
THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE IN THE BIBLE

• STUDY GUIDE •
WITH LEADER'S NOTES

TITUS

LIFE-CHANGING TRUTH IN A WORLD OF LIES

JEFF DODGE

TITUS: LIFE-CHANGING TRUTH IN A WORLD OF LIES

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STUDY GUIDE WITH LEADER'S NOTES



New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404

newgrowthpress.com

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Cover Design: Faceout Books, faceoutstudio.com

Interior Design and Typesetting: Gretchen Logterman

Exercises and Application Questions: Jack Klumpenhower

ISBN: 978-1-64507-073-3 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-64507-089-4 (eBook)

Printed in The United States of America

27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 1 2 3 4 5

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INTRODUCTION

Titus is a letter from one missionary to another. As such, we would expect it to be full of the gospel. After all, gospel truth is what missionaries proclaim. Their purpose is to tell the wonder-filled good news of all Jesus is and all he gives to those who believe in him, and to see his kingdom expand.

So, it should be no surprise that as you study the book of Titus you will learn about the gospel—or “knowledge of the truth,” as it is put in the very first sentence. What might surprise you, though, is the rich variety of uses for this gospel truth that pop up in this brief letter. It turns out that gospel truth isn’t just about soul winning and church planting. It’s also about soul refining and church growing. It’s about courageous leadership and faithful following. It’s about purity, respect, love, humility, devotion to family, trustworthiness at work, and support for the church’s great mission. The gospel powers the whole Christian life.

Like the other small-group resources in this series, this book will show you those connections between the truth of the gospel and a godly life. You will consider how the good news of Jesus propels you out, on mission, to love and serve others. And you will practice returning to the gospel daily, for comfort and renewed hope, when life on mission gets hard.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This guide will help you do this in a group study. Titus was written to a leader in the church, and it is meant to strengthen every member of that church body. Studying with other Christ followers lets you benefit from what God is also teaching them, and it gives you encouragement and accountability as you apply what you learn.

Gospel-centered growth includes growing in awareness of your sin and in confidence that Jesus saves you in every way from that sin. Therefore, the group will be a place to share not only successes, but also sins and needs. Expect differences in how God is working in each group participant. Also expect differences in how people join in. It's okay if some in the group are cheery while others are weary, if some "get it" quickly while others want to look more deeply, or if some are eager to share while others take it slowly. But because you'll be studying the Bible and praying together, also expect the Holy Spirit to work. Expect people to grow and to become "eager to do good works" (Titus 2:14). And expect that to start with you!

Each participant should have one of these study guides in order to join in reading and be able to work through the exercises during that part of the study. The study leader should read through both the lesson and the leader's notes in the back of this book before each lesson begins. Otherwise, no preparation or homework is required from any participant.

There are seven lessons in this study guide. Each lesson will take about an hour to complete, perhaps a bit more if your group is large, and will include these elements:

BIG IDEA. This is a summary of the main point of the lesson.

BIBLE CONVERSATION. You will read a passage from Titus and discuss it. As the heading suggests, the Bible conversation questions are intended to spark a conversation rather than generate correct answers. In most cases, the questions will have several possible good answers and a few best answers. The leader's notes at the back of this book provide some insights, but don't just turn there for the "right answer." At times you may want to see what the notes say, but always try to answer for yourself first by thinking about the Bible passage.

ARTICLE. This is the main teaching section of the lesson, written by the book's author.

DISCUSSION. The discussion questions following the article will help you apply the teaching to your life. Again, there will be several good ways to answer each question.

EXERCISE. The exercise is a section you will complete on your own during group time. You can write in the book if that helps you, or you can just think about your responses. You will then share some of what you learned with the group. If the group is large, it may help to split up to share the results of the exercise and to pray, so that everyone has a better opportunity to participate.

WRAP-UP AND PRAYER. Prayer is a critical part of the lesson because your spiritual growth will happen through God's work in you, not by your self-effort. You will be asking him to do that good work.

Titus will show you how gospel truth is anything but static. If you are a follower of Jesus, it is active and alive in you. It leads to godliness (1:1) and makes you ready for every good work (3:1). If you have ever doubted its power in you, now is the time to look more deeply at the love of Christ proclaimed in this short book of the Bible, and let its truth transform you.

Lesson

1

TRUTH THAT LEADS TO GODLINESS

BIG IDEA

God's truth is a powerful treasure. We should pay close attention and expect it to change us, leading to godliness.

BIBLE CONVERSATION *15 MINUTES*

The book of Titus is a letter from the missionary Paul to his close associate and fellow missionary, Titus. In addition to this letter, Paul also mentions working alongside Titus in 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and 2 Timothy, suggesting that Titus was well-traveled and familiar with Paul's ministry. The occasion for this letter is that Paul had left Titus on the Mediterranean island of Crete to build up recently-planted churches there, where immorality was part of the island's reputation and false teachers were already springing up among God's people.

Begin your study of Titus by having someone read **Titus 1:1–4** aloud. Then discuss the questions below as a group.

Paul describes himself as God's servant and as an *apostle*, which means "one sent on a mission." List the purposes behind Paul's

service and mission. Which purpose most makes you want to read the rest of his letter, and why?

Based on Paul's purposes, how can you expect the rest of his letter to help someone who is engaged in mission? Which of these helps do you most need in your life, and why?

Paul takes pains to say not only that he is a servant of God and an apostle, but also that his preaching is commanded by God and contains God's revelation. How should reading his words be different from listening to an everyday believer? How might it affect the way you study Titus?

Now read the following article by this book's author. Take turns reading it aloud for the benefit of the whole group, switching readers at the paragraph breaks. Then discuss the questions at the end of the article.

Lesson

1

ARTICLE

WORDS FROM GOD

5 MINUTES

Introductions are important. As we begin our journey through a new book of the Bible, these first words must never be skipped or read too quickly.

First-century letters were treasures. The paper and the utensils were precious commodities. If you had the opportunity to write a letter, you weighed every word. Even the introductory words were very intentional. Those opening lines spoke volumes. They set a tone. They revealed something important about both the author and the recipients. Here you often discover the purpose for writing and the heartbeat of the message to follow. There is a lot to be gained as we mine just four verses.

As Titus unrolled this letter he was met with the familiar (perhaps less-than-perfect) penmanship of his mentor and friend. Titus's heart must have been warmed as he noted that Paul referred to himself first as a "servant of God" and then as an "apostle of Jesus Christ."

Paul was carrying on a sacred tradition and passing it on to Titus. Like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and especially Jesus, the title *servant of God* was worn as a badge of honor. It spoke of the humility

that was to mark leaders among God’s people. It also points to the proper positioning of leaders before the throne of the Most High.

Additionally, Paul was an *apostle*. He was sent by God to represent Jesus Christ. Paul was bringing more than words from a friend; he was writing authoritative words from God. Note that Paul even refers to his preaching as something entrusted to him “by the command of God our Savior.” This letter to warm Titus’s heart was also to call him to attention.

This means that as we read the book of Titus, we need to lean in is as if a trusted mentor is writing to us. But we must also have a deep respect for the real Author—God, our Father who is also the King of all creation. Because he is our Master, he tells us what a proper response to his words looks like: “I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and trembles at my word” (Isaiah 66:2). These words are for our good and our joy, but they are not to be trifled with. They are to be obeyed, because they are from God—the same God who created us, loves us, redeems us, and is transforming us into the very likeness of Jesus.

This letter is addressed to God’s elect—to Christ followers, saved by Jesus and regenerated (made new) by the Holy Spirit. And then comes these riveting words: “knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.” We have not even made it past the first verse and already a phrase that is pregnant with meaning has hit us. Now do you see why we can’t fly through the introduction too quickly? This is the theme of Titus, the banner under which Paul is writing this important letter.

Truth. Titus lives on an island known for its lies and its liars (see 1:12). But now God, who cannot lie and will not lie, is bringing truth to Crete. And this truth is not meant to sit on a shelf to be admired. It is not simply a weapon to win arguments. Truth is not

static and it certainly is not stagnant. It does more than set the record straight. Truth bursts on the scene and changes everything. Truth leads to godliness.

People in our modern Western world often fall into the trap of imagining a life in which it is perfectly rational to believe or think one way but make decisions and actually live in a way that stands in contrast to their belief. For instance, it is not uncommon in our culture for someone to identify themselves with a religion (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, etc.) but not actually hold to the stated tenets of that religion or practice a lifestyle that accords with that religion. They see no contradiction here. In fact, they may be offended if you say, “But how can you say you are a _____ (Christian/Muslim/Jew) when you openly disagree with what _____ (Christianity/Islam/Judaism) teaches and you don’t actually live according to those principles?”

This ability to divide belief from action is a relatively new way of thinking on the world stage. More, it runs counter to the way God designed us to think and live. Those who are elect, who have experienced the kindness of God in salvation (3:4), who have been born again by the Holy Spirit (3:5), are people whose beliefs correspond to a new way of life. Scripture transforms us from the inside out, precisely because it is God’s true Word given to us as his beloved children. Truth leads to godliness.

Be warned: there are people who think differently about this. The end of chapter 1 mentions some who claim to know God but deny him by their works. This letter reminds Titus, and each of us who reads these words, that there is to be a necessary connection between belief in God’s truth and a changed life. The new trajectory of our life is to point toward godliness.

This is a small letter, but don’t be fooled by its brevity. It packs a punch. We must not approach this study simply as a means of

growing in our knowledge of the truth. We must prepare to be changed. In fact, when we hear the words of God, we *must change* in response.

Titus is a true son to Paul. Paul loves Titus with a passionate, fatherly love. And he is entrusting Titus with a monumental task—establishing a beachhead for the church on the notorious island of Crete. Scary stuff. But Titus is not alone. Jesus is with him. And these words from Paul will be a tremendous help to guide him. May they be so for us as well!

DISCUSSION *10 MINUTES*

Think about “knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.” Tell about a time when you learned some truth from the Bible and you become godlier as a result. Or share about a time when you learned new truth but resisted changing.

Much Bible truth does not tell us directly how to live, but instead gives us good news. For example, verse 2 mentions “the hope of eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.” How might that kind of good-news truth change how you live? Give a specific example from your life, if you can.

Lesson

1

EXERCISE

THE SWORD OF GOD'S WORD

20 MINUTES

As we think about listening to God's truth, you may recall that the Bible pictures the word of God as a sword. Hebrews 4:12–13 says, "For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account."

In that passage, the sword is not used by us in battle but rather is used by God for surgery. His word exposes us and gets into every joint of our person, so that we cannot hide and must instead let it change us.

For this exercise, consider how you tend to treat God's Word, the Bible. What kind of sword is it to you? Begin by working on your own: read through the descriptions below and note some that are most true of you. Try to be honest even though some might be bad ways you use the Bible and others, while valid, are not the best way to use the Bible. When the group is ready, you'll have a chance to share and discuss some of your responses.

I tend to treat God's Word as . . .

. . . a sword on the shelf. I admire it and look at it often, but I seldom take it down and really use it in my life.

I like to learn more of God's Word because it feels good to have Bible knowledge.

I more often quote the Bible to repeat my favorite verses, not to challenge myself with hard verses.

. . . an ornamental sword. I wear it to dress myself up and look good, but I don't sharpen it lest it prick me.

I like to learn more of God's Word because people expect me to know it or admire me for it.

I more often quote the Bible to sound spiritual, not to actually become more spiritual.

. . . a sword pointed at others. I take it out for battle against those who disagree with me.

I like to learn more of God's Word so I can win spiritual arguments.

I more often quote the Bible to correct and direct others, not to correct and direct myself.

. . . a sword pointed at myself. I see it first of all as God's sword, wielded by him to expose and shape me.

I like to learn more of God's Word because it helps me trust Jesus, repent of my sin, and go out into the world with love for others.

I more often quote the Bible privately, to myself, because I need its corrections and gospel promises daily.

The Word of God is again called a sword in Ephesians 6:17. There, it is part of the armor we use to resist the devil's schemes by covering ourselves in the gospel—the truth, righteousness, salvation, etc. we have in Jesus. So finish the exercise by completing the sentence below.

I am willing to let God's Word expose and shape me because it also assures me that Jesus gives me _____
_____.

When the group is ready, share some of your responses. How do you tend to use the Bible, and why? What changes would you like to make?

What gospel blessing did you put in the blank at the end of the exercise? How does it encourage you to let God expose your life and change it?

WRAP-UP AND PRAYER *10 MINUTES*

As part of your closing prayer time together, ask God to be a skillful surgeon during your study of Titus, exposing you where necessary while he also speaks the gospel to you. Also pray that you would accept the teaching of his Word.