

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: Guard the Good Deposit

2 Timothy 1:1-18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter opens Paul's final letter, and the doctrinal heart of it is the call to guard the good deposit, the apostolic faith handed down and entrusted to Timothy (vv. 13-14). The lesson aims to give your class a settled conviction that the gospel is a fixed treasure to be preserved and passed on, not a private project to be revised, expanded, or improved. Paul speaks of "the pattern of sound words" (v. 13) and "the good deposit" (v. 14), language that assumes the faith has a definite shape, delivered through the apostles and now complete in the New Testament (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Help your students see that faithfulness means holding fast and handing on, not inventing something new, and that there is no need for fresh revelation, because the deposit is already ours to guard.

At the same time, this chapter is a wellspring of grace and courage, and the lesson should reach the heart as much as the head. Paul tells a frightened young man that God saved him "not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace" (v. 9), and that the God who saves did not give us a spirit of fear (v. 7). Marvel with your class at the freeness of grace, and hold it firmly together with the "holy calling" that grace produces. Salvation is not earned by our works, and it is never a bare decision that leaves the life unchanged; God's grace calls us to holiness and to faithful endurance. Teach grace and human response as friends, not rivals.

As you teach, be pastoral with the theme of courage versus fear. Many in your class carry quiet timidity about their faith, an embarrassment in the workplace, a reluctance to speak of Christ, a fear of suffering for the gospel. Let Paul's chains and his calm confidence ("I know whom I have believed," v. 12) become a model. Aim not merely to inform your students about the deposit but to send them out unashamed, fanning the gift of God into flame.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says God "saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (v. 9). What does this verse teach us about why and how God saves, and how does it hold grace and a holy life together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the breathtaking sweep of verse 9. God "saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ

Jesus before the ages began.” Paul wants the trembling Timothy, and us, to know that our salvation does not rest on our performance. It rests on God’s own purpose and grace, planned before time, given in Christ. Let the class feel how steady that is. Our standing with God is anchored in something far older and far surer than our works.

Make sure the class hears the phrase “not because of our works.” Salvation is never something we earn, never a wage God owes us for good behavior. If it were, grace would not be grace. Paul guards this carefully here and in Titus 3:5, “not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.” This protects us from the deadly idea that we save ourselves, and it humbles the proud and comforts the weary.

But notice the other half of the verse, which is just as important. He saved us and “called us to a holy calling.” Grace does not leave us where it found us. The same grace that forgives also summons us to holiness. Paul is not describing a salvation that excuses an unholy life; he is describing grace that creates a holy one. Hold these two truths tightly together for your class, because here is where so many go wrong, splitting grace from godliness as if they were enemies.

This is the place to gently mark the boundaries. We do not teach that we are saved by our own works, as if we could put God in our debt. Nor do we teach a “faith only” that needs no response, no obedience, no holy life. Scripture holds grace and the human response together: God acts first in pure grace, and we respond by believing, repenting, confessing Christ, being baptized into Him, and then living the holy calling to which He summoned us (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27). Grace is the source, and a holy life is the fruit; neither cancels the other.

Close by letting them marvel. The God who planned your rescue before the ages began, who gave it freely in Christ, now calls you to a holy life, not to repay Him, which is impossible, but because He has made you His own. That is the gospel that gave Paul courage in chains, and it is the gospel we guard.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Salvation grounded in God’s own purpose and grace, not in our works (v. 9; Titus 3:5)
- Grace as the source of salvation and a holy life as its fruit, held together, not opposed
- The human response to grace: faith, repentance, confession, baptism into Christ, then faithful living (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27)
- Salvation as a “holy calling,” never a license for an unchanged life
- The error of earning salvation by works and the error of a “faith only” with no obedience, both corrected here
- God’s eternal purpose in Christ “before the ages began” as the deep foundation of our security

Discussion Prompts

- What does it protect in us to know that salvation is “not because of our works”?
- How does Paul keep grace and the call to holiness from becoming enemies in this verse?
- Why is it dangerous to embrace grace while ignoring the “holy calling” that comes with it?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul reminds the fearful Timothy that “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (v. 7). When you feel the pull of timidity in your faith, where does it usually show up, and what would courage look like there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns verse 7 inward. Paul knew Timothy was timid, and his words are tender and bracing at once: “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” Help students locate their own timidity honestly. Fear in our faith rarely announces itself; it disguises itself as politeness, busyness, or simply staying quiet when we should speak.

Walk through Paul’s three gifts as the antidote to fear. Power is God’s strength at work where we feel weak. Love keeps our courage from becoming harsh; we speak truth because we care, not to win. Self-control keeps us steady, so fear does not stampede us into silence or panic. Notice that none of these depends on a bold personality. They are gifts of the Spirit available to the most naturally fearful believer in the room.

Press for specifics. Where does timidity show up for them, at work, with family, with a neighbor who needs the gospel, in standing for what is right when it costs something? Naming the exact place where fear shrinks obedience is the first step to overcoming it.

Close with hope. Paul does not scold Timothy for being afraid; he reminds him of what God has already given. Courage, for the Christian, is not the absence of fear but the presence of the Spirit. The gift is already there. The call is simply to fan it into flame.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Spirit’s gift of power, love, and self-control as the antidote to fear (v. 7)
- Courage as a fruit of the Spirit, not a personality trait
- The difference between godly timidity and the fear that silences obedience
- God’s grace working through naturally fearful believers

Discussion Prompts

- Where does timidity most often show up in your walk with Christ?
- Which do you most need right now: power, love, or self-control, and why?
- What is one fearful place where you could obey God this week instead of staying silent?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says Christ Jesus “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (v. 10). What does it mean that Jesus has abolished death, and how does the gospel bring life and immortality “to light” for us now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Lead the class into the soaring claim of verse 10. The grace given before the ages “has now been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” The eternal plan has stepped into history in a person. Grace is no longer hidden in God’s purpose; it has a face, the face of Christ.

Unpack “abolished death.” The word means to render powerless, to break its grip. Death still happens, of course; Paul himself was about to die. But Christ has stripped death of its final authority. By His own death and resurrection He has broken the chain, so that for the Christian death is no longer a wall but a doorway. Help the class feel the comfort of this, especially any who have stood at a graveside.

Explain “brought life and immortality to light.” Before Christ, the hope of life beyond death was a flicker, glimpsed dimly. In the gospel it blazes out in full. The resurrection of Jesus turns a hope into a certainty. We do not merely wish for life beyond the grave; we have seen it in Him, the firstfruits of those who sleep.

Bring it home to the fearful Timothy and to us. If death itself has been defeated, then what is left to fear? The threat that hangs over every human life, that gives every tyrant his power, has been broken by the empty tomb. This is why Paul can sit in chains, facing execution, and write with such peace. The worst Rome can do to him is open the door to life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ’s appearing as the manifestation of God’s eternal saving grace (v. 10)
- Death defeated and rendered powerless through Christ’s death and resurrection
- Life and immortality brought “to light” in the gospel, turning hope into certainty
- The resurrection of Jesus as the ground of the believer’s confidence before death
- Freedom from the fear of death as a fruit of the gospel (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Christ has “abolished” a death we still see all around us?
- How does the resurrection turn our hope of life after death from a wish into a certainty?
- How would living free of the fear of death change the way you follow Christ?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul is not ashamed of the gospel even in chains, and he urges Timothy not to be ashamed of “the testimony about our Lord” (v. 8). Where are you most tempted to be quietly ashamed of Christ, and what helps you stand unashamed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses verse 8 into daily life. Paul, in chains, urges Timothy not to be ashamed “of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner.” Shame is a quieter enemy than outright denial. Most of us never renounce Christ; we simply stay silent, change the subject, or laugh along when we should speak.

Help students locate their own places of shame. For many it is the workplace, where faith feels unwelcome. For some it is among educated or skeptical friends, where the gospel sounds embarrassing. For others it is family. Naming the specific arena where shame creeps in robs it of some of its power.

Point them to what cures shame. Paul is unashamed not because he is naturally bold but because he is convinced of the worth of the One he serves: “I know whom I have believed” (v. 12). Shame shrinks when our eyes are fixed on Christ’s glory rather than on the opinions of the room. We are not ashamed of the gospel because we are persuaded it is true and that it is the very power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16).

Encourage one concrete step. Perhaps it is a simple, unashamed mention of the Lord this week, a willingness to be known as a Christian where it costs a little. Courage grows by use. The first unashamed word makes the second one easier.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call not to be ashamed of the testimony about Christ (v. 8; Romans 1:16)
- Shame as a subtle form of denial that silences witness
- Confidence in Christ’s worth as the cure for shame
- Suffering for the gospel as a shared fellowship, not a disgrace (v. 8)

Discussion Prompts

- In what setting are you most tempted to be quietly ashamed of Christ?
- What truth about Jesus most helps you stand unashamed?
- What is one unashamed step of witness you could take this week?

Question 5**Student Question:**

Paul declares, “I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me” (v. 12). What is the difference between knowing about God and knowing the One you have believed, and what gave Paul such confidence facing death?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 12 is one of the great confessions of Scripture: “I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.” Notice Paul does not say, “I know what I have believed,” as though faith were merely a set of correct ideas. He says, “I know whom.” His confidence rests on a Person he knows.

Draw out the difference for the class. It is possible to know a great deal about God and never know Him, to master the doctrine and miss the Lord. Knowing about God fills the head; knowing God anchors the soul. Paul’s calm in that prison cell does not come from winning an argument; it comes from a relationship with the One he has trusted for decades and found utterly faithful.

Examine the ground of Paul’s confidence: “he is able to guard.” Paul has entrusted his life, his soul, his future to Christ, and he is convinced Christ can keep what has been deposited with Him. This is not arrogant self-assurance; it is humble certainty in Another. Paul is sure, not of himself, but of his Savior.

Help the class long for this kind of knowing. It does not come overnight. It is forged in years of trusting God through trials, of finding Him faithful when everything else fails. Encourage them that the path to Paul’s confidence runs through daily, dependent fellowship with Christ, in prayer, in His word, in obedience, in the church.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith as knowing a Person, not merely affirming facts (v. 12)
- The difference between knowing about God and knowing God
- Christ’s faithfulness to guard what is entrusted to Him
- Assurance grounded in the Savior’s ability, not in our own strength
- Confidence before death as the fruit of a long-tested walk with Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between knowing about God and truly knowing Him?
- Where does your own confidence in God most need to grow from facts into trust?
- What experiences have most deepened your sense that Christ is faithful?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul recalls Timothy's "sincere faith," the same faith that lived first in Lois and Eunice (v. 5). What part of your faith did you receive from others, and what are you doing now to keep it sincere rather than secondhand?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question reflects on the heritage named in verse 5: Timothy's "sincere faith," which "dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice." Faith was handed to Timothy across three generations. Most of us, too, received our faith partly through others, parents, a teacher, a friend, a congregation.

Help students honor that heritage without leaning on it. A received faith is a gift, but it must become genuinely our own. Paul calls it a "sincere" faith, an unhypocritical faith, faith without pretense. There is a danger in secondhand religion, going through motions we inherited but never owned. The faith of Lois cannot save Eunice's son unless it becomes Timothy's own.

Invite honest reflection. Are there parts of their faith they hold simply because they were taught them, but have never truly wrestled with or made their own? That is not a crisis to fear but an invitation to go deeper, to take the family treasure and make it the living conviction of their own heart.

Point them toward what keeps faith sincere: personal time in God's word, honest prayer, real obedience, and the fellowship of the church. A faith that is fed becomes our own. Encourage one practice this week that moves their faith from inherited to owned.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith handed down through families and the church (v. 5)
- The call to a "sincere," unhypocritical faith that is genuinely our own
- The danger of secondhand religion held without personal conviction
- Practices that keep faith living and sincere: word, prayer, obedience, fellowship

Discussion Prompts

- Whose faith was handed down to you, and how?
- Which parts of your faith feel inherited but not yet fully your own?
- What is one practice that helps keep your faith sincere rather than secondhand?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul tells Timothy to "follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (v. 13). What is this "pattern of sound words," and why does Paul speak of the faith as something with a fixed shape to be followed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 13 gives us a key phrase for this whole letter: “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” The word “pattern” pictures a model or outline, a fixed shape to be reproduced. Paul assumes the faith is not formless or endlessly negotiable; it has a definite contour that Timothy must follow.

Explain “sound words.” As in 1 Timothy, “sound” means healthy, life-giving. The apostolic teaching is not just correct; it is health-giving to those who hold it. And these words are ones Timothy “heard from me,” the apostolic message, delivered with authority, the same message now preserved for us in the New Testament. The pattern is not Timothy’s invention or Paul’s private opinion; it is the deposited truth of Christ delivered through His apostle.

Mark how this guards against drift. If the faith has a pattern, then teaching can be measured against it. We can tell when something is out of line, off-pattern, contrary to the sound words. This is why Paul keeps using such language; he wants a stable standard that protects the church from being talked off its foundation by impressive new ideas.

Note the closing phrase: “in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” The pattern is not held coldly, like a museum piece behind glass. It is held in faith and love. Sound doctrine and warm devotion belong together. We guard the pattern not because we are rigid, but because we love the Christ it reveals and the people it saves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The faith as a fixed “pattern of sound words” with a definite shape (v. 13)
- “Sound” teaching as health-giving, not merely correct
- The apostolic message, now preserved in the New Testament, as the standard (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- Doctrine held “in faith and love,” not coldly or combatively
- A stable pattern as the church’s protection against drift and novelty

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the faith has a “pattern” to be followed, not reinvented?
- How does having a fixed standard of sound words protect a congregation?
- How do we hold sound doctrine “in faith and love” rather than coldly?

Question 8

Student Question:

Onesiphorus “often refreshed” Paul and “was not ashamed of my chains” (v. 16), while Phygelus and Hermogenes turned away. Whose presence has refreshed you in a hard season, and whom could you refresh by showing up unashamed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question draws on the warm contrast at the end of the chapter. Phygelus and Hermogenes, with all of Asia, “turned away” from Paul (v. 15), but Onesiphorus “often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains” (v. 16). He even searched Paul out in Rome until he found him. Paul never forgot it.

Let students feel the weight of the word “refreshed.” In a discouraging season, the presence of one faithful friend who is not ashamed to be associated with you can be like cold water on a hot day. Invite them to remember who has done that for them, who showed up when others drifted away, who stood by them when it was costly.

Then turn the question outward. Onesiphorus refreshed Paul by his presence and his courage. Who in their life is in a hard place, sick, grieving, struggling, perhaps even suffering for their faith, who needs someone simply to show up unashamed? Refreshing others is rarely complicated; it is mostly about presence.

Encourage one concrete act. A visit, a call, a meal, sitting with someone in their chains rather than pretending not to notice them. The Onesiphoruses of the church are remembered by God; their small faithfulness is never wasted.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithful presence in others’ suffering as Christian love (vv. 16-18)
- The contrast between those who turn away and those who stand firm
- Courage to be associated with the suffering and unpopular
- God’s remembrance of small, faithful acts of refreshment

Discussion Prompts

- Who has “refreshed” you by showing up in a hard season?
- Whom could you refresh this week by your unashamed presence?
- What keeps us from standing by people when it becomes costly?

Question 9

Student Question:

Twice Paul speaks of guarding: he is convinced God can guard what was entrusted to him (v. 12), and he charges Timothy to “guard the good deposit entrusted to you, by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us” (v. 14). What is the “good deposit,” how do God’s guarding and ours work together, and why does this rule out any notion of improving on or adding to the faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, and it turns on a single, weighty word: guard. Paul uses it twice. In verse 12 he is convinced that God “is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.” In verse 14 he charges Timothy, “guard the good deposit entrusted to you, by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.” Help the class see both guardings, and how they fit together.

Define the “good deposit.” The word pictures a treasure placed in trust, like money left with a trusted friend for safekeeping. The deposit is the apostolic faith itself, the pattern of sound words (v. 13), the gospel message delivered through the apostles. It is not Timothy’s to edit, expand, or improve. It is a trust to be kept whole and handed on undamaged. Paul received it from Christ, deposited it with Timothy, and Timothy will deposit it with faithful men who teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). This is how the faith travels through history, not by reinvention but by faithful transmission.

This is the place to address new revelation directly. If the faith is a deposit to be guarded, then it is already complete; you do not guard something you are still inventing. The notion that the church needs fresh revelations, new doctrines, or improvements on the apostolic message runs directly against this charge. The faith was “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and it is now preserved entire in the inspired New Testament, which equips us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We have no apostles producing new Scripture today, no continuing stream of revelation; we have the deposit, and our task is to guard it, not to grow it. To add to it or subtract from it is to fail the trust.

Now hold the two guardings together, because this is pastorally crucial. Paul is sure God can guard what he entrusted to Him (v. 12), and yet Paul still charges Timothy to guard the deposit (v. 14). Divine keeping and human faithfulness are not rivals. God preserves His truth through faithful people, not apart from them. And notice the means: Timothy guards the deposit “by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.” Even our guarding is empowered by God. We are responsible to keep the faith, and we are enabled by the Spirit to do it. This rules out both laziness (God will keep it without me) and pride (I keep it by my own strength).

Finally, let the class marvel at what they have been handed. The gospel that warmed Lois and Eunice, that steadied Paul in chains, that has come down through nineteen centuries of faithful Christians, has reached us. It is a treasure, beautiful and saving and true. To guard it is not a grim duty but a sacred privilege, and one day we will hand it on to those who come after us, undamaged and shining, just as we received it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The “good deposit” as the apostolic faith, a treasure to be guarded, not revised (vv. 13-14)
- The faith once for all delivered to the saints, complete and not to be added to (Jude 3)
- The New Testament as the full and final apostolic deposit, against any claim of new revelation (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

- Faithful transmission, not reinvention, as the way the gospel travels through history (2 Timothy 2:2)
- God's keeping and our guarding working together, not in competition (vv. 12, 14)
- The Holy Spirit as the One who empowers our faithful guarding of the truth (v. 14)
- The privilege, not merely the duty, of guarding and handing on the gospel

Discussion Prompts

- What exactly is the "good deposit," and why does calling it a deposit shape how we treat it?
- If the faith was once for all delivered, what does that say about claims of new revelation today?
- How do God's guarding and our guarding work together rather than cancel each other out?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole chapter, from the faith of Lois and Eunice to the grace that saved us, to the deposit we must guard. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you, and one concrete step you will take because of it.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole chapter. Paul has moved from a heritage of faith (v. 5), to fanning the gift into flame (v. 6), to the spirit of power not fear (v. 7), to grace that saves and calls us holy (v. 9), to a Savior who abolished death (v. 10), to a confident "I know whom I have believed" (v. 12), to the charge to guard the good deposit (v. 14). The single thread is a treasure received, to be held unashamed and handed on.

Invite students to look back and name what God has stirred. Perhaps it is gratitude for those who handed them the faith, or conviction to fan dying embers into flame, or freedom from the fear of death, or a fresh resolve to guard the gospel and pass it on. The aim is a specific takeaway, not a vague good feeling.

Press toward one concrete step. Spiritual formation lives in particulars: a word of witness to be spoken unashamed, a friend to refresh, a portion of God's word to memorize as part of the pattern of sound words, a person to begin handing the faith on to. Help each student turn this rich chapter into a single act of obedience this week, trusting the Spirit who dwells within them to do the forming.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as a treasure received, guarded, and handed on
- The Spirit's ongoing work of forming believers through Scripture
- Grace as the source and a holy, courageous life as the fruit

- Obedience as the fitting response to truth received in faith

Discussion Prompts

- What is the single most important thing God has shown you in this chapter?
- What is one concrete step you will take this week because of it?
- Who is one person you could begin handing the faith on to?