Focused

Believers can find strength for life’s hardships by focusing on God’s grace and the gospel.

2 Timothy 2:1-13

MEMORY VERSE: 2 Timothy 2:10

READ 2 Timothy 2:1-13, First Thoughts (p. 84), and Understand the Context (pp. 84–85). As you read, note verses that support the following statement: Following Jesus requires us to look to future generations and how we invest as well as how we are focusing on Christ today.

STUDY 2 Timothy 2:1-13, using Explore the Text on pages 85–89. Identify factors that contribute to a hardship sharpening or souring a person’s view of life. Spend time in prayer, examining your life and how you have counted the cost to follow Jesus. Consider ways those in your group have done the same.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 90–91) and More Ideas (p. 92). Also refer to QuickSource and Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible for other ideas. Take care to customize the plans to meet the needs of the group, and prepare to welcome and include guests.

GROW with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; □ Some Bible concordances and/or Bible dictionaries for the Bible Skill activity; □ Enlist an interviewer and someone in your church who has faithfully endured a hardship for the alternative Focus Attention on page 92. Prepare to display the following Pack Item: □ PACK ITEM 3 (Poster: Metaphors in Paul’s Letters). Make copies for group members of: □ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark); □ PACK ITEM 9 (Handout: Models of Church Structure); and □ PACK ITEM 10 (Handout: Timothy: A Snapshot).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

We all face seasons of disappointment. As followers of Christ we don’t receive an exemption card that allows us immunity from hardships and heartbreaks. The Lord assured us that we would face tribulation. He also promised that He would never forsake us no matter how menacing the tribulation. Every trial provides us the choice to focus on the problem or to focus on His empowering grace. The decision we make can make a difference between victory or defeat.

(In PSG, p. 73) What factors contribute to a hardship sharpening or souring a person’s view of life?

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

2 TIMOTHY 2:1-13

Paul’s letters to Timothy are both personal and instructive. These two qualities weave in and out of each chapter of these epistles. Within paragraphs, and sometimes in the same sentences, the letters move from church-related issues to Timothy’s personal life and ministry and back again.

Chapter two begins with a reference to the previous discussion about faithfulness. This serves as a transition to Paul’s encouragement for Timothy to remain strong. At the end of chapter 1, Paul described how he had been abandoned by people who formerly supported him. At the same time he was uplifted by others who made extra efforts to aid him. He shared his experience to identify with Timothy’s difficulties. Timothy was not alone in his struggle.

Opposition to Timothy’s ministry had taken a toll on the young pastor. Some elements of this letter suggest Timothy had become reticent about pressing important issues in the church. Paul was confident that Timothy would remain dedicated to God’s calling. He used several different approaches to encourage Timothy.

Throughout these pastoral epistles, Paul referred to his personal experiences of suffering and to those of Christ as a motivation for Timothy. Writing from prison, Paul described his travail to remind Timothy of the consequences for remaining committed to the gospel. Paul was faithful to his calling regardless of the cost.

Paul also reminded Timothy of Jesus’ anguish and ultimate victory. Christ experienced rejection and affliction from the people He had come to help. In the same way, Timothy could endure antagonism with confidence. While he might share Christ’s suffering, he would also share the Lord’s victory.
Paul also employed three metaphors to encourage Timothy. The examples of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer address three different aspects of the Christian life. Together, these analogies illustrate the servant spirit and need for obedience while also promising a reward for faithfulness. Each word picture portrayed a character quality that Timothy should emulate.

Another emphasis of this passage involves expansion of the kingdom through multiplication of laborers. It was not enough for Timothy to believe the gospel and share it. He should be intentional in helping believers make future generations of disciples who would do the same with others. Perpetuating the good news involved more than mere witnessing. It required developing new believers' spiritual lives so they can replicate themselves in others.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

FUTURE FOCUSED (2 TIM. 2:1-2)

VERSES 1-2

We can become discouraged when our focus shifts from Christ to our circumstances. Using the word therefore to link his previous comments, Paul moved Timothy’s attention back to the Lord. Regardless of the difficulty of his situation, the young pastor could move ahead in his ministry with the proper focus.

First, Paul wanted to reinforce his personal affection for Timothy. By referring to him as my son, Paul reminded Timothy of their long-standing relationship. While Paul did not lead Timothy to Christ, he had mentored Timothy throughout their journeys together. Second, Paul encouraged Timothy to be strong. At the same time, he affirmed that the strength needed was not in himself, but in grace. Finally, Paul reminded Timothy that the grace that sustains is found in Christ Jesus.

Having identified the power for ministry, Paul quickly moved to the purpose of ministry. Timothy needed to do more than to remain faithful or even to proclaim the gospel to others. Just as Paul was about to pass off the scene and hand over this work to men he had trained, Timothy needed to do the same.

The message Timothy had heard from Paul needed to be propagated. Timothy not only had learned the truth in private conversations with Paul, he had observed it publicly in the presence of many witnesses. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel and he wanted Timothy to share in bold ministry of the Word.

One day Timothy would come to the end of his work. Preparing for that inevitability, he needed to take what he had learned from Paul and pass it along to faithful men. Not only should Timothy preach to and teach the church as a whole, he also would seek out certain men who could be counted on to continue this vital mission. He chose them according to their faithfulness as evidenced by their participation in the gospel ministry.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR


VERSES 1-2

1 You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2 What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.
Timothy was to commit the gospel to these trustworthy leaders. The term translated commit carries the idea of making a deposit. In the same way Paul had invested himself in Timothy, Timothy was to entrust the gospel ministry to others who would be able to teach others also. What many writers have called “spiritual multiplication” can also be understood as the ongoing process of disciplemaking.

Faithful believers invest in the lives of future church leaders. We are always one generation from a totally atheistic world unless we continue not only to witness for Christ but also to train the next generation of Christians. We can never be satisfied with current success but must remain focused on the future of Christ’s church.

(In PSG, p. 75) Why was it so important for Timothy to prepare another generation to lead? How is this strategy used today?

MISSION FOCUSED (2 TIM. 2:3-7)

Paul identified three images as symbols of the Christian life: the faithful soldier, the disciplined athlete, and the hardworking farmer. He wanted Timothy to consider the lessons to be learned from these occupations and apply them to his life.

VERSES 3-4

3 Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer.

Paul did not offer gentle platitudes to comfort Timothy in the midst of opposition at his church. Suffering was part of the normal Christian experience. Jesus warned His disciples that just as the world hated Him, even so they would experience rejection and worse for His sake. (See Matt. 10:21-25.) Like Timothy, we cannot escape suffering but must embrace it and share in it as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

The image of a soldier was familiar to the early church. Roman legions were conspicuous in most large cities like Ephesus. During times of peace, the soldiers’ regimen revolved around training for their ultimate purpose—warfare. Privations, injury, and even death were part of their lives. Paul urged Timothy to embrace the role of one who would experience suffering for the sake of Christ. His conduct and attitude ought to demonstrate the character of a good soldier of Jesus.

A soldier does not become entangled in the concerns of civilian life. Civilians may engage in business, marry and raise a family, or become involved in other aspects of independent living. A soldier, however, has a different focus. He seeks to please the commanding officer.

A good soldier genuinely wants to fulfill the expectations of his superior. He does not merely follow the letter of commands but endeavors to honor the intentions of his commander. In the same way, believers should not be distracted by the pursuit of personal pleasure but remain committed to pleasing God.
VERSE 5
A second metaphor for faithful Christian service is the athlete. Two assumptions about athletic participants involve their willingness to prepare and their desire to compete. Victory was recognized by being crowned, usually with a circlet of laurel wreaths. However, no athlete receives recognition unless he competes according to the rules. A uniform set of criteria guides the competition. All participants must follow these procedures or be disqualified. Similarly, Scripture is the standard by which all Christian endeavor is judged.

VERSE 6
Moving to the third metaphor, Paul emphasized the spiritual compensation of the Christian servant. Any farmer who succeeds in producing crops has to be hardworking. Lazy laborers do not make good agricultural workers. In Paul’s day, preparing a field involved pushing a plow behind an animal. Planting usually meant spreading seed by hand. Dealing with weeds and insects required diligence throughout the long months between planting and harvest. Even after a year of backbreaking work, a single week of bad weather can wipe out the year’s crop. Consequently, the farmer should be the first to receive a share of the produce. Similarly, people who are diligent in service to Christ receive spiritual blessings.

VERSE 7
Paul urged Timothy to consider what he had said. The term consider involved reflection. Spiritual understanding does not come from human intellect. Paul was confident that the Lord would give Timothy understanding. The word everything did not mean Timothy would receive insight into unlimited knowledge. Instead, by trusting God’s leadership Timothy could understand how to apply the truth of the gospel in his life and ministry, even in the face of opposition.

What helps you remain focused on Christ’s mission, especially during difficult days?

CHRIST FOCUSED (2 Tim. 2:8-13)

VERSES 8-9
Any hardship must be balanced with the potential of sharing the gospel. Paul’s command to remember Jesus Christ did not suggest Timothy’s memory was faulty. Rather, he wanted Timothy to adjust his focus. Instead of being distracted by his problems, the young pastor should concentrate on Christ.

Christ’s resurrection power enables every believer to share in His victory. (See Phil. 3:10; Rom. 4:24-25.) The power by which God raised Jesus from the dead effectually works in us to accomplish His will. (See Eph. 3:19-20.)

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Timothy needed to recall Christ’s resurrection in order to strengthen his resolve as he led the church and resisted the false teachers.

Interestingly, after making the point of Jesus’ resurrection, Paul mentioned that Jesus was descended from David. Connected with the emphasis on Jesus’ resurrection, this statement was not merely a reference to Jesus’ parentage. The title “Son of David” was uniquely Messianic in nature. The resurrection was the culmination of God’s covenant with David concerning a King who would rule forever. Paul’s gospel included the promise and its fulfillment. Because of the gospel, Timothy could stand strong and boldly proclaim the good news.

Affirming the power of the gospel does not mean believers will never experience grief. Paul acknowledged that the gospel was the reason he would suffer. Paul had been bound like a criminal and was, even at that moment imprisoned and awaiting imposition of the death sentence. Timothy might ultimately face similar trials.

Although the messenger of the gospel might be bound, the word of God cannot be contained. It has the power for salvation of the lost (Rom. 1:16) and for strengthening the believer (Rom. 16:25). The gospel consists not of mere words, but is infused with the power of God’s Spirit (1 Thess. 1:5). Paul had already told Timothy that even his suffering was an expression of the gospel’s power (2 Tim. 1:8).

VERSE 10

Paul intended the gospel when he wrote this is why I endure all things. He had experienced hardships of all kinds. Instead of drawing back to safety, he continued to risk everything, even his life, for the sake of the elect. The term elect formerly addressed the unique relationship of God with His chosen people—Israel. Paul used it to refer to believers in Christ.

God has chosen the proclamation of the gospel as His means to bring people to salvation in Jesus.

Interestingly, Paul said he endured suffering so that they also may obtain salvation. Surely, Paul did not claim to be able to add anything to Jesus’ atonement so people could be saved. Instead, he knew that God has chosen the proclamation of the gospel as His means to bring people to salvation in Jesus. Paul was willing to suffer in order to spread the gospel to as many people as possible.

Salvation is found only in Christ Jesus. Paul often used the phrase in Christ to describe the source of the Christian’s faith and hope. God imputes His righteousness to believers through faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:22). Our justification by grace and our redemption are found only in Him (Rom. 3:24).

The phrase eternal glory could refer to the Lord, since all glory belongs to Him now and forever (Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17). However, given the context as Paul wrote about salvation, eternal glory likely involves the blessedness believers shall experience as they faithfully endure suffering because of their commitment to Christ (2 Cor. 4:17).
Summarizing his trust in Christ’s gospel, Paul employed a familiar technique. He appealed to a **trustworthy** saying. The first of four conditional declarations relates back to verse 10 regarding what it means to be in Christ. It connects believers’ union with Jesus in death and life. Another aspect of the saying could relate to the suffering Paul and Timothy had experienced. However, the tense of the word **died** more likely indicates the way that, in salvation, believers have died with Christ to their old ways.

If in Christ we have died to our former lives, **we will also live with him**. The future tense of the second part not only touches on the aspect of eternity in the previous verse but also to the state of life we enjoy in Him now. The statement mirrors Paul’s encouragement to the Roman Christians in Romans 6:8.

The second condition relates to the believer’s willingness to **endure**. Again, referring back to suffering for the gospel, Paul used the plural pronoun **we** to include Timothy with himself. The word **endure** literally means to “stay under.” To endure means remaining faithful to the gospel task even when under the pressure of opposition.

Believers who persevere **will also reign with him**. Scripture promises victory to all who endure for His sake. Just as Jesus endured the cross and rose again to His seat in glory, even so in Him believers can share His triumph. (See Heb. 12:2.)

On the other hand, **if we deny him, he will also deny us**. Jesus said whoever denies Him before men will be denied before the heavenly Father (Matt. 10:33). The term **deny** means more than simply not believing; it carries the idea of disavowal. This statement particularly contrasts with the previous saying. The promise of endurance stands opposite the penalty of denial.

The final conditional expression takes the idea of denial a step further. The lack of endurance can lead to denial, which ultimately ends at being **faithless**. Still, even when we are at our worst, **he remains faithful**. While it is true that God remains faithful to us, this statement connects with the truth that **he cannot deny himself**. Therefore, His faithfulness relates to His trustworthiness regarding the gospel. He continues to pursue people with His loving mercy and truth.

Because of God’s faithfulness, we take strength in knowing our faithful witness opens doors for the gospel to be heard and believed. By maintaining our focus on Christ, we can remain steadfast in helping others know Him.

**(In PSG, p. 80) **How does focusing on Christ’s faithfulness to us help us persevere in faithfulness to Him?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

EXPLAIN: Begin the session by asking everyone what this old Bulgarian proverb means: “God promises a safe landing but not a calm passage.” Ask: What are some ways we’ve seen this to be true in our lives?

DIRECT: Guide the group’s attention to page 73 of the PSG and read the introductory paragraph and question: What factors contribute to a hardship sharpening or souring a person’s view of life?

HIGHLIGHT: Call attention to the context of the passage using Understand the Context (pp. 84–85; PSG, p. 74). Use Pack Item 10 (Handout: Timothy: A Snapshot) to review with the group of who Timothy was and the nature of the letter.

TRANSITION: Today we’re going to learn how God’s grace and the gospel help us face the trials of life and remain focused on living for Christ through all circumstances.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 2:1-2, while others listen for how Timothy should be strengthened.

EXPLAIN: Paul expected Timothy to depend upon all that Jesus could do through him more so than what he could do for himself. Ask: How do you define “dependence”?

STATE: Paul called on Timothy to pass on to others the things which had been taught to him, who will in turn also teach others.

ASK: Why was it so important for Timothy to prepare another generation to lead? How is this strategy used today? (PSG, p. 75)

TRANSITION: Paul’s next step was to encourage Timothy to remain focused on completing the mission for the glory of God for future generations.

READ: Direct someone to read 2 Timothy 2:3-7, while the group listens for how Paul viewed hardships.

STATE: From the PSG (p. 76): Verse 3 “conveys the idea of mutual participation in the pain and agony of another person. For Paul and Timothy, suffering for the mission of Christ was not an incidental matter. It was expected.”

EXPLAIN: The call to share in suffering is a way that believers are able to join where God is working to demonstrate His power and grace. Distribute copies of Pack Item 9 (Handout: Models of Church Structure) and highlight the various responsibilities of those in your church’s leadership. Note how each helps carry the burden of the needs of the church. Discuss ways your group can assist with those efforts.

ASK: Discuss each of the three metaphors Paul named in verses 4-6 and how they relate to suffering. (List them on a board, if possible.) Use Pack Item 3 (Poster: Metaphors in Paul’s Letters) to show how this was a common practice for Paul—using vocations and other
real-life examples to relate biblical truth to life. Ask: *In what ways are the disciplines required to be a soldier and athlete similar? How are they different? How does the discipline of being a believer compare?* (PSG, p. 77)

**COMPARE:** Use the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 78) to further the study of the word *endure.*

**READ:** Direct someone to reread 2 Timothy 2:7 to the group.

**REVIEW:** God delights in granting believers understanding when they desire to glorify Him. Receptivity to God’s Word creates the spiritual fertility for grasping and applying His truth in the confusing details of daily life.

**ASK:** In what ways could your vocation be used to illustrate the point being made by Paul?

**TRANSITION:** Paul challenged Timothy to remain focused on Jesus and His resurrection. He explained that any hardship faced must be balanced with the potential of sharing the gospel with others.

**READ:** Have a volunteer read 2 Timothy 2:8-10.

**EXPLAIN:** Remembering Jesus’ resurrection served as proof that He was fully God; remembering He descended from the lineage of David served as proof that He was fully man. Furthermore verse 9 reminds us that Paul saw the message of the gospel as something not to be bound. Then in verse 10, Paul counted the cost of obedience and remained faithful because the salvation of others was at stake.

**ASK:** How can opposition serve as a means for sharing the gospel? What are ways that we see people count the cost today to follow Jesus?

**READ:** Direct someone to read 2 Timothy 2:11-13, while the group circles the “if” statements in the passage.

**COMPARE:** Identify the four “if” statements from these verses and compare and contrast how they relate to keeping our focus as believers.

**ASK:** How does focusing on Christ's faithfulness to us help us persevere in faithfulness to Him? (PSG, p. 80)

**TRANSITION:** Believers cannot always rely upon their strength, but they must always rely upon the strength of Christ and His faithfulness as their main focus.

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**RECAP:** Review the bulleted statements from In My Context (PSG, p. 81) with the group. Ask if anyone shared anything in the group time today that changed the way they felt about maintaining faithfulness during hardships.

**REFLECT:** Lead the group to discuss the second question set from In My Context on page 81 of the PSG: *Discuss as a group ways your group can minister to people facing a crisis of faith in your community. What one action can your group take to encourage them?*

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, asking for the strength to maintain a faithful witness for others to hear and believe the gospel.
PRACTICE

- Find videos of people who have endured difficult circumstances and send those to your group as an encouragement to keep pressing forward and trusting Christ in all circumstances.

- Prayerfully study the attendance patterns of the group to determine if there are individuals who appear to be withdrawing from the group. Develop a plan to reach out to them with extra encouragement and grace.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
Identify someone in your church who has faithfully endured during a hardship and, as a result, others came to know Christ. Enlist a group member to interview that person prior to the session, either by video (if they agree) or by taking notes. Once the group arrives, invite the interviewer to summarize the discussion or show the video.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- For further discussion of 2 Timothy 2:1-2, look up and reference the example of the heritage of godly influence that led to Billy Graham’s conversion. Then lead the group to consider those in their lives who have invested in their spiritual walks with Christ and those whom they have in turn invested in regarding the truths of Scripture.

- For further insight into 2 Timothy 2:3-7, brainstorm further examples of vocations or activities that require endurance. Then discuss how perseverance in these vocations helps us understand how to persevere in godliness while facing difficulties.

- To supplement the group’s understanding of 2 Timothy 2:8-13, read Hebrews 12:1-2 and find commonalities between the writer’s encouragement and Paul’s in this passage.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Discuss practical ways that the group can encourage each other during times of difficulty. Encourage the group to memorize 2 Timothy 2:10 to use when they have feelings of doubt. Give out copies of Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark) to those who need one.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
Play the hymn “It Is Well,” by Bethel Music, as the group arrives. Lead them to read the lyrics as a closing prayer.