



Six Themes
Everyone Should Know

1 and 2 Timothy

Thomas G. Long

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Press

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Six Themes Everyone Should Know series

The Bible, by Barry Ensign-George

Genesis, by W. Eugene March

Matthew, by James E. Davison

Luke, by John T. Carroll

1 and 2 Timothy, by Thomas G. Long

Introduction to the *Six Themes Everyone Should Know* series

The *Six Themes Everyone Should Know* series focuses on the study of Scripture. Bible study is vital to the lives of churches. Churches need ways of studying Scripture that can fit a variety of contexts and group needs. *Six Themes Everyone Should Know* studies offer a central feature of church adult educational programs. Their flexibility and accessibility make it possible to have short-term studies that introduce biblical books and their main themes.

Six Themes Everyone Should Know consists of six chapters that introduce major biblical themes. At the core of each chapter is an introduction and three major sections. These sections relate to key dimensions of Bible study. These sections ask:

- What does this biblical theme mean?
- What is the meaning of this biblical theme for the life of faith?
- What does this biblical theme mean for the church at this point in history for action?

This format presents a compact and accessible way for people in various educational settings to gain knowledge about major themes in the biblical books; to experience the impact of what Scripture means for Christian devotion to God; and to consider ways Scripture can lead to new directions for the church in action.

Introduction to *1 and 2 Timothy*

The books of 1 and 2 Timothy, tucked away near the end of the New Testament along with Titus, are called the “Pastoral Epistles.” They have been seen as letters written by Paul—or, today, most scholars believe, a “pastor” who writes in Paul’s name and continued Paul’s views—to encourage and strengthen churches that were seeking around the end of the first century to establish order, discipline, and theological fidelity.

Yet, the two letters to Timothy are not highly used by Christians and not frequently preached on by pastors. They address issues of controversy and difficulty in early congregations. These folks were trying to institute ways of ordering church life so they could live the lives to which they were called by Jesus Christ: “Do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share” (1 Timothy 6:18). They are told that through all church squabbles and disagreements, faithfulness to the gospel should be primary so Christians “may take hold of the life that really is life” (6:19).

The six themes explored here enable us in the church today to hear the gospel as expressed to these early Christians. We need to concentrate on worship, be led by faithful leaders, stay strong in the faith, love God more than wealth, hear and live God’s Word, and serve faithfully in the church. These themes can strengthen our lives of faith as well as the church’s witness and service to Jesus Christ.

The last words of 1 Timothy are a blessing for us as well: “Grace be with you” (6:21).

Biblical Backgrounds to 1 and 2 Timothy

Author and Date

“Although some New Testament scholars think that 1 Timothy was written by the actual apostle Paul, and probably near the end of his life, most scholars take a different position. They see this letter as written by an unknown author and as coming from late in the first century, probably after Paul was dead (which is the position taken in this [study]). So this is the signature not of the historical Paul the apostle but a literary ‘Paul.’”

—Thomas G. Long, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*. Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 20.

Major Concerns

“The Pastoral Letters belong to the postapostolic age and are addressed to the concerns of second-generation Christianity. No longer were Christians convinced that the world-order would soon pass away with the glorious return of the Christ. The spiritual vigor that characterized the Pauline missions was replaced by an equally serious mandate: to establish the church as ‘the pillar and bulwark of the truth’ (1 Tim. 3:15).”

—James L. Price Jr., “Timothy, the First and Second Letters of Paul to, and Titus, the Letter of Paul to,” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985), 1075.

Importance

“To read these documents as Scripture does mean recognizing that the church has included them in the canon of Scripture because, through the centuries, it has heard gospel in them and found its life formed by them more fully into the pattern of Jesus Christ.”

—Long, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, 8.

*Worship is not one of the activities of the church;
it is the central activity of the church.*

Chapter 1

Worship at the Center of the Christian Life

Scripture

1 Timothy 2:1–15 A church in the middle of strife and conflict is reminded that worship is central to the life of the Christian faith and that a congregation vital and faithful in worship will be healthy in the rest of its life.

Prayer

O God, you are the center of our life and the One whom we adore. In our worship, keep us from being distracted by the baubles and bright lights of this world. In our praying, keep us focused on you, and draw together all our thoughts with the tether of your will. As we worship, let us open our hands to your presence, our minds to your teaching, and our hearts to your mercy, through Jesus Christ, who gave himself for all. Amen.

Introduction

1 Timothy is one of three brief New Testament letters known collectively as the “Pastoral Epistles” (the other two are 2 Timothy and Titus). They are called “pastoral” because they present themselves as letters written by an aging pastor, the apostle Paul, now nearing death (see 2 Timothy 4:6–9), and they are addressed to young pastors, Timothy and Titus, giving wisdom about how to conduct their ministries in the face of difficult challenges.

Today we sign letters at the end, but in the ancient world writers signed their names at the beginning of letters, and all three Pastoral Epistles are “signed” in the very first verse by Paul (1 Timothy 1:1, 2 Timothy 1:1, Titus 1:1). Even so, most biblical scholars (but not all) are persuaded that these letters were written in the name of Paul by a later writer whose identity we do not know (we will call him “the Pastor”). The pastorals were written probably in the late first or early second century, almost certainly after Paul’s death. There are three main reasons to think that the pastorals postdate Paul:

The “Paul” in these letters doesn’t sound quite like the Paul of Romans and Corinthians. His tone is a shade sterner, and he evidences a deeper concern for church discipline and right doctrine than does the apostle Paul.

The churches reflected in these letters seem to have developed beyond the infant Christian communities addressed by the apostle Paul. They are concerned with more developed matters such as the qualifications for bishops (see 1 Timothy 3:1–7), and “the gospel” has come to mean a fairly settled body of teaching (see 1 Timothy 1:10–11).

It is difficult to fit the places and events named in these letters neatly into what we know of the life and travels of Paul the apostle. Thus, the Pastoral Epistles were likely addressed to Christian communities in the late first or early second centuries. As is the case with most of the New Testament letters, they were probably read aloud in worship, and the original hearers of these letters surely knew that Paul was no longer around. News of Paul’s death would have traveled quickly and widely in the earliest churches. So, these letters were received as answers to the question, “What would the revered apostle Paul have said about the problems that face us now?” The problem under the spotlight in the passage before us is one of the most demanding in congregational life: faithful worship.

A Basic Theme: The Centrality of Worship

The church addressed in our passage is depicted as located in Ephesus, a significant port city in what is today Turkey, and Timothy is

its pastor (1 Timothy 1:3). But the main thing to know about this church is that it was in trouble. Before 1 Timothy is done, a whole laundry list of congregational problems will have been addressed, from false teaching to bitter conflict to poor leadership, but at the top of this list is a concern about worship. This is not surprising. When there is conflict anywhere in the body of a congregation, the first symptoms usually show up in worship. When members of a congregation begin to grouse about the hymns, the sermons, or the style of the liturgy, or when bickering breaks out in the choir loft or in the worship committee, it is often the case that there is distress elsewhere in the life of the church. A struggle for power or control in the congregation can erupt as a dispute over old hymns versus contemporary music, over whether it's good to have a children's sermon, or if it's permissible to applaud in the service.

The converse is also true. Harmony in worship generally signals harmony throughout the life of the congregation. The reason for this relationship between worship and the health of congregational life is that worship is not merely one of the many activities of the church. It is the *central* act of the church, pulsating out to every other arena of the church's life.

Theologian Geoffrey Wainwright wrote, "Worship . . . is the point of concentration at which the whole of the Christian life comes to ritual focus."¹ What this means is that every aspect of being a Christian, every ministry and expression of the church, can be found in microcosm in the rituals of worship. The sermon reverberates out into the whole church's witness to the world. The Lord's Supper stands at the epicenter of all other meals—the family dinner table, the church supper in the fellowship hall, the meals served in the homeless shelter, the love and fellowship of friends gathered around a common table. The prayers for those who are ill or grieving radiate into acts of compassion at bedside and graveside. The cleansing and renewing water of baptism finds expression in all ministries of reconciliation and in every attempt to point to the image of God in all humanity.

No wonder then the Pastor of 1 Timothy, concerned about the many problems of the church pastored by young Timothy, turns

1. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God Is Worship, Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 8.

very early to the issue of worship. Like a physician placing a stethoscope over a patient's heart, listening to the rhythm of heartbeat, the Pastor places his stethoscope over the heart of worship. When he hears an irregular heartbeat, he knows that a sickness in worship puts everything else about the life of the church at risk.

The Life of Faith: Standing in the Need of Prayer

A service of worship is essentially a long conversation between God and the worshipers. This is essential for the life of faith. Sometimes God speaks to the people, mainly in sermons and Scripture, and sometimes the people speak to God, in prayers, creeds, hymns, and ascriptions of praise. The fact that worship is a dialogue between God and the people is a sign that the whole of worship is prayer. There are specific prayers *in* the service of worship, of course, but in a larger sense the entire act of worship is prayer—speaking and listening in the context of a deep and trusting relationship with God.

First Timothy 2:1–7 is the lengthiest treatment of prayer in the New Testament.² The passage addresses some particular issues about praying rightly, but it soon soars into a powerful hymn about our relationship through Christ with the saving and merciful God (vv. 3–6). In other words, the details about proper prayer are nestled into the larger relationship with God that makes prayer possible.

Two specific prayer issues are addressed in this passage:

The scope of prayer. How big should we make our prayers? Very big, according to the Pastor. He urges that every kind of praying that we do—“supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings” (v. 1)—be done for everyone, not some or a few, but *everyone*. This counsel undercuts all attempts to narrow our prayer concerns. Our tendency is to pray for our loved ones but not those far away, our nation but not others, ourselves but not our neighbors, our church but not those unlike us. Quite pointedly, there is plenty of evidence that the church addressed in this letter was in deep and acrimonious

2. Robert W. Wall with Richard B. Steele, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 79.

conflict. That may be the hardest praying of all, to pray not only for yourself but also for the person in the next pew who, for a season, has become an enemy.

The scope of prayer is so large, says the Pastor, that we should pray even “for kings and all who are in high positions” (v. 2). At the time this letter was written, this was a radical and disturbing view because this meant praying for the emperor of the cruel and despotic Roman Empire. The Romans considered their Caesar to be a quasi-divine figure and demanded full devotion and obeisance from his subjects. Notice, however, that the Pastor urges the church to pray *for* the emperor, not *to* the emperor, and therein lies a world of difference. Despite his posturing, the emperor is not divine. Indeed, “there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus” (v. 5).

The reason for prayer. Why pray? The Pastor suggests that the overarching reason for all prayer is hope in the saving power of God. God, says the Pastor, “desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (v. 4), and prayer is participation in the saving and reconciling work of God. There is hope even that the violent tendencies of the emperor might be gathered into the will of God, allowing people “to live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity” (v. 2b).

The Church: Men Behaving Badly . . . and Women, Too

We are not completely in the know about the circumstances to which 1 Timothy is addressed, but we know enough to realize that the church was in crisis. As for the men in the congregation, some of them had abandoned the truth of the gospel in favor of superficial and destructive pseudo-religious nonsense (see 1 Timothy 1:3–7). Some of them taught this fluff at the top of their lungs and in argumentative tones. Some of the women in the congregation had been victimized by this foolishness, imperiling their ability to live a Christian life (see 2 Timothy 3:1–9).

Again, the Pastor is persuaded that the place to begin correcting these problems is in worship, and he offers specific instruction to men and to women. A few years ago, a bestselling book, *Men Are*

from Mars, *Women Are from Venus*, got a lot of mileage out of the opinion that the genders are, down deep, very different temperamentally. This idea, that men and women are essentially very different creatures, was also the predominant understanding of the ancient world, an outlook shared by the Pastor of 1 Timothy. For him, men have hot blood running in their veins and are prone to violence, while women are the weaker sex, easily swayed by emotion. Thus, he counsels men should pray “lifting up holy hands without anger or argument” (1 Timothy 2:8b), and he advises women to “learn in silence, with full submission” (2:11b).

Today we raise an eyebrow of suspicion over the idea of fixed male and female roles and temperaments. But we do not have to share the Pastor’s views of gender, and certainly not the assumptions of a patriarchal society about the need for women to submit to supposed male superiority, to hear the wisdom about worship offered in this passage, about the importance of faithful worship in the midst of church conflict. There are three items of wise counsel:

The posture of prayer: hands open and lifted (2:8). Here the human body expresses a receptivity to God and a confession of dependence on God’s grace. A Christian who stands in worship with hands outstretched in surrender to God’s mercy is unlikely to turn toward a fellow worshiper with clinched fists.

Dress in worship. The Pastor’s instruction is not to come to worship with “hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes” (2:9b). Some commentators think the Pastor is alarmed that some women were coming to worship trying to look sexually alluring. But Latin American biblical scholar Elsa Támez is probably closer to the truth when she thinks the issue was about class. These folks in Timothy’s church were not trying to look sexy—they were trying to look *rich*, thus vaunting themselves over their poorer fellow worshipers.

“Learn in silence” (2:11). Although the Pastor here addresses women in worship, we can discover an insight for all worshipers. New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson translates

this phrase “to be in the quiet as you learn,”³ a reminder that the proper attitude for every worshiper is humble receptivity.

For Reflection and Action

1. In the study, the statement is made, “When there is conflict anywhere in the body of a congregation, the first symptoms usually show up in worship.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. The author of 1 Timothy urges the church to pray “for kings and all who are in high positions” (2:2). In our own time, this would mean praying for presidents, governors, members of Congress, and so forth, even if we did not support these people politically. Why do you think the church should pray for such civic leaders?
3. One of the issues that the author of 1 Timothy addresses is the matter of proper dress in worship. Obviously, dress codes and standards change over time. What do you think is wise counsel about dress in worship today?

3. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 201.



Group Gatherings

Eva Stimson

Worship at the Center of the Christian Life

Main Idea

Worship is not *one* of the activities of the church; it is the *central* activity of the church. The whole of worship is prayer, an extended conversation between God and God's people. Yet, as shown in 1 Timothy, worship is often the place in congregational life where problems are revealed. A congregation vital and faithful in worship will be healthy in the rest of its life.

Preparing to Lead

- Read and reflect on chapter 1, "Worship at the Center of the Christian Life."
- Review this plan for the group gathering and select the questions and activities that you will use.
- What other questions, issues, or themes occur to you from your reflection?

Gathering

- Provide name tags and pens as people arrive.
- Provide simple refreshments; ask volunteers to bring refreshments for the next five gatherings.
- Agree on simple ground rules and organization (for example, time to begin and end; location for gatherings; welcoming all points of view; confidentiality, and so on). Encourage participants to bring their study books and Bibles.

Opening Worship

Prayer (unison)

O God, you are the center of our life and the One whom we adore. In our worship, keep us from being distracted by the baubles and bright lights of this world. In our praying, keep us focused on you, and draw together all our thoughts with the tether of your will. As we worship, let us open our hands to your presence, our minds to your teaching, and our hearts to your mercy, through Jesus Christ, who gave himself for all. Amen.

Prayerful, Reflective Reading

- Read 1 Timothy 2:1–7 aloud.
- Invite all to reflect for a few minutes in silence.
- After reflection time, invite all to listen for a word or phrase as the passage is read again and to reflect on that word or phrase in silence.
- Read the passage a third time, asking all to offer a silent prayer following the reading.
- Invite volunteers to share the word or phrase that spoke most deeply to them.

Prayer

Loving God, hear our prayers today as we seek to follow you more faithfully:

(spoken prayers may be offered)

Hear us now as we pray together, saying, Our Father . . .

Conversation

- Introduce Chapter 1, “Worship at the Center of the Christian Life.” Share observations, reflections, and insights.
- Review the Introduction (pp. 1–2). Share these key points:
 - a. 1 and 2 Timothy (along with Titus) are known as the Pastoral Epistles, offering wisdom to young pastors Timothy and Titus about how to conduct their ministries in the face of challenges.
 - b. Most scholars believe these letters were written in the name of Paul in the late first or early second century. (Go over the reasons for believing the letters postdate Paul.)

- c. The letters were received as answers to the question, “What would the revered apostle Paul have said about the problems that face us now?”
- Review “A Basic Theme: The Centrality of Worship” (pp. 2–4). Write “Worship” in the center of a sheet of newsprint. Call attention to the statement: “Worship is not merely one of the many activities of the church. It is the *central* act of the church, pulsating out to every other arena of the church’s life” (p. 3). Ask:

What are some of the things included in a worship service (sermon, prayers, Lord’s Supper, baptism, and so forth)? Write these on the newsprint around “Worship.”

How are these rituals reflected in other areas of the church’s life and witness to the world?

Form several groups and discuss the first question in For Reflection and Action (p. 7). Share highlights of the discussions.

- Review “The Life of Faith: Standing in the Need of Prayer” (pp. 4–5). Key points:
 - a. 1 Timothy 2:1–7 is the lengthiest treatment of prayer in the New Testament.
 - b. The passage addresses two specific issues: (1) the scope of prayer (Who should we pray for?), and (2) the reason for prayer (hope in the saving power of God).

Form several groups and discuss the second question in For Reflection and Action (p. 7). Share highlights of the discussions.

- Review “The Church: Men Behaving Badly . . . and Women, Too” (pp. 5–7). Form several groups. Have each group read 1 Timothy 2:8–15 and discuss:

What is your first reaction to this passage? What problems is the Pastor trying to address? What relevance does the passage have for the church today?

What do you think of the idea that men and women are essentially very different creatures? How is this outlook reflected in the Pastor’s instructions about worship?

What do you think is wise counsel about dress in worship today?

Share highlights of the discussions.

Conclusion

Spend a minute in silent prayer and meditation, assuming the posture of prayer—hands open and lifted—as an expression of humble receptivity to God.

Passing the Peace

The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Amen.