

Safe

They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons (1 Timothy 3:10).

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:8-13

Song: “Leave It at the Cross”

Amusement parks usually have a list of guidelines to follow in order to have the privilege and the pleasure of participating in the attractions. These rules are in place for the safety of all individuals involved, so everyone can enjoy their day.

When we serve in the church, there are also requirements that we must follow. In this passage, Paul tells Timothy a list of such requirements. However, these guidelines for leaders in faith are also applicable to all Christians. We should all be worthy of respect, honest, clear in conscience, and we should all hold to the truths of the faith.

These guidelines are not just to keep our leaders in line, but also to protect all Christians from danger. When Christians are worthy of respect, we reflect God to the world. When we hold to the truths of the faith, we are not easily swayed. The entire Bible is full of such instruction, and it is imperative that we remind ourselves and others of these things in order to keep each other safe.

Father, thank You for Your instruction to us. We pray that in all things we would be reminded of Your Word, which reminds us of what we should do. Help us to be good servants to You and to others. In Jesus' name, amen.

November 16–22. **Jessica Fitch** loves running and volunteering at her church. She aims to begin a career as a professor.

Shine

People brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by (Acts 5:15).

Scripture: Acts 5:12-16

Song: "Glory to God"

My sister-in-law attended a concert where the performing artist went into the crowd to be closer to her fans. After the concert, and with a shine in her eyes, my sister-in-law exclaimed to me longingly how she wished she had been close enough just to touch the performer's hand. She certainly wasn't the only one. That performer has quite a reputation.

The apostles had a reputation through "many signs and wonders among the people" (5:12). They did not need an introduction, for the people came voluntarily. The testimony of their faith in God and His work through them prompted people to also act in faith, trusting that even Peter's shadow falling on their sick friends and family members would heal. And as Peter walked through the crowd, "all of them were healed" (v. 16).

God's work through our lives, because of our faith, can create a reputation so that we stand out and draw people as would a city on a hill (Matthew 5:13-16). Because of our testimony they will wonder what it is that makes us different and will be encouraged to seek God's power for their own lives. These become our opportunities to help others draw near to God and learn to follow Him.

Father, I pray that You would help me shine for You so that others would see Your power to change their lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Correcting Malfunctions

The word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7

Song: “Keep Making Me”

If your car has ever broken down, you may have experienced a huge disruption in your day, even if it turned out that the breakdown was caused by the tiniest malfunction. Just recently my car stopped on an exit, blocking the way for trucks and cars alike, all because one bolt on my brake bracket fell out while I was driving. This one \$5 bolt cost six hours of my time, a day of work, and a \$104 tow.

Even the smallest piece malfunctioning in a system can cause system-wide collapse. However, when all the pieces are tuned and tightened for efficiency, we get system-wide production. The disciples knew this principle, so when they learned of a problem, they addressed it. They assigned men who were known for their faithfulness and godliness to do a task. The result was system-wide increase.

When ministries ignore frustrations, they experience disruptions and problems. When they address them, they see more fruit grow. Sometimes we forget to focus on disruptions and think them insignificant (or just hope they'll go away). But if we take the time, we may find that addressing even our smallest deficiencies can have significant effects.

Father, I pray You would give us the strength and wisdom to see the problems that hinder our work. Help us to address them and to, by doing so, find greater growth in our relationship with You and with others. In Jesus' name, amen.

Tough Love

[Members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen] could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave [Stephen] as he spoke (Acts 6:10).

Scripture: Acts 6:8-15

Song: “Let Them See You”

I adopted a cat when she was the tiniest, cutest little kitten. She would meow pitifully when I attempted to train her. I had scratches all over my arms because I loved playing with her, even though she was rough with me. It took some time before I realized that my loving her didn't mean I could avoid the hard work of training—or she would continue to hurt me and others.

Stephen knew that loving others required speaking the truth, even if that was hard. He was ready to stand for what he knew was right and to show others the truth. However, this wasn't something he did alone—the Spirit gave him wisdom, power, and grace to speak (6:8). We might think that loving others means approving others as they are. However, to truly love is to want the best for them, regardless of the outcome for ourselves. And that might require speaking uncomfortable truth. But God has given us His grace and power too. We have the ability through the Spirit to share the truths of the gospel, even when it's challenging.

Father, give us Your grace and power, and embolden us to share more of You. Give us the wisdom in our words to speak truth so we can love other people in greater ways. In Jesus' name, amen.

Together

[All the believers] broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people (Acts 2:46-47).

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47

Song: “They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love”

I entered a short-term missions program with 11 others. We had three months of training to prepare for six-month trips. The training was like a boot camp. It included a full and rigorous schedule of chores, activities, devotions, and Bible studies. The 12 of us drew close to each other and, in turn, closer to God.

The disciples had been through their training season with Jesus. Just previous to events recorded in today’s passage, the disciples had received the filling of the Holy Spirit (2:1-4). Now they are getting their bearings for ministry and learning more about how to work with each other as they step out in faith to share the message of Jesus. Times together, breaking bread, and praising God help them become a body of faithful followers of Jesus—strengthened for the trials and successes to come.

Time with other believers, when we can share the challenges and joys of our lives and encourage one another with Scripture and prayer, can help us build each other up as “iron sharpens iron” (Proverbs 27:17). Value the time you have with your brothers and sisters, and let them enrich your life with God.

Father, thank You for the companionship of other believers. Help them sharpen and encourage me. I pray that You would remind me daily that these people are a gift. Help us aid each other in our walk with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Anchor in the Storm

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them” (Acts 4:23-24).

Scripture: Acts 4:23-31

Song: “Oceans”

I was worried about a friend, so I spent a night praying that God would protect him. I prayed until I felt a wave of total peace with God’s control. I was confident that God knew my friend’s need, and I trusted that whatever God planned would come about. It didn’t matter what would happen, because God was there.

Peter and John demonstrated God’s sovereignty by healing a disabled man (3:7) and proclaiming salvation in Jesus (vv. 19-20). The Sanhedrin (4:5) scolded Peter and John (vv. 7, 18, 21) and released them. Hearing these wonderful acts of God but also the threatening actions of the rulers, the believers also declared God’s sovereignty. Remembering the God who made everything and controls everything helps us have peace in the face of both good and bad. Peace is not found in worry or striving to work out our plan. Peace comes from knowing that God is sovereign and that He is working out His plan to the end.

Father, I pray that in the good times and bad, You teach us to find peace in trusting Your sovereignty and understanding. When anxiety or fear skyrockets, I pray that we would learn to hold on to You as the anchor in the storm. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Facades

With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet (Acts 5:2).

Scripture: Acts 4:32—5:11

Song: “Of All the Spirit’s Gifts to Me”

One of my professors talked about how people default to facades in order to be perceived in certain ways, ways that they know are not genuine. People hope the fake presentation will be accepted as authentic. Ananias and Sapphira wanted a generous reputation like other believers. They tried to fake that characteristic by not speaking the truth about their giving. They expected their words to become truth and cover their lie. But God saw through their lie and revealed the truth to Peter.

God is able to cut through the lies to the very heart of each of us because He knows the truth and sees every lie in our hearts and minds, whether the lies come out in our words or not. God can make these lies known to us—if we’re not consciously aware of them already; we must listen and accept the truth. And He can also make our lies known to others, especially when doing so benefits the church.

As we humble ourselves to the truth about God and ourselves, we become more genuine people, like God intends, who live out our divine gifting and calling. Humility helps us use our gifts and practice our calling in our service to the kingdom and love of others.

Father, teach us to be honest and genuine. Protect us from pride and strengthen us against temptation to default to personal facades. In Jesus’ name, amen.