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## *Timothy: Priorities of Pastoral Leadership*

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# WHAT'S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

## Teacher Helps

### Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.



## Bible Background

The Study Guide is your main source of Bible study material.

This section helps you more fully understand and interpret the Scripture text.

## Teacher Options

The next three sections provide a beginning, middle, and end for the session, with focus paragraphs in between.

### Focus Paragraphs

are printed in italics at the top of the page because they are the most important part of the Teaching Guide. These paragraphs will help you move your class from “what the text meant” to “what the text means.”

## You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

### Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

SOUND  
FAITH*1 Timothy 1: 1-9b**Bible Background***Who Is Timothy?**

First Timothy is often grouped with 2 Timothy and Titus under the label “Pastoral Epistles.” This is somewhat of a misnomer because Timothy was not the pastor of the church at Ephesus. He was, however, fulfilling a pastoral role in guiding the church. A comparable scenario for today might be having a guest evangelist or missionary stay at one’s church for several months, leading Bible studies, holding meetings with church leaders, and engaging in one-on-one conversations with the pastor and other leaders.

Timothy was a trusted co-laborer in Paul’s missionary endeavors. He is frequently mentioned in Acts and in several of the Pauline epistles. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul implies that Timothy should be ranked among the apostles (Ciholas, 920). Despite the frequent references to Timothy throughout the New Testament, there isn’t much information on his background. We can glean from 2 Timothy that his family was mixed: his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, were Jewish followers of Christ. The fact that they have Greek names indicates they participated in Greek culture to some degree, perhaps at the insistence of Timothy’s father, who is unnamed in Scripture (Ciholas, 920). Timothy is first mentioned in Acts 16 in

relation to a controversy around circumcision. He’s forbidden from participating in Paul’s missionary efforts because he was not circumcised. Ultimately, Timothy did fulfill this Jewish ritual in order to become a Christian missionary, an irony that would make him intimately acquainted with harsh teachings that could divide churches.

As a participant in Paul’s ministry, Timothy is often a messenger, both preceding and following a visit from Paul to a local body of believers. Acts 17 tells about his remaining behind in Berea with Silas. Acts 19 mentions that he and Erastus went to Macedonia ahead of Paul’s visit. First Thessalonians 3 refers to Timothy’s presence with the church at Thessalonica, which was undergoing tremendous persecution. In addition to the church at Ephesus, Timothy is most engaged (unsuccessfully) in helping correct problems associated with the church at Corinth. In a way, Timothy was the first traveling church consultant, assisting local churches as they dealt with issues that hindered their growth and God’s mission. Although he is often referred to as a pastor and much of the content of 1 Timothy deals with the qualifications for church leadership, his church ministry, as described in Scripture, is more transient and temporary than what we typically associate with the pastoral role today.

## Who Wrote the Pastoral Letters?

Much debate and scholarship has gone into establishing the authorship of the pastoral letters, which were long assumed to have been written by the Apostle Paul. Formerly, many interpreters argued that, although accounts of Paul's journeys in Acts are silent on the subject, Paul must have written them during a first imprisonment in Rome. Today, however, that is a minority view among scholars. It is more often thought these letters were written after the Apostle's death by someone attempting to bring Paul's wisdom to bear on problems in the later church.

Why do scholars think this? For one thing, the style of the Pastoral Epistles is very different from the undisputed letters of Paul such as Romans or Galatians. More compelling is the argument that, according to Acts, the letters do not fit into the chronology of Paul's ministry and that the church structure described in the letters developed long after Paul's original ministry in that region (Polhill, 651).

At the same time, others continue to argue for Pauline authorship. Some say, for example, that 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians differ substantially in style for each other, but neither are doubted as authentically Pauline (Wright, 5). Whatever your opinion on these issues, the substance of 1 Timothy remains the same. For simplicity's sake, we will refer to the author of this letter as Paul in this unit.

## What False Teaching Is Being Addressed?

It is both puzzling and helpful to be left in the dark about the specific nature of the false teaching Timothy is asked to address. On one hand, our curiosity is sparked by the phrase "myths and... genealogies" (1 Tim 1:4). It's natural to want to understand Paul's reference point so we can apply the Bible accurately. It is likely that the false teaching was related to an interpretation of Jewish law (Polhill,

649), but it is only described in such general terms as "ruined their faith" (1:19) and "consciences will be seared" (4:2). We also know from Paul's exhortation that this false teaching is causing divisions among the believers.

Not knowing any further details helps us focus on the effects of the teaching and seek to avoid them. Whether it's myths and genealogies or guessing games or a burdensome legalistic interpretation of Scripture, we can be sure Paul would have churches set aside those distractions to focus on the core elements of the gospel.

Second, it is clear that Timothy's role in Ephesus is to confront the false teaching and call attention to its devastating effects. Leadership has a responsibility to name the causes of dissension and confusion in order to address them.

Finally, there are approaches to Scripture that are "useless." We sometimes fall into a trap of believing that any

# Outline

## FOR TEACHING

- I. Who Is Timothy?
  - A. Origin and Nature of their Ministerial Relationship
  - B. Itinerary and Locations of Shared Ministry
  - C. Timothy's Purpose in Ephesus
- II. Who Wrote the Pastoral Letters?
  - A. Authorship
  - B. Purpose
  - C. Context
- III. What False Teaching Is Being Addressed?
  - A. Myths and Genealogies
  - B. Abuse of Jewish Law
  - C. Dissension
- IV. What Is the Desired Outcome?
  - A. Unity
  - B. Sound Faith
  - C. Faithfulness to God's Way

Bible study is helpful. Paul makes the point that without a pure motive for teaching and a proper understanding of the journey of faith, a misguided interpretation of Scripture harms believers both individually and collectively.

Paul also emphasizes that the law may be at the root of the problem, but it is not the problem. He walks a fine line to keep from alienating Jewish believers who may be struggling to reconcile Jewish practice with Christian teaching. He says clearly in verse 8 that the law is “good if used appropriately.” He doesn’t want Timothy to tip the scales the other direction in favor of the Greek or Gentile believers and send the Jewish believers running for the exits. A delicate balance is required in Ephesus, not unlike many of the other congregations with which Paul worked.

### **What Is the Desired Outcome?**

Just beneath the surface of this opening exhortation is a strong undercurrent of genuine love and concern. Paul’s desire is for the church at Ephesus to exhibit sound faith and not succumb to distracting arguments. He insists that teaching should lead to “faithfulness to God’s way of doing things” (1:4).

## **A** *A Way to Begin*

*How much of our theology comes from the study of Scripture versus the lessons and sermons of teachers and preachers we’ve listened to over the years? If we are honest, we take on more of what we have been taught than what we have acquired through our own study. This is why Paul is so adamant that Timothy help the church at Ephesus have a sound approach to biblical instruction. He is aware of the damage that can be caused by misguided teachers passing on their own personal interpretations of Scripture based on impure motives. Today’s text gives us a perfect opportunity to engage group members in thinking about their approach to Bible study and the real source of their beliefs.*

### ○ **Sunday School Answers**

Discuss Bible lessons participants were taught that they took as fact, but later learned were either questionable or downright incorrect. How did they come to question what they had previously been taught? How can they know that what they are being taught today is sound?

Contrast adult Sunday school and children’s Sunday school. What should be expected of adult Bible learners that may not be possible or appropriate for children?

### ○ **Trusted Sources**

In today’s political environment, a person’s chosen news sources often reflect their political biases. The result is that we often only hear “news” that confirms what

we already believe. Discuss how the same thing can be true when it comes to Bible study.

### **Questions**

- What are your trusted sources of information about the Bible and its interpretation?
- Why do you trust these sources?

### ○ **Unsettled**

Ask participants to reflect on the adage “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.” What problems are inherent in that statement?

Note that all biblical teaching comes from a particular point of view. This can’t be avoided, but we can at least be aware that we may have blind spots in our reading and application of Scripture.

# **B** A Way to Explore Scripture

Today's lesson addresses the theme of spiritual discernment. In the opening lines of 1 Timothy, Paul reminds Timothy of how he led him to truth in the beginning. Therefore, his advice can be trusted now. The church at Ephesus was young and easily influenced. **Paul didn't want to see these believers led astray or fall into dissension because of misguided teachers.**

## ○ **Questions for Discussion**

Read 1 Timothy 1:1-9b. Ask the following questions.

### **Questions**

- What are some clues about the author's feelings toward this congregation?
- Why is Paul so direct about the teaching being wrong?
- What "myths and...genealogies" (1 Tim 1:4) might have been distracting the Ephesian church? What are some contemporary examples of such secondary, speculative issues?
- Is it possible to discern the goals of a particular Bible teacher or preacher? If so, how?
- What are other examples in Scripture when the Jewish law was mishandled to the detriment of the gospel message?
- When do rules get in the way of biblical truth?

## ○ **Old Wounds**

As a class, brainstorm the benefits of studying the Bible with a group as opposed to personal study (although both are important!). List these on the board. Next, discuss attitudes or behaviors that are necessary for fruitful group Bible study.

Read 1 Timothy 1:3-7. Invite participants to share specific words or phrases that remind them of negative experiences related to bad teaching they have heard.

## **Questions**

- What did that teaching do to your faith journey?
- What was its impact on your congregation?
- Was the teaching ever corrected? If so, how?
- What would you do differently if this situation arose in our church today?

## ○ **Taking Inventory**



Distribute copies of the resource page "Sources of Faith Inventory." Have participants complete the worksheet and ask those who are willing to share what they wrote. Ask the following questions.

## **Questions**

- What did you learn about your own faith development?
- Based on this survey, do you think you have a sound faith? Why or why not?
- What additional work do you think you need to do in order to shore up your biblical understanding?

# C A Way to End

*There is a fine line between serious biblical scholarship and elitism. The Scriptures are for everyone, but as the experience of the church in Ephesus bears out, teaching is not for everyone. Glancing at a text and throwing some personal thoughts out without prayerful consideration of the text's meaning and application can be destructive. It's not enough to say, "Well, I did my best." On the other hand, it shouldn't take a PhD to teach Sunday school. Investing time in study, spiritual disciplines, and evaluation of one's motives will pay dividends in sound teaching and sound faith.*

## ○ Take Responsibility

Invite participants to think about the last time they spent time in personal Bible study. Ask them to reflect on the following questions.

### Questions

- What is the hardest part of Bible study for you?
- How do you form your beliefs?
- Have you ever changed your mind about a biblical text based on further study?
- Have you ever been derailed by "myths and...genealogies" (1 Tim 1:4)? If so, how did you get back on track?

If any are willing, allow them to share their responses with the group.

## ○ Lectio Divina

*Lectio divina* is Latin for "sacred reading." It is an ancient practice of reading a brief passage of Scripture deeply and meditatively. It involves four phases:

- (1) Simple reading or listening to the text, focusing on the facts of the passage (*lectio*).
- (2) Reading while seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit (*meditatio*).
- (3) Reading while offering up sentence-prayers based on what one hears (*oratio*).
- (4) Listening for a single word or phrase that God lays upon the heart (*contemplatio*). This can be something participants take with them to mull over in the days to come.

Read 1 Timothy 1:1-9b through four times, once for each movement of *lectio divina*. Remind participants of what they should focus on each time through. Pause for a moment of silent prayer after each repetition.

## Resources

Paul Ciholas, "Timothy," *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. Watson E. Mills et al. (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1990).

John B. Polhill, "Pastoral Epistles," *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. Watson E. Mills et al. (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1990).

N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

# 2

## BLAMELESS CHARACTER

*1 Timothy 3: 1-13*

### *Bible Background*



#### **What Is a Supervisor?**

Last week's lesson introduced us to the overall theme of 1 Timothy. In our discussion of "sound faith," we delved into our understanding of Scripture and the sources of that understanding. This week, we look at a passage that has likely been controversial in many churches. Instead of focusing on the character traits needed for church leadership, many have instead used this text to exclude people from service. These two lists of qualifications have been twisted to create disunity within a church and are often quoted when debates over who is qualified for service arise. If these issues have been settled for your congregation, you will likely have a broader discussion in your class. If not, you will want to take extra time in prayerful preparation for leading this session.

It's important to understand two important keys to this (and any) biblical text: translation and culture. The first role mentioned in this text is one of "supervisor" (1 Tim 3:1). This word has traditionally been translated as "bishop." The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses this term for military commanders, managers, and even God. In the New Testament, the word is used to describe Christ as well as early church leaders (Jefford, 116).

What exactly were the responsibilities of a supervisor or bishop in the early church? The Pastoral Epistles suggest there was one such leader per congregation who handled instruction of the believers, administration of ceremonial practices, and protection and preservation of Christian doctrine. The supervisor also oversaw economic management of the flock, hospitality, care of the poor and marginalized, and general arbitration of disputes within the community (Jefford, 116). Thus, the first-century "supervisor" was not entirely the same as a present-day "bishop," and we have to be careful not to imagine a present-day bishop when reading this text. That said, a supervisor was an important person in the life of the church. Drawing up a list of qualifications for this position was a natural and necessary step in the church's development.

Who can be an overseer? Stated generally, it must be someone who practices what they preach. His or her life must reflect what the church is all about (Wright, 28). They must model the gospel message. They should live with enough of a distinction from the culture around them that they can speak to the culture with moral objectivity. The requirements are straightforward: be without fault, faithful to one's spouse, sober, modest, honest, hospitable, an effective teacher, not addicted to alcohol, not a bully, gentle, peaceable, not greedy, a good

home manager and parent, not a new believer, and have a good reputation outside of the church. Simple, right?

## Controversies

Notice that this list does not specifically say “must be a male” or “must not be divorced.” Like many modern translations, the Common English Bible avoids gender-specific language throughout this passage. By not differentiating between male and female, the CEB actually holds to the more literal translation without reflecting a cultural bias. At the same time, it is most likely that, in the early days of Christianity, all overseers were male because it was a male-dominated society.

As for divorce, the phrase “faithful to their spouse” (vv. 2, 12; literally, “a one-woman man”) most likely refers not to remarriage after divorce (or the death of a spouse) but rather to polygamy (Wright, 30). When understood in this light, the qualifications also do not exclude the service of single people.

One final note about the character requirements for a supervisor: some Protestant traditions have appealed to this text to decry the consumption of alcohol. The phrase “shouldn’t be addicted to alcohol” (v. 3) does not require a “teetotaler” approach. Rather, it states that church leaders should avoid excessive consumption. Clean drinking water was a rarity in the first century, and fermented beverages such as wine were actually healthier to drink (Wright, 35; see 1 Tim 5:23). Even so, Paul puts Timothy on notice that overindulgence is a character flaw that will harm the church.

Through the years, churches have tended to focus on gender, marital status, and alcohol consumption rather than the more difficult to discern elements of personal character such as being hospitable, not greedy, honest, and peaceable. The selective enforcement of these qualifications historically has been more of a function of cultural or political

# Outline

## FOR TEACHING

- I. What Is a Supervisor?
  - A. The Meaning of the Term
    1. Translating the Language
    2. Translating the Culture
  - B. Responsibilities
  - C. Qualifications
- II. Controversies
  - A. Women Supervisors?
  - B. Divorced Supervisors?
  - C. Drinking Supervisors?
- III. What Is a Servant?
  - A. The Meaning of the Term
  - B. Responsibilities
  - C. Qualifications

views rather than scriptural authority. Help group members distinguish between personal bias and a biblical mandate. With a better understanding of the language used, the cultural context, and the structure of the early church, group members should be freed from divisive issues and focus on the key points of the passage relating to character.

## What Is a Servant?

“Servant” is a literal translation of the Greek word traditionally translated “deacon” or “minister.” This word is used thirty times in the New Testament in a variety of contexts. It can mean anything from table waiters to the servants of a king (Crockett, 200). The vast majority of occurrences of the word are in the letters of Paul. It is used to designate an official church office in Philippians 1:1 and in Romans 16:1, where Paul specifically mentions a deacon by the name of Phoebe.

What is the role of a deacon? Traditionally, this has often been seen as an administrative function. A closer look at the biblical data reveals that these servants were actually more engaged with

social ministry. In Acts 6, they are charged with care for the church's widows, freeing others to conduct ministries of evangelism and proclamation. Today's passage lends support to this understanding of a deacon's responsibilities. Here, Paul lists character traits rather than specific skills for holding the office of deacon.

The list is similar to that of the supervisor: dignified, not two-faced, not a heavy drinker of alcohol, not greedy, and holding on to the faith. Qualifications are then enumerated for women servants of the church: dignified, not gossipers, and faithful in everything. The qualifications continue with admonitions that would appear to apply to both genders: being faithful to their spouses and managing their children and households well.

## A Way to Begin

*When thinking about the methods churches have used to select leaders through the centuries, it's impossible to ignore the influence of corporate culture, particularly in American Christianity in the past fifty years. Churches look for a chief executive officer with theatrical skills in their pastors and look for financial and operations management skills in their deacons. Paul clearly articulates the qualifications for these crucial roles, however, and he focuses almost exclusively on issues of character.*

### ○ Ministerial Criteria

Distribute slips of paper and pens or pencils to the class. Ask participants to list the top five characteristics they like to see in a pastor. Have them make a similar list for deacons. Invite all who are willing to share their lists with the class. List their responses on the board. Note traits that are mentioned more than once.

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Ask the following questions.

#### Questions

- What are the similarities between the lists on the board and the lists in the text?
- What are the differences?
- How do you account for the similarities? The differences?
- Do Christians generally focus on the right qualities when selecting church leaders? Explain.

### ○ Finding the Ideal

Ask participants to imagine the ideal minister or deacon. Call for volunteers to share their descriptions. Listen for how many of the descriptions are skills-based and how many are character-based. Point this out to the class. Ask the following questions.

#### Questions

- Have you ever known anyone who lived up to your ideal in these roles? Have you ever been disappointed? Explain.
- In your experience, do churches choose leaders based more on skills or on character?
- What role does personality and popularity play in the selection process?
- What role does prayer and spiritual discernment play?

# **B** A Way to Explore Scripture

*One of my mentors used to say this about senior leadership: “The first qualification is that they don’t want the job.” Paul takes a different approach with his instructions for Timothy, declaring that whoever wants to serve wants a good thing. Last week we talked about motives for serving. **This week, we look at the most essential character traits for those who would serve the church.***

## ○ **A Scary List**

Paul’s list of qualifications is daunting, beginning with the statement that a church’s supervisor must be “without fault” (1 Tim 3:2). Compared to that, the rest of the list is easy!

If you haven’t already done so, read 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Discuss how this text might scare away good potential church leaders who fear they could never measure up. Ask the following questions.

### **Questions**

- Do you think these lists of qualifications are exhaustive? What would you add?
- Other than the supervisor being “skilled at teaching” (v. 2) and not a new believer (v. 6), these lists focus exclusively on character traits rather than learned skills. How does this compare to how pastors and lay leaders are chosen in our church today?
- It has been said there are only three ways to tell what’s important to people: how they spend their time, how they spend their money, and what they talk about. How might this apply to selecting suitable candidates for church leadership?
- Based on this text, is anyone truly qualified to serve, or is this an unattainable ideal? Explain.
- If this text does paint an idealistic portrait of church leaders, are there still nonnegotiable characteristics on which churches should insist for their leaders? What are they?

## ○ **Excluded from Serving**

If you haven’t already done so, read 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Christians have been good at excluding ever since some in the church preached that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). Today’s passage has often been used to exclude certain groups of believers from serving. Ask the following questions.

### **Questions**

- What have you been taught about who could or could not serve as a pastor or deacon?
- Is it possible for the church to make room for opposing viewpoints on this question? Should it?

Using information in the Bible Background section, discuss what the text says and does not say about who may or may not serve as a pastor or deacon. Explore how much our culture influences how we apply this passage of Scripture.

# C A Way to End

Paul puts great emphasis on how much those who would serve should be distinguished from the culture around them. Their reputation should be good outside the church to prevent “embarrass[ment]” (v. 7) and falling “under the devil’s spell” (v. 6). **This admonition isn’t just applicable to church leaders. It’s a message we all need to heed.**

## ○ What About You?

Ask participants to reexamine the text and make mental notes of areas where they feel they don’t match up. Invite them to listen as you ask the following questions for their silent reflection. Read the questions, pausing for a full thirty seconds between each one.

### Questions

- Would you be willing to serve this church as either a pastor or a deacon?
- According to the lists, what are your strengths?
- Where do you fall short?
- Other than teaching skill and not being a new convert, is there anything in these lists of qualifications that shouldn’t be expected of all Christians? Explain.
- If you are not willing to serve, what is holding you back? (Make note of nonordained leadership roles, such as teachers, committee members, etc., that participants might want to consider.)
- How can God use you to help this church outside of formal leadership roles?

## ○ Your Turn



Distribute copies of the resource page “Your Ministry Résumé.” Have participants complete the inventory privately. Ask the following questions.

### Questions

- How do you stack up to your own ideal of a minister?
- Where do you need to do some work?
- What is holding you back from serving?
- How does applying these standards to yourself change your perspective?

### Resources

Bennie R. Crockett, “Deacon,” *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. Watson E. Mills et al. (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1990).

Clayton N. Jefford, “Bishop,” *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. Watson E. Mills et al. (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1990).

N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

INSPIRING  
EXAMPLE

1 Timothy 4: 7b-16

*Bible Background***Training Regimens**

We have already established that 1 Timothy offers advice about pastoring God's people. As such, today's text speaks wisdom about the spiritual training required for such a calling. But what's good for the pastor is good for the people. How much healthier would the church be if all members were trained to be more like Christ? The challenge in today's text is a relatively self-focused one. It answers the question: what should I be doing to be a better minister and follower of Christ? After all, it's not only the pastor who can set an example.

The contrast between physical and spiritual training in verse 8 is reminiscent of Paul's description of the faith journey in 1 Corinthians 9 as either a race or a wrestling match (Wright, 46). It's one of the few places in the New Testament that describes an activity we are familiar with today. Paul makes the point that training for holy living is work. This approach to spirituality stands in stark contrast to contemporary views of spirituality as "a sense of the presence of God" (Wright, 46). By reducing our spiritual discipline to such a minimal and passive state, we are not living into what Paul claims will have benefit both here and now and in the life to come. It only makes sense that if we grow closer to God through spiritual

training today that this closeness will continue to enrich our experience of God when we actually live in God's presence.

**Savior of All People**

Verse 10 affirms that God is the "savior of all people, especially those who believe." What are we to make of this assertion? There are at least three possible interpretations:

- (1) Everyone will be saved, but those who believe in the gospel here and now will enjoy a relationship with God in the present.
- (2) God is the savior for potentially everyone if they believe. There is no other savior.
- (3) This God through this Jesus is the true savior through whom the entire world will be rescued from decay and injustice, but because humans retain the right to refuse God's offer, only believers will find salvation (Wright, 48).

Our interpretation hinges upon our emphasis. Is Paul suggesting God will save *everyone* or that everyone will be saved by *God*? In the first case, the emphasis seems universalistic; that is, God will save everyone regardless of their belief. In the second case, God is the only one who can save those who believe.

The word "savior" was in wide use in Paul's day as a title of honor for the Roman emperor (Wright, 48). Paul

subverts the cultural and political use of the term by applying it exclusively to the one true God. Though it may be tempting to teach a more universalistic approach—it is certainly more palatable for our consequences-averse culture—it’s important to note that in other letters, Paul mentions that not all will be saved (Wright, 48).

### Reading, Preaching, and Teaching

Verses 11-16 are action-oriented. Pay attention to the verbs Paul uses: “command,” “teach,” “don’t let anyone look down on you,” “set an example.” Here we find the heart of Paul’s pastoral advice. Paul challenges Timothy to lead and not merely be present with the congregation at Ephesus. Those who have experienced authoritarian relationships in their lives or even at church may shy away from such seemingly heavy-handed admonitions, but in Paul’s day, the church was so new it had to have clear and strong direction.

As we discussed in a previous session, there were false teachers and misinterpreters of Jewish law in the midst of this congregation. A strong word was needed to counteract their teaching. Part of the strength of the message had to be Timothy’s view of himself. The gospel message would be undermined if Timothy approached it timidly because he was young. Paul asserts that age is not a qualification for authority in this case. Despite his youth, Timothy must preach and teach the truth and trust God to back it up (Wright, 51).

While youth shouldn’t undermine Timothy’s ministry, neither should his character. Paul gives Timothy a clear formula to follow: be an example by “your speech, behavior, love, faith, and by being sexually pure” (v. 12). Each of these aspects of character could have the potential to disrupt Timothy’s ministry and send the church into chaos and confusion.

What applies to the clergy also has merit for the laity, of course. There are

# Outline

## FOR TEACHING

- I. Training for Holiness
  - A. Useful for Everything
  - B. Promise for This Life
  - C. Promise for the Life to Come
  - D. Work and Struggle
  
- II. God, the Savior of Everyone
  - A. Our Hope
  - B. Possible Interpretations
    1. Everyone Will Be Saved
    2. Everyone Can Potentially Be Saved
    3. God Is the True and Only Savior
  - C. A Question of Emphasis
  
- III. Action Verbs
  - A. Command
  - B. Teach
  - C. Don’t Let Anyone Look Down on You
  
- IV. Set an Example
  - A. Speech
  - B. Behavior
  - C. Love
  - D. Faith
  - E. Sexual Purity

only two ways to determine a person’s character: what they do and what they say. Paul addresses both. If it’s important for adherents of a fledgling religion to demonstrate good moral character in order to build a good reputation among outsiders, how much more important is it today when the world knows Christianity and yet sees very few examples of truly Christlike Christianity? Unfortunately, the oft-quoted observation of G. K. Chesterton is all too true: “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried” (48).

To keep in check the legalistic tendencies of his audience, which was obviously struggling with onerous applications of

Jewish law to Christian living, Paul includes “love” and “faith” in his series of commandments (v. 12). These qualities temper our pursuit of high moral character. We mustn’t lose sight of love for God and our fellow humans, nor must we attempt to follow a rigid moral code without accepting by faith that the God who calls us to live such a life can empower us to do so.

The final admonition in this series, to remain sexually pure, would definitely make Christians stand out. Ephesus was a port city and home to all the activities a cosmopolitan port city promotes (Blevins, 256). By not sharing the sexual mores of their culture, Christians would distinguish themselves even more clearly than by just generally following rules and being nice.

Paul concludes his admonition with instructions about self-care. He explicitly states Timothy should work on his “own development” (v. 16). Exhibiting good moral character and teaching God’s truth can’t be achieved without cultivating God’s gifts (Wright, 52).

## A Way to Begin

*Athletes, performers, and other celebrities have been quick to point out they are not role models—particularly when they have been caught in some illicit activity. People don’t want the pressure of being a role model because of the inherent accountability that comes with such a lofty position. In Paul’s writings, he often lifts himself up as an example for others. In today’s text, he instructs Timothy to do the same.*

### ○ **Role Models and Heroes**

Ask the following questions.

#### **Questions**

- Whom do you admire most? Whom do you try to imitate? What makes these people admirable and worthy of imitation?
- Are there people you admire but don’t try to imitate? Explain.
- What is beneficial about having an admired role model? What is potentially harmful?
- Has a role model ever let you down? What influence did that have on you?

### ○ **Big Brothers and Sisters**

Ask participants to reflect on a time when they taught a young person something new. Perhaps they led children in Vacation Bible School, volunteered at a school, or served as a mentor to their own children or someone else’s. Ask the following questions.

#### **Questions**

- What was it like to be someone’s role model?
- Did you realize you were a role model at the time? If not, when did that realization come?
- How did being a role model influence your behavior when that person was present?
- Did you ever feel that you had disappointed those who looked up to you? Explain.

# B A Way to Explore Scripture

Woody Allen once said that eighty percent of life is just showing up. That is not true, however, of living the Christian life. It takes real effort and discipline, which can be in short supply in our world today. Paul's allusion to physical training is a metaphor that resonates with any of us who have ever tried to get into better shape, lose weight, or run a distance race. **Encourage participants to accept Paul's challenge to set a worthy example for others.**

## ○ Questions for Discussion

Read 1 Timothy 4:7a-16. Ask the following questions.

### Questions

- How is “training in holy living” useful for “everything” (v. 8)?
- What are the immediate benefits of such an effort? What are the eternal benefits?
- How can hope in God (v. 10) be an encouraging thought in our “work and struggle”?
- How do you feel about church leaders being told to “command” other believers (v. 11)? Why would this be an important instruction for Timothy? Why might it be difficult for him?
- In what sense do church leaders “set an example” (v. 12) for the congregation?
- Paul encourages Timothy not to feel defensive about his youth. When have you seen young pastors struggle to gain the respect of the congregation? What is required—both of them and of the church—for them to become the leaders they need to be?
- Why is public reading, preaching, and teaching (v. 13) important to the life of a church?
- What are some ways we might neglect our spiritual gifts (v. 14)?
- What is the significance of the laying on of hands? When do we practice it in our congregation? Why?
- Why is visibility important to Timothy's growth (v. 15)?
- In what sense can Timothy “save” himself (v. 16)? What was Paul trying to say?

## ○ In the Public Eye

Read 1 Timothy 4:7a-16. Discuss what it means to set an example of faith for others. Read Matthew 6:1, which warns believers against practicing their religion in front of others.

### Question

- How can we set an example for others while not drawing attention to our piety?

Make two lists on the board labeled “Public Acts” and “Private Acts.” Ask participants to categorize the spiritual disciplines Paul mentions in 1 Timothy 4 into one or both lists. Discuss why each action goes in which list.

Discuss ways to distinguish between setting an example and fishing for praise or recognition from others.

# C A Way to End

Paul concludes this section by urging Timothy to focus on his own development (v. 16). Even those busy ministering to others need to tend to their own spiritual health. In fact, they may need this more than most. **How can Christians—both clergy and laity—take care of ourselves spiritually?**

## ○ **Heal Yourself**

In Luke 4:23, Jesus quotes a proverb familiar to his audience: “Doctor, heal yourself?” How can Christians do a better job of attending to our spiritual health? Ask participants to close their eyes and prayerfully focus on the following questions but not answer them aloud.

### **Questions**

- How would you rate your spiritual condition right now? Hot, cold, or lukewarm?
- What is missing in your life?
- Where is your weak point in living your calling and setting an example for others? What’s your strength?
- How much time do you spend in prayer each week?
- Who in your circle is most likely to be influenced by your example?

Close with prayer for those for whom we set an example. Ask God for strength and wisdom to live in such a way that others may be inspired to grow.

## ○ **Tools of the Trade**

Ask participants to list the tools and resources they rely on for spiritual growth. List these on the board.

## ○ **Fitness Schedule**

Distribute copies of the resource page “Training Schedule.” Have participants complete the worksheet, then ask the following questions.

### **Questions**

- Which spiritual disciplines are most helpful to you?
- Which ones are most difficult?
- What day is hardest for you? What spiritual discipline(s) could help the most?

### **Resources**

James L. Blevins, “Ephesus,” *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. Watson E. Mills et al. (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1990).

G. K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1910).

N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

# 4

## PROPER RELATIONSHIPS

*1 Timothy 5: 1-7; 6: 1-2, 17-19*

### *Bible Background*



#### **Family Ties**

Today's passages are held together by the common theme of relationship. Paul's pastoral advice throughout 1 Timothy has been high and lofty as well as grounded and practical. Though Paul's age and culture were different from ours, his advice still holds up almost 2,000 years later for churches and pastors today.

Anyone who has ever had to confront a family member about a sensitive issue can relate to the pretext for the opening admonition in chapter 5. Such confrontations aren't easy. The matter must be handled with wisdom and gentleness to achieve the desired results. Paul is really talking about emotional intelligence here: the ability to read one's own and other people's emotions and relate to them accordingly (Golman). This skill is inherently contextual. Paul understands that, as a pastor, you don't approach an older man the same way you would a younger woman. He spells out the best approaches based on the roles each group fulfilled in his culture.

Paul's advice is based on the family structure of the ancient world. This metaphor is also found in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Galatians. Churches of the first century were both actually and functionally more like an extended family than even small congregations are today.

The members of the local congregation were often related—such as the family of Cornelius in Acts 10—or became family for each other because their conversion cut them off from their biological families. It's a safe bet that families in New Testament times had their share of dysfunction, but by using the concept of the extended family as a model for relating to people in the church, Paul draws on a familiar set of guidelines.

Older men are to be treated with respect and gentleness, Paul says, like one's father. Younger men are to be treated with love and mutual respect like a brother. Older women are to be treated like one's mother, the pillar of a family. And younger women are to be treated like sisters. Because his culture was so male-dominated, Paul goes out of his way to instruct Timothy to respect younger women and not dismiss them. This is also a cautionary statement: if you have respect for younger women, you are less likely to objectify them and fall into sexual sin.

#### **Needy Widows**

Life in ancient times was especially harsh for women who no longer had financial support from their husbands. Throughout the New Testament, widows are a symbol of sorrow, vulnerability, and powerlessness—but occupy a special place in God's providence and concern. First Timothy 5:3-7 provides specific instructions on

# Outline

## FOR TEACHING

their care, indicating the early church had a formal system for widows through which they were both receivers and givers of care. To be enrolled in this ministry, widows should be at least sixty years old, married only once, a person of integrity, known for charitable service, and resolved not to marry again (Simmons, 959). If a widow met this criteria, she could be cared for by the church and was considered “truly needy” (vv. 3, 5). Women who were younger, however, and had family to care for them or were likely to marry again should not be enrolled.

Paul’s seemingly harsh pronouncement on the self-indulgent widow is that she is “dead even while she is alive” (v. 6). It’s unclear what Paul considers self-indulgent, but common sense tells us the church had only limited resources, and those resources needed to be directed toward widows who had no other means of support. Those who had enough to indulge themselves shouldn’t be receiving the church’s aid. Younger widows shouldn’t be enrolled because they were more likely to remarry. Paul wanted to avoid the situation of a younger widow remarrying and then being financially supported not only by her new husband but also by the church’s benevolence ministry to widows (Wright, 60).

Paul’s harshest condemnation, though, is for the family who does not take care of its own widows. A hallmark of Christian character is care for others. If believers don’t care for their own relatives who can’t care for themselves, they are a terrible example to outsiders and a detriment to the church’s reputation. Such a stingy family would also cause strife within the church if a widow had to be enrolled in the church program while her family ignored her needs. Paul wanted Timothy to be on the lookout for such abuses of the church’s resources.

### Power Dynamics

Another tricky relationship to navigate in New Testament times was that of a slave

- I. Contextual Relationships
  - A. Older Men
  - B. Younger Men
  - C. Older Women
  - D. Younger Women
- II. Caring for Widows
  - A. Criteria for Financial Support
  - B. A Family’s Responsibility
  - C. Upholding Moral Character
- III. Slaves and Owners
  - A. Working for Nonbelievers
  - B. Showing Respect
  - C. Maintaining a Positive Witness
- IV. What to Do with Wealth
  - A. Live Humbly
  - B. Give Generously
  - C. Money Isn’t Everything

owner and slave (6:1-2). Our modern sensibilities cause a strong reaction to this text. It’s important to note, however, that just because Paul advises those in the institution of slavery on how to live as Christians, he is not endorsing the owning of another human being. This was simply the world Paul and Timothy were ministering in.

Timothy most likely had slave owners and slaves in his congregation, worshipping and serving alongside each other. Paul wasn’t ignoring the inhumanity of the system. In fact, he suggests something completely antithetical to the culture: the slave owner and the slave are both equal before God and have equal standing in the church.

This is the important application for us today. We can’t let social inequities within our congregations influence how we relate to each other in the church. The wealthy are not to be catered to while the impoverished are ignored. There are too many examples of the more privileged

running—and ruining—churches because they lost sight of God’s calling and Christ’s example, focusing instead on their own interests.

At the forefront of Paul’s concern is the believers’ witness to the community. Having nonbelievers as masters was not an excuse to be a disrespectful slave. Today, we might say that working for unbelievers is not an excuse to be a lousy employee. We have the ability, just as Paul said slaves had in their day, to influence those in authority over us by the way we respond to them.

Finally, 1 Timothy 6:17-19 addresses the wealthy. For most American Christians, this means us. We are among the wealthiest people in the world, and we can’t let ourselves off the hook by comparing what we see as perhaps our own modest means with the lifestyles of the wealthiest Americans. Rather, we are to be generous and use our wealth for good ends, not selfish ones. Humility is the best approach to wealth and ensures harmony in the church.

## A Way to Begin

**A** *Approach today’s passages from the standpoint of relationships within a church. Prompt participants to find themselves among these roles and apply these insights to their circumstances. These are practical admonitions designed to help churches operate more smoothly and to help Christians get along.*

### ○ **Who Are the People in My Neighborhood?**

*Sesame Street* features a song that asks, “Who are the people in my neighborhood?” Though it’s often problematic to group people into categories, think about the different types of people that make up our church: young and old, male and female, etc. Ask the following questions.

#### **Questions**

- What is unique about the makeup of our church?
- What demographics are underrepresented? Which are overrepresented?
- How is it possible for church members to get along despite their differences?

### ○ **Givers and Receivers**

Ask participants to think about a time they received financial, spiritual, or emotional help from the church. Ask the following questions.

#### **Questions**

- What were your circumstances that required assistance?
- What did it feel like to be on the receiving end of the church’s assistance?
- How did you respond?

Now, ask participants to think about a time they provided assistance to someone in the church. Ask the following questions.

#### **Questions**

- Without mentioning names, what was the circumstance?
- What motivated you to help?
- What did it feel like to be on the giving end of the church’s assistance?

# **B** A Way to Explore Scripture

*This lesson provides a practical selection of verses about how Timothy is to relate to members of the congregation at Ephesus and how those members are to relate to each other and to those outside their fellowship. Although these instructions reflect the culture of their day, it is possible to find parallels to our situation. Help participants discover these parallels by uncovering both the context of the time in which it was written and how it might be applied today.*

## ○ **Questions for Discussion**

Read the passages one by one, asking the associated questions.

### **1 Timothy 5:1-2**

- Why does Paul advise to “encourage” rather than “correct” an older man (v. 1)?
- What attitudes do we expect our children to have toward us? What attitudes do we (or did we) display in our relationships with our parents?
- How might treating younger men and women as brothers and sisters help avoid problems in the church?

### **1 Timothy 5:3-7**

- Who is tasked with caring for widows? What is expected of widows in return?
- Why is it preferable for families to care for their own members in need?

### **1 Timothy 6:1-2**

- What makes you angry or uncomfortable about this passage? Why?
- Is this passage an endorsement of slavery or merely an attempt to deal with the reality of slavery in the writer’s context? Explain.
- How can a slave influence his or her owner for good?

### **1 Timothy 6:17-19**

- What is the responsibility of the wealthy toward their fellow church members?
- What should be the goal of having and using wealth?

## ○ **Power, Sex, and Money**



Read 1 Timothy 5:1-7; 6:1-2, 17-19. Distribute copies of the resource page “Power, Sex, and Money.” Have

participants complete the worksheet. Invite them to share their responses. Note that some of these instructions may well fit into one or more categories. Ask the following questions.

### **Questions**

- Which of these three categories is addressed most frequently in these passages?
- When problems surface in the church, how often is one of these issues the root cause?
- What stands out to you about the nature of Paul’s advice?
- How might you condense Paul’s advice into a single sentence?

# C A Way to End

Paul doesn't let us get away with shrugging our shoulders, throwing up our hands, and saying "I just can't deal with that person." **In the life of the church, we must find a way to be respectful and loving to everyone.** As you conclude this unit, help participants focus on what they can do practically to foster unity in the church.

## ○ Problem People

Ask the following questions.

### Questions

- Of the types of people mentioned in these texts, which pose the biggest problem for you relationally? Why?
- What additional techniques for improving your relationships with members of these groups do you find helpful?
- What would our church look like if everyone practiced these relational principles?
- Is there ever a time when it's okay to not interact with someone in the church because the differences are too great?

## ○ Prayerful Response

Close with prayer by asking participants to bow their heads and close their eyes while you offer the following prayer sentences. Ask them to pray silently, following the cues you provide. Pause for up to a minute between each paragraph.

Thank you, God, for ensuring our church is made up of many different types of people.

Sometimes our differences cause conflicts. Help us to see where our relationships need mending, and give us the grace to relate better to those we tend to avoid.

There are many in our congregation with needs. Bring to mind those we are overlooking in our ministries.

As we go into the world, remind us to treat everyone with respect. Remind us now of those outside the church for whom our friendship can be an influence toward a life of faith.

Thank you for these faithful participants in our group and our church. Make us all better servants for your glory. Amen.

## Resources

Daniel Golman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).

Douglas A. Knight, "Family," *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. Watson E. Mills et al. (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1990).

Paul D. Simmons, "Widow in the New Testament," *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. Watson E. Mills et al. (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1990).

N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

# SOURCES OF FAITH INVENTORY

*Understanding what we believe and why we believe it begins with understanding the sources of our beliefs. Take a few minutes to take this simple survey. You may share your answers with the group or keep them to yourself.*

Source	How much of your overall theological knowledge comes from this source?
Personal Bible study	
Sunday school - childhood	
Sunday school - adulthood	
Sermons	
Books and commentaries	
Religious education courses in school	
Parents or grandparents	
Bible study or accountability groups	
Conferences or workshops	
The Internet	
Peers	
Other: _____	
TOTAL	100%

# YOUR MINISTRY RÉSUMÉ

*Understanding what we believe and why we believe it begins with understanding the sources of our beliefs. Take a few minutes to take this simple survey. You may share your answers with the group or keep them to yourself.*

Without fault	
Faithful to your spouse	
Sober	
Modest	
Honest	
Show hospitality	
Skilled at teaching	
Not addicted to alcohol	
Not a bully	
Gentle	
Peaceable	
Not greedy	
Manage your own household well	
Children are obedient with complete respect	
Not a new believer	
Good reputation with those outside the church	

# TRAINING SCHEDULE

*In his letter to Timothy, Paul explains that spiritual training is of more value than physical exercise. Take a few minutes to consider the spiritual disciplines you find most beneficial and place them on the weekly schedule below.*

*A list of disciplines has been included to help prompt you, but it is not intended to be exclusive or exhaustive.*

Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	

- Suggested spiritual disciplines:*
- Prayer
  - Confession
  - Scripture reading
  - Bible study
  - Lectio divina*
  - Meditation
  - Listening
  - Silence
  - Worship
  - Journaling
  - Singing
  - Playing a musical instrument
  - Fasting
  - Serving
  - Resting





# POWER, SEX, AND MONEY

*In Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters, N. T. Wright suggests Paul’s advice to Timothy in this passage comes down to “power, sex, and money” (Wright, 55).*

*Assign each of the specific instructions from the text to one of those three categories. Be prepared to discuss why you placed each item in the category you did.*

<b>Power</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Money</b>

Source: N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003)

