



LIFEgroup Study Guide

September 29 - November 24

LIFEgroup Study Guide

This study guide follows along with LBF Church's current Sunday message series, and is intended to be a supplement in your daily passionate pursuit of Jesus.

• *Watch last Sunday's message video:*
[www.lbf.church/messages]

Is your group stumped? Did you come to a question that you feel needs clarification? Our church isn't too big, contact Pastor Dan with your questions.

• *Contact Pastor Dan:*
danfranklin@lbfchurch.com

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In This House: A Series through 1 Timothy

House Rules

Every household has its own set of values. It has its own set of "house rules." Some households value neatness and order, and so there are house rules about cleanliness. Some homes value hospitality and spontaneity, and so there are house rules about flexibility and sharing. Some have house rules about honesty, about complaining, about food, about exercise, about forgiveness, or about habits. Every household has specific house rules that establish how life is lived in that household.

The Household of God

Most scholars believe that the key verses of 1 Timothy are chapter 3, verses 14-15. They say, "Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." At the center of this letter is a message about how people are meant to conduct themselves in the church of Jesus Christ. In other words, 1 Timothy is about the "house rules" of the church.

To flesh out these house rules, Paul writes (in this first of two lessons to his protégé Timothy) about refuting false teachers (1:3-11, 1:18-20, 4:1-5, 6:3-5). He also writes about the significance of sound doctrine (1:5-7, 3:9, 4:6-10, 6:11-16). He writes about good practices and behavior when the church is gathered (2:1-15, 4:11-16). He writes about church leadership (2:11-15, 3:1-13, 5:17-25). And he writes about church members showing care for one another (5:1-16, 6:17-19). All of these elements give us a fuller picture of life in the family of God. Paul is saying, "This is how life is lived in this house."

Today

While not all of us will be pastors (like Timothy), those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ are all a part of what God is doing through his church. This means that we are wise to listen carefully to Paul's instructions about the mission of the church and about how we are called to conduct ourselves as members of Jesus' church.

Throughout this series, we will be invited to be swept up in the wonder of the gospel of Jesus and the unique and vital calling of his church. As we grow more and more to live in light of what Paul writes in this letter, we will experience more of God's presence and power in our lives and in the life of the church. As we embrace God's house rules, we set ourselves up for greater growth, greater joy, and greater impact.



We Enjoy God's Gifts

Lesson 1 • September 29 • by Christy Gonet

Main Point

God wants us to use the good gifts He has given us.

Getting Started

1. What are some of the good gifts God has given to humankind?

2. How would our lives be different if God did not give us these good gifts?

Explanation of the Passage

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ²Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. ³They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from

certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."

Paul had reminded Timothy at the beginning of his letter that one of the reasons he wanted Timothy to stay in Ephesus was so he could put a stop to some of the false teachings that were being circulated in Ephesus. In verse 1 of this week's passage, we learn that the source of these false teachings is deceiving spirits and demons. Just as Satan questioned the goodness of God's commands to Adam and Eve, these spirits challenge the goodness of God's creation and the gifts He has provided to His children. Some people end up being led astray by these false teachings, and then they also spread those false teachings to others. By choosing to believe someone other than God, they end up searing their consciences, making them callous, so they no longer are effective at helping them determine what is right and wrong or what is true and false. This leads them further and further away from God and the life He has planned for them.

One of the false teachings being spread in Ephesus was that believers should not get married or eat

certain foods. The problem is that both of these "commands" contradict the teaching of Jesus. When a group of Pharisees questioned Jesus about divorce in Mark 10:2-9, Jesus quoted from Genesis 1-2, saying that God is the one who chose to make humans as male and female and to bring them together in the covenant relationship of marriage. By answering their question in this way, Jesus communicated that marriage was still in effect and still a good thing in God's eyes. Similarly, in Mark 7:1-23, some Pharisees had asked Jesus why His disciples did not observe the ritual of washing their hands before eating. In answering this question, Jesus explained that nothing a person consumes could make the person unholy or unclean in God's eyes. By saying this, Jesus taught that people can eat any food God has created.

The reason Paul wanted both of these false teachings stopped was that both assume that part of the physical world God created is not good. Forbidding marriage implies that sex is not good when the truth is that God created humans specifically to be able to build intimate relationships and have children in committed marriage relationships. Likewise, forbidding the eating of specific foods assumes that only some of the plants and animals made by God are good when the truth is everything he made is good, and the only bad things that exist in this world are the result of our sin. As long as we recognize that what we eat is a gift from God, and as long as we eat the food with the proper heart of gratitude, we can eat any food we want without worrying that it will harm our relationship with God. We need to turn to God and his Word to find out how he wants us to live and not listen to false teachers who may lead us to deny some of God's good gifts to us. God is the one who made us, so it only makes sense that he is the one who knows what is best for us.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about this passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. How can we determine if a teaching is from God or from a deceiving spirit?

5. Sometimes Christians judge other Christians for behaviors that are not actually sins but are really a matter of living out our faith differently. What are some of these behaviors?

6. How should we respond if someone we know is spreading false teachings about God and the Christian life?

7. Is verse 4 a free license to eat or drink whatever we want, including illegal or harmful substances? Explain your answer.

Wrestling with Issues

8. How can we make sure our consciences are functioning properly and not erring by either failing to tell us when we are sinning or by telling us we are sinning when we are not?

Taking it to Heart

9. Which good gift from God would you like to thank him for right now?

10. Is there anything that God is telling you through your conscience to start or stop doing that you are ignoring? If so, share it with your LIFE group so they can support you, pray for you, and lovingly hold you accountable.



IN THIS HOUSE

We Embrace Discipline

Lesson 2 • October 6 • by Rich Shores

Main Point

Sacrifices made for godliness always pay off.

Getting Started

1. What are some reasons why people fall away from their faith?

2. What are some benefits and some drawbacks of being a disciplined person?

Explanation of the Passage

Read 1 Timothy 4:6-10.

"⁶ If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to

do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. ⁹ This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. ¹⁰ That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe."

At the beginning of 1 Timothy 4, we learn how the Holy Spirit identifies that the Ephesian Church will fall away and abandon their faith (read Revelation 2 for John's vision of the Ephesian church and their falling away). We also learn how many were making rules against the good things of God (marriage and food, namely). And now Paul recognizes that Timothy needs some guidance on redirecting the church back to God's goodness that the Ephesians were straying from (1 Tim 4:6a). So how does Paul guide Timothy in these matters? By identifying the necessity of disciplining oneself. In this context, discipline is training oneself in a way that things become a habit. Paul gives Timothy (and us) some specific points of guidance.

First of all, we should regularly discipline ourselves by the nourishment of truth and good teaching (vs. 6b). Essentially, we should be in the Word daily for sustenance as well as not forsaking the opportunity

to be fed by the Spirit during our teaching on Sundays.

Second of all, we should discipline ourselves against godless talk and “old wives tales.” We see today, especially in social media, that those who are arguing their own gospel to elevate themselves above the truth. As Paul said in 1 Timothy 2:8-9, men and women are to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of being called godly.

Thirdly, Paul compares physical training and spiritual training. Physical exercise is profitable for this life, but if you think about it, it is our flawed body that we are disciplining. But training in godliness is valuable for our soul, both in the present and for eternity. Disciplining ourselves in godliness shapes us into the person God created us to be.

Now Paul makes a very distinctive qualifying statement in verse 9 regarding his previous comments to Timothy, “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.” It is almost like he is saying that there is no reasonable argument to combat what he has told Timothy. But why would he say this? Verse 10 says, “That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially for those who believe.” Paul is saying it is worth disciplining ourselves daily because Jesus is our hope for better things to come. Denying ourselves the instant gratification of many of life’s attractions pales in comparison to what Jesus has in store for us if we have the discipline of faith and belief. None of this life is about us; it is about Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about this passage or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. What kind of “godless myths” or “old wives’ tales” are there in the church today?

5. What do you think Paul means by “godliness has value for all things?”

6. Paul often uses “physical training” or athletics as a comparison to our faith journey. Why do you think this analogy is so helpful?

7. In verse 10, Paul talks about how believers have put their hope in the living God. How do you think hope relates to discipline?

Wrestling with Issues

8. Paul says to Timothy in verse 6: "If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters..." regarding the false teaching, the Ephesians were slipping into.

In what situations do you see it as your role to confront a brother or a sister when evidence suggests they are subscribing to an unscriptural belief or behavior?

Taking it to Heart

9. In what specific ways do you "labor and strive" because of your hope in Jesus?

10. What is one specific area of your life in which you believe God is calling you to discipline yourself for the sake of godliness?



We Fulfill Our Calling

Lesson 3 • October 13 • by Bryan Vander Tuig

Main Point

Believers are called to pursue growth in their gifts diligently.

Getting Started

1. Professional athletes must train regularly to achieve a high level of proficiency in their sport. What happens to their muscles if they stop training? What will happen to your muscles if you stop all physical activity?

2. How are you exercising the spiritual gifts God has given you for the good of the church and the glory of God?

Explanation of the Passage

1 Timothy 4:11-16.

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young,

but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

Paul's thoughts in these verses are a continuation of what he was previously discussing. He is communicating to Timothy that he is to teach and command, with authority, "these things" to the church. "These things" he mentions previously: the hope of the believer is in the living God who is the Savior of all men. Paul is exhorting Timothy to teach and command to the church that God is the source of true hope and true peace, the only source of eternal life. This was a necessary reminder for the early church, and us as well, because it is so easy to put our hope in other things: People, possessions, careers, government, etc....

Timothy was a young man, relatively speaking when he was commissioned to lead the church, and Paul didn't want Timothy to think that his youth impeded his ministry of preaching the gospel. God had given

Timothy a gift, and Paul encouraged Timothy to use that gift and, despite his age, to set an example for the other believers. Timothy's example of a life lived with wise speech, love for others, faith, and purity would be a reminder to the church that authority given by God to preach or teach is not based upon age, but on character.

Paul also didn't want Timothy to become complacent with the gift he had been given. Paul instructed Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching. The public reading of Scripture was an essential element of church activity in the first century because, for many, it was their only access to hear God's Word, the Old Testament Scriptures. Timothy was also to nurture his gifts of preaching and teaching; this was accomplished only as he utilized them regularly. God expects that we will all grow in our areas of giftedness, for the benefit of the church and, ultimately, to bring glory to God. Paul uses several phrases in these verses to encourage Timothy in his growth: "Do not neglect your gift," "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them." Timothy needed to exercise his gifts regularly so that he could continue to grow in them and, ultimately, be more useful for the church and God's work through him. Just as our muscles atrophy when not used regularly, so do the gifts that God gives to us through the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, Paul indicated that the church is a witness to our growth or lack thereof. In verse 15, Paul mentioned to Timothy that the church would "see your progress." It reminds me of the phrase "Iron sharpens iron." God uses the church to encourage us to grow in our giftedness and to hold us accountable, in love, when we are not growing as God intends for us to. Timothy, by all accounts, was a respected

leader in the early church who, by God's grace, was given gifts of preaching and teaching. His continual growth in those areas was not only for himself but for the benefit of the church and God's mission. The same principle applies to you and me and all believers: We are called to diligently pursue growth in the gifts God has given us for his glory and the encouragement of the church.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage or the sermon if you heard it?

4. What spiritual gifts has the Holy Spirit given you? Read Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 for a list of spiritual gifts.

5. Paul affirmed Timothy's call as a pastor even though he was young. Likewise, we have been given spiritual gifts to use in the church, no matter our age. What are some ways that you are tempted to doubt your contribution to Jesus' church?

6. Paul warns Timothy not to neglect his gift.
Why might a person neglect their gift?

10. Who can you encourage, as "iron sharpens iron,"
to use their spiritual gifts in the church this week?

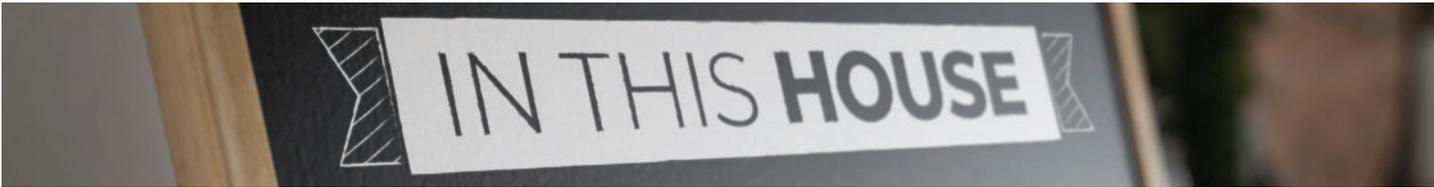
7. In verses, 15-16 Paul encourages Timothy that his progress and growth will have a positive impact on those around him. How have you benefited by seeing other Christians grow in how they are living out the to which mission God has called them?

Wrestling with Issues

8. In verse 11, Paul reminds Timothy to teach the church about the hope that is found in God our Savior. This is a message that we need to be reminded of as well because it is easy to put our faith in other things. What "other things" are you tempted to put your hope in?

Taking it to Heart

9. What steps, if any, do you need to take to begin using your spiritual gifts in the church?



IN THIS HOUSE

We Care for the Needy

Lesson 4 • October 20 • by Bill Mulligan

Main Point

The church is called to care for those who cannot care for themselves.

Getting Started

1. Share a time when your family came together to help out another family member in need.

2. What made it easier or more difficult when helping those outside your family?

Explanation of the Passage

Read 1 Timothy 5:1-16.

"Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, ²older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. ³Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.

⁴But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. ⁵The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. ⁶But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. ⁷Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. ⁸Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. ⁹No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, ¹⁰and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds. ¹¹As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. ¹²Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. ¹³Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to. ¹⁴So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. ¹⁵Some have in fact

already turned away to follow Satan. ¹⁶If any woman who is a believer has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need."

Several years ago, while talking with a stranger at a Christian conference, I discovered we had a friend in common. When I made the comment, "It's a small world!" he laughed and said, "No, it's a BIG family!" It is this idea, that Christians are a family, that Paul champions in this passage. The idea in 3:15 of how we should conduct ourselves in "God's household," Paul continues here in Chapter 5.

In verses, 1-2 Paul reminds Timothy, in a general way, that he should treat those in the church as family. He uses the verb "to exhort" or encourage (in the Greek-to call alongside) in a way that connects all four groups. We should not treat them harshly but rather with respect and a sense of familial love.

Moving from the general idea of being part of God's family and how we should treat each other, Paul then moves into a more practical area: those in the family "who are really in need." In verses 3-16, he specifically addresses the needs of widows. The idea that the church is called to care for those who cannot care for themselves is nothing new. This idea follows the teaching of the Old Testament where God is presented as a God who "defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow" (Deuteronomy 10: 17-18). Even in the early church, the Apostles saw the need to make sure that widows were taken care of properly (Acts 6:1-7).

Verses 3-8 address the responsibility that individual families (children and grandchildren) have to care for widows in need of care. Paul makes it clear that one

way to put "their religion into practice" is by caring for their own family and "repaying their parents and grandparents." This action is considered as "pleasing to God," and even unbelievers would consider this as something that should be done. Paul sees this as a practical outcome or action as a result of our faith.

The importance of taking care of widows has resulted in keeping a list of those in need of care. Verses 9 & 10 gives some thought to what the role of supported widows might look like and perhaps even the suggestion that widows might take a vow to serve the Lord in the ways mentioned in these verses. In verses 11-15, Paul cautions younger widows and addresses some of the problems that had been occurring at the church in Ephesus. Because of these issues, Paul encourages younger widows to remarry to avoid sensual desires that might "overcome their dedication to Christ," idleness, gossip, and in some cases turning from their faith altogether.

Paul ends this section with the same phrase as he did in verse 3 to begin it; "so that the church can help those widows who are really in need." The bottom line is that God desires us to see the church as a family and that caring for those who cannot care for themselves is of the utmost importance to living out, in a practical way, our faith.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. What are some problems that have to be dealt with when it comes to taking care of family members in need?

5. What other groups of people (apart from widows) might fall under “those in need”?

6. According to this passage, what factors might qualify a person to receive financial assistance from the church?

7. How does our personal history with our families affect how we might treat those in the family of God?

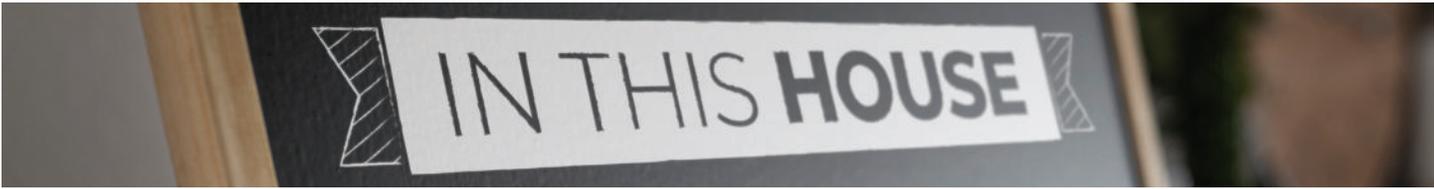
Taking it to Heart

9. What would be a practical way that you could seek to help members of your church family who are in need?

10. Think of the different ways that your church shows care to people who are in need. How do you sense God calling you to participate in these ministries?

Wrestling with Issues

8. Some would say that for the church to help widows; they must be over 60 years old. How would you interpret what Paul is saying in verses 9-10?



We Honor Our Leaders

Lesson 5 • October 27 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Christian leaders are to be honored and also held accountable.

Getting Started

1. Do you find that you are more likely to be suspicious of those in authority or more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt? Why do you think you land on the side that you are on?

2. What do you see as your responsibility when it comes to the leaders of your church?

Explanation of the Passage

Read 1 Timothy 5:17-25

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those

whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."¹⁹ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.²⁰ But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning.²¹ I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.²³ Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.²⁴ The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.²⁵ In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden forever."

Paul just finished instructing Timothy on how to handle church affairs when it comes to taking care of widows. Now he moves on to instruct Timothy about elders. While Paul has only mentioned elders once so far (1 Timothy 4:14), he spoke of them in an extended passage (3:1-7) when he wrote about qualifications for overseers. According to Titus 1:5-6, overseers, and elders are the same. Now Paul speaks of the church's relationship with elders. He begins with positive words about how to treat elders but then moves on to give

warnings, as well as instructions about discipline.

The positive side of things begins with Paul saying that elders who work hard at directing the affairs of the church and, especially, preaching and teaching, are worthy of double honor. The honor he speaks of is not merely theoretical, but also financial. This is made clear by the fact that in verse 18 he quotes both Moses (Deuteronomy 25:4) and Jesus (Luke 10:7), to say that those who work hard at the office of elder should have no shame in being paid for their work. They are worthy of it.

Then Paul addresses instances in which there are accusations brought against an elder. His first statement defends elders from flippant accusations. Paul says that an accusation must not be entertained unless it is backed up by two or three witnesses. This could seem like Paul is supporting the idea that elders should be protected from scandal at all costs. But Paul then goes on to say that if any elder is sinning, he is to be reprovved in front of everyone, so that others will take it as a warning. Paul wants to protect elders from spurious accusations, but he also wants to protect the church from immoral elders. Paul warns that Timothy must not show favoritism (seemingly by protecting a guilty elder), but must work toward justice both for elders and for any accusers. With the public ministry of elders comes a higher level of responsibility and accountability.

Paul then warns that if Timothy is hasty with the laying on of hands (most likely a reference to commissioning an elder), he could end up sharing in the sins of others. In other words, Timothy must be careful before putting people in leadership because he will be partially responsible if they abuse that leadership.

Paul then strangely gives Timothy a very personal appeal to drink some wine—instead of only water—to

give himself relief for his stomach and his frequent illnesses. Perhaps, after calling Timothy to purity, Paul wanted to make clear that Timothy did not have to pursue the appearance of purity to the detriment of his health. Perhaps he was abstaining from alcohol entirely to project purity, while his illnesses could have been relieved if he drank wine in moderation. Paul seems to want to relieve Timothy of an unnecessary burden.

Finally, Paul warns that some people have apparent sins, while others have sins that are more carefully hidden. The same is true of good deeds: some are obvious, and some are less prominent. What is Paul saying? Most likely, he is telling Timothy to take time to observe the life of any man who aspires to be an elder. Paul is confident that the real character of the man will eventually come out. But if Timothy hastily commissions leaders in the church, this could end up putting dangerous and unqualified people in a position to bring harm to God's flock.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. In verses 17-18, Paul advocates for honoring elders, and even for paying them for their work. What are some advantages and disadvantages of church leaders being paid?

5. In verses, 19-21 Paul walks through the procedures for times when an accusation is made against an elder. What stands out to you about Paul's approach to this kind of situation?

6. Paul's comments to Timothy in verse 23 seem to come out of nowhere. What, if any, connection do you think they might have to the overall message of this passage?

7. In verse 22, Paul emphasizes to Timothy that he needs to be responsible not to put someone in leadership flippantly. Then in verses 24-25, he seems to comfort Timothy that the truth of a person's character will eventually be made known. In light of these two messages from Paul, what do you think should be your personal approach to how you think of the spiritual leaders in your life?

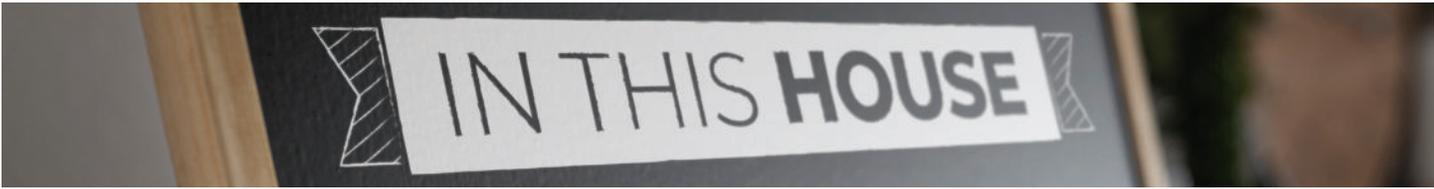
Wrestling with Issues

8. Paul says that an accusation against an elder should not be entertained unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. We all know, though, that an elder can commit an offense that only one person would know about. Why do you think Scripture seems to lean in the direction of protecting the accused person in a case like this?

Taking it to Heart

9. What are some ways that you can actively show honor to the leaders who serve your church family?

10. What are some ways that you can actively help to create an environment of positive accountability for the leaders who serve your church family?



We Serve One Master

Lesson 6 • November 3 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Those in authority and those under authority ultimately answer to the same master.

Getting Started

1. Do you find that you are more likely to be compliant toward people in authority or more likely to be antagonistic toward them?

2. How does your relationship with God impact the way that you interact with people who are in authority over you?

Explanation of the Passage

Read 1 Timothy 6:1-2.

"All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered."

² Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers. Instead, they should serve them even better because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves."

Any passage in the Bible about the subject of slavery is difficult for us in the 21st century. Many of us have the instinct to say, "Why don't the biblical authors simply say that slavery is unjust and should, therefore, be abolished?" The answer is complicated. First of all, slavery in the first century was not a carbon copy of slavery in the early history of the United States. In the first century, slavery was often more like indentured servitude. It was certainly not a desirable position to be in, but people often sold themselves into slavery to pay debts and make an income. And people were rarely slaves for life. On top of this, they were often able to get an education, and they often had consistent free time. Not to mention the fact that, unlike the horrific slavery in the United States, slavery in the first century rarely had anything to do with race. It reflected more the idea of having a class of servants rather than what comes to the minds of Americans when we think of slavery. In fact, many scholars relate this passage more to employer-employee relationships than to an oppressive and unjust institution.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. Read the following quote about first-century slavery. If what Timothy Keller writes is true, then how does this impact your understanding of this passage about slavery?

"In the first-century Roman Empire, when the New Testament was written, there was not a great difference between slaves and the average free person. Slaves were not distinguishable from others by race, speech, or clothing. They looked and lived like most everyone else, and were not segregated from the rest of society in any way. From a financial standpoint, slaves made the same wages as free laborers and therefore were not usually poor. Also, slaves could accrue enough personal capital to buy themselves out. Most important of all, very few slaves were slaves for life. Most could reasonably hope to be manumitted within ten or fifteen years, or by their late thirties at the latest." (Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*)

5. According to verse 1, slaves should treat their masters with respect because otherwise, God's name could be slandered. How could the hard work of slaves reflect a positive view of Jesus and the gospel?

Another part of the reason why the biblical authors do not merely suggest the abolition of slavery is that in many situations, this certainly was not practical. The biblical authors often write to people who have little power over their external circumstances. They write to women who are married to difficult men. They write to citizens who are dealing with oppressive governments. They write to prisoners who are unjustly being held in confinement. God speaks hope to those who cannot change their external situations instead of leading them to believe that an external change is their only hope. The gospel tells us that a slave could remain a slave their entire life, and yet this would in no way result in them missing out on their place in the family of God.

With all that in mind, this passage addresses slaves. Paul's message to them is to consider their masters worthy of respect. Instead of being rebellious and challenging, they are to seek to be a benefit to their masters. This is especially true if the masters are believers. Slaves should not take advantage of believing masters by being lazy or presumptuous. Instead, they should work hard so that their brothers and sisters in Christ benefit from their work.

Paul says that slaves should live in this way so that God's name and the church's teaching may not be slandered. If members of the Ephesian community saw that slaves who became Christians suddenly became disrespectful and lazy, that would not reflect well on Jesus or his church. But if members of the community saw that the slaves became more devoted to benefiting others, they would be drawn to Jesus to see the power and the message that was bringing such a change.

6. In verse 2, Paul addresses how slaves are to relate to Christian masters. Why might slaves be tempted to disrespect masters who are believers?

7. In verse 2, Paul assumes that Christian masters are "devoted to the welfare of their slaves." How does this idea impact the relationship between slaves and masters?

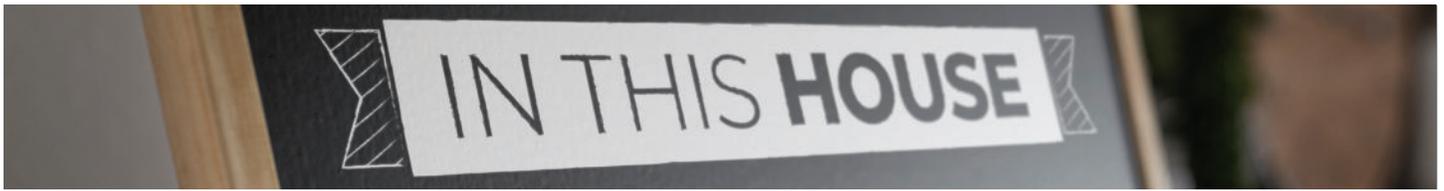
Wrestling with Issues

8. While first-century slavery was very different from American slavery, this passage still brings up issues related to justice. What role do you think Christians have when they encounter unjust structures and institutions in a society?

Taking it to Heart

9. What are some ways that you can work to bring a benefit to those who are in authority over you?

10. Since those in authority and those under authority all answer to the same God, how can you seek the welfare of those under your authority?



We Practice Contentment

Lesson 7 • November 10 • by Bill Mulligan

Main Point

Christians treasure contentment more than riches.

Getting Started

1. Share a time when you struggled with contentment.

2. How do you feel about the “health and wealth” teaching of some churches?

Explanation of the Passage

Read 1 Timothy 6:3-10.

^{2b}These are the things you are to teach and insist on. ³If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus

Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. ⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

Verse 3 of this passage marks a transition from the overall teachings of Paul to his finishing thoughts and truths for Timothy. Often connected with verse 2, “These are the things you are to teach” is better understood as referring to what he has been teaching in the previous verses and is now encouraging Timothy to teach these things. He is to “insist” on these truths. Paul also returns to one of the main concerns he has at the Ephesian church: false teachings. He contrasts the “sound (healthy) instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ” to those who have an “unhealthy” teaching that

reveals that their “godliness” is merely a means to an end. That end is financial gain. Verses 4-5 identify what the results of those who “teach otherwise are.” Those results are easily seen in controversies, quarrels about words, envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction”. As one commentary notes, “They not only split hairs, but they do so with a chainsaw!” (p. 252, Reformed Expository Commentary, I Timothy, Philip Ryken)

The difference between the “godliness” of verses 4-5 and the remaining verses is that the former is a means to an end (financial gain), whereas the latter is the end. Godliness is described as “great gain,” but only if you seek nothing more. As early as the first century, people had decided there was financial gain in religion and Christianity was no exception. Paul emphasizes that the difference is “contentment.” It is the contentment that we have in God when we recognize He gives us all that is necessary to live this life. If we strive for more, we will end up dissatisfied or in many cases, ruined and destroyed. In one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible (10), Paul points out that many people “plunge” (Greek-drown) into ruin and destruction not because of money, but rather the “love of money.” He is not saying money is evil, but rather the problem lies in the grasping or pursuit of money because they are not content with what God has given them. Paul finishes his thoughts on this by once more, identifying the false teachers as “eager for money” and ultimately have wandered from the faith because they have no contentment in what God has provided.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. How do verses 4-5 help us identify what is healthy and unhealthy when it comes to controversial issues in the Bible?

5. Paul warns of the desire to be rich. Is it wrong to try and earn more money? Why or why not?

6. What are some ways that you have seen people use Christianity for their financial gain?

7. What other areas, besides money, can we be discontented?

Wrestling with Issues

8. What is the bottom line in verse 10? Is money evil? Is being wealthy bad?

Taking it to Heart

9. What are some current challenges in your life in the area of contentment, financially or otherwise?

10. What are some practical ways you can combat the temptation of greed and embrace an attitude of contentment?

We Look to Jesus

Lesson 8 • November 17 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Following Jesus leads us to run away from sin and run toward righteousness.

Getting Started

1. What is the practical difference between pursuing Jesus and pursuing virtue?

2. What are some of the marks of a person who is actively pursuing Jesus?

Explanation of the Passage

Read 1 Timothy 6:11-16.

"¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith.

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen."

Paul has just finished writing about false teachers who are led astray by their cravings for money. Paul wants to call Timothy away from that and give him a picture of what it looks like to pursue Christ instead of pursuing riches.

Paul makes a strong call to Timothy, calling him a man of God to remind him of his true identity. His first command is for Timothy to flee from the love of money, and instead to pursue virtues that are connected to God's will for him. He tells Timothy to seek righteousness, which has to do with right and just living. He tells him to pursue godliness, which relates to our reverence for God in all that we do. He tells him to pursue faith in God, love toward others, along with endurance and gentleness. Paul wants Timothy to

pursue godliness instead of making money or prominence his goal.

Paul continues with his active language by calling Timothy to fight the good fight of the faith and to take hold of the eternal life, to which he was called. Paul is telling Timothy that godliness will not just happen to Timothy. He cannot be passive. He must pursue and fight and take hold of what God is calling him to do.

In verse 13, Paul calls witnesses to the actions that Timothy needs to take. The witnesses are God, who gives life to everything, and Christ Jesus, God's Son. And Paul reminds Timothy that Christ Jesus himself modeled what it looks like to pursue and fight and take hold. Jesus testified before Pontius Pilate, not shying away from bearing witness to the truth about God, even though telling the truth resulted in his crucifixion. Paul then reminds Timothy that Jesus Christ will one day appear again to bring a consummation to all God's promises. He tells Timothy to look to Jesus as the witness, to whom Timothy is accountable. He then tells Timothy to look to Jesus as the example, after whom Timothy can model his courage and faith. And he then tells Timothy to look to Jesus as the one who will bring final reward to all of Timothy's hope.

Paul finally ends the passage with a beautiful and stirring doxology about God's kingship, his immortality, his holiness, his invisibility, and his honor. Timothy may have some daunting tasks ahead of him, but the great and glorious God will make all of his sacrifices worthwhile.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. In verse 11, after calling Timothy to flee from "all this" (the greed talked about in verses 3-10), Paul calls him to pursue several virtues. Which virtue mentioned in verse 11, most stands out to you, and why?

5. In verse 12, Paul uses active words like "fight" and "take hold of." What does this tell you about what we should expect the Christian life to be like?

6. In verses 13-14 Paul directs Timothy's attention to Jesus as a witness ("In the sight of... Christ Jesus... I charge you"), as an example ("who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession"), and as his hope ("until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ"). How do each of these roles that Jesus plays, influence how you approach your walk with God?

7. In verses, 15-16 Paul lists several powerful qualities of God. Which of the qualities listed in these verses brings you the most hope and strength, and why?

Wrestling with Issues

8. In verse 12, Paul tells Timothy to "take hold of the eternal life to which you were called." We know that we gain eternal life not through our works, but God's grace. What, then, do you think Paul means when he gives Timothy this command?

Taking it to Heart

9. Right now, do you find yourself needing to look to Jesus as your witness, as your example, or as your hope? Explain your answer.

10. Name at least one specific way that God is calling you to flee (verse 11), pursue (verse 11), fight (verse 12), or take hold (verse 12)?



We Lay Up Treasure

Lesson 9 • November 24 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Wealth is best used when it brings eternal benefits.

Getting Started

1. Do you consider yourself to be rich? Why, or why not?

2. What are some ways that you find yourself tempted to place your hope in money?

Explanation of the Passage

Read 1 Timothy 6:17-21.

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our

enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. ²⁰ Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, ²¹ which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all."

As Paul draws this letter to a close, he wraps up a section that he began back in 1 Timothy 6:3. He started by talking about the false teachers who use the gospel as a means to financial gain. He then warned Timothy, as a man of God, to flee from this kind of greed and selfishness and to pursue godliness. Now, still in the context of money and greed, Paul gives Timothy some ways that he should instruct the rich people who are part of the church.

Paul first says that the rich should not be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth. Money has a way of making us feel self-sufficient. We begin to believe that we can control our own lives because money can buy us anything we need. Paul doesn't merely say that the rich shouldn't put their hope in wealth because this would be ungodly. He says that they should not put their

hope in wealth because this would be foolish. Wealth is uncertain. Jesus himself talked about how thieves break in and steal it, while moths and rust destroy it. Therefore, instead of placing their hope in uncertain wealth, they should put their faith in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Notice that Paul doesn't say that the rich should give away all their money. Instead, he addresses their hope, which is a deeper heart issue. He then tells them that when God provides for us, he intends for us to enjoy his good gifts. Instead of feeling guilty about what God has provided, Paul says that rich people should hope in God and be thankful.

Paul follows this up by saying that the rich should do good, be rich in good deeds, and be generous and willing to share. The riches that they have been given are not merely for their enjoyment. They were given so that the rich would share with those who are in need. The rich are called to see their riches as a trust from God. They are to be stewards of their resources and to help others. By doing this, according to Paul, they are laying up treasures in heaven. In other words, they will miss out on nothing if they are generous with their resources.

Finally, in verses 20-21, Paul wraps up his letter. He tells Timothy to guard what has been entrusted to his care. This, in context, is the gospel message. He tells Timothy to turn away from godless chatter and false teachings. This has been a significant theme of the letter. Paul is reminding Timothy that his calling is to proclaim and protect the gospel and to correct and refute those who oppose it.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. Verses 17-19 speak to those who are rich. Taking into account global living standards, what are some ways in which you are rich?

5. What are some signs that someone has put their hope in wealth?

6. Verse 18 has three commands: (1) Do good, (2) Be rich in good deeds, (3) Be generous and willing to share. Name one practical way that you could do each of these.

7. In verses 20-21, Paul gives Timothy a final charge. Use one sentence to summarize Paul's charge to Timothy in these verses.

Wrestling with Issues

8. In verse 19, Paul talks about eternal rewards. What role should the desire for rewards play in the Christian life? Explain your answer.

Taking it to Heart

9. How would your attitude toward your money change if you viewed yourself as a steward of God's resources, instead of merely seeing your money as your own?

10. What are some ways that you have experienced joy and growth in your relationship with God through living generously?