



**1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, and
The Great Commission**

Path 9: Advancing the Gospel Mission

1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, and
The Great Commission

Supplemental Reading: “Master Plan of Evangelism”

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Memory Verses:

1 Thess 1:9-10, 2:8, 4:3, 4:9-10, 5:16-18

2 Tim 2:1-2, 3:16-17, 4:2

Matt 28:16-20

1 Thess, 2 Tim, and Commissions

Disciple-Makers,

The Gospel Journey is about studying the Word of God, led by the Spirit of God, in a discipleship relationship, to grow in the grace of the Gospel. The Field Guide is NOT to be taught as a Bible Study or even as the primary curriculum for the Gospel Journey. The curriculum is the Word of God, and we want there to be great freedom for those in a group to discuss what the Holy Spirit has been revealing to them in their study that week. We do not want the discussion to be limited to the content covered in the Field Guide.

With that being said, the Field Guide is an effort to prepare you for significant theological terms, concepts, and themes that will likely arise in the course of discussion in a given week of reading. Thus, we encourage you to read over the content in the Field Guide a couple times before your weekly discussion so that you are able to explain these terms, concepts, and themes faithfully and clearly as they come up. If they do not come up naturally, we'd encourage you to bring them up at some point in the discussion, as we believe they are things that a mature and equipped disciple of Christ needs to understand.

Again, our hope is that far more than what is covered in the Field Guide be brought up in discussion each week and that this tool might prepare you to explain foundational Gospel terms, concepts, and themes found in each week's reading. Ultimately the Gospel Journey is about studying the Word of God, led by the Spirit of God, in a discipleship relationship, in order to grow in the grace of the Gospel. May your journey be blessed!

The Harvest Team

Podcast

We created a Podcast as an additional resource that expands on the Field Guide while providing additional insight into the weekly reading. To access this podcast, open the podcast app on your phone and search for “The Gospel Journey.” You can also access the Podcast at: www.harvestmemphis.org/tgj-podcast.



Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Paul, Silas, and Timothy brought the gospel of Jesus Christ to a pagan metropolis called Thessalonica which was the capital of the Roman Province of Macedonia. Paul came into the city proclaiming Jesus, and many people turned from their idols to serve the living and the true God. Nevertheless, Jewish opposition arose, when they hired thugs who started a riot that abruptly ended Paul's time in Thessalonica. Most commentators believe that Paul was only there for a couple months before he had to depart. However, a small church was birthed from the preaching of the gospel, and these people became very dear to Paul's heart.

Paul continued to go on throughout Macedonia proclaiming the gospel, but when he got to Athens he became very worried about the church of Thessalonica. So, he decided to stay by himself on his journey and send Timothy to check on the church. Timothy brought back amazing news to Paul in Corinth that the church was standing steadfast in the gospel of Jesus Christ despite the widespread opposition they still faced. Therefore, Paul penned a letter of encouragement, instruction, and hope to a small church that was representing Jesus throughout the whole region of Macedonia. Most commentators believe that this was Paul's second letter that he wrote in his apostolic ministry.

Grace to You (1:1)

Paul greets the church of Thessalonica with the words “grace and peace.” The church is in the midst of severe persecution, and Paul says there is grace and peace because Christ is in their midst. He has saved them by grace alone through faith alone and has established peace between them and God. Therefore, no matter what circumstances arise, they can rejoice because of their grace and peace in Christ. We too, like the church of Thessalonica, can rejoice no matter what season of life comes our way because of our unwavering position in Christ.

Work of Faith, Labor of Love (1:3)

It is interesting to read what Paul thanks the Lord for concerning this church. He does not thank the Lord for church growth, financial gains, or safety instead he thanks the Lord for the church being distinguished by faith, love, and hope. Paul remembers this small church representing Jesus in a hostile city by faith, love, and hope which characterized their lives. The Thessalonian church unwavering commitment to Christ is something worth emulating so that God’s church might represent him well in this hostile age.

God Has Chosen You (1:4)

The doctrine of election in the Bible causes challenges and difficulties no matter what your denominational background. People throughout church history have come to many different conclusions regarding this doctrine. The Bible emphatically teaches that God is completely sovereign in all things while at the same time men are entirely responsible for their actions. We cannot fully comprehend these truths, but that does not mean we do not strive to understand even better the more difficult parts of the Bible. We are ultimately learning more about the character of God when we dive into these complex theological ideas.

Imitators of Us, Examples to the Believers (1:6-7)

As Paul imitated Christ, the believers in Thessalonica could imitate Paul; this is life-on-life discipleship. We see the fruit of the faithful discipleship because the Thessalonian Church became an example of Christ to the surrounding cities in Macedonia and Achaia in the midst of persecution. Two implications arise from this text. First, we must be diligent to disciple those who come to know Jesus Christ. Secondly, we must be able to say, “Follow me, as I follow Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). The lives we live must be consistent with God’s Word so that that younger Christians can see a great picture of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Christian Conversion (1:9)

When the gospel was proclaimed, the church responded by turning from idols, to serving the living and true God, and waiting for the Son from heaven. The converted Christian's life involves turning, serving, and waiting. The church turned from their sinful worship of dead and false idols to bow down to the true and living God. This produced a lifestyle of worship as they faithfully served him, and had an anticipation for the Second Coming of Christ. So, how can we tell if our neighbor, co-worker, or friend is a Christian? Consider their lives. Do they give evidence of turning from their sin, serving the Lord, and waiting on his Son from heaven?

Jesus Delivers Us from Wrath (1:10)

The wrath of God has become less and less popular to talk about among Christians these days. But the reality is that if Christians minimize the wrath of God then they inevitably start to minimize the cross of Christ. God the Father poured out his holy wrath on his only Son as he became the curse for the world. We do not want to take away from the suffering of Jesus by the hands of the Romans, but the agony of the wrath of God was far worse than the beating, mocking, and scorning. The weight of our guilt was transferred to Jesus Christ, and the wrath of God was poured out on his only Son. As a result, the children of God will never experience the wrath of God because Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath in their place. This is the beautiful message of the gospel.

Boldness to Declare the Gospel (2:2)

Paul had to leave in the middle of the night because of the serious legal allegations that were thrust upon him. After he departed and had not returned, the unbelievers in the city started to undermine his authority by questioning his motives. Paul immediately starts his defense by reminding the church that his coming was not empty of purpose because he brought them the gospel with boldness even in the midst of persecution. We must remember that our gospel conversations are not without purpose because Jesus Christ is being proclaimed. Let's ask the Lord to give us boldness to proclaim the good news no matter what circumstance arises.

Not to Please Men (2:3-4)

Stewardship is a word that is often quoted when a Father is teaching his teenager how to care for his or her own vehicle, but it is rarely thought of in the context of gospel proclamation. Although this verse does not explicitly say the word stewardship, Paul is speaking about the stewardship of the gospel of Jesus Christ that he has from the Father. He carefully preached the gospel, not allowing error or impurity to dilute the message. Paul knows very well that if you add or take away from the gospel, then you empty the message from its powers. Also, Paul exclaims that his motives were pure and that he did not try to deceive anyone. Instead, but

his main focus was to honor and please God, to whom he will have to give an account. The call to the stewardship of the gospel is not just for Paul the apostle, but for all Christians who have been given the message of reconciliation.

The Thessalonian Legacy (2:7-13)

Paul continues to give a defense about his conduct regarding his time with the church of Thessalonica. He reminds them of the pastoral love and care that he showed the church by using two metaphors. First, he tells the church that he was gentle among them, like a mother. Next, he reminds them that he was like a father in the way he instructed and comforted them. Paul, in giving a defense about his discipleship, shows the church that his motives were pure, and that he was sacrificing so that the church would be built up in the gospel. Even though Paul's main point is not to give an exposition on discipleship, we see an extraordinary example of discipleship in the text. Paul gave the church the gospel, which is of utmost importance, but he also gave the church his life. Biblical discipleship that produces other disciples includes both truth from God's Word, and sacrificial life transference.

What the Word of God Really Is (2:13)

The pronouns in verse thirteen are incredibly important to point out as Paul thanks the Lord for the Thessalonians' response to the gospel. "The Word of God that you received by hearing it from us has its origins from God himself." Paul shows how God has designed to save and sanctify his people by hearing the Word of God preached. Paul was confident about heralding God's gospel because the Word of truth has inherent power and authority (Rom. 1:16). Although many people we encounter when we evangelize do not believe in the Bible, that does not make it less powerful or less effective. A man denying the existence of knives would only need to be pricked by one to realize his error. Likewise, the unbeliever needs only to be pricked by the Bible to come to an understanding that it is indeed the Word of the Lord.

You Are Our Glory and Joy (2:19)

Paul recalls his abrupt departure from the church of Thessalonica and informs them of the great desire he had to return to them. He knew the church was being persecuted, and He desired to walk with them during their tough times, but Satan hindered him from coming to the church. Paul in this section gives us a unique look into the love that he had for the church of Thessalonica. John Stott says, “What Paul seems to mean, in this transport of love, is that his joy in this world and his glory in the next are tied up with the Thessalonians, whom Christ through the apostle’s ministry has so signally transformed.” The Thessalonians were his most esteemed prize, and Paul’s joy was bound up in their present and future state in Christ.

Paul's Sacrifice (3:1)

Biblical love is always accompanied by sacrifice. Paul loved this church, which showed in the great sacrifices that he made while he was in Athens. Two applications for the church arise from Paul's actions. First, we must strive to fervently love one another. That will show in the way we sacrifice for another. Secondly, we must be willing to be in uncomfortable situations for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. Yes, we look out for our interest, but in humility, we consider others as more important than ourselves (Phil. 2:4). Let us continue to sacrifice for each other as Christ sacrificed for us by dying on the cross.

God's Coworker (3:1-5)

Paul sent Timothy – God's coworker – to Thessalonica to strengthen the church and ensure that they had not shifted away from the hope of the gospel. This is the first recorded ministry that Timothy carried out on his own. Paul had been pouring into Timothy ever since he joined Paul on his second missionary journey. Paul was a spiritual father to Timothy, instructing, rebuking, and encouraging this young boy into spiritual maturity.

This method of discipleship is not just for the so-called "superstar" Christians. Jesus calls all of his followers to take part in the process of

discipleship (Matt. 28:19). Many people have trouble trying to find someone to disciple, and this struggle in many ways keeps the Christian on the sideline. Paul's strategy was simple. He found someone who was younger in the faith than him, and he gave him the gospel and his life. Let us not over-spiritualize the process of finding someone younger in the faith than us to disciple, lest we never even start the journey.

Standing Fast (3:8)

The Church of Thessalonica showed perseverance, which is the ultimate mark of true faith. Because of this, Paul can have great assurance in their salvation. Paul knows that a Christian cannot lose his salvation, but the evidence of the church continuing in their faith gives proof that they are truly born again. The important point here is that our lives give evidence of our conversion when we remain grounded and steadfast in the faith (Col. 1:20). The Christian goes on repenting and believing in Jesus throughout his whole life, thus showing that God has indeed called him or her to be born again.

Paul's Prayer for the Church (3:12)

After rejoicing over the church's faith, Paul then starts to pray for the church. Paul knows that he is dependent on the Lord for these petitions to come to fruition, so he pleads with the Sovereign Lord to bring about his request. Remarkably, Paul does not ask for the persecution to cease. Instead, he petitions God for three things in this prayer: that he would see them again, that the Lord would cause them to increase in their love for one another, and finally for their holiness.

Almost every Christian has asked the question, "How can I improve my prayer life?" A great way to strengthen one's prayer life is by praying the Bible. Every Christian desires that their prayers be glorifying to God, and there are no better words to use than God's own words in the Bible. Our prayer life will quickly become more God-centered when we start to pray through the pages of the Bible.

How You Ought to Walk (4:1)

Paul moves from talking about the past to spending the rest of the letter focusing on the church's present and future state. He starts with a call for the church's obedience to Christ's commands. It is important to note that Paul links obedience to pleasing the Lord. This obedience flows out of the church's love for Jesus. The church's love for the Lord will shine through in their obedience to the Lord, and Paul urges them to do this even more – just as they are already doing.

Many people could perceive Paul's call to more obedience as legalism, but this appeal is the farthest thing from a tactic to earn God's favor by works of righteousness. Although legalism is unbiblical, Christians are not immune to falling into the trap of trying to work for the Lord's favor. The antidote to this legalism is the recognition that delight comes before duty. We must be drawn back to loving Jesus more, and this starts to happen when we remember the love that God has for us. Our delight in Jesus will then overflow into the motivation to walk in obedience to him.

What is God's Will for My Life? (4:3)

Paul, in verse three, is speaking about God's revealed will for the church of Thessalonica: their sanctification. The Lord's will for your life is your holiness. He explicitly commands that they stay away from sexual immorality. Later in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul uses the same language, exclaiming that rejoicing always, praying constantly, and giving thanks in everything is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. The Church of Thessalonica does not have to wait for a writing in the clouds to understand the will of God because Paul has clearly and concisely explained God's revealed will for their lives.

The question – “What is God's will for my life?” – comes up frequently in our discipleship relationships. The Bible talks about God's will in two ways. First, God's will of decree, his secret will that he alone has ordained (Deut. 29:29). Second, the Bible talks about God's will of precept, or his revealed will, which is God's commands (Deut. 29:29). Those are the only ways that the Bible speaks about God's will. But when Christians ask about God's will for their life, they are usually referring to guidance for a specific decision. This includes questions like “what job should I take?” or “Whom should I marry?” In his grace, God gives the Christian much freedom in making decisions such as these, so that Christians can spend more time and energy thinking about God's revealed will.

Sexual Purity (4:4-5)

God has designed sex to be enjoyed inside of the confines of marriage. Paul warns the church to keep away from sexual immorality, and then gives them a great charge in verse four. John Stott says the first half of verse four is the most difficult phrase to translate in the letter. Paul is either exhorting the church to take one wife for themselves or exhorting everyone to control their own body. It seems by the context that Paul is referring to the latter. He is charging the men of the church to take one wife and be faithful to that one wife. In that heterosexual marriage alone, sex can flourish.

Living a Quiet Life in Christ (4:10-12)

Paul encouraged the church to continue to love one another and to be financially self-supportive by working with their hands. Either the Thessalonians were confused about the coming of Christ, or many of the church members were dependent on wealthier Christians for their essential needs. Paul states that being financially independent shows love for one another. He does this by showing particular manifestations of brotherly love: live a quiet life, mind your own business, and work with your hands. Paul wants the church to represent Jesus well to outsiders, and not to be a burden for those inside of the church (4:12).

The Coming of the Lord (4:13-18)

Here, Paul answers the first question that the Thessalonians had concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The church was concerned about members who died before Jesus' Second Coming. Would they miss out on being with Jesus? Paul assures them in this passage that they will not miss out on eternal life, and that they will be with Jesus forever. Thus, their grieving looks radically different from the world because of the hope they have in Christ Jesus.

Paul reassures the church that Jesus' Second Coming will certainly bring salvation for both the Christ follower who is asleep – which means they have died – and the one who is alive at his return. This passage is incredibly encouraging for those who have lost Christ-following friends or family. We grieve that they are no longer here on earth, but simultaneously we rejoice knowing they will be with the Lord forever. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the hope that produces this rejoicing in the midst of our mourning.

The Day of the Lord (5:1-2)

The Thessalonians were greatly confused about the Second Coming of Christ. They thought if they understood the exact time of Christ's coming, then they would be more prepared. We see this in 2 Thes. 2:5. Concerning the Day of Lord, Paul said, "Don't you remember when I was still with you, I used to tell you about this?" Paul had already instructed them on the Second Coming of Christ, but there was still a lot of confusion concerning this day. The Day of the Lord is a day that is prophesied in both the Old and New Testament. The Day of the Lord is the day when Jesus will come back not to die but to reign. It is a day that will bring judgment to the unbeliever and salvation to the believer. (See also Isa. 13:6, Ezek. 13:5; 30:3, Joel 1:15, 2:11, 3:14, Amos 15:18, 20, Zech. 14:1-21, Mal. 4:5, and Acts 2:20).

Delivered, so Live Distinctive (5:4-8)

Paul explains to an anxious congregation that the Day of the Lord will not surprise them like those who are in the darkness. The Church of Thessalonica had been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of his beloved son (Col. 1:13). Paul reminds them of their position in Christ, and then urges them to live a life glorifying to God in

light of Christ's Second Coming. Paul explains that living a life that is self-controlled, alert, and awake is the right preparation for that great Day.

God Has Not Destined Us for Wrath (5:9-10)

Paul reminds the church of Thessalonica about their destiny concerning the Day of the Lord. Paul proclaims that they were not appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Why will the Thessalonians not suffer God's wrath? Jesus Christ was the substitute and sacrifice, taking on the wrath of God and dying on the cross. Paul goes on to say in verse 10, "...so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him." The only way Christians can live together with Christ is if he has been resurrected from the dead, and is alive sitting at the right hand of the Father. Paul knows this to be true, and he is telling the church that Jesus is alive! Our hope is in the risen Christ, and he surely is coming back for his bride, who will be fully and finally cleaned by the blood of the lamb.

Therefore, Encourage One Another (5:11)

In light of verses 9 and 10, we must prioritize our time to build up and support the members of the church. Paul shows the responsibility that each individual member has the others, and that the goal is to build one another up into maturity. The Lord has not called Christians to live life isolated from others, but he designed the church for every member to build one another up and encourage one another. The Lord has given each member certain gifts that he or she can use to serve the body. We must be reminded of Paul's exhortation frequently, lest we fall back into a self-centered mentality, thinking that church is all about our own individual needs.

Respect Your Elders (5:12-13)

Paul urges a young congregation to respect the elders that are laboring among them. God gives elders of the church as a gracious gift to be under-shepherds of the flock that Christ purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28). Paul is calling the members of the church to respect, appreciate, and esteem the elders for their work in leading the congregation. We too, as members of a local church, must honor our elders well. We must constantly pray for them as they lead in protecting the church from error and impurity. We must serve them in whatever we can so that they may be freed up to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4).

Introduction to 2 Timothy

The letter labeled “2 Timothy” in our Bible is the apostle Paul’s final letter before his death. Not only that, it is the final letter to his most trusted disciple, Timothy. As such, this letter contains some of the most stirring and personal elements of any of the Pauline epistles. Paul wrote from a prison-dungeon in Rome in an effort to see the gospel ministry and work continue through Timothy long after he was gone. One helpful outline, from John Stott, considers the letter according to its four individual chapters as such: 1) Guard the Gospel. 2) Suffer for the Gospel. 3) Continue in the Gospel. 4) Proclaim the Gospel. These are the four charges Paul offers to Timothy – and to us – throughout the letter.

In his letter, Paul not only tells Timothy what he is to be doing – advancing the gospel mission – but the means by which he will be able to do this and the manner in which he must conduct himself throughout the mission. First, Timothy is to pass on the gospel truth which he has received from Paul. For Paul, Timothy will be the disciple to carry on the work after he is gone. Now, Timothy will need to find faithful men who advance the gospel mission with and after him. Second, the means by which he will teach and disciple others is the Word of God. Over and over again, Paul is clear that the answer to false teaching, and godlessness, and those who have turned from the truth is God’s Word. Timothy must hold tightly to what the Word teaches and

deliver it to others just as it is. Third, in doing this, Timothy must conduct himself in a certain manner as well. Disciples of Christ are to be gentle and respectful, patiently enduring evil and falsehood even as they offer correction and rebuke.

The Promise of Life (1:1)

In light of its content, the opening of this letter is especially significant. Paul reveals both his great hope and the reason for his writing in the same sentence. In Christ, Christians have “the promise of life” from God. That is, our sins have been forgiven because of Jesus’ perfect life and sacrificial death. Believers receive the saving benefit of eternal life. This great spiritual blessing begins now and stretches forward into eternity. The gift of life is available only in Christ, and it is promised by God and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit.

God Uses Family to Spark Faith (1:5)

This particular verse highlights a fascinating element of Timothy’s testimony. That which “dwelt first in [his] grandmother Lois and [his] mother Eunice,” Timothy now carries forward as his own. This same “sincere faith” now belongs to Timothy. A couple of things are remarkable about this. First, God uses the family to create faith people, which is a truth that motivates us to intentionally consider how we might disciple both our own children and the other children in our church family. While we sometimes consider lightly the testimony of one who has not lived in debauchery and rebellion before coming to Christ, Timothy’s testimony is much more akin to the one who professes faith at a young age

and keeps believing into adulthood. And what a testimony of God's persevering grace that is! Second, for Timothy to become a Christian, he must not merely be descended from Lois and Eunice. Timothy must make the faith his own. Timothy must repent of his sins and believe in Jesus. On the last day, no one will be saved upon the faith of another. Therefore, we must encourage students and children to repent and believe.

Fan into Flame the Gift of God (1:6)

What Timothy has grown up in he must now continue to grow in. The “gift of God” which Paul exhorts Timothy to “fan into flame” is, at least in part, the gift of faith – the faith that was just discussed in the previous verse. Now, Timothy must, by God's grace, cultivate that gift of faith. Timothy must continue to repent of his sins and believe the promises of God, trusting that the same Christ who justified him will also sanctify him. One practical element of our effort toward our own sanctification is fighting for gospel affections. Like Timothy, we must consider the gospel and ask God to stir our hearts toward what he loves and commands.

Suffering for the Gospel (1:8)

In one important sense, Paul points Timothy toward suffering. For Christians, suffering is inevitable. But it is not without reason. We must note Paul's reason for Christian suffering – it is “for the sake of the gospel.” Sharing “the testimony about our Lord” will most assuredly endanger us and put us at risk. Christians will only be able to endure this suffering “by the power of God.” The clearest demonstration of this promise is the incarnation and life of Christ, where God the Son became incarnate for us and for our salvation. Jesus assured his disciples that he must suffer for our sake (Luke 24:26).

Guard the Good Deposit (1:9, 1:12, 1:14)

To put it simply, we could say the “good deposit” is the gospel. God’s grace in Christ (v. 9) has been given to us and produced faith in us (v. 5). Now, the Christian task is to guard that deposit. Specifically, we must be gospel fluent with ever-increasing gospel clarity. This message from God must not be distorted or changed, even if subtly. Notice, too, that Timothy’s – and our – work of guarding the gospel is also a triune work of God. The Father gifts the gift. The Son protects the gift (v. 12). The Spirit empowers the guarding of the gift (v. 14). We must always work hard at sticking closely to God’s truth. Tragically, some have not been faithful in guarding the good deposit, as we see in the examples of Phygelus and Hermogenes (v. 15), and we should expect others will not either. This fact both warns and encourages us toward greater and greater faithfulness.

Teach Others (2:1-2)

One main emphasis of the apostle Paul is discipleship and reteaching. In these two verses, we find a sort of “Great Commission according to Paul.” The first thing we must note is that unless Christians are first “strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,” no disciples will be made. That being the necessary prerequisite, Paul highlights in verse 2 that the faithfulness of one person can spread and multiply through four generations. The key, of course, is the faithfulness of those doing the teaching and reteaching. If we are to advance the gospel mission, we must select and associate with “faithful” people who will “be able to teach others also.” Each Christian is involved in this task of discipleship. It is not merely a job for pastors and church leaders or some sort of Christian elite. Rather, all of us are to ask God for help in the task of making more and more faithful disciples of Christ.

Soldier, Athlete, Farmer (2:3-6)

Here Paul gives us three vibrant metaphors for the Christian life. Like soldiers, Christians must endure suffering and keep focused on the task of advancing the gospel mission at hand. Practically speaking, this means there are some things in “ordinary” life which we will need to give up in order to follow Christ. While the world is entangled in “civilian pursuits,” Christians cannot be. Like athletes, Christ followers are to follow his commands. We are not to engage in sly tactics or schemes in an attempt to win converts. Rather, we must be people of truth as those who follow the One who is the Truth. Like farmers, Christians must endure until the very end when it is time for the harvest. On the last Day, when Christ returns, it will be time to receive our reward; for now, we continue to fight hard and strive after the gospel mission. Finally, we need to do as Paul says: “think over what I say.” Each of these metaphors deserves full consideration for the sake of Christian maturation. The Lord will grant understanding as we engage in thinking deeply as a means of grace.

Denying Jesus (2:11-13)

These few verses are set in a poetic form in many English translations. This format is likely because the content of these verses formed an early Christian creed or hymn, which was repeated for learning together and shaping our view of the world. Some modern readers may come to the words about denying Jesus and panic about “losing their salvation.” However, Paul’s intent was not to cause inordinate fear or doubt. This is clear from a few things. First, the pattern of someone appearing to be a Christian without actually being one is a persistent theme in the New Testament (see John 15, Hebrews 6, etc.). Second, these reminders are meant to motivate us to faithfulness and careful examination of our professions of faith and our lives. We must take the warning seriously, remembering the final verse of the passage – even when “we are faithless, [Jesus] remains faithful.” Thus, “denying Jesus” is more likely a consistent pattern of unrepentant sin in one’s life, not a one-time act of disobedience.

A Reminder of Truth (2:14)

Notice Paul's regular practice of encouraging the believers through the reminder of something they already know (see also 2 Tim. 2:8). Often, we do not need some new teaching, but a fresh application of the ancient truths of God's Word. Much of Christian growth is the preaching of the gospel to ourselves and to each other. We must remind ourselves of who we are in terms of creation, fall, and redemption. God created us in his image to glorify him. Yet, we have transgressed his standard of righteousness. In his great love, Jesus accomplished salvation on the Cross. By doing so, Jesus restores us to his own image, so that now we can glorify God.

God Grants Repentance (2:25)

Verses 24 and 25 of 2 Timothy 2 are great memory verses about how each Christian is to be in action and attitude. In this passage, we are told that God grants repentance (see also Phil. 1:29). It even appears this is entirely God's prerogative. This may be viewed as a hard teaching, given its implications for our responsibility. We can and should pray that God would change us to be more like him – to think his thoughts after him. The important point here, however, is that repentance and reconciliation is the hope of every conversation we have. God often uses the means of a gentle and kind spirit to bring about that intended end.

The Last Days (3:1)

Biblically considered, the last days have begun, and we are currently living in them (1 John 2:18). The apostles, and here specifically, Paul, use this language to talk about the time between Jesus' first and second coming – a long period in which Jesus reigns as king and the Father subdues his enemies (1 Cor. 15:20-28). After completing his mission on earth, Jesus ascended and now sits on the throne which he inherited (Phil. 2:5-11). The way in which Jesus rules is most remarkable. At present, God is defeating his enemies spiritually by converting them into his sons and daughters (Rom. 5:10). One day, God will defeat his remaining enemies physically at the Second Coming (Rev. 19:11-21). This tension between the “already” and the “not yet” is the central tension of a biblical study of the end times.

Vice Lists (3:2-7)

The list of sinful attitudes and actions in this passage can be very instructive for us. First, we must recall that sin is the breaking of God's law. Second, we can actively pray through these lists asking God to cultivate the opposite, godly virtues in us and our Christian brothers and sisters. Other "vice lists" in the New Testament include Romans 1:28-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and Galatians 5:16-21, and you will likely notice significant overlap in them. The most important point here is that Christians are no longer characterized by the items in these lists.

Jannes and Jambres (3:8)

In Jewish tradition around this time, the names Jannes and Jambres became associated with the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses in the court of Pharaoh (Ex. 7:11-12). More interestingly in this passage, Paul seems to be putting himself and his teaching on the same level as Moses and the Law.

Our Ultimate Authority (3:14-17)

It is incredibly significant that in the dark times of these last days, Paul tells Timothy – and us – to go to Scripture as our ultimate authority. Notice that Paul does not point to a Roman bishop, elders of the church, the state government, or the heart of the individual as “God-breathed.” Only that which is God-breathed can be ultimately authoritative. In other words, only Scripture has God as its origin, and so it deserves a uniquely authoritative and unquestioned status for the Christian. This does not mean the Christian does not have any other authoritative sources of information and guidance, but it does mean that there is nothing equal to or over Scripture.

The Sufficiency of Scripture (3:16-17)

Along with what Scripture is (see the previous paragraph), we must also observe what Scripture does. The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments have divine origin, and as such, these Scriptures are the only thing that every Christian needs in order to know and please God. As Paul says, through Scripture the man (or woman) of God is “complete” and “equipped for every good work.” This means there is no “good work” which Scripture cannot equip us to do. Praise God that he has given us his wisdom in his word!

Preach the Word (4:2)

Following Paul's comments about what Scripture is and what it does, he begins to talk about how we must use Scripture in our lives. This counsel to "preach the Word" is not just for pastors. We must preach the Word to ourselves and to each other. We must always be bringing God's Word to bear on the issues of our lives so that we can grow more and more like Christ.

Fight the Good Fight (4:7-8)

In this admonition, the Christian life is pictured as battle or warfare. And we know that we are engaged in spiritual conflict with powers and principalities (2 Cor 10:4-7, Eph 6:10-20). While we fight, we must remember that the prize is worth it. Perseverance in faith is the distinctive mark of the Christian. Looking at examples who have gone before us can significantly aid our journey (Heb 11:40). This is one reason many Christians have found reading biographies of saints from church history to be of great spiritual benefit. Yet, the greatest example of persevering faith is Jesus himself (Heb 12:1-2). Like Christ, we must continue to believe God's Word until the day when we see him face to face. The race is not over until that Day.

The Sad Story and Solemn Warning of Demas' Life (4:10)

One tragic example of failing to persevere in the faith comes to us in the story of Demas. We do not know much about this man. We do know that he is mentioned earlier in Paul's life as a "fellow worker" in the gospel (Phlm. 1:24) and again alongside Luke (Col. 4:14). Yet, somewhere along the way, Demas showed himself to be someone other than what he appeared to be (see also 1 John 2:19). Demas' particular story is one of being "in love with this present world." As a result of an inordinate love for the world, Demas left the faith and departed from Paul and Luke. The example of Demas stands as a warning to continue in persevering faith until the last Day. We must be careful not to let the things of the world allure us away from Christ.

Mark: A Beautiful Story of Reconciliation (4:11)

Like Demas, this Mark is also mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. But this time, the story is a happy one. Mark was also called John, or John Mark (Acts 12:12, 12:25). Yet, he is also a “fellow worker” in the gospel with Paul (Phlm. 1:24). However, on the first missionary journey of Paul, John Mark departed ways over some dispute (Acts 15:37-40). Joyfully, though, somewhere along the way, Paul and John Mark found reconciliation in the shared cause of advancing the gospel mission. In 2 Timothy 4:11, at the end of Paul’s life, we see him summoning once again for John Mark. This is a tale of gospel reconciliation and it is the goal of all Christian disputes.

The Lord will Repay (4:14)

This ominous warning is a reminder of twin realities. While Christians do seek to live justly and bring about justice in society where possible, we know that perfect justice exists only in the hands of God at the final judgment. Because of this, Christians are not to seek vengeance for themselves (Rom 12:19). Finally, we conclude with Paul in verses 17 and 18 that the Lord will use all evil, injustice, and suffering that we and others endure for his eternal and self-glorifying purposes. The gospel mission will advance, even in the face of great injustice. In fact, it is the greatest injustice of all time – the crucifixion of the only innocent Man ever – that we go on to proclaim as the only way of salvation from sin until he returns.

The Great Commission in the Gospels and Acts

Advancing the gospel mission is the central command and organizing principle of the New Testament. This is why Jesus came and why the apostles worked so hard. That said, pay particular attention to the nuances of each passage to bring out the emphasis in each. We will reap much spiritual benefit by doing so, even as the charge to make disciples of all nations remains the same. We must go and proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ died for sinners!

A Practical Way to Share the Gospel

One practical way to share the gospel is the fourfold paradigm of God-man-Christ-response. In the first point, God, we must share about our holy and righteous Creator, who has given us life and breath and everything. Not only that, God has made us in his image to reflect his glory to Himself, each other, and all of creation. God has given us a standard to live by, his law and commands. In the second point, man, we must talk about the sinful condition of every human being. We do not keep God's law. Instead, we break it and try to create our own false standards of righteousness and justice. In the third point, Christ, we must share about the only name under heaven by which people can be saved – Jesus. He alone is the Savior because he alone is

both God and man. In Jesus' perfect life, he kept all of God's law, whereas we and everyone else have failed. In Jesus' sacrificial death, he died as the substitute for all of his people. In the fourth point, response, we proclaim the necessary response to Jesus' person and work. Here we talk about repentance and faith. Repentance is turning from sin. In significant and substantial ways, we must reject our former, sinful way of life. We must turn from it. Faith is allegiance and reliance. We turn from sin and turn to Jesus. He is our only hope and our greatest trust. He is now our source of righteousness and joy. A life of repentance and faith is not a perfect life without sin, but it is one that hates sin and treasures Jesus. This is the gospel we must proclaim to our neighbors in Memphis and to the ends of the earth!

