

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: July 21, 2019

Lesson Title: "Focused"

Lesson Passage: 2 Timothy 2:1-13

ABOUT THIS LESSON

In the lesson passage, Paul encourages Timothy to be brave and faithful in his work as a minister of Christ. Like a soldier, he must accept his share of suffering; like an athlete he must discipline himself; like a hard-working farmer he will rejoice in the harvest. Pointing to his own example as a prisoner in chains, Paul reminds Timothy that the word of God is not in chains. He then urges the young minister to be diligent in his teaching ministry, and warns him against wasting time on foolish notions and ignorant arguments that breed quarrels.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain the meaning of Paul's references to the soldier, athlete and farmer. (2) Explain the importance of teaching in the church.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Begin with this: In a recent Gallup survey fewer than half of Americans could name the first book of the Bible, only one-third knew who delivered the Sermon on the Mount (many named Billy Graham), one-quarter did not know what is celebrated on Easter, and six out of ten could not name half of the Ten Commandments. And in a survey by the Barna Research group, 12 percent of the respondents who described themselves as Christians (!) thought Noah's wife was Joan of Arc, while 80 percent of those who claimed to be "born-again Christians" thought Benjamin Franklin's saying, "God helps them that help themselves," came from the Bible. Perhaps it was because the Apostle Paul foresaw how easy it would be to lose touch with the rudiments of our faith that he urged Timothy to "Take the teachings that you heard me proclaim...and entrust them to reliable people, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). That is a major theme in the Bible passage for this lesson.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Call attention to 2 Tim. 2:2, and share these thoughts:* (1) Paul reminds Timothy that he is a vital link in a human chain. The gospel that he has heard from Paul must be committed (the same Greek word as "entrusted" in 2 Tim. 1:12) to competent teachers who will pass it on to still others. ILLUSTRATION: In colonial New England, live coals were sent out to every new home from a fireplace in a home that already existed. It was vitally important to keep the coals glowing with heat as they were shared. Similarly, the gospel must be passed on from person to person, from generation to generation. APPLICATION: This communication chain has been kept alive for 20 centuries. Who will "take up the torch" over the next

ten years?

(2) Teaching is the basic function by which this process is carried on. The church's very being depends upon the faithful teaching of the word. Without teaching, the church will cease to be the church.

2. Write "SOLDIER," "ATHLETE" AND "FARMER" on the board (or on posters). Ask class members to think of ways in which the Christian calling might resemble these three vocations. Pause for responses, then suggest that additional answers can be found in 2 Tim. 2:3-6. Summarize Paul's use of each of these analogies as follows:

THE SOLDIER: (1) Endures hardship. (2) Avoids debilitating entanglements. (3) Strives to please his commander (*Phil. 1:21*).

THE ATHLETE: (1) Disciplines himself rigorously ("No pain, no gain"). (2) Competes by the rules. FOR DISCUSSION: What are some rules by which Christians should "run the race"? SUGGESTIONS: Matthew 5:43-44; 6:6, 31-33; 7:1; Ephesians 4:31-32.

THE FARMER: The hard worker is entitled to his fair share of the crops. On a practical level, this means that Christian leaders should be appreciated and supported. FOR DISCUSSION: What are the costs of serving as a leader in our church? Is faithful service more rewarding than punishing; or is it the other way around?

3. Explain that 2 Tim. 2:11-13 might have been an early Christian hymn. Use these verses as a responsive reading, letting the class read the words in boldface type: "The saying is sure, if we have died with him, **we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful--for he cannot deny himself.**"

4. Comment on vv. 14-16: (1) In v. 14 Paul tells Timothy to give the people a solemn warning in the presence of God "not to fight over words" (literally, "do not word battle"). (2) Why should disputes over words be avoided? ANSWER: Word-battles do no good (v. 14), and they cause spiritual damage. (3) Verse 15 presents the Christian alternative to wrangling over words: "Study" means "be eager," "do your best." "Rightly dividing" means "plowing a straight furrow."

5. Observe that verses 23-25 echo the warning in vv. 14-16. Comments: (1) Early churches, like today's churches, were agitated by "stupid, senseless controversies" (v. 23, RSV). (2) Paul told Timothy to have nothing to do with such quarreling. ("The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome" and must practice the three virtues mentioned in v. 24--kindness, skill in teaching, patience.) (3) And when it is necessary to correct error, it must be done with gentleness (v. 25).

CLOSING THE LESSON

Paul uses the soldier, the athlete and the farmer to depict the nature of the ministry. Ask class members to compare the work of a minister to that of a physician, a coach and a shepherd.