

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

1 TIMOTHY

*Help for today's Christians wanting to grow
as leaders in the church.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

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NAVPRESS 

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1 Timothy

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This LIFECHANGE guide to the book of 1 Timothy is designed to give students a good overview of the first of what are known as the “pastoral epistles.” While not everyone likes the designation “pastoral epistles,”¹ it has become the accepted term to describe three short letters (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus) of instruction from the Apostle Paul to two young men who had been given great responsibility for the care of two local churches. Not only does 1 Timothy give explicit directions for basic church functions, but it also shows how an elder in the faith can instruct and motivate a younger believer to become a fine and able leader.

Objectives

Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the individual books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to each book;
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides;
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need, so that your only other reference is the Bible;
4. To help you grasp the message of each book as a whole;
5. To teach you how to let God’s Word transform you into Christ’s image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take 60 to 90 minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional ques-

tions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

Optional Application. Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

For Thought and Discussion. Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these questions, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not contain obvious answers. These questions are good for group discussions.

For Further Study. These questions include: (a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and (b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

Sometimes there is space in the margins of the study guide to jot answers to optional questions or notes from your discussion. However, you will often want more space for such notes. You can use the blank pages between lessons and at the end of the guide for notes, or you can begin a separate Bible study notebook. A separate notebook will give you plenty of room to answer optional questions, record prayer requests and answers to prayer, write notes from discussions, plan applications and record results, and describe experiences in your life that are teaching you spiritual lessons. A notebook like this can be invaluable.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

Overview and details

The study begins with an overview of 1 Timothy. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book *about*? And the key to context is purpose—what is the author’s *aim* for the whole work? In the first lesson you will lay the foundation for your study by asking yourself, “Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did he want to accomplish? What is the book about?”

Then over the next eight lessons, you will analyze successive passages in detail. You’ll interpret particular verses in light of what the whole paragraph is about, and paragraphs in light of the whole passage. You’ll consider how each passage contributes to the total message of the book. (Frequently reviewing an outline of the book will enable you to make these connections.) Then, once you understand what the passage says, you’ll apply it to your own life.

In lesson 10, you will review Paul’s major instructions to Timothy and review the whole epistle, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

Kinds of questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth *affect* my life? The wording of a question in the guide nearly always makes an interpretation itself; so you may want to observe first *before* looking at the questions.

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don't let your study become an exercise of knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God's Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, “Lord, what do You want me to see here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you remember what you have learned.

Study aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 107. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

Scripture versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the *New International Version* of the Bible. Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. While a paraphrase such as *The Message* is not suitable for study, it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

Memorizing and meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you, and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return to the passage as often as you can during the day for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

For group study

Why study in groups? Two reasons come immediately to mind: *accountability* and *support*. When each member commits to the others to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for groups of all sizes. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and business professionals' studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and mature Christians will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later any questions you find too easy or too hard.

This guide is designed to lead a group through one lesson per week, but feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later on. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each meeting for members to ask about anything that gave them trouble.

Each member should prepare for the study by writing answers for all the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, to ask about them at the next meeting, and to notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Share these tasks so that everyone will feel included and no one will feel burdened. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board (performed shower wallboard works well), so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Structuring group time

The following structure suggests one possible way to organize your discussions; feel free to adapt these suggestions in whatever way best suits your group.

Worship. Some groups like to begin with prayer and/or singing. Some pray only briefly for God's guidance at the beginning and leave extended prayer time until after the study.

Warm up. Profitable studies lay a good foundation early on for honest sharing of ideas, for getting comfortable with each other, and for encouraging a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each group member hopes to get out of your study and out of any prayer, singing, outreach, or anything else you might do together. You might also discuss what you hope to give to the group. If you have someone write down each member's hopes and expectations, you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met. You can then plan more time for prayer or decide to move more deliberately through the study.

Take some time at the outset to talk about goals. Some groups use one session to hand out study guides, introduce the study, examine the "How to Use This Study" section on pages 5-10, and discuss goals.

First impressions. You may find it helpful to discuss each member's first impressions as you progress through the study. What was most helpful? Did anything startle you? What questions do you have? What overall impression did you gain from the session?

To focus your discussion, you might ask each group member to choose one scene or teaching that was especially meaningful to him or her, and explain why. This open sharing often helps members get better acquainted.

Study. Follow the study guidelines in whatever manner best helps you to grasp the meaning of the biblical text. It should be your overall goal to gain a thorough understanding of the passage under review.

Application. The last step of Bible study is asking yourself, "What difference should this passage make in my life? How should it make me want to think or act?" Application will require time, thought, prayer, and perhaps discussion with someone else.

At times, you may find it most productive to concentrate on one specific application, giving it careful thought and prayer. At other times you may want to list the implications a passage of Scripture has for your life, and then choose one to focus on for prayer and action. Use whatever method helps you grow more obedient to God's Word.

Some possible applications for a passage: "I need to ask God for the ability and discipline to obey by His Spirit." "I need to stop . . ." "I need to ask the Holy Spirit to help me . . ." "I believe I should . . ."

As you develop applications, remember that we must cooperate with God if we are to grow spiritually; both we and God have a part to play (Philippians 2:12-13).² Effective applications must be saturated with prayer for guidance, ability, forgiveness, discipline, encouragement, and so on.

If application is unfamiliar to some group members, choose a sample paragraph from the epistle and discuss possible ways of applying it. Try to state specifically how the passage is relevant to you and how you might act in light of it. Think of responses that you might actually make, not merely ideal responses. Don't neglect prayer for ability, courage, discipline, and guidance to carry out the response you have identified!

Give the group a chance to voice any questions about the passages under

review or historical/cultural references that may puzzle them. You may decide to postpone answering some questions until you have access to appropriate information. It's a good idea to keep a list of such questions and to ask a group member to look for more information and share the answer the next time you meet. (The Study Aids found on pages 107-111 offer ideas on where to begin looking for answers.)

Wrap-up. The wrap-up is a time to bring the discussion to a focused end and to make any announcements about the next lesson or meeting. Most of the lessons in this study cover more than one chapter of the epistle; your group may decide to tackle some of these lessons in more than one session. Make sure you decide ahead of time how much of each lesson you plan to study at your next meeting.

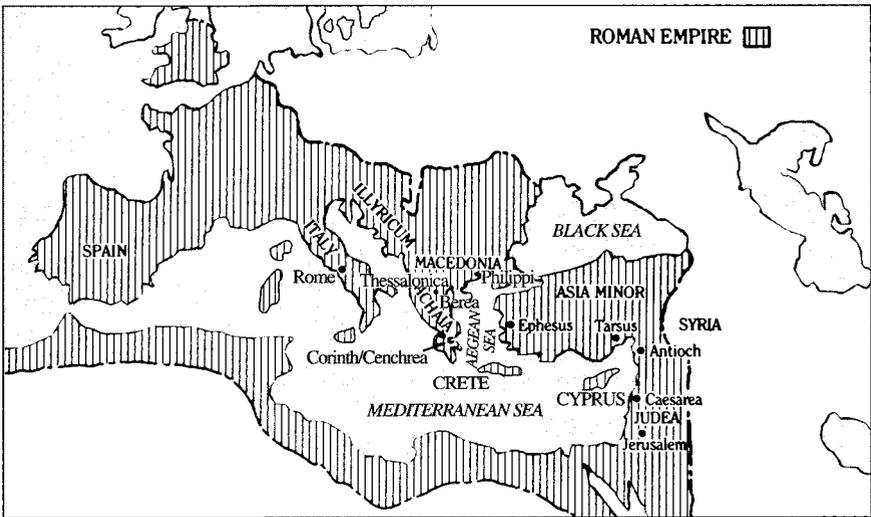
Worship. Praise God for His wisdom in giving us the teaching, principles, inspiration, and encouragement found in 1 Timothy. Praise Him for what He reveals about Himself in this book and ask Him to teach you to know, love, and obey Him throughout your study of 1 Timothy.

1. D. Edmond Hiebert, for example, prefers to use the term "Ecclesiological group" rather than "pastoral epistles" because "although the [latter] term is convenient, it is not altogether appropriate. It suits 1 Timothy and Titus quite well if the term is not used to misinterpret the position of these men [who, in Hiebert's view, were not pastors but special representatives of Paul]. It is much less suitable to 2 Timothy, which is quite largely personal. The epistles contain more than is implied in the term." D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume Two, The Pauline Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p. 307.
2. Jerry Bridges' book *The Discipline of Grace* (NavPress, 1995) examines the parts both we and God play in our spiritual growth.

BACKGROUND

The Epistle of 1 Timothy

Map of the Roman Empire



Since the early nineteenth century, the pastoral epistles—including 1 Timothy—have been more severely attacked than any of the other ten Pauline letters. Questions about their authorship and genuineness have raged since 1807 when Schleiermacher denied that Paul wrote them.¹

Author

While traditional and conservative scholarship continues to hold that Paul did in fact pen these letters that bear his name, at least four arguments are commonly raised against that possibility:²

1. *Historical*

If Paul was put to death at the end of his Roman imprisonment described at the end of Acts, as many believe, then the events recorded in the pastoral epistles cannot be made to fit within the chronology of Acts. That means that Paul could not have written these epistles.

Yet if Paul was released from his Acts imprisonment and made additional journeys—as is most likely the case—then there is nothing to bar him from writing 1 Timothy before a second and final Roman imprisonment. Clement of Rome (A.D. 95) and the Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 200) both say that Paul traveled to the extreme limit of the west, or Spain, a journey that is not recorded in Acts. And Eusebius (A.D. 326) says explicitly that Paul was taken prisoner in Rome a second time, where he wrote 2 Timothy and was then martyred.

2. *Ecclesiastical*

Some scholars claim that 1 Timothy displays a more advanced church organization than could have existed in the time of Paul. Yet when the pastorals are compared with the Epistles of Ignatius (c. A.D. 115), it becomes clear that the church organization in the former letters is far less developed than in the latter. Thus a second century date for the pastorals seems unlikely.

3. *Doctrinal*

Some authorities claim that the pastoral epistles focus on doctrinal problems which did not surface until after the death of Paul, citing especially the pastorals' emphasis on "sound doctrine" and their opposition to Gnostic ideas. Yet today it is conceded that Gnostic ideas had already invaded Judaism before Paul's day. (See the box, "Gnosticism" on page 25.)

4. *Linguistic*

The difference in style and vocabulary between the pastorals and Paul's other writings is regarded as the strongest argument against Pauline authorship. And it is true that a high percentage of the words used in the pastorals are not found elsewhere in Paul's writings. Yet it is highly probable that differences in subject matter, circumstances, and addressees can account adequately for the discrepancy. Some scholars have supposed that a secretary or scribe, perhaps Luke, was given a good deal of leeway in transcribing Paul's thoughts in these epistles. Whatever the case, there remain solid and good reasons to accept the traditional view that Paul was the author of 1 Timothy and the other two pastorals.

Date

Paul's first Roman imprisonment is usually dated anywhere from A.D. 59 to 64, while the early church without exception declares that Paul was executed by Emperor Nero (who died in June of A.D. 68). It is likely that Paul wrote 1 Timothy from Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3), sometime between A.D. 64 and 66.³

Recipient

Timothy was a young man of mixed Jewish-Greek descent whom Paul probably met on his first missionary journey as recorded in Acts 13:4–14:27. While little is said of his Greek father, Timothy’s Jewish mother and grandmother are both stated to be believers. Paul frequently referred to Timothy as his “son” (see Philippians 2:22; 1 Timothy 1:2,18; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2:1), which probably means either that he was won to Christ under the ministry of Paul (but see Acts 16:1) or that he was trained in the ministry under Paul. When the apostle saw that the young man had great promise for leadership, he had him circumcised and took him along as a younger associate.

Paul often sent Timothy on special assignments to difficult ministries—to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1-10), to Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17, 16:10-11), to Macedonia (Acts 19:22), to Philippi (Philippians 2:19-24), and to Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). While some have taken Paul’s directives to Timothy as evidence that the young man was timid and diffident, it seems unlikely that Paul would have entrusted such difficult ministries to a man who lacked courage or decisiveness. It seems more likely that Paul’s instructions are intended to encourage a young man who was facing intense opposition in Ephesus.

Background and purpose

The purpose of 1 Timothy seems clear from the third verse where Paul instructed his friend to “stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.” Paul clearly wrote 1 Timothy not only to counteract false teachings but also to encourage Timothy to stand for and proclaim the truth. The apostle also gives numerous instructions and advisories concerning various problems that either had or probably would arise in the church.

A strong Old Testament flavor fills the book. Note such phrases as “God our Savior” in 1:1 and 2:3 found nowhere else in Paul’s writings. This is also the book where Jesus Christ is flatly stated to be our only “mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5) who gave himself as a “ransom” (2:6) for us.

Yet this book is not so much theological as it is *practical*. Timothy had already been instructed in the faith; what he needed in this difficult ministry was practical guidance on how to direct the affairs of the church in such a way that it would grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. And that is just what we find in 1 Timothy.

Outline

- A. Salutation (1:1-2)
- B. Warning Against False Teachers (1:3-11)
 - 1. Warning against myths and endless genealogies (1:3-4)
 - 2. The goal of the command (1:5)

3. False teachers (1:6-7)
4. Purpose of the Law (1:8-11)
- C. The Lord's Grace to Paul (1:12-17)
 1. Abundant grace (1:12-14)
 2. Unlimited patience (1:15-16)
 3. Doxology (1:17)
- D. Paul's Charge to Timothy (1:18-20)
 1. Charge to fight the good fight (1:18-19a)
 2. Warning about shipwrecking the faith (1:19b-20)
- E. Instructions for the Church (2:1-3:16)
 1. Instruction on prayer (2:1-4,8)
 2. Jesus the Mediator (2:5-6)
 3. Paul the apostle (2:7)
 4. Women in worship (2:9-15)
 5. Qualifications of overseers (3:1-7)
 6. Qualifications of deacons (3:8-13)
 7. Conclusion and doxology (3:14-16)
- F. Instructions to Timothy (4:1-6:10,17-19)
 1. Warning against false teachings in later times (4:1-8)
 2. Hope in the living God (4:9-10)
 3. Instruction regarding church activities (4:11-16)
 4. Instruction regarding personal relationships (5:1-2)
 5. Instruction regarding widows (5:3-16)
 6. Instruction regarding elders (5:17-20)
 7. Charge to keep Paul's instructions (5:21)
 8. Instruction regarding purity (5:22)
 9. Instruction regarding personal health (5:23)
 10. Instruction regarding coming judgment (5:24)
 11. Instruction regarding slaves (6:1-2)
 12. Instruction regarding money (6:3-10)
 13. Instruction regarding the rich (6:17-19)
- G. Paul's Final Charge to Timothy
 1. Charge to keep Paul's commands (6:11-15a)
 2. Doxology (6:15b-16)
 3. Final charge and warning (6:20-21)

1. D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume Two, The Pauline Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p. 308.

2. Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 11*, Ralph Earle, "1 and 2 Timothy" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), pp. 341-343.

3. Thomas D. Lea, *The New American Commentary*, "1-2 Timothy, Titus" (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 41.

2. Repetition is a clue to the ideas an author wants to stress. What key words or phrases does Paul use over and over in this epistle?

Study Skill — Themes and Purposes

Before you study a book in detail, it is helpful to make some tentative conclusions about the book's themes and purposes. A *theme* is a main topic that recurs throughout the book, such as "the church." A *purpose* is a reason the author wrote the book, such as "to teach God's people how to operate in the church."

One reading of 1 Timothy may not give you a firm sense of Paul's main themes and purposes, but by now you probably are at least beginning to have ideas about what they may be. Don't be hesitant to express those ideas; remember, they're tentative!

3. Look especially for the following terms. Where are they found, and how are they used throughout 1 Timothy?

a. Good _____

b. Faith _____

c. Trustworthy saying _____

d. Teach _____

e. Fight _____

4. The practice of outlining often helps tremendously in obtaining a firm grasp of the flow and general content of a book. Fill in the following "skeleton" with your own chapter and verse numbers for each section, as well as appropriate titles. A more detailed outline appears on pages 13-14.

1:1-2 Salutation

1:3-11 Warning against false teachers

1:12-20 God's grace to Paul

For Thought and Discussion:

In the various epistles, Paul often talks about the Christian life as a *fight*. Why do you think he uses this image? Why not describe it in a more positive way? In what ways is it really like a fight?

2:1-14 Instructions for church worship

3:1-16 Qualifications for church leadership

4:1-6:2 Instructions to Timothy

6:3-10 Instructions about money

6:11-16 Paul's charge to Timothy

6:17-19 Instructions about the wealthy

6:20-21 Benediction

5. Note here any teachings, commands, warnings, or instructions from 1 Timothy that you want to think about this week.

Optional Application:

What do you hope to get out of this study of 1 Timothy? What one area of your life do you think it could have the most affect on?

For Thought and

Discussion: In many ways, it seems to make better sense to begin a letter with the writer's name rather than to end it that way. Do you agree? Why do you think we abandoned this ancient practice? Should we start it up again?

Optional Application:

Make a change in your prayer life this week by addressing the Lord with a title you don't normally use. Meditate on one of the titles Paul uses in 1 Timothy—or another title used elsewhere in the Bible—and consciously use this title as you pray this week. Does it give you a better perspective on the Lord? If so, how?

6. After gaining some background on 1 Timothy on pages 11-13 and after reading this epistle several times, what questions do you have about the letter or its contents? (Does anything puzzle you? Surprise you? Alarm you?) Write your questions here and refer to them as you continue this study.

Salutation (1 Timothy 1:1-2)

Like each of his thirteen epistles in the New Testament—and in keeping with the custom of the day, which was the opposite of our own—Paul begins 1 Timothy by writing his name (in Greek, *Paulos*).

7. How does Paul refer to himself in 1:1? Why do you think he does this, if in fact he is writing to a good friend? What does this imply about a larger audience for the letter?

8. How does Paul characterize Christ in 1:1? How does he describe God? How are these descriptions significant?

9. To whom does Paul address this letter in 1:2? How does Paul describe this person? How is this significant?

10. a. What kind of greeting does Paul give the recipient in 1:2? What is significant about each of the items he mentions?

For Further Study: You can learn more about Timothy by reading 2 Timothy; Acts 16:1-5; 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4-5; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10-11; 2 Corinthians 1:19; Philippians 2:19-24; 1 Thessalonians 3:2-3,6; and possibly Hebrews 13:23.

Study Skill — Summarizing the Passage
You can see whether you have understood a passage of Scripture by summarizing it in your own words. It can be helpful to write not only what the passage teaches, but also how the text relates to the main themes and purposes of the book.

For Thought and

Discussion: If you had just received this letter, what would you tell a friend about it: "Oh, I just received a letter from Paul about . . .?"

b. How does this greeting compare with those in Paul's other letters?

11. Based on what you know of 1 Timothy already, what would you say is the *purpose* of this letter?

12. What issues in your own life have been raised by your initial readings of 1 Timothy? How are you planning to address those issues in the coming week?

13. What questions do you have about 1 Timothy that you would like to explore further in your study of the book?

For the group

It's helpful to begin each session with a question that helps group members get to know each other better and connect their own experience to the passage they are going to discuss. You might begin this session by asking, "Tell us about a time when you were assigned a task that felt challenging and maybe somewhat daunting. It might be a task at work, at school when you were a child, a parenting task—anything that comes to mind. How did you feel when you set out to face that task? What helped you?"

As the group leader, you should answer the question first. You will set an example of how long and how personal answers should be. Limit your answer to a minute or less so as not to overwhelm your study time, and share something that was genuinely daunting for you but probably not the worst crisis of your life. Your goal is to invite the group to identify with Timothy's situation.

In this and later lessons, don't feel obliged to discuss every one of the numbered questions. You might choose just half a dozen that seem to promise the most lively and helpful discussion. Your goal in this session is to help the group see this letter as a whole.