



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?

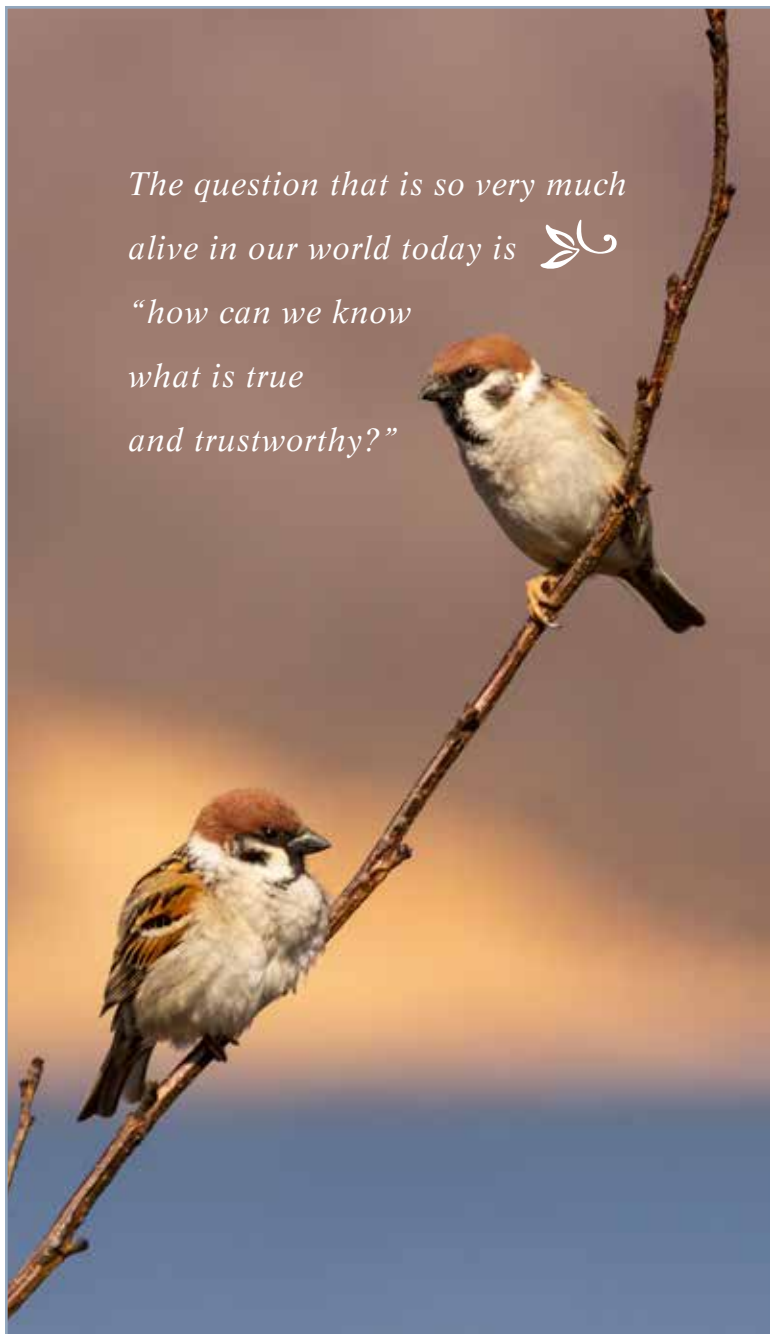
► **EMPLOYED** as servant leaders to usher in the kingdom of God

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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alive in our world today is 
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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

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.* 