ENDURING
Believers must remain faithful to God’s truth even when facing persecution.

2 TIMOTHY 3:12-17; 4:1-8
MEMORY VERSE: 2 TIMOTHY 4:7

READ 2 Timothy 3:1–4:22, First Thoughts (p. 104), and Understand the Context (pp. 104–105). As you read, underline the commands given by Paul. Make notes as to why Paul was so urgent in giving these commands.

STUDY 2 Timothy 3:12-17; 4:1-8, using Explore the Text on pages 105–109. Identify ways to focus on finishing well in the race for Christ. What truths would you share with a friend facing challenges for his or her faith in Christ?

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 110–111) and More Ideas (p. 112). Consult QuickSource (available from LifeWay.com) or Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible for additional ideas.

GROW with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; and For More Ideas (p. 112): □ Pens and paper for each group member; □ A copy of Nik Ripken's The Insanity of Obedience. Prepare to display the following Pack Item: □ PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: First-Century Heresies). Make copies for the group of: □ PACK ITEM 7 (Handout: 1,2 Timothy; Titus Time Line); □ PACK ITEM 12 (Handout: Paul’s Letters); and □ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: First-Century Heresies).
FIRST THOUGHTS

Humans can endure a great deal when they believe in their cause. They simply find a way to overcome obstacles. For some, the greater the obstacle, the more they flourish. Believers who have faced persecution demonstrate this same kind of resolve, knowing that the greater the opposition, the greater the opportunity to honor God.

(In PSG, p. 91) Why are some people able to endure rejection or opposition for their faith? What truths would you share with a friend facing challenges for his or her faith in Christ?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

2 TIMOTHY 3:1–4:22

Timothy experienced personal conflict at Ephesus, and worse situations were to come. Paul urged Timothy to meet future difficulties with grace and strength. He also wanted future generations to recognize the spiritual sources of persecution and have the spiritual resources to endure.

Interpreting these chapters requires understanding Paul’s shifts in perspective regarding time. He often did not give clear signals when moving from the “last days” to Timothy’s present circumstances and then to the immediate future. In the opening verses of chapter three, Paul described people that believers would encounter in the last days (2 Tim. 3:1-5). Modern readers might view the phrase “last days” to mean the time immediately before Christ’s second coming. In many cases, New Testament writers used this term to describe the period between Christ’s resurrection and the Second Coming.

In 3:6, Paul returned to Timothy’s current situation. In the first five verses of the chapter, Paul used the future tense, but starting with verse 6 he employed the present tense. He alerted Timothy of the dangers that lay ahead. Paul wanted Timothy to watch out for people who were already exhibiting characteristics associated with the degenerate unbelievers of the last days. The best preparation involved studying the Scriptures. God inspired the Bible so believers would have all we needed to know Him and remain faithful to Him regardless of our circumstances.

The first few verses of chapter four also contain changes in time. Paul began by charging Timothy to preach the Word of God faithfully. In verse three, he gave the reason for why biblical teaching and preaching was so important. People would grow increasingly unwilling to hear the truth. This time shift addressed the period soon to come, although it would also apply to the more distant future.
As he concluded his letter, Paul reflected about his own future. He would soon be martyred. Looking back on his life, Paul was satisfied with his faithfulness to Christ. Looking forward, he anticipated the reward Christ would give him and promised the same to all who were faithful to Jesus. In the meantime, Timothy could help Paul by bringing some personal items, especially copies of Scriptures, to Rome.

As usual, Paul ended the epistle with greetings and commendations for some friends, and warnings about people who had opposed him and the gospel. Yet, in all things, Paul was confident the Lord Jesus Christ would be with Timothy, as He is with all believers as they faithfully follow Him.

**EXPLORE THE TEXT**

**PERSECUTION COMING (2 TIM. 3:12-13)**

**VERSES 12-13**

Believers around the world today are threatened, harmed, and even killed for their faith. Paul told Timothy to expect persecution to gain momentum over time.

_Some believers may try to escape difficulties by compromising their lifestyles to accommodate society._

Paul qualified the word _all_ with the phrase _who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus_. Some believers may try to escape difficulties by compromising their lifestyles to accommodate society. Situations vary from culture to culture, but anyone who tries to follow Christ by living a godly life can expect to be persecuted. A godly life is made possible by the believer’s being _in Christ_. Paul often used this phrase to describe the union between Christ and Christians (Rom. 3:22-24; 1 Cor. 2; 2 Cor. 5:17).

Many modern readers may interpret verse 13 as referring to the period before Christ returns. While _evil people and impostors will become worse_ in the later days, Paul’s statement pointed to a more immediate context. The people of his day already were attacking Christians in many ways. Yet, evil had not reached its zenith but would increase in coming days.

By _evil people_, Paul referred not merely to unbelievers in general but especially included those who had given themselves over to sin to the point they were known as wicked. They were maliciously hurtful. Alongside these evil people were _impostors_. This term describes someone who uses deliberate deception to seduce people morally or spiritually. These schemers succeed in _deceiving_ other people because they themselves are constantly _being deceived_, giving themselves over to false doctrine and immoral lusts.

Throughout the centuries, unbelievers not only have rejected Christ, but have attacked people who follow Him. Jesus warned His disciples that they should not expect any better treatment than He had received (John 15:18-20). People who hate Jesus will oppose His followers. Our honor is to suffer with Christ.
(In PSG, p. 93) How does seeking to live a godly life lead to potential bullying and persecution?

GET EQUIPPED (2 TIM. 3:14-17)

VERSES 14-15

Regardless of how other people might behave or what conflict they might create, Timothy could remain faithful to Jesus. With the phrase but as for you, Paul contrasted Timothy from the evil persons of the previous verse. Timothy’s behavior was not dependent on his circumstances or on what other people might do. He had a solid record of serving Christ faithfully. Timothy did not need to change anything but to continue.

Paul’s reference to what his protégé had learned involved several sources of spiritual influence. Obviously, Paul had taught the young pastor. He had been Timothy’s mentor for years. In addition, Timothy had a godly heritage through an upbringing by his believing mother and grandmother. They had introduced him to the Scriptures and to Christ. Yet, Timothy’s was not a second-hand faith from those who taught him. He firmly believed. Paul encouraged him to stay true to the course he had chosen in Christ.

Timothy’s spiritual preparation began at a young age. Paul used a word that can be translated infancy or “childhood.” His mother and grandmother taught him the sacred Scriptures. These godly women were faithful believers who followed the biblical pattern of passing God’s Word along to their children and grandchildren.

Timothy learned that the Scripture provides all a believer needs to be equipped and used by God. The Scriptures contain the wisdom for salvation. Through the Scriptures, Timothy came to have faith in Christ Jesus.

VERSES 16-17

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Timothy’s faith rested in God who inspired the Scripture. Through the Holy Spirit, God moved holy men to write as He breathed out (the meaning of inspiration) the Word into their minds and hearts. All Scripture is God’s inspired Word.

Scripture’s substance can be categorized by the areas for which it is profitable. Because God inspired it, the Bible does not merely provide subjects for theological debates but contains practical benefit in at least four ways. First, Scripture is beneficial for teaching. This term describes doctrinal instruction. The Bible provides the basis for spiritual understanding. We know truth through God’s Word. Biblical principles help us to know God and relate to Him and one another properly.

Second, Scripture is useful for rebuking. When we stray from the straight path of God’s ways, the Bible warns us of our danger. Such reproof exposes the error of our choices and convicts us of the need to repent. Scripture contains the proof we have done wrong and draws us to turn from evil.
Third, having called us to repentance, the Bible provides the method for **correcting** us. It helps get us back on the right path. The term translated **correcting** is a compound word meaning to “straighten up again.” God’s purpose in dealing with our sin always involves bringing us back to our original purpose of reflecting His image and accomplishing His will.

Finally, Scripture provides **training in righteousness**. The culmination of spiritual discipleship involves doing what is right according to God. God’s Word helps us mature as believers, not only in what we believe but also in how we behave.

The proper use of Scripture results in transformation of the **man of God**. In this immediate context Paul used this phrase to describe Timothy. However, the intention of this passage was not limited to Timothy individually but applies to every believer.

God wants each person to be **complete**. This word literally means “perfect” or “competent.” This carries the connotation of spiritual maturity as seen in the descriptive phrase **equipped for every good work**. Prior to glorification in heaven, believers will never be perfect in the sense of sinless perfection. Rather, this idea means Scripture provides everything Christians need to perform **every good work** God places before us.

Believers can trust the Scriptures as God’s Word. God gave us this divine book so we might know Him, believe Him, and follow Him.

**(In PSG, p. 95)** How does using Scripture for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (v. 16) equip a believer for “every good work”?

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**PREACH HIS WORD** (2 TIM. 4:1-4)

**VERSES 1-2**

For the fourth time in his two letters to Timothy, Paul would **solemnly charge** the pastor. (See 1 Tim. 1:18; 5:21; 6:13.) The phrase **solemnly charge** translates a single word meaning to admonish someone seriously. Paul’s challenge was so important that he offered it **before God and Christ Jesus**. The fact that Jesus will **judge the living and the dead** adds weight to Paul’s charge. While Timothy’s salvation was established, how he fulfilled Paul’s directions would greatly influence others in their relationship with Christ.

Another reason for the gravity of Paul’s challenge involved the sureness of Christ’s **appearing and his kingdom**. The church anticipated Jesus’ return at any time. Scholars apply the idea of Christ’s **kingdom** to several applications: the church, believers through the ages, heaven, and Jesus’ earthly reign following His Second Coming. In the case of any of these interpretations, the implication for the ministry of the Word was significant.

While the previous verse established the seriousness of Paul’s charge, this verse dictated its substance: **Preach the word**. All other directives in this verse describe aspects of accomplishing this mandate. The term **preach**
employs the idea of a herald who declares his Master’s message dependably. Timothy did not have the luxury of sharing personal preferences but was responsible for declaring God’s Word faithfully.

Knowing opportunities to proclaim the gospel often arose unexpectedly, the preacher had to be ready at any time, in season and out of season. Paul’s instruction immediately applied to Timothy but has meaning for all believers. Each of us should be prepared to share Christ’s good news at all times.

The nature of proclaiming the Word included actions in keeping with the substance of Scripture as indicated in 2 Timothy 3:16—rebuff, correct, and encourage. In both cases, the proclamation of the Word should be done with great patience and teaching.

VERSES 3-4

Paul’s charge contained a sense of urgency because people would not always tolerate sound doctrine. Increasingly, people would allow their personal desires to decide what they want to hear. Instead of heeding a word from the Lord, they would seek to satisfy the itch to affirm their own cravings. Rejecting godly teachers, they would multiply teachers who mirrored themselves.

The reference to myths recalls Paul’s warning in his first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:4). As in the previous epistle, these myths could relate to Jewish fables or Gentile superstition. In any case, they include everything that stands in opposition to hearing the truth of God’s Word. If people turn away from what is true, they will turn to what is false. Because of this ever-present danger, believers must be ready to present the true gospel at all times.

(In PSG, p. 97) What are some contemporary examples of “itching-ear” spirituality? How do those examples distort God’s Word?

VERSE 5

But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

VERSE 5

Using the familiar phrase, but as for you, the apostle shifted from Timothy’s preaching responsibilities to his personal life and service to Christ. With four imperative statements, Paul urged Timothy to take actions necessary to his calling. First, Timothy was to exercise self-control. In other epistles, Paul used this term to implore watchfulness (1 Thess. 5:6). Responsible followers of Christ must restrain their desires, not only in areas of morality, but in everything.

Paul’s second encouragement seems unnecessary since Timothy had already been experiencing hardship. Paul urged Timothy not to give up in the face of opposition, but to endure it.

The third challenge required Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. One does not need a special gifting to carry out the work of an evangelist. All believers have the mandate of Christ’s Great Commission to make disciples of all people (Matt. 28:18-20).
As Timothy fulfilled these and other aspects of Christian service, he would fulfill his ministry. This phrase was an imperative necessity. Paul wanted his son in the ministry to realize the potential of his ministry.

**VERSES 6-8**

Paul pointed to himself as an example. He announced his resolve to finish his life well. Paul used two word pictures to describe his anticipated death. *Being poured out as a drink offering* referenced a sacrifice to the Lord honoring His holiness and goodness. Perhaps the first drink offering was made by Jacob at Bethel when God gave him the covenant name of Israel (Gen. 35:14). Drink offerings were regular parts of the daily sacrifice in the tabernacle and later in the temple (Ex. 29:38-41).

The fact that Paul felt he was already being poured out indicated his current suffering as his execution approached. The second metaphor simply alluded to Paul’s departure. An obvious reference to his pending death, Paul knew that his time was close. He was ready to meet his Lord.

Reflecting on his ministry, Paul made three triumphant declarations, not out of pride but from a sense of fulfillment. He had fought the good fight. Possibly a reference to his many battles with opposition throughout his ministry, this phrase could also encompass Paul’s overall spiritual endeavors. The important point was that it was a good fight. His was not self-serving effort but work that glorified Christ.

Another metaphor came from the athletic arena, similar to one already used in this epistle (2 Tim. 2:5). Paul was no longer in the race, he had finished it. He could look back as he was about to cross the finish line and feel satisfaction from a race well run.

Finally, and most importantly, Paul had kept the faith. More than having faith, this phrase addressed the faith, meaning the faithful adherence to Jesus and His gospel. He had not been deterred or defeated. He stayed true to the end and was victorious in Christ.

Paul knew a reward was reserved for him in heaven. The champion athlete received a wreath-like crown for his victory. Paul anticipated a crown of righteousness. He envisioned that day when the righteous Judge would grant him the culmination of both the righteousness that Christ imparted to believers and the rightly lived life that reflected that righteousness.

Paul did not claim this award for himself alone but promised it to all those who have loved Christ’s appearing. The tense suggests believers looked back on Christ’s earthly life and ministry with deep affection and appreciation. It also could look forward to Jesus’ second appearing. In both cases, the emphasis rests on Christ. As believers demonstrate the genuineness of their faith by remaining faithful to Christ to the end, we can also anticipate the ultimate commendation, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21).

What is the relationship between fighting the good fight and keeping the faith? Can you have one without the other? Explain.
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, share about a time when you experienced personal opposition for your faith. If you do not have a personal story, find an example to share. (*Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* is a great resource.)

ASK: Why are some people able to endure rejection or opposition for their faith? (PSG, p. 91)

STATE: Believers who have faced persecution demonstrate this same kind resolve, knowing the greater the opposition the greater the opportunity to honor God.

REVIEW: Read the main points from Understand the Context (pp. 104–105). During your highlights, direct the group’s attention to Pack Item 12 (Handout: Paul’s Letters) and direct a volunteer to read its purpose—how this letter was used to encourage Timothy in the faith.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 3:12-13.

DEFINE: Ask the group to define the difference between opposition, bullying, and persecution.

ASK: Why should believers expect this type of treatment? As followers of Christ, we are going to be different to the culture no matter where we are or what circumstances we face.

EMPHASIZE: Paul knew this truth personally. He understood the lengths to which nonbelievers would go to silence believers. Use Pack Item 7 (Handout: 1,2 Timothy; Titus Time Line) to point out Paul’s location while writing this letter (under the subheading “AD 62–67”).

ASK: How does seeking to live a godly life lead to potential bullying and persecution? (PSG, p. 93)

READ: Direct someone to read 2 Timothy 3:14-15, while the group listens for what Paul urged Timothy to do.

STATE: Timothy would have to guard against pastoral pitfalls and doctrinal deviations that could dampen his spiritual fire. As God’s truth took deep root in Timothy, his ministry would bear abundant fruit to the glory of Christ and equip him to tackle challenges at Ephesus.

ASK: How have others helped you build a spiritual foundation based on the Scripture?

READ: Call for a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

STUDY: Create small teams (a person can be a team). Instruct each group to review the information under Verses 16-17 in the PSG (pp. 94–95) to discover the four essential areas that made Scripture sufficient for equipping Timothy’s life and ministry. After allowing time for review, call for volunteers to share their findings. Then ask: How does using Scripture for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (v. 16) equip a believer for “every good work”? (PSG, p. 95)
**EMPHASIZE:** Only God’s Word can inform us about what God expects of His people. Just as Timothy needed to use Scripture to develop strong moral character among believers at Ephesus, so we also need it to train our thoughts and actions to conform to God’s will today.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Affirm the Key Doctrine for this week’s session (The Scriptures) on page 95 of the PSG.

**STATE:** By continually saturating and nurturing himself in Scripture, Timothy would be thoroughly capable of godly living and effective leadership. He would prove in his own life the reality that Scripture is the tool God uses to develop spiritual maturity.

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 4:1-4, and direct the rest of the group to listen for what will happen to the truth when it’s not guarded.

**EMPHASIZE:** State from the PSG (p. 96): Paul warned about the growing number of people who reject God’s truth in favor of personal preferences. Point to Pack Item 5 (Poster: First-Century Heresies) and give copies of Pack Item 13 (Handout: First-Century Heresies) to explain some of the false teaching that Timothy dealt with in his church.

**HIGHLIGHT:** People who turn from God’s truth and turn aside to embrace fabrications and falsehoods suffer a spiritual dislocation. Myths were fabrications of the imagination that satisfied a temporary preference but dismissed salvation in Christ.

**ASK:** What are some contemporary examples of “itching-ear” spirituality? How do those examples distort God’s Word? (PSG, p. 97)

**READ:** Call for a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 4:5-8, while the group listens for Paul’s instructions on how to finish well.

**SUMMARIZE:** Reflecting upon his life in Christ, Paul affirmed three accomplishments that carried continual implications. First, Paul endured the agony of spiritual warfare. Second, he had lived purposefully for the glory of Christ without quitting. Third, Paul had guarded the treasure of the gospel that had been entrusted to him. Furthermore, he had maintained a passionate faith in His Savior.

**ASK:** What is the relationship between fighting the good fight and keeping the faith? Can you have one without the other? Explain. (PSG, p. 98) After discussion, ask: Did anyone share anything in the group today that impacted how you would respond to those questions now?

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**RECAP:** Review the bulleted statements from In My Context (PSG, p. 99) with the group. Call for volunteers to share their answers to the following question: What truths would you share with a friend facing challenges for his or her faith in Christ? (PSG, p. 91)

**REFLECT:** Lead the group to discuss the first question set from In My Context on page 99 of the PSG: How can your group draw attention to the plight of persecuted believers? What specific action steps can you take to be a voice for them?

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, thanking God that we can rely on His Word. Ask for the strength not to be caught off guard when persecution arises.
PRACTICE

• Encourage your group members by reminding them that our faith journey is a walk and not a sprint. Tell your group members that you are praying for them this week to remain steadfast in their walks with Christ.

• Assign regular attenders the name of another group member to contact this week and check in with that person.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Prior to the session, review current statistics on persecution available at www.persecution.com, or print a listing of people to pray for from www.icommittopray.com. As the group arrives, direct attention to page 91 of the PSG and invite a volunteer to read the paragraph. Then share your findings on persecution around the world and open the session with prayer.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• To supplement discussion of 2 Timothy 3:12-13, use the stories from Nik Ripken’s *The Insanity of Obedience* of how, in a time when believers were to be silenced by oppression, their faith instead grew. Discuss times in the Bible when people’s faith grew when oppressed.

• For further study of 2 Timothy 3:14-17, illustrate how God’s Word is like someone driving and is corrected back onto the road to avoid destruction.

• To enhance application of 2 Timothy 4:5-8, find stories of people who ended their stories of faith well and those who did not. Lead the group in completing the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 98): *Compare Paul’s last testament with the closing statements of others: King David (2 Sam. 23), Moses (Deut. 33), the dying thief (Luke 23), and Stephen (Acts 7).* What common things, if any, do you find in these accounts? What do these reveal about the importance of faith at the end of life on earth?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Supply pens and paper to the group. Encourage them to think through the third questions set under In My Context on page 99 of the PSG: *As you are running the race of faith, what inspires you to persevere? List the names of believers who inspire you to finish well. What characteristics inspire you the most? What can you do to continue to develop those characteristics in your own life?* Once they have identified someone who inspires them, provide time for them to write a note of encouragement to that person.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Read the lyrics of the song “Forever,” by Chris Tomlin. You can supplement this activity by also reading Psalm 136 as a group.