

Semicontinuous  
**Lam. 1:1–6**  
**Lam. 3:19–26**

Complementary  
**Hab. 1:1–4; 2:1–4**  
**Ps. 37:1–9**  
**2 Tim. 1:1–14**  
**Luke 17:5–10**

# Faith in Discouraging Times

**Goal for the Session** *Adults will heed the call in 2 Timothy to remain faithful to Christ and the gospel even when they are discouraged.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on 2 Timothy 1:1–14

#### WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Lewis R. Donelson

This journey from suffering to glory is the heart of the gospel. The challenge here is to hold to this gospel of suffering and glory. Paul was appointed “herald,” “apostle,” and “teacher” of this gospel (v. 11). Timothy is called to hold fast to this gospel, to “guard the good treasure entrusted to you” and to do so “with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us” (v. 14). The passage as a whole raises the ancient question that haunts many Christians. Do we trust the yet unfulfilled promises of the gospel, when so much evidence in our lives seems to contradict them? Can we live our lives accordingly?

#### WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Joseph L. Price

As a culmination to this opening, the author incorporates a stanza of an early church hymn that grows out of the underlying issues of doctrinal authority and personal experience: “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (v. 12 KJV). The writer proposes that Christian experience serves as the litmus test to verify the salvific work of Christ. He is persuaded by the depth of his belief in Christ as the one who transforms that he will be held in divine acceptance and favor until “that day,” the end of time and the judgment of all.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Olive Elaine Hinnant

Paul’s fear that Timothy will be ashamed and not tell others of his faith reminds us that this good news is always one generation away from extinction. If one generation becomes ashamed of the gospel and does not risk testimony, how will the next generation know? This seems to be the ultimate concern here; at the end of his life, Paul needs Timothy to carry on for him. Churches take this responsibility seriously when we provide Christian education classes to pass along knowledge of the Scriptures and faith to all ages.

#### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by J. Peter Holmes

In the midst of struggles, there seemed to be no thought of anger or anxiety, but rather gratitude. Amid discouragement or even despondency about the setbacks and the challenges to the faith, the mentor’s gratitude helped Timothy to see that he was part of something so much bigger—Christ’s ministry. When we face setbacks, pausing to give thanks can make all the difference in the world. Gratitude puts things in perspective.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**2 Timothy 1:1–14**

## Focus on Your Teaching

Most adults find life discouraging at times. After all, life is naturally full of good times and bad. But some people face particularly discouraging experiences, such as dealing with rebellious children, failing marriages, severe illness, and discrimination in the workplace or in society. Many may find relief in voicing feelings, or may be helped by hearing about ways that others face discouragement. Paul's words of encouragement to his disciple offer the chance to reflect on where we find strength as individuals and communities in times of trial.

*O God, give me wisdom to listen and to speak a word that will bring hope and comfort, through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

### YOU WILL NEED

- copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- Bibles
- pens
- paper
- newsprint
- markers
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for October 13, 2019

#### For Responding

- option 1: pens, markers, card stock strips for bookmarks (optional: decorative materials)
- option 2: paper, pens, scissors, colored paper, tape, and small containers or cardboard center tubes of paper towel rolls
- option 3: pens, paper, and envelopes

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session, print on newsprint the verse assignments listed in Exploring.*

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. When all have gathered, ask them to form pairs with the people they know least well in the group. Instruct the pairs to spend a few minutes telling each other about a recent time when they were discouraged and what, if anything, gave them hope in their time of discouragement.

Gather as a whole group and tell the group that today we will examine a passage in which a great pastor–preacher was discouraged.

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

*O Lord, thank you for those who have gone before us in the faith, and for the gift we are to each other today in the church. Be with us in this time together. Amen.*

### EXPLORING

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Timothy) and have people read it in silence. Allow time for any observations and then have a volunteer read aloud 2 Timothy 1:1–14.

Reread verse 8 aloud to the group to emphasize the point of the letter—the author wants to encourage Timothy to remain faithful to his calling in the light of coming suffering.

Have participants call out words that would describe the possible feelings of a missionary who is faced with suffering and difficult congregational members. They will probably suggest sadness, fear, discouragement, loneliness, desire to leave, longing for a friend. Suggest that they bear these words in mind as they discuss today's focus text in groups.

While most people will not be troubled by discussing disappointment, it is possible that someone may have experienced a tragedy or traumatic event that is difficult to discuss. Show sensitivity and give time to process feelings. Encourage discussion on the focus text's message of comfort.

If you have fewer than six participants, assign verse selections to individuals.

Second Timothy is a short letter, easily read in one sitting. Encourage participants to read the entire letter at home now that they know its context. Reading an entire book of the Bible enables the reader to more fully appreciate the writer's thoughts.

Distribute pens and paper for note-taking, and form three groups. Assign to each group one of the following selections of verses (posted on a whiteboard or newsprint prior to class): verses 1–4; verses 5–10; and verses 11–14.

Indicate that the purpose of the discussion is to find in the assigned verses some good news, some encouragement for Timothy. Suggest that participants look for as many encouraging points as possible. While the groups are working, set out markers and a sheet of newsprint on a table. Write on the newsprint the heading “Encouraging Words.” As each group concludes their discussion, invite them to write on the newsprint words or phrases that describe their findings. Encourage them to make their writing large enough to be read by the whole group.

Gather together as a whole group and post the newsprint where all can see it. Have a few participants expand briefly on the points their group made. Leave the newsprint for use in Closing and in option 1 of Responding.

Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on 2 Timothy 1:1–14). Have a volunteer read aloud the “What?” excerpt. Have the group discuss the two questions at the end of the excerpt.

Now have a different volunteer read aloud the “Where?” excerpt. Discuss:

- ✧ How do you understand Paul’s teaching that, whatever happens, Christ will hold believers “in divine acceptance and favor until . . . the end of time”?

Invite someone to read aloud the “So What?” excerpt. Discuss:

- ✧ How do you understand the meaning of the following phrase: “the good news is always one generation away from extinction”?
- ✧ When has the Christian message seemed particularly vulnerable? (Examples: the early days of the church, which had just a small number of disciples; the second and third centuries, when persecution was widespread; the twentieth century, when atheistic communism took root in some countries.)
- ✧ What factors have helped the gospel survive? (Include the work of the Holy Spirit; the faithfulness of preachers and Christian educators; words of encouragement when preachers and teachers faced great odds.)

Move to Responding by having everyone read the “Now What?” excerpt silently. Discuss:

- ✧ How does having a sense of gratitude help to put life events in perspective?

## RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities, depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Bible Encouragement Strips** Tell the group that, as Paul encouraged Timothy to remain faithful to Christ and to the gospel even when discouraged, they will choose one or more words of good news to take home that may encourage them in times of discouragement.

Provide pens, markers, and strips of card stock to make bookmarks (optional: decorative materials such as glitter and glue, ribbon). Have participants choose words from the

**EASY  
PREP**

“Encouraging Words” sheet (from Exploring) that they find personally helpful. Have them print the words on a strip of card stock, which they can use as a Bible bookmark that will give them daily encouragement to remain faithful to Christ in trying times.

- 2. Time Capsules for One Another** Tell the group that, as Paul encouraged Timothy to remain faithful to Christ and to the gospel even when discouraged, this activity will help them give one another words of encouragement.

Provide paper, pens, scissors, colored paper, tape, and small containers (baby food jars, large pill bottles) or cardboard centers of paper towel rolls cut in half. Invite participants to print their favorite verse from today’s focus text on a sheet of paper, and then fold the paper to fit inside a “time capsule.” To make the capsule, they should wrap a container (baby food jar, large pill bottle, or paper towel cardboard tube cut in half) in colored paper and fasten the paper with tape.

When all have finished, have them place the time capsules on a table. Have everyone choose one capsule to take home. (They should avoid choosing the capsule they made.) They are to keep the capsule in a safe place until they find themselves in a time of discouragement. Then they can open the capsule and read the message that may give them the encouragement they need.

- 3. Letter to the Pastor** Timothy was not the only pastor to have felt discouraged on the job. Every pastor needs and appreciates a word of appreciation and encouragement.

Distribute pens, paper, and envelopes. Have each participant write a brief note of thanks and/or encouragement to your pastor. Encourage the writer to include a specific detail if possible (such as “I appreciated last Sunday’s sermon because . . .”). Place each note in an envelope with the pastor’s name on the front, and deliver the notes to the pastor after the session.

## CLOSING

As a summary of the session invite participants to each read aloud one of the words of encouragement on the newsprint.

Tell the group that you will begin a prayer and then they are invited to say aloud the names of pastors, congregational leaders, and others for whom adults are grateful. Pray aloud:

*Lord, we pray today for your presence and strength to be with those we now name before you. (Pause for adults to speak names.) These people we commend to your loving care. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for October 13, 2019, or e-mail it to participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

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## Timothy

Timothy came from the area of Lystra in the province of Galatia. His grandmother Lois (who had been converted by Paul) and his mother, Eunice, were Christians, and young Timothy had been instructed in the Jewish Scriptures from childhood.

By Paul's second missionary journey, Timothy had matured in the Christian faith to the point that Paul decided to choose him as a companion for his missionary journey. Timothy was then circumcised in preparation for the mission to Jewish hearers and synagogues and was set apart by the laying on of the hands of the council of elders in Derbe and Lystra. Paul mentored Timothy in the missionary work. Paul and Timothy were the first two Christians to enter Europe, where they established missions in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Timothy stayed on to take care of these congregations, and later joined Paul in Athens. Paul also took Timothy on his third missionary journey.

Paul considered Timothy to be a son in the gospel, a beloved child. They continued to have a close relationship that lasted two decades. Timothy spent considerable time with Paul in Corinth and Ephesus. Paul used him to carry communications between congregations, and Timothy may even have assisted in writing letters. He represented Paul at various times in Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and Macedonia.

The setting for this Second Letter to Timothy is that Paul is in prison in Rome. He has recently had a trial that proved an opportunity to witness for Jesus. Some of his friends have deserted him or gone on missions, although Luke is still with him.

Paul longs to see Timothy, especially since he suspects that the coming winter may well be his last. Paul urges Timothy to bring the warm cloak he had left in Troas as well as particular books and parchments. Aware of Timothy's situation, Paul writes encouraging words to his loved protégé.

