

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

July 26-August 1, 2020

Sermon Series: The Fine Art of Disagreement

Week One: “Why Do We Believe What We Believe?”

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week’s Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday’s sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsel, and all just works do proceed, give unto us Your servants that peace which the world cannot give. Set our hearts to obey Your commandments, that we may pass our time in rest and quietness, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

Our culture today faces disagreements with great energy – not all of it positive. Some tears down as arguments become name calling and finger pointing. Is it possible to have a difference with someone and love them? We Christians are called to it. Let’s learn the fine art of disagreement.

This Week’s Sermon Theme:

As followers of Jesus Christ we turn to the Bible as our beginning point in all life circumstances. We’ll talk about the ways that the Bible is our “Authority” and our “Ultimate Arbitrator.”

Sunday Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 3:10-17 (A group member should read the passages aloud).

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

Which of Paul’s personal attributes does he point out to Timothy? (3:10-11)

Which of Paul’s life experiences does he point out to Timothy? (3:11)

What happens to people who want to live a godly life? (3:12)

What happens to evil people and impostors? (3:13)

Why does Paul advise Timothy to continue in what he has learned? (3:14)

What does Paul say makes Timothy wise for salvation? (3:15)

What is the source of Scripture? (3:16a)

What is Scripture useful for? (3:16b)

What does Scripture ultimately prepare us for? (3:17)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Encourage participants to simply ask any questions they have about the passage. The questions below are only suggestions, representative of the kinds of questions that might be asked. The goal is not necessarily to provide answers, but to ask questions of the text! Open discussion about the questions raised below, or by the class, is encouraged.

If we are not familiar with the story of Paul, we might wonder what he's referring to that happened to him in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, and how God rescued him.

We probably wonder how the godly are persecuted – what should we expect on this Christian journey?

We might wonder why Paul draws a connection between what has been taught and the character of the teacher. Is that really a reliable standard?

We probably wonder what Scriptures Paul is referring to, since the letter we are reading is part of OUR Scriptures and wasn't around when Paul wrote his letter.

We might wonder what being made "wise for salvation" looks like.

We might question what it means for Scripture to be "God-breathed." In what way is it "inspired"?

We might wonder how exactly we are to use Scripture to rebuke and correct others, without coming across as if we are self-righteous or offending others.

Finally, we could ask how Scripture equips us to do good works.

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: 2 Timothy 3:1-9; Acts 13:50, Acts 14:5-6, Acts 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 3:4, Matthew 5:10; Acts 16:1; John 5:39; Luke 24:44

This week, we have another Scripture passage that begins with a verse that we need to look at in the context of what comes immediately before. In 2 Timothy 3:1-9, Paul has given his protégé Timothy a lot of advice concerning the kinds of people he will encounter in his ministry. Paul describes these people with all of these words: selfish, money-loving, braggards, slanderers, disobedient, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, contrary, critical, lacking self-control, brutal, disloyal, reckless, conceited, pleasure-loving, appearing religious but denying God, opposing truth, of corrupt mind, of counterfeit faith, and foolish! It's hard to imagine a catalog of more disparaging terms!

So now, in verse 10, Paul begins to describe to Timothy how Timothy himself has exemplified the duties and qualities of a leader of Christ-followers, by following Paul's example. The NIV has Paul telling

Timothy that he “knows all about my teaching,” while the CEB says Timothy has “paid attention to my teaching.” The actual word used here means literally “to follow alongside” – Timothy has “followed alongside Paul’s teaching.” But that Greek word (*parakolouthēin*) has a huge range of meaning. It can mean to physically walk alongside someone, it can mean to emotionally stay attached to someone, through thick and thin, it can mean to mentally pay attention to someone and to grasp the meaning of their teaching, and it can mean to take a subordinate role to someone, always carrying out their ideas and emulating the person being followed. In the New Testament way of thinking, it pretty much carries the meaning of “be someone’s disciple.” Timothy has been a loyal student of Paul, following alongside him in every sense of the word. He is Paul’s disciple, just as Paul is a disciple of Jesus.

Paul goes on to list the qualities Timothy has modeled, in contrast to the heretics previously described, because these qualities are representative of the way of life of a disciple of Jesus: a willingness to be taught or trained, conducting life by a particular pattern, toward a particular purpose, being faithful, having patience, and loving others. But just as these are qualities of life Timothy has modeled, there are also specific experiences that both Timothy and Paul have undergone that demonstrate discipleship as well – endurance, persecutions, and suffering.

Endurance is particularly necessary *because* the Christian life will include persecution and suffering. Paul goes on to list three specific examples of his own such experiences – in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. These stories are found in Acts 13:50, Acts 14:5-6, and Acts 14:19, respectively. It is important to recognize that these events happened before Timothy became Paul’s protégé, but they happened in the district where Timothy lived, and Timothy may well have seen them happen or at least heard about them. If so, it is even more of a testimony for us of Timothy’s character, beyond the description Paul is lifting up with these words. Paul believes strongly that a real Christian cannot escape persecution. He had warned the church in Thessalonica about this (see 1 Thessalonians 3:4), just as Jesus had warned His disciples (see Matthew 5:10). And yet, Paul is as confident in the fact that God will come to the rescue of those persecuted in His name, as he is in the fact that evil people (like those he had described earlier) will get even worse, bringing others along with them.

And now Paul turns to the heart of the matter. The Scriptures Timothy grew up with will provide a solid foundation to keep him from being turned by these evil deceivers. Paul implores Timothy that just as he has been loyal to Paul, Timothy must now be loyal to the teaching he has received. We should remember that Timothy’s mother was a Jew, while his father was a Greek (see Acts 16:1). In that culture, mothers raised their children in their faith, and Jewish children learned their Scriptures from infancy – an idiom even arose that Jewish babies “drank the law with their mother’s milk.” Thus, Timothy had known the Jewish Scriptures from infancy (NIV) or childhood (CEB). We should note that “holy scriptures” here means our Old Testament. As Christians, we may be surprised to realize that Paul says it is *these* scriptures that will help to “make you wise in a way that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus” (CEB), but Jesus also insisted that our Old Testament Scriptures all spoke of Him (see, for example, John 5:39 and Luke 24:44).

Finally, Paul reminds Timothy of the inspiration of Scripture. Many of the heretics who Paul has condemned had books of their own to which they turned to support their claims. Paul regarded these books as man-made things, but the Scriptures, while written by the hands of men, are God-inspired. This is a foundational belief that makes the words of Scripture useful for life in a way other books of philosophies are not. Paul then lists four specific ways that Scriptures should be used. First, for teaching

– for Christians, especially the teaching of Jesus as handed down in the Gospels is the basis for all the church’s life instruction, but study of the Old Testament helps to understand the context of that teaching of Jesus. Second, Paul says Scripture is useful for “rebuking,” or “showing mistakes.” What this means is not that the Bible should be used for finding fault in others, but rather, that Scripture helps us to see the error of our ways and put us back on the right track. Paul’s third way Scripture should be used is for “correcting.” This is another foundational teaching – Scripture is to be the norm against which all other theories, theologies, philosophies, and ideas are tested. If they contradict the teaching of Scripture, they are to be rejected or corrected – the test of a claim’s validity is always the words of Scripture. And finally, Scripture is useful for “training in righteousness” (NIV), or “training character” (CEB). The purpose of this training is to equip us for good works. The point is that study of Scripture is not done from a selfish standpoint – for our own good (even though it *is* good for us). It is done to make us useful to God, and to accomplish God’s purposes in the world.

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

Can you identify people in your world who have the attributes of the “dangerous people” Paul warns about in 2 Timothy 3:1-9? Who are they, and how do you safeguard yourself from them?

How are you “following alongside” the teachings of Paul and Timothy? Is your conduct, life purpose, faithfulness, patience, love, and endurance modeling those teachings? If not, how can you better align your life with these models?

Have you ever been harassed because of your faith? Were you surprised by it? How will being warned that this is to be expected change your response if/when it happens again?

Who taught you the Christian way of life? What made them trustworthy?

What role has Scripture had in your own salvation journey? Is it continuing to shape your path to wisdom?

What do you believe about the inspiration of Scripture? Does your life reflect a belief that its words should be the test of all other philosophies, theories, and worldviews?

How has Scripture taught you, shown you the error of your ways, corrected you, or trained you? Can you point to specific examples of how your own choices or lifestyle have been impacted by Scripture?

How has Scripture served as a basis for why you believe what you believe?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Holy God, help us to model our lives on love, faithfulness, patience, and endurance, and not on disloyalty, recklessness, pride, and corruption. Help us to model our lives on Jesus, Paul, and Timothy. Help us to always turn to Your Holy Word as the foundation for our lives and hold us firm in what we have been

taught. Allow us to allow Scripture to form us, rebuke us, correct us, and train us. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.