

Studies in 2 Timothy

Leaders Guide



*And the things you have heard me say in the
presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men
who will also be qualified to teach others.*

2 Timothy 2:2

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2 Timothy

Introduction

Paul's second epistle to Timothy is probably the last letter he wrote. He is aged and in prison as he writes.

Unlike the fairly pleasant imprisonment he experienced at the end of Acts, this time he is incarcerated in a "dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air."¹ He is in chains (1:16; 2:9) and suffering deeply from loneliness (4:9-13). He expects to be executed shortly (4:6-8). These realities make this one of Paul's most deeply moving and human letters.

As difficult as things are for Paul, his mind remains focused on the spread of the gospel and the glory of God. Knowing how quickly our own thoughts turn inward when we are suffering, one cannot help but be amazed by Paul and attracted to his character. His life and thoughts are dominated by his love for God. In particular, his concern is for the future of the church. "His own apostolic labors are over... But now he must make provision for the faith after he has gone, and especially for its transmission (uncontaminated, unalloyed) to future generations. So he sends Timothy this most solemn charge. He is to preserve what he has received, at whatever cost, and to hand it on to faithful men who in their turn will be able to teach others also (2:2)."²

It is easy to see why a study of this letter is so relevant for those in leadership. We want to impart leadership qualities to those who are "passionate for God and compassionate toward people" so that, through their leadership, others may develop those same characteristics and perhaps become leaders also. Of course, none of us is as passionate or compassionate as we would like to be. But by studying this very personal letter, our hope is that Paul's words, which embody those attributes, will penetrate our hearts and make us more like him in our passion for God and compassion for others.

2 Timothy

The charge to guard the Gospel

Study 1 | 2 Timothy 1:1-18

1. Name one person who has influenced your life significantly. In what way did this person impact you?

READ 2 Timothy 1:1-18

2. How does Paul identify himself at the beginning of this letter? Why is such self-knowledge important? How did his understanding of his role affect the way he lived?
3. How has your self-understanding affected the way you live and the choices you make?
4. Looking at this first chapter, what observations can you make about Timothy and Paul? How would you describe their relationship? How can we pursue relationships similar to theirs in the church?

5. **What is the gospel message according to verses 9 and 10? What issues in our lives does it address? Which aspect of the message do you think is most easily misunderstood or most regularly forgotten?**
6. **What metaphors does Paul use to describe the gospel Timothy is to guard? What do they tell us about the gospel?**
7. **What does it mean to “guard” the gospel? Why is it important, and how does one do so? Who ultimately guards the gospel? Why is it important to understand this?**
8. **Paul brings up the issue of shame on four occasions in this chapter (vv. 8, 12, 16). What are the occasions and causes for shame? Why does Paul give so much attention to this topic?**

MAIN POINTS

Aware that he will soon die, Paul is making provisions for the gospel message to be kept pure. In a number of ways he seeks to communicate to Timothy that he must not allow the message of the gospel to be distorted or diluted. He must not let timidity, shame, or suffering affect the way he communicates the gospel. Instead, he must diligently guard and propagate the only message capable of giving life.

COMMENTARY ON THE PASSAGE AND NOTES ON THE QUESTIONS

1. Most studies are best begun with an “approach” question, meant to be asked before the passage is read. Its primary purpose is to get people warmed up and talking before delving into the passage. A free flow of conversation should be encouraged.

2. Paul identifies himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus” (v.1, NIV). This tells us that he has a God-centered, gospel-centered view of himself. He allows God to define him and he lives out that definition.

He first says he is “an apostle.” The term “apostle” in the Bible is a technical one. It refers only to a select group of people who have (1) seen the risen Jesus and (2) are specially sent out (“apostle” means “sent one”) by Jesus to represent him and teach in his name. They are distinct from the rest of Christ’s followers. Paul understands the gifts and calling God has given him. This self-understanding determines his choices, decisions, and the use of his time. It is the basis for how and where he invests himself.

Second, he is an apostle “by the will of God.” Paul did not designate himself an apostle, nor had any other human being. He was an apostle because God chose him to be one. Armed with that truth, Paul was capable of persevering in the tasks to which God called him, regardless of the obstacles and discouragements that came his way. Paul was sure that a certain kind of authority had been given to him by the Creator of the universe and the Redeemer of the world. He was, therefore, able to exercise this authority with confidence.

Third, he was an apostle “according to the promise of life.” This is one way of describing the gospel, which gives life here and in the hereafter. Paul has been called to duties that are duties of joy because he proclaims the “life” he now possesses. Paul is still obviously thrilled by the truth of the gospel. Even in prison, joy can be discerned in his life.

3. This very practical question gives you as a leader the opportunity to model to your group how your sense of giftedness and the call of God on your life have determined how you think, act, and make decisions. It gives group members the opportunity to reflect on whether they are allowing themselves to be controlled by their sense of God's calling on their lives; it calls them to consider how the realities of their giftedness and call should further inform and transform their lives. It would be very appropriate to give special attention to the group members' sense of calling and how that will affect their lives.

4. The following things can be noted about Timothy: (1) He was brought up in a godly home. The faith was passed on to him in part by his mother and grandmother. (2) He apparently had gifts in teaching and preaching. The laying on of hands was used by the church to set an individual apart to gospel ministry. (3) He was a timid individual, perhaps even an introvert, more passive than proactive. There is some indication that this timidity was severe enough to limit the way he used his gifts, so that they lost some of their sharpness. As they sometimes say, "If you don't use it, you lose it." Therefore, Paul tells him to "kindle" or "fan into flame" his gifts.

About Paul we learn the following: (1) He was an apostle. (2) He had a very powerful understanding that his apostleship came from God, which made him exceedingly bold. He was not afraid to exhort people. (3) He was feeling deserted and somewhat lonely.

The relationship between Paul and Timothy was apparently warm and genuine. Though Paul was older than Timothy and in a position of authority over him, theirs was a relationship of mutual affection. Paul calls Timothy "my dear son" (v. 2). Timothy had wept at their last goodbye and Paul longs to see him now. He anticipates that the moment will be filled with joy. Relationships with this kind of emotional intensity often exist only when there has been significant vulnerability and people have shared in accomplishing some task together.

The importance of relationships in the church can hardly be overemphasized. In his book on cell ministry, *The Coming Church Revolution*, Carl George writes, "In the church of the future, pastors will focus on developing people capable of relational ministry. Cell leaders will focus on relationships more than meetings, and every small group will deeply value nurture and one-to-another, peer-based caring... Relationship-based leadership gathers people and sees that they receive care."³

5. The gospel message is that, apart from any effort of our own, God in Christ has rescued us from sin and death and has given us life and holiness.

First, the Christian faith is a religion of rescue: "God has saved us" (v. 9). It teaches us that we are completely helpless to save ourselves from our predicament. We are dead before God and unable to change the situation. God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Second, what we are rescued from is sin and death: "who has destroyed death" (v. 10). Death is the wage paid to the employees of sin. Because we sinned, death is our lot. Having sinned, we are in bondage to it and unable to live as God intended apart from his intervention. At death, apart from God's intervention, we are left with nothing but the fear of condemning judgment.

Third, this rescue is accomplished through the historical work of Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension: "this grace... has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ" (v. 10).

Fourth, what we are rescued *to* is life and holiness: "God... has called us to a holy life... and has brought life and immortality to light" (v. 10). The gospel is far more than deliverance from the negative consequences of sin, judgment, and death. It also brings positive blessings. We are given eternal life, which includes a renewed heart and a reestablished relationship with God (John 17:3). We are also renewed in holiness. Genuine salvation always involves deliverance from sin unto holiness because to turn from sin is to grow in holiness. Life change is inherent in salvation.

Fifth, this rescue is completely of grace: "not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace" (v. 10). This salvation is completely God's doing. We bring nothing to our salvation but our sin. He is its initiator, accomplisher, and completer. It is by grace from the beginning to the end. We contribute nothing.

This is the message of the gospel. If you leave out any of these elements, you have changed the message and taken away its power. When we are in touch with our own predicament, the gospel speaks deeply to our lives. Everyone lives in fear of death, whether they acknowledge it or not. Death casts a huge shadow over the whole of life. On the one hand, our lives are meaningless if there is no life after death. On the other hand, the reality of death convicts us of our guilt and leaves us in fear of God's righteous judgment. Death is the one thing in life we are absolutely powerless against; we cannot stop it from occurring. To know that death has been rendered harmless and powerless through Christ is great news for those who have ears to hear it.

6. Paul uses two metaphors to speak of the gospel: “sound teaching” and “the good deposit.” To speak of the gospel as *sound teaching* is to emphasize the wholeness the gospel brings. “Sound” words are “healthy” words. The words of the gospel are not diseased or maimed and thus likely to infect their hearers with sickness. This is the case with so many of the teachings of man. They look attractive. They look like they will bring health and wholeness. But, in truth, the words are diseased and wreak havoc on our lives when we consume them. The gospel is sound, healthy teaching. Those who embrace it find they are able to make sense of reality as they experience it. It does not stunt the growth of those who embrace it, but instead causes growth and blossoming to occur in our lives.

To speak of the gospel as the *good deposit* is to emphasize that it is a treasure. The gospel is wealth and riches for those who embrace it. It does not impoverish your life. It is a message that is precious and priceless. We must guard against it being tarnished by those who would change its message. It loses its value and beauty if it gets watered down or twisted. Only when it is preserved in its truth does it remain an invaluable message that enriches you.

7. When you guard something, you protect it from harm. When you guard something, you don’t let anyone damage it. So when we guard the gospel, we are preventing it from becoming damaged, distorted, twisted, watered down or altered in any way. So crucial to Paul is the guarding of the gospel that elsewhere he writes, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal. 1:8). Paul’s strong language makes it obvious that guarding the gospel is of utmost importance. But why? Because the gospel is the truth about God. Whenever a distorted gospel is proclaimed, lies are being told about God. When lies are told about God, whose world it is and who runs it, it cannot but help change the way we live.

Eugene Peterson puts it like this: “Paul is not tolerant when people he loves are being told lies about God, because he knows that such lies will reduce their lives, impair the vitality of their spirits, imprison them in old guilts, and cripple them with anxieties and fears... That is Paul’s position: a lie about God becomes a lie about life, and he will not have it. Nothing counts more in the way we live than what we believe about God. A failure to get it right in our minds becomes a failure to get it right in our lives. A wrong idea of God translates into sloppiness and cowardice, fearful minds and sickly emotions.

“One of the wickedest things one person can do to others is to lie to them about God... It is wicked to tell a person that God is an angry tyrant, [because the person who believes it will] defensively avoid him if he can. It is wicked to tell a person that God is a senile grandfather, [because the person who believes it will] live carelessly and trivially with no sense of transcendent purpose... It is

wicked to tell a person a lie about God because, if we come to believe the wrong things about God, we will think wrong things about ourselves, and we will live meanly or badly. Telling a person a lie about God distorts reality, perverts life and damages all the processes of living.”⁴

One way we guard the gospel is to study it and know it well so that when someone distorts it, we are able to discern the distortion and prevent it from being passed on. We can also guard the gospel by teaching it faithfully. Closely related to this is to use it effectively in people's lives. We are to use it on our own and other's fears, insecurities, bitterness, disobedience, etc. When we do, we are able to see that only the true gospel is able to eradicate these problems. Thus we discourage people from giving in to the temptation to pervert the gospel.

Ultimately, Paul reminds us that it is God who guards the gospel (vv. 12, 14). The Holy Spirit is active in the church and he lives in us. He will guide the church in his truth. He will give us wisdom to know when the gospel is being distorted. He will make sure that when we start to stray from it, we are reined in and taught it faithfully again. It is, after all, God's gospel. While we are to be diligent in guarding it, we need not live in fear that it will be lost. God, who knows that the gospel is the only thing that will prevent humanity from falling into utter and final ruin, will make sure that it is protected.

8. Paul gives at least three possible causes for shame. In v. 8 he says there is a possibility of being ashamed of Christ and the gospel. In v. 8 and v. 16 he notes the possibility of being ashamed of fellow Christians. In v. 12 he admits the possibility that suffering can bring shame. Shame is what we experience when we fall short of standards we have set for ourselves. We all have standards we believe will render us respectable when they are achieved. We have an image in our minds we consider to be heroic. When we fail to live up to those standards or that image, we experience shame.

Our culture often establishes these standards and images for us. These standards include not being needy, and not associating with those who are considered needy or socially unacceptable. Yet in embracing Christ, we admit our own neediness and we associate with One who was rejected by society and crucified. We also become family members with others who have admitted their neediness and often manifest such neediness in their lives. Suffering is often viewed as the lot of those who have done something wrong and thus is often accompanied by feelings of shame.

The reason Paul gives so much attention to shame is that he knows how it can debilitate us when we are overcome by it. Shame paralyzes us. When we are ashamed of Christ and the gospel, we are reluctant to admit we are his. We hesitate and fail to speak the gospel. When we are ashamed of fellow

believers, we withdraw from them. We cease to be effective agents for good in their lives. When we are ashamed of suffering for the gospel instead of being people who rejoice “because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41), we will refuse to do things that may lead to persecution and rejection. In all these things we grieve and dishonor God.

If we are to avoid being overcome by shame, we must think in a way that is opposite from the world. God evaluates things differently. His evaluation is true to the way things are. If we remain faithful to him, we will be vindicated in the end. It will be those who have failed to associate themselves with Jesus and his people and who have been unwilling to suffer who will experience true shame at the last day.

¹ William Hendriksen, *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 234.

² John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 13.

³ Carl George, *The Coming Church Revolution: Empowering Leaders for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1993).

⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Traveling Light: Modern Meditations on St. Paul's Letter of Freedom* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1988), pp. 34ff.

2 Timothy

The charge to suffer for the Gospel

Study 2 | 2 Timothy 2:1-13

1. Tell about an activity, skill, or experience you take delight in passing on to others.

READ 2 Timothy 2:1-13

2. What does it mean to “be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ” (v. 1)? How does a person go about being strong in that way? How can you tell that you are successful?
3. As Paul talks about the gospel being passed on to others, how many generations does he mention? Why is this “chain of transmission” so important?
4. What qualities should be evident in those involved in the “chain of transmission”?

5. **Paul uses three metaphors to describe the Christian life we have been called to: soldier, athlete, and farmer. What does each metaphor tell us about how to live as followers of Jesus?**
6. **Why, in this context, does Paul tell Timothy to “remember Jesus Christ” (v. 8)?**
7. **What principles does Paul seem to want Timothy to draw from the example of his own life in verses 9-10? How have you found these principles to be true in your life?**
8. **What is the point of the “trustworthy saying” in verses 11-13? What does it communicate and how is it meant to motivate us?**

MAIN POINTS

In the previous passage Paul emphasized Timothy's need to guard the gospel. There was opposition to it, and with that came a pressure to alter the gospel so that the opposition and inevitable persecution would cease. In this passage, Paul explains how Timothy not only can protect the gospel but advance it. He is to rely on God for strength (v. 1) as he himself does all he can to protect it. How can he do all this?

- By diligently passing the gospel on to others (v. 2).
- By meditating on other examples of endurance that reap great dividends (vv. 3-7).
- By remembering Jesus' example (v. 8).
- By looking at Paul's own life (vv. 9-10).
- By remembering the promises of God (vv. 11-13).

If Timothy relies on God *and* uses all the means at his disposal, this crucial task of guarding and passing on the gospel will be accomplished.

COMMENTARY ON THE PASSAGE AND NOTES ON THE QUESTIONS

1. Approach question.

2. To "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" means to be living in dependence upon God. It means you are not living out of your own resources or in your own strength. Instead, you are looking to God to give you the strength to live faithfully before him. You don't consider yourself adequate or competent in and of yourself; you realize that your competency and adequacy come from God (2 Cor. 3:4-6). Because this is dependence upon God's "grace," it means you are not assuming that your performance makes you worthy of God's favor and strength. You recognize that whether you are doing reasonably well or rather poorly in living your Christian life, the only reason you have a claim to God's favorable involvement in your life is because of Jesus' merits. "Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace."

How does a person go about being strong in this way? Quite simply, by being a person of prayer. There is no other way to express your utter reliance upon God. Prayer is our "declaration of dependence." Then, believing that God will give you the strength you asked for, you move out to do his work and will. Only in this way is prayer demonstrated to be believing prayer.

While it may be difficult to judge how “successful” you are at being “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus,” there are at least three things whose absence in your life makes it clear that you are *not* doing so. First, there will be very little prayer in your life. Second, there will be very little risk-taking to speak the gospel and plenty of caving in when you are given opportunities to speak or defend the gospel. Third, there will be very little peace and plenty of anxiety in your life — a sure sign that you are failing to trust God.

3. Four generations are mentioned in the transmission of the gospel message. First there is Paul himself : “the things you have heard *me* say.” Second, there is Timothy: “the things *you* have heard me say.” Third, there are those to whom Timothy will entrust the message: “entrust to *reliable men*.” Fourth, there are those who will hear the message from those reliable men: “who will also be qualified to teach *others*.”

Paul knew that the spread of the gospel would come to a halt unless people were being prepared to spread it. He saw it as his job not only to teach others to proclaim the gospel, but also to teach them how to teach others to do the same. It was not going to be good enough for Timothy to preach the gospel himself; he also had to teach *others* to preach the gospel and to train the *next* generation. This is nothing other than leadership development within the church. It was not considered optional; it was considered necessary for the future existence and health of the church. It was a command.

If we are leaders, we must see ourselves continuing this chain of transmission. It is not only our job to articulate the gospel faithfully, but also to train *others* to proclaim and train. Redeemer asks Fellowship Group leaders to take on apprentices because we take Paul’s words seriously. We don’t view the task of seeking out apprentices and training them as optional, but as a command of God. Dropping the ball can only harm the church and cause its health to suffer. There are two questions we must be willing to ask ourselves: Am I thinking three generations of leaders ahead? Am I not only training an apprentice, but training him or her well enough that he or she is able *to train others to train others*? (The repetition in that phrase is not a mistake!)

4. The two qualities Paul says we are to seek in those we equip are *reliability* (many translations use the word “faithful”) and *ability*. *Reliability* means that a person can be trusted to proclaim the gospel faithfully and to teach others to do so. They can be depended upon. But how do we know people are reliable? We know this only by significant interaction with them. We ought to be asking, “In the history of my relationship with this person, has he shown a faithfulness to the group and to God’s people in general? Has she been fairly regular in attendance at our group? Has he demonstrated a desire to care for the people of God?”

Ability means that people have the gifts and skills necessary to do this job. They are *qualified*; that is, they have the qualities needed to be a leader. We ought to be asking, "Have I seen this person effectively care for a person in the group? Has this person been teachable and willing to learn?"

In keeping with these general requirements, Redeemer asks leaders to look for individuals with the following qualities to serve as apprentices: desire, faithfulness, availability, and teachability. With regard to desire, individuals should *want* to be an apprentice and leader. They ought to consider it a privilege, an honor, and a thing of great importance. With regard to faithfulness, they ought to be people who have been consistent in attendance at the group and motivated to care for others. With regard to availability, they must have the time both to lead the group and to attend meetings for training and support. With regard to teachability, they ought not to think they know it all, but instead have a genuine desire to learn how to become more effective leaders and shepherds.

5. Paul is calling us to meditation with the use of these metaphors. What is true in these well known examples is also true for the servant of God. If we think about them, we will see that the only wise choice is to endure.

The first metaphor for the Christian life is that of a *soldier* who does not get involved in civilian affairs but lives to please his commanding officer. Our commanding officer is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

It must be our goal to obey and please him. If anything in our life prevents us from obeying or pleasing him, it ought to be done away with. The life of the soldier is one of discipline and alertness because "there is a war on." He never lets his guard down to the point that he forgets this. In applying this example to our own lives, we must be careful not to make the mistake of creating a dichotomy between "secular" and "religious" activities. "The Christian, who is intended to live in the world and not contract out of it, cannot of course avoid ordinary duties at home, at work and in the community. Indeed as a Christian he should be outstandingly conscientious in doing and not dodging them. Nor should he forget... that 'everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving' or that 'God... richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy' (1 Tim 4:4; 6:17)." ¹ One way we are to please Jesus Christ is to take him at his word about these things. All of life is to be lived unto God, not just the narrowly "religious" parts. In fact, one way we do battle as soldiers of Jesus Christ is to let others see us take God at his word in these things.

The second metaphor for the Christian life is that of the *athlete*, who receives the victor's crown only if he competes according to the rules. The Christian life is often compared to a race in the New Testament; it involves the "strenuous self-discipline of training," ² endurance to run the race to the end and not quit and, in this case, the keeping of rules. Obedience to God's law is not optional.

Though we are no longer "under the law" in that it has no power to condemn those who are in Christ Jesus, it still serves as the guidebook for how to live a God-pleasing life. Though suffering comes, we are never at liberty to cast aside God's law and act as if it does not matter. If we do, we will find ourselves disqualified from the race, and the victor's crown we thought we had won will be taken away from us. A hurdler may run past every hurdle rather than jump over them and appear to come in first. However, he will not be proclaimed victorious; he will be disqualified. So God will disqualify us from heaven if we turn aside consistently from his Word. "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

The third and final metaphor Paul uses for the Christian life is that of a hardworking *farmer* who receives a share of the crops for his hard work. The farmer "depends as much on sweat as on skill. However poor the soil, inclement the weather, or disinclined the farmer, he must keep at this work."³ His job is one "totally devoid of excitement, remote from all glamour of peril and applause."⁴ Yet he has a harvest coming to him from all his strenuous labors. The Christian life has similarly always entailed hard work. No one has ever claimed it would be easy. However, for those who engage in it without shirking their responsibilities, a harvest awaits. This harvest includes seeing God face to face, holiness of life, treasures in heaven, and the joy of seeing others come to faith in Christ. The hard work of the Christian life — making sure that the gospel is guarded by your thoughts, words, and deeds to the very end — brings a deep-seated joy.

All these tasks involve discipline, hard work, and struggle. We should expect nothing less as we strive to live the Christian life.

6. If these metaphors are not enough to keep Timothy guarding the gospel in the face of opposition, then certainly the example of Jesus should be. Jesus suffered and died that the gospel might become a reality. He did not shrink back even though he faced the wrath both of men and of God. Instead, he endured to the end. And, lest we think this was an easy task because he was God, Paul reminds us that "he was descended from David"; that is, he was a human being subject to all the fears, suffering, and struggle common to human beings. The lesson for us, of course, is that "no servant is greater than his master" (John 13:16). If Jesus suffered, we should expect no less: "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him" (Phil. 1:29). "Remembering Jesus" should strengthen us in our task of guarding the gospel.

7. Paul himself has been locked in prison because he refused to adjust the gospel message to satisfy the ears of his hearers. He has guarded the gospel with his words and actions and therefore been put under guard himself. The spread of the true gospel is a task of such importance that no amount of suffering can be allowed to stop it. This was the first principle Paul's life communicated.

The second principle communicated through Paul's words is that though people may stop *us*, nothing can stop the spread of the gospel. It will break through whatever barriers people set up in its path. However people may attempt to suppress it, it cannot be held back. However people may try to stamp it out of existence or bury it, it will rise again. God will accomplish his work. No one can thwart his purposes. Paul had seen the gospel penetrate the hearts of many closed people. No heart was too hard.

Paul's life also communicates a principle of motivation: it is a love and concern for others, arising from our love for God, that causes us to ferociously protect and zealously spread the gospel. It is "for the sake of the elect" that Paul endures all he does. His love and concern for those God has chosen lead him to guard and spread the gospel in the face of suffering.

8. This "trustworthy saying" amounts to a promise of God. However, it is a much misunderstood promise, especially its fourth stanza.

The first two stanzas are obviously meant to encourage us. The phrase "if we died with him" can be taken a couple of ways. Given the context, in which Paul is encouraging faithfulness to the gospel amid opposition, it is probably meant to convey that our willingness to suffer and die for Christ will not go unrewarded. Sacrifice will not be futile. We will be raised with Christ into a glorious existence. The second stanza goes one step further: Not only will we live with him if we endure until death, we will also reign with him. Therefore we should stand firm in the face of even the strongest opposition.

The second half of the saying turns considerably more dark and ominous. "If we disown him, he will disown us" is clear enough. If we turn our backs on Christ continuously, it does not matter if we professed belief in him at one time. Our actions reveal that we never belonged to him in the first place (1 John 2:19). Our profession was obviously not genuine. We can expect only rejection at the final judgment.

Though the last stanza has sometimes been interpreted as being an encouraging word, the context makes it clear that it is a warning in keeping with the preceding words. The last stanza further highlights the reality of God's judgment on those who disown him, grounding this judgment in the very being

of God. In essence Paul is saying, "If we are faithless, the very faithfulness of God demands that he judge us. Not to do so would be to disown his very self, which is clearly something he cannot do." To put it another way, Paul is saying, "God is always faithful to his covenant. He will bless the enduring faithful. He will curse the faithless. To act in a manner contrary to this would mean that he was not true to his covenant — a liar. He would be disowning himself, plainly something he will not and cannot do."

The contrast between the first and second halves of this saying could not be greater. Endurance brings greater benefits than we could have ever dared to hope for. However, a failure to endure brings the worst consequences we could possibly imagine. The wise choice is obvious, no matter how much pain and suffering it might mean in the here and now.

¹ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p.53.

² Stott, p. 55.

³ Stott, p. 56.

⁴ Bishop Moule, cited in Stott, p. 56.

2 Timothy

The charge to develop character in keeping with the Gospel

Study 3 | 2 Timothy 2:14-26

1. What character trait do you particularly admire when you see it in someone's life? How is this character trait expressed in the life of someone you know?

READ 2 Timothy 2:14-26

2. What character quality is Paul urging Timothy to develop in verses 14-19? Why is this quality so important? What happens when it is absent?

3. What does this character quality look like in a person's life?

4. In the analogy Paul uses in verses 20-21, what is the house, who is the master, and what are the noble and ignoble vessels?

5. **What character quality is Paul calling Timothy to develop with this illustration (vv. 20-22)? Why is this quality so important? What happens when it is absent?**
6. **How are we to treat those whom God has placed in our ministry care?**
7. **How will understanding Satan's role in human behavior and belief affect the way we treat others?**
8. **Which of the character qualities mentioned in this passage are you most convicted to work on? Why?**

MAIN POINTS

Paul continues to give his final advice and encouragement to Timothy as he prepares for his own death. He encourages him to develop a love for truth that matters, a hatred for falsehood, and a compassion for those who have been deceived by lies. He also encourages him to grow in holiness, for without such purity of character he will not be fit to minister to others.

COMMENTARY ON THE PASSAGE AND NOTES ON THE QUESTIONS

1. Approach question.

2. Paul is seeking to cultivate in Timothy a love for "truth that matters." He is aware that knowledge for knowledge's sake is ultimately useless. Such knowledge merely makes a person proud and puffed up. He does not want Timothy to meet that end. Instead, he wants Timothy to major in truth that will build people up and enable them to live God-pleasing lives. Without a love for truth, people cannot live well. One's character will be lacking in righteousness, faith, love, peace, and purity. False teaching is described as both "godless" and "gangrenous." It leads people away from God. It breeds infection in people's lives and damages them. Those who abide by falsehood are condemned to live poorly. At the very least, it gets people involved in useless quarreling. So, Timothy is to love truth and hate lies.

3. One way in which the character quality of loving the truth manifests itself is by "correctly handling the word of truth" (v. 15). To correctly handle literally means "to cut straight," as in cutting a road through the countryside so that a traveler can go directly from one point to another. In the context of handling Scripture, "to cut straight" means that one ought to be *accurate* and *plain*. The teaching should not distort the Scriptures. The person handling God's Word should not say that the Scriptures mean one thing when they actually mean another. The teacher should not add to or subtract from their meaning. In addition, the person should not seek to appear wise to others by making the teaching complicated and convoluted. Instead a person should keep the teaching simple (not shallow) so that people can understand it, make sense of it, and apply it. A person who does not handle Scripture correctly has good reason to be "ashamed." By teaching falsehood, a person can "ruin" his or her hearers. By teaching in a complicated way, one does not end up benefiting one's hearers but only enhancing one's own reputation as an "intellectual." Timothy is to develop a disdain for such teaching and distance himself from it.

A second way this character quality of loving the truth manifests itself is in a lack of "quarreling about words," a lack of arguing over inconsequential matters. Timothy is urged to avoid people who "argue for argument's sake," but to steer people back to the issues that really matter.

4. The house referred to is the church, the community of believers who profess faith in Christ. The master of the house is God himself. The vessels are the ministers and teachers in the church. However, even though teachers in the church are being referenced specifically, that does not mean that a broader application cannot be made to all members of the church. After all, every one of us is called to minister to others and to instruct one another, whether or not we have that role in an official capacity. It is interesting to note that we are likened to vessels. A vessel's job is not to draw attention to itself, but to carry something else. It is meant to be of use and service to the master. As vessels of Christ, our function is to carry Christ's name before unbelievers. To use language Paul uses elsewhere, we are earthen vessels called to carry the glorious treasure of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:7).

5. Verses 20-21 serve as a bridge between the preceding verses and those that follow. Paul has addressed purity in doctrine and he is about to talk about purity in personal life. In this metaphor of vessels in a house, Paul is calling Timothy — and all teachers in the church — to holiness and purity, both in doctrine and life.

Though God has occasionally used rather wretched characters to carry out his purpose, the overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that he uses those who are holy in character. If we are not striving to walk in holiness, our ability to effectively minister will be greatly compromised and the power of our ministry will be reduced. Our words ring hollow and lack authority if our lifestyle does not back up those words. Our lifestyle tends to teach as much or more than our words do. People don't tend to follow abstract principles and truths, but people who embody those principles and truths. They learn as much by example as they do through words. The beauty of a life of holiness will have a far greater impact on people than words of eloquence. This is why one preacher used to say, "My people's greatest need is my own personal holiness."

In the following verse (22), Paul spells out what a life of holiness looks like. On the one hand, we are to "flee the evil desires of youth." These desires include such things as making success an end in itself and our ultimate goal, allowing riches, material wealth or financial independence to be the things that drive us, and making pleasure in all its forms our chief love. Both self-assertion and self-indulgence are to be shunned. On the other hand, we are to run after "righteousness, faith [a deep and abiding trust in God], love [seeking to make others great], peace [pursuing and seeking those things that lead to a just and

flourishing society],” and wholesome community (we are to seek these things “along with others”). When we are characterized by such a lifestyle, we will be useful and ready for any good work God would call us to do.

6. Chiefly, we are to treat the people under our care with kindness and gentleness. The word for kindness is used of “a nurse taking care of her children,” ¹ so we are to nurture them with a view to their growth. When they fail to grow or when they resist our instruction, we are not to be resentful. Instead we must be patient with them. Our tendency often is to treat people who disagree with us or who do not accept our teaching as our opponents. We treat them as enemies and become harsh with them. Such behavior is not appropriate. We are to continue to be kind to them and gently instruct them.

What we are to avoid is not controversy in and of itself, but “foolish and stupid” controversies that arise from speculation and go beyond Scripture. “Unbiblical speculations and uncharitable polemics have done great damage to the cause of Christ” ² and we are to steer clear of them. They breed quarrels that tear people down instead of building them up.

7. Though human beings are never seen as anything but 100 percent responsible for their beliefs and actions, they are seen as victims as well. Satan is a deceiver; he entraps people. Those who have believed lies are Satan's victims. Therefore, though we must remind them that they are accountable for the things they believe and warn them to turn (“repent”) from such false and destructive beliefs, we should also pity them. Compassion for those who are held captive to lies ought to characterize our lives. Solemnity ought to be found in our words to them, but not harshness. We should seek to gently instruct them. We can attack their beliefs, but we should not attack the person who holds them. And even if we do attack their beliefs, we ought to do so with the appropriate goal in mind: winning the person to the truth. If we win the argument but lose the person, we have failed. Gentle persuasion should be our methodology.

We also ought to make prayer a priority for those captive to lies. When we realize that they are the Devil's victims — that our battle is not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6) — we recognize that the battle must be fought with spiritual weapons. Therefore, prayer for such individuals is to be our predominant activity. To chastise them for false beliefs and fail to pray for them is to miss the nature of the problem.

8. A straightforward application question. The way you as a leader share on this question will set the tone for the rest of the group. After people have shared, take time to pray for one another with respect to the development of these character qualities.

¹ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p.53.

² Stott, p. 77.

2 Timothy

The charge to continue in the Gospel

Study 4 | 2 Timothy 3:1-17

1. Which environments make it hardest for you to act on your convictions and do the right thing? What is it about the environment that makes it so hard?

READ 2 Timothy 3:1-17

2. What period is Paul referring to when he speaks of “the last days”?
3. In the catalog of behaviors that will characterize “the last days,” which ones particularly strike you? Do any of the behaviors mentioned give you new insight into human wickedness? Are there any that you would not have initially included on a list of human evil? Which of these behaviors are most prevalent in our society?
4. How does the possibility of “a form of godliness” without the “power of godliness” warn and convict you? How does one prevent such a disastrous combination?

5. What marks of Paul's life set him apart from such people? Why does Paul draw Timothy's attention to these qualities in his life?
6. In verse 14 Timothy is told to "continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of." What does Paul mean and why does he consider it important to exhort Timothy this way?
7. What does Paul say about the source of the Scriptures (v. 16)? Why is that so important?
8. Use your own words to explain the purpose of the Scriptures. Give a recent example of how God's Word has operated in your life.

MAIN POINTS

Paul is describing to Timothy the environment in which he must be prepared to minister the gospel. The values of that environment will be hostile to gospel values. There will also be religious leaders with impure motives who, by their very presence, will make his work more difficult. The reputation of these leaders will breed mistrust even for those serving with pure motives; their success may also tempt godly leaders to follow the same evil course. In the midst of these difficulties and pressures, Paul encourages Timothy to continue in the gospel and to not forsake it. To do this, Timothy is to follow Paul's example and immerse himself in the Scriptures. These things will keep him from straying.

COMMENTARY ON THE PASSAGE AND NOTES ON THE QUESTIONS

1. Approach question.

2. It is common for people to think of the "last days" as those days immediately preceding the return of Christ. However, in the New Testament, the "last days" is almost a technical term, referring to the entire period between Christ's first and second coming. For example, during Peter's sermon at Pentecost, he says of the events that are transpiring: "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people'" (Acts 2:16-17). The writer to the Hebrews refers to the time of Christ's coming by saying, "But in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son." So, the "last days" are ushered in by Jesus' incarnation and will continue until he comes again. Within these last days we are told that there will be various seasons in which things get worse. There will be "terrible times" when the experience of evil will be heightened. Most likely, there will be one final period in which evil reaches a climax. However, we may not be able to identify when we are in that period. Thus, we are always to be ready for Christ's return.

3. The best way to help the group answer this question is for you as the leader to reflect on the list of behaviors and choose the ones that strike you as especially noteworthy.

There are a couple of things worth pointing out in this list. First, notice that it is the people themselves who are considered responsible for these "terrible times." Second, notice that the primary characteristic that makes these times "terrible" is the people's lack of love for God and others and their preoccupation with themselves. They are "lovers of themselves," "lovers of

money," "without love," "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." Misdirected love characterizes these times. The behaviors Paul lists all express selfishness and a lack of concern for others. The biblical priority is to love God first, others second, and ourselves third, but this list clearly evidences a reversal of that order. A self-love arising from sinful pride has a hold on people's hearts. It turns the health of society upside down so that the times become terrible and nearly unbearable. Certainly our own time, with its self-absorbed and self-centered behaviors, is such a time as Paul describes here. The direness of our situation is especially revealed by the fact that we paint such "self-love" as a virtue to be acquired, not a vice to be spurned.

It is exceedingly important to recognize that such a state of affairs is unnatural, lest we be duped into behaving the same way. If we fail to see this, we will become like those who have "a form of godliness, but [lack] its power."

4. To be a person who has a "form of godliness [while] denying its power" is to be a person who engages in religious activity (church attendance, Bible studies, Bible reading, prayer) but whose behavior is not in keeping with what he or she professes to believe. It is to have a religion of the lips but not the life. While some people may deliberately engage in such activity to take advantage of others (vv. 6-9), others may unwittingly fall into the deception of religious belief and rituals without moral transformation. That such a state of affairs can exist should be a warning to us and a cause for regular self-examination. Being aware of the possibility that one may have a "form of godliness [while] denying its power" is the first defense against falling into a such a state of self-deception. The fact that one does all the right activities is no clear indication that all is well with one's soul. Such a "check-list spirituality" ("I've done everything on the list and therefore must be pleasing to God") is a dangerous spirituality to live by. The question must not be, "Am I reading the Bible?" but "Am I applying the Bible to my life and being transformed by what I read?" Not, "Am I going to church?" but "Am I meeting with God when I worship so that I am convicted of my sin and so amazed by his love that I want to change patterns in my life that aren't pleasing to him?" We must be aware of tell-tale signs that indicate that we do not have the power of godliness. For example, do we regularly avoid difficult people or do we seek to minister to them with love and tenderness? Do we obey God out of conviction even when it is difficult or do we obey him only when it is convenient for us and costs us little? (And so on.)

This problem of having the form without the power is nothing new. It goes back at least as far as Moses when he was opposed by Jannes and Jambres. These individuals (who, interestingly, are not mentioned by name in the Old Testament) were acting against God's chosen leader and opposing the truth of God. What is interesting about their case — as well as present-day manifestations of this behavior — is that, while those afflicted by it do not notice it, people around them eventually do: “their folly will be clear to everyone” (v. 9). Therefore, we not only need to examine ourselves, we need to have others in our lives who will lovingly confront us whenever they think this syndrome might be lurking in our lives in one form or another.

5. One mark of Paul's life particularly set him apart from those he had just written about. This was the fact that, while they used religion for their own benefit and thought about how to get God to serve them, he was concerned with how he could be used by God for the benefit of others. Their religion was man-centered: they were interested in getting God and others to bend to them. Paul's religion was God-centered: he knew that he was to bend to God, not the other way around. This controlling reality in Paul's life caused his teaching, his way of life, and his purpose to be polar opposites to the teaching, way of life, and purpose of the false teachers. While these false teachers were seeking their own gain and unwilling to suffer or to be

inconvenienced, Paul was undergoing intense persecution and demonstrating qualities of love, patience with people, endurance, and trust in God that served to authenticate his message. In the midst of pressure to adjust the gospel and make it less offensive, Paul's life and willingness to suffer demonstrated its truthfulness and warned Timothy against changing the message.

6. When Paul tells Timothy, “Continue in what you have learned and become convinced of” (v. 14), he is calling him to continue believing, preaching, and living the biblical gospel (see Lesson I in this series). Through faith alone and by grace alone, we have been made right with God. Christ's substitutionary sacrifice on the cross is the revelation of this grace and the sole basis by which we are reconciled to God and made his children. This is the message Timothy must not deviate from, however great the pressure may be to do so.

Continuing in this way is important because Timothy will be numbered with those who are “deceiving and being deceived” (v. 13) if he fails to do so. His failure would bring harm to others and to Timothy himself. If he lets go of this message and teaches something else, he will have let go of the truth and resigned himself to teaching lies about God. Such lies will destroy him and his hearers. Paul is very adamant about this point. It has surfaced time and time again in this letter. We would do well to let a deep concern for the truth and a great fear of diluting, changing, or distorting it to grip us as well.

7. The source of Scripture is God himself. The language used to describe the nature of Scripture is that it is "God-breathed." It is not merely inspired in the sense that it is inspiring to read; it is inspired in the sense that God breathed it out. Notice that Paul does not say the *writers* of Scripture were inspired, but that the *written word* ("All scripture") is God-breathed. Therefore, we can say that whatever Scripture says, God says. The importance of this lies in the fact that we are not left to speculate about what God is like or what he requires of us. He has not left us in the dark regarding his character or his commands. Those who lack confidence about the source of Scripture are left to guesswork and personal opinion when it comes to these matters.

8. Paul says that the Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (v. 16). You might want to look at a number of Bible translations to see other ways of stating these purposes. "Teaching and correcting" may refer primarily to instructing people in right doctrine. The Scripture is useful for "teaching truth and refuting error." "Rebuking and training in righteousness" may have particular reference to our conduct. The Scripture is useful for "reformation of manners and discipline in right living."¹ Notice that the Scriptures or the study of Scripture are not ends in themselves. They are means to an end. They are "useful" or "profitable." Whenever we use them as an end in themselves, we misuse them. The Scriptures are given to us to change us. Our chief goal must not be to master the Scriptures, but to be mastered by them.

When it comes to the practical application part of this question, make sure people are aware that there are a number of means through which the Scriptures may have impacted them: Bible reading, sermons, tapes, music, Christian books. With these in mind, ask group members to mention a truth or teaching that has impacted or convicted them. A question like this can be the most meaningful part of the Bible study if people share openly.

¹ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p.53.

2 Timothy

The charge to preach the Gospel

Study 5 | 2 Timothy 4:1-22

1. Have you ever had to tell someone something you were pretty sure he didn't want to hear? What was the situation and what enabled you to do it?

READ 2 Timothy 4:1-22

2. What ought to motivate a person to "preach the Word," according to this passage?
3. To what degree do you think the instructions given to Timothy apply to all Christians? What leads you to that conclusion?
4. What ought to characterize our preaching, according to this passage? In what manner should our preaching be done? In particular, what does it mean to preach the Word "in season and out of season"? What will our lives look like if we are doing this?

5. What are the characteristics of Timothy's audience? To what extent do we see those characteristics in our audience when we preach the gospel? Substantiate your answer.
6. In your own words, what is Paul saying in verses 6-8? What gives him the confidence to speak as he does?
7. What does it mean to "long for Christ's appearing"? Why does Paul assume this will characterize all Christians?
8. If in your heart you really did "long for Christ's appearing," how would it change your life? What qualities would it produce in you? To what degree do you see such characteristics in your life now?

9. What is Paul revealing about himself in verses 9-18? What does this teach us about our own humanity and about admitting our own needs and weaknesses?

MAIN POINTS

As Paul writes some of his last words, his primary concern is that the gospel would go forth faithfully (4:2). Humanly speaking, there is so much that could lead Timothy to abandon that task, so Paul provides a strong motivation to keep Timothy going. Though Timothy will face opposition and rejection as he preaches (4:3-4), he and his listeners will eventually face the judgment of God and the coming of Christ and his kingdom (4:1). These eternal realities can motivate Timothy to persevere, just as they enabled Paul (4:6-8). Paul ends with a number of personal comments, some of which underscore the points he has just made (4:9-22).

COMMENTARY ON THE PASSAGE AND NOTES ON THE QUESTIONS

1. Approach question.

2. The awareness that everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ when he returns ought to serve as a strong motivation to faithfully speak the gospel to others. The character of this judgment is tempered for believers by the fact that the Judge is our Savior. Perfect love casts out fear. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1), for those who are united to Christ. It is a joyful Savior who will embrace us and welcome us on that day, however poorly we may have lived. Still, there will be an accounting for our lives.

Faithless behavior will be exposed with consequences, although Scripture does not define the consequences clearly. Because we do not want to dampen our homecoming in any way, Christians should prepare for the moment like a bride for her wedding day. We will want to be at our most beautiful. It is thus a defining event that should encourage us to live faithfully. This includes "preaching the Word."

Non-Christians will also stand before the judgment seat of Christ. They *do* have something to fear. There *is* condemnation for those who are *not* in Christ Jesus. Out of love for those around us who have not yet trusted in Christ, we must “patiently and carefully” speak the gospel to them. We must speak it accurately and in the spirit in which the Savior himself spoke it. What kind of people refuse to speak because of fear of opposition and rejection? The second coming ought to motivate us to speak to others rather than surrender to our fears.

3. This letter is addressed to a pastor and applies to those who have been called to a life of preaching and teaching God’s Word. It comes as a direct command for these individuals, who will undoubtedly be held accountable to a higher standard in their delivery of the Word. Yet the command has application for all of God’s people. Every Christian is a minister of the gospel. All of us carry the treasure of the gospel in “vessels of clay” (2 Cor. 4:1-7). Jesus says to all disciples, “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). Peter writes, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” and to do so with “gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). Paul’s command to Timothy is thus not just for pastors, but for everyone.

4. First, our preaching of the Word will be done with “great patience.” It will be marked with gentleness, not harshness and anger. Our speaking the gospel to others will be accompanied by the recognition that it is God who must open people’s eyes if they are to understand and believe. We will not get exasperated with the person who does not “get” what we are saying, who raises continual objections to it, or who denies it. We will do everything in our power to get the message across. We will work hard at articulating the gospel powerfully and persuasively. Warnings, if they must come, will be issued with compassion. We will speak the message of grace graciously.

Second, our preaching will be done “carefully.” We will strive not to distort the message, but seek to communicate it accurately. We will strive to give the whole truth and attempt to show its relevance to our lives. We will also seek to present it with the joyfulness, attractiveness, and beauty of which such good news is worthy.

Third, we will speak the gospel “in season and out of season.” This could be interpreted as referring to the hearers. In that case it would mean that we are to speak up when people are interested in the gospel and when they are not. The urgency of this issue should compel us to speak of the gospel with others without their inquiry. But if they deny us the opportunity, it does no honor to the gospel to force the issue.

However, it is far more likely that this verse is referring to us: we are to speak the gospel when *convenient* and when *inconvenient* for us. Thus, when we have the opportunity to speak the gospel to others, it should take precedence over other competing and legitimate activities. If we think we have better or more pressing things to do, we are to think again! There is an urgency to this task. It is not the only important activity in our lives, but it is of such importance that we are commanded to take advantage of any opportunity that presents itself, even if it means that some other pressing activities will be done less well.

5. The audience for Paul and Timothy was not significantly different from ours. People still “gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.” Technology may have progressed, but human nature remains the same. We are thus drawn to much present-day teaching that tells us that our first obligation is to love ourselves and to seek self-fulfillment. As Paul charges elsewhere, we “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18). We seek to tame and domesticate God as one who exists for our benefit rather than seeing him as the One we are to serve. We avoid teachings about God that make us uncomfortable or call many of our actions into question. We are quick to adopt any teaching that elevates us and makes us feel comfortable with ourselves and our own efforts to please God. We rebel against teaching that suggests we are helpless and hopeless apart from God's mercy and grace.

6. Paul's language implies that he is expecting to die a martyr's death very soon. His life is about to be sacrificed (“poured out like a drink offering”) because of his faithfulness to the gospel. Upon his death he fully expects to joyfully meet God, be welcomed into his kingdom, and be transformed into one who is completely righteous. (Because the “crown of righteousness” is given to “all who long for his appearing” and not just a select few, it is apparent that this is not a special reward of some kind.) The primary reason for Paul's confidence comes from the fact that he has persevered to the end. Though this is not the *grounds* for a person's acceptance by God (the grounds is solely Christ's death and resurrection plus nothing), it is a *means* of giving a person assurance. Such perseverance is a sign that Christ has graciously saved us. All who belong to Christ will persevere to the end. Without such perseverance, there can be no confidence and assurance of Christ's acceptance.

7. Paul expects that one of the characteristics of God's people is that they will “long for Christ's appearing.” They will yearn for the day when Christ returns. They will so badly want that day to arrive that their hearts will ache in anticipation. Why? First, because on that day everything that is wrong, broken, and fractured about this world will be mended, healed, and made right. The

things that make life unspeakably sad will be removed and the entire creation will flourish. It will be a place of delight. Evil in all its forms will be abolished. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Second, with Christ's appearing will come the consummation of our relationship with God. Presently, our knowledge of God is partial. We see in a glass dimly. But on the day of Christ's appearing, we will know God in full, even as we are fully known. The Bridegroom (Christ) and the Bride (Christ's people) will enter into the fullness of their relationship. We will receive acceptance, understanding, and forgiveness so complete that it will heal and transform us instantaneously. This seems to be Paul's focus more than any other aspect of the event. What he looks forward to is *Christ's* appearing. "Now the dwelling place of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and will be their God" (Rev. 21:3). Persons of authentic and genuine faith will look forward to and deeply desire these same things. They will long for Christ's appearing.

8. There appears to be at least three ways in which "longing for Christ's appearing" would affect our lives. First, having this hope produces a life of self-sacrifice. We become people who preach the gospel "in season and out of season," which means "both when it is convenient for you and when it is inconvenient for you." We become the kind of people who will forgo legitimate pleasures if there is an opportunity to do something better for Christ's sake. When we are looking forward to Christ's return, we don't have to count on this world to meet our deepest desires and pleasures.

Second, having this hope enables us to be obedient and to deal with temptation. Paul, who lived with this hope firmly before him, writes, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race." According to Paul, living in obedience to God amid temptation is like running a marathon. What enables you to keep fighting or running when you feel you can't keep it up any longer? The prize at the end. As long as that prize is more meaningful to you than the temporary pleasures achieved by quitting, you will not throw in the towel. You will keep on going. When Christ's appearing and the benefits it brings are constantly before your eyes, it empowers you to resist temptation and walk in obedience.

Third, having this hope enables us to handle suffering without falling into despair or doubting God's goodness. Paul was able to face his own execution without becoming suspicious of God's love. "I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure." He knew that this world was fallen. He knew it was a place of suffering. He expected life in this

world to be painful and difficult. But because he lived with the hope of a better world and a fuller relationship with God, he didn't fall into self-pity and despair. More than anything, Paul wanted to be with Jesus. He knew that one day he would see him. That made his suffering bearable. Either he would, through death, go to be with Jesus or Jesus would come to get him. The fact that one of those things would happen is what really mattered. And it made his suffering and disappointments pale in comparison.

9. Paul is admitting his weaknesses. He is willing to express his needs. He is admitting that he is dependent upon others. Paul did not see himself as a "rugged individual" who could make it on his own. He doesn't claim to have attained a level of super-spirituality where he is beyond normal human needs. He is unwilling to pass himself off as someone stronger than he really is. This honesty allows others to know where he stands and enables them to encourage and support him.

Certainly, Paul believed that if he was abandoned by everyone, God was still with him; he could still live obediently. If no one were to come to his aid, he is sure God will and thus he will be able to endure.

However, he would not have thought such a situation to be ideal. The Christian community meant a great deal to him. He wanted others with him. In particular, he wants Timothy to visit him and urges him to come quickly. He knew that, as a human being, he was made to be in relationships with others. It would do no good to pretend otherwise. If Paul, arguably the greatest and most mature Christian in the history of the world, is able to be vulnerable and admit his needs, we should be willing to do the same. If Paul needed others, we need others too. He was honest; we should also avoid duplicity. His willingness to express how he was hurting was a sign of his maturity. If we are growing in maturity, we will be marked by the same vulnerability and exhibit a similar dependence upon others.

2 Timothy

Introduction

Paul's second epistle to Timothy is probably the last letter he wrote. He is aged and in prison as he writes.

Unlike the fairly pleasant imprisonment he experienced at the end of Acts, this time he is incarcerated in a "dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air."¹ He is in chains (1:16; 2:9) and suffering deeply from loneliness (4:9-13). He expects to be executed shortly (4:6-8). These realities make this one of Paul's most deeply moving and human letters.

As difficult as things are for Paul, his mind remains focused on the spread of the gospel and the glory of God. Knowing how quickly our own thoughts turn inward when we are suffering, one cannot help but be amazed by Paul and attracted to his character. His life and thoughts are dominated by his love for God. In particular, his concern is for the future of the church. "His own apostolic labors are over... But now he must make provision for the faith after he has gone, and especially for its transmission (uncontaminated, unalloyed) to future generations. So he sends Timothy this most solemn charge. He is to preserve what he has received, at whatever cost, and to hand it on to faithful men who in their turn will be able to teach others also (2:2)."²

It is easy to see why a study of this letter is so relevant for those in leadership. We want to impart leadership qualities to those who are "passionate for God and compassionate toward people" so that, through their leadership, others may develop those same characteristics and perhaps become leaders also. Of course, none of us is as passionate or compassionate as we would like to be. But by studying this very personal letter, our hope is that Paul's words, which embody those attributes, will penetrate our hearts and make us more like him in our passion for God and compassion for others.

2 Timothy

The charge to guard the Gospel

Study 1 | 2 Timothy 1:1-18

1. Name one person who has influenced your life significantly. In what way did this person impact you?

READ 2 Timothy 1:1-18

2. How does Paul identify himself at the beginning of this letter? Why is such self-knowledge important? How did his understanding of his role affect the way he lived?
3. How has your self-understanding affected the way you live and the choices you make?
4. Looking at this first chapter, what observations can you make about Timothy and Paul? How would you describe their relationship? How can we pursue relationships similar to theirs in the church?

7. What does it mean to “guard” the gospel? Why is it important, and how does one do so? Who ultimately guards the gospel? Why is it important to understand this?

8. Paul brings up the issue of shame on four occasions in this chapter (vv. 8, 12, 16). What are the occasions and causes for shame? Why does Paul give so much attention to this topic?

¹ William Hendriksen, *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 234.

² John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 13.

2 Timothy

The charge to suffer for the Gospel

Study 2 | 2 Timothy 2:1-13

1. Tell about an activity, skill, or experience you take delight in passing on to others.

READ 2 Timothy 2:1-13

2. What does it mean to “be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ” (v. 1)? How does a person go about being strong in that way? How can you tell that you are successful?
3. As Paul talks about the gospel being passed on to others, how many generations does he mention? Why is this “chain of transmission” so important?
4. What qualities should be evident in those involved in the “chain of transmission”?

5. **Paul uses three metaphors to describe the Christian life we have been called to: soldier, athlete, and farmer. What does each metaphor tell us about how to live as followers of Jesus?**
6. **Why, in this context, does Paul tell Timothy to “remember Jesus Christ” (v. 8)?**
7. **What principles does Paul seem to want Timothy to draw from the example of his own life in verses 9-10? How have you found these principles to be true in your life?**
8. **What is the point of the “trustworthy saying” in verses 11-13? What does it communicate and how is it meant to motivate us?**

2 Timothy

The charge to develop character in keeping with the Gospel

Study 3 | 2 Timothy 2:14-26

1. What character trait do you particularly admire when you see it in someone's life? How is this character trait expressed in the life of someone you know?

READ 2 Timothy 2:14-26

2. What character quality is Paul urging Timothy to develop in verses 14-19? Why is this quality so important? What happens when it is absent?

3. What does this character quality look like in a person's life?

4. In the analogy Paul uses in verses 20-21, what is the house, who is the master, and what are the noble and ignoble vessels?

5. **What character quality is Paul calling Timothy to develop with this illustration (vv. 20-22)? Why is this quality so important? What happens when it is absent?**
6. **How are we to treat those whom God has placed in our ministry care?**
7. **How will understanding Satan's role in human behavior and belief affect the way we treat others?**
8. **Which of the character qualities mentioned in this passage are you most convicted to work on? Why?**

2 Timothy

The charge to continue in the Gospel

Study 4 | 2 Timothy 3:1-17

1. Which environments make it hardest for you to act on your convictions and do the right thing? What is it about the environment that makes it so hard?

READ 2 Timothy 3:1-17

2. What period is Paul referring to when he speaks of “the last days”?
3. In the catalog of behaviors that will characterize “the last days,” which ones particularly strike you? Do any of the behaviors mentioned give you new insight into human wickedness? Are there any that you would not have initially included on a list of human evil? Which of these behaviors are most prevalent in our society?
4. How does the possibility of “a form of godliness” without the “power of godliness” warn and convict you? How does one prevent such a disastrous combination?

5. **What marks of Paul's life set him apart from such people? Why does Paul draw Timothy's attention to these qualities in his life?**
6. **In verse 14 Timothy is told to "continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of." What does Paul mean and why does he consider it important to exhort Timothy this way?**
7. **What does Paul say about the source of the Scriptures (v. 16)? Why is that so important?**
8. **Use your own words to explain the purpose of the Scriptures. Give a recent example of how God's Word has operated in your life.**

2 Timothy

The charge to preach the Gospel

Study 5 | 2 Timothy 4:1-22

1. Have you ever had to tell someone something you were pretty sure he didn't want to hear? What was the situation and what enabled you to do it?

READ 2 Timothy 4:1-22

2. What ought to motivate a person to "preach the Word," according to this passage?
3. To what degree do you think the instructions given to Timothy apply to all Christians? What leads you to that conclusion?
4. What ought to characterize our preaching, according to this passage? In what manner should our preaching be done? In particular, what does it mean to preach the Word "in season and out of season"? What will our lives look like if we are doing this?

5. What are the characteristics of Timothy's audience? To what extent do we see those characteristics in our audience when we preach the gospel? Substantiate your answer.
6. In your own words, what is Paul saying in verses 6-8? What gives him the confidence to speak as he does?
7. What does it mean to "long for Christ's appearing"? Why does Paul assume this will characterize all Christians?
8. If in your heart you really did "long for Christ's appearing," how would it change your life? What qualities would it produce in you? To what degree do you see such characteristics in your life now?

9. What is Paul revealing about himself in verses 9-18? What does this teach us about our own humanity and about admitting our own needs and weaknesses?