

Roots

Anchoring Your Soul In Turbulent Times

by Mark Robinson



A 9 week Bible Study through 2 Timothy
for groups or individuals

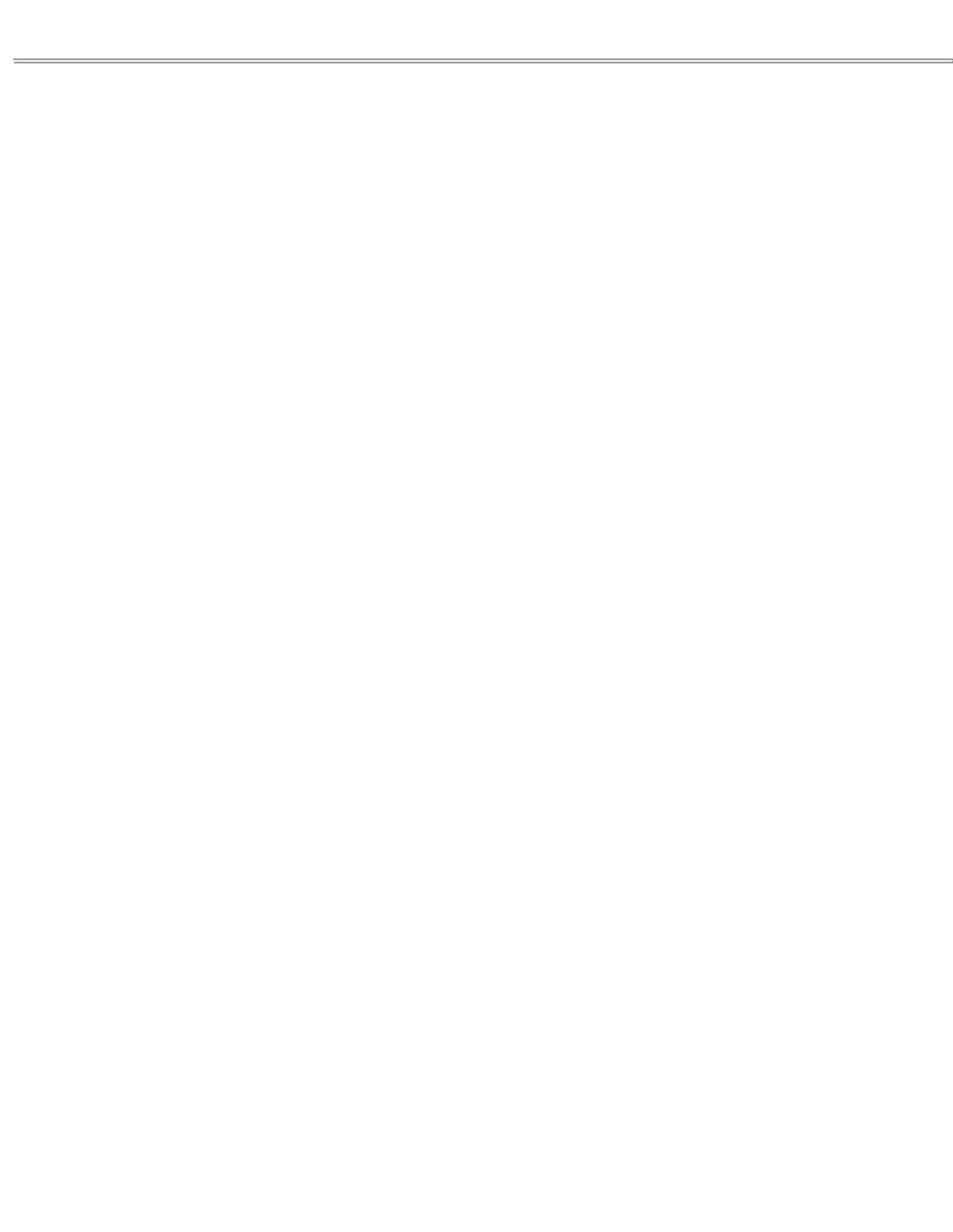


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Special contributions to this study were provided by Jina Schrader.

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Intro:

Sitting alongside the cliffs and canyons inside Yosemite National Park stands a grove of trees you simply have to see to believe. The Giant Sequoia trees of Mariposa Grove are more than 30 feet wide and nearly 300 feet tall. When you gather a few dozen of these trees in one valley in the Sierra Nevadas, you have (what amounts to) nature's Manhattan skyline. It is simply awesome to behold.

Part of what makes these trees so impressive is their age. Growing 300 feet tall takes time . . . lots of time . . . 2,000 years and counting. In their 2,000 years of life, these trees have seen it all. They have survived blanketing snowfall, sweeping avalanches, strikes of lightning, high winds, human expansion, forest fires, the logging industry, and the gold rush. Heck, when these trees were saplings, Augustus Caesar was calling a census that would take Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.

So, what is the secret to the longevity of these giants who seem to get more beautiful with age? These beauties were designed by God with many enduring qualities (including fire resistant bark and a natural preservative in its wood), but perhaps their most amazing feature is its intricate root system.

The roots of the Giant Sequoias do not grow particularly deep, but they do grow incredibly long. A 300 foot tall tree can have a root system that spreads as far as 300 feet from its massive trunk. This wide base rooted in the mountain soil gives the tree its "staying power" during the harsh weather days of the high country.

2,000 years ago, when those trees were growing their first branches, Jesus came to this planet and died on the cross for our sins so that we might have an enduring life . . . an eternal life with Him in heaven. As we live out our lives on this planet, however, what is the key to our longevity? How do we remain standing tall in this life amidst the forces that attempt to take us down? How can our faith survive persecution for our faith, rejection from those we love, and a general sense of uncertainty? For answers to this question, we need to look to the book of 2 Timothy.

2 Timothy is a letter written from the Apostle Paul to his friend and co-worker, Timothy, encouraging him to stay anchored amidst turbulent times. At the time Paul writes the letter, he is in a dungeon in the city of Rome, awaiting his execution because of His faith in Christ. The Roman sponsored persecution of Christians which placed Paul in chains had shaken Timothy and a number of other Christians. Though Timothy's eternity was secure, Paul wanted Timothy to stand tall to the very end of his earthly life. Therefore, Paul writes this letter to remind Timothy of the secret to weathering the storms that come in life.

Like the giants inside Mariposa Grove, Paul wanted Timothy to know that the secret to longevity was found in the roots. For believers in Jesus Christ, our root is the Truth given to us by God and recorded in the Old and New Testaments. By anchoring our souls in the root of God's Word, we have the broad support of God's wisdom for our lives that equips us for every good work and reminds us of the deeper reality of the world in which we live. As you work your way through this study, I hope and pray you will be encouraged to root your life in God's unchanging Truth.

As you work your way through the nine weeks of this study, you will notice that each week is divided into six days of guided questions. Day one of each week invites you to read the entire book of 2 Timothy. That may sound intimidating at first, but realize that reading the entire book is not a time consuming activity. After all, the whole book is only a couple of pages long in many Bibles! Reading the book in one sitting will help you understand how each part of the book relates to the whole. Day two of each week has you read and make general observations on a particular section of the book. Days three and four include guided questions and commentary for deeper understanding of the meaning of this book. Day five of each week is a devotional highlighting one truth from the verses you have been studying. Day six of each week is a review. At the conclusion of each week, you will find a page entitled "For Further Application or Group Study." This page provides one key applicational project for each week, as well as some questions for small group interaction if you are working through this study with a small group.

Of course, I would love for each of you to work your way through every part of this book, but I know that will not always be the case. Don't worry! Go at your own pace and do whatever you can do. The goal is to get to know Jesus Christ better, not complete every blank in a book. My prayer is that you will be as blessed working through this book as I have been writing it.

In Christ,



Mark Robinson

Week 1: 2 Timothy 1:1-12

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray. Remember that it is not possible to really understand God's truth unless He reveals it to you. (Reflect on 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.") Acknowledge that you cannot understand His Word by yourself, and ask God to illuminate His Truth for you today as Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-19a: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe."
2. On Day 1 of each week, you will be asked to read the entire book of 2 Timothy. Do not let this assignment intimidate you. The book of 2 Timothy is a short letter written from the Apostle Paul to his friend and ministry partner, Timothy. By reading the letter in its entirety once each week, you will have the chance to appreciate the full context of the letter before digging in to a more in depth study of a shorter section in Days 2-6. After reading 2 Timothy, in the space below write down the things that most stand out to you about the overall feel and message of the book.

Day 3

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."
2. Read 2 Timothy 1:1-7
3. Notice the way that Paul begins this letter to Timothy. He emphasizes that it is God's will that makes him an apostle of Christ. (Note: The word "Apostle" means literally "one who was sent" and was a title used of the earliest leaders in the church who were sent out by Jesus Himself to "make disciples of all nations." Obviously the 12 disciples were given this charge, but Paul was added to their number several years later after Christ appeared to Him on the road to Damascus - see Acts 9:1-31; 13:9; 1 Corinthians 15:9.) Paul wrote this letter while awaiting his execution because of his faith in Jesus and his leadership in the early church. Given all this, why do you think it was important for Paul to remember that his leadership in the early church as an "apostle" was a product of being in God's will for his life?
4. Are there ever times when you have experienced difficulty because of your faith in Christ? When you experienced that difficulty did you ever wonder if you had somehow wandered away from God's will?
5. In the midst of his difficulty, Paul held onto the promise of a better life through Christ Jesus. Paul was not experiencing any of the normal "joys of living" we might imagine (freedom, good food, sunshine, companionship, etc.), but because He was in God's will, Paul was holding onto the hope that one day he would experience the life (the abundant life – see John 10:10) that was promised to all those in Christ Jesus. This life might not be fully realized in a dungeon cell, but Paul knew that eternity held paradise, the abundant life, for those who were with Christ Jesus. In the midst of difficulty, how would holding onto the "promise of life that is in Christ Jesus" encourage you in your hour of trouble?

6. Paul was greatly encouraged as he thought about Timothy. Timothy and Paul had a very close relationship. Paul calls Timothy his “dear son” (1:2) and recalls the closeness of their relationship (1:3-5). Paul had met Timothy on one of his missionary journeys and the two had formed a life-long partnership in ministry. Paul describes his relationship with Timothy and Timothy’s value to Paul’s ministry in Philippians 2:19-22. Apparently Timothy was Paul’s “go-to guy” when it came to ministry issues. 1 Timothy 1:3 describes a time when Paul and Timothy had to part ways in order to provide pastoral leadership to different areas (Paul to Macedonia, Timothy to Ephesus.) On at least one occasion, it seems that Timothy took his departure from Paul’s side particularly hard (2 Timothy 1:4 indicates that Timothy had wept at a previous time when he and Paul had to split ways). As Paul writes this letter he says that he “longs to see you (Timothy)” knowing that a visit would mutually encourage them both. Who is someone in your life who has had a positive spiritual impact, but who you do not get to see on a regular basis? Do you long to see them? What do you miss about them?

7. Timothy apparently had grown up in a “Christian home” (1:5). His faith in Christ had been growing for many years and from an early age. This was a great contrast to the testimony of the apostle Paul. Paul had been a persecutor of the church in his early days. Seeing Paul and Timothy being used by God side by side is a great reminder to all of us that we do not have to have a radical testimony to be used by God for great things. If you grew up in a Christian home, you may have a testimony very similar to Timothy’s. Which testimony can you more easily identify with, Paul (the radical lifestyle change as an adult) or Timothy’s (grew up believing in Jesus in a Christian home)?

8. STUDY NOTE: In 1:6, Paul encourages Timothy to “fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” This phrase is very poetic and inspiring, but what does it really mean? What is the “gift” that Paul is referring to here, why does Paul refer to his “laying on of hands” and how does one “fan” it into flame? It seems that the “gift of God” that Paul was referring to was the divine enablement given to Timothy to equip him to serve in ministry. 1 Peter 4:10 tells us that all believers are given a gift to empower them to serve others in this life. Timothy, like all believers had been given such a gift. At the outset of Timothy’s ministry, he was set apart by the body of Elders in his church and prayed over as they laid their hands on him (see 1 Timothy 4:14). This moment was probably not a time when Timothy received a special form of gifting, but was time when the church leadership acknowledged the gifting that Timothy had already been given by God. Similar to how a person is water baptized as an outward symbol of what God has already done in their heart, so this public “laying on of hands” was an outward acknowledgment of the gift already given to Timothy. Paul mentions the “laying on of hands” to encourage Timothy to remember that he had been gifted by God. The admonishment to “fan into flame” this gift was a challenge by Paul to Timothy to not squander the gifting for service given to him. Timothy was not to waste the gift of God, but keep stoking that fire by serving others. Anyone who has ever sat around a campfire knows that apart from adding new branches to a fire, the fire will go out. The same is true of our aptitude for serving. We are to continue to engage in serving others and so fan the flame of our gifting inside us.

9. In 1:6-7, Paul encourages Timothy to keep serving others in the name of Christ. Timothy appears to have been tempted to become passive and shy about employing his gifting in service to others, but Paul tells him that “God has not given us a spirit of timidity ...” Many times, out of fear (I don’t want to serve because I might not do it right), laziness (I don’t want to serve because it would be too hard), or hyper-humility (I am not good enough or valuable enough to serve in a significant way), we fail to engage in serving others in the name of Christ. In the space below (and to the best of your abilities), write down how you believe God has gifted you for service to others. (In order to help you answer this question, you may want to ask others who know you how you encourage them and what they think your gifts are.) Are you “fanning to flame the gift of God that was given to you”? Why or why not? Remember God has not given you a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love and self-discipline!

Day 4

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23-24. "This is what the Lord declares: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord." Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read 2 Timothy 1:8-12
3. Based on what you know about the letter of 2 Timothy so far, why do you think that Timothy was tempted to shy away from openly professing his faith in Christ or openly standing with Paul, his friend (1:8)?
4. In 1:8-12, Paul gives Timothy a line of argument for why he should not be ashamed. What does that argument center around? Timothy's personal strength and will-power or something else?
5. In 1:8b-10, Paul makes several statements about the "gospel." What does he say about it? Based only on what you see in these verses, what is the central message of the "gospel?"

6. STUDY NOTE: The word “gospel” literally means “good news.” As it pertains to humanity’s relationship with God, there is “good news” or “gospel” to be shared concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. Humanity is sinful and therefore separated from a holy God (Romans 3:23). In fact, in an act of divine judgment, our sins require our death (Romans 6:23a). That is the bad news. But the good news (or gospel) is that from eternity past, God saw our situation and decided to set a plan in motion to save us from the necessary death penalty our sins deserved (Ephesians 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9, Titus 1:2). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to this earth and lived a perfectly righteous and sinless life. After 33 years of life, Jesus was arrested (on some trumped up charges) and killed on a cross. In a divine act of mercy and grace, God offers all of humanity the opportunity to have Jesus’ death on the cross take the penalty of all our sins (Romans 5:8 and 2 Corinthians 5:21). He offers to die in our place. The death our sins deserved was paid for by Christ so that we might now be guilt free, and live anew in a relationship with God. Without the weight of sin and its consequences, the way is now paved for us to have an everlasting relationship with God (John 3:16 and 2 Timothy 1:10). Though this amazing offer is given to all humanity, only those who accept this gift by faith (believing that Jesus’ death truly is sufficient to pay the penalty for all our sins) get to experience the benefit of it. Like Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:9, we are saved not because of anything we have done – but because of “His own purpose and grace.” (See also Ephesians 2:8-9). The gospel, therefore, is the good news of how sinful people can have a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

7. How is the gospel an encouragement to you to not be ashamed of your relationship with Christ?

8. Paul takes comfort in 1:12 that Jesus will “guard what I (Paul) have entrusted to Him (Jesus) for that day.” What do you think Paul has entrusted to Jesus, and what day do you think Paul is referring to?

9. From 1:12, it seems clear that Paul's confidence was not in himself, but was in Christ Jesus His Lord. Paul had entrusted Jesus with his life and even if that step had led Paul to a prison cell, he believed that one day Jesus would reward him with eternal life in paradise. Therefore, as Paul waited for "that day," he would not be ashamed of Jesus or His calling because of what Jesus had done for him and what He had promised him in the future. How does knowledge of the future blessings of Christ encourage you to stand firm for Him today?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, "Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word."
2. Read 2 Timothy 1:1-12

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Can You Top This?

Have you ever been around a "One Upper?" This is the strange, yet common breed of person that no matter what you have done, seen, or planned to do, can "one up" your story. A typical conversation with a "One Upper" goes something like this:

YOU: "I was just diagnosed with cancer and have ten weeks to live."

ONE UPPER: "Oh really? I was diagnosed with an even worse strand of cancer and should have died ten days ago."

Sadly, I am not exaggerating that much.

We all have "One Uppers" in our lives who have experienced better and longer vacations, have undergone more painful surgeries, and have a more dysfunctional family than us. Further, they are not afraid to tell us about them.

Interestingly enough, we do not pity the "One Upper" for the depth of their suffering, or celebrate them for the grandiosity of their success. Instead, we typically turn silent around the "One Upper." We know they have a "better" story than ours, so we tend to swallow our own stories rather than have them topped like a bid at the county auction.

I think the reason we do this is because there are few things more personal than someone's story. The things that you and I have experienced are very important extensions of who we are as people, therefore, to have our stories topped somehow lowers us on the pecking order of the human race. In a sense, our stories are many times about us, and by keeping our stories to ourselves around a "one upper" we protect ourselves from appearing second class.

As I read the book of 2 Timothy, I see the stories of two men who are both heroes

of the Christian faith, Paul and Timothy. At the time that 2 Timothy was written, both men were leaders in the early church. Both men had been used by God to do great things. The path to church leadership for both men, however, was quite different.

Paul grew up a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was a Jew through and through who studied under the greatest teachers of devout Judaism. Like many Jewish leaders of his day, Paul rejected the teaching and person of Jesus Christ and set out to destroy the church that Jesus had founded. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that Paul was “dead set” against the church, as he stood by and participated in attempts to assassinate leaders in Christ’s earliest church. This path of destruction for Paul was radically changed (in Acts 9) when Jesus appeared to Paul as he was heading toward the city of Damascus to round up and persecute more Christians. Jesus called Paul out of his life of destruction and to a life of being a minister of grace in the name of Jesus Christ to all the non-Jewish people of the world. Paul repented of his past ways and accepted the new life offered to him in Christ, and his transformation is remembered today as maybe the greatest 180 in church history.

Timothy, on the other hand, had a much different testimony (as 2 Timothy 1:5 tells us). Timothy grew up in a home where his mother and grandmother believed in Jesus Christ and taught him to place his faith in Christ at an early age. Timothy had no “Damascus Road” experience like Paul did. He grew up embracing Christ by faith.

I can imagine if the leaders of the early church got together to share their testimonies that no one would have wanted to follow Paul. After all, his story could “one up” all of theirs. By our subjective scale, Paul’s story is just more impressive. However, it is interesting to see that in the opening verses of 2 Timothy, Paul celebrates Timothy’s testimony. The man who would have been able to “one up” Timothy does not take the opportunity to do so. He recounts Timothy’s legacy of faith with great admiration and appreciation.

I believe Paul does this because he realizes that the faith story of any Christian is not about Paul OR Timothy. The faith story of any Christian is really the continuing story of Jesus Christ. Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:8-9, “But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – NOT BECAUSE OF ANYTHING WE HAVE DONE but because of His own purpose and grace.” In other words, it was Jesus’ plan, power, and creativity that authored each of our testimonies. While each story is different, each can be celebrated because the Master’s hand can be seen in each one. In Paul’s life, the depth of God’s grace can be seen as He can change the heart of His greatest opponent. In Timothy’s life, the depth of God’s grace can be seen as He works through a loving mother and grandmother to bring up a child with a soft heart for the things of God and an enduring faith in the person of Jesus Christ. Each story can be shared boldly and proudly because each story is not about them, but is about Him.

Remember this the next time you are asked to share what God has done in your life and you pause, wondering if your story is “good enough” or will be “one upped” by the recovered drug addict sitting next to you. Your spiritual story is not just about you. It is about Him. The spiritual stories of all Christians point to Him and He can never be topped.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend a few moments thanking God for the promise of life that He has given you in Jesus Christ. Ask that His Holy Spirit would continue to help you hold on to that promise in your daily life. Pray that you would “fan into flame” the gifts that God has given you and the unique ways He has equipped you for ministry.
2. Reread 2 Timothy 1:1-12
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

For Further Application and Group Study

For Group Discussion:

1. Are there ever times when you have experienced difficulty because of your faith in Christ? When you experienced that difficulty did you ever wonder if you had somehow wandered away from God's will?
2. Which testimony (Paul or Timothy) do you relate to more? What are the blessings you see in your life because of the way in which God has worked?
3. Do you ever shy away from serving Christ out of fear or timidity? If so, why do you think you struggle with that fear? How do this week's verses help you overcome that struggle?
4. Based on 1:8b-10, what is the central message of the Gospel?
5. How is the Gospel an encouragement to you to not be ashamed of your relationship with Christ?

Application Project:

Write a letter this week to someone who has had a positive spiritual impact in your life (like Paul had to Timothy.) In that letter thank them for being used by God in your life. Be as specific as you can as to how God has used them to impact you.

Week 2: 2 Timothy 1:13-18

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray. Echo Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16-19: "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
2. Read the entire book of 2 Timothy. In the space below write down the things that most stand out to you about the overall feel and message of the book.

Day 3

1. Let us pray that through our study we'll grow in knowledge and love for Christ as Paul prayed in Philippians 1:9-11: "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."
2. Read 2 Timothy 1:13-14.
3. Paul had spent a great deal of time teaching others about the person and work of Jesus Christ and its implication for their lives. In 2 Timothy 1:13, Paul encourages Timothy to use Paul's teaching as the "answer key" for determining truth and as the ethical rules to live by. Do you think Paul was being egotistical by saying this? What would make Paul's teaching different from what his contemporaries (who said different things) were teaching?
4. We saw last week in Acts 9 that Paul saw Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, and that event changed his life forever. Jesus gave Paul a mission to share His truth with the non-Jewish people of the world for the rest of his life. Paul went on to travel throughout the Roman Empire sharing this truth about Jesus with all he came in contact with. Paul even wrote letters to churches and individuals that Christians everywhere (from Paul's day until today) believe to have been inspired by God. These letters make up a number of our New Testament books. Given this information, does it change your answer in question 3 above?

9. What do you turn to when making decisions in your life? Do you primarily look to your friends for advice? Your own preferences? God's Word? Paul was admonishing Timothy to turn to God's Word as the final authority in His life. This did not mean that Timothy was never to consider his own feelings or the opinions of others, but it did mean that Timothy was never to violate God's Word in order to satisfy a desire or appease a friend. Is the Word of God the final authority in your life?

10. What role does the Holy Spirit play in your study and application of God's Word in your life? Are you taking advantage of this tremendous resource that God has given you?

Day 4

1. Pray for God to reveal Himself in a new way and to use this study to purify your heart. We know that it is God “who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13), so pray that you will be “blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life” (Philippians 2:15b-16a).
2. Read 2 Timothy 1:15-18
3. In this section, Paul mentions by name 3 individuals. Based on what you see about them in this passage, who are they and what have they done?

4. STUDY NOTE: Ephesus (the town where Timothy currently lived and a town where Paul had greatly ministered), was the capital of the Roman province of Asia (modern day Turkey). Upon Paul's arrest and imprisonment because of his faith in Christ, apparently “all” in that city turned their backs on Paul and failed to come to his aid. When Jesus was arrested before His trial and crucifixion, all the disciples scattered and abandoned Him for fear that their lives might come to a similar fate. Apparently, when Paul was arrested, all the believers in Timothy's city had done the same thing to Paul.

5. Though “all of Asia” had abandoned Paul, two men stood out to him as “poster children” for this exodus of support, Phygelus and Hermogenes. Have you ever had a close friend abandon you in a time of need? How did that make you feel? Is it encouraging or discouraging to know that others (like Paul and Jesus) have also experienced this feeling of isolation?
6. In contrast to Phygelus and Hermogenes, Paul was greatly ministered to by Onesiphorus. What does Onesiphorus do that so greatly encourages Paul while he is in prison?

7. Onesiphorus was a common man about whom no other Scriptural record is given. He apparently was not the pastor of the church in Ephesus or any other church in the area. He was just a common man who was moved by God to refresh a lonely friend in despair. Is there a friend you know who is in need of refreshment? Rather than hoping that someone else will encourage them, is it possible that God is prompting you to encourage and refresh your friend as Onesiphorus did Paul? What is God prompting you to do?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray and thank God for His word, which is living and active in our lives. Praise Him for the power of His word as you remember Hebrews 4:12, which says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Ask God to use His word powerfully in your life today.
2. Read 2 Timothy 1:13-18

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Guard the Deposit

Concealed beneath my shirt, in a lap belt I had \$4,000 cash. On my customs form I had declared all of it. As I waited in line to talk to the next available customs official in the Moscow Airport, I was terrified.

No, I was not part of an international drug deal or money laundering operation. I was simply doing my part in helping establish a team of long term missionaries in Volgograd, Russia in the early post-communist days of 1995. With all the political unrest that the rending of the iron curtain brought, banks in the former Soviet Union were not considered reliable by those in the west, so the initial start up funds for this long term missionary operation had to be carried in on the bodies of summer mission team members (of which I was one).

Part of our briefing for the summer trained us to be very cognizant of our surroundings, and very careful to avoid pick-pocketers. Apparently petty theft was very common in Russian cities at the time (especially toward Americans), and we were told to stay alert and not carry many valuables with us. Of course, I considered the forty \$100 bills underneath my shirt to be valuable, so I was quite nervous about losing six months worth of rent into the hands of a band of gypsy thieves. Thankfully, I made it through customs just fine, but I was always aware of my surroundings and the location of those funds from the time they hit my money belt until they were delivered to the new landlord of our Russian flat.

I was thinking of that deposit of \$100 bills today as I was reflecting upon Paul's statement to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:14 when he says, "Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." Paul was writing to Timothy to brief him to be very cognizant of his philosophical surroundings, and very careful to avoid false teachers. Apparently teaching wrong doctrine and failing to stand for the truth of the Gospel was very common in Asia where Timothy was, so Paul tells Timothy to stay alert and stop

concealing the great deposit of truth that he was carrying. It seems that Timothy had gotten scared by the harsh treatment Paul received because of his ministry, and Timothy was probably tempted to alter his teaching slightly in order to stay out of trouble. Paul writes to encourage Timothy to guard the deposit of sound teaching that he had received from him.

I think Paul's advice to Timothy holds true for us today. In a world where clinging to the sound teaching of Scripture labels you as "closed minded", we may be tempted to either keep our truth concealed beneath our shirts, or even worse, fail to declare our allegiance to Christ when given the opportunity in the customary places of our day. Paul's advice to us would be the same as his advice to Timothy, "Guard the deposit."

What does it mean to "guard the deposit" of truth entrusted to us? I believe guarding the deposit means that we are aware of our surroundings. We know that there are influences in our world which promote truth that runs counter to the sound teaching of God's Word, so we evaluate what we hear and see to determine if our world's messages jive with God's truth. We need to look around and discern through the filter of sound doctrine. Secondly, though, "guarding the deposit" means that we go ahead and declare God's truth to those we encounter when the opportunity presents itself. Jesus does not want us to conceal His truth in our lap belts. He wants us to defend His Truth to our friends, family, and co-workers.

The thought of doing this can stir up quite a bit of fear within us. We are afraid that we will wilt when the pressure cooker of persecution turns on, and we fear that when we declare His Truth, we will say it wrong. This fear can be paralyzing, but it need not be. Jesus has given us an incredible gift to empower us to stay strong, and say it with power. He has given us His Holy Spirit to live inside us and to empower us to have the strength to stand under persecution and say it correctly. As you live your life this week, by faith believe that God's Holy Spirit will help you to discern and declare God's Truth. Act with that confidence and see God use you in this life until you return that deposit to Him in eternity.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend some time praising God for His truth and for His Holy Spirit who gives you eyes to recognize the truth. Ask Him to help you guard the good deposit of sound teaching that He has entrusted to you. Pray that He would use this study and His Word to saturate your life with His sound teaching.
2. Reread 2 Timothy 1:13-18
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant for you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

For Further Application and Group Study

For Group Discussion:

1. Paul encourages Timothy to keep his teaching while demonstrating both faith and love. Can you think of instances where people around you have held onto truth while not demonstrating love? What would holding onto truth in a loving way look like for you?
2. What role does God's Word play in the decision making process for your life? Do you value Scripture over the advice of friends and your experience/feelings? What would it look like if God's Word was the final authority in your decision making?
3. Paul had been abandoned by Phygelus and Hermogenes. Have you ever been abandoned by someone you cared about?
4. Onesiphorus had a ministry of refreshment in Paul's life. Has another believer ever had a ministry of refreshment to you? What did they do?

Application Project:

Who is someone in your life right now in need of "refreshing?" Think of that person, then come up with an action plan to refresh them this week (like Onesiphorus did to Paul).

Week 3: 2 Timothy 2:1-13

Day 1

1. Thank God for the provision of His Holy Spirit, who leads us into His truth. Reflect upon Jesus' words when He told His followers, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Pray and ask God to make you sensitive to the Holy Spirit's faithful counsel and guidance. Ask Him to teach you as you look at today's study.

2. Read the entire book of 2 Timothy. In the space below write down the things that most stand out to you about the overall feel and message of the book.

Day 3

1. As you begin today's study, pray and ask God for wisdom as you look into His word. Remember James 1:5, which says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." Pray thankfully to God, trusting that He will generously give you wisdom as you rely on Him to reveal His truth and help you understand His word today.
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:1-7.
3. These verses begin with Paul renewing his plea to Timothy to be strong (in contrast to those who had fallen away like Phygelus and Hermogenes in 1:15). In these verses, however, Paul reminds Timothy that strength is not found "in" Timothy, but "in" something else. What is Timothy's strength found in according to 2:1?
4. "Grace" is a very important word throughout the Christian New Testament. "Grace" literally means "an unmerited gift." In other words, grace is something that is given freely, not earned (like a wage). With this understanding, what do you think Timothy is given in Christ Jesus that would help to make him strong in the face of opposition? (For help, see also week 2, day 4 to help further understand the context.)

5. STUDY NOTE: 2 Timothy 2:2 is one of the most often quoted verses of this short letter from Paul to Timothy. In context, it seems Paul was admonishing Timothy to not just keep internalized the truths he had heard from Paul. Paul wanted Timothy to keep passing on the sound doctrine he had received to faithful men and women who would then pass along this truth to others. The perpetuation of Jesus' teaching hung in the balance of this transmission, therefore it was very important. Timothy and others faithfully kept that charge as is seen by the fact that you and I today are beneficiaries of their faithful service centuries ago. Like a baton that has been passed from generation to generation, we now possess the mantle of sound doctrine that has flowed from Jesus through Paul and the apostles to Timothy and eventually on to all of us. The idea of the perpetuation of truth from Jesus to today is written on by commentator Richard C.H. Lenski in his book *The Interpretation of St. Paul's epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* when he says, "This is the true apostolic succession of the ministry: not an uninterrupted line of hands laid on which extends back to the apostles themselves so that all ordinations which are not in that line are null and void; but a succession of true apostolic doctrine, the deposit of what we still hear from Paul in his writings, this held by us in faithful hearts with competency to teach others the same things. The apostles did not evidently expect the future teachers of the church to produce new or different teaching."

6. As a recipient of the Apostle's teaching of sound doctrine, who are the faithful men and women God has placed around you so that you might "teach others also?" What are their names, and what are some ideas you have for how God might use you to encourage them to embrace God's Truth today?
7. From 2:3-6, Paul gives three analogies to encourage Timothy to "be strong" and to "teach others also." After sharing these three analogies, Paul instructs Timothy to "reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all of this (2:7)." What are those three analogies? Reflectively pray as you reread those analogies and write down any insight the Lord has given you about the importance of these three analogies. In other words, what do you think Paul wanted Timothy (and us) to get out of these three analogies?

Day 4

1. Take some time to pray and ask God to use His word to teach, rebuke, correct and train you, just as Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16,17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Thank God for His word and ask Him to equip you for good works today.
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:8-13.
3. What do you think is significant about Paul referring to Jesus in 2 Timothy 2:8? Why do you think this might be encouraging to Timothy?

4. STUDY NOTE: Paul points Timothy to the example of Jesus Christ as encouragement to remain faithful in difficult times. In 2:8, Jesus is described as the One who was raised from the dead and a descendent of David. These two promises would have been very encouraging to someone who was experiencing persecution because it reminds us of the future for Jesus Christ and His followers. Though crooked men arrested Jesus and killed Him on the cross, Jesus would raise from the dead! Though Jesus never sat on a throne while on this earth, He will one day sit on King David's throne and rule over the earth forever and ever! What a tremendous encouragement to Timothy and other believers of His day who were being persecuted and dishonored by their surrounding communities. Though their present was tough, their future was bright. Just as Christ conquered death, so they would rise again. Just as Christ would one day rule, so believers will one day reign with Him. The next time you are in an experience where you are persecuted and mocked or dishonored due to faith in Christ, remember Jesus' example. Our future is bright and secure!

5. Based on His understanding of the person of Jesus Christ (2:8), Paul is encouraged that his present chains in no way hinder or halt the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ. "God's Word is not chained!" God was going to continue to be at work in the world regardless of what temporary afflictions or persecutions were effecting God's people. Have you ever experienced a difficulty or hardship that caused you to wonder if God was absent or indifferent to your struggle? If so, how would remembering the security of our future, and the unchainability of God's Word encourage you to persevere in difficult times?

6. STUDY NOTE: 2:10 is an interesting verse that stretches our understanding of the word "salvation." At first glance, it appears that Paul is talking about persevering so that He can share the message of salvation with those who have yet to embrace Christ's gift by faith. There is a serious problem with this interpretation, however. Paul says that He is enduring all things for the sake of the "elect." The "elect" in the New Testament always refers to the Body of believers. In context, it appears most logical to assume that the "elect" Paul is referring to are the same "faithful men" that Timothy was instructed to teach in 2:2. These faithful men, most certainly had already experienced saving faith in Christ, therefore, why would Paul say that he was hoping they would "obtain salvation?" It seems that the salvation Paul was referring to was the ongoing growth of the Christian in their spiritual life. In a sense, our salvation has a past, a present, and a future sense. Our salvation past is the forgiveness that comes to us when we place our faith in Jesus Christ (in a sense, we are saved from the wrath our sins deserve). Our salvation present is the sanctification (or progressive display of holiness) that shines through us as we place our faith in Jesus Christ and walk in obedience to His teaching (in a sense, we are saved from doing things that are harmful to us.) Our salvation future is the translation of our bodies into eternity in the presence of God in heaven (in a sense, we are saved from hell as our eternal resting place.) Therefore, Paul endured his hardship so that the believers he was ministering to might persevere as well and thus mature in their relationship with God as a part of their present aspect of salvation.

7. Have you ever witnessed someone go through a hardship in their lives that has inspired you to trust God more with your life today? Who was that person and what about their life caused you to trust God more? If someone were to look at your life today, would it inspire them to trust God more? Why or why not?

8. 2:11-13 are four couplets of statements that were often quoted in the early church. These verses were probably parts of early creeds, catechisms, hymns, or baptismal confessions and were said by local groups of Christians together to remind them of their faith. The first two couplets of statements appear to be positive (2:11-12a). The second two couplets of statements (2:12b-13) appear to be warnings/admonitions. The four couplets seem to reinforce the message from 2:8-10, that because of Christ our future is bright. Therefore, we should persevere amidst hardships today. In the midst of these verses, however, there are two statements that are particularly difficult for us to understand because they appear to contradict themselves. The last two couplets make statements about disowning Christ and being faithless. Do you think these last two couplets are contradictory? How do you see these two statements harmonizing in truth?

9. STUDY NOTE: The context for this entire section is referring to Christians, therefore the four couplets in 2:11-13 are statements concerning Christian people, not unbelievers. The “we’s” in these verses remind us that these are statements about “us” Christians, not “those” pagans. Based on our understanding of salvation on the basis of God’s grace and not our works (Ephesians 2:8-9) and based on the understanding that our salvation is permanent (i.e. we cannot lose it – see Hebrews 13:5 and 1 John 5:11-15), we must concur that 2 Timothy 2:12b is not referring to a loss of a believer’s salvation. The “disowning” that Christ returns to the one who “disowns” Him must mean something less than the loss of one’s salvation. Especially since 2:13 reminds us that even when we are faithless, our God will remain faithful! It seems best to reconcile these two couplets by seeing them as talking about two aspects of eternity for the Christian. 2:12b is referring to issues of reward and future responsibility in Christ’s Kingdom. Someone who enters into a relationship with Christ initially, but then “disowns” Him later in life will still experience salvation, but will not experience the same high reward and responsibility in Christ’s Kingdom as those who persevered to the end. On judgment day, Christ will still hold onto those whose faith has waned, but He will not advocate for their lofty position of responsibility in His Kingdom if they have disowned Him in this life.

Day 5

1. Begin today's study with 2 Peter 1:3,4 in mind: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." Praise God for His divine power which provides us with everything we need! Ask God to remind you daily of His great and precious promises that you are learning as you read His word.
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:1-13.

Take a moment to read and reflect on this devotional as you continue to seek understanding of this week's passage for your life.

Spiritual Champions

With eager anticipation, a sweaty (and smelly) collection of eighth graders placed their hands in a pile and shouted aloud, "Take State in '92!" We ended every basketball practice this way my eighth grade year. On and off the court, we looked like anything but champions that year. We were a collection of awkward adolescents with new found hair on our legs and faces. When we talked, we sounded a lot like Peter Brady in the classic "Time to Change" episode of The Brady Bunch. On the court, we finished a very average 9-8 that year. Somehow, though, through it all our coach saw something better in us. He saw more than just our present; he saw our future. Five years later in the Mabee Center in Tulsa, OK, we would cut down the nets as the back-to-back 5A State Champions.

Looking back on that experience, I find myself being so thankful for that vision of our future that Coach Dale Dishman placed inside my mind. Practices for any sport can grow hard and tiring over time. In the huddle that day were over 25 eighth graders on the team. By the time we were seniors, only two of us were left to realize that dream. Everyone else had grown weary and quit along the way or decided to pursue other pursuits. The idea of one day being a champion, however, for me kept me going until the very end. Sometimes we need someone outside of our situation to see beyond our present circumstances to the future reward and call us to endure toward that grand vision.

As Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:11-13, I believe he is encouraging Timothy to endure into eternity as a champion for Christ because a great reward was waiting for those who persevered. At the time Timothy received this letter, he did not look like a spiritual champion. Due to the intense persecution and discouragement of his day, Timothy was tempted to turn passive and shy

away from his heavenly calling. Timothy's life was hard, the bad guys seemed to be winning (his friend Paul was already in prison), and the early church seemed like anything but an eternal kingdom. Seeing Timothy contemplating these thoughts, Paul grabs his coach's whistle and shares with Timothy encouragement concerning the future. A paraphrase of 2:11-13 might go like this, "We will live with Him. We will reign with Him. Stay the course and He will stick with you and He will never let you go!" Paul wanted Timothy to see beyond His present to the future reality of His life and use that as motivation to persevere to the very end.

What is going on in your life right now? Are you experiencing any persecution because of your faith in Christ? Are you experiencing hard times right now that are causing you to question your faith in Christ, or your place in His plans? Do you feel more like a spiritual eighth grader than an eternal champion? If so, place your hand on the pile and listen to the words of Paul describing our future. We will live with Him. We will reign with Him. Stay the course! See beyond your present to your future. Today's perseverance equals tomorrow's champion.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Pray that God would continue to make you strong in the grace of His Son, Jesus. Ask Him to give you endurance and perseverance to remain faithful in the midst of any circumstance, whether you deem it to be good or bad. Thank Him that He has made you more than a conqueror through Christ's work on the cross!
2. Reread 2 Timothy 2:1-13.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant for you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

For Further Application and Group Study

For Group Discussion:

1. What does Paul encourage Timothy to find his strength in according to 2 Timothy 2:1?
2. Who are the faithful men and women that God has placed around you right now that He is prompting you to share His truth with? What are some ideas you have as to how you might begin to influence them for Christ?
3. Consider the three analogies Paul highlights in 2:3-6. Do you see any application to your life from these analogies?
4. Have you ever experienced a difficulty or hardship that caused you to wonder if God was absent or indifferent regarding your struggle? How does remembering the person of Jesus Christ as highlighted in this week's study encourage you have a better perspective in the midst of your difficulty?
5. How do you harmonize the truth of the different couplets that make us 2:11-13? Do you see a way in which all of these statements are true and not contradicting each other?

Application Project:

Do an internet search (like Wikipedia, Google, or Yahoo) on one of the following people: George Muller, William Carey, Eric Liddell, Elizabeth Elliott, or L.B. Cowman. Based on what you read about one of these people's lives, how are you encouraged to trust God more in your life today?

Week 4: 2 Timothy 2:14-26

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray. Remember that it is not possible to really understand God's truth unless He reveals it to you. (Reflect on 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.") Acknowledge that you cannot understand His Word by yourself, and ask God to illuminate His Truth for you today as Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-19a: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe."
2. Read the entire book of 2 Timothy. In the space below write down the things that most stand out to you about the overall feel and message of the book.

Day 3

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:14-21
3. In this section, Paul continues to remind Timothy of what he should teach to the "faithful men" referenced in 2:2. In 2:14 Paul tells Timothy to not "quarrel about words" because of its negative impact on people. What do you think he meant by "quarrels about words?"
4. Amidst Christian theologians (and everyday Christian people), there are many disagreements about fine points in theology. Some believe baptism ought to be administered to grown men and women submerged in a lot of water. Others believe baptism is allowed for infants with only a cup of water sprinkled on the child's head. Some believe Jesus will rule for 1,000 literal years on the planet before He judges Satan and ushers in a "New Heaven" and "New Earth," while others believe that the 1,000 year reign spoken of in Revelation 20 is symbolic of Christ's current reign from His seat next to the Father in heaven. What are some of the disagreements in theology that you have heard between Christians? Have you seen any negative consequences come out of those disagreements?
5. The wrangling over words could mean disagreements between Christians over fine points in theology that are not "major" issues. Do you think this is a reasonable interpretation of Paul's intent in 2:14?

6. 2:15 encourages Timothy and his followers to not just argue over fine points with each other, but to spend their energy instead working through God's Word so that they might accurately understand it. (The word translated "correctly handling" is a term used of tent makers who cut a straight line in their fabric. The word translated "workman" is a term used for someone who works hard at something.) Would you say that you work hard to correctly understand the meaning of God's Word? What are some ways that you could increase your diligence in studying God's Word and accurately understanding what is communicated there?

7. 2:16-18 remind us that though we should not quarrel about words and the non-essentials of Christian theology, deviations from understanding God's truth on major issues leads to real problems. What is the major issue that Hymenaeus and Philetus were leading people astray on? According to 2:16, what was that truth causing people to become?

8. It is common for people today to draw a hard line between what Christians believe and how they act. I believe this hard line is a cultural byproduct of a generation that has equated tacit mental acknowledgement with true heart conviction and belief. The Bible does not equate mental assent with heartfelt belief, therefore the Bible sees a much closer connection between our theology and our lifestyle. What we believe, we act upon. This is clearly seen in this passage where a misguided teaching about the timing of the resurrection led people to live ungodly lives. From your own experience how have you seen bad beliefs lead to bad living?

9. In 2:18-19, Paul further draws the connection between what we believe and how we act. The inscription (or stamp that shows our true identity) that rests on God's people ought to be that we "turn away from wickedness." In other words, those who are His ought to live a life that looks different from those around them. Is there any wickedness in your life right now that God would have you turn away from?

10. In 2:20-21, Paul offers another analogy to encourage Timothy and the faithful to stay pure in their doctrine and teaching. Assuming the "large house" refers to the church, the "gold and silver articles" refers to sound teaching/teachers, and "wood and clay articles" refers to false teachers, what do you think Paul is trying to tell Timothy and us concerning who we associate with and what we are learning?

Day 4

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23,24. "This is what the Lord declares: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord." Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:22-26
3. Paul continues his admonition to Timothy to embrace sound doctrine and to pursue Christ's path for his life. 2:22 is a bold statement encouraging Timothy to not just avoid false teachers (2:20-21), but to pursue God and apply His truth in life. In the space below, rewrite Paul's direction in 2:22 in your own words. After that, write one or two personal applications that God brings to your mind of how you can heed Paul's warning and pursue Christ's way.
4. Are there theological conversations that you routinely get roped into that prove to not be profitable? Are there arguments with other Christians that you routinely have that tend to destroy relationships and waste time, rather than build up the Body of Christ and encourage Christian growth? What would 2:23-24 encourage you to do when these conversations/arguments begin?
5. 2:24-26 provide one of the many "job descriptions" for someone who seeks to do the work of God as a Christian leader. What are the components of this job description that Paul lists here? If you are in Christian leadership, how are you doing at living out these responsibilities? If you are not in Christian leadership, how are the Pastors/Leaders in your church or Christian organization living out these responsibilities?

6. 2:26 speaks of Christians falling into the “trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.” What do you think this is talking about? Can a Christian really do the will of the Devil?

7. Edmond Hiebert in a 1976 article in the theological journal *Bibliotheca Sacra* entitled, “Pauline Images of a Christian Leader” says this of 2:26, “If men will not be servants of God they inevitably become the captives of the Devil. Man’s freedom is his freedom to choose his master.” Hiebert (and Paul) reminds us that all of us will inevitably serve something . . . ultimately either God or Satan. False teachers and defiant Christians are not merely people doing their own will, they actually end up doing Satan’s work without even knowing it. False teaching and lawless living cause division in the Body of Christ and confusion in the world around us. These are the exact outcomes that Satan desires to inflict upon the Church. Given this understanding, do you better understand now why Paul is so firm in speaking out against false teachers? Is there any evidence of false teaching or ungodly living in your circle of influence today that God would have you speak out against?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, "Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word."
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:14-26

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Playing the Hand You are Dealt

Country music singer Kenny Rogers in his hit song "The Gambler" muses, "You got to know when to hold 'em. Know when to fold 'em. Know when to walk away. Know when to run." These were the dying words of advice shared from an aging card player to his young apprentice as they rode the rails across the prairie. The gambler's advice was a metaphor for life. In life, we are all dealt a variety of "cards." Wise people are people who know what to do with the cards they are dealt. Some cards should be played, while other cards should be kept in silence.

In 2 Timothy 2:14-26, Paul shares his dying words of advice with Timothy as he looked through the rails of his prison cell. Paul's advice in this section is simple: in the Christian life, think first before you play the cards you are dealt. The "cards" Paul was referring to were the philosophical and theological conversations he would have with the people he was trying to influence.

One type of "card" we might get dealt is a controversy over insignificant or small issues in theology that parse small words to create big controversies. These are the "quarrels about words" Paul mentions in 2:14. Examples of these types of controversies might be the detailed understanding about the timing of the end of the world or the definitive explanation of how many spiritual gifts are in existence today. These conversations hang on a few words, and can cause large rifts between Christians.

Another type of "card" we might get dealt is a divergence from orthodox truth on one of the "essential" doctrines of the Christian faith. In 2:18, Paul talks about two of his contemporaries who were teaching strange things about the resurrection of Christ. Examples of this type of thing today might be the rejection of the Bible as God's inspired and inerrant Word or the rejection of the understanding that salvation for all people in the world is found only through

faith in Jesus Christ. Our world today is full of many people who want to discredit the essential truths of Christianity.

As Paul writes to Timothy, he reminds him that some of these cards that Timothy gets are best left unplayed, while others need to be dealt with. In other words, Timothy needed to “know when to hold ‘em” and to “know when to fold ‘em.” Disputes about smaller issues should be avoided, says Paul (2:14, 23) for engaging in those disputes only tears apart the Body of Christ. Disputes about essential issues, however, should be trumped immediately, to keep the Body of Christ from wandering into wickedness (2:16-21).

So, how do we know when an issue is essential and when an issue is insignificant? Paul tells Timothy that when essential issues are perverted, we should notice two things, “Avoid godless chatter because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly (2:16).” First, Paul says that when essential issues are violated, God is removed from the conversation (i.e. the conversation becomes “godless”). Arguments against the Bible as God’s Word take the supernatural out of the Bible’s authorship. When God is removed from the conversation, a serious error has taken place. Similarly, when conversations about salvation center on fairness to man or man’s ability to attain eternal life, then we have removed God (Jesus Christ) from the conversation as our redeemer. When our theological conversation removes God from the occasion, a serious issue is at hand.

Second, 2:16 tells us that ungodly living is a byproduct of godless teaching. This makes sense. When people begin justifying lifestyles that go against God’s standards of holiness, then serious errors in theology have occurred. The trend among some Christians today to normalize homosexuality is an example of this. If God’s Word is removed from the conversation and our chatter on the topic of sexual orientation simply deals in science, then we could argue that homosexuality is “natural” for those who have a predisposition to this expression of sexuality. However, for the true Christian, our chatter should never be godless. Godless chatter leads to ungodly living.

Think about your life for a moment. Think about the “cards” of world view conversations and theological debates that you might encounter in the next month. How will you know if those are conversations that you should hold or fold? Heed Paul’s admonitions from 2 Timothy 2:14-26 as a guide. Small issues that honor God and take the Scriptures seriously, might be issues to ignore to keep peace in the Body. However, large issues that neglect God and remove Him from the conversation should be confronted. Godless chatter and ungodly living are two things no one should gamble with.

Week 4

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Thank God for His truth and for the wisdom He gives you as you seek to live in a way that honors Him. Ask Him for discernment and grace as you think through and discuss the major and minor issues of your faith. Pray that His holy truths would manifest themselves in the way you act in your everyday life.
2. Reread 2 Timothy 2:14-26
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

For Further Application and Group Study

For Group Discussion:

1. Have you ever seen any negative consequences come out of disagreements between Christians over smaller doctrinal issues?
2. Would you say that you work hard to correctly understand the meaning of God's Word? What are some ways that you could increase your diligence in studying God's Word and accurately understanding what is communicated there?
3. What are some examples you have seen where bad beliefs lead to bad living?
4. What are the various components of the "job description" for a Christian leader listed in 2 Timothy 2:24-26? If you are in leadership of a church or Christian group, where are you challenged by this job description? If you are not in leadership, how do you see the leaders of your church or Christian group living up to these responsibilities?
5. In 2 Timothy 2:26, Paul speaks against false teachers. Why do you think Paul is so concerned about false teachers in the church?

Application Project:

Write down a list of what you consider to be the "essential" truths of Christianity. Also write down a list of things that you hear people debating frequently that are "non-essential" issues in your opinion. Brainstorm ways you could stand up for the essentials, and ways you can have intelligent conversations about the non-essentials without creating undue conflict in the church.

Week 5: 2 Timothy 3:1-9

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray. Echo Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16-19: "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
2. Read the entire book of 2 Timothy. In the space below write down the things that most stand out to you about the overall feel and message of the book.

Day 3

1. Let us pray that through our study we'll grow in knowledge and love for Christ as Paul prayed in Philippians 1:9-11: "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5.
3. In 3:1, Paul begins talking about the last days. The Biblical idea of "last days" seems to be the concept of the last era of human history before Jesus returns to the earth to set up His Kingdom. Hebrews 1:2 uses the term "last days" to refer to the entire era of the "church age" (the period of time from Christ's ascension into heaven – Acts 1:8-10 – until Christ's return to planet earth – Revelation 19:11-21). From this, we can understand that Paul was talking to Timothy about the current time and place that he was living in, not just a future reality. It was important for Timothy to know Paul's description of the last days because Timothy was already living in the last days. Since we live as people who are also living in the last days before Christ's return, it is important for us to hear Paul's description as well. In general, is Paul's description of the "last days" positive or negative? How good or bad are these last days from a moral/ethical perspective?
4. 3:2-4 lists out 19 specific negative qualities of people in the last days. What evidence do you see today of these descriptions being accurate? Are there certain descriptors listed here that stand out to you even more than others in contemporary society?

8. Paul instructs Timothy to “not have anything to do” with those whose lives were marked by these behaviors. Since we are all sinners, and all fall short of God's glorious standards (and many of us struggle with some of the things mentioned in Paul's list here), what do you think Paul was suggesting to Timothy? Who do you think Paul was trying to keep Timothy from associating with? Any “sinner” or a more specific type of person? (We will look deeper at this question in day 4, but what is your best guess at this point?) What do you think an appropriate application of this principle would be in your life?

Day 4

1. Pray for God to reveal Himself in a new way and to use this study to purify your heart. We know that it is God “who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13), so pray that you will be “blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life” (Philippians 2:15b-16a).
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:6-9
3. 3:6-9 helps to paint a further picture of who Paul was warning Timothy of in 3:1-5. It seems that Paul was warning Timothy not just about people who struggle with sin, but people who are promoting a lifestyle of sin and teaching things contrary to sound doctrine among God's people. This is made clear by the description of those to avoid that Paul outlines in these verses. What is the strategy of the false teachers described in 3:6-7? Anything about this description bother you?

4. STUDY NOTE: Paul's description of the strategy of the false teachers appears rather chauvinistic against women. Paul seems to indicate that women more readily follow false teachers. Before we condemn Paul for these remarks, we need to remember that Paul was probably describing a real life situation that had unfolded in Ephesus. There were real false teachers in Ephesus who had really swayed a number of people to follow their teaching. Apparently a majority of these converts were women. Paul is not saying that women everywhere are more susceptible to false teaching, only that in the city of Ephesus at that time, there were a number of women who were led astray by these false teachers. Probably the lack of education of women in Ephesus led to their affinity with the false teachers, but there is no way of knowing for sure. In today's world, both men and women can follow false teaching if we fail to run all teaching through the truthful filter of God's Word.

5. 3:7 indicates that it is possible to be learning so many “false truths” that it prevents you from learning any “right truths.” Can you think of any examples today where false teaching prevents someone from embracing Biblical truth?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray and thank God for His word, which is living and active in our lives. Praise Him for the power of His word as you remember Hebrews 4:12, which says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Ask God to use His word powerfully in your life today.

3. Read 2 Timothy 3:1-9

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

And Here is Your Host . . .

In my third year of seminary, I took a course on the theology of the end times. This course (called Eschatology) was taught by one of the oldest, most published, and most respected professors on this topic in North America. As a part of the class, we were divided into teams and given a topic to teach to the rest of the class as a group project. My group was given the task of teaching the class five different views of the timing of Christ's return. Knowing that we could not impress our professor with simply spouting knowledge (he already knew it all anyway), we felt it would be best to add some entertainment to our presentation to spice things up.

We set up our presentation like a game of Jeopardy, where I played the host of the show Alex Trebek. We set up the front of the classroom like the game show, had the famous Jeopardy music playing when class began, and had five categories of answers organized around the five views we were supposed to teach. When class began, I said, "Welcome to Jeopardy, I am your host Alex Trebek." The class laughed, and played along, spending the rest of the hour calling me Alex when asking questions.

Up to this point, I am simply recounting a rather boring story of my seminary days. However, this is where the story gets a little weird. My professor, who probably did not watch as much daytime game shows as his students, also called me Alex. In fact, he really thought my name was Alex Trebek. He spent the rest of the semester calling me Alex in class and when he would see me around campus. Hilarious! No one ever told him otherwise. We all played along because it was a funny story for us to tell and retell. By the way, I got a "B" in the course. I wonder what Alex got?

I tell you this because that story is a reminder of the power of the community we run in. Those we are around can convince us that certain "facts" are true, even

if they are a total fabrication. My two year old son is learning to talk right now. If everyone around him told him that day was night and night was day, he would call the darkness day and the light night. To a certain degree, the people we associate with help shape our reality. This is a force so powerful, it can make one of the smartest men I know think that I am game show host, Alex Trebek!

In 2 Timothy 3:1-9, Paul writes to Timothy to warn him about keeping close association with false teachers. In fact, Paul says in 3:5b, "Have nothing to do with them." The reason Paul is so adamant about this is because false teachers have the power to define the reality of their followers. Since false teachers by definition try to pass off fiction for fact, they can greatly confuse their followers and lead many people astray. As Paul says in 3:7, they can get people so confused that they can "always be learning, but never able to acknowledge the truth." The thing that makes these false teachers even more tricky is that they often come in religious costume. Many times they are pastors of churches and people of prominence inside the house of God. Paul says of them in 3:5 that they "have a form of godliness but deny its power." These false teachers want to worm their way into homes and convince people that day is night and night is day when it comes to Biblical truth (3:6).

Who are the false teachers of our day? Some are men who take the pulpit promising prosperity and longevity to all in this life ... if we just have enough faith. Others are men who tell us that Jesus was a great teacher, but whose ideas are just a bit out of date for today's world. Others are men who promote a relationship with God based on what we do, and not on the basis of what Christ has done. The fact of the matter is, there are many teachers out there who work in buildings with a cross on the outside, but who are leading people astray on the inside. Since continuing to associate with these false teachers can make a grown adult think wrongly, we should avoid their teaching since it is destructive for our faith.

Evaluate all teachers you encounter to see if what they are teaching jives with God's Word. If it does not, then avoid that teaching like the plague. Seminary professors who think I am Alex Trebek create a punchline in a joke, but people who follow the instruction of false teaching find their lives in jeopardy and the joke is on them.

Week 5

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend some time in prayer praising God for being a trustworthy and faithful teacher. Thank Him that He is always reliable. Pray that the Holy Spirit would keep you from believing false teachings and reveal to you any areas where you may have wrong beliefs.
2. Reread 2 Timothy 3:1-9
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant for you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

For Further Application and Group Study

For Group Discussion:

1. In 2 Timothy 3:2-4, Paul uses 19 terms to describe the conditions in the last days. Which of these terms do you see more prevalent in today's culture?
2. The list in 3:2-4 indicates a lot of misplaced love. What are the objects of people's misplaced love in this section? Have you ever placed any of these things as the center of your affection?
3. Paul instructs Christians to have nothing to do with people who are practicing the things listed in 3:2-4. Knowing that all of us are sinners and fall short of God's perfect standards in different areas, what kind of person do you think Paul is really encouraging believers to avoid in these verses?
4. What are examples today that you know of where false teaching is preventing someone from embracing Biblical truth?

Application Project:

In our life today, we interact with false teaching (false messages) in many locations. We hear false teaching in movies or television that we watch, radio hosts we listen to, books we read, speakers/preachers we might hear, or from friends and family members. Think for a moment through your own life and write down some of the sources of false teaching that you find your mind influenced by in a negative way. Write down an action plan to reduce the influence these false teachers have on your life and put it into practice this week.

Week 6: 2 Timothy 3:10-17

Day 1

1. Thank God for the provision of His Holy Spirit, who leads us into His truth. Reflect upon Jesus' words when He told His followers, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Pray and ask God to make you sensitive to the Holy Spirit's faithful counsel and guidance. Ask Him to teach you as you look at today's study.

2. Read the entire book of 2 Timothy. In the space below write down the things that most stand out to you about the overall feel and message of the book.

Day 2

1. Take a moment to pray and consider this promise from Isaiah 55:10-11 concerning God's word: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Praise God that His word and promises are trustworthy and reliable. Continue to pray that He will use this study to accomplish His work in you.

2. Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17 and write down some observations of the text. (I.e., what stands out to you about this passage?)
 - What are the key words in this section?

 - What is the big idea of this section?

3. What questions come to your mind as you read 2 Timothy 3:10-17? In the space below, write down any questions you have about this text.

Day 3

1. As you begin today's study, pray and ask God for wisdom as you look into His word. Remember James 1:5, which says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." Pray thankfully to God, trusting that He will generously give you wisdom as you rely on Him to reveal His truth and help you understand His word today.
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:10-14.
3. Paul begins verse 10 with a mini-testimony about his own life. He seems to be doing this to contrast his life with someone else's life. Given the overall context of this passage, who do you think Paul is contrasting himself with? Given what you have seen so far in this study, what are the differences between Paul and this "other" person (or group of people)?
4. Paul talks about what happened to him in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra (3:11). Below you will find supplemental verses that will help us remember what happened to Paul in these cities. After reading these verses, summarize what happened to Paul in those areas in the space provided.
 - Antioch (Acts 13:14-50)
 - Iconium (Acts 13:51-14:5)
 - Lystra (Acts 14:6-20)

5. Paul makes a statement in 3:12 that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Based on what you have experienced and seen in the world, do you think this statement is accurate?

6. STUDY NOTE: As North American Christians, many times we can think that the words of 2 Timothy 3:12 are no longer relevant today. Certainly the followers of Christ were persecuted in the first century, but many followers of Christ in North America today are not subject to government sponsored (or government allowed) persecution of Christians. In fact from our perspective today, we may be tempted to think that the persecution of Christians is an outdated practice. A quick survey of the world today, however, provides a very different picture. Consider this article found on "The Standard Report" website www.thestandardreport.com:

**Religious Persecution in 21st Century:
Many Christians in more than 40 countries are in prisons serving sentences ranging from a few months to life.**

By Dale Linder-Altman (published November 4, 2005)

Christian persecution and martyrdom are words that seem alien in the 21st century. They're words that kindle visions of Christians facing lions in the Coliseum or tied to flaming stakes during the Middle Ages. But though many Christians are unaware of it, some of their spiritual brothers and sisters are facing persecution, prison and even death throughout the world today. Dr. Rebekkah Zakaria and several friends are serving a three year sentence in a prison in West Java, Indonesia for "attempting to coerce children to change their religion" – even though the children had their guardians' permission to attend Zakaria's Sunday school classes. Zakaria, a medical doctor who once treated 30-40 patients per day in her clinic, now spends her time in a filthy prison. She sleeps on a wooden platform without blankets or a pillow. She and other prisoners have to pay the guards to turn on the water to flush the toilets. They get barely enough food to survive. Even though she is imprisoned and separated from her two children, Zakaria holds no grudges against those who brought charges against her. She shares her testimony with her fellow prisoners and was recently overjoyed when a male prisoner accepted Christ. Zakaria's story is available as part of the program called "Doing Hard Time for God." This project was organized by Archbishop Gary Beaver of the Old Catholic Church in England to raise the public's awareness of religious persecution and urge intervention in behalf of the prisoners. Many Christians in more than 40 countries are in prisons serving sentences ranging from a few months to life, Beaver said in a recent news release. These Christians are not murderers or thieves. They are not heroes or statistics. "They're our Christian brothers and

sisters," Beaver said. "Our persecuted brothers and sisters do not have to suffer in silence; we can join in their trials and triumphs as co-workers in Christ." The Souther Baptist Press also publishes stories of modern Christians who are suffering for their faith, including that of Bektas Erdogan. A fashion designer in Istanbul, Erdogan has been a Christian for 11 years. When he went to work for a designer jeans company earlier this year, his Muslim employer promised to evaluate Erdogan on the basis of his work and not his religion. Recently, his first collection sold well in Russia, and Erdogan's employer called him in to work on Sunday afternoon. Erdogan expected to receive congratulations, but instead, his employer and several other men accused him of "missionary work" and brainwashing the other employees. They beat him in the face and head and shot at him three times, but the gun failed to fire. After several hours, Erdogan was released, but his captors warned him that they'd kill him. He has received a number of threatening phone calls, but has not turned to the police because he fears that his employer, who has ties to the local police, will make him the target of further aggression. Other Christian organizations describe increased persecution worldwide. Voice of the Martyrs and the Christian Monitor report persecution in Indonesia, India, China, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Nigeria, and Azerbaijan and Eritrea, etc. during 2005.

According to Beaver, more than half of today's Christians face some form of discrimination, ridicule, restrictions or persecutions. Over 2.7 billion people live in nations where a freedom of religion is understood. Recent estimates indicate that 200 millions Christians face actual persecution while another 350 millions face discriminations and restrictions. This persecution of the Christian faith comes in fulfillment of prophecy, Beaver said. "Jesus warned that 'if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you also.' (John 15:20) As more and more governments separate the Church and State, which is a worrying reality, we should be aware of greater levels of acceptable persecution. 'I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.'" (Revelation 17:6)

7. One possible interpretation of 3:12 is to understand Paul to be teaching that in every era of the history of the church, persecution will be found. It is the norm for Christians to be persecuted for their faith in Christ. In other words, Paul is not saying that everyone will experience the same harsh treatment, but that the Body of Christ will continue to be persecuted until Christ returns. What do you think of this interpretation?

8. Some have read 3:12 and deduced from it that if they are not being intensely persecuted, that they must be “living the Christian life wrong.” The spirit of this passage is not to egg Christians on to go “pick fights” with unbelievers, but to encourage Timothy that though persecution is going on, the truth of God is not chained (2:9) and God is still at work in a mighty way. Have you ever struggled with the truth of 3:12 by wondering why you were not being persecuted more than you are? How does understanding the overall context of these verses help you to better understand these verses?

9. In 3:14 Paul encourages Timothy to continue to embrace the truth of the Bible because of the testimony of those from whom Timothy first learned the Scriptures from. In what ways has God used the testimony of those you know to convince you of the truth of Christianity?

Day 5

1. Begin today's study with 2 Peter 1:3,4 in mind: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." Praise God for His divine power which provides us with everything we need! Ask God to remind you daily of His great and precious promises that you are learning as you read His word.
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17

Take a moment to read and reflect on this devotional as you continue to seek understanding of this week's passage for your life.

Outside the Stadium or Inside the Huddle

On November 22, 2008 the University of Oklahoma played Texas Tech in what college football analysts were calling the "Game of the Century." Texas Tech was ranked number 2 in the country, and OU was ranked number 4. It may not have been the game of the century, but it certainly was the biggest game in Norman in nearly a decade, and as a Norman resident and avid OU football fan, I couldn't wait to go to the game. As the game kicked off, however, I was not in attendance. In fact, I was not even watching the game on TV or listening to it on the radio. Instead of wearing crimson and cream, I was wearing a black suit, officiating the wedding of a friend.

Now before you get the wrong impression, know that I was actually very happy to be officiating this wedding. As a pastor, this is one of my favorite moments, to be able to stand so close to two people committing their lives to one another. On this night, however, it put me in a chapel, rather than in the stadium.

After leaving the reception, I navigated my car from the chapel back to my house to try to watch the second half on TV. As I drove across town, I found myself taking a detour. Bypassing the highway, I wove my way through side streets, toward Oklahoma Memorial Stadium where the game was being played. If I could not be in the game myself, I at least wanted to be as near the game as possible. I wanted to see the fireworks shoot up after an OU touchdown, to hear the muted roar of the crowd, and to see the lights shining down on the action below. It was a beautiful sight! Though I was not in the game myself, I could at least catch a glimpse of greatness.

I was thinking of this as I read 2 Timothy 3:10-17 and reflected upon many of our attitudes toward God's Word. I think many times we come to God's

Word wanting to drive by and “catch a glimpse of greatness.” We read the Scripture with the subtle feeling that the real action of the Christian life is being experienced by others. With this attitude, we read Scripture with hopes of seeing the fireworks in other people’s spiritual lives and hear the distant roar of other people’s praise of God. This way of thinking views the Scripture as a history book of other’s people’s experiences with God, and we drive out of our way on Sundays to just catch a glimpse of the action in their lives.

While the Christian Bible is certainly an accurate historical record that shows us the accounts of others encounters with God, that is not the purpose for God giving these words to us. God gives us His Word, not just to educate, but to equip. According to 3:15, He gives us His Word to make us “wise for salvation through faith in Christ” and 3:17 tells us that His Word is designed to make us “equipped for every good work.” To put this truth in our football game analogy, it is to say that God gives us His Word so that we might be “in the huddle” receiving His plays for our life, not just outside the stadium watching others live it out.

God desires that our study of His Word transform our lives. Does it transform yours? Do you come to Scripture to simply see others being “God’s man or woman” or are you receiving instruction from it on how your life is intended to go? From now on, try this. Every time you sit down to study God’s Word, do not close your Bible without answering the question, what does God want me to do based on the truth I just read. The Bible is a book designed to equip you for life, not just to entertain you with the lives of others.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend some time praising your Father that His Words are God-breathed and holy. Pray that the Holy Spirit would use His Word to teach, rebuke, and train you. Trust that He will plant His words in your heart and equip you for every good work.
2. Reread 2 Timothy 3:10-17.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant for you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

For Further Application and Group Study

For Group Discussion:

1. Paul makes a statement in 3:12 that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Based on what you have experienced and seen in the world, do you think this statement is accurate? If you are a Christian today and not experiencing direct persecution because of your faith in Christ are you necessarily doing something wrong?
2. In 3:14 Paul encourages Timothy to continue to embrace the truth of the Bible because of the testimony of those from whom Timothy first learned the Scriptures from. In what ways has God used the testimony of those you know to convince you of the truth of Christianity?
3. In 3:15-17 Paul tells Timothy (and us) several things about the Bible. What does Paul tell Timothy about the Scriptures?
4. 3:15-17 inform us that the Bible was given to us to “make us wise for salvation and to equip us for every good work. From your experience, how have you seen the Christian Bible accomplish those two purposes in your life?
5. Based on what you have read in 2 Timothy thus far, what are one or two personal applications you can employ in your life in response to what you have read?

Application Project:

Write out one paragraph stating why (or why not) you believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. If you do believe that the Bible is the Word of God, then include in your paragraph a plan you have for reading God's Word on a regular basis.

Week 7: 2 Timothy 4:1-8

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray. Remember that it is not possible to really understand God's truth unless He reveals it to you. (Reflect on 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.") Acknowledge that you cannot understand His Word by yourself, and ask God to illuminate His Truth for you today as Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-19a: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe."
2. Read the entire book of 2 Timothy. In the space below write down the things that most stand out to you about the overall feel and message of the book.

Day 3

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."
2. Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5
3. 4:1 provides a significant preface to the command Paul will give Timothy in verse 2. This preface deals with a reality that should influence Timothy's actions. What is that reality?

4. STUDY NOTE: 4:1 states that Jesus Christ was going to return to the earth to establish His Kingdom. Knowledge of Christ's return was meant to encourage Timothy toward faithfulness in ministry. Paul talks about Christ's return as His "appearing." The word "appearing" was a Roman concept that related to the arrival of a Roman Emperor as William Barclay says, "The [Roman] Emperor's appearance in any place was his "epiphaneia" ["appearing"]. Obviously when the Emperor was due to visit any place, everything was put in perfect order. The streets were swept and garnished; all work was up-to-date. The town was scoured and decorated to be fit for the epiphaneia of the Emperor. So Paul says to Timothy: 'You know what happens when any town is expecting the epiphaneia of the Emperor; you are expecting the epiphaneia of Jesus Christ. Do your work in such a way that all things will be ready whenever He appears.'"

5. Knowing that Christ is to return, Paul gives Timothy what 5 commands in 4:2? How would you summarize these commands in your own words?

6. Paul gives the command to Timothy to publicly proclaim God's Word and use it for correction, rebuking, and encouraging others. Timothy was to do this both in season and out of season (i.e. when it was natural to do so, and when it was more difficult to do so.) In your life today, when is it easiest to talk to others about God's Word (your "in season")? When is it most difficult to talk to others about God's Word (your "out of season")?

7. Our teaching of the Word is said to be done with "great patience and careful instruction." Think of an environment you are currently in where it is difficult for you to share with others God's Truth. What would sharing God's truth with great patience and careful instruction look like in that "out of season" setting?

8. According to 4:3-4, what is one of the motivators for people to endorse, teach, or follow bad doctrine? Can you think of any examples from our world today where people are "gathering around teachers who are saying what their itching ears want to hear," and that has led people to embrace bad doctrine?

9. From 2 Timothy 4:1-5, Paul gives Timothy 9 total commands. These 9 commands comprise the primary thrust of his letter. What are those 9 commands? Based on those commands, why do you think Paul wrote this letter? How would you summarize the basic intent of the message of this book in your own words?

10. Have you ever been tempted to think that the Christian life is a passive experience? Upon reading Paul's concluding summary in 4:1-5, do you still think that God's primary intent for us is to live a life of passive indifference? What changes would you like to see in your life (by the power of God's Holy Spirit) that would enable you to live more in line with Paul's commands here?

Day 4

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23,24. "This is what the Lord declares: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord." Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8
3. In 4:6, Paul offers a symbolic picture of his life. What is that symbolic picture, and what do you think he means by it?
4. The drink offering was the last offering given to God in Jewish worship. A drink would be poured out on the altar at the end of the sacrifices. Paul here seems to be saying that his life has been a sacrifice to God and it is now being "poured out" as he was awaiting his execution. As Paul awaits his death, he reflects on his life and gives a brief summary of his conclusions in 4:7. What stands out to you about the way Paul discusses the end of his life?
5. Suppose you knew you were going to die next week. Upon reflection, what three short statements would you use to characterize your life? What short statements would you like to use to characterize your life? If there is a difference between those two sets of statements, what changes do you need to make in your life to work towards your preferable outcome?

6. In 4:8, Paul describes a reward he is certain he will receive from Christ at the moment he is translated into death. As a matter of fact, Paul understands that this reward is not just for him, but for all believers. What is this reward that Paul is looking forward to? In your own words, what do you think this reward is?

7. STUDY NOTE: In Greek/Roman culture, winners of athletic contests would be rewarded with crowns or wreaths that they would wear on their heads symbolizing victory. While several views exist about the nature of crowns in heaven for Christians, I believe it is best to understand these crowns as symbolic, instead of literal. In other words, there are various things that the believer gets as a reward when they enter into eternity, but these rewards are blessings, rather than literal crowns for our heads. At least five crowns are mentioned in Scripture as rewards for Christians in eternity: the imperishable crown (1 Corinthians 9:25), the crown of rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19), the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8), the crown of life (James 1:12), and the crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4).

8. How does knowing that reward awaits you in eternity encourage you to “finish the race” of faith today?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, "Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word."
2. Read 2 Timothy 4:1-8

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Marathon Man

At mile 14 I got tired. At mile 16, my foot got a cramp that I could not shake. At that point I was quite certain that I was not in the "Happiest Place on Earth," I don't care what the brochures and signs say!

You see, in January 2008, I "ran" the Walt Disney World Marathon in Orlando, Florida with a friend. I say "ran" because the last ten miles of this race for me hardly looked like running. (Hobbling maybe, but running - no way.) The cramp in my foot forbade me from taking a full stride, and all I could do was limp toward the finish line.

It was at that point that I began to doubt the wisdom of my decision to run this race. At my now walking pace, I had plenty of time to think. At nearly 3 hours out in the Central Florida sun, I also had plenty of time to begin to hallucinate, and so a conversation broke out between two imaginary figures, one on my right shoulder, the other on my left. On my right shoulder sat Steve Prefontaine, noted Oregon runner and fitness icon. On my left sat someone who looked like me, in my recliner watching Sportscenter and eating peanuts. "You can do it Mark," Little Steve would shout out. "I want to take a nap," I would scowl back. "Oprah ran a marathon," Pre would remind me. "Shut up," was my quick retort. I guess deep down I knew Little Steve was right, Oprah had run a marathon before, so I thought I should continue on. So, I hopped along toward the finish line like James Caan looking for the front door in "Misery."

At the 26 mile mark, however, something remarkable happened. A marathon is 26.2 miles, so at that point, I only had less than a half mile to go. I looked up and saw the giant Epcot Center "ball" towering above me, and I knew the finish line was just on the other side, so I started to run. After an additional 3 hours of limping along, my legs hardly worked and I tried to pick up the pace, but with some effort, I was slowly gaining ground and at least looked like I was running.

With about a tenth of a mile left in the race, I turned a corner and saw a 100 person Gospel Choir serenading me! Now, the conversation between Little Steve and me in the easy chair . . . that was a fabrication . . . but this 100 person choir, they were the real deal. They were singing the "Hallelujah Chorus" as they swayed back and forth to the music in their white robes. Suddenly, I was a new man. I began singing with them as I literally jumped up in the air and high fived the choir director on my way by. As I turned the final corner, I saw the grandstands filled with about 2,000 spectators cheering me on. At that point, I galloped into a full blown sprint. I encouraged the crowd to "raise the roof" a la Kevin Garnett in the NBA finals. Just steps before the finish line I gave the oversized Chip and Dale chipmunk characters a full body hug before slapping Pluto's hand and crossing the finish line. Tears filled my eyes as I remembered all the training that went into that day and the relief that all that pain was now over. In the end, I was so glad to have persevered to the finish.

I tell you this story today, because in life, many get to about mile 16 and begin to "cramp up" under the stress and strain of this life. Years of illnesses, the death of loved ones, fractured relationships, financial struggles, world wars, sin struggles, addiction, and other problems have left us weary and wanting to give up. Sometimes we may even have simple conversations in our heads about the value of continuing in the Christian life. "Keep the faith," the angel on our right shoulder declares. "Give up and just entertain yourself," the red suited man on your left scowls back. Even if we do continue to walk with God in this life, sometimes we feel like we are limping towards the end.

If that is you, or if that is someone you know, then remember something: the finish line of this age is even more grand than the grandstands at Disneyworld. Revelation 19:11-21 describes for us the climactic and triumphant return of Christ at the end of the race of life. When Jesus returns, He will return with the armies of heaven riding white horses and wearing white robes . . . and it is a large army! If I thought the "Hallelujah Chorus" was impressive at the Epcot ball, how much more so will it be to see the multitude of heaven returning to earth. Far better than seeing Pluto and the chipmunks at the end, at the finish line of this age, we will see Christ Himself.

At the end of the Apostle Paul's life he says in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 that he now awaits the "crown of righteousness, which the Lord will give to him on that day." As I read this, I am struck by the fact that when Christ returns and helps us cross the finish line into His Kingdom, we will be ecstatic. I am sure that tears of joy will fill our eyes as we reflect on the fact that we have walked with Him through many years of "training" and rejoice in the fact that the pain of this life is now over.

If you are limping along in life right now, read 2 Timothy 4:6-8 again and remember the finish line that lies ahead. Knowing it is there should give us the courage to pick up our pace and carry on. In the end, we will be so happy that we have persevered.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend some time in prayer, meditating on the lasting rewards that Christ offers you as His child. Thank Him that these rewards are not monetary or perishable, but that they are eternal blessings of life, joy, and righteousness. Ask the Holy Spirit for the strength and grace to finish your race well, fully devoted to Him.
2. Reread 2 Timothy 4:1-8
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

For Further Application and Group Study

For Group Discussion:

1. Knowing that Christ is to return, Paul gives Timothy what 5 commands in 2 Timothy 4:2? How would you summarize these commands in your own words?
2. In your life, when is it the easiest to talk to other people about your faith in Christ (in season)? When is it the most difficult (out of season)?
3. What are examples you can think of from the world around you where people have gathered around themselves teachers who are saying “what their itching ears want to hear”?
4. Have you ever been tempted to think that the Christian life is a passive experience? How does 2 Timothy 4:1-5 counteract that kind of thinking? What kinds of proactive things is God leading you to do in response to what you have read?
5. How does knowing that reward awaits you in eternity encourage you to finish the race of faith today?

Application Project:

Write out your eulogy (a short reflection on your life that might be read at your funeral.) Do not write this eulogy as if you died today, but write it as if you had lived out your days fulfilling all your wildest dreams and goals in this life. As you write this out, answer the question, “How do I want my life to be remembered after I am gone.” After writing this eulogy, reflect on what changes you need to make in your life today to live the life you described in that eulogy.

Week 8: 2 Timothy 4:9-22

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray. Echo Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16-19: "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
2. Read the entire book of 2 Timothy. In the space below write down the things that most stand out to you about the overall feel and message of the book.

Day 4

1. Pray for God to reveal Himself in a new way and to use this study to purify your heart. We know that it is God “who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13), so pray that you will be “blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life” (Philippians 2:15b-16a).
2. Read 2 Timothy 4:16-22
3. Under Roman law, when a prisoner was arrested, they were given a preliminary hearing when people could come and speak on the accused's behalf. Apparently, at Paul's preliminary hearing (according to 4:16), none of the Christians in Rome came to his defense. This was probably due to the fact that the Emperor Nero had set an all out war against Christians, and the believers in Nero's hometown were afraid to speak up in Paul's defense for fear of bringing a similar fate upon themselves. Knowing this context makes Paul's statements in 4:16b even more amazing. Have you ever been hurt by your friends before when they let you down? Reflect on what Paul says in 4:16-18. How could his response here encourage you to “not hold it against” those who let you down in life?
4. We saw last week that Paul was certain of his imminent physical death. In 4:17-18, however, Paul also is certain of God's faithfulness to him in the past and God's promise concerning his future. What had the Lord done for Paul in the past and what was Paul counting on from the Lord in the future?
5. Paul would eventually be executed under Nero because of his faith in Christ. In what way is Paul's statement then true that “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack . . .”?

6. This most personal letter of Paul's ends with the mention of many people's names (from 4:9-22). Several of the names mentioned were people who had hurt Paul or abandoned the cause of Christ. However, there are many other names of faithful friends of Paul who he was cheering on from a distance. This combination of people is quite representative of our relationships in the Christian life. There will be people who will let us down, and there will be people who God uses to bless us greatly. Even the Apostle Paul had both positive and negative experiences with people. How does knowing this fact and seeing Paul's response to it encourage you as you deal with people who you know who either walk away from God or disappoint (or hurt) you?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray and thank God for His word, which is living and active in our lives. Praise Him for the power of His word as you remember Hebrews 4:12, which says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Ask God to use His word powerfully in your life today.

4. Read 2 Timothy 4:9-22

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

"Where are Your Men?"

"Where are your men?" When I graduated from the University of Oklahoma back in 1996, my good friend Todd Stewman told me that later in life, when our paths would cross, he would want to know how I would answer that question. You see, for the previous four years I had been one of Todd's "men." I had learned to study the Bible in his Bible Study. I had learned to lead my future wife by watching him interact with his wife through their engagement and early married years. I had gained a vision for God's work around the globe through his challenge to participate in summer mission trips. I learned the value of male friendship through interaction with the other men in his small group. For four years, God had used him in a significant way in my life, and Todd was trusting that the things he had entrusted to me would continue to flow through my life to others. In fact, as I was heading into ministry, Todd wanted to make sure that at every point in my life I would have some "men" I would be investing these same things in.

There were several of us who were in Todd's small group who also received the same challenge. Rob's "men" are tribal people for whom he is translating the Scriptures into their own language for the first time. Bob's "men" are his congregation at a church plant in the American heartland. My "men" are the people of Wildwood Community Church. And these are just some of the people from Todd's small group.

The reason we have all taken Todd's charge so seriously is not because we simply love him. We do love Todd, but this mission to share God's love with others goes way beyond any single person. In fact, it goes all the way to the top. Jesus Christ is on a mission in this world moving toward people. As Jesus is moving toward people, drawing them into a relationship with Himself, He is revealing truth about God to them and redeeming them from their sins. If any would believe in Him, they would experience the blessings of our Gracious God.

Jesus Christ's pursuit of humanity and His attempt to gather his "men" and "women" from all peoples is a mission that He has been on from the beginning of time. Jesus' pursuit of humanity began when humanity left the Garden of Eden. He preserved humanity in the time of Noah. He began a strategy to bless the world through the descendants of Abraham. He continued His revelation through the nation of Israel. He became incarnate in Palestine and lived and died to redeem sinful humanity. He continues to pursue mankind through the work of His Church worldwide today. And, in the future, even in the time of judgment, He will continue to pursue mankind to the very end.

As Paul concludes his letter to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:9-22, he mentions the names of many individuals. Some of the names mentioned here are Paul's "men" he had invested in throughout his life. People like John Mark, Tychicus, Crescens, Luke, Carpus, Erastus, and others. These men had scattered throughout the Roman Empire spreading the good news about Christ that Paul had entrusted to them. I can imagine Paul thinking of his men and wondering who their "men" were that they were building into. The personal nature of Paul's conclusion to this letter reminds me of Todd's statement to me in 1996 . . . "Where are your men?"

Do you want to be a part of what God is doing in this world? Do you want to have a life of eternal significance and see God use you to do amazing things? Then let me ask you a question . . . "Where are your men?" Who is it that you are sharing Christ's love with? Who is it that you are pointing toward the Savior? What Christians are you in community with that you are sharpening as "iron sharpens iron?" What non-Christians are you pursuing in an intentional way? That is the mission Christ is on in the world, and if we want to be with Him, we should join Him in this effort and allow Him to reach others through us. This does not have to be a vocational effort . . . there are "men" in every walk of life and in every neighborhood in the world. Christ is reaching out. Will we?

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Thank God for the people that He has put in your life. Ask that He would use you in their lives to encourage them and draw them closer to Christ. Reflect on the amazing truth that no matter what happens to you in this life, God will always rescue you and bring you safely to His side.
2. Reread 2 Timothy 4:9-22
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant for you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

For Further Application and Group Study

For Group Discussion:

1. Demas is said to have “loved this world.” What do you think that means? To what degree does your love of this world keep you from following Christ more deeply?
2. Do you have a friend who has disappointed you in the past, and that disappointment led to a fracturing of the friendship? If so, who is that person and is the Spirit of God using the story of John Mark and Paul to prompt you to reinitiate the friendship?
3. How does Paul’s advice regarding Alexander the metalworker influence how you act around those who have harmed you in the past because of your faith in Christ?
4. Based on what you see in 4:16-18, how can you “not hold it against” other believers when they let you down or fail to offer the help you need?

Application Project:

Write down the names of 10 people having an impact on your life right now (positive or negative.) Pray through that list as you reflect on this week’s study. If God is prompting you to alter the way you are interacting with them (based on this week’s study), then make notations beside their name and make plans to alter your interactions with them in the coming week.

Week 9: Review

Day 1

1. Thank God for the provision of His Holy Spirit, who leads us into His truth. Reflect upon Jesus' words when He told His followers, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Pray and ask God to make you sensitive to the Holy Spirit's faithful counsel and guidance. Ask Him to teach you as you look at today's study.

2. Read the entire book of 2 Timothy. In the space below write down the things that most stand out to you about the overall feel and message of the book.

Day 2

1. Take a moment to pray and consider this promise from Isaiah 55:10-11 concerning God's word: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Praise God that His word and promises are trustworthy and reliable. Continue to pray that He will use this study to accomplish His work in you.
2. Read 2 Timothy 1:1-18
3. Review weeks 1 and 2 of the study and write down the most significant insights you had from those weeks of the study.

Day 3

1. As you begin today's study, pray and ask God for wisdom as you look into His word. Remember James 1:5, which says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." Pray thankfully to God, trusting that He will generously give you wisdom as you rely on Him to reveal His truth and help you understand His word today.
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:1-26
3. Review weeks 3 and 4 of the study and write down the most significant insights you had from those weeks of the study.

Day 4

1. Take some time to pray and ask God to use His word to teach, rebuke, correct and train you, just as Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16,17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Thank God for His word and ask Him to equip you for good works today.
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:1-17
3. Review weeks 5 and 6 of the study and write down the most significant insights you had from those weeks of the study.

Day 5

1. Begin today's study with 2 Peter 1:3,4 in mind: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." Praise God for His divine power which provides us with everything we need! Ask God to remind you daily of His great and precious promises that you are learning as you read His word.
2. Read 2 Timothy 4:1-22
3. Review weeks 7 and 8 of the study and write down the most significant insights you had from those weeks of the study.

Day 6

1. Pray and thank God for revealing Himself to you through this study. Ask Him to continue to show you how to live boldly for Him, persevering in love, gentleness, and sound truth.
2. Scan over the entire book of 2 Timothy
3. What is the most significant thing you have learned from this study over the last 9 weeks?

4. Suppose someone were to ask you, "Why should I read 2 Timothy?" How would you answer this question?



