

STUDY GUIDE

In this week's study guide, we will read the entire text of 2 Timothy, probably the last letter the apostle Paul wrote. (If you have time, read Acts 16:1-4, where we learn how Paul first met Timothy, the young man who became one of his most trusted co-workers and friends.)

Monday, January 16 – Read 2 Timothy 1:1-14. What do you learn from these verses about how Paul felt about Timothy and his family? How does Paul want Timothy to go about serving God's people? What phrases in this passage tell you that Paul is a prisoner as he writes this letter? According to verses 10-12, what gives Paul confidence in spite of his difficult circumstances?

Tuesday, January 17 – Read 2 Timothy 1:15 – 2:13 Sometimes we think being a Christian means always sounding cheerful, even if we have to be inauthentic and “put on an act” to do that. Notice Paul's honesty in this passage, both about his loneliness and sadness and about his abiding confidence that God is with him. In verses 4-6, Paul uses three different comparisons to encourage Timothy to be faithful and loyal in his ministry. Which of the metaphors—soldier, athlete, or farmer—speaks most strongly to you? What can you learn about faithfulness from each of the three? In chains himself, Paul writes that no human power can chain God's message. That you are reading Paul's letter 2000 years later shows that he was right! How have you experienced the power of God's Word in your life? From what chains of brokenness has God's power freed you?

Wednesday, January 18 – Read 2 Timothy 2:14-26. Paul makes it clear to Timothy that it's important to do the work of Bible study thoroughly and well. But in addition to good skills and accurate knowledge, Paul is also deeply concerned that we study with the right attitude, and for the right reasons. Paul says how we handle God's truth is a kind of craftsmanship, urging Timothy to do work he won't have to be ashamed of. How confident are you that you know how to handle God's Word rightly? Have you ever experienced a kind of “Bible study” that seemed to be mainly concerned with arguing about words? What do the final verses of this passage tell you about the attitude with which we study God's Word, and the purposes for which we share it?

Thursday, January 19 – Read 2 Timothy 3:1-9. In the New Testament, “last days” does not mean a distant future time, but the whole period when “the present evil age” lingers, yet God's Kingdom is also here through the grace of Jesus (Galatians 1:4). Paul wants Timothy to be realistic about evil in the world, but to face it with confidence and courage. Reading a somber passage like this one always offers us a chance to do a personal spiritual inventory. Ask yourself, “Are any of the destructive qualities named here a part of my life and character?” If so, make growing beyond those qualities a focus of your prayer today. Paul warns Timothy against those who do evil, but he does not tell Timothy to spend his energy criticizing or denouncing the evildoers. How does this fit with what you read yesterday at the end of chapter 2? Do you share Paul's confidence that evil ultimately discredits itself? Why or why not?

Friday, January 20 – Read 2 Timothy 3:10 – 4:5. In this moving passage, Paul “passes the torch” to Timothy, asking his friend, even in the face of hardship, to carry on the work of preaching the Word that Paul can no longer do. The Holy Scriptures are at the center of all true Christian ministry—they are a God-given gift to equip us for all good work. In 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Paul outlines the main roles that God's Word is meant to play. How (if at all) is the Bible playing each of these roles in your life? How can your Bible study focus more deeply on God's purposes for giving us the Bible? Like Timothy, you stand in a great line of succession—you, too, are called to a life devoted to God's purposes. How does Paul's charge to Timothy speak to your heart? Affirm the ways God has already led you to live out this charge, and offer yourself to God anew to more fully live out your calling.

Saturday, January 21. Read 2 Timothy 4:6-22 The letter ends on a deeply personal note. Paul has little time left (tradition says the Romans beheaded him), and he urges Timothy to come as quickly as possible. But even in these dire circumstances, his confidence in God rings out strongly, and he's eager to receive “the crown” God has for him. What words does Paul use to express his confidence in God's presence with him, even when nearly all human friends have deserted him? What steps can you take to build this type of all-conquering confidence in God? Facing death, Paul could calmly write the words of verse 7 to Timothy, who had journeyed with him and knew him well. Can you use those words to summarize your life? As you pray today, ask God to make these words true of you.