SESSION 5

BEING RESPONSIBLE

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-8, 17-21

1. Don’t rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters with all purity. Support widows who are genuinely in need. 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. 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; however, she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command this also, so that they will be above reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his own family, especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. ... The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says: Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and “The worker is worthy of his wages.” Don’t accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses. Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will be afraid. I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A. “Don’t be harsh or impatient” (The Message)
B. Make your appeal or plea respectfully.
C. Paul’s expressed his concern that widows be shown respect and receive the help they need. James also directed believers to care for widows (Jas. 1:27). Luke showed how caring for widows mattered to Jesus (Luke 4:25-26; 20:47; 21:2-3).
D. Put their devotion to God to work (ESV)
E. They serve God by helping their parents like their parents helped them when they were children.
F. “To pray and to ask God for help” (NIV)
G. She lives only to please herself because seeking selfish pleasure matters most of all to her.
H. “Turned against the faith” (NCV)
I. Church leaders; the only specific reference to the ministry of elders is in James 5:14-15.
J. “Double pay” (GNT); “paid well” (NLT)
L. “Do not listen” (GNT) unless credible evidence is available from trusted sources.
M. “Reprimanded in front of the whole church” (NLT)
N. “Chosen angels” (CEV) who watch over the congregation as believers served the Lord together.
O. “Without showing any prejudice or favor to anyone in anything you do” (GNT)

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1. RESPECT ALL (1 Tim. 5:1-2)
   • Paul compared the church to a family with respect being given to each member.
   • The church leader is to demonstrate care for those in the church he is called to lead.
   • Emphasize the mutual nature of respect.

2. CARE FOR WIDOWS (1 Tim. 5:3-8)
   • Paul called on Timothy to lead the church to minister to the needs of widows.
   • He emphasized holding family members accountable for the care of their parents while making concessions for those women with no family to whom they could turn.

3. CARE FOR PASTORS (1 Tim. 5:17-21)
   • Paul taught that the local church’s pastoral leadership deserved to be supported financially and treated with respect.
   • Unsupported accusations against pastoral leaders should be rejected, but warranted discipline should be fair, open, and redemptive.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
Believers should care for others, including widows and ministers.
• Believers are to treat each other as respected family members.
• Believers are to help take care of the needs of faithful believers who face life alone.
• Believers are responsible to God for the support they provide their pastoral leadership.
FOCUS ATTENTION
Whom are you obligated to care for in your daily life?
What roles do you fill for them?
• While our parents care for us until we’re adults, most would agree that self-care becomes our responsibility. Society acknowledges an unwavering obligation to care for the children we parent. Married people commit to their spouses with the understanding that mutual care encompasses sickness and health. Conscientious children often accept responsibility for the care of aging parents.
• As Christians, we have these roles and an additional set of obligations for care.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
1 TIMOTHY 5:1-2
What role do church leaders have in the spiritual care of others?
• Defining the church as a family relationship implies an inherent and equivalent structure to the home where love, care, and respect for one another take precedence.
What age and gender distinctions do we find here that we should carry over to the workplace or community?
• Choosing encouragement as the method for urging older men to righteousness respects their age and experience and prevents a younger leader from falling into the trap of arrogance.
• Consistently treating women like mothers and sisters entails a level of courtesy and respect that naturally creates harmony and dispels suspicion.

1 TIMOTHY 5:3-8
Why do you suppose Paul spelled out such detailed instruction for the care of widows?
• The plights of widows, especially aging women who do not have the earning power to be self-sufficient, remains a crisis of care for those who find themselves in that situation.
• The directions for widow care is more evidence of God’s compassion for the underdogs of this world and should be a warning to be careful how we treat them.
What principles should be followed today for the care of widows?
• God holds family members accountable to serve as the first responders in caregiving for widows.
• Leading the church to accept responsibility to help care for faithful widows who have no family is a demonstration of God’s compassion.
• Becoming widowed is not a reason for despair. Widowhood offers a unique opportunity to trust God and turn to Him for provision and protection.

What do the stern words Paul reserved for negligent family members tell you about how seriously God takes these relationships?
• When we ignore the needs of our family whom God has entrusted to our care, our failure ranks with denying a dying Christ on the cross.
• Not accepting obligations of care puts us on the same level as unbelievers, who may be ignorant of their moral obligations.

1 TIMOTHY 5:17-21
Why would Paul include pastors as a special class of people who are entitled to the care of churches?
• Hard work deserves its reward, and incentivizing pastors’ efforts not only encourages them to keep it up but demonstrates God’s love for them.
• Pastors who dedicate their lives to the church usually haven’t had other opportunities to amass financial support.
When dealing with church leaders, what specifics did Paul give about the unique pastoral role?
• Refusing to entertain unsupported accusations prevents the leader from being needlessly derailed by false accusations or determined critics.
• Discipline that’s warranted but redemptive serves as an example to others and a striking reminder that no one is above God’s laws, and we all have a way back into God’s favor.
• By taking to heart Paul’s reminder to avoid prejudice and favoritism, we stand a much better chance of avoiding church-wide conflicts and managing our relationships with our leaders.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
How can we know we’re meeting our obligations to the people whom God has entrusted to our care?
• Paying attention to the special classes of people that Paul highlighted in this passage helps us respond appropriately with the care that God expects us to provide.
• Reviewing our relationships inside and outside of the church and looking for signs of neglect, indifference, or division will help us focus on those who need attention.
• Having concern for those who should receive special considerations for care will help us meet our spiritual obligations.
• Personal Challenge: Review your obligations to others, especially in the church. Do you treat them as Paul directed Timothy? Think about the widows you know, especially church or family members. How can you and the church further provide for their care? How can your church effectively honor and support your pastor?
A CUP AND A CARDBOARD SIGN

Secure a cup, hat, or other container that will serve as a makeshift collection receptacle. Be prepared to seed the cup with a few coins and dollar bills. Also prepare a cardboard sign with the words *Homeless. Please help.*

Show the group the sign you prepared and prop the cup or other container next to it. Note that these items are common sights when someone begs for money. Spend a few minutes discussing feelings upon seeing someone begging for money. Ask: *Do you feel compassion, guilt, fear, or helplessness?* Read 1 Timothy 5:1-21, emphasizing that Paul’s instructions to Timothy reminds the church to care for the needs of widows and pastors.

Briefly reiterate that Paul gave special instructions for caring for widows and pastors, but mutual concern should be offered to everyone in the church family. Point out that refusing to give someone the respect that should be automatically afforded them as a fellow believer means that some people find themselves in the position of begging for respect and care with their hats in their hands.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE CHURCH

Church discipline has become quite a topic of discussion among Christians these days. For some believers, it’s a troublesome topic because of the painful images in their minds of church members being expelled from the fellowship because of sinful behavior. For others, however, it’s welcomed as a biblical practice that’s been forgotten in too many churches for too long. In their opinion, too few churches practice church discipline and too many wandering believers need it.

Paul’s instruction to Timothy gives us an approach to church discipline that’s healthy. It’s an approach that includes two necessary components: preventive discipline and corrective discipline. His directive regarding widows serves as an example of preventive discipline. Study the text and observe the care given to choosing widows in the church who need to be helped (1 Tim. 3:3-8). In this passage, Paul gave an example of preventing problems before they emerge by establishing and reinforcing standards of accountability for God’s people. With the standard presented clearly, church members can choose wisely how they will help individuals and families in a way that honors the Lord. As this passage shows us, accountability makes a huge difference.

Of course, corrective discipline cannot be ignored. In the passage about taking care of elders, Paul takes us down the difficult road of holding church leaders accountable for their sinful behavior (vv. 17-21). Wise Christians don’t take that road easily, and we tend to hold off for a long time before we take such a difficult step. But as the text implies, the painful work of confronting sinful behavior in the lives of church leaders leads to a fresh awareness that none of us can escape accountability. No believer lives above or beyond the mandate of godliness.

Accountability among Christians served as a theme for Paul’s other epistles. For instance, he underscored the value of preventing believers from drifting into behavior that dishonored the Lord with his instruction regarding marriage and family (Eph. 5:22–6:3). By affirming a standard of behavior at home, believers demonstrated the kind of spiritual discipline that prevented problems from growing. Another example involved Paul’s directive to the Corinthian church about correcting the behavior of an incestuous church member. Instead of overlooking the issue, Paul called the church to action. Such sinful behavior had to be confronted, and the person engaging in it had to be held accountable (1 Cor. 5:1-8). Whether preventive or corrective, Christians helped each other through accountability so they could become stronger in Christ.