



# Imparting Faith to Daughters and Sons

*A 24-Day Devotional through the  
Apostle Paul's Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*

**BRIAN FLEWELLING**



## ***Author's Note***

These twenty-four devotionals I wrote first appeared as a single volume in the publication, *The Journey* by Bible Reading Fellowship in August of 2020 under the title *Imparting Faith to Sons and Daughters*. Minimal edits have been made from their first publication. I pray that they strengthen your love and appreciation for God and enable you to express that love more deeply to others.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Flewelling". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" and last name "Flewelling" clearly legible.

Brian Flewelling

Equipping Pastor, Petra Church



# Drifting Off Direction

## **Read 1 Timothy 1:1-11**

Every beginner goes through periods of correction and habit reformation. Bad habits so easily creep into our fitness routines, management, music techniques, and mathematical equations. They constantly need revision. We also find this in the church. The Ephesian house churches were veering off the path of sound doctrine into false doctrines (v.3); myths; genealogies (v.4); meaningless talk (v.6); and the misuse of the law (v.7-8). In our eagerness, we can easily misfocus on nonessential truths or overemphasize less critical details of the faith.

Paul calls the church back to the essentials: conforming to Jesus (v.11) and advancing God's work (v.4). This faith is recognizable by its "sound teaching" and the fruit of "love." As rigid and uncompromising as the law is, it leads us to love. Neither abandoning the law nor misusing it does the believer good. Verses 9-11 elaborate on the second half of the ten commandments: dishonoring parents, murder, adultery, theft, and perjury. ("Perverts" is the Greek word connected to the prohibition in Leviticus 18:22; 20:13).

What about you, reader? Is Jesus still the center of your life, or have you drifted off course? What about your church? Have irrelevant issues and nonessential theological conversations crowded out the

clarity of Messiah's mission? Are we fixated on having flawless ministries or captivated by Jesus? If you pursue the latter, you may build healthy ministries. If you pursue the former, you may lose sight of the centrality of Christ's beauty and spirit. Soak yourself in Biblical truths. Remain steadfast in your faith in Jesus alone.

## **REFLECT**

Are there distractions that crept into your life that may have caused you to drift from your "first love?"

## **PRAY**

*Father, give me one pure and holy passion - to know your son Jesus and make him the center of my life.*



# God Uses Ordinary People

## Read 1 Timothy 1:12-20

Some people skim past the personal details in Paul's letters, thinking they are less important than the practical instructions or brilliant theology that has helped shape Church thinking for several millennia. If that is you, I'd encourage you to reread this section with a renewed perspective.

Paul started out as a judgmental and even violent man (v.13). His personality was flawed like the rest of ours. The man wasn't important; it was his message. Paul handed over his "sound faith" to his spiritual son Timothy—a son very different from himself. Timothy seemed to possess none of the all-star attributes we look for in a church planter or overseer. He was young and timid, with perhaps a weak stomach for conflict. Of all the churches for Timothy to lead, he was in sin city-Ephesus, fighting a coalition of false teachers (v.3-7) and ringleaders: Hymenaeus and Alexander (v.20). It appears to be a rather poor fit to assign an insecure leader to a such a position that demands leadership insight and tenacity.

Paul was working with the resources and personnel he had. And isn't that the mystery and the mercy of God? God speaks his eternal and flawless word through the shabby clothes of human language. God makes friends with Nomad wanderers. He conceals his glory under a

tent made of animal skin. The Messiah, King Jesus, was laid in a farmer's feeding trough. God's messengers to nations still stink of fish and rotten money. The future salvation of all peoples, and the reputation of a perfect God, has been aligned with a damaged and disconnected people. Save your excuses; you have none. Take your little talents and invest them in the broken and unqualified people around you.

## **REFLECT**

In what ways do you think you have disqualified yourself or others around you?

## **PRAY**

*Lord, help me to look to your great strength and not at the weaknesses of myself and others.*



# The Big Picture

## **Read 1 Timothy 2:1-7**

In this section of Paul's letter, he starts to give his spiritual son practical instructions. How is this faith in Jesus lived out in Christian community? Leaders of churches know that you not only face problems of spiritual development but organizational and administrative chaos as well. It is not by accident that many pastors and church leaders have turned to Paul's letters to Timothy for advice on how to steer their communities through the choppy waters of church life. These next four chapters give very practical instructions for churches on their structure, worship, and leadership.

Paul begins by giving Timothy the heart and reasoning for his instructions. This helps Timothy understand how the detailed instructions fit into the big picture and plan. These seven verses capture the big picture. God desires for all mankind "to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (v.4)." The truth is that Jesus is the only bridge that spans the chasm between God and man (v.5). Paul is a herald of this message (v.7). We are all to cry out in prayer for our local communities and governments to find salvation in Jesus and walk in the way of peace, godliness, and holiness (v.2).

That's Paul's goal. Our worship services should reflect our Savior's peace, godliness, and holiness (2:8-15). Our leaders should emulate



the character of our Savior (3:1-16). Our personal leadership should be courageous enough to lead people to the truths of our Savior (4:1-16). And our pastoral shepherding should be empathic and discerning, just like our Savior (5:16).

## **REFLECT**

Do you have the same heart as Jesus—for the nations of the earth to come to his great salvation?

## **PRAY**

*Lord, renew my passion for your great rescue mission to save all mankind.*



# Appropriate Worship

## Read 1 Timothy 2:8-15

People seem hasty to use this passage, verse 12 in particular, to put a lid on women's public teaching ministry. But they are not so hasty to apply the same rigid interpretive standard to the other commands in this passage: men are to "lift up holy hands in prayer (everywhere)" (v.8), and women are not permitted to wear "braids," "gold," "pearls," or "expensive clothes" (v.9). Women aren't allowed to speak (v.11). And women's eternal salvation is tied to "childbearing" (v.15).

I do not mean to devalue the scripture. I simply intend to show that Paul addresses dysfunctions within a very specific church community. His intention, as we learned in our last devotional, was for the Christian community to worship in a way that is fitting to the character of Jesus.

The men in this Ephesian church acted more like snarling dogs than brothers, engaging in anger, disputing (v.8), and controversies (1:4). The women dressed more like the temple prostitutes of Artemas than in the pure and modest spirit of Jesus.

Ephesus was the home of the largest temple in the world, the greatest wonder of ancient times. The complex feminist ideas from that massive fertility cult were still worming their way into the church's

teachings. Verses 13-15 seem to be specific counterpoints to this corrupted theology.

Many scholars would suggest that Paul wasn't banning women entirely from teaching. He is asking them first to learn the gospel with a teachable spirit and not to lord over men as the feminists were doing.

This passage is delicate and should remind us to slow down and remember we are only hearing one side of the conversation. Paul is a practical theologian. He is pastoring imperfect churches with timely demands that intend to shape them toward maturity.

## **REFLECT**

Is modesty a heart issue, or has it become a legalistic dress code for you and your church?

## **PRAY**

*Father, give us humility to worship in the kind of unity that elevates one another.*



# Family Health

## **Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13**

The reason behind Paul's instructions is simple, "that you will know how the people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the (assembly) of the living God." I once tore out an exterior wall of a house that had thoroughly rotted through. There was no strength left to support any weight. In this process, I discovered the house had been built wrong. This chapter exhibits the care God takes to build his people correctly, so we don't rot and decay from the inside out. He wants to ensure our spiritual overseers are sound and load-bearing to carry the weight of kingdom responsibilities!

God is the Father of a family, not the CEO of an organization. His family contains spiritual fathers and mothers (elders) and overseers. He starts with the health and character of the parents because parents reproduce who they are.

Some people are afraid of leadership or hierarchy. They've witnessed its abuses and blemishes. The world and its leadership are rotted, self-focused, and full of ambition. Godly parents use their authority to destroy evil and set people free. Godly parents lay down their lives for the family and are the first to serve the family. The very word deacon (diakonose) is the same word used for house servants.

We are God's servants, shepherds, and the spiritual parents of his children. We are the Bride of Christ—the Church of the living God. The Bride gains nothing from worldly power. She has only her groom and his inheritance. She is united to him, one in Spirit and character. She has only the joy of laying her life down for others the way her groom has laid down his.

### **REFLECT**

If you've ever witnessed the devastation of a spiritual leader's integrity, how did that affect you?

### **PRAY**

*Lord, fill your leaders with your holy purity and the wisdom to lead well.*



# Setting Up Your Spiritual Children for Success

## **Read 1 Timothy 4:1-16**

In this beautiful chapter, we get to eavesdrop on a mentoring moment between a father in the faith and his spiritual son. Paul's crowning advice to Timothy is caught in these final words: "watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (v.16).

What a weight. Profound responsibility rests on the shepherds of God. Life and death hang in the balance. The Church is the salt that preserves the earth, and that salt is preserved by its leaders. It's not that the Church rises only to the level of her shepherds, but rather, the Church rises to maturity and power in Jesus as her shepherds teach and lead the way.

Earlier in the chapter, Paul addresses the enemies of that pure life and doctrine. Verses 3-4 seem to point to an influence of asceticism. Paul calls it for what it is: things taught by demons (v.1), godless myths, and old wives' tales (v.7). Asceticism is never based on the character of God's rich joy and abundance—only fear and abstinence.

This chapter is ultimately a treatise for Timothy to lead well. But

remember, this was a public letter read to the entire house church. Though Timothy is young, it's even more reason for his leadership to be respected by the community. And Paul's instructions to Timothy are to be taken as sound advice for the Christian Church.

Paul pumps Timothy full of nine commands in the last six verses. Most of them are to sharpen his personal leadership. The strength of the godly leader isn't in himself but in training himself and the community to sink their roots into the life of Jesus.

## **REFLECT**

Do you have a spiritual son or daughter you are currently investing in?

## **PRAY**

*May the next generation become fully mature in Jesus Christ.*



# Caring Community

## Read 1 Timothy 5:1-16

Since giving the Mosaic law four thousand years ago, the Jewish community has shouldered the legal, social, and moral responsibility to care for the most vulnerable members of their community: the widow, the poor, the orphan, and the foreigner. This demonstrates the kindness of God and the worth of human life. It has been said that you can tell the quality of a civilization by the way they treat the weakest members among them.

This section of the apostle's letter addresses an issue the Ephesian community was having in caring for its widows. Having a Jewish legal background, Paul mediates between two overlapping support systems: the family and the church. Apparently, familial laxity was causing an overload on the church community's resources. "If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family" (v.4). And "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (v.8).

After encouraging families to step up and take responsibility, Paul establishes criteria for the church to discern which women are freeloading on the system and which are deserving of care. "*The*



*younger widows...get into the habit of being idle...and also become gossips and busybodies.” Conversely, the widow should be “well known for her good deeds” (v.10).*

Caring for the disadvantaged requires compassion and discernment. Every community possesses limited resources. Practicing a blend of compassion and discernment is wise for families, churches, and even national governments.

### **REFLECT**

Is there a member of your family or community that needs special “looking after?”

### **PRAY**

*Lord, help us to care for our families and communities well.*



# A Reordered Life

## Read 1 Timothy 5:17-6:2

The Christian faith is like a plowman's yoke—it repositions the believer. You are realigned into the yoke with Jesus; he drives the plow. Everything the believer once knew, every hour and institution, is relocated with Jesus in between. Our elders and leaders are no longer the aged, but the wise and spiritually mature (5:17). Even the slave and the master are repositioned with Christ between them (6:1-3).

Yet, sin is a winter wind, always seeping into the house. We are always on alert for its infiltration, constantly sealing it out. Those who sin publicly are to be rebuked publicly (5:20). Do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure (5:22). The tree will be recognized by the fruit it produces (5:24-25). Even the accusation of sin used deceitfully is a sin and has damaging effects that must be avoided (5:19).

Paul gives his great charge in verse 21: “to keep these instructions without partiality, and do nothing with favoritism.” We all stand equal under the searching eyes of truth. The holiness of the Lord is an unquenchable fire; it's a furious and beautiful thing. No sin or sinner is granted an exception. They are all nailed gruesomely to the tree.

Some sins are obvious. Others are painted over and may remain hidden for a time. But all men's deeds, good and evil, will be exposed

in the end. We are to live with that end in mind. We are to live as though Jesus were calling the shots. He is yoked with us, rearranging all our old devotions. Only in him do our lives become well-ordered.

## **REFLECT**

Have you given Jesus permission to reprioritize anything and everything in your life?

## **PRAY**

*Lord, rearrange every part of me and make it pleasing to you.*



# Mammon— A Seductive Force

**Read 1 Timothy 6:3-10; 17-19**

Jesus warned that it's not possible to serve both God and money (Mammon). He spoke of the “cares of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth.” He gave them a name and a face—Mammon.

Mammon is a seductive force. It chokes God's kingdom out of a person, like ivy tentacles sucking the life out of a tree—grabbing your heart. Paul called it “a trap” (v.9).

Paul was following Jesus' teaching here. “The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil”—like stagnant waters collecting bacteria. He calls it harmful, a temptation, foolish, ruinous, evil, destructive, and grievous (v.9-10). Quite a list!

Jesus and Paul were both correcting the old mentality that wealth was always a sign of divine blessing. Even though it may be, it may also foster an avid appetite for the things of this world. Vacation homes; a new kitchen; the latest technology; the right tools and equipment; a new car; an updated wardrobe; your 401k—these can easily entangle us in worldly worries and fascinations. They become false affections.

The American Church is worried about many things when it should only be worried about one thing—pleasing her Groom, not herself.

We should be free from the baggage of self-interest and its contents. Paul's words are as piercing as ever: You can't take anything where you're going; nothing outside of your own skin, anyway (v.7). Contentment in Jesus should transform our sense of need and desire (v.6, 8).

Be rich in his character (6:18). We own nothing. We keep nothing. It's all a mirage, anyway—the things of this world. But Jesus—he is a treasure beyond measure. We'll still be enjoying him ten thousand years from now.

### **REFLECT**

Are you being entangled by the cares of this world?

### **PRAY**

*Lord, teach me to be fully satisfied in you.*



# Confession— The War for Truth

**Read 1 Timothy 6:11-16; 20-21**

As with a ribbon, Paul wraps his letter to Timothy back around to where he started, with a warning against godless chatter and controversial ideas (v.20). Faith, conversely, is that immovable ground you can stand on and build a life upon. You can almost hear Paul shouting as if they were in the Olympic games—fight in the good contest of faith, Timothy! Hang in there. Cling to your “good confession.”

Faith is the challenge to trust in truth. There is always rebellion against truth. There are real enemies, both physical and spiritual. At the time of Paul’s writing, Nero was impaling Christians on poles to use as torches in his gardens. Pilate stared truth in the face and disqualified it—  
“What is truth?”

“Are you then the Son of God,” Pilate asked Jesus. “You are right in saying I AM”—as in the Great I AM—was Jesus’ claim. I AM Life! I AM your very next breath. Paul says elsewhere, “From him, through him, and to him are all things.” Yet after walking into his own creation, Truth was hated and warred against by the world. He was harassed and made an exhibition to the world’s ridicule!

Paul's final doxology soars with the poetry of faith (v.15-16). Who does the world have that is like our Great I AM--the source of all that is good and beautiful? He is blinding light. Impenetrable to man's sinister confusions. Victorious over man's greatest enemies. Death has been swallowed whole. And heaven and earth will roll up like a window shade at Truth's great judgment. Cling to him! He is all there is, ever was, or ever will be. That is the believer's confession. Cling to it!

### **REFLECT**

When you talk about life, are you confessing doubt, anxiety, falsehood, and gossip? Or are you confessing hope in Jesus and his lasting peace?

### **PRAY**

*Father, let every part of my life align with your good confession.*



# The Slow Growth of Fathering and Mothering

**Read 2 Timothy 1:1-10**

Can you hear the affection and investment in Paul's voice as he opens his second letter to Timothy with "my dear son?" He continues, "Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers" (v.3). How many of us have yearned for the devotion of a spiritual father like that? How many of us are investing in our spiritual children like that? And what better gift can we leave to our children than the gift Jesus left to his Church and Paul left to his son—the gift of the Holy Spirit (v.5-7). The Spirit transforms timid sons into world-changers every time.

Timothy began his ministry career as a servant and assistant to Paul. In other letters, Paul praises Timothy as one of his most trustworthy co-workers: 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10; Philippians 2:19-23; and 1 Thessalonians 3:2,6. Despite his youthfulness, Timothy blossomed into a great minister of Jesus. Indeed, history tells us that within forty years of this letter, the entire city of Ephesus was transformed by the Christian house-church movement—a movement Timothy helped lead. It was in this very city that Timothy concluded his ministry by becoming a martyr.

True faith is imparted one relationship at a time. It changes a city one



household at a time. Our generation is fascinated with crowds, publicity, and success. But faith begins with moms, dads, and grandparents teaching their children the ways of the Lord (v.5). It is passed on through personal touch (v.6). It is a call to suffering (v.8). Parents will sacrifice immensely for their children. We must remember that true faith is slow, quiet, and often painful. But that is the hard work of raising children.

### **REFLECT**

Is there a success you are celebrating right now in your spiritual son or daughter's life?

### **PRAY**

*Lord, may our spiritual children be filled with the fullness of your power and your Holy Spirit.*



# Guarding the Good Deposit

## Read 2 Timothy 1:8-18

How much is the good news worth? Paul's answer to that question is not an intellectual one. He says he's about to pay for the gospel with his life. That's not actually correct. He's about to pay it forward so the next person can receive the gospel for free. That's the call of the herald and apostle—to pay it forward. Have you embraced that call for yourself? Paul provoked Timothy to “join me in suffering for the gospel” (v.8). You are God's messenger, God's Plan A, to reach your family and community with the news of reconciliation with God.

Paul's faith is anchored in that relationship with the Father. It has transformed him. “I know whom I have believed.” It's personal. It's relational. It's not a concept or an idea. He has entrusted his life to a person. Not just any person. To Jesus—our fierce warrior who “destroyed death.” He truly is our Lion of Judah roaring over his young. Can you visualize a lion guarding his cubs from jackals? Your life is precious to him. He is guarding you.

Two verses later, Paul tells Timothy to guard the deposit God has laid in him. It is our turn to stand watch. God puts his trust in you. It is not by your own strength you are left to stand. It is “with the help of the Holy Spirit” (v.14) and through “the power of God” (v.8). Aren't you grateful to your generous Father who is calling you to a higher life,

putting his trust in you to steward that life, and providing his power to live in that life?

### **REFLECT**

How are you actively guarding the “good deposit” within yourself and in people around you?

### **PRAY**

*Father, give me the will to protect the good deposit you’ve invested into my life.*



# The Labor and Its Fruit

## Read 2 Timothy 2:1-13

A soldier, an athlete, and a farmer each exhibit a necessary discipline that helps them accomplish their tasks (2:4-7). Paul points to these heroes of everyday life as he urges Timothy a second time to *“join with me in suffering for the gospel”* (1:8; 2:3). The lesson? Just like a farmer must put in the hard work to harvest fruit, so there is a level of suffering that makes the gospel fruitful. It’s part of the process.

Paul says, “I am chained like a criminal” for this gospel. But God’s Word is unchained. The Word is powerful. It transcends barriers. The world’s systems try to banish the Word and silence the messengers of the Word. The serpent is always lying to distort what God has said and lying in wait to swallow the children of the Truth. The focus of men is constantly being diluted by the deceitfulness of wealth and intriguing distractions. It is the messenger of God who is setting the world on fire with God’s Word. That flame burns on without him. You can shut up the man, but you can’t shut up the Word.

Here finally, is our hope: *“If we died with him we will also live with him”* (2:11). We can live in the resurrection life of Jesus. Man is a wilting flower, but the Word of God stands forever. Let us live in the joy of his resurrection life. If we invest in the suffering, we will harvest the resurrection. If we share in the hard labor, we will reap the fruit of it.

## **REFLECT**

How are you seeing the effects of your teaching and witnessing go beyond your own life to impact others?

## **PRAY**

*God, may the fire of your Word burn inside me!*



# The Direction of Traffic in Your Life

## Read 2 Timothy 2:14-26

Paul is encouraging you to point your life in a particular direction. He is saying that you should be in the habit of running away from something and also in the habit of running toward something. *“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness...”* (v.22); *“Avoid godless chatter”* (v.16); *“turn away from wickedness”* (v.19). *“Don’t have anything to do with...”* (v.23); *“Escape the trap of the devil”* (v.26).

There is a cancer eating away at the Ephesian community. Paul literally calls it a flesh eater—*“gangrene”* (v.17). This “ungodly chatter” is ruinous. Apparently, the anticipation of Jesus’ return was so urgent that the delay was causing confusion and doubt. The rumor that the resurrection had already skipped over the community gave some an excuse to sin.

As followers of Jesus, we are forming habits that distance ourselves from evil. But it’s more than that. In the past, we’ve defined holiness as everything we run away from, but we’ve forgotten that holiness is actually everything we are running towards. God says, *“Be holy, as I am holy”* (Leviticus 11:44). *“Keep reminding...”* (v.14); *“pursue righteousness...”* (v.22); *“present yourselves to God”* (v.15); *“if a man cleanses himself...he will be made holy”* (v.21).

The key is found in verse 15: *“Do your best...”* The Greek word means to “exert yourself.” Break into a sweat over it. Christ did his best. Now we do ours. But we don’t do it in our own strength. No! Remember, it is in joyful dependence on the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of power, love, and self-discipline (1:7). Like a locomotive, we just fan the engine fire and let his mighty machinery do the heavy moving.

## **REFLECT**

Are the habits in your life leading you towards Jesus, self, or the world?

## **PRAY**

*Holy Spirit, bring alignment to every one of my habits so they produce the Son’s character in me.*



# Fresh Bread

## **Read 2 Timothy 3:10-4:8**

What a beautiful gift the Lord has given us. Like a baker who bakes fresh bread daily, our God provides delicious nourishment daily for his people (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4). He nurtures like that.

Here Paul says the holy writings (graphe) are filled with God's breath (3:16). Breathe in—breathe out—breathe in. That's how often he is filling them with life. They should never be stale. Whatever season of life you are in, God's oxygen is flowing through his Word.

What is the purpose of the writings? Paul summarizes them; they lead us to Jesus (3:15). The holy writings should always be leading us to encounter the person of God. The written word should always be opening a way to the presence of the living Word. Historical studies and refined theological examinations are important and fun, but they should always lead us back to richer encounters with God.

Paul says the writings are also helpful to equip us fully. To fully equip means to fully refurbish—as in an extreme home makeover. Wow! God's Word not only leads us to Jesus, but it finishes the job of re-forming us in his character. What a beautiful gift!

Observe how Paul concludes this thought in 4:2. He doesn't say,



“Preach the holy writings.” He says, *“Preach the Word”* (Logos). The Logos is the same Greek word used to describe Jesus Christ, who creates order out of chaos, light out of darkness, and holds all things together. Christians should be declaring the living person of Jesus with his timely wisdom and grace to a broken world. It’s not just a text we declare; it’s the timeless truth that emerges from his presence and conforms our reality to his Father’s reality.

## **REFLECT**

Are you regularly hungering for and eating from God’s Word?

## **PRAY**

*Lord God, thank you for this precious gift, your Word, that leads me to encounter you.*



# The Valley of Despair

## Read 2 Timothy 4:9-22

Have you ever felt isolated and alone? Isolation is often accompanied by feelings of abandonment, betrayal, discouragement, weariness, and even doubt. In his final charge to Timothy, Paul asks his friend to come to him quickly (v.9)! Paul needs a companion. Even the strongest among us do.

*“Crescens has gone...and Titus...I sent Tychicus...Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm...At my first defense, no one came...”* (v.10-16). You can feel the ache in Paul’s words. Community is an armor that defends us from a host of evils. In our society, the enemy has stripped us of that armor one piece at a time. People feel alone—alone in their churches, in their living rooms, in their marriages, and in their professions.

Jesus knows the feeling. He was denounced by his own brothers and cast out by the Jewish community. He was publicly humiliated in front of the city. Out of the crowds of thousands who came to hear his sermons, only a few women came to hear him cry out on the cross. Every disciple except the juvenile, John, had abandoned him. Worse than all of these was the abandonment by his Father: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46).

Jesus was cast off, so we would never have to be. He walked the valley of darkness alone so we wouldn't have to. Paul said, "*the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength*" (v.17). Can you feel him today? Whatever pit you may be standing in, the Lord is standing with you. Take strength in his presence. He has promised, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

### **REFLECT**

Have you experienced the Lord's comfort in your hour of abandonment?

### **PRAY**

*Lord, rescue me from the valley of despair.*



# Titus and the Brutish Cretans

**Read Titus 1:1-5; 12-16**

Paul does a wonderful job of releasing the people around him. Titus is another example of a son (Titus 1:4) he raised in ministry. Titus was capable and resourceful enough that Paul used him in the troublesome Corinthian churches. He trusted him enough to leave him in Crete to resolve their situation. William Hendriksen has said, “Titus was consecrated, courageous, resourceful. He knew how to handle the quarrelsome Corinthians, the mendacious Cretans, and the pugnacious Dalmatians (2 Tim 4:10).”

Titus became the first gentile to be made a public precedent for Jesus-followers who would not conform to the Jewish law (Galatians 2:1-3). This differs from how Paul handled Timothy, who was considered Jewish through his mother. In order to keep the Jewish law and reach the Jewish community, Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). This goes to show how thoughtful and careful Paul was with the gospel. He uses all his resources to reach different people, but always with a measure of sensibility.

Crete was not a very influential place, nor were its people very refined. Paul quotes, “*Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons*” (v.12). Their low moral character does not diminish their need for the gospel; it heightens it. The Church is called to reach the lowest

men and make them Princes of God. It is not our job to deem who is worthy enough to be reached. Cretans were one of the tribes listed present at Pentecost (Acts 2:11). They will also be present at the great wedding feast in heaven. What seemingly unlovable, corrupt person is God asking you to reach with his love?

### **REFLECT**

Is there someone in your life that you have written off, but God is provoking you to reach out to?

### **PRAY**

*Father, give me compassion for the lowly and unworthy.*



# Precious Leadership

## Read Titus 1:5-11

It is a sacred responsibility to be an overseer of God's people. A loving shepherd is precious to God. In Titus 1:7, Paul says the overseer is doing God's work. In 1 Timothy 3:1, he calls it a noble task worthy of desire—desire for all the right reasons.

We live in a culture that desires all kinds of self-interests. Not necessarily evil, just self-invested: Soccer. Career. Gardening. Literature. Traveling. Video Games. Being an overseer is worthy of pursuit because it is not out of self-interest but others-interest.

The list of qualifications Paul gives Titus is different in specifics than his list to Timothy; however, it is similar in temperament. Both lists demand a high degree of character and self-control. Timothy's list really addresses the need for the home to be the anchor of faith and character. *"If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?"* (1 Timothy 3:5).

Our modern church circles have leaned heavily on leadership qualifications. We ask questions like, "Are they a charismatic leader? Can they build teams? Can they grow numbers of people? Do they raise funds?" We are no longer looking for church fathers and mothers. We have been looking for church enterprisers and leaders.

This shows how worldly our mentality has become. It would do us well to steer back to the Biblical concentration of developing the life of Christ within us instead of developing the enterprising talents that are noticeably absent from Paul's lists.

## **REFLECT**

Have you had positive or negative experiences with church leaders?

## **PRAY**

*God, make me a leader who gives his life for his people.*



# Cutting and Pasting God

## Read Titus 1:10-16

The Cretans, who have been a Mediterranean melting pot for as long as time, picked up pieces of Jewish myths (v.14) and tried adding them to their Greek way of life. The details are undefined. It is unlikely to have any similarity to the godless myths of 1 Timothy 4:7 or the hollow philosophy of Colossians 2:8. Perhaps the “circumcision group” is most similar to the Judaizers in Acts 15:1. In any case, Paul encourages Titus to rebuke them back to sound faith. The teachings of this circumcision group are *“disrupting whole households,”* resulting in people who are *“detestable, disobedient, and unfit.”*

We are not so different from the Cretans. We collect the parts of God that we like or that serve us. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil teaches us to maintain control. Man is always making God useful to himself. Even the highest religions become a way for man to trust himself. The serpent’s strongest craft is not to get us to deny God but to make God another useful tool in our lives. A useful God allows us to keep the things we love. Without the dethronement of self, we effectively become atheists. Paul says, *“They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him”* (v.16).

In contrast, the gospel starts with the destruction of self so that a person can be rebuilt on the solid foundation of sound doctrine: *“I*



*have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ force the termination of a person’s self-preservation, self-sufficiency, and self-trust. Only after that can we be retrained to live in unity with the life of the Holy Spirit.*

## **REFLECT**

Have you embraced the parts of Jesus’ message you like the least?

## **PRAY**

*Jesus, may every part of me be crucified with you, Christ, so that I no longer live, but you, Christ Jesus, live in me.*



# Healthy Faith

## Read Titus 2:1-10

You've probably heard people refer to the old phrase "of sound mind." A sound mind is a healthy mind. Physicians know best how to detect illnesses and nurse people back to health. They have studied how the body is designed to work, and they know the ways it is corrupted.

Paul uses the language of a health professional to refer to both the level of people's moral character and the teachings that lead to it. Four times Paul uses the phrase "*sound doctrine*" (1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:3; Titus 1:9, 2:1), once concerning life and doctrine (1 Tim 4:16), twice concerning sound teaching (1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13), twice concerning sound faith (Titus 1:13; 2:2), and once of sound speech, in Titus 2:8.

Jesus is the Great Physician. He knit us together, body and soul. He knows how our soul is designed to work. He is the perfect model for how to live life. His teachings and his example are the gold standards of spiritual health. Let us keep our eyes trained on him and our spirits connected to his Spirit.

We are to be on alert to guard our thoughts, our speech, and our teaching. Better to catch cancer in stage one than in stage four. Remember how Paul called false teachings a "flesh-rotting gangrene" in 2 Timothy 2:17? A loving shepherd and leader of his people is not

passive in the face of this cancer. Guard your heart. Guard the culture of your family conversations. Guard the teachings within the community. Life and death is in the power of the tongue.

## **REFLECT**

Are there areas you're allowing rotten speech to infiltrate your conversations?

## **PRAY**

*Lord, set a guard over my tongue, and grant me the words of life that heal.*



# Adoption. Then Parenting.

**Read Titus 2:11-3:11**

*“Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own (2:14)...He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (3:5).* Believers sometimes get confused about salvation. Is it an experience we have or a journey we take? Is it something we do, or is it something Christ has done? Is it free, or does it cost us something? YES, to all of the above!

As much as adopting a child is an event and a process, our answer is—YES! Adoptions are made official through a legal contract performed on behalf of the child. Training a child to learn the family value system is a process, a journey the child must embrace for him or herself.

As much as having our financial debts paid off by a benefactor is an event, a redemption, our answer is—YES! Learning to walk in sound financial habits that lead to ongoing financial freedom is a process.

As much as Christ redeemed us and washed us in rebirth—that is his birthday gift to us. *“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (3:5).* We have been *“justified by his grace.”* But the “purifying of himself” and the “renewing by the

Spirit.” That is his parenting process; he is making us HIS child. A child is “*careful to devote themselves to doing what is good*” (v.8). The son or daughter acts more and more like the Father with each passing day. God loves us just as we are. He is also tenderly renewing us and shaping us into his character.

## **REFLECT**

Do you trust in the Father’s great love for you, or do you feel there is something you need to do to earn his approval?

## **PRAY**

*Father, help me to rest in your love and receive it for myself.*



# The Glue That Holds Us Together

## Read Philemon 1:1-25

In this tight little letter, we see Paul trying to glue a botched relationship back together. He attempts to restore a runaway slave, Onesimus, to Philemon, a house church leader in Colossi. Paul finds a spiritual son in Onesimus, *“I appeal to you for my son (v.10)...who is my very heart (v.12)...he is very dear to me” (v.16).*

The name Onesimus—whether an actual name or just the nickname for a slave—means “useful.” Paul is basically saying, “you treated useful as if he were useless.” Isn’t it true that we often take the people closest to us for granted? We can underestimate the value of our own family members. We can downgrade the destiny of the people we are most familiar with. Perhaps we know their quirks too intimately. Maybe we aren’t listening hard enough to what God is speaking about them. Sometimes it takes a mediator or an outsider to renew our perspective, like when the angel sent Hagar back to Sarah.

It’s no accident that such a personal letter made its way into our scripture. The theme of reconciliation in relationships glows through the text like a neon sign. Paul is injecting the values of Jesus as the new adhesive. Jesus provides a radical new bond and purpose to our relationships. We need his Spirit to live in powerful peace, forgiveness, love, and unity with one another.

According to Jesus, a community in unity is proof of the power of his love. We are the billboard advertisement of how the Father and Son have loved one another and have now given that love to the world (John 17:23).

### **REFLECT**

How healthy are my relationships? Am I living in unity with those around me?

### **PRAY**

*Father, help me to express my love for you by loving everyone around me.*



# The Art of Persuasion

## Read Philemon 1:1-25

Paul is a master builder of the church. Like a carpenter, he knows how to use the many different tools in his toolbox. In Athens, he uses philosophy and argument. He brings authority and correction to the Corinthians. In Philippi, he simply sets a humble example. He mentors Timothy. To the Thessalonians, he is encouraging. To the Ephesians, he is theological. And in his letter to Philemon, Paul pulls out all the arts of persuasion.

He threatens to use his authority—*“although in Christ I could be bold and order you what to do...”* (v.8)—and effectively tells him what to do. In fact, later, he says, *“confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask”* (v.21). Nevertheless, he withdraws the force of his command and appeals to Philemon’s heart: *“I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous”* (v.14).

Three times he says, *“he is very dear to me,”* *“he is my very heart,”* and *“my son.”* Then he leverages that relational equity through comparison: *“formerly he was useless to you* (v.11)...*I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you”* (v.12).

Paul uses the power of suggestion to cue Philemon on how he should



act. He uses his relationship with Philemon to guilt him into complying. Paul offers to pay Onesimus' debt but then persuades Philemon to forgive any financial burden. It is Philemon, after all, who owes Paul his very life.

Paul is masterfully persuasive. We can rejoice that it was in the service of a worthy cause. Don't be bashful to put every good resource in your toolbox to work for the causes that please Jesus.

### **REFLECT**

Are you using all your talents and resources to please Jesus?

### **PRAY**

*Jesus, give me divine favor so that I may use relationships to build your kingdom.*



# Words with Weight

## **Read 1 Timothy 1:1-7**

These four letters of Paul are generally bundled together by scholarship and labeled as the Pastoral Epistles. You probably noticed a remarkable difference in Philemon from the first three. An even wider gap exists between these and the rest of Paul's letters addressed to the church communities.

Many scholars have attributed the differences in tone, vocabulary style, and advanced church ecclesiology to different authorship altogether. Though the letters to Timothy and Titus are certainly different from the Apostle's other letters, they do have similarities. Some themes include the importance of sound doctrine; the investment in, and character of, the church leaders; and the necessity of protecting the core of church life from cancerous beliefs and practices.

The fact that we have so much of Paul's correspondence is remarkable. One out of every five books of the Bible have been attributed to Paul. From the first moments his letters were received by the church communities, they have been embraced as foundational to helping the developing movement with its theology, structure, and ethics. There's no question why they were embraced so readily the canon of the New Testament.

Finally, the Apostle's life demonstrates the message he has carried—even to his final days of martyrdom. From Paul's life and writings, we see a passing on of a faith that is divinely revealed. It's full of truth and power. It's transformative and demands a response of obedience on our part. The beautiful thing is that all the ingredients that made the Apostle Paul and the first Church extraordinary are still available to make us extraordinary. When we choose to live in them, we will experience the fruit of them.

### **REFLECT**

What do you most appreciate about Paul's letters to his spiritual sons?

### **PRAY**

*Jesus, empower me to be a disciple who helps make other disciples.*



565 Airport Rd | New Holland, PA 17557  
717-354-5394 | [www.petra.church](http://www.petra.church)