

August 1

2 Thessalonians 2:5-12

Do you not remember that I told you these things
when I was still with you?

You know what is restraining him,
so that he may be revealed when his time comes.

The mystery of lawlessness is already at work,
but only until the one who now restrains it is removed.

Then the lawless one will be revealed,
whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth,
annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming.

The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan,
who uses all power, signs, lying wonders,
and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing,
because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion,
leading them to believe what is false,
so that all who have not believed the truth
but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned.

- * To what do you think “but only until the one who now restrains it” refers?
- * How do wicked deceptions operate for those who “refuse to love the truth”?
- * What powerful delusions lead us, too, to believe what is false?

Almighty God, righteous, holy judge, we cannot comprehend your condemnation. May we fear only you, so that we do not fall prey to the lawless one, Satan, and all sorts of wicked deceptions. Draw us close to Christ whose very breath will destroy all evil. Keep us from false delusions so that we firmly believe the truth of salvation through Christ's cross and resurrection, in whose name we pray. Amen.

August 2

2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters
beloved by the Lord,

because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation
through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.
For this purpose God called you through our proclamation of the good news,
so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions
that you were taught by us either by word of mouth or by letter.

Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread
rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you,
and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people;
for not all have faith.

- * For whom do you pray that their mission work might be fruitful? What might churches in different parts of the world learn from one another about spreading the word of the Lord?
- * How might holding fast to that which we were taught ground us for reaching out to more people with ever new challenges?

God is faithful and will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.
We have confidence in the Lord concerning you,
that you are doing and will go on doing the things that we command.

May our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort all our hearts and strengthen us in every good work and word. May the Lord direct our hearts to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ. Amen.

August 3

2 Thessalonians 3:6-17

Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, keep away from believers who are living in idleness.

You know how you ought to imitate us;

we were not idle when we were with you,

and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it.

With toil and labor, we worked night and day,

that we might not burden any of you,

not because we did not have that right, but to give you an example.

Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

We hear that some of you are living in idleness,

mere busybodies, not doing any work.

Such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ

to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter;

have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed.

Do not regard them as enemies, but warn them as believers.

* Pick out some phrases in these verses that resonate with your attitude towards personal and communal work. Have a conversation with a companion or small group, e.g. staff, council, about these phrases. What do they mean? And not mean?

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.

May the Lord of peace give us peace at all times in all ways. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of us. Amen.

August 4

1 Timothy 1:1-7

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God

and of Christ Jesus our hope,

to Timothy, my loyal child in the faith:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia,

to remain in Ephesus, so that you may instruct certain people

not to teach any different doctrine,

and not to occupy themselves with myths

and endless genealogies that promote speculation

rather than the divine training that is known by faith.

The aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart,

a good conscience, and sincere faith.

Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk,

desiring to be teachers of the law,

without understanding either what they are saying

or the things about which they make assertions.

* In each age people may deviate in different directions from the doctrine of being saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. What are some myths and speculations in this age? Both outside the church and within?

* Who are good, faithful, teachers in the faith for whom you give thanks?

* What are you doing to raise up and equip teachers in your congregation?

*What continuing education does each of us need so that we do not teach without understanding the things about which we teach?

Wise and caring God, teach us so that we may teach with knowledge, loving hearts and sincere faith. May we continue to search the depths of your scriptures, and mature in sound doctrine so that we might understand you more fully. Together in Christ we pray Amen.

August 5

1 Timothy 1:8-13a

Now we know that the law is good,
if one uses it legitimately.

This means understanding that the law is laid down
not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient,
for the unholy and profane,
for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers,
fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers,
and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching
that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God,
which God entrusted to me.

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord,
who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful
and appointed me to God's service,
even though I was formerly a blasphemer,
a persecutor, and a man of violence.

* How do we use the law legitimately (an interesting phrase)? And why is the law given not for the innocent, when no one is innocent? What is its purpose?

* What echoes of the Ten Commandments do you hear in the list of lawlessness and disobedience? What is the power of the Gospel, through sound teaching, to transform lives?

* We know that it is God who judges us faithful in Christ Jesus and calls us to service. What has been the power of God in your life?

Lord, conform our lives to Christ. Turn us again from unholy and profane living. We thank you for our callings, rooted in the forgiveness of sins. May your law curb unrighteousness, and turn people to the good news of the Gospel of Christ. Amen.

August 6

1 Timothy 1:13b-20

But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,
and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me
with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.
The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance,
that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—
of whom I am the foremost.

For that very reason I received mercy so that in me
Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience,
making me an example to those who would come
to believe in him for eternal life.
To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible,
the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen

I am giving you these instructions, Timothy, my child,
in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you,
so that by following them you may fight the good fight,
having faith and a good conscience.
By rejecting conscience, some people have suffered shipwreck in the faith;
among them Hymenaeus and Alexander,
whom I have turned over to Satan, so they learn not to blaspheme.

* On this day of remembrance of the bombing of Hiroshima, what sins have we committed, what acts of ignorant disbelief, what shipwrecks of faith?

* What mercy, what grace in Jesus Christ have you witnessed? How is God shaping you in patience and good conscience?

Immortal, invisible, wise God, to you be the glory, for you alone are God. May we remember our baptisms so that we might cling to what is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. In Christ we pray. Amen.

August 7

1 Timothy 2:1-7

First of all, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions
and thanksgivings be made for everyone,
for kings and all who are in high positions,
so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in godliness and dignity.

This is right and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,
who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
For there is one God; there is one mediator between God and humankind,
Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all.

I was appointed a herald and an apostle
(I am telling the truth, I am not lying),
a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

* First of all, for whom this day might you offer prayers of intercession?
Prayers of supplication? Prayers of thanksgiving? For whom might you pray
who are in high positions that all people might lead a quiet and peaceable life
in godliness and dignity?

* God desires everyone to be saved. What, therefore, is your mission, this day,
and each day? How is your ministry apostolic?

*God our Savior, you desire everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge
of the truth. We believe that there is one mediator who gave himself for all. In
you we trust. Strengthen our belief that we might be teachers of the faith in
Christ Jesus. Amen.*

August 8

1 Timothy 2:8-15

I desire that in every place the men should pray,
lifting up holy hands without anger or argument;
also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently
in suitable clothing, not with hair braided,
or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes,
but with good works, as is proper for women
who profess reverence for God.

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission.
I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man;
she is to keep silent.

For Adam was formed first, then Eve;
and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived
and became a transgressor.

Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they
continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

* This passage has been so often used to exclude women from fully serving
Christ and the Church. What do we do with it? Why were these “instructions”
given? How are they culturally specific to the first century?

* What does Genesis say about the nature of sin and deception concerning
men and women? For women and men, how are anger and argument a
hindrance to communal prayer? How might women and men profess reverence
for God and love for the community through good works?

* Given the power of the use of this passage to defend oppression of women,
what liberating justice still needs to be sought and achieved in and through the
churches?

*Holy and loving God, we remain silent before You. All have sinned, and in
Christ alone, all have been saved. Transform our relationships, equip us for
partnership in ministry and through the power of your Spirit empower us to
exercise authority with justice. Amen*

August 9

1 Timothy 3:1-7

The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.

Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.

He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way— for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church?

He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into condemnation of the devil.

He must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

* The specific instructions continue. What judicatory leaders would be excluded from office through these regulations? However, what characteristics of good leadership do you see at the core of these instructions?

* What do you think are the roles and responsibilities of judicatory leaders today? How does one’s person affect one’s office? How does one’s leadership within the church relate to one’s call in the broader ecumenical, inter-faith and public world? And should not “he” for bishop now be “he or she”?

Holy and loving God, creator, redeemer and sustainer of the church, rise up among us wise, ethical, respectful, gentle and honest leaders. Give them gifts for teaching, preaching, administration, and all other gifts necessary for their callings in Christ. Amen.

August 10

1 Timothy 3:8-16

Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Let them first be tested; then, if they proved themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons.

Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.

Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

* The list of those instructed continues. To what sins are we prone? What does being “double-tongued” sound like? What does being greedy look like? What does being slandered feel like?

*How are the instructions for bishops, deacons and women similar? How does our being faithful in all things also increase our boldness in faith, ministry and mission?

I write these instructions, so that if I am delayed in coming, you know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

God, shape us into faithful servants, for the mystery of our religion is great: Christ was revealed in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, and taken up in glory. In him we pray. Amen.

August 11

1 Timothy 4:1-10

The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith. Deceitful spirits, teachings of demons, and the hypocrisy of liars forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving. Everything created by God is good, sanctified by God's word and prayer; nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving.

Be a good servant, nourished on the words of faith and sound teaching you have followed; put these faithful teachings before the brothers and sisters. Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness, for while physical training has some value, godliness is valuable in every way in the present life and in the life to come.

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. We toil and struggle because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

* What reasons for renouncing the faith are prominent today? What hypocritical demands deceive one into rejecting those very gifts created and sanctified by God?

* How do we train ourselves in godliness? What disciplines help keep us fit in the midst of struggles of faith and life?

Living God, we set our hope on you alone. Keep us from the subtle as well as blatant ways that we renounce our faith. Keep us firmly believing in the one who is the savior of all people, Christ Jesus, in whom we pray. Amen.

August 12

1 Timothy 4:11-16

These are the things you must insist on and teach. Let no one despise his or her youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting and to teaching.

* Did (does) anyone see you as too young to have the authority to read, teach and proclaim the Gospel? How do we exercise not only official authority, but also personal authority? How can we help young people claim their own voices for discipleship?

Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.

Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

* How can we help people claim their own gifts and use them?

*What central gift given you through baptism and perhaps through the laying on of hands in rites of consecration or ordination might you still be neglecting?

* Of course we do not save ourselves, so what do these final verses mean? How are you paying close attention to what the Spirit is doing through you?

God of all stages of life, may we not despise our age. Give us a full measure of the Spirit that we might claim the gifts you have given and upon which the faith community depends that we, together with all your saints, might faithfully serve Jesus Christ. Amen.

August 13

1 Timothy 5:1-8

Do not speak harshly to an older man,
but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers,
to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters--
with absolute purity.

Honor widows who are really widows.

If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should be dutiful to family,
for this is pleasing in God's sight.

The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God
and continues in supplications and prayers night and day;
but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.

Give these commands as well, so that they may be above reproach.

Whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members,
has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

* It's all about respect and relationships! What can we learn today about
showing respect across generations? How are our relationships transformed in
Christ?

* The writer brings his own views to his instruction concerning widows. How
might they cloud his perceptions? [But] How might his words to live above
reproach apply to all of us?

* How do we, in this time and culture, provide for family members and
relatives? What are the challenges? What are the possibilities? How is it a
matter of faith?

*God of relationships, shape us into caring, respectful and responsible people.
Conform our lives to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who
transforms lives and gives us the strength and love we need for service. Amen.*

August 14

1 Timothy 5:9-16

Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old,
has been married only once and has a reputation for good deeds,
a woman who brought up her children well, has shown hospitality,
washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted
and devoted herself to doing good.

Refuse to put younger widows on the list; when their sensual desires
alienate them from Christ, they want to marry,

and incur anger for having violated their first pledge.
They learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house
and are gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say.

I would have younger widows marry, bear children and manage households,
to give the adversary no occasion to revile us. Some already turn to Satan.
If a believing woman has relatives who are really widows, let her assist them;
let the church not be burdened so it can assist those who are real widows.

* So, who are real widows and who are not? Is it age? Sensuality?

* How have the words of "gossips," "busybodies," "gadding about" been used
negatively as stereotypes about women in general?

* What other divisions of women into "good" woman and "bad" woman have
you noticed in Scripture? Barren and childbearing? Harlot and virgin? Others?
What effect has this had in society dividing women from women?

* Think about the words, "Let the church not be burdened so it can...."

*God of mercy and care, teach us to care. God, who created woman and man in
your image, open our eyes to the needs of all, that your church may be the
healing body of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

August 15

1 Timothy 5:17-25

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor,
especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for scripture says,
“You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and
“The laborer deserves to be paid.”

Never accept any accusation against an elder except on evidence of two or
three witnesses.

Rebuke those who persist in sin in the presence of all,
so that the rest also may stand in fear.
In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and the elect angels,
I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice,
doing nothing on the basis of partiality.

Do not ordain anyone hastily, and do not participate in sins of others;
keep yourself pure.

No longer drink only water, but take a little wine
for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

The sins of some are conspicuous and precede them to judgment,
while the sins of others follow them there.

So also good works are conspicuous; and even when not,
they cannot remain hidden.

* Select one or two of the sayings, “The laborer deserves...,” “Do not
ordain...,” “Take a little wine...,” and consider how it is helpful in context.
How might it be misused out of context?

* What do you think about the words about keeping instructions without
prejudice? About conspicuous (and not) sins and good works?

*God who has called us to life in community, may we be so grounded in Christ,
that we care for one another, for leaders, and for a faithful life. Grow us in the
power of the Spirit, even beyond instructions until we reach the full stature of
Christ, in whom we pray. Amen.*

August 16

1 Timothy 6:1-2a

Let all who are under the yoke of slavery
regard their masters as worthy of all honor,
so that no one will speak evil of the name of God
and of the teaching.

Those who have believing masters
must not be disrespectful to them
on the ground that they are members of the church;
rather they must serve them all the more,
since those who benefit by their service
are believers and beloved.

* How has the central point of these verses, that the church, its members, its
teaching and its God not be regarded negatively, been obscured by misuse of
this passage to justify unquestioning servitude?

* Slavery had a different context in the ancient world. Slaves were not
invisible, but seen, and not as 3/5 of a person, but as vital members of the
household and the community. What do you think about that?

* Slavery in any system is slavery! Just as the “yoke of slavery” was woven
into the pattern of society, what unjust, oppressive practices and institutions
remain today? What are you doing about it?

* How can one have two masters: God and a human being who owns you?

*O God, may we respect those with whom we work and to whom we are
accountable. May we hold in high regard your holy name, the teachings of the
church and all its members. May we even more claim your liberating power
in Christ Jesus that gives us courage to take down walls of injustice and
oppression, that all might be free. Amen.*

August 17

1 Timothy 6:2b-10

Teach and urge these duties.
Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words
of our Lord Jesus Christ and the godly teaching,
is conceited, understanding nothing,
and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words.
From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions,
and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of truth,
imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

There is great gain in godliness, combined with contentment.
We brought nothing into the world,
so that we can take nothing out of it;
if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.
Those who want to be rich fall into temptation
and are trapped by senseless and harmful desires
that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,
In their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith
and pierced themselves with many pains.

* Sharp words. Piercing insights. Take one at a time, in context, and ponder
its meaning for yourself. What traps do you encounter? What contentment do
you experience? What entanglements have you felt? What is the Gospel word
for you? For those you care about?

*God, you know our faith and our faithlessness. Forgive us, free us, fill us with
the power of your Spirit that we may believe, trust, and live, connected to
Christ Jesus. Amen*

August 18

1 Timothy 6:11-16

As for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness,
godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.
Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life,
to which you were called and for which you made
the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

In the presence of God who gives life to all things,
and of Christ Jesus, who made the good confession before Pilate,
I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame
until the day when our Lord Jesus will appear,
which he will bring about at the right time.

He is the blessed and only Sovereign, King of kings
and Lord of lords. He alone has immortality and dwells in
unapproachable light whom no one ever has or can see.
To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

* What are you shunning? And what are you pursuing? Throughout this day,
what knowledge and what hope will empower your work and your encounters
with others?

* What does it mean for you to take hold of eternal life? How does that shape
your calling to witness, ministry, and mission?

*King of kings, and Lord of lords, you alone are immortal. You who dwell in
unapproachable light and whom no one has or can see, we give you honor and
praise and glorify your holy name. In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

August 19

1 Timothy 6:17-21

As for those who in the present age are rich,
command them not be to haughty,
or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches,
but rather on God who richly provides us with everything
for our enjoyment.

They are to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,
thus storing up the treasure of a good foundation for the future,
so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

* What phrases here provide wisdom for one's relationship with what God has provided? Pray about them. Talk about them. How do they provide both security and freedom?

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you.
Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions
of what is falsely called knowledge.
By professing it, some have missed the mark as regards the faith.
Grace be with you.

* How will we guard the knowledge and wisdom that has been entrusted to us? What profane chatter clutters our own minds? How, through professing the faith, does it become more truly ours?

God of grace and mercy, you have provided us with immeasurable riches in our Lord Jesus Christ. May we set our hope on you, our solid foundation and our certain future. May we enjoy your gifts and share your treasure. In Christ, Amen.

August 20

2 Timothy 1:1-7

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
for the sake of the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus,
to Timothy, my beloved child:
Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am grateful to God—
whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—
when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.
Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.
I am reminded of your sincere faith,
a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois
and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God
that is within you through the laying on of my hands;
for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice,
but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

* Whom do you remember in your prayers today? Whom do you long to see, that you may be filled with joy? Through whose faith did the Holy Spirit kindle your own?

* Since God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, how is God growing in you a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline? What does that look like in your life?

May we and those among whom we have ministered in faith, remember our baptisms, and receive again this day grace, mercy and peace from you, the Triune God, in whom we were baptized in Christ Jesus. Amen.

August 21

2 Timothy 1:8-14

Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me as his prisoner,
but join with me in suffering for the gospel,
relying on the power of God, who saved us
and called us to a holy calling, not according to our works
but according to God's own purpose and grace.

This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,
but is now revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus,
who abolished death
and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher,
and for this reason I suffer as I do.
But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust.
and I am sure he can guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.

Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me,
in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.
Guard the good treasure entrusted to you,
with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

* Have you ever been ashamed of the gospel? How, even in a subtle way,
might you be?

* In whom or in what have you placed your trust? God entrusts us with the
Gospel; we place our trust in God to guard that trust. Which comes first?

* In our own holy callings, how might we, too, lose our grip on the sound
teachings we have received? How is God holding you fast and growing the
faith within you?

*We trust you, Christ Jesus, for you have abolished death and brought life and
immortality to light. Strengthen our faith, deepen our trust, and care for us in
our suffering. Amen.*

August 22

2 Timothy 1:15-2:7

You are aware that all who are in Asia have turned away from me.
May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus,
because he often refreshed me and was not afraid of my chain.
In Rome he eagerly searched for me and found me—may the Lord
grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day.

You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
What you have heard from me through many witnesses
entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.
Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs;
the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer.
An athlete is not crowned without competing according to the rules.
The farmer who does the work ought to have the first share of the crops.

* "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all
things." How do you understand what is being said here? What metaphors
would you use?

* Over whom do you ache because they have turned away from the teachings
of the faith? For whom do you give thanks because of their faithful teaching
and service?

Grant us mercy, oh Lord, and keep us strong in grace in Christ Jesus. Amen.

August 23

2 Timothy 2:8-13

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead,
a descendant of David—that is my gospel,
for which I suffer hardship,
even to the point of being chained like a criminal.
But the word of God is not chained.

* What is your Gospel? What is core to your belief, that belief upon which you rest all of your decisions, suffer hardship, witness and serve?

* What are you enduring so that others might also obtain salvation?

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect
so that they may also obtain the salvation
that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him.
If we endure, we will also reign with him.
If we deny him, he will also deny us.
If we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

Jesus Christ, you have died for us that we might live with you. Center us on your cross and resurrection that we might remain steadfast in faith and strong in service. Whatever bondages we face, may we boldly shout, "The word of God is not chained!" Amen.

August 24

2 Timothy 2:14-19

Remind them of this, and warn them before God
that they are to avoid wrangling over words,
which does no good but only ruins those who are listening.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by God,
a worker who has no need to be ashamed,
rightly explaining the word of truth.

Avoid profane chatter,
for it will lead people into more and more impiety,
and their talk will spread like gangrene.

* How in the midst of conflict, "wrangling over words," are those who are observing the conflict hurt?

* What, in your estimation, is "profane chatter?" How have you seen it spread like gangrene?

Hymenaeus and Philetus have swerved from the truth
by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place.
They are upsetting the faith of some.

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription:
"The Lord knows those who belong to God," and
"Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness."

* There is a time to speak up and to point out teachings that have swerved from the truth. How and when to you do that? With whom should you consult? What is the firm foundation God provides?

God of all truth, may we discern your truth, that our teachings may not hurt those growing in faith but build up the body of Christ. We pray in your most holy name. Amen

August 25

2 Timothy 2:20-26

In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver
but also of wood and clay,
some for special use, some for ordinary.
All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned
will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner,
ready for every good work.

* What type of utensil are you: ordinary or special? What is the point here?
What does it mean that you have been cleansed and dedicated for God's work?

Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace,
along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.
Have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies;
you know that they breed quarrels.
The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone,
an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness.

* How do you know the difference between important debate and senseless
controversies? How is God maturing you? Who are your role models who are
not quarrelsome, but kind? Who has shown you how to be a patient teacher,
correcting opponents with gentleness?

God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth,
and that they may escape from the snare of the devil,
having been held captive by the devil to do the devil's will.

* Which of Satan's snares prevent others, and ourselves, from knowing the
truth?

*God, cleanse and dedicate us for your use. Grow us. Guide us. Give us the
courage and wisdom to teach with patience and perseverance. In Christ, we
pray. Amen*

August 26

2 Timothy 3:1-9

You must understand this,
that in the last days distressing times will come.
People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant,
abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman,
implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good,
treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit,
lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power.

Avoid them!
Among them are those who make their way
into households and captivate silly women,
overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires,
who are always being instructed and
can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses,
so these people, of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith,
also oppose the truth.
But they will not make much progress, because,
as in the case of those two men,
their folly will become plain to everyone.

* In these last days—in every age—people, including ourselves, are
distressed—and distress the world—with that list of abuses. How is it that
people, overwhelmed by their sins, can be continually instructed, but never
come to the knowledge of the truth?

* What if the folly does not become plain to everyone? What if it progresses?

*May we not be lovers of pleasure but lovers of you, O God, from whom all joy
and pleasure come. Guard us from corrupt minds and counterfeit faith so that
we may find our truth in you, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

August 27
2 Timothy 3:10-17

You have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life,
my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,
my persecutions, and my suffering the things that happened to me
in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured!
Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
Wicked people and imposters will go from bad to worse,
deceiving others and being deceived.
As for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed,
knowing from whom you learned it,
and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings
that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching,
for correction, and for training in righteousness,
so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient,
equipped for every good work.

* Persecutions are part of the Christian life! How do we pray and study
Scripture in preparation for times when we will need endurance? To be
equipped for the good work of seeking justice?

* Scripture is inspired by God who is authoritative and faithful as we
encounter Jesus Christ, the Word of God. How is this different using “inspired
by God” to prove an inerrant view of the Bible?

*Righteous God, keep us from being deceived and from deceiving. May we
continue faithfully in what we have been taught about your grace so that in
our teaching and in our ongoing learning the Scriptures we may be equipped
for every good work in our ministries in daily life. We pray in the name of
Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

August 28
2 Timothy 4:1-5

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,
who is to judge the living and the dead,
and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you:
proclaim the message;
be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable;
convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

The time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine,
but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves
teachers to suit their own desires,
and turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.

As for you, always be sober, endure suffering,
do the work of an evangelist,
carry out your ministry fully.

* Hear these words and prayerfully consider what you are urged to do:
Proclaim the message! Be persistent no matter the situation or the time!
Convince! Rebuke and encourage! Teach with utmost patience!

* For what do people have itching ears in our times? What teachers do we seek
to suit our own desires, thereby wandering down false paths?

* We are called to be evangelists. What does that mean in your ministry,
whether that be officially on behalf of the church or informally through daily
encounters?

*O God, judge of the living and of the dead, strengthen us to endure suffering
that we may carry out fully our ministries as evangelists of Jesus Christ, in
whose name we pray. Amen*

August 29

2 Timothy 4:6-15

As for me, the time of my departure has come,
I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.
From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness,
which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day,
and not only me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas,
in love with this present world, has deserted me
and gone to Thessalonica;
Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.
Only Luke is with me.
Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry.

I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus.
When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas,
also the books, and above all the parchments.

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm;
the Lord will pay him back for his deeds.
You also must beware of him,
for he strongly opposed our message.

* How do you make decisions about where to go and with whom to work?
What decisions are you making now? How can the Spirit guide you?

* Recall partners in ministry in whom you have placed your trust. When did you feel deceived? Abandoned? Who are companions through the years for whom you give thanks?

O God, in whom alone we can place our trust, give us faithful partners for ministry of the Gospel. And make us faithful, trustworthy partners for those whom you have given us. Together may we serve you and live your Gospel in and for the sake of the world. In Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

August 30

2 Timothy 4:16-22

At my defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me.
May it not be counted against them!
But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength,
so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed
and all the Gentiles might hear it.

So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.
The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack
and save me for God's heavenly kingdom.
To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greet Prisca and Aquilla, and the household of Onesiphorus.
Erastus remained in Corinth;
I left Trophimus ill in Miletus.
Do your best to come before winter.
Eubulus sends greetings to you, as to Pudens and Linus
and Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.

* When have you felt deserted? On whom did you count that neglected to give you support? In what surprising, grace-filled ways did God give your strength—even save you—to continue in your proclamation of the Gospel?

* Take time to list those people who right now need your attention and support. What specific concerns do they have? Beyond your own concern and care, with whom might you connect them?

Thanks be to you, O God, that you have placed each of us in the midst of a Christian community. Connect us in Christ Jesus. Increase our care for one another. Amen.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

*Grace to You and Peace:
A Yearlong Devotional Companion to the New Testament Letters*

August 31

Titus 1:1-9

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ,
for the sake of the faith of God's elect
and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness,
in hope of eternal life that God, who never lies,
promised before the ages began.

God revealed God's word through proclamation
with which I have been entrusted by command of God our Savior,

to Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share:
Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

I left you behind in Crete to put in order what remained to be done,
and to appoint elders in every town, as I directed you:
someone who is blameless, married only once,
whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious.

A bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless, not arrogant
or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain.
He must be hospitable, a lover of goodness,
prudent, upright, devout, self-controlled.
He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in teaching,
so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine
and to refute those who contradict it.

* What characteristics of an elder (e.g. church council member) would you look for?

* That a bishop would be male has been assumed for centuries. Male or female, what are the responsibilities of a judicatory leader and for whom would you look to fill this office?

God, who had called the church into being and called leaders to be good stewards of Christ's church, may we live trustworthily, teach faithfully, and lead responsibly in the name of Christ, our Savior. Amen.

*AUGUST
2nd Thessalonians, 1st & 2nd Timothy, Titus*