

LIFE THAT TRULY IS LIFE

A young green plant with two leaves growing out of dark brown soil against a blurred green background. The plant is positioned centrally, with its stem and leaves extending upwards towards the text.

A STUDY OF ST. PAUL'S LETTERS
TO HIS DISCIPLE TIMOTHY
— THE REV. DR. R. LEIGH SPRUILL —

Life That Truly is Life

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LIFE

THAT TRULY IS

LIFE



“Take hold of the life that truly is life.”

1 Timothy 6:19



*“I came that they may have life
and have it abundantly.”*

John 10:10



*“Our Lord’s pastoral plan, as every page of the Gospels
plainly tells us, is based upon his calling, training,
and direction of the Twelve.*

This is his constant consideration.”

Martin Thornton,

The Heart of the Parish: A Theology of the Remnant



*“It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance
that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book,
nor a creed, nor a system of thought,
nor a rule of life, but a visible community.”*

Lesslie Newbigin,

The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church

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A Study of St. Paul's Letters to His Disciple Timothy

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The Rev. Dr. R. Leigh Spruill

With devotions written by Katie Pearson



Published by the Church of St. John the Divine





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INTRODUCTION

A core premise guiding this study of First and Second Timothy is that we grow in our faith when we develop intentional relationships with other Christians who are examples, mentors, and friends to us. The church is more than a repository of spiritual truths and more than a meaningful religious institution. It is a community of loving relationships within which the life of Christ is received, lived, and shared.

One of the most special relationships in the entire Bible is that of St. Paul and his beloved protégé Timothy. Paul met the younger Timothy in Asia Minor on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1). Paul immediately recognized great leadership potential in Timothy and invited him to join in his ministry. For the rest of Paul's life, Timothy held a unique place in the great apostle's heart. As Paul writes in his Letter to the Philippians: "I have no one like him" (Phil. 2:20).

Paul writes two letters to Timothy that are preserved in the New Testament prior to his martyrdom in Rome during the mid-60s AD. By this point, Timothy has matured under Paul's tutelage and become his trusted proxy overseeing the churches in and around the significant city of Ephesus. These letters to Timothy have three purposes: 1) to offer him practical encouragement in church oversight, 2) to exhort him to guard the faith against false teaching, and 3) to express Paul's obvious love and gratitude for Timothy as a successor in his apostolic ministry.

Why study First and Second Timothy? Of course, as books of the Bible they are a means of divine revelation. Also, the hope is that fresh engagement with these New Testament correspondences will enable us to become more familiar with the concerns that inspired Paul to write them. But we also want to learn from the special relationship he cultivated with Timothy. A key goal for this study is that the letters will inspire us to consider relationships in our own lives. These relationships are opportunities, offered to us by God, to grow in Christian maturity and to help others grow as well.

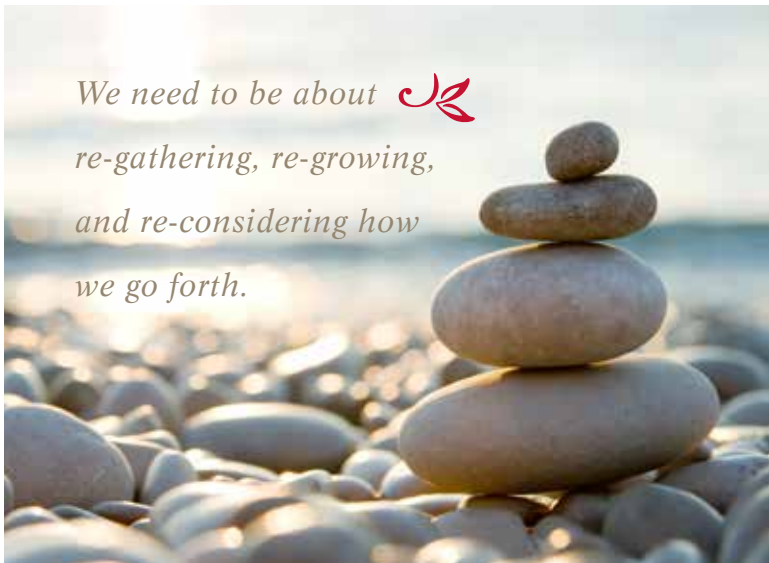
A significant reason for the ongoing and accelerating decline of churches in North America is a failure of mature members to disciple the next generation of believers. Recent generations of Christian leaders and congregations have neglected the clear and consistent biblical concern to pass on the faith to those coming after us so they in turn will pass it on to the generation to follow (e.g., Psalm 78:5-8). Our times invite an urgent return to the essential ministry of discipleship. And Christian discipleship begins as an invitation into a loving, mentoring relationship. Christian discipleship is always a gracious investment in another, nurtured by sharing and modeling what it really looks like when we “take hold of the life that truly is life” (1 Timothy 6:19).

In this important season at St. John the Divine, we need to be about re-gathering, re-growing, and re-considering how we go forth. My deepest hope is that we will come together as never before to cultivate a life as a local congregation wherein every member sees himself or herself as one Jesus has called into “the

life that truly is life,” and also wherein every member sees himself or herself as one called to help others experience this life as well. In fact, to be a disciple is ultimately to become a disciple-maker. Throughout these six sessions, I am inviting all of us to consider father or mother figures in our lives who have helped us know Christ and deepen our faith. Who has been a Paul figure for us? Also, looking to the future, who has the Lord placed in our lives that we can love, encourage, and mentor in the faith? In other words, who is a Timothy figure in our lives right now?

Thank you for investing time, energy, and prayer in this study. May God direct your learning, deepen your faith in Christ Jesus, and thereby increase your capacity to share your faith with another.

Leigh — **The Rev. Dr. R. Leigh Spruill**



USING THIS STUDY

Why do we come together in small groups to study God's Word?

Small groups are where transformation happens. Every week, we gather to create a fellowship of people who share a desire to learn, a belief in the Word, and a willingness to open our hearts to each other in a unity of the spirit. This fellowship deepens our individual relationship with God; it also creates a stronger bond with each other in worship, enhancing our ability to see God's will being done in the world.

*“²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”* — Lamentations 3:22-23

God's word continues to be fresh, renewing our understanding and providing more to learn and experience with each reading and every study.

This book is structured to be used in a group setting and to also help you stay connected to the study between sessions.

Small Group Roster

Please take the time to enter your group's contact information on this page. This is helpful for communication during the length of the study, and you may want to stay in touch with new friends after the study ends.

Devotions

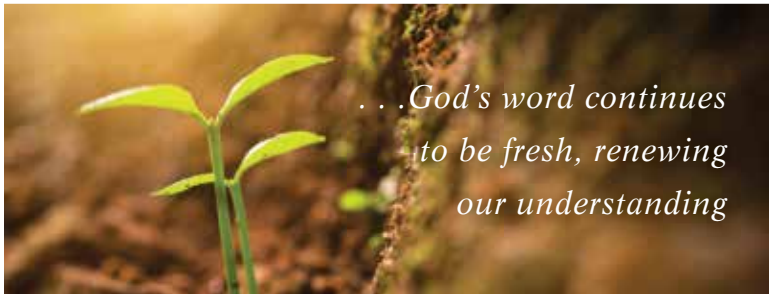
Use the daily devotions that follow each weekly session to create or refresh your daily practice.

Notes

Take notes in the spaces provided after each session as you watch the video or hear inspirational thoughts. Space is provided after each devotion as well.

Videos

The “Watch the Video” segment has handy links to each session's video teachings. Rewatching a session or watching the video to the upcoming session can deepen your engagement with the study.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What do we do on the first night of our group?

New groups benefit from using the first week as an introduction. Use the time to learn more about each other, get familiar with the meeting location, and make sure everyone has access to the videos and books. If you are a long-standing group or eager to get started, feel free to jump right into the first session.

How long will this group meet?

Most groups meet weekly to cover the length of the study, but meeting every other week can work as well.

At the end of this study, each group member may decide if he or she wants to continue for another study. Some groups launch relationships for years to come, and others find a seasonal commitment fits best.

Can we do this study on our own?

Of course! You can do this study alone, with one other friend for a two-person group, or with just a few friends.

What if this group is not working for us?

You are not alone! This could be the result of a personality conflict, life stage difference, level of spiritual maturity, or any number of things. Pray for God's direction, and at the end of this 6-session study, decide whether to continue with this group or

find another. However, do not bail out before the six sessions are up — God might have something to teach you. Also, do not run from conflict or prejudice people before you have given them a chance. God is still working in your life, too!

Who is the leader?

Most groups have an official leader. But often, as the group grows, members will rotate the facilitation of meetings. At the end of each meeting, ask the group who should facilitate the following week. Let the group help select your weekly facilitator. This model ensures that all members grow, make their unique contribution, and develop their gifts. This study guide and the Holy Spirit can keep things on track even when you rotate leaders.

How do we handle the childcare needs in our group?

You may try one option that works for a while and then adjust over time. Many groups choose to meet at the church on Sunday during the coffee hour to take advantage of Sunday school. Another approach is for adults to meet in the living room or dining room and to share the cost of a babysitter (or two) who can watch the children in a different part of the house.

The most common solution is to decide that you need to have a night to invest in your spiritual lives individually or as a couple and to make your own arrangements for childcare. No matter what decision the group makes, the best approach is to have an open conversation about the groups needs and the solution that fits best.

SMALL GROUP ROSTER

Get to know your fellow group members as you record your small group contact information.

Name	Email	Cell Phone



Key Verse

³ As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ⁴ nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. ⁵ The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

-- 1 Timothy 1: 3-5

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, whose blessed apostles Peter and Paul glorified thee by their martyrdom: Grant that thy Church, instructed by their teaching and example, and knit together in unity by thy Spirit, may ever stand firm upon the one foundation, which is Jesus Christ our Lord; who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

BCP. 190

Introduction

Paul's concern for the growth of the church, for it to carry on the path of true belief and teaching, is manifest in all his letters. Among all those he corresponded with, Timothy was his favorite, the "true child in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). It is in his letters to Timothy that Paul, nearing the end of his years, concentrates on leadership, specifically succession. The succession of believers – those trained in the gospels so that they themselves will go forth into the world, make disciples, and pass the gospels on to those who come after them.

One of the primary roles Paul entrusts to Timothy is to "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3). Paul wants to make sure Timothy understands the qualities of a true leader, one who, by his very nature, will be true to the teachings of Jesus. Paul is entrusting the leadership of the church to Timothy but wants to make sure Timothy understands the qualities that define leadership, the traits Timothy should seek when it is his time to raise a new generation of leaders. Paul warns that it will be easy to see heroic qualities, those markers of success that define worldly leaders. Those charged with leading

the church forward, however, will need to meet a drastically different set of criteria: a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

► **ENCOURAGED with warm affection and clear confidence**

1. As you begin this study as a small group, take some time to introduce yourselves. What are your hopes for this group and for this study?
2. Who are the names that come to mind when people are asked to name the world's greatest or most influential leaders? Why? What makes a great leader?

 **WATCH THE VIDEO**

The video is called “Session 1: From Success to Succession” and can be found on www.sjd.org/life-study and <https://teachingcenter.sjd.org>

 **VIDEO NOTES**

A Pure Heart. Our lives are defined by the work of our hearts. Paul is concerned with the succession of the gospel. He is near the end of his life – who will step in to carry it on? The weightiest of all biblical exhortations is our responsibility to carry out the Great Commission.

A Good Conscience. Your conscience is a God-given evaluator of your behavior, the built-in judge of what is good and right to do. A good conscience is one that, with greater clarity of God's love and mercy and will for our lives, is better able to judge our own actions. A good conscience is necessary for integrity.

A Sincerer Faith. The Good News is not simply true in the religious or doctrinal way. It is sincere – deeply trusted as personally true. A heart that is changing more into the likeness of Christ is a heart that is making our conduct more like him. It is one that deepens our sense of personal assurance.

► **EQUIPPED with his word to carry out his ministry**

Read 1 Timothy 1: 3-20.

(You may want to take turns reading at the paragraph breaks.)

3. What does each of the aspects of divine training – a pure heart, a good conscience, a sincere faith – mean to you?
4. What is the “aim of our charge” that issues from these aspects? Why do you think this was difficult to wrestle with, especially as a leadership trait? Is it still so today?
5. In what ways have “certain persons” strayed from “stewardship from God that is by faith”? What do you think that phrase means?
6. Read Acts 16:1-3. From this somewhat cryptic description, what do you imagine impressed Paul about Timothy when he first met him? Do you think Paul thought Timothy’s heritage as the son of a Jewish-Christian mother and a Gentile father was potentially valuable for their mission?
7. Please read three references to Timothy in various correspondences of Paul: 1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Romans 16:21. What might it tell us about the nature of

Paul's mentoring that over time he calls Timothy a child, then a brother, and finally a co-worker?

► **EMPLOYED as servant leaders to usher in the kingdom of God**

8. Who has been a Paul-like figure for you in your life? Who has been a mentor to you in the maturation of your personal character, your education and learning, your professional development?

9. How might we develop greater discernment to identify one whom the Lord has placed on our path to come alongside and mentor? What steps might we take to grow in our capacity to help others grow?

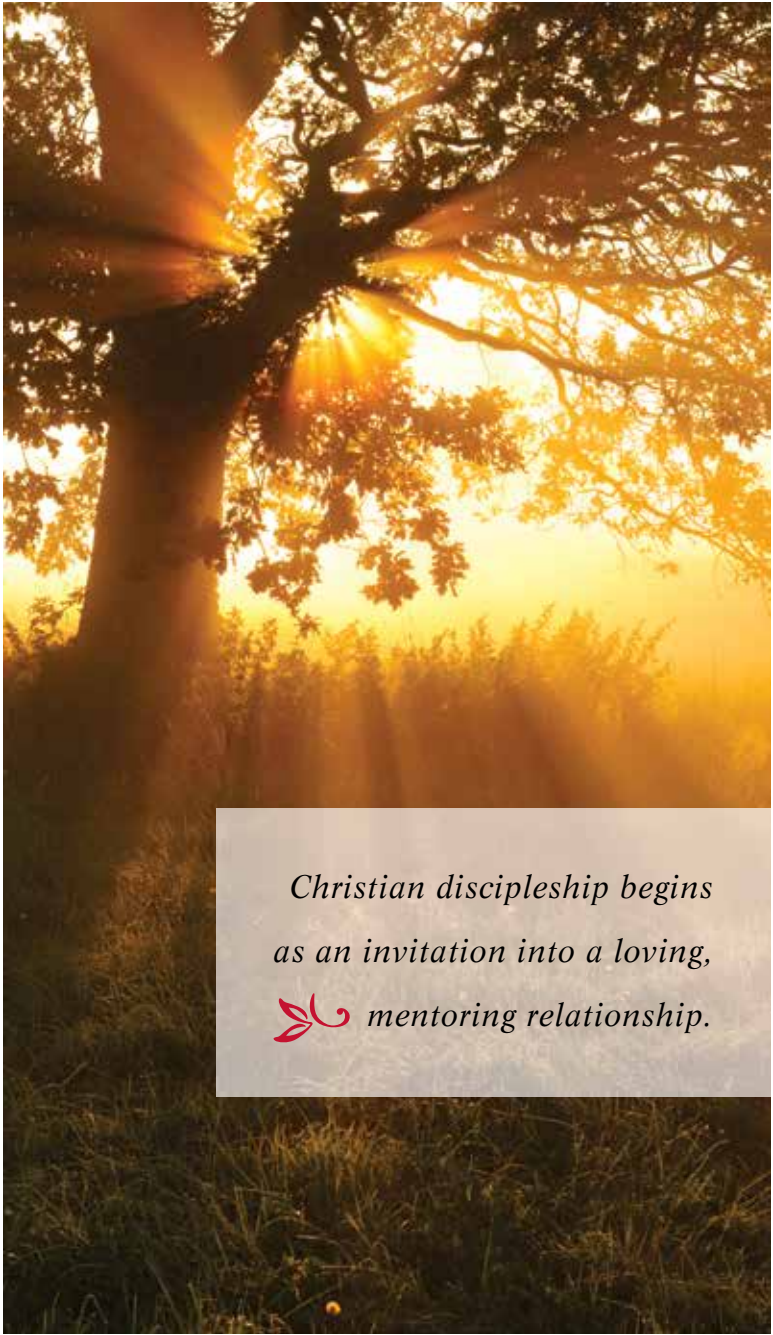
Closing Prayer


Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. BCM. 230

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Study  *Notes*

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*Christian discipleship begins
as an invitation into a loving,
 mentoring relationship.*



SESSION 1

Devotions

Day 1: Called by God

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

— 1 Timothy 1:1

Before we begin any study of God's Word, it is important to understand a little bit about authorship and intention. Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy to his younger counterpart Timothy, whom he mentored and appointed over the emerging church in Macedonia and Asia minor. Combined with Titus, these letters are called the Pastoral Epistles because they focus on the pastoral care of churches and the qualifications of ministers.

Who gave Paul the spiritual authority to write about godly leadership? The Lord himself. Even though Paul was a blasphemer and persecutor, Jesus chose Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

According to the world's definition of a leader, Paul is the last person we might expect to have such prominence. He lacked reputation, respect, a glowing resume, and referrals. But in God's kingdom, what we know and understand to be true is often inverted. Nowhere is this inversion more apparent than in how the Bible portrays leadership.

What qualifies a godly leader? Certainly not age, talent, or connections. Timothy was young and inexperienced, and his father was an unbelieving Greek. But God chose Timothy and directed Paul to mentor him. Paul's background would remind him that God equips those whom he calls. With human and spiritual input, Timothy could become an exemplary soldier and godly leader.

God defines his chosen leaders based on their hearts. "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*" (1 Peter 5:5). God gives natural gifts, and he alone can supply the supernatural power to attract, develop and send young (in terms of age or maturity) leaders into the world. God uses those who trust Jesus as our Savior and place their hope in him over worldly ambition and approval.

Paul, Timothy, and many other biblical examples emulate a leadership style based on servanthood. True "servant leaders" imitate Jesus in prioritizing loving others above their own preference or agenda. Rather than seeking applause, financial gain, or security, God's leaders strive to do his will whatever the cost. Servant leadership is a lifestyle that sounds relatively simple. And as Jesus models it, servant leadership is simple—but it is

never easy. However, it is the greatest privilege we have on earth. When done courageously and authentically, it empowers others in Christ to become followers who lead with God’s love in their own circles.

Reflect: *Do you feel called to lead? Perhaps you already are in a position of influence but feel unqualified for what you lack. Or you live in fear that others will find out about your past, whether sins of commission (what you did that you regret) or omission (what you didn't do that you should have). One of the most critical and ongoing practices a leader must cling to is confession. If your “not enoughs” overrule your courage to step out in faith wherever Jesus leads you, then your biggest struggle is pride—because you are overly focused on your limitations and not nearly focused enough on God.*

Day 2: My True Child

² *To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*

— 1 Timothy 1:2

In Paul’s emotional first words to Timothy, we witness firsthand the hallmark of an authentic servant leader in Christ: deep, familial love for his young protégé. In 1 Corinthians, Paul calls Timothy his “*beloved and faithful child in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 14:17). He uses the phrase “true child,” which in Greek has two meanings: *legitimate child* and *genuine*. Paul makes it very clear to Timothy that their relationship goes well beyond serving a purpose in expanding the church. It is deeply personal and eternal. It is rooted in their mutual connection to God the Father and God the Son. God chose Timothy to lead and strengthened his calling through Timothy’s relationship with Paul.

God wants to use us, too, to inspire others to become all they are created to be in Christ.

While our relationships with those we lead might not be as intimate as Paul and Timothy’s, they should be marked with heartfelt affection. In other words, do not be afraid to express genuine concern for those in your charge. Rather than keeping people at arm’s length, prioritize developing personal relationships. A few simple strategies include remembering names, asking questions, praying together, and celebrating every step of their journey—including what they learned from mistakes and failure.

The secular world often places leaders in the highest position of honor at the head of the table. This placement does not just acknowledge their role or extend honor; it serves to separate and distinguish them as more worthy and deserving of better treatment. A true servant leader chooses to sit *with* the people and participate in their lives. Be a leader who hangs out in the kitchen with the volunteers. When you walk alongside those you lead, your influence increases because you establish trust. When you show genuine concern for others' wellbeing, they are encouraged to labor with joy and fulfill their ministry callings.

How do we know that a more personal, familial approach works? Look beyond Timothy's perseverance and ministry influence to the work accomplished by the disciples. Jesus poured into them as a brother, father, friend, and mentor. He went beyond serving them to sacrificing his life for their sake—and ours.

Reflect: *Loving Father, I pray that my greatest desire would be to see others succeed in every area of their life and leadership, even exceeding my accomplishments. Please help me to love extravagantly, to overcome any temptation to compete or compare. Empower me with the longing to “go low” in order to see your beloved children reach great heights in Jesus’s name. Amen.*

Day 3: Lead with Love

³ As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ⁴ nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. ⁵ The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

— 1 Timothy 1:3–5

Conflict is expected in leadership settings. In fact, conflict offers us an excellent opportunity to influence others for Christ. Leaders are defined more by *how* they handle a conflict than by *what* happens. Paul gets right to the point in his first letter to Timothy: address disobedience directly but do it with love. Why? Because when we extend grace in confronting issues, we inspire change. When we exert power for power's sake or need to be right, we cause more division.

What you face isn't nearly as important as how you face it. Servant leaders, like Paul, aren't hesitant to share the hard truth, but they always temper it with grace. Jesus calls this loving our enemies. An enemy isn't necessarily an attacker coming after your reputation, position, or close relationships—although this happens. Sometimes enemies are closer to home, like a family member who critiques your teaching style or a friend who quits her position working under you because she longs for a more spiritually mature mentor.

These situations sting and cause self-doubt. However, as leaders, we are called to keep our gaze on Jesus and not allow a spirit of defeat to overcome us. This is where our real enemy Satan loves to jump in and lead us to quit. Our Master knows how challenging it is to stand toe-to-toe with the father of lies and choose love.

What issues are you called to confront today? Do they feel personal? Or do you think that addressing people living outside of God's design will create disagreements? Get your heart right with God and ensure that your motive is to love people well. Get behind your Lord and let him be the judge and jury. You can be willing to serve as his hands and feet.

Unless we lead with love, we will never see the potential fruit that can emerge from conflict. Even if both parties disagree, love makes a broader perspective possible. It builds respect and credibility. Love makes it possible for others to meet Jesus, *especially* in sticky or dark situations.

One of the greatest descriptions of such love is found in another scriptural passage written by Paul: *“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”* (1 Corinthians 13:4–7).

Prayerfully read this reminder before attempting to enter a difficult situation or conversation. To make it more personal, replace the word “love” with your name. Let the Holy Spirit

prepare your heart and fill your mind with truth so that you express the love and peace found in Christ alone, whatever the outcome.

Loving well is our highest calling.

Reflect: *What situations or people are most difficult for you to handle with love? Perhaps it isn't your outward manner that's unloving; your inner dialogue is just as damaging to godly leadership. Bring the situation before the Lord and get his perspective. Allow him to give you a new heart to help you lead more like Jesus.*

Day 4: Under Grace

¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

– 1 Timothy 1:12–14

Grace is perhaps the most powerful force on the planet. It saved us from eternal separation from God and continues to empower us daily as we wrestle with living as servant leaders in Christ. Yet, as we experience more leadership success and influence, it is easy to discount the importance of grace. The more people acknowledge our spiritual authority, the easier it is to disregard that we are still sinners. Rather than turn to Jesus for a daily outpouring of grace to provide strength, humility, and wisdom, we start to rely on ourselves. This is dangerous territory, and it is more common among Christian leaders than we like to acknowledge.

Paul wants Timothy to understand the holy tension in being chosen, called, and utterly dependent on Christ in all things. Who is bolder than Paul and yet vulnerable about sharing his weakness? In 2 Corinthians 12:9, he goes so far as to say, “*for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” In his life and letters, Paul celebrated his limitations so that Christ’s power would rest on him. That is true humility.

It is not common for secular leaders to be open about their shortcomings, past or present. They think that looking weak or limited might detract from their power and deflect admiring followers. But Christian leaders must be transparent in order to develop self-aware and Spirit-led disciples, as well as to prevent becoming personally self-reliant and prideful. Our job is to point people to Christ for all their needs and be an example of how to live an empowered life.

It is important to note that pride often sounds like thinking of yourself more highly than you ought (Romans 12:3), but it can also appear as putting yourself down. This is almost more damaging because when leaders constantly belittle themselves or live under a cloud of self-condemnation, the grace of God is not celebrated. If you find yourself more focused on your sin than grace, seek wise counsel and revisit the truth of the Gospel.

In his writings and ministry, Paul demonstrates a holy balance between bold confidence and genuine humility. When Paul writes to Timothy, God's Word also ministers to us. Whatever your age or season of life, be willing to prayerfully examine these truths to glorify God in thought, word, and deed!

Respond: *Lord, help me walk the line between holy confidence and humility. I recognize that I can't do this without the help of the Holy Spirit, convicting and gently encouraging me to move forward in grace. I pray that I can become a leader who listens to your voice first. Amen.*

Day 5: Unshakable Faith

¹⁸This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

— 1 Timothy 1:18–20

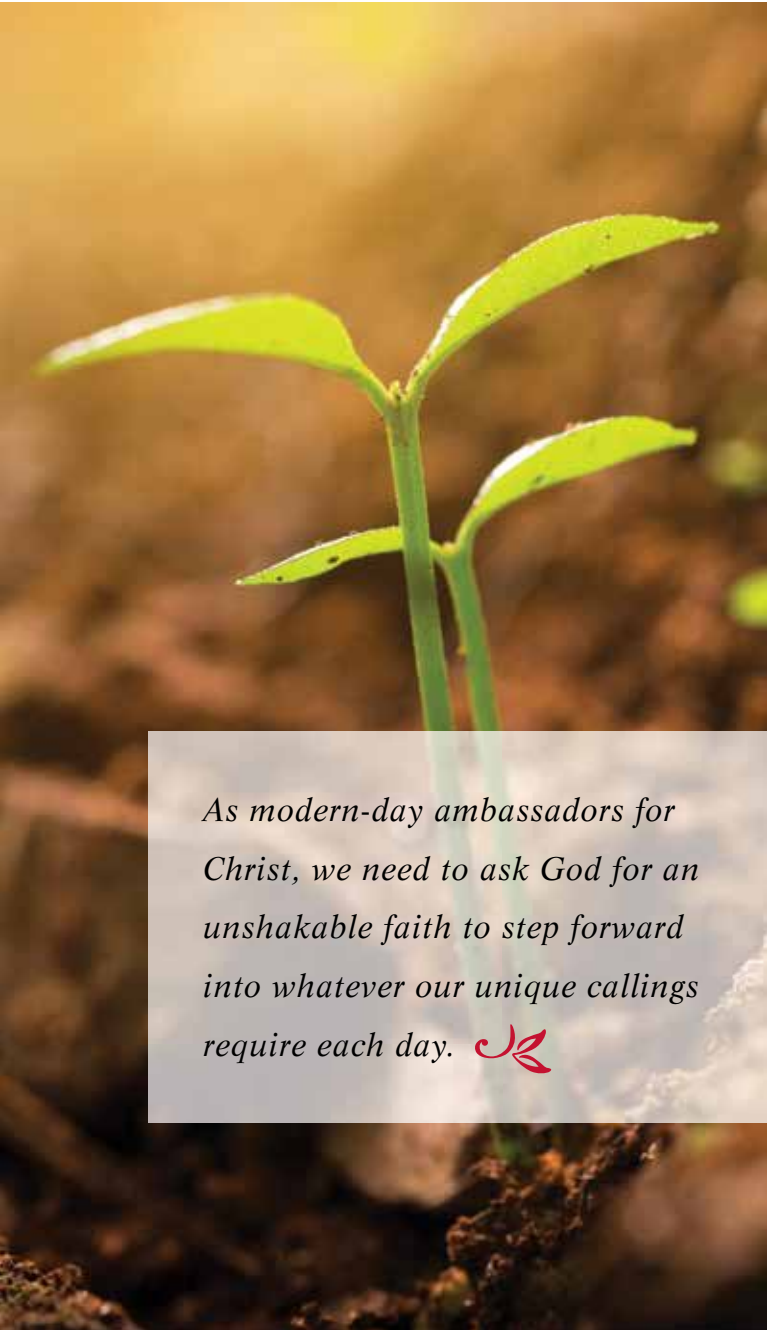
As we have read leading up to this passage, Paul knew that God had chosen and equipped him to be an ambassador for Christ. Despite his human limitations, Paul had the courage to move forward in faith. No question, he returned to the memory of his conversion many times to encourage him when his faith faltered. In Acts 16, following an unjust imprisonment, Paul sings hymns of


praise to his Caller. Clearly, he drew strength from his story, and he could also remind Timothy that he, too, has been called by God when facing leadership challenges.

What ministry challenges are you facing today? Where do you feel inadequate? As servant leaders in Christ, we, too, must remember that God equips whom he calls.

As modern-day ambassadors for Christ, we need to ask God for an unshakable faith to step forward into whatever our unique callings require each day. Sometimes this means acting with integrity or “walking our talk,” even if others are disappointed or reject a godly decision. When we face such spiritual crossroads, we must remind ourselves that we belong to Jesus. We cannot lose what ultimately matters most (our salvation), and we aren’t expected to succeed in our ministry roles in our own strength. We did not create our roles, but we can say yes to pursuing them. The rest is in God’s hands. Our job is to wake up every day and remember that we have a divine assignment. Like Timothy, when our feet hit the floor we have a responsibility to say yes to whatever the day brings, with the absolute belief that God is in control and making all things new in and through his servants. We have the high calling to be willing and prepared to obey, but the outcome is always in God’s hands.

Why is an unshakable faith so important? This passage makes clear that we have an enemy who is bent on deceiving us into abandoning our path. How does he do this? By thwarting our faith, just as he did in the garden. Satan wants you to believe that your purpose does not matter, that your calling isn’t from God,



As modern-day ambassadors for Christ, we need to ask God for an unshakable faith to step forward into whatever our unique callings require each day. 



Key Verse

¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

— 1 Timothy 3:15

Opening Prayer

O Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men: Grant unto thy people that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. BCP. 167

Introduction

In reading First and Second Timothy, one cannot help observing the deep affection Paul has for his protégé Timothy. Again, theirs was a special and close relationship.

A deeply important presupposition of this study is that what we know most deeply and personally happens in relationships. The question that is so very much alive in our world today is “how can we know what is true and trustworthy?” Certainly, we learn truths from books, history, science, philosophy, and the arts. But a sound Christian anthropology understands that truth is social: we tend to believe as true the things we trust from our social environment or those people and communities to which we wish to belong. Recall, for example, the immense social pressure in junior high school to fit in and go along with whatever “the group” believed was a “cool” thing to do. As younger children, we believed our parents about Santa Claus because, God-willing, we loved and trusted them. We come to know what we believe to be true most powerfully through relationships.

These two letters invite us to consider how our own relationships, our Christian investments of love and time and encouragement in others, builds them up in the faith and builds up the church.

► **ENCOURAGED** with warm affection and clear confidence

1. Who were the trusted people in your life when you came to believe the way you do about God, your values, your political loyalties, your chosen profession or vocation? Who influenced those perspectives or convictions and why?
2. Think of the most personally influential or impressive ordained church leaders you have known. What have been their most important qualities that shaped you or that you might wish to emulate?

 **WATCH THE VIDEO**

The video is called “Session 2: Character Bests Competence” and can be found on www.sjd.org/life-study and <https://teachingcenter.sjd.org>

 **VIDEO NOTES**

Encouraged. These letters to Timothy are characterized by great affection and fatherly counsel. Great care is taken to guard the treasure of the gospel for the sake of the coming generation of believers. Paul exhorts Timothy to be about the business of divine training both for himself and for others in the life of the church.

Equipped. Paul wants us to remain connected to God, which is why guarding the faith from falsehood is so critical. The agency of God's direction is worked out through elders and leaders, and disciples making new disciples. But nowhere are needed skills or expertise listed. The emphasis is on character over competence.

Employment. In Paul's instructions to Timothy on the ministry of overseers and deacons, we see the initial signs of formal organizational life in the church. We are invited by these texts to help manage the household of God by overseeing someone else's growth in faith and by serving them. Through you, they will also witness what sacrificial love and leadership look like.

► **EQUIPPED** with his word to carry out his ministry

Read 1 Timothy 2

(You may want to take turns reading at the paragraph breaks.)

3. What do verses 3-6 say about the church's identity and mission? What does God desire, and what does Christ the mediator counsel us to do?
4. Some of the issues, values, and people that Paul admonishes against in these chapters are no longer considered the same way in a contemporary cultural context. How do you reconcile with the challenges posed by these passages in your own life?
5. Read Genesis 12:1-3 along with 1 Timothy 2:3-6. What do we say to our friends and neighbors who may bristle at any religious claims to exclusive truth? How do these two passages relate? What do these texts reveal about God's

ultimate purpose in calling a particular people into an exclusive relationship?

6. Read Numbers 11:16-17 and 24-25. Why did God reveal to Moses that he needed elders? What does this story reveal to us about leadership generally and more specifically for our life together in the church?

► **EMPLOYED** as servant leaders to usher in the kingdom of God

7. Read Matthew 20:28 and John 13:6-11. How do you define servant leadership?
8. Contemplate the way you are invited by these texts to help manage the household of God. Could you encourage the growth of faith in another? Could you serve as an example of sacrificial love and leadership? How will you be employed by God?


Closing Prayer

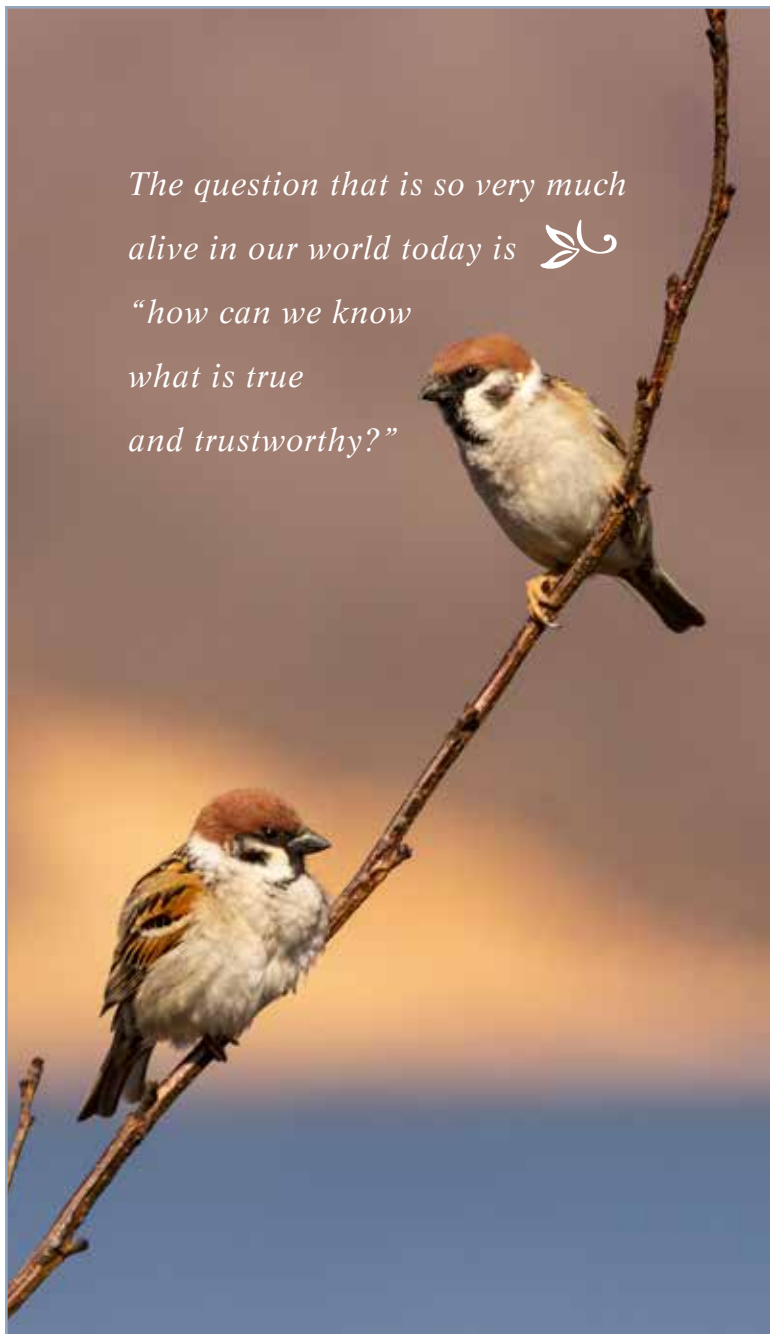
O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. BCP. 815

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Study  *Notes*

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*The question that is so very much
alive in our world today is 
“how can we know
what is true
and trustworthy?”*





SESSION 2

Devotions

Day 6: **Prioritize Prayer**

²First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

– 1 Timothy 2:1–2

There is perhaps no discipline more critical to Christian leadership than prayer. Paul’s letters indicate that he prayed diligently and wholeheartedly for the leaders he mentored. In Ephesians 1:15–19, his last letter, he writes: “*I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*” His requests and gratitude for the leaders in his care are never-ending. Imagine knowing that such a father of the faith was praying for you? Clearly, it emboldened and encouraged Timothy.

Who in your circle of influence do you intercede for? Sadly, for many of us, our prayer life falls far short of what we know it could be and should be. The busier we get, the less we make time

for communing with God. We might cry out in prayer when a crisis hits, but never take the time to stop and really seek God's perspective and wisdom. It is impossible to measure just how much we are missing.

J. Oswald Sanders says that "spiritual leaders should outpace the rest of the church, above all, in prayer."¹ We might pay lip service to prayer, but do we truly practice it daily? If the answer is no, it might be because we do not truly trust God with outcomes. Pause for a moment and sit with this truth. Do you prefer to have immediate answers and provide solutions for a quick fix? Or are you willing to seek godly counsel, wait on the Lord for divine insight, and act on his revealed will? Leaders under pressure often make terrible mistakes trying to please people with expediency and impress followers with a brilliant plan, rather than waiting on the Lord.

Prayer is vital to a servant leader's success on every level. What can feel like accomplishing nothing literally transforms everything. It is an act of faith. Prayer declares that we can't and won't lead independently. We know that we must be dependent upon God and interdependent with others. Moses modeled faithful intercession for the people of Israel, David openly shared his deepest emotions with God, and Nehemiah sought God's help in fulfilling his calling to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. Thousands of saints and servants have made prayer their primary language and overcome enormous obstacles not just for the Lord, but *with* him.

What is the secret to staying the course despite endless obstacles and little worldly gain? Prayer. Scour Paul's writings and observe

his courage and composure. One of his greatest gifts to emerging leaders then and now is his unwavering commitment to prayer.

Response: *Lord, teach me to pray. I long to be a leader intimately and absolutely connected to you in every area of my life and faith. I recommit today to knowing you above all else that I do, and being a leader who is led by your Spirit above all else. Amen.*

Day 7: Defending the True Faith

³ *This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

— 1 Timothy 2:3–6

One of the themes addressed most often in the New Testament is the danger of false teaching—or communicating anything but the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1 Timothy 1:3, 4:1–3, and 6:3–5, Paul returns to this inherent danger that was present in every church he planted. Because of so many other influences vying for the hearts and minds of people in Paul’s day and ours, *knowing* the truth and sharing it are arguably a servant leader’s highest priorities.

In our day, we may not come face-to-face with teachers possessed by demonic spirits, but false teaching comes in many dangerous forms. One of the most common challenges for servant leaders is confronting believers who love Jesus but are following their own version of Christianity. You may converse with individuals who are drawn to faith but opposed to Jesus as the only way to salvation. When it comes to the gospel, even a half-truth is still a lie. Paul makes clear that ultimately, it’s a life-or-death situation: salvation is at stake.

One helpful strategy I have learned over my years leading ministries is to focus more on what I *do* believe than what I *don’t*. In other words, I am for the true faith more than I am *against*

the multitude of other opinions and beliefs in the world. First, this approach helps me avoid dead-end arguments and further division, which Paul warns us about. It also doesn't require me to spend an inordinate amount of time learning the nuances of various viewpoints. While there may be specific situations when it's helpful, as with missionaries living in foreign cultures, a lot of time is wasted trying to understand a false theology. There is also the risk of false teaching confusing my own conscience.

Effective leadership is often like walking a tightrope, but remember that the Holy Spirit is ultimately the one who can convict those wandering from the truth. Make sure your life and doctrine align with the Lord and be willing to address false teaching directly with grace and truth. Then spend time praying for the false teachers' salvation. In Ephesus, false teaching was a major problem, yet Paul instructed the leadership to make every effort to maintain unity through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). Be a leader who is *for* Jesus in every circumstance to win hearts, minds, and souls for the kingdom of God.

Respond: *Lord Jesus, author and perfecter of my faith, please help reflect the truth of who you are and what you have done for all people. Give me courage to go on the offensive in sharing the good news and be the peace that invites people to come home to you.*

Day 8: Cultivating Godly Character

³ The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

— 1 Timothy 3:1–13

God doesn't take leadership lightly. Not everyone with a dynamic personality or a teaching gift should be permitted to lead in the household of God. Those called to more visible leadership responsibilities in ministry must be spiritually mature, which requires time and testing. Seasoned individuals are often sought out for leadership positions because they consistently demonstrate Christ-centered behavior in a variety of situations, especially when unaware that others are watching. Because they are experienced in *living* the Christian faith, not just learning about it, they demonstrate the spiritual authority to lead.

But spiritual authority isn't something Christian leaders obtain based on ambition or a self-centered desire to be successful. It's a gift given to those who consistently prove that their highest purpose is an intimate and obedient relationship with God. They want to know God, and their lifestyle is sober-minded, disciplined, and without reproach. To the pure-hearted, spiritual authority is *bestowed*, not bought. Often, such individuals never actually aspire to lead, but their character leads to a higher calling. These are the leaders whom Paul says should oversee the church.

In his devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers writes, "No man is born naturally or supernaturally with character; he has to make character. Nor are we born with habits; we have to form habits on the basis of the new life God has put into us. We are not meant to be illuminated versions, but the common stuff of ordinary life exhibiting the marvel of the grace of God."²

Paul shares with Timothy a portrait of a leader who has cultivated the godly habits that frame a holy lifestyle. This list isn't complete,

but it paints a picture and points toward a higher standard that is only fulfilled in the power of the Holy Spirit. As leaders, we are merely jars of clay, yet when filled with God’s strength, wisdom, and purpose, we overflow with power to be and do things far greater than we could ever accomplish alone.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul refers to this power as “*treasure*” because its value is priceless. We cannot be better or do better without the Spirit’s help. All the qualities we associate with Christian character are called “the fruit of the Spirit” in Paul’s letter to the Galatians: “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” (Galatians 5:23). A holy lifestyle produces abundant fruit.

Reflect: *Read this passage several times and notice your natural response to the standard Paul issues. Rather than trying to conform to rules, focus on your intimacy with God so that your character is formed as a response to his endless love and goodness. In this sense, godly leaders are developed organically and filled with grace that overflows.*



Day 9: Testing

¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

— 1 Timothy 3:10

Life tests servant leaders perhaps more than anyone else, both in our personal lives and ministry roles. These trials can come in the form of temptations, illness, fear, loneliness, or criticism, to name a few. It's safe to say that ministry guarantees exposure to any number of threats that challenge our faith and cut down our confidence. Many leaders eventually quit because they feel abandoned by God, or they try to fight back with their own ideas and strength. This only leads to further defeat and even shame. Satan loves shame because it strikes a powerful blow to a leader's identity in Christ.

Paul, of all people, demonstrates the vulnerability associated with a higher calling, although most of us will never experience anything like the dangers he faced to body and soul. He had the wisdom to understand that long seasons of testing can refine a leader to become spiritually fit to oversee a church. He is kind to prepare Timothy to face trials by telling his own stories of defeat and victory. A good mentor never leaves out sharing the rewards for persevering – for God is always on our side, even when we can't see or feel him in the moment.

Tests press us to choose either ourselves or God. Over time, with practice, consistent obedience results in responding in faith versus fear or self-protection (which often go hand-in-hand). Courage becomes part of our character because we have trained

ourselves to draw from supernatural faith. At this point, we can “count it all joy” when we are tested, because God uses our trials to make us steadfast in our faith (James 1:2).

So, don’t give up when you are under fire. Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness first. Take every thought captive to maintain the mind of Christ. Recall how Jesus faced every trial, temptation, and test with his heavenly Father. You can too. Trust that trials will accompany your calling to lead and forge ahead. He is refining you for a higher purpose and will never, ever forsake you.

Reflect: *When do you find it most challenging to put on the character of Christ? How do you compromise? Whatever role you are assigned in any given season of life or leadership, you are called to fulfill with excellence to the glory of God. Whether you are eventually called to become an “overseer” in the church or not, putting on the character of Christ should be your highest priority in season and out.*

Day 10: The Household of God

¹⁵ *if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*

— 1 Timothy 3:15

Every member of God’s household is invited to accept the high call of servant leadership, but few do. What about you? Have you disqualified yourself based on mistakes in your past or shortcomings in your life? In *Leading with a Limp*, Dan Allender writes:


“Anyone who wrestles with an uncertain future on behalf of others—anyone who uses her gifts, talents, and skills to influence the direction of others for the greater good—is a leader. No one is a mere follower. If you are a follower of God, for instance, then you are called to lead. Every believer is called to help someone grow into maturity—and such is the core calling of a leader.”

It may surprise you that your unique combination of spiritual gifting, life experiences, vocational skills, core values, and natural talents have divine purpose. This is your unique leadership profile. Thank God for these gifts, then tune your conscience to the Holy Spirit and bend your will in obedience to God’s plans for your life. This includes pursuing a servant-leadership *lifestyle*. Respond wholeheartedly to the Lord’s call and use your gifts to “*serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace*” (1 Peter 4:10).

Several years ago, I was responsible for building a ministry leadership team to lead small groups at Christ-centered retreats. Many of the women I selected were reluctant because they believed that leaders had to fit a certain mold and possess particular gifts, such as charisma and an aptitude for public speaking. I explained to them that I would teach them small group dynamics and train them to skillfully orchestrate a safe and sacred experience, but that I had selected them for their character and their willingness to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Over time I had the privilege of watching the Holy Spirit shape them into empowered servant leaders and prepare them to step into greater roles with holy confidence and great joy.

What's the cause or concern that sparks your heart? Often, that's a clue to what God is calling you to invest in. Ministry can look like caring for your children, running a company, or serving coffee at Starbucks. Do some soul-seeking, then go wherever you are called and focus on developing godly character. Start with integrity, which is the quality of wholeheartedly living what you believe, especially when no one is looking or listening. Become accountable to God at all times, in all places. He will use you in magnificent ways. Next, be humble and teachable. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you through prayer, God's Word, other people, and even circumstances. Allow the Holy Spirit to light your path and infuse you with grace. Finally, trust God that wherever he calls you, he will equip you. Be willing to go outside your comfort zone and lead with courage, faith, and love!

Respond: *Lord Jesus, please give me your heart for leadership. Wherever my life leads me, wherever you call me, may my greatest desire be to point others to the way, the truth, and the life!*

*So, don't give up when you are under
fire. Seek the kingdom of God and his
righteousness first. *





SESSION 3
Training To Be A Trainer
----STUDY GUIDE----



Key Verse

*¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.
Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself
and your hearers.*

— 1 Timothy 4: 16

Opening Prayer

We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers; for the songs of birds and the loveliness of flowers. We praise you for these good gifts and pray that we may safeguard them for our posterity. Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honor and glory of your Name, now and for ever. Amen. BCP. 840.

Introduction

Let us begin by asking: what is a mentor? I would define a mentor as a more experienced person who comes alongside another to help them grow and flourish in their potential. The word mentor is helpful to consider as we embrace a richer New Testament word: disciple. In the previous session we defined a disciple as a follower, a learner, and one who imitates the character and conduct of their leader. But a critical need for our day is the understanding that being a disciple always has an end that points beyond ourselves. A fully activated and growing disciple of Christ becomes a disciple-maker. This is the end that Paul has in mind for him; not simply for Timothy to remember his discipleship under Paul, but for his discipleship to prepare him to disciple others.

To amend slightly the definition above of a mentor, we might say a disciple is the following: a more experienced Christian who comes alongside another to help them grow and flourish in their potential as a believer. Disciples become disciple-makers.

We want a church that is actively and unabashedly cultivating a common life wherein mature believers are investing in others such that everyone is encouraged, equipped, and employed to grow in Christ and to help others grow as well.

► **ENCOURAGED** with warm affection and clear confidence

1. As we move deeper into Paul's letters to Timothy and read his urgent words to his young mentee, are you more keenly aware of examples of mentorship and leadership around you?
2. A growing self-awareness can be overwhelmed by emotion. Discuss with your group some practices that have helped you to be still, to pay attention to your feelings and to what may lie beneath. Is prayer part of your daily practice?

 **WATCH THE VIDEO**

The video is called "Session 3: Training to Be a Trainer" and can be found on www.sjd.org/life-study and <https://teachingcenter.sjd.org>

 **VIDEO NOTES**

It Starts Closest to Home. We often think that if we are called into deeper faith, we need to look out beyond our circle of current relationships. Most often, however, the path to spiritual growth and the opportunities to disciple others begins closest to home. Spouses, children, friends, co-workers... there are people already close by.

Know Thyself! Be self-aware. Self-criticism is necessary for growth and maturity. We cannot lead anyone else well, if we're not first leading ourselves. Emotions are often a window into what is going on deeper inside us. Emotions can overwhelm reason if we are not self-aware.

Training in Godliness Comes from Perseverance not Popularity. The perceived success or popularity of others should not be our goal. Do not fall for popular ideas that contradict the gospel or be tempted by money or other creature comforts. It is enough – more than enough – to be content with pursuing godliness.

► **EQUIPPED** with his word to carry out his ministry

3. Read 1 Timothy 4: 7-16. Does Paul sound like a trainer or coach, exhorting a youthful charge to keep going, in these verses? What does it mean to train in godliness?
4. In 1 Timothy 5, Paul dwells on the concerns of pastoral ministry. How does practical advice on respecting elders and caring for the widowed and needy underline the importance of leadership?
5. Why do you think Paul cautions Timothy against being too hasty in promoting people in 5:22-24?
6. Paul's final charge to Timothy is to "fight the good fight of the faith" (6:12) and "guard the deposit entrusted to you" (6:21). Does he sound like a coach on game day? But in this fight, are we called to win or to persevere? Battles on the

gridiron are measured in trophies and medals – is achieving the Lord’s work ever measured?

► **EMPLOYED** as servant leaders to usher in the kingdom of God

7. Read Mark 1:16-17. How do we see the end of Jesus’ ministry with his disciple already in the beginning? How might these verses challenge or encourage us as the church today?

8. Do you have an imitable life – a life worthy of imitation? If so, it is only by the grace of God and only to him do we point. Who has been a mentor to you in the Christian faith? Who has helped you move deeper into the Life that Truly is Life? Might you be that one for someone else?

Closing Prayer


Almighty and everlasting God, who in Christ hast revealed thy glory among the nations: Preserve the works of thy mercy, that thy Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of thy Name; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
BCP. 183

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Study  *Notes*

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*A fully activated and growing
disciple of Christ becomes a
disciple-maker. *



SESSION 3

Devotions

Day 11: Leadership Begins at Home

⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

—1 Timothy 3:4–5

Parenting is perhaps the most demanding calling for emerging kingdom leaders. It is also humbling because there is no pay, no status, and no accolades for sleepless nights and thankless service. Parenting also requires tremendous physical, emotional, and spiritual energy. Who has more calloused knees than a faithful parent? Yet, such dedication combined with appropriate, consistent discipline usually results in respectful, productive, and joyful children who trust the Lord. Godly parenting pays off and can build leadership potential.

However, Paul's instructions are not a black-and-white mandate that our families must be perfect. Not at all. Rather, we must recognize that our homes are where we have the greatest influence in discipleship. What if you have a teenager acting out or questioning their faith? While others may comment on your family and parenting, be less concerned with outsiders' opinions, and be more invested in your family's souls. Trying to force your family to conform to an image will only cause more rifts and even rebellion. You are also not obligated to share all that goes on at home, as your family's privacy should be protected.

Your children are your primary investment in the kingdom and should never be overlooked for more "important" endeavors. So is your marriage. In Ephesians 5, Paul eloquently compares a husband and wife to Christ and his bride, the church. Your marriage *is* ministry, and the intimacy you share will impact everything else you do, including your children's well-being. Furthermore, we need our inner circle to be a supportive, safe haven that we can return to when leadership responsibilities start to take a toll. Home should be a refuge, even if it is not always idyllic. Servant leadership begins at home.

Respond: *Heavenly Father, please give me the strength, wisdom, and courage to focus on my family first. I pray for the well-being of every member, for their protection, and for physical provision. May your unconditional love for each of us be reflected in our love for one another and, in turn, for this broken and hurting world that desperately needs your Son.*

Day 12: Teach with Your Life

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

— 1 Timothy 4:11–14

Two themes that come up again and again in 1 and 2 Timothy are leading by example and teaching others how to live in and for Christ. Regardless of your age, place, or position, this is your responsibility as a believer. Whether you have gone to seminary or graduated high school, you can inspire and educate others to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Pause for a moment and consider the men and women of faith who introduced you to Jesus. What about them caught your attention? What did they possess that captured your heart with hope? What conversations with them awakened something in your soul? I can think of several people God used to lead me to faith, some of whom I never met.

One was a Young Life leader, probably no older than Timothy, who was always filled with energy, joy, and love for wayward kids. His passion for having fun sparked something in my introverted, serious self that I didn't know existed. Another was an assistant pastor at a church I attended in my twenties following a painful, disorienting divorce. She invited me to study a book with her over coffee every week. Because she called out something in me

that I couldn't see in myself, I began to believe that I, too, could become a ministry leader.

These two individuals were quite different, but both sparked something in me that pointed me to Jesus and my place in the kingdom. I also love books and have been deeply challenged and changed by numerous writers, to whom I am eternally grateful. What about you? Spend time contemplating your role models in the faith, then consider how your life and leadership might impact others. You may never know the difference your walk makes to others whose lives look vastly different from your own.

Respond: *Lord, I confess that sometimes I fall back in my faith because I don't see the fruit of my labor. I pray that you would once again open my eyes to opportunities to teach your Word and wholeheartedly persevere on the only path worth following—life with you.*

Day 13: Know Thyself

¹⁶ *Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

— 1 Timothy 4:16

As humans, we are often disappointed by our own reactions and behavior. While we may blame fatigue or stress, our natural self continues to make unwanted appearances in the form of boasting, lying, perfectionism, over-functioning, defensiveness, and so on. On one hand, it's important for leaders to normalize sin so shame doesn't take root, which can lead to hiding. On the other hand, we don't want to become so conceited that we deny our sin even exists. The Pharisees were famous for self-righteousness, and Jesus would have none of it.

Paul acknowledges his own struggles in Romans 7: *"For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out."* He confesses his humanity but doesn't excuse it. In our Scripture today and throughout the Pastoral Letters, Paul charges Timothy to strive for godliness.

As servant leaders in Christ, how do we live as sinners yet hold positions of power and influence in God's church? How do we maintain a pure heart and a good conscience, so our teaching isn't influenced by our personal wants, needs, and desires?

We remember that we live under grace, train our minds to stay fixed on truth, and watch our behavior closely. It's a delicate balance between holy confidence and active repentance. Being aware of our tendencies toward self-protection, self-knowledge,

self-satisfaction, and a host of other “self-sins” requires courage, humility, confession, and a willingness to make amends as needed.

Paul is open about his shortcomings so they don’t overpower or define him. He writes in Ephesians 5:13–14 that anything brought into the light of Christ becomes light as well. In other words, living transparently before God and others (as appropriate) heals our souls, and protects our relationships, which are priceless in effectively sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Reflect: *How well do you recognize your own shadow side? Are you mature enough to turn to Christ when it emerges and respond from your true self instead? Self-awareness and self-absorption are two very different attitudes. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness to uncover any blind spots that might be hindering you from leading with a kingdom mindset.*

Day 14: Rescuing versus Empowering

⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

– 1 Timothy 5:8

As servant leaders in the household of God, we are called to meet the needs of those we lead – emotionally, spiritually, and financially. Many of us enjoy solving problems and protecting people from pain. That’s a good thing. However, even if we have abundant resources in terms of skills, patience, time, or money, excellent leadership is more about pointing people to Christ than helping them feel better in the moment. It’s a fine line.

Paul makes it abundantly clear that our immediate families and our spiritual families require our love and devotion, as well as our attention and sacrifice. That said, we must use discernment in determining what helps others and what holds people back from growing into their full potential in Christ. Unless we uphold our higher calling to develop mature disciples, it’s easy to fall into “rescuing” with our resources rather than empowering with the resources available through the Holy Spirit. Rescuing looks good and feels good because we often see immediate results. But our failure to remind those we lead that they, too, are responsible for themselves robs them from realizing their potential, destroys their relationships, and thwarts their calling.

Plenty of people will try to take advantage of you and the church. Many of us know some people with a spirit of entitlement, or others who choose to be lazy. Paul isn’t referring to repeatedly saving people from the consequences of bad decisions or

behavior. Like the prodigal son in Luke, we allow others to make choices but always celebrate their return with joy and grace. Discerning the difference between real needs and felt needs is critical if our goal is to help others grow in their faith.

Where is God calling you to serve today? Whether you receive a phone call from a friend in crisis, your teenager gets fired from her part-time job, or your mentee keeps missing coffee dates – pause and pray. Before rushing in with all the answers, take a moment to ask the Lord for his perspective. What response will serve the individual’s faith and future? We don’t have all the answers, and we can’t prevent our loved ones from experiencing hardship, loss, or suffering. But we can provide the comfort of our care and seek the divine wisdom that reminds them of our all-knowing, ever-loving heavenly Father.

Reflect: *Consider a time when suffering the consequences of your own poor decisions resulted in growing closer to God. What else changed in your life as a result? Perhaps pull out a journal and thank God for how he allowed you to experience discomfort for the sake of becoming more like Jesus.*

Day 15: Godly Contentment

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.

⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

– 1 Timothy 6:6–10

What is your honest reaction when you read the New Testament warnings about the danger of money? Do you dismiss them as irrelevant to you? I used to believe that material possessions weren't important, and I often said that if I had enough money to buy books and coffee, all would be well! How naive. The years have brought family medical concerns, desires for more education and life experiences, and fears that I would not be able to retire in my beloved town that has grown terribly expensive. Money has become indispensable and a consideration in many decisions.

Yet has money become an idol? I don't believe so, but when my fear starts to override my faith, and I lie awake at night wondering how much is enough, then I'm no longer trusting God and his care for my life. The Bible calls us to be good stewards of all we are given, including our choices concerning leadership opportunities, and this often involves financial consideration. But money should never be the only consideration. If our need for money causes us to make decisions or seek a position outside of God's will, then it becomes evil.

Jesus teaches us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation” (Matthew 6:13). If you believe that money will never come between you and God, then you should be particularly alert to the possibility. One thing to remember about Satan is that he is crafty. He watches for our weaknesses, then blindsides us with temptations or distractions we didn’t realize posed a danger. Money is at the top of his list. Why? Because human beings crave comfort and security. We are also prone to power and control. Money offers the illusion that we are self-sufficient, and money can easily become an idol.

How do we keep our hearts in check when it comes to financial need versus want? As Dallas Willard says, we develop a “faith of desperation—trusting faith—[that] digs in, holds on, clings tight, and says, ‘I don’t care what’s going to happen, I am holding on to God!’”³ Often God allows us to become desperate so we learn how to trust his sovereignty and provision. Job and Jacob both experienced this kind of soul transformation, and it resulted in spiritual freedom. Willard makes the life-changing observation that only in our moment of need, not before nor after, can we experience the reality of God for ourselves. This is when our reliance on anything but God, including money, fades into a secondhand faith that we can happily leave behind.

Respond: *Lord Jesus, you came that I might know there is only one way to live an abundant and free life. You are the way, the truth, and the life. I pray that in moments of desperation, I instinctively turn to you to meet every need and restore my contentment. I release my desire to understand all that happens in my life and the world around me and relocate my trust in you alone. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.*

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Key Verse

²⁰ O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge.”

— 1 Timothy 6:20

Opening Prayer

O Almighty God, kindle, we beseech thee, in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with thy wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth, that in tranquility thy dominion may increase till the earth is filled with the knowledge of thy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. BCP. 207.

Introduction

A close reading of First and Second Timothy reveals a subtle but consistent concern: Timothy seems to suffer from a lack of confidence and timidity. The reasons for this insecurity or timorousness may have been varied. Timothy perceived himself relatively young to assume the pastoral authority that Paul confirmed in him (1 Timothy 4:12). He may have experienced some insecurity about his mixed background with a believing Jew for a mother and a Gentile for a father. Perhaps he was simply constitutionally timid by the nature of his personality (1 Corinthians 16:10). In any case, it is clear that Timothy does not exhibit a Type-A, “commandant” leadership style.

This week’s session grapples with Christian courage and confidence in the face of challenge. As we read chapter six of 1 Timothy, we will note three exhortations from Paul who wants to encourage and bolster his protégé’s confidence. First, Paul urges the conviction of the sound teaching of Jesus Christ, especially against those who are false teachers who stir up controversy. Second, Paul encourages Timothy to embrace a

contentment with the life God has given him rather than chase after worldly comforts. Even if the call of a Christian is hard in an unbelieving world, Timothy is to take hold of the life that truly is life. And third, Paul beseeches Timothy to be courageous. To embody the faith for the sake of Christ is a counter-cultural calling, but it is a glorious one. No one embodied this courage more than Paul –who is writing from jail!

Paul, by example and exhortation, implores Timothy in his pastoral oversight of the churches in and around Ephesus to “fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12). The Apostle is employing a rich metaphor of an athlete’s training for growth in spiritual maturity. Our goal this week is to consider where we may need encouragement to be strong in our faith, and how we may train for greater growth in Christ.

This training for spiritual growth has two dimensions: 1) an internal struggle with our selfish orientation that may be shaped by Christian virtues into godly character, and 2) an external struggle with the patterns of the world that divide people and pressure us to compromise our commitment to Christ when the cost increases.

► **ENCOURAGED** with warm affection and clear confidence

1. As we begin this week’s theme, take some time to recollect a period when you may have felt timid, inexperienced, or lacking in confidence to tackle a challenge at hand. How did you overcome that feeling? Was there someone who provided encouragement?

2. Consider any new observations in your life since you began this study. Have you noticed examples of effective leadership at home or work?

WATCH THE VIDEO

The video is called “Session 4: Courage and Confidence” and can be found on www.sjd.org/life-study and <https://teachingcenter.sjd.org>

VIDEO NOTES

Conviction. Conviction in the gospels. Conviction of the sound words of Jesus Christ. Conviction to stand firm, especially in the face of false teachings by the conceited, or those who want to stir up controversy among believers.

Contentment. Contentment in the gospel itself, with the life God gives us. Do not chase after worldly riches nor after worldly measures of success.

Courage. Courage to “fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Timothy 6: 12). Courage of our convictions. Courage to be righteous in an unrighteous age.

► **EQUIPPED** with his word to carry out his ministry

3. Read 1 Timothy 6:11 and Galatians 5:16-26. Paul is clear that our fight for Christian maturity is markedly distinct from worldly fighting and characterized by particular virtues or fruits of the Spirit. Can you cite stories or events in the life of Jesus when he himself exhibited the various virtues listed in these verses?

4. In our age of intense polarization, emotional fragility, and angry denunciations of those with differing perspectives, what are some practical encouragements we can take from these verses? What is the risk of taking on these virtues more and more?
5. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-12 and consider this quote by John Calvin in his seminal work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*: “The surest source of destruction to men is to obey themselves.” What are the ways that our growth in Christ is challenged by our own selves?
6. Read 1 Timothy 6:13-16 and John 18:33-38. Why does Paul refer Timothy to Jesus before Pontius Pilate? How is Jesus’ response to Pilate’s question “Are you the King of the Jews?” intended to encourage Timothy? What do you make of Jesus response?
7. In the concluding verses of 1 Timothy, Paul seems to have had no one in view but his beloved Timothy whom he addresses personally: “Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you.” Paul is using a legal term: to hold in trust something of value in for another. How is the idea of holding the gospel as a trust helpful or challenging?

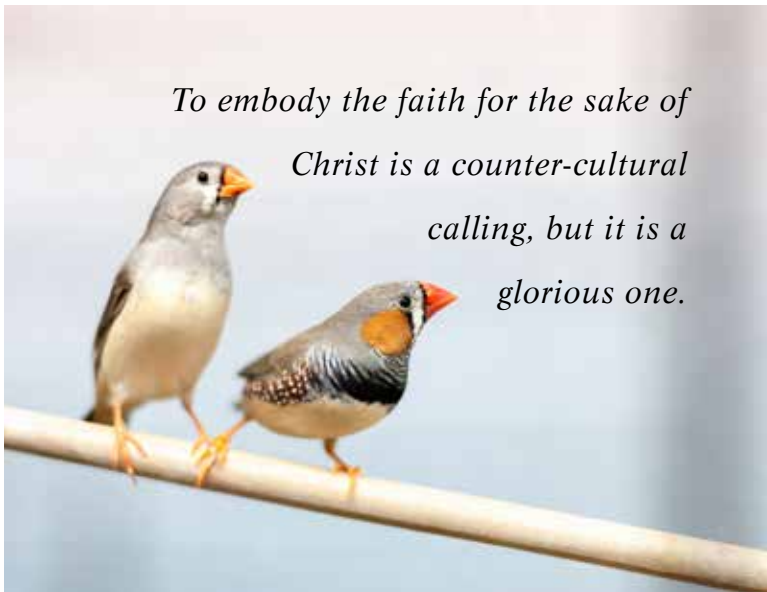
► **EMPLOYED** as servant leaders to usher in the kingdom of God

8. Read the Parable of the Talents: Matthew 25:14-30. How might you relate this parable of Jesus to Timothy and to your own stewardship and investment of the gospel?

9. Is there someone in your life – whether at home, at work, or someone you come across in your daily routine – who seems lacking in confidence? Is there a way you can help encourage them?

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, who hast so linked our lives one with another that all we do affects, for good or ill, all other lives: So guide us in the work we do, that we may do it not for self alone, but for the common good; and, as we seek a proper return for our own labor, make us mindful of the rightful aspirations of other workers, and arouse our concern for those who are out of work; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. BCP. 210.





SESSION 4

Devotions

Day 16: The Body of Christ

⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

— 2 Timothy 1:5

How beautiful that Timothy's mother and grandmother are referred to in the Pastoral Letters. While a legacy of faith doesn't guarantee salvation, it can certainly have an impact. Even though Timothy's father was Greek, the women in his family believed in the one true God, and Timothy was eternally impacted. Countless other souls came to know Jesus through Timothy's ministry, and the Gospel he preached is still changing our world today!

What will be your spiritual legacy? Who in your circle of influence is struggling, with no one else to turn to? You have a treasured possession to share with them. Your investment in one individual

could start a fire that changes hundreds of lives. Jesus left the ninety-nine to go after just one lost sheep. Who is God calling you to bring home to the family of God?

Ministering to our families can be the most challenging leadership position and yet the most powerful. Billy Graham said, “The greatest legacy we can pass on to one’s children and grandchildren is not money or other material things accumulated in one’s life, but rather a legacy of character and faith.”⁴ My mother often retells her grandmother’s hardships surviving three husbands in her years as a pioneer homesteading in Montana. But she speaks most often about her Nana’s deep love for Jesus. My great-grandmother never ran a company, lived in a beautiful home, or had many friends. However, she had an unwavering faith that God used to change generations of women in her family. My adult daughters never knew her, but I love to ponder how her legacy indirectly touches their lives and inspires their faith today.

Paul teaches that our most important role in the kingdom is our corporate calling, or obligation to care for the needs of fellow believers, starting with our family members. Even if you are gifted in teaching, preaching, or writing, don’t ignore the spiritual needs closest to home. The word “corporate” comes from the Latin word *corporal*, or *body*. We are all members of Christ’s body, equally essential and completely dependent on one another.

Respond: *Lord, give me the courage to take off my leadership mask at home and simply be your faithful servant. More than anything, I want my loved ones to see my dependence on you for wisdom, patience, and even faith. I pray that my example inspires*

*trust over greatness and love over accomplishments. May my legacy
celebrate the joy of a life devoted to you.*

Day 17: The Power of Encouragement

⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

— 2 Timothy 1:6–7

One of the greatest obstacles leaders face is fear: fear of criticism, rejection, making a mistake, disappointing God, or looking stupid. For the most part, fear doesn't disappear with experience; it just changes forms. We can have a spirit of courage and still be afraid. Whether you struggle from low-level anxiety or outright terror, it doesn't disqualify you; instead, it reveals that you are human and need an all-powerful God.

If you desire to make a difference in someone's life, help them face their fears and move forward with Jesus. Normalize the emotion, but then encourage faith-based action. Empathize with them. Yes, it's scary and hard, but with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). Remind them that God will impart the courage needed to move forward despite fear (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Furthermore, remind those who are shrinking back that God's anointing is on them and the Holy Spirit is in them. What else do we need? I love to help people discover their spiritual gifts and put them into practice, to help them develop holy confidence over self-confidence. Celebrate their successes and point out when you see God's power at work. Finally, when fear does get the upper hand and someone you walk alongside cowers or runs,

get to them immediately. Pray together, explore what happened, and offer encouragement to do better next time. Courage is a muscle that must be strengthened over time.

Of course, your example of “fear-less” leadership is critical. Remember, fearless doesn’t mean the absence of fear; it’s simply less fear than you would have without Jesus. Share your own experiences with anxiety and how God carried you forward. Scripture is also full of very human, yet bold, leaders who can offer inspiration! Nehemiah took months to ask the king if he could return to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1–10). Isaiah was afraid to serve as Israel’s mouthpiece because of his “unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). Gideon hid from Israel’s enemies (Judges 6–7), and Esther was afraid to reveal to the king that she was a Jew (Esther 4). The list goes on. Yet, every time we choose to act courageously despite our fear, our faith increases. The most courageous step we can take is to do it *afraid*.

Respond: *Holy Spirit, thank you for infusing Scripture with many examples of men and women who trusted God despite their fear. I pray for the strength to face my fears in faith and the vulnerability to share my moments of cowardice so that you might be glorified. Amen.*

Day 18: Guard the Good Deposit

¹³ Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

– 2 Timothy 1:13–14

Love for those we mentor is not just felt; it is *lived*. Leading with love is not natural; it is *supernatural* and only possible because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). Our mentor relationships must always flow from the love that we receive daily from our close connection with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Without God's help, we will lead from our brokenness and humanity. Striving in our own strength results in spiritual lethargy and physical burnout.

How can we continue to receive the love that is required to fulfill our leadership callings? We stay intentionally and unswervingly connected to its source. We spend as much time reading our Bibles for our own growth as we spend preparing to teach. We pray with fewer requests and more questions to receive wisdom and discernment. We surround ourselves with a mature and trustworthy group of spiritual friends and leaders who have authority and permission to speak truth into our lives. We can add many other disciplines to the essentials, but the point is that it requires time and effort to maintain a robust faith, supported by a pure heart and the mind of Christ.

Leaders in the faith cannot and should not spend all their time serving, despite the many external pressures that often accompany ministry and family life. While it's important to

add time with the Lord, it's equally important to avoid worldly practices and temptations. This isn't to say that we don't participate in society and have friends and activities that extend beyond our Christian circles. As leaders, God can use our testimony to shine light on those watching from the outside. This is yet another reason to invest in cultivating spiritual disciplines infused with the light of Christ and protected from distractions like "vain discussion" (1 Timothy 1:6) or "foolish, ignorant controversies" (2 Timothy 2:23). Instead, be steeped in God's love so you can be a servant leader and light bearer in your circles of influence.

Reflect: *What distracts you from spending time with God? Which of the three disciplines above (personal time in the Word, prayer, spiritual community) are you lacking? Make a commitment today to return to your first love—in heart, soul, mind, and strength. Ask God to make you a vessel of heavenly light wherever he leads you.*

Day 19: Called to Mentor

2 *You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.*

— 2 Timothy 2:1–2

Regardless of your age, if you are a Christian, then you are called to mentor others. Reliable, Christ-centered relationships are one of the primary ways God transforms his people. Whether that excites you or terrifies you, it's part of God's plan that we invest ourselves in others.

Simply put, mentoring means developing a teaching relationship to help others see what it looks like to follow Jesus. This requires *imitating Christ* in all we do and *becoming love* as the foundation of who we are. Why? Because we can't teach what we don't know, and our example speaks much louder than our words.

To teach and relate well, we must prioritize our maturity in Christ. Here are some guidelines taken from Paul's writing:

- 1. Die to self.** Seek God's truth above your own.
- 2. Know your true identity.** Stop trying to prove yourself – you are an adopted child of the King!
- 3. Stay humble.** Keep growing.
- 4. Practice integrity.** Always do the right thing, even when no one is looking.
- 5. Embrace community.** Mature leaders and mentors rely on each other for accountability and support. They practice humility and have fun together while taking their faith seriously.

6. Empower others. Seek to help those you mentor exceed your own maturity by equipping, encouraging, and educating them with God’s truth. *Believe* in them when they can’t believe in themselves.

Finally, know that God wants you to be authentically *you*. You don’t have to role-play or pretend to have advanced expertise to inspire others to “*excel in everything*” (2 Corinthians 8:7). Mature mentors are secure in Christ and firm in their faith (Philippians 1:27). They aren’t trying to self-promote because they are so excited about participating in God’s projects and purposes! It’s a high calling, and yet God extends it to everyone!

Reflect: *Who has God placed in your life that you feel led to mentor? Remember, age isn’t the most important criterion – maturity is what matters in mentoring. Walk alongside those younger in the faith, and offer your life experiences, both positive and negative, to point them to God’s greater purposes. Remember, there is a difference between a good story and a God story. The former might be exciting but lacks God’s redeeming power. A God story always encourages faith, hope, and love!*

Day 20: Fan or Follower?

²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

— 2 Timothy 2:22

It is thrilling to disciple others in Christ. Being on the front lines of God's movement in another's life is a privilege. However, it's not one to be taken lightly, nor too soon. Throughout my life, I've witnessed many women come to know Christ and grow in their faith through a spiritual friendship with a mentor. I've also seen many women hurt and confused through such relationships. So, what qualifies a mentor to make a healthy difference in another's walk with Jesus? Spiritual maturity.

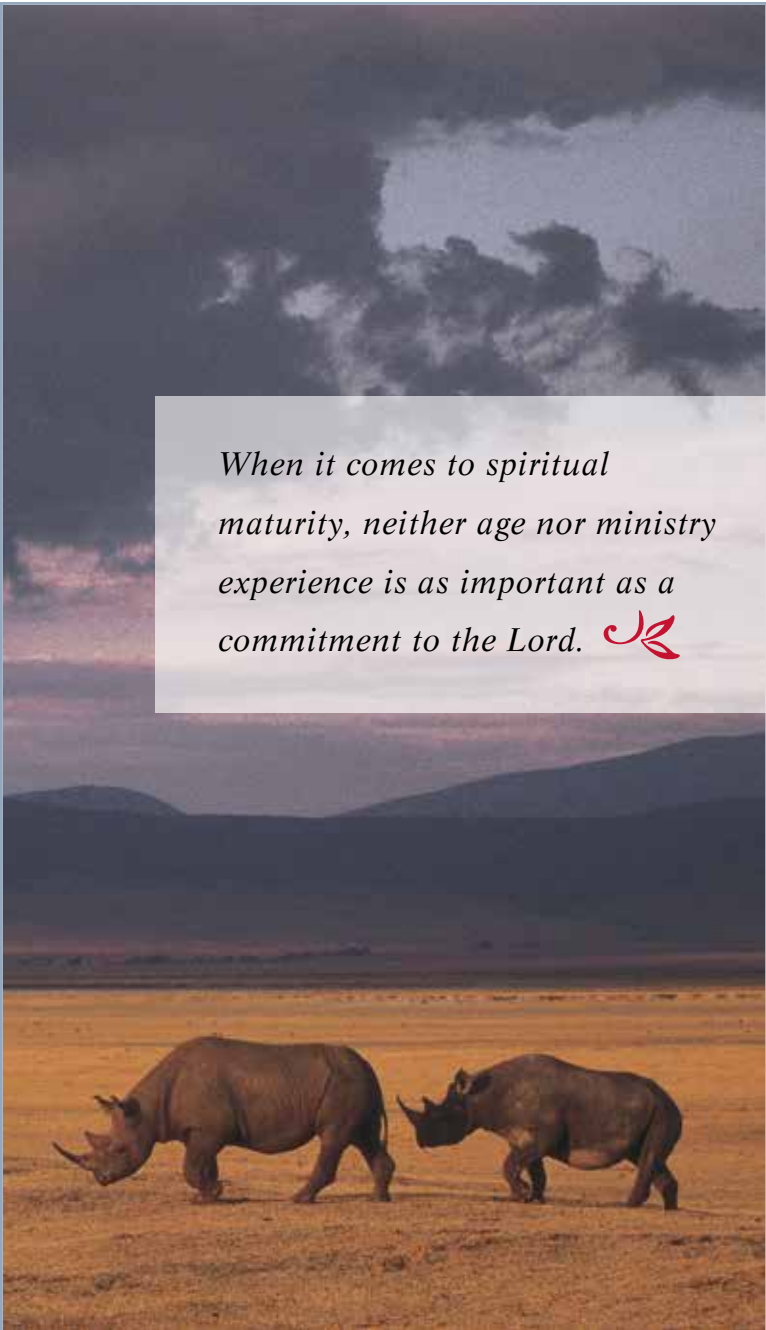
*"No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are easy prey for imposters. God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love – like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love." (Ephesians 4:14–6, *The Message*)*


When it comes to spiritual maturity, neither age nor ministry experience is as important as a commitment to the Lord. Mentors must be *followers* of Jesus, not just *fans*. What's the difference? A follower is willing to become more like Jesus in every area of life, while a fan of Jesus simply admires or respects his message. In other words, just because someone promotes Jesus doesn't mean she has the godly wisdom and attributes to lead others. Without

concern for reaching spiritual maturity, we can unknowingly have a negative influence on those we disciple. An immature woman can communicate with competition, criticism, and control. None of these encourage life in Christ.

Does discipling others bring life to your soul? Are you excited about opportunities to share the Gospel when God gives you a chance? If not, then consider whether your relationship with Jesus is one of convenience or commitment. It's common for believers to step off the path from their position behind Jesus to resume a place on the sidelines with the crowd. While it may only be temporary, others can tell the difference. Even more importantly, Jesus knows.

Respond: *Lord Jesus, you know I love you, but I don't always show it with my actions. I am so easily distracted or discouraged by anxiety and self-doubt. I want to be a follower in and out of season, in every storm and every celebration. I pray that those who are still fans see my joy in you and want to join in the fellowship of the saints. Amen.*



When it comes to spiritual maturity, neither age nor ministry experience is as important as a commitment to the Lord. 



A person is seen from behind on a boat, looking out at the ocean during sunset. The sky is a mix of light blue and orange, and the water reflects the colors. The person is wearing a white shirt and dark shorts. The boat's railing is visible in the foreground.

Key Verse

³ I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

— 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Opening Prayer

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that, by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. BCP. 184.

Introduction

The Second Letter of Paul to Timothy begins with a poignant memory: “I remember you constantly in my prayers, night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you that I may be filled with joy” (2 Timothy 1:3-4). We ask, when did Paul last see Timothy in tears? While we cannot be sure, it seems very reasonable to suggest that Paul is remembering his final arrest before his Roman imprisonment and subsequent execution. Perhaps he turned to look back at Timothy who witnessed the episode and cried as Paul was taken away. As we embark on an engagement with 2 Timothy, we see a poignant spirit of affection and finality pervade this correspondence. Paul is writing a final farewell, and this letter is regarded as the last of the letters before the great apostle’s martyrdom under the emperor Nero in the mid-60s AD.

The letter is also addressed to one who is discouraged. Earlier, Paul charged Timothy with the cultivation of the burgeoning church movement happening in and around Ephesus in Asia Minor. Paul understands that the younger Timothy is struggling

under the weight of this big leadership role, he faced daunting problems ranging from false teachers and bad preachers, to internal division, to external social discrimination against Christians. Moreover, Timothy misses Paul and is worried about his mentor's welfare.

The theme for this week's study is finding encouragement in the gospel when we are discouraged. In this particularly dispiriting moment in our own national life, where so many are discouraged about the present state of affairs and anxious about the future, 2 Timothy provides a powerful antidote to despair. As Paul articulates to Timothy, the realities of the here-and-now that may cause discouragement are enveloped in an ever bigger, omnipresent reality that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us explore how Paul helps Timothy return to this bigger reality.

► **ENCOURAGED** with warm affection and clear confidence

1. What resources of the Christian tradition (e.g., prayer, Scripture, worship, service, community) are most helpful to you in times of discouragement or questioning?
2. Can you share a memory of an experience with someone in your life whose grace-filled expectation of eternal life with God shaped their handling of a challenging adversity? What did you learn from them?

 **WATCH THE VIDEO**

The video is called “Session 5: Encouragement to the Discouraged” and can be found on www.sjd.org/life-study and <https://teachingcenter.sjd.org>

 **VIDEO NOTES**

Paul offers a very simple but powerful three-pronged strategy for helping his trusted protégé – one like a son to him – out of discouragement.

The Past: Memory as a Gift to Rekindle Hope in the Midst of Discouragement. Paul invites Timothy to remember past relationships that have shaped his life and ministry as a Christian. He specifically names Timothy’s mother and grandmother – their faith and character formed Timothy and live on in him.

The Present: You are Not Without Resources and You are Not Alone. Whatever Timothy is going through in the present, he is not alone in his challenges, and he is not without resources and aid.

The Future: Take Hold of the Promise. Paul reminds Timothy that Christ Jesus will appear again, ushering in the Kingdom whereby the living and the dead will be judged. The horizon of hope is not defined by this life with its own fallen definitions of success or failure. Take hold of the promise of Christ and its strengthening assurance of ultimate victory.

► **EQUIPPED** with his word to carry out his ministry

3. Read 2 Timothy 1:3-7. Paul teaches us that the memories of those who are most important to our spiritual life are gifts to rekindle ministry in the midst of discouragement. There is an old expression, “next to love, memory may be God’s greatest gift to us.” How is this so?
4. Why do the Scriptures so often recall events and significant people of the past? (For reference, you can review Hebrews 11, Deuteronomy 32:7, Job 8:8, and Psalm 78:5.) How is the memory of our spiritual ancestors formative?
5. Who is in the “family tree” of your own spiritual genealogy?
6. Paul faced imminent execution as he wrote this letter and was very likely fearful himself. Do you think he found himself encouraged, sharing the future promises of eternal life with another? That seems a paradoxical gift of the gospel: as Paul quotes Jesus in Acts 20:25, “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” Have you had the experience of finding yourself encouraged and built-up iwhile you were encouraging someone else?

► **EMPLOYED** as servant leaders to usher in the kingdom of God

7. Please read 2 Timothy 2:1-2. Note the four generations of believers in this brief passage revealing the pattern of church leadership. Can you identify the gospel procession

of generations? How do these verses influence a vision of a faithful and vibrant local congregation?

8. Paul exhorts Timothy to look to his past, his present, and his future, to see and trust the hand of God in Christ empowering him to regain his purpose. Take some time to consider your own past and present. What rekindles your hope for the future?

Closing Prayer

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. BCP. 236.

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Study  *Notes*
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SESSION 5

Devotions

Day 21: Suffering for the Gospel

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

— 2 Timothy 2:8–10

Paul wrote 2 Timothy from a prison cell near the end of his life. Yet, despite great suffering, he still passionately and joyfully proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ as his highest calling. In this intensely personal letter to his spiritual son, Timothy, there is no hint of Paul's regret for the ongoing persecution he has endured, only faith and love. What greater testimony to the Gospel is there than a saint willing to sacrifice everything to share it with the world?

What I find most inspiring about this passage is that it's not about Paul. While honest about his circumstances, he isn't seeking

sympathy or asking to be celebrated. Rather, he is using his situation to point to Jesus and celebrate the living God who gave him the opportunity to die for the truth once again. While he has sacrificed enormously, he continues to embody peace and joy. What an inspiring example of what it means to die to self and live for Christ.

Have you ever sought attention or sympathy for the sacrifices you have made as a servant leader? I know I have. I've complained to my family about unpredictable hours and people who refuse to respect boundaries. I've also lamented about making less money, handling unnecessary conflict, and receiving critical emails. While it's appropriate to get support at times, it's inexcusable to use hardships to draw attention to ourselves rather than point to Jesus. Yes, we are human, but we are called to *become like Christ*. Our spiritual growth is accelerated when the going gets tough – if we choose to lean in.

How do we cultivate this mindset? We must return regularly to the gospel of grace. If we forget that we did absolutely nothing to deserve the gift of salvation and eternal life, much less our leadership positions, we will naturally return to exalting ourselves above the Lord. We make *ourselves* the ultimate reference point through bragging, complaining, or both. Pride comes in a lot of forms, and martyrdom is one of the ugliest.

Leadership is rarely neutral territory, but you are never without the cross to remind you *why* you serve and who your life glorifies. When we are pressed, our godly example has far greater kingdom influence.

Respond: *Gracious God, I ask your forgiveness for continuously making myself the reference point in my work and hardships. It's not about me, and it never was. Please give me holy courage and confidence to trust you when the going gets tough, and I would rather quit or play the martyr. Instead, I pray that you would give me the mind of Christ to see all suffering as an opportunity to glorify your name. Thank you. Amen.*

Day 22: Be Your Best

¹⁵ *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

— 2 Timothy 2:15

The phrase “Do your best” has become almost cliché in modern times. We remind our kids that this is enough to please us and walk away from any given circumstance with their head held high. It implies that as long as they tried hard, then the outcome is irrelevant. Based on who Paul was as a servant of the gospel and his body of teaching, that’s nowhere near good enough for those who are called to kingdom leadership. Why? Because when it comes to guiding souls, the outcome is *everything*. Salvation is at stake, as well as the sanctification that leads to maturity.

What is Paul really asking? Be your best and give your best is more accurate, which goes well beyond using our skills to teach, preach or write about scripture. Being and giving our best requires devoting every moment of our lives to pleasing God first, and walking with Jesus as our constant companion. Then, when opportunities arise to share God’s Word, we reflect and communicate from the power of the Holy Spirit within us, rather than our own need to please or be right. In other words, we become conduits, not the cornerstone of our ministries. The only one who can fulfill that role is Jesus.

When we tell our kids, our coworkers, or staff to “do their best” we typically intend to help them avoid any shame that results from how others perceive their performance. Paul only cares how

God perceives us. He wants Timothy, and all of us who devote our lives to the gospel, to experience the holy confidence that comes from within, and is unaffected by outside influences and opinions. Of course, this is only possible when we rely completely on the grace of God and the Word of God to shape our own hearts and lives. But it's possible. Paul is our shining example, and he wouldn't proclaim it so boldly if he didn't believe we can stand before the throne without shame too, faces lifted to the One who created us, leads us, and defines us.

Reflect: *There is a significant difference between doing our best and giving our best. Where in your personal life is the Spirit leading you to walk closer with Jesus? Perhaps it's an issue of stepping out in faith, being more careful with your choice of words, or putting on the mind of Christ versus a worldly mindset. Ask the Lord for help and guidance and commit your effort to God that He might use you more readily to share the gospel with those who desperately need to hear the whole truth as God intended.*

Day 23: Take Every Thought Captive

²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

— 2 Timothy 2:24–26

If you are on the frontlines of God's kingdom, you are a threat to the prince of this world. Leadership is a spiritual battle, and until we accept that reality, we will not prepare adequately. We are already victorious in Christ and are given a spirit of “*power, love and self-control*” (2 Timothy 1:7), but we can't let our guard down in our daily spiritual battles.

Satan's greatest weapon is deception. Because he can't physically touch you or make you do anything, he messes with your mind. He will do whatever he can to convince you that you are not qualified to lead, God is not trustworthy, and you should quit. Sound familiar? Perhaps you have been listening to these voices lately and not the voice of truth. Jesus was tempted by the devil three times, and in every instance, responded with the most effective and definitive weapon we possess: scripture.

Of all the pieces of spiritual armor Paul refers to in Ephesians 6, the sword of the Spirit, or the Word of God, is the only component designed to be used both defensively and offensively. We need to be skilled at *both* to prevent dangerous untruths or false teaching from infiltrating our minds or the church.

How do we offensively care for ourselves? A soldier wouldn't go into battle without first mastering sword fighting. Paul counsels leaders in spiritual training to *"put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4:22–24). The devil attacks our desires with untruths, so we must apply ourselves to learning what God says. Don't just pick and choose verses and conveniently apply them to situations. Study all of God's Word, even the seemingly irrelevant books. This attitude, coupled with faith-based action steps to live like a believer, will protect us.

Furthermore, we read God's Word for ourselves and our sanctification, not just to prepare a sermon or share a verse with a hurting friend. Teachers are tempted to study with the sole intent of edifying others. When you are in teaching mode, it's easy to tune out the Holy Spirit's voice speaking to your own heart. The sword is the Holy Spirit, and without it, leaders cannot survive.

Reflect: *What book of the Bible have you avoided because it's too boring or irrelevant? Do you feel the Spirit nudging you to read the entire Old Testament? God's Word is the most important and powerful weapon we possess to ward off Satan's attempts to run us off the battlefield. The Psalms teach us to meditate on God's Word day and night, until it speaks to our every thought and drives every action. Commit to being a good steward of your godly influence by being a diligent student of the Holy Scriptures.*

Day 24: Scripture as Divine Instruction

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

— 2 Timothy 3:14–17

If you are called to kingdom leadership, you are called to teach God’s Word. While your spiritual gift might be hospitality or mercy, you must learn how to effectively communicate biblical truth to believers and nonbelievers. In Paul’s day, teaching was the only way to tell people about Jesus and educate them about his identity and place in Jewish history. Getting the facts right was imperative as the documents accumulated that would become the New Testament.

Today, as leaders in God’s church, teaching is more about *formation* than information. While we must ensure that our facts about Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection are accurate, our work is to communicate the story of Christ from Genesis to Revelation in such a way that changes hearts. We don’t have to be experts in theology; only passionate followers convinced that *“the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12). The Holy Scriptures are what shape our souls.

As Eugene Peterson writes, “Christians don’t simply learn or study or use Scripture; we assimilate it, take it into our lives in such a way that it gets metabolized into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus’s name, hands raised in adoration of the Father, feet washed in company with the Son.”⁵ When teachers recognize that Scripture informs and transforms, they share God’s Word to bring *life* to God’s people.

How can you be a more effective teacher? First, own the calling and commit to it. Don’t disqualify yourself because you aren’t articulate, can’t write a three-point sermon, or haven’t memorized long passages. The best teachers are the ones who are so enthralled with the subject matter that their enthusiasm inspires others to take a look for themselves. That means finding the teachers that ignite your passion, whether authors, speakers, or individuals whose lives are a testimony to the power of God moving in and through them. Stay excited and on fire for God’s truth in your own life, and it will become your greatest asset.

Finally, pray for God to give you the wisdom to share biblical truth in any given situation. Show empathy and interest in those you teach and ask a lot of questions. It usually isn’t about how much you know but what is applicable and helpful in the moment. Your job as a teacher isn’t to ensure that every point is heard and assimilated but to embrace these words from Isaiah 55:11: *“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”* Trust the Spirit’s leading and let go of the outcome.

To lead well is to create mature disciples who are “complete and equipped” to fulfill their God-given callings. Only the book given to us by the Holy Spirit can make a follower both whole and holy, or set apart to do the will of God.

Respond: *Holy Spirit, I pray for a renewed excitement to immerse myself in your book, embrace its generative power, and allow even the hardest truths to transform me. I want to learn, but even more, I want to participate with you in living out God’s reality in every aspect of my life and leadership. I’m ready!*

Day 25: Preparation of Mind and Heart

⁴ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

— 2 Timothy 4:1–4

When it comes to using Scripture to confront false teaching or correct ungodly beliefs and behavior, maturity is essential. Godly character is an absolute necessity if our instruction is to have value. Paul cites patience as a virtue that servant leaders in Christ must possess in increasing measure, because if we aren't able to demonstrate Christ in us when things get heated, we lose all credibility.

We all have a vision of what it looks like to practice patience. Most of our examples revolve around a short-lived experience – like being held up from a meeting by a phone call from a needy friend or getting stuck in traffic with cranky, hungry kids. However, the biblical definition of patience takes the long view. It is defined as long suffering and persevering until the end, regardless of the circumstances.⁶ Only God's power operating in us could ensure this level of endurance.

That's why Galatians 5:22 calls patience a fruit of the Spirit. We are completely reliant on God to exercise self-control rooted

in love in situations that might never resolve. In Ephesians, Paul includes patience in a list of godly characteristics that leaders are to develop through spiritual reformation in Christ: *“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Ephesians 4:1–3).

What tries your patience in ministry leadership? Perhaps it isn't a person but something else that inhibits you, like a chronic illness or lack of resources. Or you have an unbelieving spouse, critical co-worker, or job with no opportunity for advancement. Life tries our patience, but ministry requires us to cultivate patience. With God's help, we can. Scripture describes the holy patience for us that Jesus demonstrated through his life, death, and resurrection. God is still longsuffering with us today and teaches us patience through his Word and Spirit. Knowing this helps me be patient with others and with myself.

Respond: *Lord Jesus, I confess that I am less patient than I thought, and I can never be patient enough to reflect your love without the power of your Spirit working in my heart. No amount of willpower can transform me into your likeness, only surrender to your Spirit and Lordship. Thank you for being infinitely patient with me. Remind me of your example as I steward the callings you have given me. Amen.*



Key Verse

² You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. ³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. ⁵ An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. ⁷ Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

— 2 Timothy 2: 1-7

Opening Prayer

O God, who didst lead thy holy apostles to ordain ministers in every place: Grant that thy Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may choose suitable persons for the ministry of Word and Sacrament, and may uphold them in their work for the extension of thy kingdom; through him who is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. BCP. 205.

Introduction

As we have studied, The Second Letter of Paul to Timothy is the very last preserved correspondence that we have from the apostle. Scholars believe this letter was written shortly before Paul was beheaded in Rome, perhaps in the year 64 or 65AD. This poignant and affectionate letter is written to Timothy from a Roman prison cell.

As we have also studied, the letter indicates that Timothy is feeling beleaguered and discouraged in his church leadership of the growing church movement in and around the major city of Ephesus. Contemporary hearers of this letter, therefore, may find it particularly relevant. There is much discouragement in the wider church today. We are living in what many call a “post-Christian” new world wherein fewer and fewer people self-identify as engaged believers or as church members. Statistical data confirms the numeric decline in Christian membership in the USA, with mainline churches such as the Episcopal Church in precipitous decline.

Moreover, the deleterious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on church life will linger for a long time. Many are writing about an accelerating trend of church pastors resigning their positions due to discouragement and exhaustion.

To which I hope we say: “What an incredibly noble calling to represent Christ in this current time!” Though the challenges are significant for the church in our day, the opportunities are abundant for new growth and innovate ministry. Hand-wringing cynicism and beleaguered discouragement are not Christian virtues nor are they attractive.

This is the sort of spirit that animates Paul’s writings. He would want us to know that, despite the plethora of reasons for the world to be discouraged, Christians are to embody a visible expression of a different narrative for the sake of others. That despite appearances to the contrary, people have every reason to be hopeful and joyful because of the Good News. This is the spirit of Paul writing this last letter to Timothy!

► **ENCOURAGED** with warm affection and clear confidence

1. As you conclude your journey with your small group, take some time to give thanks to each other. Share your stories of any blessings and inspiration you may have received from this group.
2. The previous five weeks covered the care and detail with which Paul lay the groundwork for succession and leadership in the nascent church. Spend a few minutes reflecting upon this inheritance.

 **WATCH THE VIDEO**

The video is called “Session 6: Hope for the World” and can be found on www.sjd.org/life-study and <https://teachingcenter.sjd.org>

 **VIDEO NOTES**

The Soldier: Fight the Good Fight. Maintain the mentality and discipline of the soldier. Avoid entanglements or “weeds.” Do not go astray. Focus on pleasing the commanding officer: “The Lord knows those who are his” (2 Timothy 2:19). Unlike Roman soldiers, Christian soldiers are not to mete out punishment, but instead are to suffer for the sake of Christ who died on the cross.

The Athlete: Finish the Race. Athletes win races by following the rules, no shortcuts. Those who do not follow the role of the church and faith are “disqualified regarding the faith” (2 Timothy 3:8). Like athletes, Christians must commit to exercising spiritual gifts in order to participate more and more in the life of Christ.

The Farmer: Keep the Faith. The key to the farmer’s success is day-in-day-out faithfulness to the hard work of the task. However, Timothy must, like a farmer in season and out of season, stay faithful.

► **EQUIPPED** with his word to carry out his ministry

3. Is this image of a soldier helpful to you in your discipleship? Why or why not? How do Christian soldiers utterly upend the Roman perspective on true power and victory?

4. Who is a favorite athlete of yours? What can you learn from him or her that may apply to your commitment to growing in faith?
5. Without worship, prayer, Scripture, a community of support, and a commitment to serving others in some way, we are not likely to develop a strong faith. What is the spiritual discipline that is perhaps strongest for you right now in your life? What may be a discipline the Spirit is calling you to strengthen?
6. Read Mark 4:1-9: The Parable of the Sower. How does this parable help you understand Paul's metaphor of the Farmer in 2 Timothy? How might we measure our influence on the multiplication of new believers?
7. Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17. How does Paul speak of the practical value of Scripture in the Christian life? Why do you think he is reminding Timothy of this?
8. How do you answer others in your life who are skeptical about the value of the Bible for our day and age?
9. What does Paul mean when he says, "I've been poured out as a drink offering" in 2 Timothy 4:6? How is this sacrificial image helpful in understanding what Paul wanted to convey at the end of his life?

► **EMPLOYED** as servant leaders to usher in the kingdom of God

- 10.** 2 Timothy 4:7 is considered one of the most eloquent and haunting passages of the scripture: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” How does Paul hold himself up as an example of one who has lived the path he encourages Timothy to follow?
- 11.** Consider the final sections of 2 Timothy 4, as Paul entreats Timothy to come visit him. What does it say about the nature of discipleship, about the nature of sharing life together, about the nature of the Gospel itself?
- 12.** Spend some time in reflection. You, too, are equipped and entrusted to carry Paul’s vision forward. What do you think you will do next?

Closing Prayer

Keep, O Lord, we beseech thee, thy household the Church in thy steadfast faith and love, that by the help of thy grace we may proclaim thy truth with boldness, and minister thy justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. BCP. 178.

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Study  *Notes*

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SESSION 6

Devotions

Day 26: Training in Godliness

² You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. ⁵ An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. ⁷ Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

— 2 Timothy 2:1–7

Spiritual authority comes from a radically different source than the world's paths to power. God has designed you with gifts, abilities, and talents that he wants to use to grow others, but first, he wants your commitment to become more like himself every day for the rest of your life. This is what qualifies you to lead. And it's worth it! As Paul writes in 1 Timothy 4:8, "for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."

The road to maturity requires rigorous training, a willingness to suffer, and a commitment to work in season and out. Godliness also requires reverence, an inherent respect that leads you to seek to serve him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Surely reverence will take you to the end of yourself and your ability, but that's where you encounter the Lord. When your energy is spent getting to know God, you benefit from all the benefits of becoming more like Jesus. Just watch how others sit up and take notice!

If you haven't spent time working out your own faith, it's impossible to guide others in working out theirs. You won't relate to their struggles or appreciate their celebrations. Immaturity doesn't empower others—it separates, excludes, and even diminishes those it influences. Isn't it encouraging to know that God wants to use your heartaches to help others on their journey? *Your stories matter.*

So, keep working out your faith by stretching and toning your wisdom, knowledge, and character. Then you can teach and model love over competition, prioritize God's glory above your own, and recognize that God places you in relationships based on your spiritual authority, not your agenda. It's not about being perfect, just purposeful!

Reflect: *For servant leaders training in godliness, the finish line is the day we take our last breath. Who is God calling you to become as a leader? Keep following Jesus, and soon you will find yourself impacting others around you for the greatest cause in all the kingdom—Jesus Christ!*

Day 27: Interruptions

¹⁰ You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

— 2 Timothy 3:10–11

When have your best-laid plans been interrupted? Has the disruption caused you to question God or your calling? Not every season of your life feels like it is directly fulfilling your calling. Take heart; all leaders face obstacles that sometimes cause pain and suffering. It's excruciating to be moving forward with momentum and joy, then face an unexplainable roadblock. However, when reflecting on Paul's story, we realize how normal it is to get sidetracked.

Sometimes you will feel utterly convinced that you know where God is leading. You do all the preparation necessary to continue along the path, only to find that the opportunity has ceased to exist. This can happen for many reasons, some more obvious than others. I even moved my family to another state for a ministry role, only to have my daughter get sick and require yet another move for medical care. I was confused and devastated. How could I trust God again? In Acts 16, Paul and Timothy thought God was taking them in one direction, only to discover God had other plans:

⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And

when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. (Acts 16:6–8)

It doesn't say why Paul and Timothy were redirected, but it's important to note that it doesn't appear to be their fault. We don't see any blame occurring. If our heart is bent on following Jesus, we can quickly shift from "Why Me?" to "What's Next?" Paul may have counseled Timothy through this mysterious redirection.

Sometimes God simply brings us to a full stop. Paul experienced this during his multiple experiences in prison. Yet, he continued to worship, write, and preach the Word. Frustration and doubt occur at a soul level when duty (or worse) threatens to remove us from our greater purpose if we forget that we belong to God and not to ourselves. Accepting these rhythms will feed our souls and keep God at the center of our leadership. What appears to be something in the way might actually be the way.

Reflect: *Often, the seasons that feel stagnant or worthless are the most essential for spiritual growth and development. We can liken these periods to winter, when the seeds are planted but growth is unseen. We know that in Christ, it's important to "winter" well, to do the work of releasing what has gone before, and to prepare our minds and hearts for what's coming. And we can remember that spring is just around the corner.*

Day 28: Finish Strong

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

— 2 Timothy 4:6–8

Throughout 2 Timothy, Paul charges Timothy to persevere in multiple areas, including suffering, teaching, handling opposition, and confronting false teachers. When I step back and look at the scope of responsibility that Paul expects Timothy to shoulder, I feel weary. Who has the strength to live up to such a task? As leaders, how are we expected to handle such a heavy load that requires so much of us physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally? The truth is that none of us do, at least not in our own strength.

To read this letter without the Holy Spirit is to see only a job description with little incentive. But it's more plausible when we reframe it as a calling from God, to be fulfilled in his power and strength. Yet, even if we, as leaders, begin to believe success is possible, what motivation do we have to endure so much at great cost to ourselves and our families? Why would we willingly choose a challenging path that offers little tangible reward?

The answer is simple but profoundly important: We don't serve as kingdom leaders based on what we do, where we do it, or how we do it. We devote our lives to our calling because we have

a Caller who has issued a request from heaven that only we can fulfill. It's whom we serve that will enable us to persevere until the end. *"Therefore [we] endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"* (2 Timothy 2:10).

So, on the days when leadership goes well, and you fall in bed with a deep soul satisfaction, give thanks for the power and authority you have in Jesus Christ to serve on the front lines. And, when you wake up in the morning dreading another day, plant your feet on the ground with determination and accept your marching orders because ministry is a "get-to" for the King himself. Don't forget who you serve and why, and your life will be a testimony reaching into eternity.

Respond: *Lord Jesus, I want nothing more at the end of my life than to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Grant me the power of your name and Spirit that I might serve you with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength for all the days you give me on earth. Amen.*

Day 29: The Promised Land

¹⁶ At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! ¹⁷ But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

— 2 Timothy 4:16–17

What are your ultimate goals as a leader? What spoken or unspoken aspirations do you cling to as your definition of success? It's important to bring these before the Lord to make sure your agenda doesn't cause a blind spot that prevents you from fulfilling your calling. We all have personal "promised lands" that we believe will fulfill our souls and prove to God, ourselves, and others we are worthy.

Guess what? Your benchmark for success is likely not the Lord's plan for you. Pursuing a far-off goal is wonderful, but not at the expense of your primary calling, which is an intimate relationship with the triune God. If our eyes are only focused on what we have determined the outcome to be, we miss the spiritual markers along the way where God makes his promises known. We all succumb to spiritual strongholds, like discouragement, doubt, and unbelief, when the road takes an unexpected turn.

In *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, Ruth Haley Barton suggests that Moses realized at the end of his life that literally reaching the Promised Land wasn't as important after all. His journey with God taught him that his true Promised Land was in God's presence, which went with him everywhere. Above

all the noise and confusion leading the Israelites, he regularly encountered God. Many visions never transpire due to internal and external causes, but we can always return to our souls, where God's Spirit meets ours regardless of where we are.

What if all the effort you poured into leadership development was only meant for one person? It's possible. It might be your child, spouse, or neighbor. Or what if you are called to be a servant who supports a leader with a larger presence and platform than your own? Jethro played that role for Moses and his counsel was indispensable. Trust God's greater plan and hold your definition of success loosely. God is in charge, and your relationship with him is the greatest opportunity you are given.

Respond: *Father God, you are leading me to beautiful places, but please don't let me miss my opportunities to meet with you today. My soul hungers and thirsts for your nearness, your wisdom, and your presence in my life. I release all my earthly ambitions and aspirations into your care, knowing that your ways are higher than my ways, your thoughts higher than my thoughts, and your plans for my life and leadership are absolutely perfect. Thank you for being such a good Father. Amen.*

Day 30: Eternal Perspective

¹⁸ *The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

— 2 Timothy 4:18

How did Paul persevere to the end of his life and ministry with kingdom focus? There's only one answer: he maintained an eternal perspective. He wasn't concerned about the journey itself because his eyes were focused and clear on the destination. He knew God's glory because he experienced a taste of it on the road to Damascus in Acts 9, and it was so real and spectacular that he spent the rest of his life anticipating his return.

How real is Jesus to you today? If pursuing the high calling of becoming a servant leader for God's kingdom is what pulls you out of bed every morning, prepared to face with joy any trials that the day brings, then you are likely glimpsing God's glory on a regular basis. If instead, you still feel trepidation, confusion about your identity, or even boredom with the ministry, then you are likely missing God's glory. In his book, *Leading with a Limp*, Dan Allender writes:

“Glory is compelling. The more we taste, the deeper its hook in our souls, and the harder it is to dislodge the hook and flee from leadership. With all the suffering and struggle in leading others, why would we not bolt? For one reason: God pours out enough of his presence to keep us hooked. And God allures us to the point we want to know how the next episode of the story will turn out. God is playing

out his plot, and reluctant and limping servants, while being humbled as leaders, are lifted up to see his glory.”

If you are missing glory in your life and leadership, God isn't likely holding out on you. Perhaps you simply aren't recognizing it. God's glory isn't an ecstatic feeling, a supernatural aura, or an audible voice. Rather, it's God's revelation of who he is and how he wants to be known. As we see in Paul, it always has the power to change the beholder. Where is one place we can look for God's glory today? In Jesus. He is the absolute defining image of who God is and how he wants to reveal his nature and attributes. In Christ, we see mercy, kindness, forgiveness, grace, and so much more. Beholding our Lord and Savior through worship and reading the Holy Scriptures, we are filled with the glory of God.

Reflect: *Dearest brother or sister in Christ, as you complete these devotionals, may your heart hunger and thirst to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Your faith is your greatest asset as a leader, and what will influence others to step up into their highest callings as the Lord wills. Prayerfully pursue more of God's glory with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and you will find it in your leader, Jesus Christ.*



Notes

- 1 J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1994), 85
- 2 “Get a Move On,” Oswald Chambers Publications Association, <https://www.oswaldchambers.co.uk/classic/get-a-move-on-2-classic/>
- 3 Dallas Willard, *Life Without Lack: Living in the Fullness of Psalm 23* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2018), 106.
- 4 Charles River Editors, *American Legends: The Life of Billy Graham* (Scotts Valley, CA: Create Space, 2015).
- 5 Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 104.
- 6 “Patience.” Holman Bible Dictionary. <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/hbd/p/patience.html>. 1991.
- 7 Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 127.

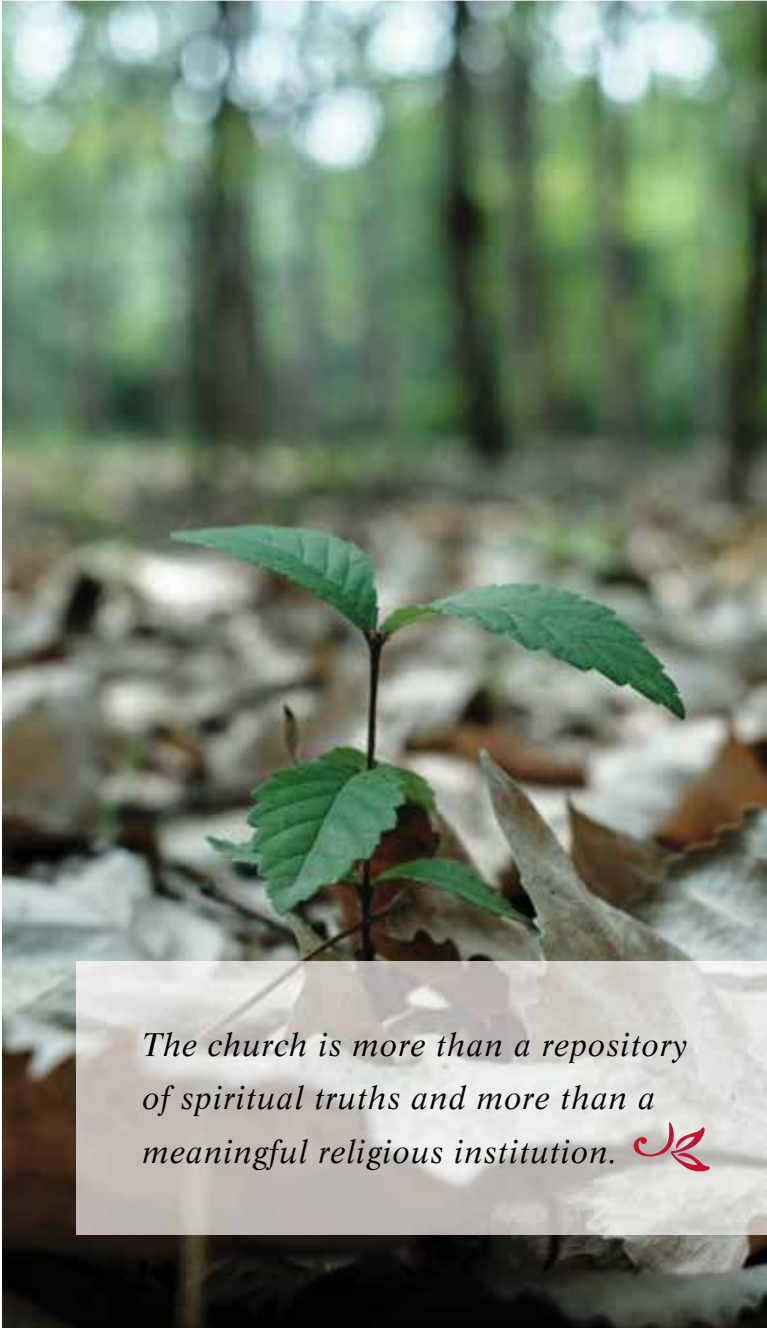



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Our vision is to nurture a community gathering around Jesus, growing in faith, and going forth for others. This three-dimensional Christian life is a shared life. Therefore, we seek more among us who feel called to develop mentoring relationships to help others deepen their experience of “the life that truly is life,” Jesus our Lord. Disciples make disciples, and I am grateful for all the encouragements to press forward on this vision. I pray this study is a means to that end.

— R. Leigh Spruill



*The church is more than a repository
of spiritual truths and more than a
meaningful religious institution. *

