

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

1 Timothy | *Church Life & Leaders*

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INTRO

- In the early 1980's my parents were serving as missionaries on **the Navajo Reservation** in the mountains of Arizona. So, my story begins with the Navajo Indians. God led my parents somewhere else when I was still a baby, so I don't have any memories of the Navajo Reservation. But when I grew a little older, it seemed to me that, because I was born among the Native Americans, I must actually *be* a Native American! 😊
 - My parents tried to convince me that it doesn't actually work that way, but what did they know!
 - **1.** I was *born* there.
 - **2.** I really *wanted* to be.
 - **3.** I *self-identified* as an Indian.
 - So, no matter what they said, I decided that my truth would be that I was (at least partly) an Indian.
 - I remember, as an 8- or 9-year-old, trying to convince my mom that I was an Indian by hopping around our driveway and making what I thought were Indian sounds. 😊
- I'm sure my parents just smiled because they knew that that's not the way biology works. And that's not the way that truth works.
 - Just because I felt like something was true...or just because I wanted something to be true...didn't make it true.
 - I was making a truth claim based on my *feelings* and my *desires* instead of on reality.

But...that's exactly the way the world around us operates.

- If you have recently applied for a job or registered for a class at school, one of the questions that you have almost certainly been asked is what your **pronouns** are:
 - Do you want people to refer to you as a "*him*" or a "*her*" or something neutral like "*them*"?
 - Why in the world would they ask you this?
 - Because our culture says that your truth is not based on the laws of God or the laws of biology or the laws, but rather it's based on what you want and how you feel.
 - According to our culture, truth has very little to do with intrinsic reality; it's about feelings and desires.
 - If I feel like **a girl** (or want to identify as a girl) then that is my truth, and because it's my truth, it needs to be your truth.
 - If I want to identify as **a cat**, then *that* is my truth...and yours.

That's the world we live in. *My truth should be whatever I feel!*¹

- I *feel* like a girl, and so I should be allowed to become a girl.
- I am *attracted* to my same gender; therefore, I should be allowed to marry them.
- I *want* to have a sexual relationship outside of marriage, and so I should be allowed to.
- I *don't want* to have this baby, and so I should be allowed to kill it.
- And if you challenge my feelings, I'll call it **hate speech**.
- If you tell me that I'm wrong, I'll call you self-righteous **bigot**.

That's the world we live in. But this isn't anything new. Oh, it's a new low for our country, but it's nothing particularly new in the history of humanity.²

- It's certainly not much different from a group of people creating **a golden calf** in the wilderness and then saying that "This [lifeless cow] is the god that rescued you from the land of slavery" (**Exod 32:1 – 4**).

This sinful world has **always** been pushing against the truths of God's Word in order to do what *feels good* in the moment.

- **Gen 6:1–6; Exod 22:19; 32:1–4; Lev 18:23; 20:15–16; Deut 27:21.**

Truth is whatever I want it to be; this is how our culture and this world thinks.

- But this is not how *God's people* handle the truth.
- This is not the way *the church* handles "truth".

When the world around us looks at the church, they ought to see *a different picture of truth*.

- They ought to see a picture of truth and reality that reflects the beauty of God and the holiness of God and the order of God.
- People ought to look at North Center and see a picture of truth that looks radically and gloriously different from the world around them.

But that's not an easy thing to do.

If local churches are going to stand against the tide of a godless culture, they need faithful leaders who are committed to the glory of God and the Word of God – no matter what.

That's what the book of **1 Timothy** is all about.³

PRAY

¹ **Clarification:** feelings and emotions aren't bad things. They're *good* things. God *created* us to have deep emotions & to experience strong feelings. In fact, God actually *commands* us to embrace and to express our feelings and emotions ("delight yourself in the Lord" (Psa 37:4); "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil 4:4); "Love...rejoices in the truth" (1 Cor 13:6).), but He means for our feelings and emotions to be shaped by the truth of God's Word, not the other way around.

² "There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl 1:9).

³ Paul writes to a young pastor, Timothy, about church life & church leadership – which makes this a timely book for a **church transition** like the one we are currently in here at North Center. Although I officially became the lead pastor of North Center over a year ago (June 1, 2021), it can take years to for a pastor to earn a church's trust, to develop deep relationships, to cultivate leaders, to implement new strategies for evangelism and discipleship. So, we are very much still in a season of transition here at North Center.

CONTEXT:

- **From Paul (1:1)**
 - *What was Paul's role in the early church?*
 - He was an *apostle* of Jesus Christ (1:1).
 - *Why was he an apostle?*
 - Because God called him to be an apostle (1:1; 2:7).
 - *Why is this amazing?*
 - Because Paul was the last person anybody would have chosen to be an apostle. He was formerly a *blasphemer* (1:13).
 - What does it mean to blaspheme?
 - It means *to speak defiantly against God*.⁴
 - Paul's life was (and is) a testimony of the amazing grace and mercy of God.

And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant,
with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance,
that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,
of whom I am chief.

~ 1 Timothy 1:14–15

- Paul saw his life as a pattern of grace for all who will ever believe in Jesus (1:16).
- **To Timothy (1:2)**
 - *Who is Timothy?*
 - Pastor at the local church in Ephesus (1:3)
 - A spiritual son of Paul (1:2, 18)
 - He was affirmed for ministry by the elders (4:14)
 - He was a young pastor (4:12)

- What is **the purpose** of this letter?

These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly;
but if I am delayed,

I write **so that** you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God,
which is **the church** of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

~ 1 Timothy 3:14–15

What does it look like to be a faithful Christian and a faithful church and a faithful pastor (elder, deacon) in a world that cares nothing about the glory or the holiness or the truth of God?

Paul is writing to help young Timothy answer these questions.

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/blasphemy-blaspheme.html>

Paul is writing to encourage Timothy and his local church to conduct themselves differently than the world around them...and that is never going to be easy.

- It's hard to be a faithful Christian.
- And it's hard to be a faithful leader in the church.
 - Every day, we are surrounded with temptation:
 - to compromise; to indulge the cravings of our flesh
 - to give into selfishness or pride or lust or bitterness or envy
 - to take the easy road
 - to blend in with the culture instead of being a light for the culture
 - to call it quits

This is true for every Christian...

And it is *especially* true for those who are called to lead God's people in the context of the local church.

Sometimes, people think that pastors are immune from temptation. 😊

- I have friends who think that I don't know what it's like to struggle with the things they struggle with because I'm a pastor; like all of my temptations basically vanished the day I became a pastor.
- When, in reality, the exact opposite is true. Pastors struggle with temptation all the time.
 - Paul knew it. He calls himself the "chief of sinners" (**1 Tim. 1:15; Rom. 7:18**).
 - And Paul knew that Timothy was in for a lifelong fight against sin & Satan & spiritual darkness (see **Eph. 6:12**).

So, Paul writes this letter to encourage this young Christian pastor in his fight for integrity and holiness and joy and truth...

- "Wage the good warfare" (**1:18**)
- "Fight the good fight of faith" (**6:12**)
- "Guard what was committed to your trust" (**6:20**)

The Question:

- **How** is Timothy supposed to fight this good fight of faith?
- **How** is he supposed to lead this local church in Ephesus to be joyful followers of Jesus?
- **How** is he supposed to raise up faithful elders and deacons who are wholeheartedly devoted to displaying the glory of God in their marriages and in their homes and in their hearts?
- **How** is Timothy supposed to help his people (as a local church) look different from the world around them?

The Answer:

- By teaching the unchanging truths in God's Word and nothing else.

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia – remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they **teach no other doctrine**...⁵

~ 1 Timothy 1:3

⁵ μὴ ἕτεροδιδασκαλεῖν

As a pastor, Timothy's **PRIMARY CALLING** was to make sure that the unchanging *truths* in God's Word (*which is translated into our English Bibles with the word "doctrine"*) were being *taught & treasured* in the local church of Ephesus.

The church's **only weapon** in our battle against sin & Satan is when the *unchanging truths* of God's Word are *faithfully taught* and then *fiercely treasured*. No other weapon is strong enough or sharp enough to defeat the lies that tell you to do whatever feels good to you.

That's the world in our day. And that's the world in Timothy's day.

In **1:9–10** Paul describes a world full of people who are doing what feels good to them:

- If the truth feels uncomfortable, they lie.
- If they don't feel like an individual should live, they murder.
- If they feel a desire for something or someone, they steal.

Paul concludes this list (**1:10**) by saying that all these things are "**contrary to sound doctrine**".⁶

- Which is to say that *they are contrary to the clear teachings of God's Word*.

So, **Paul's charge** to young Timothy is not to let others intimidate him in his ministry, but to teach the truths of God's Word (*sound doctrine*) no matter how it makes people feel and no matter how they respond... because they will most certainly respond.⁷

- Being a Christian is not a popularity contest (i.e., Matt 10:22; Mark 13:13; John 16:33).
- Therefore, being a pastor isn't a popularity contest. Timothy. Jeremiah. Samuel.
- You aren't here for approval ratings. *Approval ratings put Jesus on the cross*.
- No, you are here – in this church – in this pulpit – in this moment – to teach people the unchanging truths of God's Word...and nothing else.

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of **the good doctrine** which you have carefully followed.

~ 1 Timothy 4:6

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to **doctrine**.

~ 1 Timothy 4:12–13

Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

Take heed to yourself and to **the doctrine**.

Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

~ 1 Timothy 4:15–16

⁶ See also: 1 Tim 6:3–5.

⁷ See 2 Tim 4:1–5.

Teaching the truth & treasuring the truth is how you fight the good fight so that your faith doesn't end in "shipwreck" (1:19).⁸

Doctrine really matters; that's **the big picture** of *1 Timothy* that we see from 30,000 feet.⁹ But now, if we take this exegetical airplane down a little lower, we see that the **specific** doctrines are primarily related to life in the local church.

A really great way to study the book of **1 Timothy** is to begin by asking the question: *what does it look like to be a healthy church? What doctrinal truths does Paul teach in 1 Timothy that we should be teaching and treasuring in North Center today?*

I want to close by giving **five doctrinal truths** from *1 Timothy* that we are seeking to teach & to treasure here at North Center.

1. The centrality of *God's Word* (1:3–4; 4:5).

Teach no other doctrine
~ *1 Timothy 1:3*

2. The primacy of *prayer* (2:1–7; 4:5).¹⁰

Therefore, I exhort **first of all**
that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks
be made for all men...
~ *1 Timothy 2:1*

3. The beauty of *biblical complementarity* (2:8–15).

What does this mean?

- It means that we celebrate how God made men & women *equal* and gloriously *different*.
- It means that, while our culture is attempting *cancel* our differences, we (as the bride of Christ) are seeking to *celebrate* our differences.

"We believe that when it comes to human sexuality, the greatest display of God's glory, and the greatest joy of human relationship, and the greatest fruitfulness in ministry come about when the deep difference between men and women are embraced and celebrated as complement to each other. They complete and beautify each other."

~ **John Piper**¹¹

⁸ Those who depart from "good doctrine" (4:6) end up following the "doctrines of demons" (4:1). Those who reject the truth end up believing "what is falsely called knowledge" (6:20). This demonic doctrine and false knowledge is how people stray in the faith (6:21).

⁹ For an excellent resource, see Pastor John Piper's book, *Doctrine Matters* (Desiring God, 2014).

¹⁰ Pray everywhere (2:8) and for all people (2:1–2) so that their lives might glorify God (2:3) and so that they might be saved (2:4).

¹¹ John Piper, *Doctrine Matters*, 144.

4. The sacred calling of *elders* and *deacons* (3:1–13; 5:17–20; 6:20–21).¹²

When a church has qualified elders and deacons who embrace their calling with a seriousness and with joy (“*serious joy*” if you will), that is the kind of church that God will use to “*turn the world upside down*” (Acts 17:6).

5. The importance of *godly relationships* (5:1–6:19).¹³

North Center seeks to be a church that honors and celebrates one another as image bearers of God and joint heirs with Christ.

- We honor the *older man* as a father – and *the younger man* as a brother – and *the older woman* as a mother – and *the younger woman* as a sister. From the baby in the womb to the widow on her death bed, God is calling us to celebrate life and to cultivate honor.

If we hold to these 5 doctrines, we will look increasingly different from the world around us... like a lighthouse looks different from the storm raging against it. Like a city on a hill looks different than the darkness around it. Like a lamp on a lampstand looks different from the darkness around it.

¹² The *elders* (ἐπισκοπῆς: elder, bishop, overseer) are those who shepherd (3:1–7), and the *deacons* (διάκονος) are those who serve (3:8–13).

¹³ This includes women (2:9–15), men (3:1–2), the elderly & the young (5:1–2); widows (5:3–16); masters & bondservants (6:1–2). In all of these relationships, Paul is calling the local church to pursue **contentment** in our God-given identity, gifts, and calling (6:6).