

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER
12 STUDIES FOR INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS
Life Guide®
BIBLE STUDIES

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Freed to Serve God

Romans 3:9–26

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+3%3A9%2680%9326&version=NLT>

⁹What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. ¹⁰As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. ¹²All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” ¹³“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” ¹⁴“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” ¹⁵“Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ruin and misery mark their ways, ¹⁷and the way of peace they do not know.” ¹⁸“There is no fear of God before their eyes.” ¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. ²¹But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

We all have a need for acceptance. In fact our self-concept is often determined by the approval or rejection of those around us, whether family, peers, business associates, fellow students or even Christian friends. We tend to do and say what we hope will win people’s favor.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What kinds of things have you done to try to earn someone’s favor? Perhaps you can recall a humorous incident from your dating life or a way you tried to gain favor with a schoolteacher.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. This tendency to try to earn favor often carries over into our relationship with God. What are some ways you have tried to earn God’s approval?

If we feel we must somehow earn God’s acceptance of us, we end up acting out of a sense of guilt. In the book of Romans, Paul expounds the doctrine of justification, the biblical foundation upon which a right relationship is built—with ourselves, with others and with God. It frees us to be all that God intends for us. *Read Romans 3:9–26.*

1. In verses 10–18 Paul cites several Old Testament passages to illustrate the fact that everyone is “under sin” (v. 9). What portrait of humanity emerges from these verses?

2. How does this compare with the way you view people?
3. How does Paul use the various parts of the body to illustrate graphically the extent and effects of sin (vv. 13–18)?
4. The terminology Paul uses in this passage comes from the Roman legal system. In this courtroom scene God is the judge who is evaluating men and women on the basis of their obedience to his law. What do verses 19–20 tell us about the nature and outcome of this trial?
5. What do verses 9–20 reveal about our moral and spiritual condition?
6. Verses 21–26 introduce several key words which help us to understand the nature of salvation. A *justified* person (v. 24) has no legal charges against him or her and is therefore *righteous* in the eyes of the law. Why is our justification remarkable in light of our spiritual and moral condition?
7. How will a proper understanding of what God has done for you in Christ affect the way you view yourself?
8. The word *redemption* (v. 24) is borrowed from the slave market. It means to buy someone out of slavery. What are some of the ways we were enslaved as non-Christians?
9. What are some of the forms of enslavement or bondage that we struggle with as Christians? How can Jesus free us in areas we continue to struggle with?
10. The expression *sacrifice of atonement* (v. 25) is taken from the Old Testament sacrificial system. The death of a sacrificial animal turned away God's wrath from the sinner. How does this imagery help us to understand and appreciate what Jesus did for us on the cross?
11. How can the fact that God has accepted and forgiven us through Christ affect our relationships with one another and with God?

Take time now to praise God for his loving and costly acceptance of us through Christ.

Now or Later

Read Romans 8:14–16. Here we see that Christ not only justifies us, that is declares us “not guilty,” but he also adopts us into his family. Adoption (another legal term) is fundamentally not a change in nature but a change in status. Reflect on the implications of your new status—not an orphan or a slave but a son or daughter.

Acknowledging Jesus as Lord

Colossians 1:15–23

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+1%3A15%20%9323&version=NLT>

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

To some, Jesus of Nazareth is a revolutionary, leading the masses in their struggle for freedom from oppression. Others see him as a staunch conservative, fully supporting and representing the status quo. Still others view Jesus as a pious, meek and mild do-gooder who loves everyone and avoids confrontation at all costs.

GROUP DISCUSSION. How did you view Jesus before you became a Christian?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How has your picture of Jesus changed? Praise God for the privilege of knowing Jesus.

What is Jesus really like? Confusion about the identity and character of Jesus was also a problem in the first century. From both inside and outside the church, distortions of the truth about Jesus and the Christian life had arisen. Against this background Paul writes to the Christians at Colossae, reminding them of who it is they follow as Lord. *Read Colossians 1:15–23.*

1. What characteristics of Jesus Christ impress you in this passage?

2. According to verse 15, “Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God” (Phillips). What are some of the difficulties we have in trying to know and relate to an invisible God?

How has Christ’s incarnation (God becoming a human being) overcome these difficulties?

3. Christ is also “the firstborn,” which means the one who is first (or Lord) over all creation (v. 15). In what ways are his lordship and supremacy indicated in verses 16–20?

4. How does this portrait of Christ enlarge your view of him?

5. According to verse 16, what is the purpose of all created things: nature, people, “rulers” and “authorities”?

How should this affect our attitude toward life including our possessions, relationships and goals?

6. Christ is also “the head of the body, the church” (v. 18). How can Christ’s authority make a visible difference in your church or fellowship group?

7. How does verse 20 help us to understand God’s overall plan and goal for the universe?

8. According to verses 21–22, what has God done to enable us to participate in his plan?

What kind of response does he expect from us (v. 23)?

9. Verse 18 summarizes the overall thrust of this passage: “So that in everything he might have the supremacy.” In what areas does Jesus not yet have first place in your life?

What steps can you take to submit these areas to his lordship?

10. How can this passage encourage you to “continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel” (v. 23)?

Spend time worshiping Jesus for who he is and/or asking God for a clearer vision of him.

Now or Later

Read Revelation 4 and 5 during the week asking God to give you a fuller picture of who Jesus is.

The Cost of Commitment

Luke 14:25–35

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+14%3A25%20%9335&version=NLT>

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

³⁴ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

Over one billion people today—almost one-fourth of the world’s population—call themselves Christians. In the first century, too, multitudes flocked to Jesus. They came for various reasons and with various expectations: to satisfy curiosity, to be healed, to sit at the feet of this eloquent and controversial rabbi or simply to go along with the crowd.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What about Jesus initially attracted you to him?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Picture yourself sitting at Jesus’ feet and learning from him. What would it be like? Journal or pray in response to our Savior who invites us to come near.

At certain times during his ministry Jesus challenged his would-be disciples with strong and sobering words about the cost of truly following him as Lord. As those who claim Jesus as our Lord, we too need to carefully weigh these words. *Read Luke 14:25–35.*

1. In verses 25–27 what does Jesus demand of those who would truly be his disciples?
2. The word *hate* (v. 26) is an obvious exaggeration for emphasis. In what sense are we to “hate” our family and even our own life?
3. A person carrying a cross in first-century Palestine was about to be executed. In this light, explain the meaning and implications of verse 27.

4. Imagine yourself building a tower (vv. 28–30). What types of costs would you need to consider before setting out to build?

What might keep you from finishing your task?

5. According to verses 31–32, what does the thoughtful king understand about battle?

6. What do these illustrations suggest about following Jesus (v. 33)?

7. Some have used verse 33 as a basis for renouncing ownership and for justifying an ascetic lifestyle or even monasticism. What is the difference between giving away everything that we have and “giving up” everything we have?

8. In New Testament times salt was used both as a preservative (to keep meat from rotting) and as a seasoning. How does this parallel our role as disciples of Jesus (vv. 34–35)?

9. How are those who do not wholeheartedly fulfill their commitment to follow Jesus like salt without saltiness?

10. Give some examples of how following Jesus could be costly for you. (Consider such areas as relationships, ambitions, finances, academics and so on.)

11. What one thing is God calling you to change today?

Pray that God would give you grace to genuinely follow Jesus as Lord.

Now or Later

Meditate on Matthew 13:44–46. What further motivation does Jesus give us here for serving him as Lord?

Resisting Temptation

Genesis 39

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+39&version=NLT>

¹ Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

² The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, ⁴ Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. ⁵ From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶ So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, ⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" ⁸ But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. ¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. ¹³ When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, ¹⁴ she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. ¹⁵ When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." ¹⁶ She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." ¹⁹ When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. ²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹ the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. ²² So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. ²³ The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Perhaps nothing so persistently plagues Christians like temptation. Abraham was tempted to lie and fear. David fell prey to sexual immorality. Paul wrestled with pride. Even Jesus faced innumerable temptations.

GROUP DISCUSSION. How would you define the word *temptation*?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Spend some time reflecting. What areas of temptation do you struggle with the most? Ask God to use this study to help you with that temptation.

In Genesis 39 we observe one man's struggle and victory over temptation. Joseph was the favored eleventh son of Jacob. His jealous brothers sold the seventeen-year-old Joseph into slavery. In Egypt he was again sold, this time to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. This passage recounts the first test for Joseph as God prepared him for the crucial role he would play in Israel's history. *Read Genesis 39.*

1. In a few words how would you describe each of the main characters in this text—Joseph, Potiphar and Potiphar's wife?
2. Imagine yourself in Joseph's situation. What mental, emotional and physical struggles might you experience?
3. How did Joseph come to be in charge of Potiphar's household (vv. 1–4)?
4. What were the results of Joseph being placed in this position (vv. 5–6)?
5. How might this position of authority, wealth and power have affected Joseph?
6. What do we learn about Joseph's character from verses 7–9?
7. What would have made this temptation from Potiphar's wife especially difficult to resist?
8. What can you learn about overcoming persistent temptation from Joseph's example in verses 7–12?
9. What price did Joseph pay for his obedience (vv. 13–20)?
10. What are the "Potiphar's wives" that persistently grab at your cloak and tempt you?

How might your refusal to succumb to them be costly?

11. What are some ways God has worked in your life to help you overcome temptation?

Spend time confessing your struggles and sins.

Now or Later

Read Ephesians 6:10–20. What additional weapons has God given us to resist temptation? What else do you learn about spiritual warfare from this passage? Ask God to protect you.

Trusting God

Genesis 22:1-19

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+22%3A1%20%80%9319&version=NLT>

¹ Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. ² Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” ³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.” ⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” ⁸ Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together. ⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. ¹² “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” ¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.” ¹⁵ The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” ¹⁹ Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

Sometimes it seems that to trust or obey God would lead to disaster. In certain instances speaking the truth, maintaining financial integrity, remaining sexually pure or faithful run counter to our basic instincts or human reasoning.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Make a list of people that you consider trustworthy. For each person you list think of an example of how you have actually put your trust in him or her. Tell the group about one of these examples.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. When is it hard for you to trust God?

Suppose God asked you to do something that seemed utterly foolish or even contrary to all that you understand God to be. How would you respond? For example, what if God asked you to kill your child? Unthinkable? Yet in Genesis 22 God places Abraham in just such a position. In this vivid and dramatic narrative, among the most beautiful in the Old Testament, we observe Abraham coming face to face with the supreme test of his faith in God. *Read Genesis 22:1–19.*

1. Describe Abraham's predicament and his response.
2. How would you feel if God asked you to give up the most important person in your life?
3. What words and phrases in verses 1–2 emphasize the extremely painful nature of God's command to Abraham?
4. Why would this command seem so incomprehensible to Abraham (see 17:15–22)?
5. List the specific ways in which Abraham demonstrates faith in verses 1–10.
6. In verses 11–18 the angel of the Lord calls out to Abraham twice. How would the angel's words and actions have deepened Abraham's faith?
7. From Abraham's example in this passage, how would you define faith?
8. How did Abraham's faith have far-reaching consequences on other people (vv. 15–18)?
9. In what ways does your faith, or lack of it, affect people around you?
10. What did Abraham learn about God from this experience?
11. What tests of faith are confronting you today?
12. How can Abraham's example encourage you to trust God more fully?

Pray that God would give you courage to trust him even when you can't fully understand what he is doing in your life.

Now or Later

Read James 1:2–5. Reflect on God's purposes in testing us.

Living Holy Lives

Ephesians 4:17–5:7

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+4%3A17%20%935%3A7&version=NLT>

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. ²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. ^{5:1} Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

For many people the word *holiness* conjures up images of a self-righteous person who is totally removed from the problems of the world, talks only about “spiritual things” and is serious and even sullen in appearance. Yet the New Testament word *holy* is used to describe God’s people in general and not a select few.

GROUP DISCUSSION. People often view pastors, priests, missionaries and full-time Christian workers as more holy than other Christians. Why do you think this is so?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How do you feel about studying holiness?

Holiness is the goal of the Christian's life and is fundamental to our witness and service in the world. Robert Murray McCheyne has rightly written that a holy person is "an awesome weapon in the hand of God." In this light, we need to recapture the biblical call to holy living. *Read Ephesians 4:17–5:7.*

1. In verses 17–19 Paul describes how the Gentiles live. How does he characterize their minds, hearts and practices?
2. How does this description compare with the world you experience every day? Explain.
3. In contrast to the non-Christians described in verses 17–19, how were the Ephesians taught to live as Christians (vv. 20–24)?
4. Putting off our old self and putting on the new is a way of describing what happens when we become Christians. How does this description shed light on the nature of conversion?
5. If you are to become like God in true righteousness and holiness (v. 24), why is it essential for you to "be made new in the attitude of your mind" (v. 23)?
6. In practical terms, what can we do to renew our minds?
7. Because of our new identity in Christ, what things must be put away, and what things ought to take their place (vv. 25–32)?
8. With each command in verses 25–32, explain the reason Paul calls us to live differently.
9. How can we imitate God and Christ in our relationships with others (5:1–2)?
10. Why is it "improper" and "out of place" for God's holy people to do the things mentioned in verses 3–4?

Which of these do you have the greatest difficulty avoiding? Explain.

11. Looking back over this passage, what different areas of our life are to be affected by holiness?
12. What type of behavior do you most need to put off and put on, and what steps can you take to change this area of your life?

Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you an increasing desire to be like Christ.

Now or Later

Read Isaiah 6 noting how Isaiah responds to the holiness of God.

Showing Compassion

Luke 10:25–37

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10%3A25%20%9337&version=NLT>

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” ²⁷ He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” ²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” ²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’” ³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

“All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” Tertullian, an early church theologian, boasted in one of his works that this statement of Jesus had become a fact. Even their enemies, writes Tertullian, marveled: “look how they love one another.”

GROUP DISCUSSION. Think of a Christian you consider compassionate. What stands out to you about that person?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Who has shown you compassion? Praise God for that person’s grace in your life.

Unfortunately the church has not always been marked by compassion and self-sacrifice. Far too often we speak of love but fail to back our words with deeds of kindness and mercy. We need to drink deeply from the simple but profound message of the story of the good Samaritan. Its familiarity has so weakened its impact that it is seen as an exception rather than the norm for the citizens of the kingdom of God. As you read this passage, imagine that you are hearing it from Jesus himself for the first time. *Read Luke 10:25–37.*

1. In your own words recount the context and the content of this parable.
2. What do you learn in verses 25–29 about the expert in the law?

3. The expert in the law quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. How do these two commands summarize the essence of what God desires in our lives?
4. In reply to the question “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus tells a story (vv. 30–35). Describe a modern-day equivalent of this incident.
5. Suggest possible reasons why the priests and Levites may have passed by on the other side.
6. What are some ways we tend to pass by those in need?
7. Describe the Samaritan’s involvement with the man from the moment he sees him (vv. 33–35).
8. Considering the racial and religious tensions that existed between Jews and Samaritans, why is the response of the Samaritan particularly surprising?
9. How have you personally been involved with people who are hurting financially, emotionally, physically or socially?
10. How does the extent of the Samaritan’s involvement compare with most attempts we make to help needy people?
11. How has the story of the good Samaritan challenged the lawyer’s understanding of “love your neighbor as yourself” (vv. 36–37)?
12. What things keep you from not only seeing but also acting in response to the needs of those around you?

How can you begin to be more of a neighbor to these people?

Pray that God would show you one person whom you can love as a neighbor this week.

Now or Later

Read Matthew 25:31–46. What light does this passage shed on the importance of living compassionately?

Serving Others

Philippians 2

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2&version=NLT>

¹ Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. ¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. ¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. ²⁵ But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. ²⁹ So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

Power. Glory. Success. Throughout human history these have captured the hearts of men and women. In the midst of a society which measures worth by position and wealth, it is no wonder

that Christians have struggled to stand for the values of the kingdom of God: humility, self-denial, gentleness, love. In the eyes of the world these are often signs of weakness rather than strength.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What images come to your mind when you hear the word *servant*? Is it positive or negative? Explain.

PERSONAL DISCUSSION. In what ways do you struggle with seeing yourself as a servant?

In stark contrast to the values of our day, Jesus came not to be served but to serve. He calls us to follow in his steps. *Read Philippians 2.*

1. What themes connect Jesus, Timothy and Epaphroditus in this passage?

2. How is verse 1 an incentive to obey Paul's commands in verse 2?

3. How do Paul's commands in verses 3–4 go against our natural tendencies?

How do they go against the spirit of our society?

4. How is Christ the supreme example of the humility and servanthood described in verses 3–4?

5. What did it cost him to be a servant (vv. 6–8)?

6. In verses 12–18 Paul exhorts the Philippians to live godly lives. In what way is he a model of servanthood for them?

7. How does Paul contrast Timothy with others (vv. 20–21)?

8. If Timothy were alive today, how might his “genuine interest” in the church's welfare be manifested in practical ways?

9. How has Epaphroditus been a servant to Paul and the Philippians (vv. 25–30)?

10. Jesus said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus demonstrated the same kind of lifestyle. What are some ways you might follow their example more fully today or this week?

How can you serve others joyfully without getting “burned out”?

Pray that God would give you grace to serve in practical ways in the coming week.

Now or Later

Read John 13:1–17. What additional insights does this passage provide?

Developing a Godly Self-Image

Exodus 3:1–15; 4:1–17

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+3%3A1%E2%80%9315%3B+4%3A1%E2%80%9317&version=NLT>

Eph. 3:1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” ⁵ “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹² And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” ¹³ Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ ‘This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.’

Eph. 4:1 Moses answered, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you?’” ² Then the Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?” “A staff,” he replied. ³ The Lord said, “Throw it on the ground.” Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. ⁴ Then the Lord said to him, “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.” So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. ⁵ “This,” said the Lord, “is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you.” ⁶ Then the Lord said, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, the skin was leprous—it had become as white as snow. ⁷ “Now put it back into your cloak,” he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.

⁸ Then the Lord said, “If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. ⁹ But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.” ¹⁰ Moses said to the Lord, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

¹¹ The Lord said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? ¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” ¹³ But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.” ¹⁴ Then the Lord’s anger burned against Moses and he said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. ¹⁶ He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. ¹⁷ But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it.”

Few people today are immune to the effects of our fragmented, impersonal and fiercely competitive society. Many of us, both inside and outside the church, have been bruised by broken families and relationships. These wounds have not only damaged our self-images but have also hindered us from responding fully to God’s love and purposes for our lives.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Why do you think so many people struggle with a poor self-image?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Bring your own self-image struggles and questions to God in prayer.

Moses, like many today, felt insignificant and inadequate. He had been raised in the courts of the king of Egypt in great wealth and with the best of education and training. But witnessing an act of unrighteousness against a fellow Jew, Moses took matters into his own hands and killed a man. As a result he was forced to flee to Midian, where he spent the next forty years herding sheep. At the beginning of Exodus 3 he is eighty years old and has accomplished very little in his life. *Read Exodus 3:1–15 and 4:1–17.*

1. Describe the setting in 3:1–3.
2. In 3:4 God calls Moses by name. What does this tell Moses about God?
3. Why does God send Moses to Pharaoh (3:7–10)?
4. In 3:11–15 Moses raises two objections against his going to Pharaoh. What do these objections reveal about Moses’ view of himself and God?
5. In what situations do you feel inadequate to do what God commands or desires?

How can God’s reply to Moses encourage you (3:12, 14–15)?

6. Moses gives his third objection in 4:1. How does God reassure him in 4:2–9?
7. What are some of the resources God has given you to accomplish his will in a difficult or fearful area?
8. In 4:10 Moses claims that he lacks the gifts to serve God effectively. How does his view of himself differ from God's perspective (4:11–12)?
9. When is it legitimate to admit that we are unqualified for an area of service, and when is it merely a faithless excuse?
10. In what way can a poor self-image become sin (4:13–17)?
11. In what areas do you allow your self-image to be determined by your emotions or by other people rather than by God and his Word? Explain.
12. According to this passage, how should our self-image be affected by our image of God?

Pray for one another's emotional healing and for grace to move forward as Moses did.

Now or Later

If you don't already, begin to keep a journal on a regular basis. Try to express in writing this week some of your feelings or struggles as you reflect on this passage.

10

Using Your Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:4–26

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3A4%20%80%9326&version=NLT>

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. ¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Tongues, prophecy, teaching, evangelism, mercy. In recent years a wide spectrum of views has developed among Christians about spiritual gifts. In *Fire in the Fireplace* Charles Hummel describes a common misconception: “Christians are often urged to inquire: ‘What is *my* gift? How can I discover and use it?’ Our culture pressures us to ask: ‘Who am I? How can I be fulfilled and realize my potential?’ ” But is this the emphasis of the New Testament’s teaching on spiritual gifts?

GROUP DISCUSSION. How does your view of yourself affect the way you interact with other Christians?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Pray that God will help you to understand your spiritual gifts.

Questions and confusion about spiritual gifts prevailed in the church at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 12–14 Paul discusses the nature, purpose and use of spiritual gifts as a corrective to the abuses which had arisen. *Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–26.*

1. In what ways can our entire body be hindered if one of its parts isn't functioning properly?
2. In verses 4–11 what do we learn about the similarities and differences among spiritual gifts?
3. What is the purpose of the gifts?
4. How does Paul respond to the misconceptions in verses 15–16?
5. How do the people described in verse 21 view themselves and those with less “spectacular” gifts?
6. In contrast to verse 21, how should we view and treat those who seem to be weaker or less honorable (vv. 22–23)?

Where do you see examples of this in your church or fellowship group?

7. Why would the “presentable parts” of the body need no special treatment (v. 24)?
8. If the more “spectacular” members of the body don't need special treatment, why are they usually the first to receive it?
9. How does this passage correct some of our misconceptions about the difference between so-called “full-time Christian workers” and everyone else?
10. Comment on your understanding of your own place in the body of Christ. For instance, do you feel inferior? Superior? Unsure of how you fit? Are you a lone ranger?
11. According to 12:7, each Christian is given gifts “for the common good” of the body. In this light, what can you be doing to build up your local church or fellowship group?

Pray that God will fill each of you with the love of Jesus as you use your spiritual gifts.

Now or Later

For further study of spiritual gifts, examine the four primary passages in Scripture where gifts are discussed: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. Each of these contributes to our overall understanding of spiritual gifts.

11

Greatness Through Humility

Mark 10:32–45

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+10%3A32%20%9345&version=NLT>

³² They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³ “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.” ³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” ³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. ³⁷ They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” ³⁸ “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” ³⁹ “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.” ⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Pride comes in all shapes and sizes. Some of us put ourselves on a pedestal from which we judge the faults of everyone else. Others are so self-effacing that they cannot take their eyes off themselves and their own inadequacies. Still others swing like a pendulum from one extreme to the other.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What is the difference between humility and a poor self-image?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Reflect on Jesus’ humility. Spend time in prayer asking God to use this study to build a little more of Jesus’ character in you.

Paul exhorts us neither to exalt nor to belittle ourselves, but rather to think of ourselves with sober judgment (Romans 12:3). In Mark 10 we see that the disciples too were constantly learning to live humbly like the Lord Jesus. *Read Mark 10:32–45.*

1. Describe the basic tension here between James and John on the one hand and Jesus on the other.

2. What does Jesus tell his disciples about what awaits him in Jerusalem (vv. 32–34)?

3. In light of this news, how is the request of James and John inappropriate (v. 35)?
4. In ways are you like James and John in this passage?
5. The words *baptism* and *cup* in verses 38–39 are sometimes used symbolically in Scripture to denote suffering. In this context, explain Jesus' reply to James and John.
6. Compare the sin of the other ten disciples with that of James and John (v. 41).
7. Have you ever felt envious or even indignant when others were honored and you were not? Explain.
8. How does Jesus contrast greatness in the world with greatness in God's kingdom (vv. 42–45)?
9. What is radical about his definition of greatness?
10. In what ways do Christians today still embrace the world's concept of greatness?
11. Give a positive example of humility in action that you've seen in your church, family or work.
12. Jesus' concept of greatness and humility could transform every area of our lives. Name one way you could begin to follow his example.

Pray that God the Holy Spirit would help you not just to do humble acts to be humble like Jesus.

Now or Later

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1–10. What does God do to keep Paul humble? What are some ways he might be doing this in your life?

Called to Persevere

2 Timothy 1:8–2:7

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Timothy+1%3A8%20%932%3A7&version=NLT>

²Timothy 1:8 So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹He 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. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. ¹²That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. ¹³What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. ¹⁵You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. ¹⁷On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. ¹⁸May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus. ²Timothy 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ²And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. ³Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. ⁵Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. ⁶The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. ⁷Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Sometimes following Jesus is more than we bargained for. We wonder why God allows bad things to happen to us while others seem to have an easy life. Sometimes we feel like simply quitting.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Have you ever felt like giving up Christianity and taking up an easier way of life? Explain.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. What aspects of Christianity feel like weighty demands or burdens to you?

As a young and timid leader, Timothy faced the dual dilemma of personal inadequacy and a problem-stricken church. If that weren't enough, Paul, his father in the faith, was in prison facing the prospect of death. His arrest evidently resulted in widespread defections from the faith. This is the last letter Paul wrote before he was executed. From his cell he challenges Timothy to endure. *Read 2 Timothy 1:8–2:7.*

1. What basic facts do we learn from this passage about Paul, Timothy and the relationship between the two?
2. Why might Timothy be ashamed to testify about the Lord or be ashamed of Paul (v. 8)?
3. After calling Timothy to suffer with him for the gospel, what specific truths does Paul focus on (1:9–10) and why?
4. How does the message of the gospel encourage you to stand firm when you are tempted to be ashamed of Christ or of another Christian?
5. What do verses 13–14 suggest about the difficulties Timothy will encounter?
6. Imagine yourself in Paul’s position—alone, imprisoned, deserted by “everyone in the province of Asia” (1:15). How do you think you would react?
7. What is distinctive about Onesiphorus (1:16–18)?
8. Against the background of Paul’s impending death and the disloyalty of the Asian church, what is the significance of Paul’s command in 2:2?
9. Reflect on the three metaphors describing the Christian life (2:3–6). How does each provide insight into the life of a disciple?
10. In each illustration, what are the consequences for the person who fails to endure?
11. In what specific ways might it cost you to endure for the sake of the gospel, both now and throughout your life?
12. Timothy was undoubtedly overwhelmed by his own inadequacy and the massive defections from the church. How would 2:1 encourage him in the face of the great task at hand? How is it an encouragement to you?

Pray for the strength and grace to persevere in any difficult circumstances you or others in your group are facing.

Now or Later

Read Hebrew 12:1–3. How is the example of faithful Christian men and women of the past an encouragement to you to persevere?¹

¹ Sterk, Andrea, and Peter Scazzero. *Christian Character: 12 Studies for Individuals or Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 1999. Print. A LifeGuide Bible Study.