



## SESSION 6

# ONE GREAT TASK

### ▶ ***The Point***

Each of us must share the gospel.

### ▶ ***The Passage***

2 Timothy 2:1-10

### ▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

"I have two kinds of problems: the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent." President Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke these words in 1954 to a gathering of church leaders.<sup>5</sup> It's interesting to hear those words coming from a man who had to make major decisions every day.

When you think about it, though, few things truly fall into both categories.

- ▶ Exercise is important, but not urgent.
- ▶ An email message can be extremely urgent, but not necessarily important.

Of course, some things really are both urgent and important. One example is a medical emergency. Another example is the task given to every disciple of Jesus: sharing the good news of Christ with others. People have no more important decision to make than to choose Christ, and now is the time for us to point them to Christ and help them understand everything at stake.

### ▶ ***The Setting***

Second Timothy is one of Paul's "pastoral letters," in which the veteran minister helped younger colleagues work through ministry issues. We might also call it a "prison letter." Paul wrote four prison letters during the imprisonments mentioned at the end of Acts (Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon), but many scholars think 2 Timothy came later, after Acts ended, as Paul's last letter.

## *What does the Bible say?*

### **Descended from David**

(v. 8)—Prophecies from the Old Testament indicated that the Messiah would come from among David's royal line (see 2 Sam. 7:12-16).

### **2 Timothy 2:1-10**

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

**2 And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.**

**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 recruiter.**

**5 Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.**

**6 The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops.**

**7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.**

**8 Keep your attention on Jesus Christ as risen from the dead and descended from David. This is according to my gospel.**

**9 I suffer for it to the point of being bound like a criminal, but God's message is not bound.**

**10 This is why I endure all things for the elect: so that they also may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.**

## GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 53 of the PSG: **“When have you been entrusted with an important task?”**

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Use an object lesson to introduce the theme of sharing what is good. Begin by asking for a volunteer. Once you’ve selected a group member, present him or her with a special treat of some kind—a pie, a box of cookies, a bag of candy, and so on. (Offer a treat that is large enough for each

person in the group to have some, if given the opportunity.) Inform the group that the treat now belongs to the volunteer, and it is entirely up to him or her to decide whether the treat gets shared with everyone else in the group.

**Note:** Whether or not the volunteer chooses to share the treat, transition into “The Point” for this session by declaring that some blessings are far too valuable *not* to be shared.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “The Point” on page 54 of the PSG: **“Each of us must share the gospel.”**

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 54 of the PSG. Continue with the theme of sharing the gospel by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

**PRAY:** Transition into the Scripture discussion by affirming publicly that the gospel is too valuable to be hoarded by you and the members of your group. Pray for wisdom as you seek inspiration together from God’s Word.

Notes



5 minutes

# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

### 2 Timothy 2:1-2

<sup>1</sup> *You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* <sup>2</sup> *And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

**READ:** 2 Timothy 2:1-2 on page 55 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

**SUMMARIZE:** Help group members work through the main points on pages 55-56 of the PSG:

1. "What Paul described in these verses is the process of discipleship, which involves knowing and walking in the truths of Jesus and leading others to do the same."
2. "Paul had invested much time and effort in teaching and discipling Timothy. Now, he encouraged Timothy to pay it forward, investing in others who would likewise 'teach others also.'"
3. "Paul's challenge to Timothy echoes the Great Commission. In the same way Paul shared Christ with Timothy and disciplined him, Timothy could share Christ and disciple others."

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 55 of the PSG: **"Who has been faithful in teaching you the truth about God and the gospel?"**

**GUIDE:** Encourage group members to read the story of Joseph Brucato on pages 55-56 of the PSG. Then read aloud the second paragraph on page 56:

Sadly, many Christians do something far more outrageous than hoarding mail: they hoard the good news of Christ.

**TRANSITION:** As we move to verses 3-7 in Paul's instructions to Timothy, we'll find a character trait that is necessary for sharing the gospel with any kind of sustained success: perseverance.

#### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*Why are relationships necessary in making disciples?*

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## 2 Timothy 2:1-2 Commentary

**[Verse 1]** Paul addressed the letter to “Timothy, my dearly loved son” (1:2), and he repeated **my son** in this verse. Timothy was not Paul’s biological son, but Paul had a very close relationship with this younger man. Paul met Timothy at Lystra (see Acts 16:1-3), where Timothy was the son of a Jewish Christian woman and a Greek father. Paul had Timothy circumcised, not as a requirement for salvation but to enable Timothy to be a co-worker with him and Silas. Paul mentioned Timothy in some of his letters. For instance, he called Timothy “our brother and God’s coworker” (1 Thess. 3:2). When Paul wrote the two letters to Timothy, Timothy was serving at Ephesus (see 1 Tim. 1:3).

Paul encouraged Timothy to **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus**. The word “grace” was often used by Paul for God’s generous gift of forgiveness and salvation (see Eph. 2:8). Here, the word probably refers to God’s continually gracious empowering of Timothy in his ministry. Paul’s advice to *be strong* is similar to his encouragement to the church at Ephesus earlier in their struggles in spiritual warfare (see Eph. 6:10). At times, Paul was concerned about some adversity Timothy faced (see 1 Cor. 16:10).

**[Verse 2]** Paul used several word pictures or analogies to help Timothy understand the nature of the Christian life and his role as a minister. Here, Paul focused on Timothy’s role as a teacher of other Christians. Paul had been Timothy’s mentor or teacher for several years. Timothy had heard Paul preach many times, and undoubtedly they had discussed issues together one-on-one. Paul played many roles in the early church, including preacher, church planter, missionary, and author. This verse reminds us Paul also mentored and disciplined young Christians.

Paul noted that Timothy had heard Paul speak **in the presence of many witnesses**. Paul might have referred to the time others laid hands on Timothy (see 2 Tim. 1:6), or when Timothy was baptized. We cannot be sure what event Paul had in mind, but Paul’s main point was that Timothy had learned from Paul.

Paul reminded Timothy to **commit** the spiritual truths he had learned from Paul **to faithful men who will be able to teach others also**. Paul might have had in mind a general teaching ministry for Timothy with the members of his church. Perhaps he had in mind Timothy’s relation to church leaders in Ephesus. Paul had mentioned earlier that Timothy should “hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me” (2 Tim. 1:13).



20 minutes

# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

### 2 Timothy 2:3-7

<sup>3</sup> *Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.* <sup>4</sup> *No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the recruiter.* <sup>5</sup> *Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.* <sup>6</sup> *The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops.* <sup>7</sup> *Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.*

**READ:** 2 Timothy 2:3-7 on page 56 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** Question #3 on page 56 of the PSG: **“What can we learn from Paul’s word pictures in these verses?”**

**Note:** The content on page 75 of this Leader Guide offers additional commentary on each of Paul’s word pictures.

**DO:** Direct group members to the activity called “The 3-1-5-1 Strategy” on page 57 of the PSG. This strategy is a tool that can help your group members plan to share the gospel with others. Your group has been using parts of this strategy in recent weeks within the material of this study—praying for three people who need salvation, inviting five people to the group, and so on. Encourage group members to use the outline on page 57 to plan outreach strategies for the future.

*List three people you are praying will accept the gift of salvation:*

*Record one sentence that summarizes the gospel message:*

*List five people you will invite to be part of this group:*

*Commit to sharing the gospel with one person this week:*

**GUIDE:** Encourage group members to read Azzam’s story on page 58 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 58 of the PSG: **“What excuses do we make for not sharing Christ?”**

#### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

***What emotions do you experience when you think about sharing the gospel?***

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## 2 Timothy 2:3-7 Commentary

**[Verse 3]** Another word picture Paul used to illustrate the nature of the Christian life is **good soldier of Christ Jesus**. One aspect of the Christian life was **suffering**. Earlier, Paul alerted Timothy to the need to “share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God” (1:8). Paul did not identify specific types of suffering or adversity Timothy might experience. Paul was reminding his younger friend that being a Christian does not guarantee a trouble-free life. Indeed, in some hostile situations, being a bold witness for Christ might provoke ridicule or persecution.

**[Verse 4]** Here Paul highlighted the need for a *good soldier of Christ Jesus* to have a single-minded focus on serving Christ. A soldier should not get **entangled in the concerns of civilian life**. Paul’s concern was that we, like good soldiers, have a single focus on our obligations to our Lord and Savior. A good soldier prioritizes obligations. The highest obligation is to please the **recruiter** or the commanding officer. A Christian in the first century or today will have many obligations, including family, church, career, and friendships. Paul emphasized that we need to always place our loyalty and commitment to Christ above other obligations.

**[Verse 5]** Paul’s next analogy for the Christian life was an **athlete**. Many in his audience were familiar with first-century sports, and he often used sports imagery. In 1 Timothy, Paul compared the value of “training of the body” and spiritual fitness (1 Tim. 4:7-8). Both are good, but our priority should be on training in “godliness.” Paul knew that a successful athlete prepared and trained over a long period of time in order to compete successfully. Here, Paul emphasized an athlete competing **according to the rules**. If the athlete played according to the rules of the sport and won, the reward was a crown. Like a good athlete, we need to focus on spiritual exercises such as prayer and Bible study in order to be ready to share the good news with the people who need to know about Jesus.

**[Verse 6]** Paul next compared the Christian life to being a **hardworking farmer**. Even if you’ve never been a farmer, you can still grasp Paul’s point. The methods farmers use to raise their crops have changed, but successful farmers are still hardworking. Paul’s main emphasis with this word picture is that the farmer **ought to be the first to get a share of the crops**. Probably Paul referred to the spiritual rewards or blessings that come to those who serve Christ faithfully. Some think Paul might have included financial support for ministers.

**[Verse 7]** Paul reminded Timothy to think seriously about what he had written—to review and reflect. Paul stressed that **the Lord will give you understanding in everything**. Like any student, Timothy needed to study what Paul had written, but he would have divine assistance in his study.





10 minutes

# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

## 2 Timothy 2:8-10

<sup>8</sup> *Keep your attention on Jesus Christ as risen from the dead and descended from David. This is according to my gospel.* <sup>9</sup> *I suffer for it to the point of being bound like a criminal, but God's message is not bound.* <sup>10</sup> *This is why I endure all things for the elect: so that they also may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*

**READ:** 2 Timothy 2:8-10 on page 59 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the second paragraph on page 77 of this Leader Guide to help group members understand Paul's emphasis on Jesus' resurrection and connection with King David.

**RECAP:** In verses 3-7, Paul used three word pictures to describe the Christian life. Now, use the bullet list from page 59 of the PSG to show how Jesus is the ultimate example of persevering in the Christian life:

- ▶ **Jesus is the greatest example of a soldier.** He was obedient even to death for us. He fought the ultimate battle for us—and won (see Phil. 2:8-9).
- ▶ **Jesus is the greatest example of an athlete.** He endured until He was victorious over sin and death and gained the prize—our salvation (see Heb. 12:2).
- ▶ **Jesus is the greatest example of a farmer.** He alone has the power to break apart the hardened soil in a person's life to bear spiritual fruit (see Matt. 13:1-23).

**GUIDE:** Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the final two paragraphs on page 59 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** Question #5 on page 59 of the PSG: **"What steps can our group take this month to share the gospel?"**

**Note:** Encourage group members to be practical and realistic when answering this question. What steps will you actually take together?

**GUIDE:** Refer back to "The Point" for this session: **"Each of us must share the gospel."** As time permits, encourage group members to share any final thoughts and questions.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*What are your hopes and dreams for sharing the gospel?*



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## 2 Timothy 2:8-10 Commentary

**[Verse 8]** Paul was doing more than exchanging shoptalk with a fellow minister in this passage. Paul wanted Timothy to keep his **attention on Jesus Christ**. It's hard to think of any better advice for a Christian, young or old! Paul occasionally used himself as a role model for other Christians, but he was always careful to avoid any egotism. For example, "Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Here, Paul reminded Timothy that all ministry was rooted in our faith in Jesus.

Paul did not develop a full-scale Christology (doctrine of Christ) here, but he did note two key points. First, Jesus is **risen from the dead**. The resurrection of Jesus was central to Paul's preaching and teaching. The fact God raised Jesus was the basic evidence for Jesus' deity (see Rom. 1:4). Second, Paul mentioned that Jesus is **descended from David**. Certainly this was a major issue for Jews, who expected the Messiah to be a descendant of King David. Also, Paul may have been pointing to Jesus' humanity in this way. Timothy had heard Paul discuss other issues about Christology before, so Paul did not need to review all of that again. Paul's main concern was that Timothy stay focused on Jesus, the Son of God and their Savior.

**[Verse 9]** Paul mentioned again that he was a prisoner (see 2 Tim. 1:8). He hoped Timothy could come visit him soon (4:9,21). Paul had suffered for Christ in many ways. Now he was in jail **bound like a criminal**. This word *criminal* was used by Luke for the men crucified with Jesus (see Luke 23:32). Rather than dwell on the specifics of his chains, Paul stressed that **God's message is not bound**. Paul's activity was limited, and he seemed to expect his own death soon (see 2 Tim. 4:6-8), but the good news about Jesus was not in chains.

**[Verse 10]** Paul could **endure all things** for the sake of those who needed to hear and receive the gospel. These **elect** apparently had not heard the gospel yet, but they would receive it eventually. Somehow the good news about Jesus would be presented to these people, and they would **obtain salvation**. Paul's reference to **eternal glory** reminds us that the ultimate goal of our salvation is in the future. As many Bible scholars have noted, salvation has a beginning (see Rom. 5:1), middle (see Rom. 6:19-22), and end (see 1 John 3:2). Paul sometimes identified the final stage of our salvation as glorification (see Rom. 8:30).

Paul's advice about keeping our focus on Jesus and the unbound Word of God is relevant to all Christians, because witnessing is a great task for all Christians. Some Christians have a specific calling from God to be a pastor, evangelist, or missionary, but all Christians have an obligation and calling to witness for and about Christ.



## Notes

- Pray.** If you've never told someone about Christ, begin with prayer. Pray that God will bless you with boldness and wisdom. Pray for an opportunity to share Jesus with someone whom God has prepared.
- Learn.** Seek out new information and new strategies for sharing the truth of Christ with others. If possible, begin by enrolling in an evangelism class at your church, or by connecting with someone who can mentor you.
- Join.** Join a group in your church that regularly engages in evangelistic outreach or goes on mission trips for the purpose of sharing the gospel.

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the Conclusion from page 60 of the PSG:

Sharing the gospel is a massively important endeavor because eternity is at stake. Sharing the gospel is also incredibly urgent, since none of us are guaranteed tomorrow. Let these two truths frame every decision you make in the days and weeks to come.

**PRAY:** Thank God once again for His incredible grace and mercy in making salvation available to all people. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you and your group members whenever you lose sight of the vital task of sharing the gospel.



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# TEACHING FROM THE OVERFLOW

BY MIKE LIVINGSTONE

Effective Bible teaching is artesian in nature. The word “artesian” describes a well through which water rises naturally to the surface as a result of internal pressure. Charles Spurgeon used this metaphor with reference to preaching: “True preaching is artesian; it wells up from the great depths of the soul. If Christ has not made a well within us, there will be no outflow from us.” What is true for preachers is true also for small-group Bible study leaders—God’s Word is most effectively communicated from the overflow of what God is doing in our lives.

This being true, the key to transformational Bible teaching begins with recognizing the difference between preparing a lesson and preparing the leader of the lesson. Make no mistake; I’m a strong proponent of lesson preparation. Artesian teaching doesn’t negate the need for personal study, though a prepared heart is more critical. If we have only prepared a lesson but have not spiritually prepared ourselves, we are unprepared to teach the Bible.

How, then, can we prepare ourselves to teach from the overflow? Rather than offering a step-by-step process of preparation, let’s consider three general principles of spiritual preparation:

## **Prepare on your knees.**

It’s not the physical posture of kneeling that matters, but the posture of the heart—dependency on and submission to God. “A prayerless ministry cannot know God’s truth and, not knowing it, cannot teach it,” said E. M. Bounds.



The apostles gave priority to two things in ministry, according to Acts 6:4: prayer and teaching the Word. Certainly this means they considered their responsibility to pray to be no less important than their responsibility to communicate the Word to others and knew the two priorities could not be separated.

### **Pursue God.**

It's one thing to go to the Bible in search of lesson material. It's another thing altogether to go to the Scripture in pursuit of the Person of God. How important it is not to allow the former to take precedence over the latter!

Leonard Ravenhill said: "A man may study because his brain is hungry for knowledge, even Bible knowledge. But he prays because his soul is hungry for God." The effective Bible teacher prays not just that God will give him something to say; he prays because he desires God.

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord condemned the priests because of a grave sin: "The priests quit asking, 'Where is the LORD?' The experts in the law no longer knew Me" (Jeremiah 2:8, *HCSB*). Those who dealt with the law of God did not seek God and thus had no first-hand knowledge of what they taught. The Bible is God's personal Word to the leader before it is lesson material for the next meeting.

### **Practice what you teach.**

"Never traffic in unpracticed truth," Dr. Howard Hendricks used to say. Ezra, the Old Testament priest, scribe, and teacher of God's law, provides a model. Ezra 7:10 says he "determined in his heart to study the law of the LORD, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel." The order is significant: *study*, *obey*, and *teach*. If we haven't studied the Word, we are not ready to teach it. If we're not obeying it, we are not qualified to teach, for we can't understand the truth of the Word if we are not practicing it.

Let's not emphasize lesson preparation to the point that we lose sight of the more important thing—heart preparation. Prepared hearts make prepared lessons. May Christ make a well in the depths our hearts out of which flows the truth of God's Word in sincerity and power.

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This article originally appeared on [lifeway.com/groupministry](http://lifeway.com/groupministry). Visit the blog for more ideas on leading your group.

# 3 REASONS WHY CONSISTENCY BEATS EXCITEMENT

BY MICHAEL KELLEY

Imagine a leaky faucet. Regardless of how hard you twist the knob, it still drips. One drop at a time. Incessantly—drip, drip, drip. The consistency becomes an annoyance pretty quickly. But put in the right environment and given enough time, that same dripping with that same consistency can have an immense amount of power.

That's how canyons are made. Not all at once, but through the power of consistency.

Dripping isn't that exciting, but what it lacks in flash it makes up for in effectiveness. There's a lot to be said for the power of consistency.

When we lead people in the way of discipleship, one of the issues we must deal with is the boring nature of it all. I mean, there are only so many ways you can "spice up" the habits that characterize consistent growth in Christ.

In the end, there will be many days when you and the people you lead won't feel like reading the Bible. They won't feel like praying. They won't feel like memorizing Scripture or serving or doing any of the other practices of spiritual development. Consequently, we might be tempted to reframe or describe spiritual growth as some grand adventure completely free of drudgery. While it's true that at times growing in Christ will feel like that, it's also true that many times it won't.

In the end, what we'll find is that consistency wins over excitement time and time again. And here are a few reasons why:

## 1. Consistency emphasizes faith over experience.

What makes someone get up and do the same thing day after day after day regardless of whether they feel like it or not? You could argue that it's simply being a creature of habit, but you could also say that such action is driven forward by faith.

You do the same spiritual practices because you genuinely believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

You truly believe God hears you when you pray. The alternative to this kind of consistency is a life driven by experience. If that's the case, your spiritual development is like a yo-yo moving up and down with the flippancy of emotion.

**2. Consistency causes roots to grow deep.** When you opt for consistency over excitement, you are developing the kind of practices that will carry you through the seasons of spiritual dryness all of us will encounter. In other words, your roots are growing deep.

When we integrate the same, repeated practices into our lives, day after day, we will find that when we eventually don't feel anything, when we are suffering, when we simply can't pray anymore, that our roots will have extended well past the shallows.

**3. Consistency works into other areas of life.** One of the side benefits of this kind of spiritual discipline is that it will work into other areas of life as well. You'll find, I believe, that not only are you disciplined "spiritually" but physically, emotionally, and mentally as well. But then again, that's why "spiritually" is in quotes, because I seem to remember Jesus saying that we should love God not only spiritually but with every part of ourselves.

Time is a powerful ally. Drip, drip, drip. One drop at a time. And slowly, the landscape changes.

**Michael Kelley** serves as Director of Groups Ministry for Lifeway Christian Resources. He is the author of *Wednesdays Were Pretty Normal: A Boy, Cancer, and God*; *Transformational Discipleship*; and *Boring: Finding an Extraordinary God in an Ordinary Life*. Find him on Twitter: @MichaelKelley.