

February 25
Lesson 13 (NIV)

THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Timothy 6:11-21

1 TIMOTHY 6:11-21

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

²⁰ Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, ²¹ which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.

Grace be with you all.



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KEY VERSE

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.—1 Timothy 6:12

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the attitudes and actions Paul encouraged Timothy to maintain as a minister.
2. Explain the long-range view of lifetime faithful behavior.
3. Give a specific example how one's faith will influence his or her actions in the week ahead.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. The Fight of Faith

B. Lesson Background

I. Preparing for Battle (1 TIMOTHY 6:11-16)

A. What to Pursue (v. 11)

Flee or Follow?

B. What to Remember (v. 12)

For the Long Haul

C. Whom to Imitate (vv. 13-16)

II. Enlisting Allies (1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19)

A. Uncertain Wealth (v. 17)

B. Eternal Riches (vv. 18, 19)

III. Eyeing the Prize (1 TIMOTHY 6:20, 21)

A. Know Your Mission (v. 20)

B. Keep on Track (v. 21)

Conclusion

A. False Trust in Wealth

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Fight of Faith

In the 1990s, evangelical leaders such as Carl F. H. Henry (1913-2003) began talking about something called the “culture war.” Faithful church members were pictured as battling secular forces bent on destroying Christian influence. The battlegrounds for the culture war were seen to be places such as public schools, marriage license bureaus, and courtrooms. These battles were often overtly political.

In Paul’s day, no one would have taken such an outlook. Christians were a tiny minority of the population of the Roman world and had little voice or influence in culture as a whole. The “fight of faith” was not the church against the secular world. Rather, it was the battle waged within the life of each believer. The question for each Christian was, “Will I remain faithful until the end?” (compare [Revelation 2:10](#)).

In today’s lesson, Paul addresses this topic with Timothy, his son in the faith. The culture may have changed over the centuries since then, but our internal fight of faith is not much different. We too must remain faithful and endure.

B. Lesson Background

The relationship between Paul and Timothy began on Paul’s second missionary journey. Paul found young Timothy in Lystra ([Acts 16:1](#)) and recruited him as a missionary associate. Timothy became trusted and competent in that regard. He is mentioned seven times in the book of Acts and seventeen times in the letters of Paul, making him one of the most important church leaders in the New Testament. Six of Paul’s epistles list Timothy in the opening greeting, which is a tribute to Timothy’s influence.

Paul wrote two letters to Timothy while Timothy was ministering to the church in Ephesus. He had been left there by Paul to deal with some false teachers (see [1 Timothy 1:3](#)). First and Second Timothy are among the last of Paul’s letters, being written in the mid-60s AD, some 15 years after Paul and Timothy first joined forces. Timothy is perhaps 30-35 years old by this time, still a young man in Paul’s eyes; but he is given responsibility for a highly influential church.

Timothy had credibility because of his association with Paul, but that went only so far. Timothy needed to show to the Ephesians that he was wise and capable in his own right. He would have been instructing and correcting men and women older than he. That is why it was so important that he demonstrate a consistent and faithful life, one above reproach in every aspect (see [1 Timothy 4:15, 16](#)). He was called to set an example to all the Ephesian Christians despite his relative youth ([4:12](#)). Paul knew this would be difficult, so he advised Timothy to be a “good soldier” for Jesus Christ, willing to endure great hardship ([2 Timothy 2:3](#)).

I. Preparing for Battle

(1 TIMOTHY 6:11-16)

A. What to Pursue (v. 11)

“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.”

All this includes what Paul addresses in [verses 9, 10](#), centered on the temptations and failings coming from the “love of money” ([1 Timothy 6:10](#)). Paul strongly advises Timothy to watch for the lure of using his ministry position as a leverage to become rich. He tells Timothy that “godliness with contentment is great gain” ([1 Timothy 6:6](#)).

The Greek word translated *flee* means more than “run away”; it implies running and seeking safety (examples: [Matthew 2:13](#); [10:23](#)). Timothy is a man of God, not a man of money. He must follow a different path, one that pursues the qualities of a person devoted to God. Paul gives Timothy a list of six qualities that should become a priority for him. First, he must *pursue righteousness*. In this context, Paul means Timothy must know the right thing to do and then do it. Second, he must pursue *godliness*. In this letter, this is the practice of proper reverence for God and the things of God. Paul teaches Timothy that the exercise of godliness is even more important than exercise for the body, though he does approve of the latter ([1 Timothy 4:7, 8](#)).

HOW TO SAY IT

Ephesus *Ef-uh-sus*.Iconium *Eye-ko-nee-um*.

Lystra *Liss-truh*.

Pontius Pilate *Pon-shus* or *Pon-ti-us Pie-lut*.

Third, Timothy is encouraged to pursue *faith*. This will be the theme of some of his later advice, the need to trust in God fully for all things (v. 17, below). Fourth, he should run after *love*, the spirit of compassion that motivates one to care for others more than oneself. Ministry lacking in love is empty and doomed to failure. Fifth, Timothy must find *endurance* in his task. One who reads 1 and 2 Timothy cannot help but realize how frustrating his situation must have been at times. He was surely challenged as an outsider, a meddling kid who had no right to correct his Ephesian elders. Successful ministry walks a line between patience and impatience, but the minister with the ability to endure dealing with difficult people will have more long-term success.

Gentleness, last item on the list, is a misunderstood and underappreciated quality today. Modern culture celebrates and rewards brash, overbearing personalities in many ways (sometimes even in ministry). Gentleness is not weakness. It is the willingness to handle others with care. It is cultivating a ministry of care rather than intimidation.

What Do You Think?

What would have to happen for you to follow the six listed virtues more closely?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In terms of positive prompts to add

In terms of negative influences to avoid

FLEE OR FOLLOW?

For nearly a decade I had the privilege of serving as dean of junior high week at a church camp in Indiana. Bible classes, chapel services, and vespers were part of our daily routine. So was recreation. One of the most popular games the students played during this time was Capture the Flag. Groups of students were assigned territories and given colored armbands to identify their teams. Each team received a flag and was instructed to place it in a protected area. Students on the opposing team were to sneak in and steal their opponents' flag without being caught. The students whose task was to capture the flag spent a great deal of time fleeing from their opponents. If you got caught trying to capture a flag, you wound up in "prison."

On the other hand, a group that found and captured its opponents' flag spent a great deal of time following, making sure the captured flag—and the student who carried it—arrived safely in their home territory. Winning was a matter of knowing when to flee and when to follow.

Paul wanted Timothy to know when to flee and when to follow. Being a Christian and a leader required that Timothy turn away from greed and personal gain and pursue a life marked by godly characteristics. He was to live a life controlled by the Spirit.

Is something in your life keeping you from following Jesus? If so, identify it and pursue the qualities that lead to faithfulness and obedience.

—S. M.

B. What to Remember (v. 12)

12. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

The Greek word translated *fight* is the term from which we get the English word *agonize*. It does not refer to fighting in a military sense, but to struggling, or making strong effort. Paul includes significant motivation to Timothy in his fight of faith. First, he should remember that he is called to eternal life. Second, he should never forget his *good confession* of faith.

This harkens back to Timothy's initial encounter with Paul in Lystra. Paul found Timothy as a young disciple, one who had been raised in the faith by his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5). He was already well respected for his faith by the church in Lystra as well as the church in nearby Iconium (Acts 16:2). The public testimony of Timothy's faith in Christ had been heard many times by *many witnesses*. Now is not the time to nullify this confession of faith by rash and ungodly actions. Much in Ephesus is riding on the purity and consistency of Timothy's life.

What Do You Think?

What would full application of this verse to your life look like?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In your use of time

In your spiritual disciplines

In your friendships

Other

FOR THE LONG HAUL

My father was a noble man. He was an elder in the church, a teacher, a preacher, a tireless worker, a successful businessman, and a philanthropist. He worked for years as a welder and pipe fitter before he and my mother purchased and operated a nursing home in our hometown. Of all the qualities that made my dad my hero, one stands out among the rest. Having sat under my father's teaching and preaching hundreds of times, I can say without hesitation that every biblical principle I heard him expound in the classroom or from the pulpit, I watched him live out daily in our home. He had that kind of character, that kind of consistency, that kind of heart. I knew early on that as far as the Christian life was concerned, my dad was in it for the long haul.

Paul wanted Timothy to grasp the long-range view of faithful behavior. He wanted to show him the value of fighting the good fight, of laying hold on eternal life, and of persevering until Christ returned. Life is full of surprises—and disappointments. Often the disappointments tempt us to give in and give up in our pursuit of holiness and faithfulness. But there is good reason to remain steadfast. One day the faithful will stand before the Lord and hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:23). Those words will make every hardship and every painful moment seem like distant memories. And we will be with the Lord forever.

Are you tempted to give up? Do you want to throw in the towel? Before you do, think about what you'll gain by remaining faithful.

—S. M.

C. Whom to Imitate (vv. 13-16)

¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you

Paul expands on the idea of a *good confession* by pointing Timothy to God himself. God is the one who *gives life to everything*; there is no other source (see the words of Hannah in [1 Samuel 2:6](#)). This highlights the all-powerful nature of God. What could be more powerful than the authority over life and death?

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to remind ourselves frequently that God is the ultimate source of life?

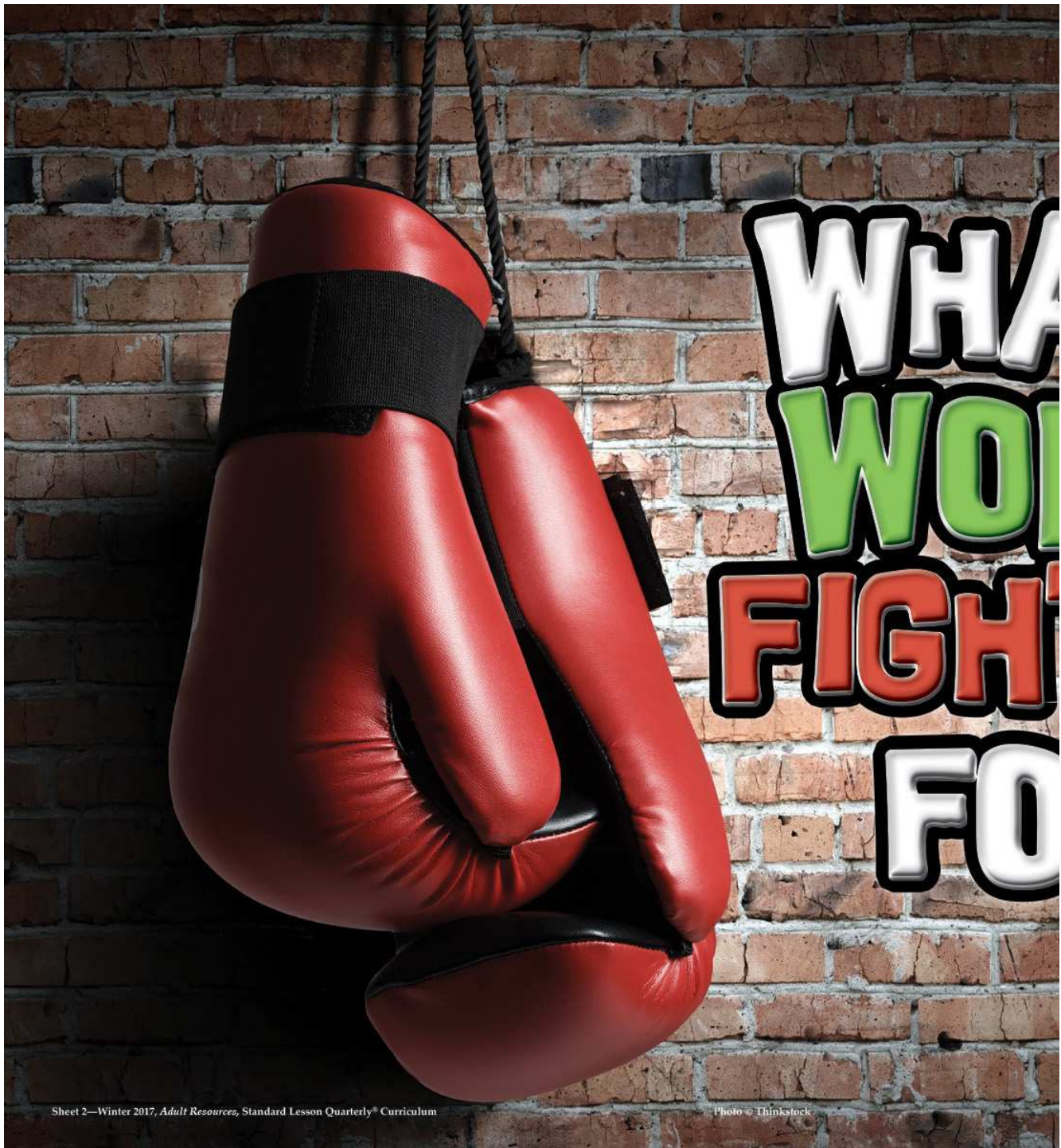
Talking Points for Your Discussion

- By using inanimate objects
- With regard to living things
- With regard to personal experiences
- Other

Paul also notes the importance of *the good confession* that *Christ Jesus* made *before Pontius Pilate*. All four Gospels record Pilate's asking Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" ([Matthew 27:11](#); [Mark 15:2](#); [Luke 23:3](#); [John 18:33](#)). In all the accounts Jesus acknowledges the truth of Pilate's statement, with John's record providing the most extensive exchange between the two ([John 18:33-38](#); [19:8-11](#)). Even in the face of the threat of death, Jesus gave the right answer. Paul challenges Timothy that even if his life is threatened in Ephesus, he must always confess the truth about Jesus; for God is his ultimate judge.

¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Timothy may have several decades of life and ministry ahead. From Paul's perspective, this may be cut short by the return of *our Lord Jesus Christ*, his *appearing* in power and glory. But it should not be cut short by Timothy's denial of his Christian faith, whether by word or deed. For him to be effective in difficult times, his witness must be *without spot*, characterized by no careless words or actions. It must be without *blame*, so pure that no one can find a charge against this young man.



Sheet 2—Winter 2017, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

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Visual for Lessons 2 & 13. Point to this question as you ask, “How do we know what’s worth fighting for and what is not when it comes to the gospel?”

Like Timothy, we too must strive for purity in what we teach and consistency in how we live. And this must be for a lifetime, not a season! We never retire from being Christians. We must be “faithful, even to the point of death” ([Revelation 2:10](#)). If Christ comes before we die, we will be ready. If he does not, we will die with no regrets, having fought the good fight of faith until the end ([2 Timothy 4:7](#)).

¹⁵ **which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords,**

Paul loves the promise of the second coming of Christ, so he takes the opportunity to say more about it. First, Christ will come *in his own time*, not according to a humanly devised schedule. Why have some tried to predict this date? We should be content with the promise of his return and relinquish all control over calculating the date.

Second, no one will misunderstand who Christ is when he returns. He will be praised by every living creature (see [Philippians 2:10, 11](#)). He will be revealed as *the blessed and only Ruler*, a term that emphasizes power. Paul expands on this by designating Christ as *the King of kings and Lord of lords*. This is similar to the title accorded Christ in [Revelation 19:16](#), a dramatic designation indicating that the returned Christ will have immediately recognized authority over all the rulers

of the earth.

What Do You Think?

What more can you do to make it clear to others that Christ is your ultimate authority?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In choice of recreational activities

In financial priorities

In moving past the "milk" of God's Word ([Hebrews 5:12, 13](#))

Other

16. who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Third, we understand the nature of Christ in this period of awaiting his return. He is *immortal*, literally "non-dead." Christ has the preeminence when it comes to victory over death, for he was the first to rise from death to live forever ([1 Corinthians 15:20](#)). Given that he dwells in *unapproachable light*, we cannot even imagine coming into his presence. Even so, "We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" ([1 John 3:2](#)).

Paul ends this section with a doxology, a word of praise to Christ. The ending *Amen* means "truly." To his Lord, Paul gives recognition of ultimate and eternal *honor and might*. Paul does not need to wait until the return of Christ to say these words. He says them now, and this reality undergirds his commitment to ministry and to maintaining a witness of purity in word and deed.

II. Enlisting Allies

([1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19](#))

A. Uncertain Wealth (v. 17)

17. Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Having climbed the heights of praising Christ and contemplating his nature and return, Paul brings Timothy back to the task before him. Paul has specific advice for teaching those who are *rich in this present world*, perhaps referring to wealthier church members, although the teaching applies to unbelievers as well. It is worth noting that Paul does not condemn the rich for being rich. He does advise Timothy to teach those who are prosperous that they must be godly in use of money.

First, the rich must place their faith in God, not in themselves (being *arrogant*). Rich people, especially self-made ones, have many reasons to trust their own judgment and abilities. There is a time and place for this in the business world, but even the most successful businessman needs to trust the Lord. Second, the rich must not place their faith in their money. The worst thing that can happen to a person of affluence is to think, "I have plenty of money; I don't need God." Jesus' parable of the rich fool illustrates the folly in this false faith, for he was so consumed by his wealth that he was unprepared for death ([Luke 12:20](#)).

Third, the wealthy must remember that God is the ultimate source of all good things. There are rewards for hard work, to be sure. God, however, is the Creator and Sustainer of the world. Farmers do not cause their crops to grow. Miners do not put minerals in the earth. Businessmen do not create people who become customers. All wealth depends upon the provision of God. Those who trust in money are rewarded with devastation when there is a stock market crash or the economy turns sour.

B. Eternal Riches (vv. 18, 19)

18. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

The rich should be taught *to be rich in good deeds*, as should any Christian. Wealth that counts is a bank account of good deeds rather than bags of gold. Those with wealth should be generous with it, *willing to share* with those in need. This is true wealth and is both satisfying to the person and pleasing to God.

19. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

The coming age that Paul has in mind might be a near future of economic distress or it might be the time of Christ's return. At any rate, one who has shared his wealth and strengthened the church community will always have a more secure future. Ultimately, this includes *the life that is truly life*, the future that the rich fool in Jesus' parable did not consider.

In giving this advice to Timothy, Paul is not teaching that salvation can be earned. Good deeds are not tallied for the Day of Judgment. When rich people act with generosity, they are caring for their own souls. They are not buying friends or God's favor. They are building a *firm foundation* of faith in their own lives. They are learning to trust God, and in doing this they are winning in the fight of faith, the battle within.

III. Eyeing the Prize

([1 TIMOTHY 6:20, 21](#))

A. Know Your Mission (v. 20)

20. Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge,

What has been entrusted to Timothy is a body of sound doctrine (compare [Titus 2:1](#)). All kinds of *godless chatter* and *opposing ideas* surround Timothy, threatening to pollute the gospel message. What many accept as true and factual is often merely superstition, etc. Timothy's teaching must result in changed lives and be exemplified by his own conduct.

What Do You Think?

How will you make sure that what you value most is what God values most?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In how you initially identify what God values

In making plans for periodic reassessment

B. Keep on Track (v. 21)

21. which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.

Grace be with you all.

Paul ends with a warning: false beliefs result in false doctrine (errors concerning *the faith*). Having a great mind is no guarantee against abandoning essential gospel truths. This is not a condemnation of careful study of doctrine. There are things of the faith that are hard to understand (2 [Peter 3:16](#)), and diligent investigation can help build one's faith. But we must always rely on the basics. Paul does not want to see a young minister like Timothy shipwreck his faith (1 [Timothy 1:19](#)). He finishes with a blessing of grace for Timothy, trusting that he will find his counsel helpful and follow it.

Conclusion

A. False Trust in Wealth

A friend of mine who was connected to big-time sports told me of a well-known former basketball player who was completely broke. This man had made over \$150 million in his career. He was not only broke, but was a broken person. His trust had been in his own abilities and his wealth, and now he had neither.

Let's admit that the church and its members need money to operate. We are naïve to think otherwise, but money must not control everything. The "good fight of the faith" can often be a battle against personal greed and selfishness. Do we trust in money more than God? Or are we blameless in this area? Will we trust that God will provide the opportunities and money we need? These are some of the most crucial questions we can ask ourselves, especially if we are in positions of leadership in our congregations. We must be both careful with the money with which we are entrusted and thankful to God for his provision. When we do this, we are fighting the good fight with a winning strategy.

B. Prayer

Father, when times are tough, you are with us. When we are discouraged, you are with us. When others run away, you remain. May we be like Paul, who finished faithful. We pray this in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

"We have met the enemy and he is us."

—Cartoonist Walt Kelly (1913-1973)

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Begin class by asking your group to respond by a show of hands whether they would make the effort to retrieve the following: a penny they dropped in the street, their doggie bag left at their restaurant table, \$50 they left at their bank counter, \$50 left in a burning building.

Briefly discuss why they would make the effort in some situations but not in others. Allow them to come to the conclusion that not all the items are worth the time, effort, or danger involved in retrieving them.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Priorities" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Allow group members a minute or two to complete the activity. Then have the class compare their rankings. Note that one would expend great effort to fulfill top priorities, which is not true of those things one places a lower value on.

Follow either activity by saying, "Priorities are important. We face conflicts every day, and each time we must decide what to do. Some problems, arguments, or disagreements are insignificant, and so we ignore them. But what about those things worth fighting about?"

Into the Word

Say, "While it can be tricky figuring out priorities, as Christians we have a lot of guidance in the Bible about such matters, including in today's lesson."

Divide the class in half. Assign one half to be the *Toward* group and the other half to be the *Away From* group. Have the groups read together the entire lesson text (1 [Timothy 6:11-21](#)); then discuss the actions and behaviors Paul says Timothy should go toward or turn away from (as determined by each group's designation).

After several minutes of discussion, ask the groups to turn their conclusions into simple bullet points. Have the *Toward* group list the actions and beliefs we should pursue and the *Away From* group list the actions and beliefs we should distance ourselves from.

When groups are ready, have a volunteer from each read their listed actions and behaviors.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Tactics, Allies, Spoils" activity from the reproducible page. Have learners spend several minutes completing the activity in groups of three.

After either activity, probe deeper by having learners discuss in pairs the following questions: What is Paul's message about what our priorities as Christians should be? In light of everything Paul instructs Timothy to do and not do, what specifically does Paul mean when he says, "fight the good fight" in [verse 12](#)?

After several minutes, invite pairs to report their thoughts to the whole class. Use the ensuing discussion to draw attention to the fact that Paul primarily focuses on the attitudes, behaviors, and mind-sets that we Christians should exhibit: that we should pursue “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (v. 11) over wealth and worldly riches (vv. 17, 18) and that, in this battle, we create allies by guiding others toward the same eternal life (v. 19).

Into Life

Write on the board or display at the front of the room the two headings “The Good Fight” and “God’s Good Peace.” Have pairs brainstorm three practical ways to “fight the good fight” and three ways to “bring God’s peace”; then craft a poem incorporating these methods.

Allow volunteers to share with the class. Wrap up by saying, “This week let’s not only take all of Paul’s wisdom about godly priorities to heart, but let’s also pray for discernment to distinguish between those situations when we should fight the good fight and those when we should be ministers of God’s peace!”