

You've Got Mail

People love to open the mailbox and pull out a letter from a friend. Now we not only get mail through the post office, but also on the computer as e-mail. It is so cheap and easy to put a stamp on an envelope or hit the send button on a computer. It hasn't always been that easy, though. A couple hundred years ago in England, it wasn't the sender who paid the postage but the recipient. Before that, there were no government post offices. Written messages were either sent by hired courier, or you waited for someone to go on a trip and agree to carry the message for you.

Most of the New Testament – that portion of the Bible written after the birth of Jesus Christ – consists of letters (sometimes called *epistles*) written by those who either knew Jesus or who worked very closely with those who knew him. Some of them were written to individuals and some to groups of believers; they would be delivered by friends and then passed around in an effort to build up the church of Christ. This week we will study a letter Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy, a pastor in the city of Ephesus. We'll see that the instructions Paul had for Timothy still apply to us today.

Monday – Words from a Mentor

"The holy scriptures are our letters from home." Augustine, 4th-5th c. Bishop of Hippo, North Africa

1. Please read 1 Timothy 1:1-20. What do you learn about God in verses 1-2? What about Paul and Timothy?

Text Insight: The word "apostle" (one who is sent) is related to the word "epistle" (something that is sent over). Paul was an *apostle* who wrote an *epistle* to Timothy.

2. What is the basis for Paul's warning in verses 3-11? How does his description of himself in verses 12-20 flow from those warnings?

3. Look at verses 5 and 18 and describe Paul's motivation.

Making it Personal: If you belong to Jesus, he has appointed you to his service just as he did Paul (v. 12). Ask God for strength and guidance in carrying out the things he wants you to do.

Tuesday – There's Authority, and then there's Ultimate Authority

"Letter writing is the only device for combining solitude with good company." Lord Byron, 19th c. English poet

1. Please read 1 Timothy 2:1-15. For whom does Paul urge prayerful support in verses 1 and 2? Why do you think he got more specific in verse 2? How do these instructions make you feel?

2. What is God's view on this issue according to verses 3-4?

3. Compare verses 1-6 with Mark 10:35-45. What does this tell you about authority and the role of Jesus?

Prayer Focus: Remember those in authority, and lift them up to God in prayer.

Wednesday – To Lead or not to Lead

"Letters are expectation packaged in an envelope." Shana Alexander, 20th c. American journalist

1. Please read 1 Timothy 3:1-16. What type of person is desired for church leadership? Why do you think Paul focused more on personal qualities than the job description?

Text Insight: Overseer is another word for the position of Elder. The word "wife" in verse 11 may also be read as referring to the position of Deaconess.

2. What does Paul say in verse 1 about desiring to take part in leadership of the church? Why do you think this is so? How could the following verses be taken as a caution to those who are thinking about it?

3. How did Paul bring Timothy back to the point of the entire letter in verses 14-16? According to verse 15, what is the role of a godly church?

Making it Personal: Whether you aspire to church leadership or not, let the qualities in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 guide you in your walk with God today.

Thursday – Blessed Assurance

"Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls. For, thus friends absent speak." John Donne, 16th-17th c. English preacher and poet

1. Please read 1 Timothy 4:1-16. What warnings and encouragements here speak to you personally? Why?

2. Consider verses 4-5 in conjunction with James 1:16-18? What assurance do you find in these passages?

3. What did Paul say would come from Timothy's efforts in 4:6-8 and 15-16?

Digging Deeper: Notice that verse 14 returns to something Paul mentioned in 1:18. What does this tell you about Timothy?

Friday – Young and Old Alike

"You deserve a longer letter than this." Jane Austen, 18th-19th c. English novelist, writing to her sister

1. Please read 1 Timothy 5:1-6:2. What advice does 5:1-2, along with 4:12, provide for a younger person in leadership? How do you think older believers would view a person who follows this instruction?

2. In what way should the principles found in 5:3-16 apply to the actions of people generally?

3. What does 5:17-6:2 tell you about the responsibility of both those in authority and those under authority?

Digging Deeper: Take a look at James 3:1-2. What standard is required for those leaders whose specific role is to teach? How does James recognize the inability to teach perfectly?

For the Weekend: Please read 1 Timothy 6:3-21 where Paul summarizes his instructions. Which of the points Paul makes is especially pertinent to your life right now? Ask God to lead you in this matter.