

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

Lesson 11: The Last Days and the Power of Scripture

2 Timothy 3:1-17

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter carries the heaviest doctrinal weight of the entire study, because it lands on the inspiration and sufficiency of Scripture. Paul tells Timothy that hard times are coming and that the answer is not a new strategy but the old, God-breathed word. The doctrinal aim is to help your class grasp two things with conviction: that Scripture is “breathed out by God” (v. 16), genuinely His own word and not merely human reflection about God, and that this word is sufficient, able to make us “wise for salvation” (v. 15) and to equip the man of God “for every good work” (v. 17). If the completed Scriptures truly equip us for every good work, then we need no new revelation, no continuing prophecy, and no modern sign gifts to be complete. The full and finished New Testament is our authority. Help the class also handle “the last days” rightly. These are not a coded reference to some future earthly millennium but the entire Christian age that began when Christ came and the kingdom was established (Acts 2:16-17).

At the same time, this lesson is not meant to win a debate about the Bible while leaving the heart untouched. Paul's whole point is that the God-breathed word does something to us: it teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains us in righteousness so that we become complete. The aim, then, is spiritual formation, not merely intellectual assent. A student can affirm that the Bible is inspired and still hold it at arm's length. Press your class to move from believing the word is powerful to actually placing themselves under its power, letting it reprove and correct and train them. Marvel together that the very breath of God is available to us on the page, and that it is enough.

As you teach, watch for two temptations in the room. Some will be eager to use this chapter as ammunition against others and may need to be reminded that Paul aims the word first at the man of God himself. Others may quietly believe the Bible is true yet live as though it were optional, leaving the hardest work of reproof and correction undone. Guide your class toward a settled confidence in Scripture that produces a tender, teachable, obedient heart, the kind of life Timothy saw in Paul and was called to continue.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul tells Timothy to expect “times of difficulty” in “the last days” and then describes people who are “lovers of self” and “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,” holding “the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (vv. 1-5). What does this passage teach about what “the last days” means and about the kind of moral and spiritual danger the church must be ready to face?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by clarifying what Paul means by “the last days.” To modern ears the phrase sounds like a forecast of the very end of the world, but the New Testament uses it for the whole Christian age that began with the coming of Christ. Peter quotes Joel at Pentecost and says, “this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: And in the last days it shall be, God declares” (Acts 2:16-17), declaring that the last days had already arrived. The writer of Hebrews says God “in these last days” has spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:2). So Paul is not handing Timothy a calendar for some distant future; he is describing the present age in which Timothy and we already live.

This matters because it keeps us from a serious error. “The last days” is not a secret code for a coming earthly millennial reign of Christ. Daniel said the God of heaven would set up a kingdom in the days of those ancient kings, a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44), and that kingdom came with Jesus and was established at Pentecost. Christ reigns now. We do not wait for an earthly thousand-year kingdom; we wait for His appearing and the glory to come. So Paul’s warning is about the moral character of this whole age, not a chart of future events.

Now walk through the vice list itself (vv. 2-4). It begins and ends with a telling pair: “lovers of self” at the start and “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” near the end. Everything in between, the pride, the ingratitude, the heartlessness, the lack of self-control, flows from a heart that has put self and pleasure where God belongs. The list is not random; it is a portrait of love turned inward.

Then land on the chilling phrase that closes the description: these people are “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (v. 5). Paul is not describing pagans outside the church. He is describing a counterfeit religion that keeps the forms, the words, and the appearance while emptying them of the transforming power of the gospel. That is the real danger in the last days, and it is why the chapter ends by anchoring Timothy to the genuine, powerful, God-breathed word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “The last days” as the entire Christian age inaugurated by Christ, not a future earthly millennium (Acts 2:16-17; Hebrews 1:2)
- The kingdom established at Pentecost and Christ reigning now (Daniel 2:44; Colossians 1:13)
- Disordered love (love of self and pleasure over love of God) as the root of the vice list (vv. 2-4)
- The peculiar danger of a counterfeit godliness that keeps the form but denies the power (v. 5)
- The need to be morally and spiritually prepared for difficult times, not surprised by them

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that “the last days” refers to the whole Christian age rather than a coming millennial kingdom?
- How is a religion that keeps the appearance of godliness but denies its power more dangerous than open unbelief?
- Which item in Paul’s vice list do you think most closely describes the spirit of our own time?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul warns Timothy to “avoid such people” (v. 5), those who keep a religious shell while denying the power of true godliness. Where do you sense the pull in your own life toward outward religious appearance without inward reality, and what would it mean to let God restore the power and not just the form?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the mirror of verse 5 toward our own hearts. Paul says to “avoid such people,” but before we hurry to apply that to others, it is worth asking whether any of that counterfeit lives in us. The appearance of godliness without its power is not only a danger in false teachers; it is a temptation for every churchgoer who learns the forms of faith without yielding to its substance.

Help students get honest about the gap between appearance and reality. We can know the right answers, sing the right songs, and attend the right services while our hearts stay cold and unchanged. That is not hypocrisy in the sense of deliberate pretending; often it is a slow drift in which the outward habits remain but the inward fire has gone out. Naming that gently is the beginning of repentance.

Point them toward the cure rather than mere guilt. The power Paul speaks of is the power of the gospel actually at work, the word reproving and correcting and training us (vv. 16-17). Restoration comes not by trying harder to look godly but by placing ourselves again under the living word and the lordship of Christ, asking Him to make the inside match the outside.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between the form of godliness and its real, transforming power
- Self-examination as a regular duty of the believer, not only a tool for judging others
- The gospel’s power to change the heart, not merely the behavior
- Repentance as the path back when the inward life has cooled

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you sense a gap between how godly you appear and how alive your faith really feels?

- What practices have helped you keep the inward reality of faith and not just the outward forms?
- What would it look like this week to ask God to restore the power and not just the appearance?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul compares the deceivers to “Jannes and Jambres” who “opposed Moses” but whose “folly will be plain to all” (vv. 8-9). What does this comparison teach us about how false teachers operate, the limits God places on their success, and how truth ultimately exposes counterfeits?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul reaches back into Israel’s history and names “Jannes and Jambres,” the traditional names for the magicians who “opposed Moses” before Pharaoh (v. 8). They could imitate some of the signs for a while, but they could not match the power of God, and eventually they could go no further. Paul uses them as a picture of the false teachers of his own day, who “oppose the truth” and are “corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.”

Notice how false teaching operates according to this passage. It does not announce itself as opposition to the truth; it imitates the truth closely enough to deceive. Jannes and Jambres did not openly reject Moses’ God at first; they competed with him on his own ground. Counterfeits are dangerous precisely because they look so similar to the real thing, which is why discernment is never optional for the church.

But Paul also gives a word of hope: “they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all” (v. 9). God places limits on the success of falsehood. Truth has a way, over time, of exposing what is hollow. This should keep us from both panic and naivety. We take error seriously, but we do not despair, because the same God who breathed out the Scriptures also guards His truth and will not let counterfeits win in the end.

Apply this to the church today. Every generation has its imitators, teachers who borrow the language of Scripture while emptying it of its meaning. The answer is not cleverness but fidelity to the apostolic word, the standard against which every imitation is finally measured and exposed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- False teaching as imitation of the truth rather than open denial (v. 8)
- The certainty that God limits and finally exposes error (v. 9)
- Discernment as a necessary and ongoing duty of the church
- The apostolic word as the standard that exposes counterfeits
- Confidence in God’s preservation of His truth against opposition

Discussion Prompts

- Why is teaching that imitates the truth more dangerous than teaching that openly denies it?
- What does it mean for us that God promises false teachers “will not get very far”?
- How can a congregation grow in discernment without becoming suspicious of everyone?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul says plainly, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (v. 12). How does that promise sit with you, and where have you been tempted to soften your discipleship to avoid the cost of standing with Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 12 is one of the most bracing promises in the New Testament: “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Paul does not say some may face opposition; he says godliness and opposition go together. This question invites students to sit honestly with that promise rather than soften it.

Help them see the range of what persecution looks like. For some believers it has meant prison or death; for many of us it looks like ridicule, lost friendships, being passed over, or the quiet pressure to keep our convictions to ourselves. The form varies, but the principle holds: a life genuinely surrendered to Christ will not blend in seamlessly with a world that loves itself and its pleasures more than God.

Press gently toward the place where we are tempted to compromise. Most of us do not abandon Christ outright; we trim the edges of our discipleship to avoid the cost. We stay quiet when we should speak, we laugh along when we should grieve, we keep our faith private when it should be visible. Encourage students to name one such place and to ask for courage to stand, remembering that the Lord who let Paul be persecuted also “rescued me” out of them all (v. 11).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certainty of opposition for those who live godly in Christ (v. 12)
- The temptation to soften discipleship to avoid its cost
- The Lord’s faithfulness to sustain and rescue His people in suffering (v. 11)
- Faithful witness as a normal mark of genuine Christian living

Discussion Prompts

- How does the promise that godliness brings persecution sit with you honestly?
- Where have you been tempted to trim your discipleship to avoid the cost?
- What helps you stand firm when faithfulness to Christ is unpopular?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul holds up his own life as an example: his “teaching,” “conduct,” “aim in life,” “faith,” “patience,” “love,” “steadfastness,” and “persecutions,” from which “the Lord rescued me” (vv. 10-11). What does this show about how the truth is meant to be passed down, not just in words but in a life that can be followed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Before the great climax about Scripture, Paul points to his own life: “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings” (vv. 10-11). Notice that he lists teaching first but does not stop there. He hands Timothy not only doctrine but a whole life, a pattern that could be watched and imitated.

This shows us how the truth is meant to be passed down. It travels best not as cold information but through people whose lives embody it. Timothy did not just hear Paul’s words; he saw Paul’s conduct, his perseverance under suffering, his love, his steadfastness. The gospel is most persuasive when it is incarnated in a faithful life that others can follow.

Draw out the connection to the rest of the chapter. Paul is about to send Timothy to the Scriptures (vv. 14-17), but he first reminds him of the living examples through whom those Scriptures came to him. Truth is meant to be both written and lived, both anchored in the inspired word and demonstrated in faithful people. Neither replaces the other.

Apply it to the church’s task of discipleship. We are called not merely to transfer correct beliefs but to live in such a way that the next generation can follow what they see. That raises the stakes for every parent, teacher, and elder, and it gives weight to the question of whose example we ourselves are following.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Truth handed down through both teaching and a life that can be imitated (vv. 10-11)
- The power of godly example in passing on the faith
- Perseverance under suffering as part of the pattern to be followed (1 Corinthians 11:1)
- The inseparable link between the written word and faithful living
- The responsibility of mature believers to be examples worth following

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the gospel most persuasive when it is lived and not only spoken?
- What aspects of Paul’s example (faith, patience, love, steadfastness) most challenge you?
- Whose godly example has shaped you most, and what did you learn by watching them?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul urges Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed,” remembering from whom he learned it (v. 14). Who are the people God has used to ground you in the faith, and how can you both honor what they handed you and pass it on to someone else?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul tells Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it” (v. 14). This question invites gratitude and responsibility. We do not come to faith in a vacuum; God uses people, parents, teachers, friends, preachers, to hand us the truth.

Encourage students to name specific people. Timothy could look back to his mother Lois and grandmother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5) and to Paul himself. Most of us can name someone whose faithfulness grounded us. Calling them to mind stirs both thankfulness and a sense of stewardship, because what was handed to us is meant to be handed on.

Then turn the question forward. Paul’s word “continue” implies endurance, holding the course over a lifetime, and the larger context implies passing it to others. Ask students who they are currently helping to ground in the faith, or who they could begin to invest in. The chain of faithful teaching is meant to keep extending, generation to generation, until the Lord returns.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith handed down through faithful people across generations (2 Timothy 1:5)
- The call to “continue,” to endure in the truth over a lifetime (v. 14)
- Gratitude for those God used to ground us in the faith
- The believer’s responsibility to pass the truth on to others

Discussion Prompts

- Who are the people God used to ground you in the faith, and what did they give you?
- What does it mean for you to “continue” in what you have learned over the long haul?
- Whom are you helping to ground in the faith right now, or whom could you begin to invest in?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul reminds Timothy that from childhood he has known “the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 15). What does it mean that the

Scriptures make us “wise for salvation,” and how does this guard us against thinking salvation comes through cleverness, novelty, or human wisdom?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul reminds Timothy that “from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 15). Two phrases deserve careful attention: “wise for salvation” and “through faith in Christ Jesus.” The Scriptures are not given to make us merely informed but to make us wise unto salvation.

Clarify what “wise for salvation” means. The Bible’s central purpose is not to satisfy our curiosity about every subject but to lead us to be saved. It does this by pointing us to Christ. The Old Testament Scriptures Timothy knew as a boy were always meant to bring people to faith in the Messiah, and the completed Scriptures now make plain the way of salvation in Christ. This guards us against treating the Bible as a book of trivia or a tool for winning arguments; its great aim is to save.

Notice that the wisdom comes “through faith in Christ Jesus.” Salvation is not earned by intellectual mastery, religious novelty, or human cleverness. It comes through trusting and obeying Christ. The Scriptures make us wise unto salvation precisely by leading us to hear the gospel, believe that Jesus is Lord and Christ, repent, confess Him, and be baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27), then to live faithfully. The word points beyond itself to the Savior it proclaims.

Apply it to how the class reads their Bibles. If the great purpose of Scripture is to make us wise for salvation in Christ, then we should come to it humbly, looking for the Savior on every page, rather than mining it for clever insights that leave Christ in the background. The Bible read rightly always leads home to Jesus.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The chief purpose of Scripture: to make us “wise for salvation” (v. 15)
- Salvation through faith in Christ, not human cleverness or novelty
- The plan of salvation: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, baptism into Christ, then faithfulness (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27)
- Christ as the central subject to whom all Scripture points
- A humble, Christ-seeking posture as the right way to read the Bible

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Scripture is given to make us “wise for salvation” and not merely informed?
- How does the phrase “through faith in Christ Jesus” guard us against thinking salvation comes by cleverness?
- How would your Bible reading change if you came looking for the Savior on every page?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says evil people and impostors “will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (v. 13). When you look honestly at your own heart, where are you most easily deceived, and what habits keep you anchored to the truth instead of drifting?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul gives a sobering warning: “evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (v. 13). Notice that deception runs in both directions; those who deceive others are themselves deceived. This question presses students to consider their own vulnerability rather than only the failures of others.

Help them see that self-deception is one of the subtlest dangers in the Christian life. We are remarkably skilled at justifying ourselves, softening our sins, and believing what is convenient. None of us is immune. The first step toward staying anchored is the humble admission that our own hearts can mislead us (Jeremiah 17:9).

Then turn toward the safeguards. What keeps us from drifting is regular exposure to the truth that corrects us: honest time in the word, the accountability of the church, prayer that invites God to search us, and a willingness to be reproved. Encourage students to name one habit that keeps them tethered to the truth, and one place where they sense they are most easily fooled.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reality and subtlety of self-deception (v. 13; Jeremiah 17:9)
- The progressive nature of sin, going “from bad to worse” when unchecked
- Scripture, prayer, and the fellowship of the church as safeguards against drift
- Humility and teachableness as protection against being deceived

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most easily deceived or prone to justify yourself?
- What habits keep you anchored to the truth rather than drifting?
- Who in your life is allowed to tell you a hard truth about yourself?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul rises to his climax: “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” (vv. 16-17). What does this passage teach about where Scripture

comes from and what it is able to do, and how does the inspiration and sufficiency of the completed word answer modern claims of new revelation, continuing prophecy, or sign gifts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal summit of the lesson, and it deserves your fullest attention. Paul writes, “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” (vv. 16-17). Two great truths stand here: the inspiration of Scripture and its sufficiency. Take time on each, and let the class marvel at both.

Consider first the inspiration. The phrase “breathed out by God” translates a single rich word meaning God-breathed. Scripture is not merely human reflection about God, nor inspired only in the loose sense that a poem or a sunset is inspiring. It is the very breath of God, His own word given through human writers who “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). When you open your Bible, you are not reading the best religious thoughts of ancient men; you are hearing what God Himself has said. That conviction should fill us with reverence every time we read.

Consider next what this word is profitable to do. Paul names four works: teaching (showing us the truth), reproof (showing us where we are wrong), correction (setting us right again), and training in righteousness (forming us in the way we should go). Notice the order, almost like a physician: diagnosis, rebuke, repair, and rehabilitation. The word does not merely inform us; it operates on us. And it does all of this so that the man of God may be “complete, equipped for every good work.” That is the language of sufficiency. The God-breathed word is enough to make the believer whole and to fit him for everything God requires.

Here is where this passage speaks directly to modern claims. If the completed Scriptures equip the man of God for every good work, then nothing essential is left out and nothing new is needed. We do not require fresh revelations, continuing prophecy, modern apostles, or miraculous sign gifts to be complete, because the word God has already breathed out is sufficient. The age of revelation through apostles and prophets has done its work and given us a finished deposit; the complete New Testament is now our authority and pattern. Any claim of new revelation that adds to, competes with, or contradicts the inspired word must be measured against, and submitted to, the Scriptures that are already enough.

Finally, lead the class to wonder, not just to argue. It is one thing to win a point about inspiration; it is another to be undone by it. The God who flung the stars into space has bent down to speak, and His breath rests on the pages in our hands. That word is able to make us wise for salvation, to reprove and correct us, and to equip us for every good work. To hold such a book and leave it unopened, or to open it and remain unchanged, would be a tragedy. Invite your class to receive the Scriptures with both confidence and hunger, trusting that they are God’s own sufficient word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The full inspiration of Scripture as “breathed out by God,” His own word (v. 16; 2 Peter 1:21)
- Scripture’s fourfold profit: teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (v. 16)
- The sufficiency of Scripture to make the believer “complete, equipped for every good work” (v. 17)
- The completed New Testament as our authority, against claims of new revelation or continuing prophecy
- The end of miraculous sign gifts and continuing apostleship, since the God-breathed word is sufficient
- Reverence and hunger as the right response to a book that carries the breath of God
- The word as something that operates on us, not merely informs us

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Scripture is “breathed out by God,” and how should that change the way we read it?
- How does the truth that Scripture equips us “for every good work” answer modern claims of new revelation or sign gifts?
- Which of the four works of the word (teaching, reproof, correction, training) do you most need to welcome right now?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole chapter, from the hard times of the last days to the God-breathed word that equips us for every good work. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you, and one concrete step you will take this week to let Scripture do its work in you.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole chapter. Paul moved from the hard character of the last days (vv. 1-9), to the certainty of persecution and the call to continue (vv. 10-15), to the great affirmation of the God-breathed, sufficient word (vv. 16-17). The thread is that in difficult times the believer stands not on novelty but on Scripture, and that Scripture is meant to make us complete.

Invite students to name what God has stirred in them. For some it may be a renewed reverence for the Bible as God’s own breath. For others it may be conviction about a counterfeit faith that keeps the form but lacks the power, or courage to stand when discipleship is costly, or gratitude for those who handed them the truth. The goal is for each person to leave with something specific rather than a vague resolve.

Then press for one concrete step. The whole point of a God-breathed word is that we place ourselves under it, so help students turn this study into a single act of obedience: a regular time in the word, a sin to let Scripture reprove, a person to invest in, a stand to take. Remind them that Christ Himself forms us through His word, and that the same word that makes us wise for salvation will equip us for every good work He sets before us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture as the believer's bedrock in difficult times
- The God-breathed word as the means by which Christ forms and completes us
- Obedience as the natural response to the sufficient word of God
- The integration of confidence in Scripture with a hunger to obey it

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 to place yourself under the power of the word?
- How can this class help one another move from honoring the Bible to obeying it?