PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY

The King's Household

1 Timothy, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

The King's Household: Paul's First Letter to Timothy, Unfiltered

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the NIV. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

Pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence in the author's own words. Inside Scripture quotations, capitalization and wording follow the 2011 NIV exactly.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

If you've read the earlier books in this series, you know the saying by now: "If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all." It's been in every book. It's not leaving now.

Up to now, Paul's letters in this series have been written to churches. 1 Timothy is different. It's a letter from an older mentor to a younger friend, a man Paul calls his true son in the faith. Timothy had been given a tough job: leading the church in a big, complicated city where some teachers had gone off the rails. He was younger than many of the people he was supposed to lead, and some of them seem to have looked down on him for it.

So Paul writes to encourage him and give him instructions. Along the way, the letter covers a lot of ground: how to deal with false teaching, how to pray, what to look for in church leaders, how to treat older and younger people, how to care for widows, and what to do about money.

That last topic might be the most relevant one for you. This letter contains one of the most famous warnings in the Bible: the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. In a world full of influencers, get-rich-quick schemes, and constant pressure to buy more, Paul's words about contentment hit hard.

And it contains a verse written especially for young people: don't let anyone look down on you because you're young, but set an example. Paul believed young people could lead, not someday, but now. Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through all six chapters of 1 Timothy, in order, one chapter of this book for each chapter of the letter. Each one explains what Paul is saying in plain language and adds background about Ephesus, the early church, and the Roman world.

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene introduces Timothy, explains what was going wrong in Ephesus, and describes the debate over who wrote this letter and the two others like it, 2 Timothy and Titus. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the New International Version (NIV), the same translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (pronouns for God are capitalized in the author's own words out of reverence; inside Scripture quotations, capitalization follows the NIV exactly); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

This book quotes 1 Timothy sparingly and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Read each chapter of the letter first, then the chapter here. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. Like the earlier books in this series, on the Gospels, Acts, and Paul's letters from Romans to 2 Thessalonians, it's written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

This book follows the letter format of the earlier volumes, walking through 1 Timothy chapter by chapter. I've quoted the letter sparingly and relied mostly on paraphrase, background, and discussion material. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the New International Version (NIV).

Paul's instructions about women in 2:9–15 are understood differently by sincere, Bible-believing Christians. I've presented complementarian and egalitarian readings fairly, with the main arguments for each, without endorsing either. You may want to share your own church's view with your teen and talk through why you hold it.

I've also presented the debate over the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), giving the main arguments on each side. The letter presents itself as Paul's, and I refer to the author as Paul throughout. Other sensitive topics, including the list

of sins in 1:9–10, the instructions about slaves in 6:1–2, and the advice about wine in 5:23, are handled briefly and carefully.

The letter's teaching on money and contentment (6:6–19) and its encouragement to young believers (4:12) are highlighted as especially relevant for teens.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will discover that they don't have to wait until they're older to set an example, and that they'll find the life that is truly life.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

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BEFORE YOU OPEN THE LETTER

Setting the Scene

Who Was Timothy?

Timothy grew up in Lystra, a town in the Roman province of Galatia, in what is now central Turkey. His mother, Eunice, was a Jewish believer, and so was his grandmother, Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). His father was Greek. From childhood, Timothy had been taught the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15).

Paul probably met Timothy's family on his first missionary journey, when he preached in Lystra and was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14). When Paul came back on his second journey, Timothy had become a believer with a great reputation, and Paul invited him to join the team (Acts 16:1–3). From then on, Timothy was one of Paul's closest partners. He's named as co-sender of six of Paul's letters, and Paul sent him on many important missions, including to Thessalonica, Corinth, and Philippi. Paul told the Philippians he had no one else like Timothy (Philippians 2:20).

We also get hints about his personality. He seems to have been somewhat timid (2 Timothy 1:7), he had frequent stomach problems (1 Timothy 5:23), and he was young enough that some people didn't take him seriously (4:12).

How Young Was Young?

When Paul tells Timothy not to let anyone look down on him because he's young, Timothy probably wasn't a teenager anymore. If he joined Paul around AD 49 as a young man, he may have been

in his thirties when this letter was written. But in the Roman world, a man could be called young until around age forty. Older men were expected to lead, and many people automatically respected age over everything else. So in a church full of older leaders, Timothy was the young guy, and that made his job harder.

Back to Ephesus

Timothy was in Ephesus, the great city on the west coast of what is now Turkey. If you've read the Ephesians volume in this series, you'll remember it: the huge Temple of Artemis, the magic scrolls burned in public, the riot in the theater (Acts 19). Paul had spent about three years there and knew the church well.

When Paul said goodbye to the Ephesian elders, he warned them that savage wolves would come in among them, and that even some of their own leaders would twist the truth to draw followers after them (Acts 20:29–30). By the time of 1 Timothy, that warning had come true.

What Was Going Wrong?

Paul never describes the false teaching in Ephesus in full, but he gives clues. Some people were obsessed with myths and endless genealogies, family trees and speculative stories, perhaps based on Old Testament characters. Some wanted to be teachers of the law but didn't understand it. Some taught that people should avoid marriage and certain foods. Some claimed special knowledge. Some were in it for the money. And some were stirring up arguments over words.

A few leaders had gone so far off track that Paul names them, like Hymenaeus and Alexander. In 2 Timothy, Paul says Hymenaeus taught that the resurrection had already happened. The teaching

may also have spread especially through some households and among some women in the church, which may help explain some of Paul's instructions in chapters 2 and 5.

When Was It Written?

Paul says he had urged Timothy to stay in Ephesus while Paul went on to Macedonia. That's hard to fit into the story told in Acts. There are two main explanations.

One is that Paul was released from his first imprisonment in Rome, around AD 62, traveled again, possibly as far as Spain, and later was arrested again and executed under the emperor Nero, sometime around AD 64 to 67. An early Christian letter, 1 Clement, written around AD 95, says Paul reached the limits of the west. In this view, 1 Timothy was written in the mid-60s, during that later period of travel.

The other explanation, held by those who think a later follower of Paul wrote the letter, is that it was written after Paul's death, perhaps late in the first century or early in the second.

The Pastoral Epistles

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are often called the Pastoral Epistles, a name scholars started using in the 1700s, because they're written to leaders about shepherding, or pastoring, churches. They share a similar style, vocabulary, and set of concerns, so they're usually discussed together.

Who Wrote It? The Case Against

The letters say they're from Paul. But many modern scholars think they were written after Paul's death by a follower who wanted to

apply Paul's teaching to a new generation. Their main reasons are these.

The vocabulary and style are noticeably different from Paul's other letters; a significant number of words appear nowhere else in Paul. The church structure, with overseers, elders, deacons, and an official list of widows, seems more developed than in Paul's earlier letters. Faith often seems to mean a body of teaching to guard, rather than personal trust. The travel details are hard to fit into Paul's life as described in Acts. And an early teacher named Marcion, around AD 140, didn't include them in his collection of Paul's letters, though he may have rejected them for his own reasons.

Who Wrote It? The Case For

Many other scholars believe Paul wrote them. Their main reasons are these.

The early church accepted them as Paul's. Polycarp, writing in the early second century, seems to echo them, and Irenaeus, around AD 180, quotes them as Paul's. Their style could be different because they're written to individual coworkers about practical matters, not to churches about big theological questions, and because Paul may have used a secretary and given him some freedom; Luke was with him near the end (2 Timothy 4:11). Paul already mentions overseers and deacons in Philippians 1:1. The personal details, like a cloak left behind in 2 Timothy or Timothy's stomach trouble here, seem unlikely to be invented. And the travel details fit well if Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment.

Some scholars take a middle view: that a follower of Paul may have used genuine notes or fragments from Paul, especially in 2 Timothy.

Christians on all sides agree that these letters belong in the Bible and speak with authority. In this book, I follow the letter's own claim and call the author Paul.

The Map

Chapter 1: Paul urges Timothy to stop the false teachers, and tells his own story as the worst of sinners saved by grace.

Chapter 2: Instructions about prayer for everyone, and about men and women in worship.

Chapter 3: Qualifications for overseers and deacons, and a short hymn about Jesus.

Chapter 4: Warnings about false teaching, training in godliness, and Paul's encouragement to young Timothy.

Chapter 5: How to treat different groups in the church: older and younger people, widows, and elders.

Chapter 6: Slaves and masters, the danger of loving money, and a final charge to fight the good fight.

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CHAPTER 1

The Worst of Sinners

1 Timothy 1

Paul opens with his name and title, an apostle of Christ Jesus, sent by order of God, who saves us, and of Jesus, our hope. Then he writes to Timothy, whom he calls his true son in the faith. Timothy wasn't Paul's biological son, but Paul had led him to faith, trained him, and traveled with him for years. Their relationship was like father and son.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Mentors**
>
> Everybody needs someone a few steps ahead of them in life, someone who can teach them, encourage them, and tell them the truth. Paul was that for Timothy. Who's that for you? A parent, a youth leader, a coach, a teacher, a grandparent? And who could you be that for? Even as a teenager, you can help someone younger than you grow in their faith.

Paul gets straight to the point. When he left for Macedonia, he asked Timothy to stay in Ephesus and stop certain people from teaching wrong things. They were obsessed with myths and endless family trees, which only led to arguments instead of helping people trust God.

The goal of Paul's instruction, he says, is love. Not winning arguments, not proving how smart you are, but love that comes from a pure heart, a clean conscience, and genuine faith. Some

people had wandered away from that and gotten lost in pointless talk.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Arguing about Everything**
>
> Some people love to argue about religion. They debate obscure details, fight over theories, and pick apart other people's beliefs, but their arguments don't make them kinder, humbler, or closer to God. Paul says that's a sign something has gone wrong. Good questions are great; Paul wasn't against thinking. But if your faith is mostly about arguing, and not about love, it's time to check your heart.

These teachers wanted to be experts in God's law, but they didn't actually understand it. Paul says the law is good, if it's used the right way. It isn't meant for people who are already living right. It's meant to expose and restrain sin. Then he gives a long list of the kinds of people the law addresses: those who rebel against God, those who are violent, the sexually immoral, liars, and others.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Paul's List**
>
> Paul's list in verses 9 and 10 follows roughly the order of the Ten Commandments: sins against God, against parents, murder, sexual sin, stealing (slave traders were kidnappers who stole people), and lying. Christians have discussed the meaning of some of the words in it, especially the term the NIV translates as those practicing homosexuality. Historic Christian teaching, held by most churches worldwide, understands verses like this to mean that sexual relationships outside marriage between a man and a woman fall outside God's design; some Christians today read these words differently. Whatever you conclude, notice two things. First, the list includes all of us; it mentions liars too. Second, Paul is about to call himself the worst sinner of all. Nobody gets to look down on anybody. And every person, whoever they are, deserves dignity and kindness. Mocking or bullying anyone is never what Jesus wants.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Slave Traders**

It's worth noticing that slave traders are on Paul's list. The Greek word described people who kidnapped others to sell them into slavery. In a world where slavery was everywhere, Paul names those who captured and sold human beings as among those who defy God's law. Centuries later, Christians who fought the slave trade pointed to verses like this one.

Then Paul tells his own story. He's thankful to Jesus, who gave him strength and trusted him with ministry, even though he used to be a blasphemer who persecuted believers and used violence. Paul had hunted Christians, dragged them to prison, and approved of their deaths (Acts 8:3; 22:4). But God showed him mercy, because he acted in ignorance and unbelief. And God's grace was poured out on him in overflowing amounts.

Then Paul shares a saying that the early Christians seem to have repeated often. He calls it trustworthy and worth accepting completely. Jesus came to rescue sinners, it says. And then Paul adds that he himself is the worst one.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Trustworthy Sayings**

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus contain five sayings introduced with words like here is a trustworthy saying. They seem to be short summaries of truth that the early churches knew and repeated, a little like memory verses or mottos. This first one may be the best summary of the gospel ever written. Jesus came to save sinners. Not good people. Sinners.

Why would Paul call himself the worst of sinners? He wasn't being dramatic. He knew how much harm he had done to Jesus' people. And he says that's exactly why God showed him mercy: so that Jesus could use him as an example of His incredible patience. If God could save Paul, He can save anyone.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Nobody Is Too Far Gone**

Maybe you've done things you're ashamed of. Maybe you think God could never forgive you, or that you're too messed up to be useful to Him. Paul's story says otherwise. The man who once tried to destroy the church became its greatest missionary. Your past doesn't disqualify you. It might become the very story God uses to give someone else hope.

Paul is so overwhelmed by God's mercy that he breaks into praise: honor and glory forever to the eternal King, who never dies and can't be seen, the one and only God. Amen.

Then Paul turns back to Timothy. He reminds him of prophecies that were spoken about him, probably when he was commissioned for ministry, and tells him to use them to fight the battle well. Keep holding your faith and keep your conscience clean, Paul says. Some people have ignored their conscience, and their faith has been shipwrecked.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Shipwreck**

Paul knew about shipwrecks. He'd been through three of them by the time he wrote 2 Corinthians (11:25), and another one on his way to Rome (Acts 27). A ship usually doesn't sink all at once. It drifts off course, hits rocks, takes on water. Faith can be like that. People rarely walk away from God in a single moment. They ignore their conscience in small ways, again and again, until they're far off course. Paying attention to your conscience keeps you on course.

Paul names two people who had wrecked their faith: Hymenaeus and Alexander. He says he has handed them over to Satan so they'll learn not to blaspheme. That sounds frightening. It probably means Paul had removed them from the church's fellowship, putting them outside the community's protection, in the hope that the consequences would bring them back. Like the church discipline

Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 5, the goal was restoration, not revenge.

KEY VERSE

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

1 Timothy 1:15 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Who is a mentor to you in your faith? Who could you mentor?
2. Paul says the goal of his teaching is love. How can you tell whether a religious conversation is helping people love God and others, or just causing arguments?
3. Paul called himself the worst of sinners. Why do you think it matters that the greatest missionary in the early church started out as an enemy of Jesus?
4. What are some small ways people ignore their conscience? How can you keep your faith from drifting?

TRY THIS *Write out 1 Timothy 1:15 and put it somewhere you'll see it. The next time you feel like you've messed up too badly for God, read it out loud.*

CHAPTER 2

One Mediator

1 Timothy 2

Paul's first instruction for the church in this chapter is about prayer. He urges that all kinds of prayers be offered for everyone: requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving. And he specifically mentions kings and everyone in authority.

That's remarkable. The emperor at the time was probably Nero, who would later persecute Christians brutally. Paul tells believers to pray for him anyway. Why? So that Christians can live peaceful, quiet lives, full of godliness and respect. And because it pleases God, whose desire is for everyone to be rescued and come to know the truth.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Praying for Leaders**

It's easy to complain about leaders: presidents, governors, principals, coaches, even parents. Paul says to pray for them, whether you agree with them or not, whether they're kind or harsh, whether they're believers or not. Praying for someone doesn't mean approving of everything they do. It means asking God to work in their lives and through their decisions. And it can change your heart toward them too.

BACKGROUND CHECK **God Wants Everyone**

Paul says God's desire is for every single person to be saved. That means there's no one God isn't interested in: not the kid who sits alone at lunch, not the bully, not the friend who says they'll never believe, not the person who

seems too far gone. Christians have discussed how this fits with passages about God's choosing, and why not everyone is saved. But this verse makes God's heart clear. He doesn't want anyone to be lost.

Then Paul gives a short summary of the faith, which may have been another early Christian saying. There is one God. And there is "one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Mediator**

A mediator is someone who stands between two sides to bring them together, like a negotiator in a dispute or a translator between people who don't speak the same language. Because Jesus is fully God and fully human, He's the perfect go-between. He represents God to us and us to God. In a city like Ephesus, full of temples, priests, and spirits people thought they needed to appease, Paul says there's only one way to God, and it's open to everyone.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ransom**

A ransom was a price paid to set someone free, like money paid to free a prisoner of war or buy a slave's freedom. Jesus used the same word when He said He came to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Paul says Jesus paid that price for everyone. That's how much you're worth to God.

Paul says he was appointed as a messenger and apostle to tell the Gentiles this message, and he adds, as if someone had doubted it, that he's telling the truth.

Then Paul gives instructions about men and women in worship. He wants the men in every place to pray with holy hands raised, not angry or quarreling. In the ancient world, people often prayed standing with their hands raised. Apparently some men in Ephesus were praying while fighting with each other. Paul says that's not okay.

Then Paul turns to women. He wants them to dress modestly and sensibly, not drawing attention with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or pricey outfits. Instead they should be known for doing good, which is what's fitting for women who say they worship God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Modesty and Money**

Paul's words here are mostly about money and attention. In the Roman world, wealthy women displayed their status with elaborate braided hairstyles woven with gold and jewels, and with expensive clothing. In church, that could make poorer believers feel like second-class members. Some Roman writers also connected flashy fashion with a new, loose lifestyle among some upper-class women. Paul's point applies to everyone, guys and girls alike: don't use your appearance to show off, compete, or draw attention to yourself. Let people notice you for your character instead.

Next come the verses that Christians discuss more than almost any others about women in the church. Paul says a woman should learn quietly and with full submission. Then he writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." He gives two reasons: God made Adam before Eve, and Eve, not Adam, was the one deceived. Then he adds, "But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Some Things to Notice**

Before looking at the main interpretations, here are a few details. First, Paul tells women to learn. In much of the ancient world, women were rarely given religious education, so that instruction itself was significant. Second, the word for quietness is related to the word Paul used in verse 2 for the peaceful, quiet lives all believers should live; it can mean a calm, settled spirit, not necessarily total silence. Third, the NIV footnotes say the Greek words for woman and man can also mean wife and husband, so some think Paul is talking about marriage. Fourth, the word translated assume authority

appears nowhere else in the New Testament, and scholars debate whether it simply means to have authority or something more negative, like to domineer. Fifth, the NIV footnote says verse 15 literally says she will be saved, which has led to several interpretations.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Complementarian Reading**

Many Christians, often called complementarians, believe that men and women are equal in worth and dignity before God, but that God has given them different, complementary roles in the home and the church. They read these verses as a lasting principle: the role of pastor or elder, with its authority to teach the whole church, is reserved for qualified men. Their main reason is that Paul grounds his instruction in creation, in the order in which God made Adam and Eve, not in local circumstances. They note that Paul goes on in chapter 3 to describe the overseer as faithful to his wife. And they emphasize that women can and should serve in countless other ways, including teaching other women and children, leading ministries, praying, prophesying, and sharing the gospel. This view is held by many Catholic, Orthodox, and evangelical churches, though their practices differ.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Egalitarian Reading**

Many other Christians, often called egalitarians, believe that men and women are equal in worth and that all church roles, including pastor and elder, are open to both, based on gifting and calling. They read these verses as addressing a specific problem in Ephesus. False teachers were spreading their ideas, apparently with some success among women who had not yet had the chance to learn (see 5:13 and 2 Timothy 3:6). So Paul tells the women to learn first, and not to domineer or teach what they didn't yet understand. They note that Paul's word for authority is unusual and may mean domineer, and that I do not permit can describe a present practice rather than a rule for all time. They point to women Paul commended as ministry partners: Phoebe, a deacon (Romans 16:1); Priscilla, who taught Apollos (Acts 18:26); Junia, whom Paul calls outstanding among the apostles (Romans 16:7); and women who prophesied in church (1 Corinthians 11:5). They read the reference to Adam and Eve as an illustration of what happens when someone is deceived, not as

a rule about roles. This view is held by many mainline Protestant, Pentecostal, and evangelical churches.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Saved through Childbearing?**

Verse 15 is puzzling for both views. Paul clearly doesn't mean women are saved by having babies, since he teaches everywhere that salvation is by grace through faith. Some think he means women will be saved through the childbearing, the birth of Jesus, the promised offspring of Eve (Genesis 3:15). Some think he means women will be kept safe through childbirth, a dangerous experience in the ancient world. Some think he's affirming the value of marriage and motherhood against the false teachers, who were forbidding marriage (4:3). And some think he means women will be saved while living out their calling faithfully. The condition is the same for everyone: keep living in faith, love, and holiness.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Disagreeing Well**

Christians who love Jesus and take the Bible seriously have come to different conclusions about this passage. Both sides agree on a lot: men and women are equally made in God's image, equally saved by grace, equally gifted by the Spirit, and equally called to serve. They disagree about how these verses apply to specific church roles today. You'll probably encounter both views. Study the passage, listen to both sides, talk to the leaders in your church, and remember that the people on the other side are your brothers and sisters, not your enemies.

KEY VERSE

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:3–4 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Who is a leader you find it hard to pray for? What would you pray for them?
2. Paul says there's one mediator between God and humanity. Why does it matter that Jesus is both God and human?
3. Paul's words about appearance are mostly about showing off. In what ways do people your age use their appearance to compete or draw attention?
4. What questions do you have about 1 Timothy 2:11–15? Who could you talk to about them?

TRY THIS *Make a list of leaders in your life, from the president to your principal to your parents, and pray for one of them each day this week.*

CHAPTER 3

God's Household

1 Timothy 3

In chapter 3, Paul turns to church leadership. He starts with another of his trustworthy sayings: if someone wants to be an overseer, that's a good thing to want. Leading God's people is a noble job.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Overseers, Elders, and Pastors**
>
> The Greek word for overseer is episkopos, which gives us the English word episcopal and is sometimes translated bishop. In the New Testament, overseers seem to be the same people who are called elders (compare Titus 1:5–7 and Acts 20:17, 28). They led, taught, and cared for local churches, and there were usually several of them in each church. Today, different churches organize their leadership differently, with pastors, priests, bishops, elders, or boards. But the qualities Paul lists here apply to Christian leaders of every kind.

Then Paul gives a list of qualities an overseer needs. What's striking is that almost all of them are about character, not talent. Only one, being able to teach, is really a skill. The rest describe the kind of person a leader should be.

An overseer should be above reproach, meaning no one can rightly accuse him of anything serious. He should be faithful to his wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, welcoming to guests, and able to teach. He shouldn't be a heavy drinker, violent, or a fighter, but gentle and peaceful. And he shouldn't love money.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Faithful to His Wife**

The Greek phrase literally means a one-woman man. Christians have understood it in several ways. Some think it rules out men who have more than one wife at a time (polygamy was rare but not unknown among Jews in that time). Some think it rules out men who have remarried after divorce or after their wife's death. Many think it simply means a man who is completely faithful to his wife, with no affairs and no wandering eyes. Whatever the exact meaning, the heart of it is clear: a leader's love life should be marked by faithfulness.

An overseer also has to lead his own household well, making sure his children obey and treat him with respect. Paul's logic is simple: if a man can't lead his own family well, he won't be able to look after God's church. He shouldn't be a new believer, either, or he might become proud and fall into the same trap as the devil, whose downfall church tradition has long linked to pride. And he needs a good reputation with people outside the church.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Translation Note**

The NIV footnote for verse 4 gives another possible reading. Instead of the father leading in a way that deserves respect, the Greek could mean that he makes sure his children obey him with proper respect. Either way, Paul is describing a home where love and respect go both ways, not one where a father rules by fear.

Then Paul turns to deacons. The word means servant. In the early church, deacons seem to have handled practical needs, like caring for the poor, so that the elders could focus on teaching and prayer (Acts 6:1–6 is often seen as the first example). Deacons also need to be respected, sincere, not heavy drinkers, and not greedy. They need to grip the faith's deep truths and keep their conscience clean. They should be tested first and serve only if there's nothing against them.

Verse 11 adds instructions for women. They also need to be respected, not gossips but self-controlled and trustworthy in everything. The NIV footnote says this could mean deacons' wives or women who are deacons. Since Paul calls Phoebe a deacon in Romans 16:1, many think he means women who served as deacons. Others think he means the wives of deacons, who would share in their husbands' work. Churches today differ on this.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Character First**

Paul's list is a great checklist for anyone, not just church leaders. Are you self-controlled? Are you gentle, or quick to fight? Do people trust you? Are you the same person at home that you are at church? Is your online life consistent with your faith? Leadership in God's kingdom doesn't start with charisma or popularity. It starts with character. You can start building that now.

Paul tells Timothy why he's writing all this. He hopes to visit soon, but in case he's delayed, he wants Timothy to know how people should behave in God's household. And then he describes the church in three ways: God's household, "the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Pillar and Foundation**

The temple of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, a massive building supported by more than a hundred huge marble columns. Everyone in Ephesus knew those pillars. Paul says that the real column holding up the truth isn't a building of marble. It's a community of people: the church. That means your church, with all its imperfections, has a very important job. It holds up the truth about Jesus for the world to see.

Then Paul quotes what most scholars think was an early Christian hymn or creed about Jesus. It's short, with six lines that move from Jesus' coming to earth to His return to heaven. It's the key verse for this chapter.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Hymn**

Look at the six lines: Line one is Jesus' birth: He came in a human body. Line two is probably His resurrection, when the Spirit proved He was who He said He was. Then angels saw Him. Then the message about Him went out to the nations. Then people around the world put their faith in Him. And the last line is His ascension into glory. The NIV footnote says vindicated by the Spirit could also be translated vindicated in spirit. Notice the way the lines go back and forth between earth and heaven. This may have been sung in the very first churches, making it one of the oldest Christian songs we know.

KEY VERSE

Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

1 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think almost every quality on Paul's list is about character rather than skill?
2. Which of the qualities in this chapter come most naturally to you? Which do you need to grow in?
3. Paul calls the church the pillar and foundation of the truth. What does that mean for how your church acts?
4. Which line of the hymn in verse 16 means the most to you? Why?

TRY THIS *Pick one quality from Paul's list in verses 2 and 3 that you want to grow in. Ask God every day this week to help you with it, and look for one chance each day to practice it.*

CHAPTER 4

Don’t Let Anyone Look Down on You

1 Timothy 4

Paul warns that the Spirit has made it clear that in the last days, some people will walk away from the faith. They’ll follow spirits that deceive them and teachings that come from demons. These teachings come through liars and hypocrites, whose consciences have been burned until they can’t feel anything anymore.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Later Times**
>
> When Paul talks about later times, he doesn’t necessarily mean some distant future. The New Testament writers saw the whole period between Jesus’ first coming and His return as the last days (see Acts 2:17 and Hebrews 1:2). Paul believed this was already happening in Ephesus. False teachers had shown up, just as Jesus warned they would (Matthew 24:11).

What were these false teachers saying? They were telling people not to marry and to avoid certain foods. That might sound strange. But in the ancient world, some groups believed the physical world was bad and that truly spiritual people should reject physical pleasures like food and marriage. Paul says no. Everything God created is good. Nothing should be rejected if it’s received with thanks, because it’s made holy by God’s word and prayer.

BACKGROUND CHECK **God Made It Good**

Some people think being spiritual means being against everything fun or physical. That's not Christianity. God created food, friendship, marriage, music, sports, nature, laughter, and the human body, and He called it good (Genesis 1:31). That doesn't mean anything goes. God's gifts are meant to be used His way. But we can enjoy them with gratitude, knowing they come from Him. Saying grace before meals is a small way of remembering that.

Paul tells Timothy that if he teaches these things, he'll be a good servant of Jesus, nourished by the truths of the faith. He tells him to reject godless myths and silly stories, which the NIV calls old wives' tales. Instead, Timothy should train himself to be godly.

Then Paul makes a comparison that every athlete will understand. Physical training is worth something, but godliness is worth something in every area, and it holds promise for this life and the next.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Training for Godliness**

The word Paul uses for training is gymnazo, which gives us the word gymnasium. Ephesus had several gymnasiums where young men trained their bodies, and athletes there competed in games. Paul isn't against exercise. He's saying that if you work that hard on your body, which won't last forever, how much more should you work on your soul, which will? Training for godliness works like physical training. It takes regular practice: reading the Bible, praying, worshiping, serving, and making good choices again and again, even when you don't feel like it. You don't get spiritually strong by accident.

Paul says this, too, is a trustworthy saying worth accepting completely. That's why we work hard and keep going, because our hope is in the living God, the Savior of everyone, especially of those who believe.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Savior of All?**

What does Paul mean when he calls God the Savior of all people, especially of believers? Some think it means God cares for and preserves all people in this life, and saves believers eternally. Some think it means Jesus died for everyone, but only those who believe receive the gift. Very few Christians have read it to mean that everyone will be saved no matter what, since Paul talks elsewhere about the need for faith. What's clear is that God's love is offered to every single person.

Then come the verses that are the highlight of this chapter for teenagers. Paul tells Timothy to command and teach these things. And then he says, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young."

BACKGROUND CHECK **How Young Was Timothy?**

Timothy had been traveling with Paul for more than ten years by the time Paul wrote this letter, so he was probably in his thirties. That might not sound young to you. But in the ancient world, people were often considered young until they were around forty. Leaders were expected to be older, and age was associated with wisdom. Timothy was leading a church where many of the elders were probably older than him. Some people may have dismissed him because of his age. Paul tells him not to let that stop him.

But Paul doesn't say, demand that people respect you, or argue with anyone who doesn't take you seriously. He says to set an example. In other words, earn respect by how you live. Paul names five areas: speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Five Ways to Set an Example**

Speech: How do you talk? Are your words kind, honest, and encouraging, or harsh, crude, and gossipy? That includes texts, comments, and posts. Conduct: How do you act, especially when no one's watching? Love: Do you treat people well, including the ones who are hard to love? Faith: Do you trust God, even when life is hard? Purity: Do you keep your thoughts and actions,

including your relationships and what you watch, clean before God? You don't have to wait until you're an adult to be a leader in these areas. You can be an example to adults right now.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Young and Influential**

Throughout the Bible, God uses young people. Joseph was a teenager when God gave him dreams. Samuel heard God's voice as a boy. David was young when he faced Goliath. Josiah became king at eight and later led a revival. Jeremiah said he was too young, and God told him not to say that (Jeremiah 1:6–7). Mary was probably a teenager when she agreed to be the mother of Jesus. God doesn't wait until you're older to use you.

Paul continues. Until he comes, Timothy should focus on reading Scripture publicly to the church, preaching, and teaching. In the early church, many people couldn't read or afford copies of Scripture, so hearing it read aloud in worship was how they learned it.

Paul tells Timothy not to neglect the spiritual gift he received when the elders laid hands on him and prophesied over him. He should work hard at these things and throw himself into them completely, so everyone can see him growing.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Don't Waste Your Gift**

God has given every believer spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7). Maybe you're good at encouraging people, teaching, organizing, serving, praying, making music, or welcoming newcomers. Timothy may have been tempted to hold back, maybe because he was young, or shy, or intimidated. Paul says, use it. And notice that Paul talks about progress, not perfection. You don't have to be perfect. You just need to keep growing.

Finally, Paul tells Timothy to pay close attention to his own life and his teaching, and to stick with them. Both matter. If Timothy does that, he'll save himself and the people who hear him. Paul doesn't

mean Timothy can earn salvation. He means that staying faithful will keep Timothy on the path of faith and help others find it too.

KEY VERSE

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

1 Timothy 4:12 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Have you ever felt like people didn't take you seriously because of your age? How did you respond?
2. Which of the five areas in 4:12 is your strongest? Which is your weakest?
3. Paul compares spiritual training to physical training. What does your spiritual workout look like right now? What could you add?
4. What spiritual gifts do you think God has given you? How could you use them more?

TRY THIS *Choose one of the five areas in 4:12 and set a specific goal for this week, like going a whole day without saying anything negative about anyone, or reading a chapter of the Bible every day. Tell a friend or parent so they can check in with you.*

CHAPTER 5

Family Matters

1 Timothy 5

Paul begins chapter 5 with advice for how Timothy should treat people in the church. Instead of harshly scolding an older man, Timothy should appeal to him the way he would to his own father. He should treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, and younger women like sisters, keeping everything completely pure.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Church Is a Family**
>
> Paul has already called the church God's household (3:15). Now he spells out what that means. The people at church aren't just an audience or a club. They're family. That changes how you treat them. You show respect to older people, even when you disagree with them. You treat people your own age like brothers and sisters, not as rivals, and not as people to use or impress. The phrase with absolute purity is a strong reminder for dating and friendships: treat others the way you'd want someone to treat your own brother or sister.

Then Paul spends a long section on widows. In the ancient world, a woman whose husband had died was often in serious trouble. There were few jobs for women, no government programs, and no insurance. Without a husband or grown children, a widow could easily end up hungry or homeless. From the beginning, the church

took care of widows (Acts 6:1). But by the time Paul wrote this letter, the church in Ephesus needed some guidelines.

Paul says the church should honor and support widows who are truly in need. But when a widow has kids or grandkids, the family should look after her first. Faith starts at home, and caring for your parents and grandparents is a way to repay them for caring for you. That pleases God.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Faith Starts at Home**
>
> Paul says that anyone who refuses to provide for their relatives, especially the people in their own home, has turned their back on the faith and is acting worse than someone who doesn't believe. That's strong. Even people who don't follow Jesus usually take care of their families. Christians should do better, not worse. For you right now, this might mean helping out at home without being asked, being kind to your siblings, spending time with your grandparents, or simply honoring your parents. Someday it may mean caring for your parents when they're old. Faith that doesn't show up at home isn't real faith.

A widow who's truly alone trusts God with her future and keeps praying day and night. But a widow who lives only for pleasure is spiritually dead, even though she's alive.

Then Paul talks about a list of widows. This seems to have been an official group that the church supported and who probably served the church in return through prayer and good works. To be on the list, a widow had to be over sixty, faithful to her husband, and known for good deeds like raising children, welcoming guests, washing the feet of believers, and helping people in trouble.

Paul says younger widows shouldn't be put on the list. He's concerned that they might make a pledge to serve Christ without remarrying and then break it when they want to marry again. He

also says some were going from house to house, gossiping and saying things they shouldn't. So he advises younger widows to remarry, have children, and manage their homes, so that critics of the church have no reason to attack it.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Reading This Section Today**
>
> Some of Paul's words about younger widows can sound harsh to modern ears. Remember the context. Paul is dealing with a specific situation in Ephesus, where false teachers were apparently spreading their ideas from house to house (compare 2 Timothy 3:6), and where the church had limited resources. He's not saying all young women are gossips, or that women's only value is in marriage. Elsewhere Paul praises single people who devote themselves to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:8, 34). The principle behind Paul's advice is that the church should care wisely for people in need, families should do their part, and everyone should live in a way that gives no one a reason to criticize the gospel.

Next, Paul turns to elders. Elders who lead well, especially those who preach and teach, deserve double honor. Paul backs this up with two quotes. The first is from the Old Testament law: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain" (Deuteronomy 25:4). The second is "The worker deserves his wages," which is exactly what Jesus said in Luke 10:7.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Double Honor**
>
> Double honor probably means both respect and financial support. Just as farmers let the ox eat as it worked, churches should provide for those who work hard to teach and lead them. It's interesting that Paul calls the words of Jesus Scripture, alongside the Old Testament. That suggests the teachings of Jesus, maybe even the Gospel of Luke, were already being treated as Scripture very early. The NIV footnotes note both sources.

Paul also gives guidelines for when an elder is accused of wrongdoing. Timothy shouldn't accept an accusation unless two or

three witnesses support it, which protects leaders from false charges. But elders who keep sinning should be corrected publicly, so that others will take sin seriously. And Timothy must do all this fairly, without favoritism. He shouldn't be quick to appoint leaders, either, or he'll share responsibility for their sins.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Protecting People**

Paul's guidelines protect both sides. Leaders shouldn't be destroyed by rumors or false accusations. But leaders who do wrong shouldn't be protected because they're powerful or popular. Sadly, some churches have covered up abuse by leaders to protect their reputation. That's the opposite of what Paul teaches here. If someone in a position of authority ever hurts you or someone you know, at church or anywhere else, tell a trusted adult. If they don't listen, tell another one. You will not be in trouble for speaking up.

Then, in the middle of all this, Paul gives Timothy some personal advice: stop drinking only water, and have a little wine to help your stomach, since you're sick so often.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What about the Wine?**

Water in ancient cities was often contaminated and could make people sick. Wine, often mixed with water, was safer to drink and was also used as medicine. Timothy may have been avoiding wine completely, perhaps to set himself apart from the false teachers or from drunkenness, and his health was suffering. Paul's advice is medical, not a party invitation. It doesn't give teenagers permission to drink. The Bible strongly condemns drunkenness (Ephesians 5:18), and the law where you live sets an age limit for alcohol for good reasons. Christians today hold different views about whether adults should drink at all, but they agree that following the law and avoiding drunkenness matter.

Paul ends the chapter with an observation. Some people's sins are obvious. Others only become clear later. Good deeds are the same

way. Some are seen right away, and even the hidden ones will come to light eventually.

KEY VERSE

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

1 Timothy 5:1–2 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. How would your behavior change if you really treated the people at church like family?
2. What are some practical ways you can care for your family right now?
3. Why do you think Paul wanted both leaders and the people accusing them to be treated fairly?
4. Paul says even hidden good deeds will eventually come to light. Why might it be good to do good things where no one sees?

TRY THIS *Do something kind for a grandparent or an older person at church this week. Call them, write them a note, help with a chore, or just ask them about their life and listen.*

CHAPTER 6

Godliness with Contentment

1 Timothy 6

Paul gives a brief instruction to Christians who were slaves. They should treat their masters with respect so that no one would have reason to insult God or the Christian message won't be criticized. If their masters are also believers, they shouldn't take advantage of that or disrespect them, but serve even better, because those who benefit are fellow believers whom they love.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Slavery Again**
>
> As in Ephesians and Colossians, Paul is writing to people living in a world where slavery was everywhere. Some historians estimate that a large share of people in Roman cities were enslaved, though numbers are uncertain. Paul doesn't launch a campaign to overthrow the system, which would have been impossible for a tiny, persecuted group. But remember that he has already condemned slave traders (1:10), told slaves to gain their freedom if they can (1 Corinthians 7:21), and taught that slave and free are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). The NIV footnote on 6:2 says it could also mean that masters benefit from the service of their slaves. Over time, the Christian teaching that every person is made in God's image helped lead many believers to work for the end of slavery.

Then Paul returns to the false teachers one last time. Anyone who teaches something different from Jesus' sound teaching is proud and doesn't understand anything. They love controversies and

arguments over words, which lead to jealousy, fighting, insults, suspicion, and constant conflict. And many of them think that godliness is a way to make money.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Religion for Profit**
>
> Ephesus had a booming religious business. Silversmiths made a fortune selling small shrines of Artemis, and when Paul's preaching hurt their sales, they started a riot (Acts 19:23–41). Apparently some false teachers in the church saw faith as a way to get rich too. Sadly, that still happens. Some people today use religion to sell things, to build their own fame, or to promise that God will make you rich if you give them money. Paul says real godliness isn't about getting rich.

Instead, Paul says, "godliness with contentment is great gain." We didn't bring anything into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave. So if we have something to eat and something to wear, that's enough.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Contentment**
>
> Contentment means being satisfied with what you have. It's not the same as being lazy or never wanting anything. It means your happiness doesn't depend on getting more. That's hard in a world full of ads, unboxing videos, influencers showing off their stuff, and a constant feeling that you need the newest phone, shoes, or game. Paul learned contentment in every situation, whether he had plenty or nothing (Philippians 4:11–12). He says the secret is Jesus, who gives us strength. Contentment is a choice you practice, often by being thankful for what you already have.

Then Paul warns that people who are eager to get rich stumble into temptation and get caught in traps. Foolish, harmful cravings drag them down to ruin. Then comes one of the most quoted verses in the whole letter: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." Some people, Paul says, wanted money so badly that they wandered away from their faith and caused themselves a lot of pain.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Money Isn't Evil**

People sometimes misquote this verse as money is the root of all evil. But Paul doesn't say money is evil. He says the love of money is the root of many different kinds of evil. Money itself is a tool. It can be used to help people, support your family, give to the church, and do good. The problem is when you love it, when it becomes what you trust, what you chase, and what you think will make you happy. Then it starts pushing God out, and it can lead you into lying, cheating, stealing, greed, and broken relationships.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Get Rich Quick**

Teenagers today are targeted by lots of schemes that promise easy money: online gambling and sports betting apps, loot boxes, crypto hype, and influencers selling courses about how to become a millionaire by the time you're twenty. Many of them are designed to make someone else rich at your expense. Paul's warning fits perfectly: the eagerness to get rich traps people. That doesn't mean you shouldn't work hard, save, or plan for your future. Those are good. But if you find yourself obsessed with money or chasing a quick win, it's time to step back and ask who's really in charge of your heart.

Then Paul speaks directly to Timothy. As a man of God, Timothy should run away from all this and chase after things like right living, godliness, faith, love, staying power, and gentleness. Paul says to "Fight the good fight of the faith." Timothy should grab hold of the forever life God called him to, which he publicly confessed in front of many witnesses.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Flee and Pursue**

Notice the two-part strategy: run away from some things and chase others. It's not enough just to avoid bad things. You also need to go after good things. If you're trying to break a bad habit, replace it with a good one. If you're trying to avoid temptation, fill your life with things that help you grow. A life that's only about saying no feels empty. A life full of good things leaves less room for the bad.

Paul gives Timothy a solemn charge, in the presence of God, the giver of all life, and of Jesus, who boldly made His confession before Pontius Pilate. Timothy should keep this command spotless and blameless until Jesus returns. God will make that happen at the right time. And then Paul bursts into praise again, describing God as the blessed One who alone rules, the King over every king and the Lord over every lord. He is the only One who cannot die. He lives in light no one can approach, and no one has ever seen Him or can see Him.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **King of Kings**
>
> In Paul's day, the Roman emperors claimed grand titles. Some were worshiped as gods, and people in cities like Ephesus built temples to honor them. Paul's words remind Timothy that there's only one true King. Every emperor, president, and celebrity will one day bow before Him. That's why this book's title talks about the King's household. The church belongs to Him.

Paul has one more word for people with money. Timothy should tell wealthy people not to be proud or to trust in money, because money can vanish. They should trust God instead, who generously gives us everything to enjoy. They should do good, do lots of good deeds, give freely, and share. That way, they'll store up treasure for the future and "take hold of the life that is truly life."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Are You Rich?**
>
> You might not think of yourself as rich. But if you have enough food, a place to live, clothes, a phone, and access to education, you're better off than a huge portion of the people who have ever lived, and than many people living today. Paul's words are for you too. Notice that he doesn't say it's wrong to have money, or that you can't enjoy what God gives you. He says God gives us things to enjoy. But he warns against pride and trusting in wealth, and he calls us to be generous. Generosity is the antidote to the love of money. Every

time you give something away, you remind your heart that money isn't your master.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Life That Is Truly Life**

Paul's phrase is worth thinking about. The world says real life is found in having more, buying more, and showing off more. But many rich and famous people say that money didn't make them happy. Jesus said He came so that we could have life to the full (John 10:10). Real life is found in knowing God, loving people, and giving yourself away. That's a life that lasts forever.

Paul closes with a final plea. Timothy, guard what God has entrusted to you. Stay away from godless chatter and from the opposing ideas of "what is falsely called knowledge." Some people, Paul says, claimed to have that knowledge and wandered away from the faith because of it. Then he signs off: grace be with you all.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Falsely Called Knowledge**

The Greek word for knowledge is gnosis. In the second century, a group of movements called Gnosticism claimed to have secret spiritual knowledge that only a chosen few could understand. Many of them taught that the physical world was evil, which fits with the false teaching Paul describes in 4:3. Scholars debate whether Paul was facing an early form of these ideas. Either way, his warning still applies. Watch out for anyone who claims to have secret knowledge about God that makes them better than other believers. The truth about Jesus is open to everyone.

KEY VERSE

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

1 Timothy 6:6–7 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. What's the difference between money and the love of money? How can you tell which one you have?
2. Where do you feel pressure to have more stuff? What helps you feel content?
3. What are some things you need to run away from, and some things you need to chase after?
4. What do you think the life that is truly life looks like?

TRY THIS *For one week, keep track of every time you feel the urge to buy something or wish you had something someone else has. Each time, thank God for something you already have. At the end of the week, give something away, whether it's money, an item, or your time, to someone who needs it.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Now What? The Bottom Line

You've just walked through Paul's first letter to Timothy. At its heart is a simple, trustworthy saying that Paul says deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Paul called himself the worst of them. If Jesus could save him, He can save anyone.

Here's what the Bible says, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He wants you to be saved.

Paul says God wants all people to be saved and to know the truth. That includes you.

2 We've all turned away.

We've all gone our own way instead of God's. The Bible calls it sin, and it separates us from God.

> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* **Romans 3:23 (NIV)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (NIV)**

4 Jesus paid the ransom.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. He's the only One who can bring us back to God.

> *For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.* **1 Timothy 2:5–6 (NIV)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* **Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)**

6 Turn and trust.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Take hold of the life that is truly life.

> *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* **Romans 10:9 (NIV)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've been running my own life, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus came into the world to save sinners like me, and that He gave Himself as a ransom. I believe You raised Him from the dead. I'm turning to You. Forgive me. I trust*

Jesus as my Savior, and I want to follow Him as my King. Help me set an example and take hold of the life that is truly life. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read 1 Timothy straight through. Then read 2 Timothy, the next letter in the New Testament, Paul's final letter to his young friend.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Find an older believer who can mentor you, the way Paul mentored Timothy. Ask about being baptized.

Talk to God every day. Pray for everyone, Paul says, including leaders. Be honest. He can handle it.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. Talk to someone you trust. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Paul is right, Jesus came to save sinners, even the worst of them, and it's worth finding out for yourself.

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:17 (NIV)