

seek God's  
solutions

## SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 16:1-5; 18:1-3, 18-26; 19:8-10; 20:17-31; Phil. 2:19-23;  
1 Tim. 1:1-3; 3:14, 15; 2 Tim. 2:1, 2

## BUILDUP THEME



## PREPARE TO SERVE

God provides Biblical solutions to church problems.

## MEMORY VERSE

1 Timothy 3:14, 15

The greatest collapse in sports history belongs to the Houston Oilers in an NFL wild-card game on January 3, 1993. Houston returned an interception for a touchdown to give them a 35-3 lead over the Buffalo Bills. But Frank Reich, the Bills' backup quarterback, threw four touchdown passes to lead his team to overtime. Buffalo kicker Steve Christie sealed the improbable win with an overtime field goal. Oilers cornerback Cris Dishman called the debacle the "biggest choke in history."

1. What collapses have you witnessed in sports or in other realms?
2. To what did you attribute the collapse?

### 3. What do you think could cause a church to fail?

The church at Ephesus had a great start under Paul's leadership. But he knew a strong start didn't guarantee a strong finish. He wrote to Timothy to guide him in dealing with issues so the church might continue to positively impact people for Christ.

## Bible Study

Paul's founding of the Ephesian church forms the background for the book of 1 Timothy. Ephesus sits on the southwestern coast of what is now modern Turkey.

### **Paul Laid the Doctrinal Foundation**

Acts 18 contains a partial accounting of Paul's second and third missionary journeys. Paul traveled from Athens to Corinth where he met Aquila and Priscilla (18:1–3). The couple had come to Corinth from Italy when Roman emperor Claudius commanded all Jews to leave Rome. Aquila and Priscilla developed a friendship with Paul because they shared his tent-making vocation.

After about a year and a half of fruitful ministry in Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla followed Paul to the province of Syria and the city of Ephesus. Paul began his Ephesus ministry by preaching Christ in the synagogue. And after declining an invitation to stay longer and continue his ministry, Paul planned his return trip to Jerusalem and Antioch, leaving Aquila and Priscilla to continue the work in Ephesus (Acts 18:18–21). Aquila and Priscilla added Apollos, an articulate and intelligent speaker, to their leadership team.

Paul had impressed upon Priscilla and Aquila the need for accurate doctrine when building a church. When they recognized some inaccuracies in Apollos's generally solid teaching, they pulled him aside to correct his misunderstanding of some doctrinal truths (Acts 18:24–26). They appreciated Apollos's enthusiasm and boldness, but they knew from Paul that Apollos's message was more important than how he delivered it. The couple understood that they needed to ensure the Ephesian church continued on a solid doctrinal standing.

4. On what foundations, besides sound doctrine, might a church attempt to build its ministry?

When Priscilla and Aquila pulled Apollos aside to instruct him, they risked offending him and losing his fervency and enthusiasm. They took the risk because they didn't see fervency and enthusiasm as suitable foundations for the Ephesian church.

### **Paul Demonstrated Effective Ministry**

Paul made his way back to Ephesus on his third missionary journey. After three months of making a case for the kingdom of God in the synagogue, he withdrew to the school (lecture hall) of Tyrannus to continue his reasoning. The Jews in the synagogue weren't interested in hearing Paul promote Jesus as the Messiah and rightful heir to God's throne. They weren't fertile ground for the gospel. But Paul's ministry had a tremendous impact in the lecture hall among Greeks and interested Jews. His lecture-hall-based ministry spread to the entire region over two years and led to the establishment of a network of churches in and around Ephesus.

5. Read Acts 19:8–10. What key phrase in these verses reveals why Paul's ministry was so effective and far-reaching?

Paul pointed people to the Lord and instructed them to follow Christ. Consequently, his ministry spread. The Jews in the synagogue who spoke evil of the Way were interested in promoting themselves and in gaining followers. Their social media pages would have been all about likes rather than substance. Effective ministers build Christ's "likes" and "followers" rather than their own.

### **Paul Prepared the Church for Trouble**

Before departing, Paul summoned the elders of the network of churches in and around Ephesus to meet him in Miletus so he might address them and prepare their churches for inevitable trouble.

6. Read Acts 20:17–31. How thoroughly had Paul prepared the church at Ephesus for coming problems?

Paul reviewed his process in planting the Ephesian church. He had declared to them the whole counsel of God as the church's foundation (20:20, 21, 27) and he had lived among them as a model minister of Christ (20:24). Paul had put his blood, sweat, and tears into planting the Ephesian church. Fittingly, he wanted the elders to protect his personal investment by watching out for troublemakers who would work to draw disciples to themselves and away from Christ through twisted versions of the truth (20:29, 30). Such troublemakers would be effective because their message would sound familiar, plausible, and authoritative. Paul, of course, was referring to Judaizers who used select truths from the Old Testament to build a case for rejecting Christ and following them and their teachings.

At some subsequent point, the church called Timothy to be their pastor. Shepherding and protecting Christ's flock in Ephesus became his responsibility. So, Paul wrote two letters to Timothy to instruct and encourage him.

### **Paul Mentored Timothy**

Paul met Timothy while he was on his second missionary journey. From that moment, Paul must have seen potential in Timothy. He started to mentor the young believer for future ministry. Timothy was Paul's "son" in the faith in that Paul helped Timothy mature and prepare for the rigors of pastoral ministry (1 Tim. 1:1, 2).

7. Read Acts 16:1–5. What ministry lessons would Timothy have learned from serving alongside Paul?

For Timothy, having Paul as a mentor was both a privilege and a challenge. Paul's knowledge, insight, and experience provided Timothy with direction, but the same qualities must have intimidated the young pastor. Perhaps Timothy wondered if he would ever reach Paul's high standard and track record of success.

8. Who has mentored you in ministry?

9. Did you ever feel intimidated by your mentor? Explain.

### **Paul Counseled Timothy**

The great start for the church at Ephesus must have helped Timothy. But the stern warnings Paul gave had to be on his mind (Acts 20:29–31). Apparently, as he entered ministry, the “ravenous wolves” were already causing trouble among his flock. Paul opened his first letter to the pastor with a reminder that he had strongly counseled Timothy to stay put in Ephesus, a sign that Timothy and the church were facing serious problems.

10. Read 1 Timothy 1:3. What was at the root of Timothy’s struggle in Ephesus?

Paul had already invested time and significant energy into Timothy. He didn’t want to see him give up in the face of problems and thereby jeopardize the Ephesian church. Paul wrote Timothy to reinforce what the young pastor had already learned, to fill in gaps in his understanding, and to address current issues that threatened the church. Paul’s instructions helped Timothy and the church navigate first century church ministry. Much of what Paul taught applies to our church today.

11. Identify the problems that Paul addressed in the following passages. You will need to “read between the lines,” realizing that Paul gave specific instructions to deal with existing problems that he didn’t directly name.

1:3–6

1:7

2:8

2:9, 10

3:1–13

4:1–5

4:12

5:3, 4

5:13

5:19, 20

6:9, 10

The Ephesian church faced difficult issues that threatened to dishearten Timothy and divide the congregation. The church's strong initial testimony was on the brink of being tarnished. Somehow Paul received a report about the problems. Caring deeply for young Timothy and the Ephesian congregation, Paul wrote to guide their responses. First Timothy 3:14 and 15 is the key passage to understanding Paul's purpose for writing.

12. Read 1 Timothy 3:14, 15. What is true of the church according to Paul's note to Timothy?

Every church will face problems. On those occasions, the church needs to humbly respond to wise instruction from God's Word, remembering the importance God places on the church. Having Paul's inspired letter to Timothy provides valuable guidance to churches today.

## Paul Commended Timothy

Before Paul even wrote 1 Timothy, he had already written the book of Philippians and noted Timothy's proven character.

13. Read Philippians 2:19–23. What was the result of Paul's ministry in Timothy's life?

A few years after writing 1 Timothy, Paul wrote to Timothy again and encouraged him to be active in identifying and mentoring faithful men to become mentors themselves. Paul's encouragement demonstrated that Timothy was well-trained and well-equipped to lead the Ephesian church (2 Tim. 2:1, 2).

The mentoring method that the Lord initiated with His disciples was His strategy for leadership development that led to church growth and expansion. Paul and Timothy used it, and the strategy continues to be God's plan for preparing leaders today. Paul's letters to Timothy are foundational to leadership and church development today.

14. What do you think our church might gain from studying 1 Timothy?

## Application

15. Affirm the following three course goals as you embark on this study of 1 Timothy.
  - Keep your desire for a dynamic ministry during frustrating challenges.
  - Use challenges to bond your church together as a family.
  - Commit yourself to reinforcing the basics of ministry as you study 1 Timothy.
16. Ask the Lord to use the counsel of His Word in this quarter to make your church stronger.

