

STUDY GUIDE



CHURCH NAME

MULTIPLY: A STUDY IN 2 TIMOTHY

MULTIPLY CHARACTER

2 TIMOTHY 2:14-26

03/19/2017

MAIN POINT

Each trial we go through forces us to study the Word to find God's will.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is one situation recently that has tested your character?

How did you survive the test? How was your character stretched in the process?

Living as Christ's followers in the world means we've been called and put to work in carrying out His mission. This responsibility demands our best devotion and effort, but we're not strong enough within ourselves. We need the strength that only the Lord can provide. Thankfully, He promised that He would freely give us His strength as we depend on Him. We will face trials, but as we rightly use the Word and succeed in overcoming our trials, we are approved by God. We cannot be approved unless we are tested. Simply put, if we are going to multiply, it will take character!

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:14-21.

Why did Paul stress to Timothy the importance of instructing his people not to fight about words? Why did Paul warn against “irreverent, empty speech”?

According to Paul, what might the consequences be for ignoring such warnings (see vv. 16-19)? What does that tell us about the importance of what is taught at our church? What does it tell us about the power of our words?

The task of calling believers to stay true to Jesus and the gospel is never finished. For Timothy, there was a solemn urgency. Those who communicate the Word—whether pastors or laypersons—must suppress the tendency to fight about words, or to spend time on things that are in no way profitable. When individuals and churches get caught up in majoring on the minors or begin distorting the gospel, the result can be the ruin of the hearers. Paul warned against sitting idly by while fruitless disputes and empty words run rampant. Doing so not only discourages the spiritual growth of believers but may also turn non-Christian hearers away from the gospel, potentially leading to their eternal ruin. Timothy needed to keep asking himself, “What topics are actually worth a fight?”

What was Timothy to model instead? What was to be the focus of his instruction? What do you think it means to be approved by God as a teacher of the Word (v. 15)?

The positive aspect of communicating the Word is the focus of verse 15. First, Timothy was to be diligent to be approved by God in his handling of the truth. He was to seek to please God in all he said and did. Second, Timothy was to approach the task as a worker. This term was used of farm laborers (see Matt. 20:1; Jas. 5:4), implying that the job of teaching God's Word is no easy task. Moreover, Timothy was not to cut corners or do sloppy work; rather, he was to seek to be unashamed. Third, Timothy was to take care that he was correctly teaching God's Word.

Even if you're not a pastor or teacher, what can you do to prepare yourself to be an approved worker who is able to share God's Word correctly?

What do verses 20-21 tell us about how we should respond to "irreverent, empty speech" in the church? What is promised to those who respond this way (v. 21)? What does Paul's instructions tell us about how we should think about our church?

Correctly handling God's Word is essential to the health of every church. If God's people are not faithfully taught from His inspired Word, they will not be able to tell truth from "empty words." Paul's challenge to Timothy challenges us to care about the health, the purity, and the witness of our church. God loves the church so much that He sent His Son to die for her sins. Since the church is precious to God, it should be precious to us. We should diligently guard it from divisive teaching and corruption—God promises to "set apart" those who do for His special use (v. 21).

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:22-26.

Paul's call for Timothy to be strong in the work of the Lord certainly included what he was to say and do. But the apostle also noted the importance of who he was. Character counts. Timothy was to keep growing in virtue.

What are young people typically passionate about? How might some of these things stand in the way of Christian devotion and maturity?

What passions and interests also distract middle and older adults from focusing as they should on Christ and His Kingdom?

What are some practical things we can do to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, particularly in place of these other things?

Paul didn't specify what youthful passions Timothy was to beware of. It's easy to think sexual temptation was in mind. Perhaps impulsiveness and the love of novelty were also included. These would find no place in Timothy's life if he put positive virtues in their place. He was to pursue the right course as diligently as he was to flee the wrong course. Righteousness, faith, and love had been urged on Timothy in the first letter (See 1 Tim. 6:11). Here Paul also noted peace, another virtue he had included in the well-known "fruit of the Spirit" passage in Galatians 5:22-23. Timothy wasn't alone. Other believers were included—those whose lives had been cleansed and were therefore people with a pure heart.

How could we reject a foolish, unprofitable dispute without being drawn into a quarrel over the issue (v. 23)?

Paul called Timothy the Lord's slave. In a sense, this was another illustration, like the soldier, athlete, and farmer (see 2 Tim. 2:3-6). Everyone in the first century was well aware of the institution of human slavery. As awful as slavery was, Paul often used it to picture his relationship with the Lord, as one owned by Him to be used as He pleased (see Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10). Because Timothy belonged to a Divine Master, he must do the Master's bidding. He must not quarrel or fight. Positively, he must exhibit the traits of being "gentle and able to teach and patient." "Gentle" calls up the image of a

nursing mother (see 2 Thess. 2:7). “Patient” implies avoiding being resentful when wronged.

What attitude did Paul say we should have toward our opponents? Why are these people not the enemy?

What happens if we begin to believe that everyone who disagrees with us is wrong? How can we keep an open and humble mind toward those who have ideas and opinions different from our own without compromising truth?

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Which of the passions or distractions of this world are competing for your heart and mind? What can you do to demonstrate your loyalty to Jesus Christ?

What disagreement or difference of opinion over matters of faith or ministry have you been involved in recently? What will these verses lead you to say or do differently?

What is your plan for growing as a student of God’s Word? What are you doing on your own to root yourself in the Word and understand its truths?

PRAY

Pray that God would help us to patiently, gently, and persistently teach and submit to His Word.

COMMENTARY

2 TIMOTHY 2:14-26

2:14-16. As a minister of the gospel, Timothy was to remind all those in the church about the instructions and warnings Paul had delivered to him. Pastors are to keep reminding their congregations of the truth of Scripture, the nature of God, and the demands of holy living. This task is never complete. Paul then set up some contrasts. He focused first on the false teachers and those who followed them. Then he turned to the good workman of God. As for the false teachers, Timothy was to warn them before God against quarreling about words. He was to call God as his witness against these troublesome people and their ideas. These teachers argued about words and built enormous theological systems upon them. They fought over small points of interpretation. Not only did they devote themselves to words and esoteric ramblings; they were contentious in their manner. Paul’s judgment of such petty obsessions: it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Not only the teachers but also those who listened to their foolishness were brought to spiritual ruin. Their debates pulled others into their pointless discussions. People were deluded, thinking it was true spirituality. In fact, their word games came from pride. Timothy, by contrast, was to do his best to present himself to God as one approved, a workman who did not need to be ashamed. Timothy and all who follow Christ are to consecrate themselves to God, working diligently for His approval. The teacher whom God approves has no need of shame in His presence. God bestows His approval on the one who exhibits truth, love, and godliness in daily living, and who correctly handles the Word of truth. The false teachers were mishandling God’s words, using them for their own benefit. Timothy was commissioned to handle the words of God correctly. All preaching should present the truth clearly, cutting through erroneous ideas or inaccurate opinions. The pastor or teacher must acquaint himself thoroughly with Scripture. He should familiarize himself with historical information and the context of the passage, especially when trying to reach back through the centuries to gain an accurate understanding of God’s revelation. Paul again issued a warning: “Avoid godless chatter.” Paul was not referring to backyard chats or little conversation groups that met over tea. The phrase “godless chatter” describes the empty babbling of false teachers. Their doctrines may have been quite organized and intricate, but Paul labeled them “chatter,” because they were without substance. In addition, their teachings did not promote the life and practices that God approves. Paul declared that those who indulged in such chatter would become more and more

ungodly. In vivid contrast to God's truth, which results in godliness, the false teachings degenerate into greater ungodliness.

2:17-18. But these false teachers and their philosophies were not pitiful little people to be ignored. They were causing great harm to those whom they influenced. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Just as the teaching they followed was rotten, so its foul and corrupt nature infected more and more people. In contrast, truth is always life producing, creating wholeness and health. Paul gave two examples of leaders who abandoned the faith and whose spurious teachings brought destructive results: Hymenaeus and Philetus, who had wandered away from the truth. Other than this mention by Paul, these two men pass unknown in history. But because their names were known to Timothy, they were probably leaders within the Ephesian church. Yet, they wandered away. This describes a slow drifting from the truth. These men did not make a dramatic break from the Christian faith and run after strange philosophies. They slowly shifted their thinking, toyed with new ideas, held to what they liked and discarded what was unappealing. After a time, they had denied the faith. Paul highlighted one main point of their false teaching: they said that the resurrection had already taken place. This supposition, rampant among the false teachers, taught that the fullness of salvation had come. Consequently, there was no future bodily resurrection, for the true resurrection was spiritual. This led to the practice of discounting anything connected with physical life, making daily obligations and concerns for holy living irrelevant. Spiritualizing the resurrection diminished the sacrifice of Christ, removed the necessity of enduring hardship, and promoted immoral living. In this way, they destroyed the faith of some.

2:19. It would seem gloomy indeed if Paul had stopped with the description of the growing influence of these false teachers. But he sounded a loud note of hope and courage as he wrote, "Nevertheless." God's solid foundation stands firm. Despite what people may say or do, God's work of salvation through Christ and His work of the church, as established by the apostles and ministers of the Gospel, continues to stand firm. If the gates of hell will not overcome the church (Matt. 16:18), neither will the apostasy of some, the destructive teaching of others, or the militant arm of Rome. God has established the church, built on Jesus Christ "as the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20). Proof of the church's endurance rests upon the guarantee made by God Himself, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are His." Paul took this quote from Numbers 16:5. It came out of the story of Korah's rebellion and God's affirmation of Moses' leadership. Paul drew from across the centuries, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, confirming God's changeless character and sovereign rule. Only God knows the inward working of the heart, but everyone who confesses the name of the Lord will evidence increasing godliness—they must turn away from wickedness. Both inward and outward changes are necessary components of a true believer in Jesus Christ. Timothy and others might have difficulty discerning the faithful from the faithless, but God cannot be fooled. He knows those who belong to Him.

2:20-21. Paul drew another word picture to illustrate the distinctions between the true believer and the false follower. He took his imagery from his readers' understanding of an ordinary house. Such a house would have a variety of utensils and wares, some of gold and silver, and others of wood and clay. Correspondingly, the gold and silver are for noble purposes, while the wood and clay are reserved for ignoble use. Basically, a person does not use china cups to feed the dog. Paul emphasized that each believer bears the responsibility of service to God: If a man cleanses himself from the latter (false teachings and wickedness), he will serve noble purposes. God can use only clean or holy vessels. This parallels the Jewish tradition of cleansing vessels for temple use or for religious ceremonies and holidays. God cannot bestow His glory upon anything evil or tainted. The Christian life demands unwavering obedience and allegiance to Christ. It places responsibility upon each believer to maintain a pure, unpolluted life. Such a person is holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

2:22. The bottom line is that each person chooses whether he or she will be fit for God's use. This sobering thought brought Paul to this urgent plea: "Flee the evil desires of youth." In the first century, the term "youth" was not confined to the teenage years. In fact, only two phases of life were recognized—youth and old age. Many interpreters believe Timothy was in his late thirties or even in his forties when Paul wrote to him. Perhaps "young" people experience greater temptations toward certain sins that diminish with age, such as haughty independence and selfish ambition. Those seriously committed to Christ must flee anything that speaks of evil or anything that would interfere with faithfulness to God. Fleeing provides only half the equation, however. As we flee from evil, we must also pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. Christianity does not consist merely of prohibitions, but of positive and powerful actions. Righteousness, faith, love, peace—these are common words, easily tossed around in Christian conversation, but they are the essence of the gospel. "Righteousness" means to live uprightly, doing good as empowered by God. "Faith" rests on trust in God's revelation and character; it consists of a genuine relationship with God. "Love" consists of self-sacrifice, living for the good of others with caring actions. "Peace" demonstrates itself through harmonious relations with God and others.

2:23-24. Paul issued another command: "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments." Paul had the false teachers and their followers in mind. Their dogmas lacked common sense (foolish) and were established upon ignorance (stupid). These bogus leaders and their followers were motivated by selfishness. Such inner drives always degenerate into petty quarrels and divisiveness. Paul declared, "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel." Selfish attitudes and manners are inconsistent with the nature of God and the disposition of His followers, especially His leaders. Unfortunately, infighting and positioning for power often characterize churches. Perhaps we have become too

accustomed to this blatant disobedience, viewing it as an inevitable component of modern church life. But pastors and lay leaders who bicker, creating factions within the church, are wrong. Instead, the church leader must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Kindness presupposes a peaceable attitude. Such a mindset speaks and acts in goodness. This does not mean spineless acquiescence to popular opinion or to those who may oppose us. Kindness must remain firmly rooted in truth. Paul required that the Christian leader be able to teach, not resentful.

2:25-26. If a leader's heart is pure, humbled before God's grace, he can then gently instruct those who err, in the hope that God will grant them repentance. God's earnest desire to draw all people into loving relationship with Himself should motivate the pastor to deal kindly with those who oppose Him. Four players participate in this crucial drama for the human soul: the teacher, the unbeliever, God, and Satan. The Christian teacher not only proclaims truth; he models godliness and kindness as well. As God's representative, he personifies God and His ways. He also recognizes that the battle for human souls takes place on two fronts—the mind and the heart. Beyond the human sphere, God and Satan enter man's spiritual struggle. Those who refuse God's truth come under the influence of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. Satan traps people into his service through clever arguments, fear, and appeals to selfish pride and ambition. Christians should exercise a healthy awareness of the participation of Satan in the thinking of unbelievers. Contending for truth involves contending with spiritual powers; we must not be so naive as to think we confront on purely human terms. But God remains faithful. He also contends for human souls and minds. As a measure of His grace, He grants repentance. God is sovereign over the universe and all created beings. We should never become overwhelmed at Satan's methods or power. Satan and God are not equals.