



November 2018

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES:
“Godlessness and
Preaching the Word” (2 Timothy 3–4)

2018–19 LCMS Circuit Bible Studies

LEADER GUIDE

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THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

A STUDY FOR DISCOVERY, MEDITATION AND CASUISTRY OF THE BROTHERS.

Every pastor strives to do as Paul exhorts Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

This series of studies has been designed to walk through the Pastoral Epistles in support of your striving toward these ends. Each study will work through these familiar texts with a search and discover mission through self-examination. To facilitate your searching and discovery in self-examination, each text will follow with a template of questions drawn and structured according to Luther’s “A Simple Way to Pray.”¹ “I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands.”² These four strands are:

1. **Instruction** – What is God teaching me in these verses about the Pastoral Office and me as one called to this office? (e.g., “What have I learned ...”)
2. **Thanksgiving** - What is there in these words of God for which I get to give thanks to the Lord of the Church as I serve in the Office of the Ministry?
3. **Confession** - In light of what I have learned in these words of God, how have I fallen short in fulfilling my responsibilities in the Pastoral Office?
4. **Prayer** - Are there things I need to change/improve in fulfilling my responsibilities in the Pastoral Office?

Following the template of questions, there is an opportunity to turn what is discovered into prayer.

While this is a time of searching the Scriptures and reaffirming the Lord’s will for the Pastoral Office and those called to this Office, it is hoped that the questions will facilitate a time of casuistry among the brothers. Listening and learning according to Luther’s four strands will also hopefully foster a sharing of struggles and the mutual support and consolation of the brothers in light of God’s Word, of which we are servants and servers.

Sequence of this Series: This series begins with 2 Timothy. While this is the last of Paul’s letters, it is foundational in that it addresses the Pastoral Office more holistically, as well as the means God provides for it and the holder of that office. Second in the series will be Titus, which addresses many aspects of exercising the Pastoral Office in the context of the congregation. Lastly, the series will then look at 1 Timothy as it addresses exercising the Pastoral Office in the midst of a hostile culture and its influences on the congregation.

Leader: Work through the introduction to 2 Timothy to get an overview of the context for both Timothy and Paul. Begin the study with some overview of Paul’s second letter to Timothy.

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, eds. Gustav K. Wiencke and Helmut T. Lehmann, Vol. 43 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 193–211.
² LW 43:200.

INTRODUCTION: 2 Timothy from *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*

Second Timothy Introduction

Paul writes from prison in Rome. He has been a prisoner for some time: Onesiphorus, a Christian of Ephesus, had already sought him out and visited him in Rome (2 Ti 1:16–17). There has already been one hearing, at which Paul was deserted by all men and yet, with the Lord's help, so successfully defended himself that he "was rescued from the lion's mouth" (2 Tim 4:16–17). But Paul has no hope of ultimate acquittal; he is at the end of his course. And he is virtually alone; only Luke is with him. He longs to see "his beloved child" Timothy once more and bids him come to Rome before the winter makes travel by sea impossible (2 Ti 1:4; 4:9, 21). But he must reckon with the possibility that Timothy may not reach Rome in time; and so he must put in writing all that he hopes to tell Timothy in person if and when he arrives. The letter is thus, as Bengel has put it, Paul's "last will and testament" in which he bids Timothy preserve the apostolic Gospel pure and unchanged, guard it against the increasingly vicious attacks of false teachers, train men to transmit it faithfully, and be ready to take his own share of suffering in the propagation and defense of it. The most personal of the Pastoral Letters is therefore in a sense "official" too; for Paul cannot separate his person from his office. The man who has been "set apart for the gospel of God" (Ro 1:1) remains one with that Gospel in life and in death. Date of writing: A. D. 65–67.³

God's Grace in 2 Timothy

God's grace is the central message in all of Paul's letters — down to his last letter, 2 Timothy, composed while he was chained in prison at Rome, knowing that the end was

near. As his last will and testament, Paul again encourages Timothy to proclaim the message of God's grace, emphasizing its basic truths. This grace was given us "in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (1:9–10). "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel" (2:8), that "the elect ... may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (2:10), and so "we will also live with him ... we will also reign with him" (2:11–12) and will receive "the crown of righteousness" (4:8).

What an inheritance for Paul to leave to his spiritual son Timothy — the Gospel of God's grace — and for us to leave to our children!

Luther on 2 Timothy

This epistle is a farewell letter, in which St. Paul exhorts Timothy to go on propagating the gospel, even as he has begun. This is quite necessary, since there are many who fall away; and false spirits and teachers keep springing up all around. Therefore, it is incumbent upon a bishop always to be alert and to work at the gospel.

But he prophesies especially ... concerning the perilous time at the end of the world. It is then that a false spiritual life will lead all the world astray, with an outward show, under which every sort of wickedness and wrong will have its fling. Sad to say! we now see this prophecy of St. Paul all too amply fulfilled in our clergy.⁴

Leader: Read through 2 Timothy 1 with the brothers, pausing as you desire for thoughts or reflection.

READ: 2 Timothy 3–4 (ESV)

Leader: Work through the excerpts to further discussion of the text with the brothers. Encourage each to share their insights from previous study of the text.

Commentary Excerpts: 2 Timothy 3–4 from *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary: Timothy / Titus / Philemon*⁵

3:2–5 The types of people and kinds of behavior Paul describes here have sadly been a part of the Church

in every generation to the present. The number and variations have been larger at various times in the history of the Church, always challenging every generation to fight the good fight by rightly handling the word of truth (2:15) for the sake of both pastor and people (1 Tm 4:16).

3:2 **lovers of self.** These words indicate that problem underlying all the rest. By exalting self above all other

³ Walter R. Roehrs and Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 2:224.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*, eds. E. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 389.

⁵ Mark W. Love, *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 99–112.

things, the self becomes an idol. Such arrogance leads to various sinful expressions such as being proud, arrogant ... ungrateful, unholy. In contrast to this self-centered sinfulness, Luther reflected on the humility of Christ, the prophets, and the apostles:

Christ was spiritually the highest on the earth, for He taught everybody as a teacher and master, but He did not exalt His person over any man, but served them with all that he had and could [cf. Mark 10:45]. The prophets and apostles undoubtedly were also the highest on the earth spiritually, for they were the light and teachers of the world; but when did one of them ever set his person, goods, and affairs over others, to say nothing of over kings and princes?" (LW 76:140–41)

3:5 appearance of godliness. Everything such people said and did publicly (i.e., everything that could be seen) looked exactly like the godliness of believers. Yet when it came to their private lives and choices, none of it flowed from faith in Christ. They were, in fact, unbelievers who, like Ananias and Sapphira (Ac 5:1–11), believed that since they could deceive other people, they could deceive God too. Jesus described the hypocritical Pharisees of His day this way, calling them whitewashed tombs. "You also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Mt 23:27–28).

3:5 Avoid. As Paul tells Timothy to be constantly aware of such people, he also tells Timothy to constantly turn away from such people, lest he give credence to them, their teaching, and their godless self-indulgence (cf. 2Jn 9–11). Timothy, like Paul and every pastor, was still a sinner. This command to keep avoiding such people was also a caution against the opportunity to be tempted by such people and their teachings.

3:8 disqualified. Literally "cast away as unapproved." These are disqualified as those who are saved by grace through faith because, though they claim a knowledge of God, or even faith in Christ, they are openly rebellious in regard to the will of God and are unrepentant (Ti 1:16). As such, they have, by their unrepentant actions, disqualified or cast out themselves. Luther wrote:

The tyrants among God's people have the appearance and act as if they were the true saints. Thus they hinder and hold back the simple, so that they cannot get free, for they are weak in conscience and cannot clearly distinguish between appearance and reality, between glittering and truth. ... Thus the Magi were held back at Jerusalem by Herod, who pretended to search the Scriptures. (LW 76:161)

3:13 impostors. The Greek word Paul uses (*goēs*) is found only here in the New Testament. In classical Greek, this word was used to refer to a "juggler," a "cheat," or an "enchanter." Paul uses this term to refer to those who serve to further people in their evil, as the Egyptian magicians served to further Pharaoh in his evil and impenitence (cf. vv. 6–9).

3:13 from bad to worse. While the progression of these impostors will not go far in terms of others, it will progress steadily within themselves. As Paul says, they will deceive, but the greater deception will come from them becoming more deceived within themselves. Such is the orientation of the sinful nature: we are all turned in upon ourselves. Those caught in the illusions of sin will constantly turn within and become progressively more and more deceived in their attempts to deal with the fragments of the Law's judgment still written on their hearts. Lord, have mercy!

3:15 wise for salvation. Paul singles out the Scriptures as the sole source by which we may be made aware of the sum and substance of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. For people to know what salvation is, how it was accomplished for everyone in Jesus Christ, and how this is received for their salvation, they must hear the Word of God. Only the Scriptures are able to inform in these matters. It is through this informing that people are brought to faith in Christ and strengthened in that faith. And it is through this faith that they are made wise unto salvation. Such is the performative nature of God's Word. While it informs the hearer, it actually produces an effect. God promises to work through the Scriptures (cf. Ti 1:1).

3:16 teaching. Imparting of knowledge or doctrine that had not been known or understood, so that the hearer may be made wise for salvation that cannot be found anywhere else.

3:16 reproof. This refers to the disproving of falsehoods, myths, and all such ideas that obscure, shade, or reject the full truth of the Gospel in Jesus Christ.

3:16 correction. This ought always follow reproof because it is a setting forth of the truth so as to call people back from their sin, falsehood, and unbelief, that they might repent and believe the Gospel. The goal is the restoration of the sinner.

3:16 training. The Greek word is *paideia* and refers to the exercising of a child through both instruction and discipline.

3:16 training in righteousness. Literally "exercised in righteousness." The Scriptures are used for exercising those who have been declared righteous. This exercise

is twofold. It is first an exercise in receiving the Word through faith, and only then can it be exercised in the second step of responding, through faith, in good works according to our vocations (cf. Heb 12:4–11). This passage receives comparably little comment from the reformers and their heirs, for whom the inspiration of Scripture was never in doubt. Chemnitz provides an example of the issue they discussed from this passage:

[God] willed that the doctrine [of good works] be repeated in many statements of Scripture, because it is a means and instrument through the hearing of which and the meditation on which He might stir up, kindle, preserve, confirm, increase, and cause to grow a zeal for the Spirit of renewal, or as Paul says, a zeal for good works in the hearts of the regenerate. (8:1179)

3:17 man of God. This phrase is consistently applied to those men who were prophets in service of God. As such, Paul is referring to those whom God has called into the pastoral office. Having said this, it has to be said that Scripture is able to make all believers competent and equipped for every good work of their varied vocations through faith in Christ.

3:17 complete, equipped. God does not call the competent, the self-sufficient, the complete, or the equipped; He makes complete and equips through His Word and Sacraments. Everyone has natural gifts and abilities that God has given, yet apart from Christ, these gifts all lack the completeness to overcome the sin they are captive to, and thus, to be pleasing and acceptable to God. Apart from faith, one's natural gifts are equipped by sin for oneself alone and not for one's neighbor. Only in Christ is a man's personal aptitude taken captive to Christ and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so that he is made complete and equipped to serve in the pastoral office.

4:1 charge. Literally, "I am testifying." The full understanding of this has to be drawn from the words of Paul that both precede and follow it. There is an implied "therefore" attached to this word. Because of all false teachers and teachings Timothy was facing, and because he would train other pastors to face and refute them, Paul "testifies" in the presence of God and Christ that pastors are to do the following things. With this word, Paul makes it clear that his command to Timothy, and to every pastor, to preach the Word is not his will or his own concept of ministry, but rather it is the divine will and the substance of the pastoral office that Christ created for the sake of the Church. As such, it is not subject to alteration by addition or subtraction.

4:1 judge the living and the dead. Paul reminds Timothy of the final judgment of the world that will take place at the return of Christ, not as a threat to Timothy, but to identify the reason for the perpetual and unaltered preaching of God's Word. This judgment is coming, and nothing can stop it. As God would have all men to be saved (1Tm 2:4), so God establishes the preaching office of the pastor so the Gospel may be heard and people may be saved from this coming judgment.

4:2 Here Paul sets forth five imperatives of the pastoral office, the final four of which are some of the fruit and purpose for always preaching the Word for believer and unbeliever. While each of the final four may take different forms in how it is carried out for the sake of the hearers, the substance of each must always be the Word of God.

4:2 reprove. The first part of any attempt to call another person to repentance and faith. This refers to the process of making another person aware of his or her sin by showing it to the person in light of both his or her actions and God's Word (cf. 3:16). The goal of this is that the hearer may have a sound, healthy faith (cf. Ti 1:13). This might be analogous to a physician diagnosing a cancerous tumor for a patient.

4:2 rebuke. This is the second part in the call to repentance. At this point, debate ends. The authority of God's Word of Law is brought to bear on the sin and the sinner. To continue the medical analogy, this might be thought of as a surgeon cutting the cancerous tumor out of a patient.

4:2 exhort. Having given the people the opportunity to repent and receive the forgiveness of sins, pastors are to boldly set before the forgiven the assurance of God's favor in Christ and the will of God for them as the forgiven and justified (Eph 2:10). This may be thought of as a doctor medicating and bandaging the surgical wound from which the cancerous tumor was removed so that the patient is free to go back to life healthy and whole.

4:2 complete patience and teaching. Here, Paul sets forth the two key components to accomplishing the previous three imperatives of reproof, rebuking, and exhorting. Each must be done by "teaching." The Greek word (*didachē*) is also translated as "doctrine," which refers to the process of setting forth all divine truths or facts as found in God's Word, so that the hearer might learn, know, and believe them. While the substance of what the pastor is to teach is fixed, the time required to bring his hearers to the knowledge and faith is not.

Therefore, Timothy, and every pastor, is to be patient, leaving room for the Holy Spirit to work through the Word when and where He will in the hearts of the hearers (Jn 3:8).

4:4 myths. The Greek text has the definite article “the” before this word—“the myths.” In this way, Paul is referring to the whole spectrum of empty humanistic, religious, and spiritual inventions of mankind. By using the term “myth,” Paul is stating that all such human teachings, like the sinful desires they sanction, arise from and are sustained by mankind, not by God. Cf. exposition of 1Tm 1:4.

4:5 sober-minded. Peter calls this girding or building up the “loins” or muscles of the mind (1Pt 1:13). Paul is not calling Timothy merely to be sober-minded when necessary, but to continuously be sober-minded and ready—a “continuing to be” so. By this, Paul tells Timothy and every pastor to have continuous clarity of thought and sound judgment. Pastors, even Paul and Timothy, are still sinners and subject to the same temptation and passions that carry others away. Only with a mind exercised in thought and judgment based on the Word of God can any of them attend to their calling to preach and teach the Word for the sake of those inside and outside the Church.

4:5 evangelist. This is not to be understood as some kind of revivalist or missionary. This is used in the general

sense and refers to one who is a “good news giver.” As such, an evangelist is one who teaches and preaches the Law and Gospel of salvation to all, through faith in Jesus Christ.

4:5 fulfill your ministry. From the charge (v. 1) forward, Paul has been putting forth essential imperatives for the work of every pastor. This final imperative is not set down because Timothy has been failing to do this, but in light of those who would turn away from his pastoral ministry; he is not to let this hinder his faithful service as a pastor. Paul is telling Timothy that he must sober-mindedly leave nothing lacking when it comes to fulfilling the previous imperatives, even if it may seem as if it is turning people away. Whether it be reproving, teaching, or exhorting, Pastor Timothy was to faithfully serve for the sake of his hearers both inside and outside of the Church.

4:7 kept the faith. Since Paul is using the definite article “the,” he is referring to the substance of the Christian faith, rather than to his personal faith. Paul begins this verse with the contest chosen for him, then moves to the course upon which this contest has taken place. Through all this, he concludes by stating that he has faithfully proclaimed the substance of the Christian faith. Despite the conflicts, beatings, imprisonments, and temptations, he never yielded any part of the Gospel and the fullness of salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone (Eph 2:1–10).

CITATIONS: 2 Timothy 2 in *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*⁶

Leader: The following citations are taken from the 2017 Catechism and further serve to explore and examine the text under review. Discuss how the citations address the question and support its answer.

2 Timothy 3:1–4:

THE LORD’S PRAYER: The Sixth Petition
And lead us not into temptation.

281. What is the focus of this particular petition?

It focuses on the constant attempts of our spiritual enemies to lure us away from God and into the captivity of sin, and ultimately into unbelief and despair.

940 **2 Timothy 3:1–4** But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.⁷

2 Timothy 3:15:

6. Where do we learn about Jesus?

God’s truth about Jesus Christ is made known in the Bible and is its central message. We call this truth the

⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

⁷ Luther, *Small Catechism*, 269–70.

Gospel, namely, the promise of the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake.

20 **2 Timothy 3:15** From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.⁸

2 Timothy 3:16–17:

7. *What is the Bible?*

The Bible gathers together the writings of God's chosen prophets and apostles over a period of more than a thousand years. Through the Holy Spirit, God Himself gave these writers the thoughts and words they recorded (verbal inspiration), such that the Bible is God's Word. For this reason, the Scriptures are both infallible (incapable of error) and inerrant (containing no mistakes). Holy Scripture is therefore entirely reliable and gives us everything we need to know and believe for Christian faith and life.

23 **2 Timothy 3:16–17** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.⁹

2 Timothy 4:3–4:

9. *Do we use human reason to understand the Bible?*

B. Because the Bible is God's Word and, unlike all other books, is inspired and inerrant, it is wrong to use human reason to question or deny its truthfulness.

31 **2 Timothy 4:3–4** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.¹⁰

215. *What are some of the privileges and responsibilities of members of the Church?*

B. We should belong to congregations that confess and teach the pure Word of God.

727 **2 Timothy 4:3–4** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.¹¹

2 Timothy 4:18:

223. *What happens to me as a Christian when I die?*

When I die, the God-given unity of my body and spirit will be broken. I will immediately be in the presence of Christ, in heaven, but my body will remain in the grave until the resurrection.

761 **2 Timothy 4:18** The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.¹²

258. *What are the benefits of living under God's gracious rule?*

Christ is risen and ascended to the Father's right hand. From there, "He sanctifies those who believe in Him, by sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts to rule, comfort, and make them alive" (AC III 5).

870 **2 Timothy 4:18** The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.¹³

THE LORD'S PRAYER: The Seventh Petition But deliver us from evil.

286. *What do we ask God our Father to do for us in this petition?*

We ask Him to

C. keep us faithful to Him, free us from this present evil age, and take us to Himself when we die.

963 **2 Timothy 4:18** The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.¹⁴

8 Luther, *Small Catechism*, 46.

9 Luther, *Small Catechism*, 46–47.

10 Luther, *Small Catechism*, 48.

11 Luther, *Small Catechism*, 216–217.

12 Luther, *Small Catechism*, 224–25.

13 Luther, *Small Catechism*, 250.

14 Luther, *Small Catechism*, 275–76.

2 Timothy 4:22:

53. What is valuable about liturgical worship?

Liturgical worship follows this pattern: Christ speaks His Word and gives His Supper; the church receives and answers in confession, thanksgiving, and petition. In this way, the liturgy keeps us focused on Christ (see also “What Is Worship?” in the Appendix).

Note: Basic elements of the Divine Service (for example, from *Lutheran Service Book*, starting on p. 151) include the following:

b. *Service of the Word*

Salutation and Collect of the Day (2 Timothy 4:22)

c. *Service of the Sacrament*

Preface (2 Timothy 4:22; Colossians 3:1; Psalm 136)¹⁵

FOR REFLECTION & MEDITATION

Leader: At this point, use the questions to walk back through the text to glean answers. Note that there may not be an answer to every question and responses will vary due to each brother being in a different place in their pastoral ministry. Encourage the brothers to write down their own answers to these and share them as they feel comfortable.

What is God teaching?

1. What is God teaching me in these verses about the Pastoral Office, and about me as one called to this office?
 - a. About Himself – Father/Son/Holy Spirit?
 - › About His work?
 - › About His promises/gifts?
 - b. About me/others?
 - › What have I been given?
 - › What I am supposed to do/not do?
 - › How am I to do what is given me to do?
 - c. About faith/belief/unbelief/doubt?
 - › What is it that I am given to trust in about myself?
 - › What is it that I am given to trust in as I serve in the Pastoral Office?
 - d. About the Pastoral Office?
 - e. About the congregation I serve?
 - f. About engaging the communities (civil/cultures) in which I serve?

Praying God’s Word

Lord of the Church, grant that I may be mindful of ...

Thanksgiving

2. What has the Lord told me for which I can give thanks to the Lord of the Church as I serve in the Office of the Ministry?

Praying God’s Word

Lord of the Church, I thank you for ...

Reflection and Repentance

3. In light of what I have learned, how have I fallen short in fulfilling my responsibilities in the Pastoral Office?
 - a. Is there something God would have me to do that I have failed to do?
 - b. Is there something God would not have me do that I have done anyway?

Praying God’s Word

Lord of the Church, I confess to You that ...

Petitions in Prayer

4. In all that I have learned, what needs to change/improve in fulfilling my responsibilities in the Pastoral Office?
 - a. What and/or How ...
 - › I have been thinking, saying or doing that I need to change/improve?
 - › I have been thinking, saying or doing that I am able to rejoice in doing well?

¹⁵ Luther, *Small Catechism*, 79–80.

Leader: Here is where the gleanings are turned into prayer and praise. This part of the study may be left to the brothers to do privately. It would be a blessing to ask the brothers to share something from their lists that could be included in a final prayer to close the time of study.

Praying God's Word

Lord of the Church, grant the work of Your Holy Spirit that I may ...

“This the Spirit will grant us and continually instruct us in when, by God’s word, our hearts have been cleared and freed of outside thoughts and concerns.”¹⁶ May it ever be so Lord! Amen.

¹⁶ LW 43:209.