Being Responsible
Believers should care for others, including widows and ministers.

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-8,17-21
MEMORY VERSE: 1 TIMOTHY 5:25

READ 1 Timothy 5:1–6:2, First Thoughts (p. 54), and Understand the Context (pp. 54–55). Highlight any confusing passages as you read.

STUDY 1 Timothy 5:1-8,17-21 and Explore the Text on pages 55–59. Refer to a trusted commentary for insight into any passages that you highlighted. Review PACK ITEM 10 (Handout: Timothy: A Snapshot) for additional background.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 60–61). Tailor the plans for your group using More Ideas (p. 62) and ideas included online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible/Adults/LeaderExtras. Determine how you will encourage group participation in the discussion. Look into how your church meets the needs of those in your community.

GROW from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible).

GATHER the following items: ☐ Personal Study Guides; ☐ An article on widows in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary or in a similar resource; and for More Ideas (p. 62): ☐ A family tree. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: ☐ PACK ITEM 2 (Outlines of 1,2 Timothy; Titus); and ☐ PACK ITEM 6 (Key Verse: 2 Timothy 2:15). Make copies for the group of: ☐ PACK ITEM 10 (Handout: Timothy: A Snapshot).
FIRST THOUGHTS

Most of us realize that a church is not a shrine for morally perfect people. It is full of people like you and me who are often messy, careless, confused, selfish, and desperately in need of forgiveness and correction. With all our relational challenges we sometime fail to minister and communicate respectfully and mercifully. Thankfully, God provides clear instructions about how to treat people in needy situations and pastors in leadership.

(In PSG, p. 46) **What role should the church play in caring for the needs of people in the community?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

**1 TIMOTHY 5:1–6:2**

Relationships comprise a significant theme in Paul’s writings. He wanted believers to treat one another responsibly and lovingly. As a pastor, Timothy came into contact with all types of people. Paul reminded him the older men and women were to be treated like fathers and mothers, while the younger people should be considered brothers and sisters.

Of special concern were the widows. God was called the champion of the widow (Ps. 68:5). Scripture often reminds God’s people to care for these women who had no husbands to provide for them (Ex. 22:22; Isa. 1:17; Jas. 1:27). The church gave benevolence assistance to many believers who suffered because of their faith, especially widows. The first deacons were established to lead the ministry to widows (Acts 6:1-6).

At the same time, Paul felt the church should not assume responsibility that rightly belonged to widows’ families. Some of the widows were younger and able to remarry. Many of the older widows had adult children and extended families capable of providing for their needs. Paul wanted Timothy to lead the church in establishing appropriate guidelines for this important ministry.

Another category for Timothy’s consideration involved the elders. The term *older man* or “elder” carries several meanings. In 1 Timothy 5:1, the word used describes older men. Given that the immediately preceding context deals with widows, one could easily think that Paul’s instruction in verses 17-22 also involved the older men. However, this section specifically refers to persons who preach and teach, leading to a different focus—the pastors of the churches. They are workers who were worthy of their wages and leaders who deserved honor. Paul outlined several ways Timothy and the church should relate responsibly to these spiritual leaders, including how to deal with pastors who had been accused of wrongdoing.

**BIBLE SKILL**

Compare similar passages.

Read 1 Timothy 5:9-16 and jot down some of the requirements Paul made for widows who received church benevolence. Read the article on widows in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary or in a similar resource. Compare this article and Paul’s instructions regarding ministry to widows with the following Scriptures: Deuteronomy 10:18; 24:20-21; 26:12-13. Based on what you read, what could your church do to fulfill scriptural expectations for ministry to widows in your church?

**KEY DOCTRINE**

*The Christian and the Social Order*

All Christians should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick (Col. 3:12-17).
At this point, Paul interjected personal instructions for Timothy. Because of Timothy’s health problems, Paul gave him a medical dispensation to mix some wine with the water he typically drank.

In the opening verses of chapter 6, Paul offered guidance for how believing servants and masters should relate to one another. In all these relationships, Paul emphasized responsible behavior that honored the Lord.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

RESPECT ALL (1 Tim. 5:1-2)

VERSES 1-2
In a distinct change of subject from the previous chapter, Paul addressed Timothy’s interaction with various kinds of church members. In the first chapter, Paul did not hesitate to urge his son in the ministry to challenge the false teachers who threatened the church. As he moved to the normal interactions with the Ephesian believers, Paul encouraged Timothy to be careful how he spoke to them.

Timothy was not to rebuke but to exhort an older man. The mood of this phrase was not an imperative command, but carried a more instructive tone. Rebuking someone involved strong chastisement. Not only in the culture, but especially in the church, older men expected respect. Paul understood the difficulty Timothy would have if the younger pastor used a tone that appeared disrespectful.

At the same time, Timothy might need to offer pastoral correction and admonishment. In such situations, Paul suggested he exhort the older man as he would a father. The sense of the term exhort involves an earnest appeal. While demonstrating appropriate deference, the young pastor could urge his senior parishioners to right action.

Similarly, in dealing with younger men, Timothy should relate to them as brothers. This approach did not overlook Timothy’s pastoral authority in leading the church but rather employed loving discretion in relationships. The younger men might have questioned the right of someone their own age telling them what to do or not do. Paul knew Timothy would have better results by exhorting them as brothers.

In the same way, Timothy was to be careful in the way he addressed the women of his flock. Continuing the same sentence relating to exhortation, Paul told Timothy to relate to the older women as mothers. In addressing the issue of the younger women, Paul recognized the inherent problems of a young male in constant interaction with females nearer to his age. The way Timothy related to these women was important. Paul encouraged him to treat them as sisters and relate to them with all purity.

Paul’s instruction to Timothy would be well taken not only by pastors, but also by all believers. If we treat one another as respected family members, we will experience healthy relationships that benefit the church and honor the Lord.
In what ways can you demonstrate respect for other church members while encouraging them to right belief and behavior?

CARE FOR WIDOWS (1 TIM. 5:3-8)

VERSES 3-7

God cares deeply about the helpless, especially widows and orphans. Society in Paul’s day did not provide a safety net for widows or others unable to care for themselves. Generally, the husband was the wage earner. If a husband died, his widow often had no means of providing for herself.

Christians especially found themselves in need of help as they were persecuted for the faith. From the earliest days of the church, believers gave sacrificially so brothers and sisters in Christ could receive proper provision. (See Acts 2:42-45.)

Paul encouraged Timothy to support the believing widows. The church did not have a responsibility for widows in general, but it embraced the idea of caring for those Christian women whose husbands had died. Based on the practice of a daily benevolence (Acts 6:1-6), the provision primarily involved food but could have included clothing and other matters.

Paul limited the church’s responsibility to those widows who were genuinely in need. Apparently some women were taking advantage of the church’s generosity. Timothy needed guidance regarding how to care for believing widows while not placing an undue burden on the congregation.

Paul offered several guidelines for the church. The first line of provision for any widow was her family. The reference to children obviously suggests adult children, as they were expected to provide for their mother. If the woman was older, adult grandchildren might also help.

Paul considered believers’ care for their own family as a way to practice godliness. Honoring one’s father and mother was the first commandment containing a promise (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:2). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes who disregarded the commandment to honor one’s mother and father. They had devised ways to get around providing for their parents financially by claiming they were offering a gift to God. Jesus denounced their hypocrisy (Matt. 15:1-9).

Paul also urged children to take action as a way to repay their parents. The reference to parents does not take away from the immediate issue of widows. Instead, Paul emphasized that parents provided for the children when they are young, making it only right that adult children should care for the widowed mother or grandmother in her old age. Such a practice pleases God.

Paul further qualified the widow who is truly in need. She did not have children who could care for her, and she was left all alone. She did not have extended family that could help. In such a situation, she has put her hope in God. Her condition necessitated an exercise of faith. She was not imposing her need on the church as a first resort, but trusted the Lord with her needs. The church is an extension of God’s hand in such provision.

VERSES 3-7

3 Support widows who are genuinely in need. 4 But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them learn to practice godliness toward their own family first and to repay their parents, for this pleases God. 5 The widow who is truly in need and left all alone has put her hope in God and continues night and day in her petitions and prayers; 6 however, she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. 7 Command this also, so that they will be above reproach.
Another characteristic of a worthy widow is her piety, as demonstrated in her prayer life. She shows her faith by her petitions and prayers. These terms describe aspects of the widow’s prayer. First, her prayers are fervent. The terms carry the connotation of strenuous pleading. Second, these requests are directed toward God, whom the widow trusts to answer. Third, the widow’s prayers are persistent as she continues in them night and day. Jesus described such importunity in His teaching about effective prayer (Luke 11:5-8).

Paul contrasted the sincerely dependent woman of faith with one who is self-indulgent. This kind of person lived for personal pleasure rather than for God. The word picture can include sensual satisfaction as opposed to spiritual sacrifice. Such a person is dead even while she lives. This phrase refers to someone who is spiritually dead. The implication is that a widow who forsakes the service of God to pursue immoral desires likely was not a true believer in the first place. In such a case, the church had no obligation to provide for her.

The object of Timothy’s command and the antecedent of the word they could involve three different applications. These references might mean the church at large, since the overall passage includes guidance for the congregation. The terms could refer to the children of the widows, given the focus of verse 8. However, the most obvious point of view associates this verse with what has preceded—the widows themselves. Timothy was to command the widows so they would be above reproach. Women who were the beneficiaries of the church’s benevolence should live in such a way as to bring credit to the congregation and its Lord.

VERSE 8
Paul returned to the emphasis of verse 4 that each person should provide for his own family. Some persons have used this verse to support the idea that husbands should take care of their families, particularly in regard to finances. While that principle is true, the context is more specific in relating to the widows. Before a congregation assumes responsibility to provide for a widow’s needs, her family should accept this obligation as a blessed opportunity.

The phrase especially for his own household brings the commission closer to home. Certainly the extended family (siblings, nephews, and such) should get involved with a widow’s needs if there is no closer relative. However, if the widow is part of one’s household, then that family has the primary role in her care.

Paul likened anyone who refused this responsibility as being worse than an unbeliever, and someone who has denied the faith. Such strong language did not suggest that people could lose their salvation, but rather that their lack of godly service to their own families reflects a denial of the faith they profess. Loving ministry to widows and others in genuine need is one way we demonstrate our faith.

How can you help meet the needs of a widow or other needy believer in your church?
CARE FOR PASTORS (1 TIM. 5:17-21)

VERSES 17-18
The local church’s pastoral leadership deserved to be supported financially and treated with respect. The term elders was a formal title for the pastors. The Bible consistently refers to two offices—pastors and deacons. Scripture uses three different words to relate to the office of pastor, including overseer (or bishop), elder, and shepherd.

On this occasion, Paul addressed the way the church should relate to pastors who are good leaders. The emphasis of the phrase is on the quality of leadership these pastors provide. It is assumed that they are leaders, providing spiritual guidance for the church. Some pastors exercised commendable leadership and, as such, were worthy of double honor. This phrase can refer to compensation as well as holding in esteem. The pastor is worthy of honor because of his role. The church should especially recognize the pastors who excel in their work.

By pointing especially to pastors who work hard at preaching and teaching, Paul did not suggest a division of elders, with some being teaching pastors and some ruling pastors. The ability to teach was one of the main qualifications for pastors. (See 1 Tim. 3:2.) Paul’s point was that pastors who were diligent in their primary role of preaching and teaching deserved acknowledgment.

The idea that the phrase double honor refers to compensation finds support in Paul’s quotation of Scripture. He quoted from two passages in Deuteronomy. The first used a proverb: Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and the worker is worthy of his wages.

VERSES 17-18
17 The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.
18 For the Scripture says: Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and the worker is worthy of his wages.

VERSE 19
Don’t accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses.

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19 Don’t accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses.
required multiple witnesses in any case regarding offenses by the average person (Deut. 19:15). Given the nature of the pastoral role in the church, he should be given at least the same consideration when being accused.

Paul understood personally how people with less than righteous intentions can use gossip or false accusation to attack the pastor. He wanted Timothy to lead the church to ensure fair treatment of all believers, especially those responsible for congregational leadership.

VERSE 20
On the other hand, if a pastor were guilty of misconduct, he should be held accountable. The pronoun those refers back to the term elder in the previous verse. While pastors should not be accused without evidence, if the pastors sin the church should publicly rebuke them. Too often, churches are hesitant to conduct church discipline properly. When a pastor errs, the offense may never be known and he could simply resign and go on to another place where the sin might be repeated.

Paul encouraged the church to deal with leaders who sin in such a way that others will be afraid and avoid temptations. The goal was not to create terror among the clergy but to exercise warranted discipline in a fair and redemptive manner.

VERSE 21
Paul concluded his admonition with a serious charge to Timothy. This charge involved an earnest testimony before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels. Invoking the heavenly witnesses added to the importance of the matter.

Timothy was not only to teach but also to observe these things in an honorable way. The phrase these things referred back to the guidance related to the elders, particularly in relation to holding them accountable. As Timothy ministered among the churches in Ephesus he was to give attention to fulfilling Paul’s instructions without prejudice or favoritism. The first part of this admonition suggested Timothy take care not to prejudge any individual or any matter. On the other hand, when dealing with pastoral accountability, no one should show favoritism. Sometimes a minister may do wrong but avoid being held accountable because he is popular or held in favor by influential members of the congregation. Neither Timothy nor the church had the luxury of treating pastors differently based on personal preferences.

Provision for ministers not only includes appropriate financial compensation but also support spiritually and in other ways. Even when pastors misbehave, the church’s response should be done properly for the sake of the office and the redemption of the individual.

How can your church provide for its ministers in a way that fulfills Christ’s mission in your community?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

WELCOME: As the group arrives, ask people to name memorable families from television or movies. After you have listed several on a board, ask: Are there any of these families that you would have liked to join? Why or why not?

DISCUSS: Point out that families aren’t made up of perfect people and neither is the church. Invite the group to discuss whether they agree or disagree with the expectation that the church can function with less conflict than a typical family.

DECLARE: To run smoothly, a family needs mutual respect among its members. While we may not have experienced this ideal in our own families, we can understand its importance. In providing instructions on how to treat fellow believers, those in need, and those in leadership within the church, Paul compared the church to a family.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 1 Timothy 5:1-2. Encourage the group to pay attention to how Paul avoided a one-size-fits-all approach to ministry.

ANALYZE: Guide in listing the different groups referenced in these verses. Ask them to consider what they’ve already learned about Timothy and the city of Ephesus through the study of 1 Timothy. Use Pack Item 2 (Outlines of 1,2 Timothy; Titus) and Pack Item 10 (Handout: Timothy: A Snapshot) as references for what you’ve already studied. Ask: How might Timothy’s background have impacted his ministry to each of the groups listed in these verses? The group may refer to the PSG under Verses 1-2 (p. 48) for help answering.

DISCUSS: How does the way we approach a person impact his or her willingness to listen? How can a person balance sternness and love? (PSG, p. 49)

TRANSITION: Assert that people have a responsibility for caring for those in their family. In the following verse, Paul explained how this responsibility applied to both the traditional family and to the church family when it came to caring for widows.

HIGHLIGHT: Direct the group to the following sentence in the PSG (p. 49): Although our English word widow refers to a woman whose husband has died, the Greek word for widow describes a woman who may have lost her husband by death, incarceration, or desertion.

INSTRUCT: As a volunteer reads 1 Timothy 5:3-8, direct the group to consider how this expanded definition of widow impacts their understanding of these verses.

EVALUATE: Paul outlined requirements for which widows should receive support from the church. Direct the group to evaluate their agreement with the following sentences in the PSG: Paul was establishing the case for discernment and wisdom in utilizing church resources for widows. To support a widow who clearly traveled the path of self-indulgence would not only represent unwise stewardship, it would also enable the widow to continue in her sin (PSG, p. 50). Ask: How can the leadership of the church determine the best use of resources while also extending grace and mercy to those in need?
EMPHASIZE: Point to Pack Item 6 (Key Verse: 2 Timothy 2:15). Note that church leaders are accountable for their actions and must seek God’s Word for their decisions.

STUDY: Direct the group to form small teams and examine the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 51) for further understanding of the treatment of widows and church benevolence.

DISCUSS: Why did Paul place primary responsibility for widow care on the children and grandchildren of the widow rather than the church? From the PSG (p. 51): Where is the line between family expectations and church responsibility? How can they partner in a way that is fair to both?

READ: As a volunteer reads 1 Timothy 5:17-21, direct the group to note the places where Paul referred to Scripture, quoting the Old Testament or citing a teaching of Jesus.

LEAD: These verses focus on care for pastors. How did your responses to the question on page 52 of the PSG change from when you first read it this past week to hearing it read aloud today?

EXAMINE: Paul discussed three areas of care for our pastors: financial support and respect; rejection of unsupported accusations; rebuke and fair discipline for supported accusations. Use information from your study of verses 19-21 for clarification (pp. 58–59; PSG, pp. 52–53).

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 7:12. Guide the group in locating places this teaching is illustrated throughout Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 5.

RESPOND: Present the Key Doctrine found on page 49 of the PSG (The Christian and the Social Order): All Christians should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick (Col. 3:12-17). Allow time for silent reflection. Encourage the group to prayerfully consider where God is calling them to provide for someone in need.

CHALLENGE: Direct the group to the third question set under In My Context in the PSG (p. 54): Memorize 1 Timothy 5:25. Consider ways you express gratitude and generosity to your pastoral leaders. What actions do you need to take to encourage your pastor and church leaders?

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for the godly leadership of your church. Ask God to encourage and protect them in their good works.
PRACTICE

• Care for pastors includes financial support. What is your attitude toward tithing? If necessary, ask God to work on your heart in this area.
• Prayerfully ask God for continued energy in leading the group for His glory.
• Consider 1 Timothy 5:25. Are there people in the group whom you can encourage for the good works they are doing? Reach out to them this week.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
For further understanding of the metaphor of the church as a family, read the first paragraph in the PSG on page 46. Invite the group to discuss ways the church is like a family.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• Complete the following exercise to help visualize the relationships suggested by Paul. Invite someone to sketch a family tree on a board and fill it out for Timothy based on the church family as outlined in 1 Timothy 5:1-2. Guide the group in suggesting words to write next to each family member that describe respectful ways of treating them. You can show an example of a family tree for further guidance.
• For further understanding of the care of widows, invite someone to read James 1:27 and Psalm 68:4-6. Guide the group in comparing these verses with the instructions given in 1 Timothy 5. Ask: What do these verses reveal about God’s heart? How does the gospel in our lives impact our understanding of care for the outcast and oppressed? Refer to Ephesians 2:12-13.
• For further discussion of 1 Timothy 5:19-21 consider the following: What factors may make a pastor or church leader an easy target for a false accusation? How can a church practice the actions called for by Paul? (PSG p. 53)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Direct the group to the first question set under In My Context in the PSG (p. 54): As a group, identify principles from today’s study for addressing each other over sensitive matters. What actions need to be implemented as a result of this discussion?

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
Direct the group to individually write a paraphrase of John 13:34-35. Then listen to or sing “They’ll Know We Are Christians,” by Peter Scholtes. The song was inspired by Jesus’ command in John 13:34-35, which reminds believers that the way we treat each other serves as a witness of our faith to non-believers.