



Outward Group Discussion Guide

August 9, 2026

SUMMARY

Drawing from 1 Timothy 5:1-16, this sermon examines Paul's instructions to the young pastor Timothy as he leads the church at Ephesus through a season of drift and distraction. Though the passage addresses the care of widows, the deeper message is about how a church can lose its center by allowing good things to become ultimate things. Using the story of Mary and Martha as a lens, the sermon identifies three forms of distraction that pull individuals and churches away from the one necessary thing: Jesus Christ and him crucified. The sermon calls the church to honest self-examination, warning that the enemy does not need dramatic sins to lead believers astray, only the slow, gentle slope of misplaced priorities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul instructs Timothy to approach older men with encouragement rather than rebuke, even when correction is needed -- in what ways do you find it difficult to deliver hard truths with a gentle tone, and what practical steps can you take to align your method with your message?
2. The sermon draws a distinction between 'truly widows' and those who have family support, raising the question of discernment in how the church distributes care -- how do you personally navigate the tension between wanting to help everyone and recognizing the limits of what you or your community can sustain?
3. C.S. Lewis writes in Screwtape Letters that the safest road away from God is the gradual one -- can you identify any good or neutral habits in your own life that have quietly edged you away from focusing on what matters most?
4. Martha was distracted by much serving, which was itself a good and necessary thing -- how do you recognize in your own life when righteous activity has crossed the line into becoming a substitute for genuine spiritual devotion?

5. The sermon warns that the church in Ephesus allowed the care of widows, a genuinely good work, to marginalize the gospel and sound doctrine -- what safeguards can a church community put in place to ensure that good works remain in service of the mission rather than replacing it?
6. Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 2:2 expresses a resolve to know nothing except Christ and him crucified -- what does it look like practically to hold that singular focus while still engaging faithfully with the many demands of everyday life?
7. The sermon observes that the way the church handles itself internally has a direct effect on whether outsiders are drawn in or pushed away -- in what specific ways do you think the internal culture of your church community either invites or discourages those on the outside?
8. Jesus tells Martha that Mary has chosen the one thing that will not be taken away from her -- what does it mean to you personally to sit at the feet of Christ, and what would you need to set down in order to do that more fully?

9. The sermon points to mainline churches as a cautionary example of communities that prioritized doing good works while allowing doctrinal foundations to erode -- what do you think is the relationship between sound doctrine and meaningful service, and can one truly exist without the other?
10. Paul instructs Timothy to encourage younger widows to remarry and manage their households so that the adversary has no occasion for slander -- how does the way you steward your time, relationships, and responsibilities either protect or undermine the witness of the gospel in your community?