses and causing people to look away from Jesus for their security. In addition, the church was more focused on using their heritage as a measuring stick of importance than seeing one another as fully and equally loved by God.

Why do you think it's so easy to become swayed by ideas and teachings that aren't found in Scripture?

What kinds of myths or beliefs do we try to mix with biblical beliefs? In what ways could these outside ideas be altering our view of Scripture?

What we hear or read informs what we believe, and what we believe ultimately affects how we behave. When we're believing in lies, it's not only going to get us off track but hinder our spiritual growth. **In what ways, if any, have ideas not centered in the gospel affected your faith?**

Today, it's a lot easier to assimilate false doctrine into our faith. We are exposed to dozens of viewpoints, influencers, and experts every day on social media and TV. Any one of their beliefs or bits of advice can find its way into our theology. **How do you guard your doctrine against outside teaching? What process do you go through to make sure you're evaluating what you hear?**

Like the church in Ephesus, we can be influenced by false teaching. And, like Timothy, we must keep a watchful eye on our doctrine. **How will you be intentional about who and what you're listening to? How could you incorporate intentional habits of self-examination into your rhythm of life?**

In 1 Timothy 1:12–17, Paul gives a brief description of his past, which included the zealous persecution of the early church. How is it that one of the greatest enemies of the church became its greatest missionary?

Read Philippians 3:5-7 and Acts 7:55–8:3. Note that when we first meet Paul, he went by a different name. Before Jesus, he was known as Saul.

How does Paul describe himself? How would you describe Paul?

Paul was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin and excelled as a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a Jewish order that was zealously committed to obeying and teaching the Mosaic law. This means that Paul would have been considered one of the most righteous men in Israel—he had the right heritage, education, family line, and passion for the Word of God.

Read Acts 9:1–22.

Paul's life changed when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. After having terrorized and killed many Christians for their faith, Jesus confronted him. **Considering what we learned about Paul's prior persecution of Christians, what—in your opinion—makes his coming to salvation so special? What does Paul's testimony teach us about Christ's desire to save sinners?**

God sent Saul faithful Christians to minister to him before he was baptized. Put yourself in Ananias's shoes: he was sent to tell one of the most notorious terrorists of his day about Jesus, knowing that confessing Christ would likely get him killed. But the faithfulness of Ananias led to the conversion of the church's greatest missionary. **What can we learn from Ananias's courage? Who is God asking you to share Christ with?**

After he came to faith, Paul's life was turned upside down. Read Philippians 3:5–11.

All the things that made Paul successful were worthless compared to the grace of Jesus. He calls his advantages a pile of trash compared to what he gained in Christ. We can similarly believe that our knowledge of the Bible, growing up in church, or ministry experience is what sets us apart—but it is the grace and mercy of God that saves us, not our own works.

What attributes come to mind when you think of your own identity?

How has your testimony influenced the way you view your identity?

Re-read 1 Timothy 1:15–16. Paul uses his testimony to show others that if God can use, save, and love him—the worst of sinners—then he can use, save, and love all of us. **How does Paul's testimony influence the way you understand the gospel?**

Session 3: 1 Timothy 2

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Prayer is an opportunity to intercede on behalf of other people, express our thankfulness, and deepen our relationship with God.

Head Change: To know that prayer is a priority for our lives, not an afterthought.

Heart Change: To feel inspired to pray over our authority figures.

Life Change: To live a lifestyle of consistent and intentional prayer.

OPEN

If you could snap your fingers and change anything in your life, what would you change? Why?

There are things all of us would change in our lives, ranging from small adjustments to major overhauls. Many of us pray about what we want to change, which is good! But, if we aren't careful, our prayers can only focus on what we want rather than building a relationship with God.

In this session, Dr. Dates is going to explain the four types of prayer the apostle Paul mentions in 1 Timothy 2, and why praying is essential to the Christian life.

READ

Read 1 Timothy 2.

Note: If you would like to read through the book of 1 Timothy during the week, you can find a reading plan in the Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of each session of this study.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Dates's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What are the four types of prayer Paul mentions?

Why is it important to pray for those in authority?

Show Session 3: 1 Timothy 2 (10 minutes).

DISCUSS

Chapter two begins with a command to pray in four specific ways. Read 1 Timothy 2:1–4.

Who does Paul want the Ephesians to pray for? What reason does he give for their obedience in these specific prayers?

The first type of prayer is entreaties. Dr. Dates explained that when Paul talks about entreaties, or requests, it is a form of begging. We come to God in need, knowing he is the only one who can help us. **What do your requests sound like? What do you think it means to beg God, as opposed to asking him for something or simply informing him of your need?**

The second kind of prayer Dr. Dates talked about was praise, where we fall on our knees and worship God. **What does it look like for you to praise God? Why do you think it is important to follow our requests with praise?**

The third kind of prayer is intercessions—prayers made on someone’s behalf. Anytime we pray for someone, or about someone, we’re stepping up and talking to God for them, just like a priest might pray for his people. **Who in your life needs you to lift them to the Lord?**

Make a list of all the people you could intercede for. When during your week could you set aside time to pray for others?

The final kind of prayer is thanksgiving. Even when we go through trials and difficulties in this life, if we stop and look at what God has done to keep and sustain us, there is always something to be thankful for. **What are you most thankful for in this season of your life? How could you be more intentional about thanking God during difficult situations?**

In verse 2, Paul goes on to specify that the church should prioritize prayer for those in authority. Kings, presidents, and government officials make decisions that affect our daily lives. Whether or not we agree with their opinions, legislations, or judgments, it is important that we ask God to guide them and that they lead according to his will. **What could make it difficult to pray for our leaders? What kind of things might change if believers were more involved in prayer over politics rather than fighting?**

Praying for those in authority shouldn’t be an occasional part of our prayers—we should pray for our political figures at all times with the hope that, despite all of our disagreements or feelings about our politicians, God will move and be glorified through them. **How, specifically, can you pray for your politicians? What would it look like to pray for them with charity and grace?**

We might feel frustrated with the views of our political leaders, but Dr. Dates reminded us that we don’t have to treat prayer as if we’re talking to men—we’re talking to a God who answers audacious prayers. **How can you remind yourself of God’s power the next time you pray for authority figures?**

In verse 4, Paul says God wants everyone to come into faith in Jesus Christ. One of the ways that becomes reality is through the power of our prayers. When we pray for those in authority who aren’t following God, we are working in line with God’s desire to save that person. **Do you tend to see authority figures as obstacles to your life or as people God loves?**

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How might your attitude toward them change if you saw them as God sees them?

Do you feel like your prayers help bring people into Christ’s church? Why or why not?

Note: If you would like to learn more about God wanting all to be saved, see Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of this study.

Paul moves on from instruction about prayer to instruction about conduct while gathered together. Read 1 Timothy 2:8–15.

In verses 8–10, Paul spends some time talking about modesty and apparel for the women of Ephesus. Gold jewelry or pretty hairstyles are not inherently bad, but they should not be a woman’s source of value. Her worth is found in Christ. Paul’s goal is to refocus the Ephesian women on Jesus and the importance of good conduct and good works. Our value comes from God, not our appearance. **What questions or concerns do you have about Paul’s words to the Ephesian women? What do you think is the value of modesty today? Has it changed since Paul wrote this letter?**

Note In 1 Timothy 2:11–15, Paul specifies certain conduct for women. We won’t be going into depth about this portion of his instruction in the small group time because there are many varying opinions and interpretations of this passage. If you would like to learn more about modesty and good conduct found in verses 8–10, go to Go Deeper Section 3 at the end of this study.

Prayer should be the most important parts of our day. If we want to grow in deeper, godly maturity, then prayer must be our first response to our circumstances. **What kinds of prayer could you practice more? How can you begin to cultivate a more well-rounded and consistent prayer life?**

LAST WORD

Prayer is effective not because of what we say, but who we’re saying it to. Knowing that we pray to a God who is full of power, wisdom, and kindness should give us all the confidence we need to pray bold prayers full of entreaties, petitions, intercession, and thanksgiving.

This week, pick one of the four types—entreaty, prayer, petition, or thanksgiving—and incorporate it into your daily prayer routine. Remember, you are not praying to a man, but the almighty Creator of the universe. Pray audaciously.

GO DEEPER

1. Weekly Reading Plan

You might not be able to cover every verse of 1 Timothy during your group session. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of 1 Timothy so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Day 1: *Read chapter 2 in its entirety.*

Day 2: 2:1–4

Day 3: 2:5–7

Day 4: 2:8–10

Day 5: 2:11–15

2. Modesty and Conduct

In 1 Timothy 2:8–15, there are certain instructions given to the Ephesian church. The general idea is that Paul wants Christians to display good conduct and for there to be established order within the church. His instructions to the men and women at Ephesus were specific to the issues and temptations of that time and place, like defining modesty and how to pray. So, what do these commands mean for us today?

In verse 8, Paul asks that men visibly lift their hands during prayer. Every denomination is different—some churches encourage verbal responses to the pastor's preaching, while other churches would find it offensive or strange to be vocal during a Sunday service. Some churches have praise dance ministries, while others focus on introspective liturgy. **What are some specific traditions or worship styles that are normal in your church, that might not be in others?**

Paul's focus does not seem to be outlining a definitive way to pray, but to confront angry disputes, which seem to have defined the men in Ephesus (see also 1 Tim. 1:3–6). Instead of lifting hands toward each other in arguments, they should lift their hands to God in holiness. **What is Paul's hope for the men in Ephesus? How might you express this hope for your local church?**

In verses 9–10, Paul turns to the women, commanding them to dress modestly and refrain from a particular outward appearance. The women in Ephesus had anchored their value in their outward appearance, but a godly woman should primarily be recognized for her character, integrity, and good works. Paul is not condemning a woman taking care of her appearance, but reordering the importance of our appearance under our character. **What are your personal views and standards of modesty? How tempting has it been for you to focus too much on outward appearance rather than your inward identity in Christ?**

Anytime we're trying to keep up with the culture or one another, we will slowly but surely become tempted to compromise our beliefs about what is most important in the church. Good works should be our focus, not wearing expensive apparel. **In what ways have you ever tried to "keep up appearances" based on the culture? What has it looked like for you to believe the lie that your value is what the culture says is important?**

We live in a culture that believes having luxury items is a sign of personal value. But for the believer, even if you're able to afford nice things, it is God that makes you important. **In what ways have you placed your identity in the things you own rather than the one you serve? How have your possessions influenced the way you think about yourself—if at all?**

Paul wanted the men and women in the Ephesian church to turn from their competition with one another to him—the one who sees all people as equal. When we become too focused on our worldly status we can lose sight of how important it is to be God’s kind of person. **What would it look like to recommit yourself to finding your value in Christ alone?**

3. God desires that all would come to salvation.

In Paul’s instructions about prayer, he reminded Timothy that God desires for everyone to be saved. As believers, we must remember we have a mission—to go and make disciples of all people. While we know that in the end there will be many unsaved people who never accepted God, we do not know who will turn to him. Re-read 1 Timothy 2:1–4.

Paul starts by specifically mentioning that prayers be made for authority figures. Praying for those in authority is not just so that we can live a peaceful life but to hopefully see those individuals come to know Jesus. For those who know him, we can pray that they submit their decisions to his authority.

But for those who don’t know him or who we do not like, we can’t allow our own disdain to keep us from being empathetic about their eternal future. **What difference could it make in our world if we asked God to lead those in authority to Christ? How might the world benefit from Christian leadership?**

There are some people that we may want to write off or forget, but God takes no pleasure in rejecting people. Read Ezekiel 18:21–23.

In these verses, God tells us his hope for sinful people. He wants everyone to turn from sin so that they might live. The sacrifice of Jesus allows all people, even the most evil, to come to him for forgiveness. **How does knowing God’s heart change your view of bringing unbelievers to Christ—if at all?**

There are times when we see the wickedness of people in our culture and it rightfully angers us. It could be tempting to see wicked people and desire their downfall. But, if God does not delight in the destruction of the wicked and has made a way for everyone in Christ, our job is to pray that God executes justice and brings them to salvation. **What makes it most difficult for you to pray for sinners you read and see stories about? What would it take for you to pray that they come to know Jesus?**

Christ saves, but we’ve been called to go out and spread his gospel. In Matthew 28:18–20. Jesus tells his disciples to go and spread the gospel to all nations. Salvation is offered to everyone, and we can’t let our own opinions of people get in the way of his work. **What has it looked like for you to go out and share the gospel with others—especially those you disagree with? Who, specifically, is God prompting you to pray for now, whether a federal authority, local politician, or person across the political aisle?**

Session 4: 1 Timothy 3

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: All believers should aspire to the godly conduct required of leaders in the church.

Head Change: To know our conduct should reflect the character of God.

Heart Change: To feel encouraged to seek leadership roles and service opportunities in our local church.

Life Change: To live worthy of leadership, even if we are not in a leadership position.

OPEN

Who has been the most influential leader in your life thus far? What has made them so effective?

Whether it was our school principal, our boss, or the person who raised us, we all can think back to someone whose leadership style stuck out to us—whether for the good or bad. Good leadership—whether in the church or outside of it—is vital for our thriving.

In this session, Dr. Meeks will walk through 1 Timothy 3 and discuss what makes a good leader.

READ

Read 1 Timothy 3.

Note: If you would like to read through the entire book of 1 Timothy, you can find a reading plan in the Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of each session of this study]

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Meeks's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What specific kind of leaders was Timothy choosing for the church at Ephesus?

According to Dr. Meeks, why do we distrust the leaders in our culture today?

Show Session 4: 1 Timothy 3 (12 minutes).

DISCUSS

Good godly leadership is necessary for the overall health and flow of the church and its function. But before being placed in leadership, there are important attitudes and qualifications to consider. Read 1 Timothy 3:1–7.

The first half of chapter three is all about choosing good leaders within the church. **What do you think being a good leader looks like? Do you think leadership in the church looks different than leadership in business or politics? Why or why not?**

Dr. Meeks pointed out that there’s been a decline in the general respect for leadership and authority figures in our society. There have been so many public falls from both political and spiritual leaders that many people expect leaders to morally fail. **What is your reaction to hearing about political or spiritual leaders falling from grace? How has the public fall of authority figures impacted your own understanding of what a good leader looks like?**

In verse 1, Paul says if you desire to be an overseer, then you desire a noble work. Wanting to be in leadership is an honorable desire. We need good leaders who are willing to direct, serve, and display the humility of Christ. **What do you think most people want when they hope to become a leader? What are some good, God-honoring reasons to seek a leadership position?**

Timothy was able to learn about leadership from Paul. He did not have to learn about leadership through trial and error; his mentor showed him how to lead well. Especially today, we need people to demonstrate what Godly leadership looks like. **In what ways is it helpful to learn about leadership by watching someone? Why is essential for the church to prioritize the mentorship of young leaders?**

Verses 2–7 highlight the qualifications of an overseer. An overseer could be seen as a guardian—someone in leadership who has a responsibility to examine the actions and doctrine of the church. **Why do you think Paul holds overseers to such a high standard?**

Who in your life comes to mind when you read the traits of an overseer? How has their faithfulness helped your faith journey?

Verse 6 specifies that new Christians shouldn’t be thrown into positions of leadership. A person who is in the early stages of learning about God might not be able to spiritually lead those who have walked with Jesus for many years. In the church, maturity is more important than the energy of youth. **What could be some dangers of promoting a leader before they are ready? What leadership qualities should we wait to see in a young person before promoting them to leadership?**

Whether we plan to step into leadership or not, we should all exhibit the traits listed in verses 2–7. We all lead in some informal way—at home, at work, or in our extracurricular groups. At the very least, we are all called to make disciples (Mt. 28:18–20), helping others learn to follow Jesus. Therefore, we should all commit to growing in the qualities required of church leaders. **What areas in life—big or small—are you required to be a leader? In what ways can you grow in the qualities required of overseers?**

Elders are not the only leaders in the church. Paul also refers to deacons or those who serve in specific roles within the church. Read 1 Timothy 3:8–13.

The requirements of a deacon in verses 8–13 are similar to that of an overseer. The Greek word for deacon literally translates as “servant.” Deacons were those who served the church in official positions, serving the church under the leadership of overseers. **What does the service of a deacon look like in your local church?**

Paul’s requirements for deacons can be summed up in one quality: self-control. They have control over their words, desires, and behavior, conforming their lives to godliness. All of us should seek to be defined by the moderation, intentionality, and blameless conduct of deacons, even if we are not deacons in our local church. **What can make it difficult to be self-controlled? Do you think self-control is valued in leadership today? Explain your answer.**

Dr. Meeks reminded us that wine, in and of itself, is not evil—the over-indulgence of it is. Without self-control, we become drunk. The same for money: we need money to survive and are encouraged to be good stewards of our finances, but without self-control become greedy, selfish, and impulse spenders. **In what areas of your life have you noticed a need for more self-control? In your current circumstance, what is one action you could take to address that lack of control?**

Paul moves on from church leadership to discussing the mystery of godliness. They may feel like disconnected ideas, but it is important to remember that we all have a standard to uphold, whether we are leaders or not. Read 1 Timothy 3:14–16.

Good conduct is imperative for the Christian life—not just because we belong to and represent God, but because our lives are on display for unbelievers who don’t know him. **What behaviors define the church today? What do you think our conduct communicates to unbelievers about God?**

1 Timothy 3 defines leadership, but also how everyone in God’s household should act. God is holy and expects his people to publicly reflect his holy character. **Why is it important that we reflect God’s holiness in the world? In what ways could we better reflect God’s character through our actions?**

Note: If you would like to learn more about what it means to be part of God’s household, go to Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of this study.

In verse 16, Paul says the church is the pillar and foundation of the truth in the world. He follows that statement with a hymn, sharing the specific truth we should be teaching and displaying. **According to this hymn, what is the church’s core message? In what ways is this hymn—a summary of the gospel—your core message?**

Note: If you would like to meditate in prayer on the hymn in verse 16, go to Go Deeper Section 3 at the end of this study.

Dr. Meeks ended the session by reminding us how essential it is for the church to have good leadership. Rather than seeking leaders with the qualities of a CEO, president, or charismatic influencer, we should prioritize character and godliness. **In what ways should our leaders look and act differently than our culture’s conventional image of leaders?**

God might call you into a position of leadership. **Is that something you desire? What would it look like for you to grow in the qualities of a leader today?**

GO DEEPER

1. Weekly Reading Plan

You might not be able to cover every verse of 1 Timothy during your group session. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of 1 Timothy so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Day 1: 3:1–7

Day 2: 3:8–13

Day 3: 3:14–16

Day 4: Cross reference your reading with Titus 2:1–8

Day 5: *Read chapter 3 in its entirety.*

2. God's Household

We were all once distant from God because of our sin. But, because of Christ's work on the cross, we've been unified with God and are brought into a new family, the church. For some of us, our life in Christ can start to feel normal after a while. We need to remind ourselves of the goodness of our salvation. Below are three blessings we have as members of God's family.

Access: Because we are part of God's family, or household, we have access to God.

There is no longer anything keeping us from being able to come boldly to the throne of God. God is available whenever we need him. Read Hebrews 4:15–16.

Where in your life do you need grace or mercy? What would it look like for you to boldly approach God with your requests?

Spiritual Blessing: Being a part of God's family gives us access to spiritual resources.

Ephesians 1:3 says that we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavens—redemption, the forgiveness of sins, an eternal inheritance, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. On top of this, we each receive spiritual gifts—Holy Spirit empowered gifts that allow us to serve God and others in unique ways. Read 1 Corinthians 12:1–11.

In what ways has God blessed you? Make a list of all he has done for you.

What unique abilities or opportunities has God given you to serve his church?

Hope: Being in God's family secures our eternity with God. Read Romans 8:31–39.

No matter what we go through on earth—calamity, heartbreak, sickness, and even death, we have a secure relationship with God. Nothing can remove you from his family. Our circumstances define our existence—our hope for the future is rooted in our understanding that God has a forever home for us. **What do you look forward to the most about spending eternity with God? How can you thank God for securing your place in eternity with him?**

Being part of God's family is the safest place we could be—we have all the resources we need today, have 24/7 access to the Creator of the universe, and have a secure future no circumstance can steal from us.

This week, say a prayer of thankfulness for being part of God's household. Ask him to help you see how special and unique it is to be part of the family of God. Starting each day with prayer, revisit the passages in this section to meditate on the access, gifts, and hope Jesus has secured for you.

3. Praying 1 Timothy 3:16

In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul talks about the mystery of godliness in a hymn of the gospel message. The core beliefs in this biblical song are not only a good reminder to us of who Jesus is but help us feel connected to all the people of faith who came before us.

Below are the four steps of Lectio Divina, an ancient method of biblical prayer, which will help you pray and think deeply about the hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16. Carve out some time this week to go through this exercise. This method isn't something to rush through, so make sure you have plenty of time before you start. Take your time with each step.

Lectio (Read): Remove all distractions and quiet your mind before God. Now read 1 Timothy 3:16 three times slowly. If you can, read it out loud to yourself. Let the message hit you. After reading it three times, find something in the text that stands out to you. Re-read the passage a couple more times and place emphasis on different words as you read.

Meditatio (Meditate): Think about a phrase that stood out to you in the hymn. What does it mean? What does it say about God? The human condition? How does it contribute to the main argument Paul is making in 1 Timothy 3?

Oratio (Pray): Pray through your favorite phrase in this verse. Ask God to show you what he's saying through this verse. Take the verse and turn it into a prayer. For example, you could pray, "Thank you, Jesus, that your testimony is sure," or, "Teach me, Holy Spirit, to find joy in Christ's work in my life."

Contemplatio (Contemplate): Now that you've read, thought, and prayed through the confession, finish your time in silence. Ask God to speak to you. Pray he'd show you one practical thing you could apply to your life from this passage. Then listen. Write down what he says and then do it.

DISCUSS

Dr. Dates started this session with a sober reminder—many young Christian leaders fail. But, if we pay attention to 1 Timothy 4, we can avoid that ending for our stories. Read 1 Timothy 4:1–5. **What do you think draws us away from true faith?**

1 Timothy 4 addresses all believers, not just Timothy. We must know what is true so that we are not captured by false doctrine. **What do you think makes “the teaching of demons” so intriguing for a Christian? In what ways does the ease of spiritual drift concern you—if at all?**

We can all be tempted by false doctrine—all it takes is hearing the things that we want to hear. **What ideas or beliefs in our society are tempting to young Christians?**

In verse 2, we see a defining marker of false teachers: they redefine what is right and wrong. The teachers Paul warned Timothy about were forbidding things that God had called good, like marriage and food. When we hear people redefining what is right or wrong, we should immediately be on guard. **In what ways has our culture tried to call good things bad, and bad things good? What does it look like to evaluate and guard ourselves against these false teachings?**

Note: If you would like to learn more about what it means to have a seared conscience, go to Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of this study.

Dr. Dates explained that an essential discipline for every Christian is to remain humble. We have to be willing to admit what we don’t know while standing on what we do know. **Are you comfortable with admitting what you don’t know about the Christian faith—why or why not? What questions do you have about Christianity or the church?**

Dr. Dates encouraged us to rest in what we know, rather than being shaken by what we don’t know. Doubt is common—but while you wrestle with your doubts, rest on the truth you know. **What could it look like for you to focus on the truth you do know about Christ, rather than the ideas, opinions, and views that you’re unsure of?**

Wrestling with doubt can be difficult, but you do not have to walk through them alone. Read 1 Timothy 4:6–10.

God has given us a community of believers who aid each other by reminding one another of the truth and good teaching. We can help each other wrestle with our doubts and actively live out the commands and wisdom of Scripture. **How have you thought of accountability in the past? What do you think it could look like to help one another wrestle with doubt and focus on the truth?**

In verse 6, Paul tells Timothy a good minister points out the truth. We have to be ready and willing to point out errors without fear while reminding one another of the truth. **In what way does the idea of pointing out errors feel scary, or liberating? What could it look like to point out false teaching in love?**

Our culture is obsessed with physical appearance and perfection. But our physical beauty disappears with age—it is a temporary thing. But training ourselves in godliness benefits us in every stage of life and our eternity with Jesus. **What kind of habits would help us to train in godly character and conduct? How might accountability help us train more effectively?**

Note: If you would like to learn more about how to train in godliness, go to Go Deeper Section 3 at the end of this study.

Dr. Dates shared an analogy about lifting weights: adding weight to his workouts was difficult, but heavier weight built muscle and stamina. Soon, the weight he thought was too heavy became light. The same is true with our training in godliness: as we grow in faith, challenges in life and questions about our faith become easier to endure and evaluate. **What kinds of “resistance” makes it difficult to commit to godliness? How will you begin to meet that resistance with joy, knowing that pushing through it will produce something good?**

It may not be working out, but we all have a passion or goal that we work hard to perfect. But the amount of effort we put into our passions and goals should always be less than the effort we put into our relationship with God. **What are some reasons it can be easier to put more effort toward your passions than your spiritual growth?**

Finally, Paul instructs Timothy as a church leader. Read 1 Timothy 4:11–16.

In verses 11–13, Paul explains that good conduct can override the inexperience of youth. We cannot disparage someone for their age if they are walking in faith, maturity, and love. While we should be wary of giving a young person too much responsibility too early, we should also be careful to not deny a faithful person opportunity to serve simply because they are young. **What do you think is the balance between being cautious about a person’s age and allowing young Christians to serve in formal ministry leadership? How could we better help young leaders who are mature, but untested?**

Paul wanted Timothy to be devoted to his ministry so that everyone around him could see his spiritual growth and progress. Timothy could only be able to serve others well if he prioritized his relationship with God. **What are the dangers of prioritizing Christian work over our relationship with God? What could it look like to prioritize your spiritual growth in your current season?**

Dr. Dates ended the session with the example of a mirror. Seeing your face in the mirror allows you to see the dirt—the mirror points you to correction. When we’re reading the word of God, it shows us what’s wrong in our lives and points us to the one who can fix it. No matter your season of life or where God is leading you, we all have areas where we can be corrected, encouraged, and comforted by God’s Word. We must keep the Bible near as we train for godliness. **When in your day do you prioritize reading Scripture? How might you and your community better guard your doctrine with the truth of Scripture?**

LAST WORD

Spiritual growth is not easy. We will be tempted to turn away from the truth, meet resistance, and have doubts in our life. But by wrestling with our doubts in community, disciplining ourselves to read the Bible and live out its truth, we will build our spiritual muscles.

Dr. Dates told us that strength comes through consistency in God's Word and power by enduring trials. Life is not just about discipline—it’s also a steady practice of devotion to God. How will you devote yourself to God in new ways this week?

Horizontal lines for writing.

GO DEEPER

1. Weekly Reading Plan

You might not be able to cover every verse of 1 Timothy during your group session. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of 1 Timothy so that you can dig more deeply into God’s Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Day 1: 4:1–3

Day 2: 4:4–5

Day 3: 4:6–10

Day 4: 4:11–16

Day 5: *Read chapter four in its entirety.*

2. A Seared Conscience

In 1 Timothy 4:2, Paul talks about the hypocrisy of liars who have “seared consciences.” But what does it mean for our consciences to be seared?

For most of society, the conscience is thought of as a common human trait. But, because of our sinfulness, our moral compasses are not tuned to true North. Therefore, we cannot always let our conscience be our guide. We need the Holy Spirit to renew our consciences, guiding us in all truth and godliness (John 16:13; Romans 2:14–15; 1 Corinthians 2:10–13).

But it is possible to ignore the Holy Spirit. Searing is the process of burning something. If you get badly burnt, you can suffer nerve damage and lose sensitivity where you were burnt. When the conscience is seared, it means we’ve intentionally become insensitive to the prompting and conviction of the Holy Spirit. A seared conscience is proof that someone has repeatedly disobeyed God and does not feel the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Repeatedly ignoring the conviction of the Holy Spirit can numb us to the point of having the inability to recognize the truth. Ignoring what we know to be the truth is not only dangerous for us, but for those around us. **How does God try to subtly turn your attention away from things you shouldn’t do, watch, or listen to? Do you have experience with becoming spiritually desensitized? If so, how has that desensitization affected you?**

When our conscience is sensitive and open, we’re able to not only distinguish good and bad, but we leave room for the Holy Spirit to convict us about our wrongdoing. But many today would rather feel positive about themselves than be convicted for their wrongs. **Why do you think we try to avoid conviction? In what ways is conviction a blessing from God?**

Paul explains that by searing their conscience, false teachers are able to confidently teach lies that lead others astray without conviction because now, they are believing falsehood is true. That is why we cannot just rely on something feeling true as a guide for what is true. **In what ways can our feelings be helpful guides to what is and isn’t true? What is a good way to evaluate our feelings to test if they are true?**

One way we can retrain our seared conscience is to tune ourselves to God’s voice. Prioritizing time in prayer, godly community, and the Bible will remind us of the truth and adjust our conscience back to the truth. **What could it look like for you to focus on being consistent in prayer, community engagement, and asking questions?**

God has given us our consciences for a reason, and we have his Word to stand on when we’re unsure of what is true. **What would it look like to be**

Lined writing area consisting of 20 horizontal lines for notes.

sensitive to the Holy Spirit this week? How might his prompting change your regular rhythms?

3. Train in Godliness

We all have some desire to look good, and it is important to spend time taking care of your health. But we also have to prioritize our spiritual health. That said, training in godliness can feel ambiguous. What does that actually mean?

To train in godliness means to make spiritual development and discipline a priority in your life. We can think about our spiritual training in three practical steps:

Learn

We have to make time for learning about our faith. The best way to do that is by reading our Bibles, which define orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right practice). But, for many of us, trying to carve out time to read the Bible can be hard, especially when we work long hours, have families to care for, try to maintain a social life, or keep up with the dozens of popular shows on TV. Yet reading the Bible doesn't have to be stressful—you can begin by starting your day or ending your evening with five minutes in a passage of Scripture. **What is one thing you can change about your schedule this week to intentionally spend five to ten minutes each day reading the Bible?**

Engage

Training in godliness also requires that we cultivate a relationship with God through prayer. Prayer is the way we communicate with and relate to God. Taking time to personally praise, thank, and ask God for guidance is essential to our spiritual health.

Carve out time during a specific part of your day—it can be as simple as talking to God while driving to work instead of listening to music or podcasts. God is always there to listen to us. Hebrews 4:16 says we can confidently go to God whenever we need grace or mercy. **What is your favorite way to pray? How will you prioritize praying more this week than you usually do?**

Display

Finally, we train in godliness by putting our faith on display. Read Ephesians 2:8–10. **What does God intend for us to do after we are saved?**

Your faith should overflow into service. God has given you specific gifts and opportunities to serve him and the people around you. When we put our faith into action, we exercise our faith, show others the love God has shown us, and glorify God. **What are your unique gifts or talents? What would it look like for you to use those talents to serve God?**

Session 6: 1 Timothy 5

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: The church is the family of God and is worthy of our time, concern, and care.

Head Change: To know God has called us to care for fellow believers through faithful service, sacrifice, and love.

Heart Change: To feel compassion for those who need help and encouragement within the church.

Life Change: To respect the older members of the church and the members of God's family who are in need.

OPEN

Would you consider yourself an independent person? Why or why not?

We live in a culture that thrives on individualism. Sadly, that causes us to see community or a need for others as a weakness. Our felt need for self-fulfillment and personal achievement can drive us into isolation. But it is not good for us to be alone.

When God saves us, he simultaneously brings us into a new community. Our relationship with God is personal but should always result in caring for his church and serving others. In this session, Dr. Meeks will talk about the family of God and how we care for each other.

READ

Read 1 Timothy 5.

Note: If you would like to read through the book of 1 Timothy, you can find a daily reading plan in the Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of each session of this study.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Meeks's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What is Paul's great desire in 1 Timothy 5?

What do our relationships with our church family communicate to the world?

DISCUSS

Dr. Meeks said the world desperately needs to see a compassionate church. Our care for one another reflects the love God has for each of us, but many of us see the church as a place to attend rather than a family to love. **What do you think a compassionate church looks like? Do you think we are successfully displaying the love of God’s family to a watching world?**

Paul begins the chapter by commanding Timothy to view other Christians as a family: mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers. Read 1 Timothy 5:1–7. **How might viewing members of the church as a family change the way we treat one another?**

What do you think it should look like to respect older Christians? Do you feel the church respects older Christians well? Why or why not?

When we see other Christians as family members, we will inevitably treat them with kindness, respect, purity, and deference. **How do you and your church family discuss hard or uncomfortable things? In what areas have you noticed skewed communication within your own church community or small group?**

If we see one another as family, we will actively care for one another. In verses 3–7, Paul is chiefly concerned with the way we care for widows. In that day, widows were one of the most at-risk and marginalized groups of people. They had few options to provide for their children beyond relying on the kindness of strangers or the support of their grown children. **Other than widows, what are some marginalized groups that are in need in our culture? In what ways can the church step in and care for people in need who have very few options?**

Note: If you would like to learn more about widows and caring for the marginalized, go to Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of this study.

Paul goes on to share how the family of God should care for one another, focusing on widows, the most vulnerable people in the church. Read verses 9–16. **How does Paul describe a widow who is eligible for church support? How does he describe her actions?**

There were some widows that Paul advised Timothy to keep off the church’s support list: younger widows who could remarry and those who were supported by their families. If the church supported young widows with no family, Paul feared they would use their idle time in unproductive ways. Some certainly had (v. 15). Instead, he encouraged them to remarry and focus on building a reputation of godliness. **In what ways can idleness or boredom lead us into temptation? What has it looked like for you to fill your free time with serving others or godly behavior?**

Dr. Meeks said it is his joy to take care of his mother. Just as she cared for him in his youth, he sacrifices and cares for her when she needs his help. His behavior is a shining example of Paul’s encouragement in verse 16, where we see it is the responsibility of the family to care for one another. The church is a backstop, looking after those who have no one else to care for them. **Why do you think many people find taking care of aging parents a burden rather than a labor of love? How could we see caring for elderly family and friends as a sacrificial statement of Christlike love?**

In verses 17–21, Paul teaches Timothy about honoring the elders of the church. Serving the church is a calling, but one that requires constant

sacrifice. We should honor elders who faithfully serve and care for the family of God. **How does your local church honor its leaders?**

Many people get uncomfortable talking about paying ministers, possibly assuming people who work for the church should, in some ways, not be paid well for their work. Read verses 17–18.

Paul says those who have dedicated their lives to the teaching of the Word are worthy of their wages. Even full-time ministers need to be paid to pay their bills, take care of their families, and save for the future. **What makes people uncomfortable about paying pastors? What concerns do you have when it comes to monetary gain for ministers, teachers, and church leaders?**

What do you think is the difference between generously caring for your church’s leaders and a spiritual leader taking advantage of the church for personal gain?

Paul’s encouragement to pay church leaders does not exclude leaders from misconduct. He lays out a plan for Timothy to judge elders and a warning about appointing elders too quickly. **What would be the dangers of accusing elders without witnesses? What do you think loving accountability of elders should look like today?**

Despite what we often see in our culture, leaders do not get a “free pass” for their behavior. Leadership in the church is held to a high standard, to be an example of godliness to all people. Read verses 9–16.

When elders sin, their sin must be publicly called out, lest people assume their wrongdoing is acceptable behavior or that the church is trying to cover over a scandal. Elders are appointed examples of godliness to the church. They should also be models of repentance. **In what ways does seeing a leader properly disciplined display God’s heart for justice and repentance?**

To avoid the problems of sinful elders, Paul encourages Timothy to be slow in appointing elders. In church leadership, it can be tempting to quickly add elders to help share the burden of leadership. But favoritism, or appointing friends and influential people to church leadership, can lead to big problems down the road. **What kind of issues could arise when we choose people for leadership too quickly? When have you seen someone operating in leadership who wasn’t ready?**

Note: If you would like to learn more about the sin of favoritism, go to Go Deeper Section 3 at the end of this study.

Appointing elders took a physical and emotional toll on Timothy, possibly prompting the stomach problems mentioned in verse 23. Paul encouraged Timothy to take care of himself, prescribing a little wine as medicine. **In what ways do we make sure our pastors stay healthy and cope with the stresses of ministry? How can we prioritize better mental health and physical health for our pastors to ensure they have long and fruitful ministries?**

This chapter covered a lot of ground—the support of widows, appointing leadership, and how to honor each other. But the overall message of 1 Timothy 5 is to care for the body of Christ through faithful acts of service, support, and exhortation. **In your current circumstance, what is one thing you could do to care for someone in your local church? Who in your church needs your help?**

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LAST WORD

The church is a family. We love one another as we would our own families, caring for their well-being, meeting their needs, and enjoying each other's company. Because we love one another, we will focus on choosing leaders that exhibit godliness and point us toward Jesus.

This week, try to commit to specific acts of care for your church family. Support elderly church members who do not have children to help them, provide a meal for an overworked single mother, or buy coffee for someone in your church who is struggling. Be the family many people in your church do not have.

GO DEEPER

1. Weekly Reading Plan

You might not be able to cover every verse of 1 Timothy during your group session. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of 1 Timothy so that you can dig more deeply into God’s Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

- Day 1: 5:1–2
- Day 2: 5:3–8
- Day 3: 5:9–16
- Day 4: 5:17–21
- Day 5: 5:22–25

2. Widows and the Marginalized

Chapter 5 goes into great detail about how we as the church can care for widows. In the ancient Near East, women lived much differently than they do today, having few opportunities to work or provide for families. They didn’t have the same kind of control or power as they do today—if a woman was unmarried, barren, or without a family, she was without a support system and subject to ill-treatment and poverty.

With this context, we can see why a woman who lost her husband might need the amount of help and instruction that Paul gave in 1 Timothy 5:3–16. **What could we learn from these passages about communal care? How do these passages help you understand the need to bear one another’s burdens as your own?**

In our culture, women have much more freedom to work and provide for their families on their own. Some widows do not need financial assistance from the church—but that doesn’t mean they don’t need our help. **What are some ways financially stable single mothers need help? What could it look like for the church to walk alongside widows today?**

The church should actively look for ways to care for people, especially those who are marginalized and forgotten in society. Single parents, the elderly, people with disabilities, abuse victims, and the homeless are all groups who are at risk just as the widows in the ancient world were at risk. The church should lead the charge in caring for those who have trouble caring for themselves. **What are some of the marginalized groups in your local church or neighborhood? How can you be intentional about caring for the marginalized closest to you?**

The church reflects Jesus’s character to the world. Just as he came to us in our brokenness, we should go to others to serve. **What opportunities has God given you to reflect his character to your community? How could you love one person in need in the way Jesus loves you?**

3. The Sin of Favoritism

For many of us, it’s natural to show partiality toward those we love. Many times, favoritism can simply be seen as caring for those closest to us. But there is a kind of favoritism that is insidious, giving benefits to people we deem more important to reap personal benefits.

The favoritism Scripture condemns is giving benefits to people based on what is important to us rather than what is important to God. For example, choosing an attractive person for a job over someone qualified or honoring people with more money than those who are poor. **What sorts**

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of favoritism are common in our society? What do we value most in people?

The Bible is clear about favoritism: God shows no partiality in his grace so we should show no partiality in our lives. Being successful or a celebrity does not entitle a person to a different standard of living than other Christians. Everyone is equally welcome at the foot of the cross and needs equal amounts of his grace, mercy, and love.

In 1 Timothy 5:19–21, Paul warns Timothy not to show favoritism to any leader, because they are to be rebuked for wrongdoing just like anyone else. Everyone needs to be held accountable for their actions, and there is to be no favor just because someone is in leadership. **What are the risks of excusing the behavior of Christian leaders?**

What kind of conclusions could unbelievers come to if Christians are constantly showing favoritism toward each other? What could favoritism do to our witness?

In what ways does the church thrive when her leadership is held to a high standard?

In many cases, favoritism is rooted in personal benefit. Our selfish desires for comfort, value, or access lead us into favoring certain people instead of treating everyone with equal dignity. **What makes it tempting for you to show favoritism?**

Ask God to help reveal any tendencies you have to show favoritism and to point out those you may have overlooked. **What could it look like for you to confront favoritism when you are tempted to treat people with different standards?**

Session 7: 1 Timothy 6

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we give God control over our finances, we will find new opportunities to bless the church, serve others, and reap eternal rewards.

Head Change: To know that our money is a resource that we should use to serve God.

Heart Change: To feel excited to be generous with our money, rather than hoarding it.

Life Change: To seek contentment while cultivating a lifestyle of giving.

OPEN

What is your relationship with money—are you a spender or a saver?

We live at a time when there are more ways to make money than ever before. If you’re on social media, you’ll see advertisements for career coaches, influencers promising you easy money, and countless investment strategies to game the stock market. But all of our focus on making money has one result: spending it all on luxuries and status objects. The world’s message is clear—if you want to be somebody, you need to spend a lot of money.

We know money is an essential part of living, but it is a resource that can corrupt us and turn us away from God. But God has a higher purpose for our finances than social media influencers could ever conceive. In this last session, Dr. Dates will walk us through the meaning of godly contentment, and how we should view and manage our finances.

READ

Read 1 Timothy 6.

Note: If you would like to read through the entire book of 1 Timothy, you can find a daily reading plan in the Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of each session of this study.

DISCUSS

First Timothy 6 begins with encouragements to slaves. Read 1 Timothy 6:1–2.

It’s important to note that the slavery mentioned in these verses are the equivalent of an employer-employee relationship, not the owning and abuse of another individual. Paul’s goal in these verses is to encourage respectful attitudes toward those in authority. **According to Paul, why should we honor our employers?**

In the ancient world, many slaves became Christians and served unbelievers. Their work and attitude reflected Christ to those in authority over them. We often work for unbelieving bosses or supervisors. The way we work will tell them about the God we serve. **In what ways can our work ethic and attitude tell people about God?**

If we work for Christians, then our efforts benefit one another. In the church, employees and employers can look out for and serve one another through their careers. **What do you think it looks like to be a Christlike employee? What do you think it looks like to be a Christlike employer?**

Paul then moves to describing false teachers so that Timothy could identify and avoid them. Read 1 Timothy 6:3–5.

How can we know if a teaching is true? One way is to examine the behavior the doctrine produces. Paul was confronting teachers who were causing arguments, division, and bickering in the church. While we may be far from ancient Greek culture, some teachers thrive on controversy and arguments in our society. **What sorts of messages encourage division, suspicion, and bickering in the church today? What should our response be to these divisive voices?**

Verse 4 says false teachers thrive and even profit by creating distractions like debates, disputes, and arguments. **What are some of the debates and arguments within the church—or in the culture—that we have an unhealthy focus on? What do you think makes it so easy to focus on the ideas that aren’t central to our faith?**

Paul describes those who teach this false doctrine as being conceited, understanding nothing about the gospel. Many issues can divide churches, but disagreement should never break the bonds of love and unity in the church. **What do you think it looks like to discuss difficult issues without devolving into division and slander?**

One of the main markers of false teachers is their desire for money, but greed is something we all struggle with. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–10.

In verse 6, Paul compares the sinful profit of the false teacher to true profit: godliness combined with contentment. We have already seen in 1 Timothy that godliness is supremely valuable. If we add to our godliness a peace, ease, or satisfaction with what we have, we will find something far greater than a big payday. **Would you say that you are content in life right now? Why or why not? What area of your life do you feel most content with?**

Note: If you would like to learn more about godliness with contentment, go to Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of this study.

To be content is a great gain because it frees us from the demands of materialism. We spend a lot of energy worrying about obtaining more

Lined writing area consisting of 20 horizontal lines for student responses.

stuff, but there is nothing we can take with us when we die. Everything we own is a gift from God to be enjoyed and used for God’s glory. **What would happen if you lost all of your possessions today? Would your hope for the future or relationship with God change?**

Godly contentment is being so satisfied with our relationship with God that our material possessions have no bearing on our happiness. **In what ways do our possessions control our behavior and outlook on life?**

Verses 8–9 tell us that if we have clothes to wear and food to eat then we should be content. The bar for contentment is incredibly low. You don’t need anything else to be content. **What thing do you feel like, if you had it, you would be happy? What steps could you take to seek contentment today?**

Dr. Dates reminded us of the ease of making money an idol. He said that our money has the potential to turn us from God or to advance Christ’s gospel. It can both be a spiritual hindrance and a holy tool. **How do you use or spend your money? In what ways do you use money as a resource to advance the message of the gospel?**

Dr. Dates warned us that if we aren’t careful, money won’t be something we possess, but something that possesses us. Money makes a terrible God, and we should be diligent to never let it rule our hearts. God is our provider, not money. **In what ways does wealth promise to take care of us instead of God? In what ways can wealth never truly take God’s place?**

Dr. Dates posed a question for us to reflect on—how would we work with and use our money if we knew that God was using it to advance his agenda, not our own? **How would you answer Dr. Dates’s question? What are some ways that money can be used to love others and advance the kingdom of God?**

What could it look like for you to use the money God has given you to invest in a local ministry, charity, or church program?

We do not earn our salvation through giving, but the way we give is evidence of our salvation. **What is your posture toward giving—does giving produce a positive or negative response in you?**

Money is not evil— it is a resource. But the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Greed and discontent lead us into all sorts of sins and evil we never imagined we would be a part of. **What are some examples from our culture of the evil that loving money produces?**

Paul moves on to command Timothy to fight the good fight of faith. Read 1 Timothy 6:11–16.

Paul encourages Timothy to compete for and lay hold of the blessings Jesus promised. Timothy’s salvation is not in question, but it is a battle to stay focused on God’s promises instead of the world’s offerings. **In what way has your walk of faith with Christ felt like a fight?**

Note: If you would like to learn more about the good fight of faith, go to Go Deeper Section 3 at the end of this study.

Paul ends his first letter to Timothy with one final reminder about money. Read verses 17–20.

GO DEEPER

1. Weekly Reading Plan

You might not be able to cover every verse of 1 Timothy during your group session. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of 1 Timothy so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Day 1: 6:1–5

Day 2: 6:6–10

Day 3: 6:11–16

Day 4: 6:17–21

Day 5: *Read chapter 6 in its entirety.*

2. Godliness with Contentment

Contentment can be difficult to find when we grow up in a society that tells us more is always better. Being at peace with our current state can feel like giving up in some ways. But in 1 Timothy 6:6–8, Paul says that godliness with contentment is great gain.

Contentment isn't giving up on your goals—it's the ability to be satisfied with what you do have, as opposed to constantly focusing on what you don't. To blend that with godliness—character that reflects our good Father—brings ultimate satisfaction and purpose to our lives. But there is an idea in our culture that faithfulness to God is a path to material wealth.

What do you think will bring you more peace: contentment or getting everything you desire? Explain your answer.

Paul warns Timothy that those who believe the lie that godliness can lead to material gain have it all wrong. That view is conceited and misguided, rooting itself in discontent and even frustration. Instead of seeing every gift from God, focusing on wealth makes us feel like we are missing out, or that God is holding out on us. **In what ways does contentment free us from anxiety and greed?**

Read Philippians 4:11–13. **What is Paul's focus in these verses?**

Paul is describing his ability to be content in all kinds of situations because he knows that Christ is with him. He is not promising that he can do whatever he sets his mind to, but that he can be content in whatever circumstance God leads him into. Whether he had plenty to eat or went hungry, lots of money or no money at all, he always had spiritual abundance through his relationship with Christ. **What would it look like to be content in your current circumstances? If your circumstances changed for the worse, could you still be content?**

Many times, people equate their status in life with the blessing of God. When things are going great, they think God must be happy with them, but when things are tough they think God is mad. But our circumstances, financial status, or success in life don't determine God's faithfulness. He is faithful to us in whatever situation we find ourselves in. **When have you been tempted to believe that circumstances are an indicator of your status with God? How could you be intentional about reminding yourself that God is good no matter what financial state you find yourself in?**

At the end of the day, owning things is not as important as worshipping the God who created and gave us those things. God's desire is for us to be content with the necessities of life—like food, clothing, and shelter. Everything else is a sign of his generosity to us. Take a moment to thank

God for all the ways he has been generous toward you. **In what ways can you be satisfied with where you are today?**

3. Fight the Good Fight

Whether we realize it or not, we are in a spiritual battle. As believers, we have to remember that we have an enemy who opposes us and wants to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). Walking by faith and pursuing godliness is not a passive lifestyle, but a constant struggle against sin and temptation. Re-read 1 Timothy 6:11–13.

Paul says in verse 11 that he needed Timothy to flee from certain behaviors. Sin was not something Timothy could dabble with—it was a dangerous temptation that could hurt and even kill him. **How do you think about sin? Is it something dangerous or just distasteful?**

Paul also showed Timothy where he should run, to righteousness, godliness, faith, love, gentleness, and endurance. Faith is not passive. If anything, we are pulled toward sin when we are passive. Faith requires action—effort to move from certain behaviors and toward godliness. **What kinds of actions help us display and participate in the characteristics Paul lists in verse 11?**

Paul's command to Timothy to fight the good fight is evidence that the Christian life won't always be easy. We will have to battle temptation, comparison, favoritism, shame, and to keep our wandering attention on God. **In what ways have you had to fight in your faith journey?**

What could it look like for you to stay true to God's word despite the conflict and opposition you face? How can you remain committed to pursuing godliness when things get difficult?

The Book of 1 Timothy

RightNow Presents
The Book of 1 Timothy STUDY GUIDE

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