



Why Study 1 Timothy?

In 2002, fashion designer Marc Jacobs invited Japanese artist Takashi Murakami to collaborate on a remodel of Louis Vuitton's luxury handbags. Traditionally identified by their brown leather and beige brand stamp, the new purses were white and boasted the iconic monogram in vibrant pinks, yellows, blues, and greens and debuted on the runways in the spring of 2003. Suddenly, the bags—not yet available in stores—graced the arm of nearly every Hollywood celebrity, including Paris Hilton, Jessica Simpson, and Lindsay Lohan.

Single and working in a lucrative career, I (Rebecca) drove myself to the Galleria Dallas, found the Louis Vuitton store, and placed my name on the waiting list. Shortly after, a girlfriend suggested that I try eBay. Many celebrities, she said, would carry a purse until the paparazzi snapped them with it, then sell it online.

To my delight, I found one nearly right away, complete with the dust bag, original tags, and a certificate of authenticity. I paid the price and awaited my purchase. Ten days later it arrived in all its glory. I carried my new purse everywhere, delighted by the squeals of envy it prompted from friends and strangers alike.

The same pal who tipped me off to eBay offered another piece of advice: "If you take it to the Louis store and register it, they'll clean it for you for life." I strode again through the arched doors of the luxury retailer, my white Takashi Murakami X Papillon bag tucked snugly under my arm. I set it on the counter and smiled.

"What's this?" asked the clerk.

I explained that I had purchased the purse online and wanted to register it so I could have it cleaned.

"That's a fake purse," she said.

"What? No, it's not; I have a certificate of authenticity. I have the tags."

"Look," she replied and showed me the stitching. "That's obviously not a Louis. And look at this." She opened a catalog and showed me a picture. "See the difference in the monogram colors?"

She looked me square in the eyes and drove her point home. “What you have is a really bad fake. I hope you didn’t pay too much for it.” Stunned and humiliated, I turned and left.

My problem with Louis Vuitton purses was the same as the new believers in the churches of first-century Ephesus had. I didn’t know the real thing well enough to recognize the wrong thing. The clerk at Louis Vuitton hadn’t studied every counterfeit bag in existence. She didn’t have to. She had enough experience with the real thing to know a fake when she saw it.

I never carried that purse again. Partly because I was embarrassed. But also because I knew that counterfeiters cost artists and designers millions of dollars in lost sales every year. To counterfeit is to deceive. Similarly, deceivers—counterfeiters of the truth—had made their way into Ephesus and were corrupting the pure teaching of the gospel and leading the believers in Timothy’s charge astray.

Deceivers live among us, too, and we can recognize them when we study God’s Word. Together, as we work our way through Paul’s first letter to “his true son in the faith,” we will soak ourselves in the truth and fortify ourselves against false teachings.

ABOUT 1 TIMOTHY

First Timothy belongs to a small group of letters also containing 2 Timothy and Titus. All attributed to the apostle Paul, they differ significantly from his other writings in style and structure. Many scholars agree that the letters come from an aged pastor toward the end of his life after years spent toiling for the sake of the gospel on the mission field. Rather than treatises of doctrine written to multiple churches, these letters are personal correspondences to Paul’s cherished co-workers as he transferred the cloak of ministry from his shoulders to theirs. Each epistle contains words of affirmation, exhortation, and caution.

Paul most likely wrote 1 Timothy in the mid-60s AD during a possible second Roman imprisonment. He had left Timothy, his dearest companion, in Ephesus to oversee the churches upon his departure for further church-planting work in Macedonia. Bible scholars consider Ephesus one of the most important geographical areas in Paul’s time. Emperor Augustus honored the city as the capital of the province of Asia around 29 BCE.² Inscriptions call it “the first and greatest metropolis of Asia.”³ Known for the wealth and prosperity of its citizens, the city boasted a population of approximately 200,000 to 250,000 inhabitants.⁴ Clearly, Ephesus presented an ideal location for carrying forth the gospel.

Evangelizing, however, was not without challenges. Anyone refusing to honor the emperor as lord and savior could face severe social and financial repercussions. Also, Ephesus housed the temple of Artemis, the virgin goddess of midwifery and protector of Ephesian citizens.⁵ Some followers of the female-led cult practiced strict piety and self-denial, and

Clinton Arnold writes that many of the Ephesians were “new Christians in Asia Minor who turned to Christ from a background of devotion to the mother goddess Artemis and engaging in magic, witchcraft, and occultic practices. An understanding of the actual life-setting of the letter helps the reader to appreciate in a more profound way all that the Apostle Paul says about the Lord Jesus Christ and spiritual warfare.”¹

Emperor worship was strictly political. Honoring Roman rulers offered no protection or safeguard from the threatening evil “powers.” Those seeking genuine religious experiences such as salvation, healing, or advice would need to seek it elsewhere.

Luke implies that a substantial number practiced magic (Acts 19), which followed many new believers into the church. This seaport swarmed with sailors, traders, soothsayers, and sellers of charms. Ephesus also hosted a substantial Jewish population, and the false teaching Paul warns about may have been a blend of Jewish and occult traditions.

While not an instruction manual for church structure, 1 Timothy offers invaluable insight concerning the qualities necessary for those who wish to serve as leaders. Paul's message is clear—character matters in the household of God.

Our culture is similar to Ephesus in some ways. Sincere believers trying to win souls to the faith find themselves fighting strange philosophies, new twists on ancient truth, and some “influencers” who lack integrity and credibility. Our character and conduct must honor Christ. Paul's words in 1 Timothy remain relevant to us today, for God and his Word remain the same forever (Psalm 102:27).

Of all ancient Greco-Roman cities, Ephesus, the third largest city in the Empire, was by far the most hospitable to magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts.⁶



Creating Beauty Out of Chaos

LESSON 1

Chaos—a jumbled feeling of utter confusion and disorder. We are living through an era shift, moving from a print to a technological age, and the result is cultural chaos. It feels a bit like anticipating the next aftershock of an earthquake, like straddling a massive crack in the earth that continues to expand. Not since the time of Johannes Gutenberg and the printing press some six hundred years ago has the Western world experienced such dramatic changes so rapidly. The ways we communicate, learn, relate, think, and worship have all changed. Barely any facet of our world today remains untouched. Scour the internet for information on how people are coping, and you'll see that anxiety is on the rise, especially among women and young people. One writer describes the cultural chaos we are experiencing this way:

The product is an activity center where the inputs are hard to identify and the outputs are strange hydra headed Frankenstein beasts. No proof of provenance [origin] is available, no fact checking is done, no critical thought is applied. Theses [theory] monsters are built to get big fast, garner attention, and then deflate to nothingness . . . in a few days. This is not a problem if one's goal is to be entertained. This is a major hurdle if the goal is to problem solve.¹

It's easy to be gobbled up in the turmoil of the times. We Christians must hang on to the sturdy cord of God's Word to lift us up and out of the chaos and set our feet on solid ground. God ordained that you would live during this era shift, and he desires that your life would be characterized by spiritual strength instead of confusion. Diamonds shine brightest against a dark background, so grab your Bible, get with others who also need God's lifeline, and ask the Lord to help you flourish despite the challenges. He can enable us all to create beauty out of the chaos.

OPTIONAL

Memorize Isaiah 61:3

[God will] bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

GET PREPARED

If you plan a trip to Singapore, you must learn about their customs and perspectives on life to truly enjoy and benefit from your travels. Before you can truly understand a book of the Bible, you must discover what life was like at that time.

Imagine you are a woman living in Ephesus two thousand years ago. Yes, her life was dramatically different in some ways, but it was much like yours in others. What lessons can you glean from Paul's letter to Timothy that can benefit Christian women of any century? That's the focus of our study. However, our saga begins before this letter. To understand it well, we must first travel back to Ephesus in the book of Acts.



Read Acts 19:1–20.

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he encountered people who had only heard a little about Jesus but who had experienced John's baptism of repentance. When Paul recognized they were deficient in their understanding of the Christian faith, he enlightened them and baptized them in the name of Jesus. Afterward, he followed his usual pattern of preaching to the city, first in the Jewish synagogue and later to the Gentiles, in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This gathering place was available for traveling teachers from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., when people met daily to eat their lunch and discuss the latest philosophies and ideas.

1. How far-reaching was Paul's two-year-long ministry of evangelistic preaching and conversations about Jesus (v. 10)?
2. What did God do through Paul to help the sick and oppressed (vv. 11–12)? As a result, what counterfeit activity began (v. 13)?

Paul taught between the hours of 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., during the siesta hours when others would rest and classes were not typically scheduled. In teaching through the heat of the day, Paul showed resourcefulness to use what was available to him and diligence to work during what in his culture was a time of relaxation. His commitment reminds us of Bible study leaders who teach in the evenings or pastors who work hard on Sunday mornings. When has fulfilling your calling required endurance to go above and beyond?

DIGGING DEEPER

What are some ways you can discern counterfeit activities from authentic works of God?

3. What did the demons say to the seven sons of Sceva when they tried to imitate Paul (v. 15)? Then what did the demons do (v. 16)?

4. How did this event stop these fraudulent attempts to counterfeit authentic miracles (v. 17)?

How did the Ephesians who had been dabbling in the occult exhibit repentance (vv. 18–19)?

5. What kinds of magic arts and occult practices are becoming more widespread in your culture today? Why do you think some women are attracted? What are the dangers?

6. Did you or were you ever tempted to dabble in magic and occult practices? If so, what did you learn and how would you advise others who are curious?

The overriding characteristic of the practice of magic throughout the Hellenistic world was the cognizance of a spiritual world exercising influence over virtually every aspect of life. The goal of the magician was to discern the helpful spirits from the harmful ones and learn the distinct operations and the relative strengths and authority of the spirits. Through this knowledge, means could be constructed (with spoken or written formulas, amulets, etc.) for the manipulation of the spirits in the interest of the individual person. With the proper formula, a spirit-induced sickness could be cured, a chariot race could be won, sexual passions could be enhanced, etc. Conversely, great harm could be brought to another person through the utterance of a curse.²

—Clinton Arnold

DIGGING DEEPER

Why do you think God chose to use extraordinary means to cure diseases and perform exorcisms in Ephesus? Why does God do this today in particular places around the world?

Witch culture turns its attention outward toward the System it aims to bring down. It is anti-institutional not merely in practice—modern witches cobble together a personal pantheon spanning several cultures and symbolic systems—but in its theology. Combining progressive feminist politics with a fervent opposition to institutional Christianity—which is dismissed and derided as a bastion of toxic patriarchy, repression, and white supremacy—modern witchcraft embraces its power to transgress.³

—Tara Isabella Burton

7. What are practices or habits from your old life that you (literally or metaphorically) may need to “burn” to experience freedom?

8. As believers were cleansed of these abominable practices, how was Paul’s ministry affected (v. 20)? In your opinion, why? What are some practical applications for us today?



Read Acts 19:23–34.

Right before Paul planned to leave Ephesus, his ministry and Ephesian believers faced another potential death blow.

9. What charges did Demetrius bring against Paul? What do you think was the underlying reason he and the other silversmiths were actually outraged? (vv. 23–27)

10. What did you learn about Artemis of the Ephesians from the introduction to this study (see pages 14–15) that helps you understand her hold on the city and that part of the world?

For God is not the author
of confusion but of peace.
—1 Corinthians 14:33 (NKJV)

11. Describe the chaos that ensued (vv. 28–34).

12. Why do you think the crowd lost control and began to shout and riot in the streets? How can we be sure we don't add to this kind of confusion and commotion when we are angry or frustrated? How do we help others when they are tempted to lose control and react foolishly?

Cooler heads prevailed when the city clerk reasoned with the mob, allowing Paul to escape and continue his missionary journeys (19:35–20:1). However, the church in Ephesus continued to be influenced by the Ephesian culture in Paul's absence. As a result, Paul sent Timothy as an ambassador to address issues within the church that were causing all kinds of chaos. He wrote the letter we'll be excavating to encourage and advise his mentee in the difficult task of cleansing an unhealthy church that had allowed outside influences to distort the true gospel. Many Christian communities struggle with the same toxic forces today, making these letters particularly profitable for us. Let's dig in.



Read 1 Timothy 1:1–11.

13. According to verses 3 and 4, what has happened in the Ephesian church since Paul left? What does Paul urge Timothy to do as a result? What then is the first and primary reason Paul wrote this letter?

DIGGING DEEPER

Compare the salutations in these three personal letters to Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 1:1–2; 2 Timothy 1:1–2; Titus 1:1–4). What does Paul emphasize in all three greetings? Contrast the salutations in his letter to Philemon (vv. 1–2) and Philippians (1:1–2). Why do you think Paul identifies himself differently in these letters?

[He] understood that niceness would not protect you from everyone, all of the time. . . . Certain people could and would cause harm to you emotionally—regardless of whether you treated them kindly or not. This might occur because the other person is intrinsically hateful, prejudiced, or bigoted; or because he or she holds an old grudge and is out to settle a score by punishing you; or simply because the other person is not emotionally healthy or mature enough to be loved and to love in return.⁴
—Harriet Braiker, about Hans Selye, father of modern concepts of stress

DIGGING DEEPER

Those who desire positions of authority and influence within the church would do well to consider James 3:1 and Matthew 20:25–28. What did Jesus advise those who desire to teach and lead to take to heart?

14. Paul accuses the false teachers of forgetting “God’s work—which is by faith” (v. 4). What should result from following the gospel that Paul taught (v. 5)? What does this tell you about the false doctrine that was being circulated in the Ephesian church?

15. What are the aspirations of the people circulating these false ideas (vv. 6–7)?

16. Have you ever witnessed a situation where someone wanted a highly regarded position, but they were not prepared for it? Why is it dangerous to give these people a place of influence before they are ready? What kinds of problems can these unhealthy aspirations create?

17. What kinds of words might be included in “meaningless talk” (v. 6)? Have you ever engaged in or been tempted to engage in this kind of rhetoric? How can you protect yourself from communicating this way?

In verses 8–10 Paul says that “the law is good if one uses it properly,” but the false teachers are not. Therefore, the Ephesians should listen to Paul and Timothy. Greek scholar William D. Mounce writes,

The opponents have misunderstood the law. They are probably saying that Paul did not think the law was good. Vv 8–10 assert that the law is good but it must be used as it was intended. . . . Those who are righteous in Christ live according to a principle entirely different from the Mosaic law. Their righteous conduct is the outward expression of an inner transformation brought about by the indwelling presence of God. The opponents' misunderstanding of the law's function has led to spiritual sickness. Paul's gospel, on the other hand, brings spiritual health revealing God's wondrous glory.⁵

18. What has God done for Paul (v. 12)? Has God done the same for you? Are you living in light of this truth? Why or why not?

19. In verses 13–16 Paul weaved together his own personal history, the gospel in a nutshell, and advice to loyal Ephesian Christians on how to treat those who were naïve and coming under the influence of the circulating heresies. List whatever lessons you can extrapolate from the verses:

Paul's personal history

The true gospel

Advice on how to treat those who act in ignorance

Much controversy surrounds "the law" (see vv. 7–10), which confirms that part of the problem surrounds misunderstanding, distortion, and misappropriation of Old Testament teaching and lore thrown in (note genealogies in v. 4), apparently with an admixture of Greco-Roman views (note "myths" v. 4). Such an amalgam would not be surprising at a cultural crossroads like Ephesus.⁶

—Robert Yarbrough

The Mosaic law has been done away in its entirety as a code. God is no longer guiding the life of man by this particular code. In its place He has introduced the law of Christ. Many of the individual commands within that law are new, but some are not. Some of the ones which are old were also found in the Mosaic law and they are now incorporated into the law of Christ. As a part of the Mosaic law they are completely and forever done away. As part of the law of Christ they are binding on the believer today.⁷

—Charles Ryrie

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

—Paul (Romans 10:4)

The phrase “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance” (1:15) occurs five times in Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus. Each time Paul asserts his apostolic authority, includes an essential kernel of important truth, and implies that those who oppose this teaching should not be seen as “trustworthy.”



I (Sue) knew very little about the Christian faith growing up and, as a result, dabbled in my early years in a variety of philosophies attempting to answer the big questions in life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? My parents believed children should be allowed to determine these answers for themselves. My husband was raised in a Christian home, although he abandoned those beliefs in college. After we were married and had children, I was invited to a women’s Bible study where my search began in earnest. About the same time, we began to search for these kinds of answers as a couple. We were invited to join with a group of believers for informal discussions about life and God. No question was off-limits. And I had plenty! But through their kindness, patience, and thorough understanding of the Bible, I found answers that resulted in a joyous, intimate relationship with Christ and a transformed life. Never hesitate to ask your questions. God doesn’t tell us everything, but he does tell us what we need to know to follow him wholeheartedly. Ask away.

20. In verse 13 Paul confesses that he was guilty of some of the sins he listed in verses 8–10. In your opinion, why did he list them? What does this reveal about God’s love for sinful people? What are the lessons for us?

21. Paul ends his introductory portion of this letter with the first of three doxologies or hymns of praise (v. 17). Why do you think Paul bursts into praise following verses 12–16?

22. As you consider what Christ has done for you, what words of praise come to mind? Can you think of any roadblocks that hinder you from praising God wholeheartedly? If so, ask God why and consider discussing this with your group or a trusted Christian friend.

23. Paul renews his charge to Timothy to be bold and courageous while exhibiting tough love and to stand up to people instilling heretical beliefs in others (v. 18). He names two such people and explains that he “handed [them] over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme” (v. 20). What do you think this means? Why do you think Paul did this?

24. Paul mentions Hymenaeus again in 2 Timothy 2:16–18, along with another false teacher named Philetus. How does Paul describe their heresies? What will be the results for both the heretics and those who come under their influence? Why is it imperative that we graciously but firmly confront teaching that distorts the essence of the true gospel?
25. What distortions, myths, and controversial speculations have you observed infiltrating the church today and resulting in confusion and chaos? (Please don't mention specific people, churches, political persuasions, or denominations.) What have you learned in this lesson that might help you be part of the solution to return to the true gospel?
26. Review the lesson. What did you learn that empowers you to create beauty out of chaos in your own life?

BEAUTY OUT OF GARBAGE

Aside from Jesus, Paul is my favorite character in the New Testament, primarily because I (Rebecca) identify with him. At twelve years old, I began to suffer from severe generalized anxiety. As a result, I started drinking in middle school. My self-medicating habit had turned into alcoholism by the time I graduated college. I took my last drink in 2009, but I have plenty of shame-filled memories I'd like to erase.

One day, while working in my backyard, I noticed a plant growing out of my compost heap. An avocado pit had rooted and started to grow. I thought about it all day long, marveling over how God could produce life and beauty out of garbage.

That's when it hit me—God can create beauty from the garbage of our lives, too, when we entrust our lives to him.