

LESSON 9

Faithfulness Illustrated

Scripture Focus

2 Timothy 2:3–13

Key Verse

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”
(2 Tim. 2:3).

Overview

The Scripture for this lesson illustrates faithfulness. Paul used a soldier, an athlete, a farmer, himself, and a famous saying to illustrate the theme of faithfulness, which is woven through his letter to Timothy. Paul’s illustrations of faithfulness show that it is an important quality, but not one easily practiced.

Topic

Faithfulness

Theme

Illustrations of faithfulness clearly demonstrate the exertion necessary to be faithful.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will understand that faithfulness requires energy and commit to expending it.

Outline

- I. The Soldier (2 Tim. 2:3, 4)
 - A. Endurance (2:3)
 - B. Singleness of purpose (2:4)
- II. The Athlete (2 Tim. 2:5)
- III. The Farmer (2 Tim. 2:6)
- IV. Paul Himself (2 Tim. 2:8–10)
 - A. Faithful because of God (2:8, 9)
 - B. Faithful for the elect (2:10)
- V. A Famous Saying (2 Tim. 2:11–13)
 - A. Faithfulness (2:11, 12a)
 - B. Unfaithfulness (2:12b, 13)
- VI. Conclusion (2 Tim. 2:7)

Materials

- RBP transparencies 1 and 12
- Lesson 9 case study from resource CD
- 2 Timothy 2:3 verse card from resource CD

Getting Started

Assembly Required

Imagine that you have purchased the electric ride-on toy your child or grandchild has been dreaming of. After getting it home, you notice those fateful words, “Assembly Required,” and the instructions are simply endless words. But all is not lost. Instructions with illustrations for each step are available online!

Ask: Would you use the verbal only instructions, or go online to get the illustrations? Why would you make that choice? How do illustrations help to explain spiritual truths? (Questions 1–3)

Searching the Scriptures

I. The Soldier (2 Tim. 2:3, 4)

A. Endurance (2:3)

The first illustration of faithfulness is the soldier (2 Tim. 2:3). Paul challenged Timothy to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The words “endure hardness” in the Greek contain the additional idea of “with.” Timothy should endure hardness along with him (Paul).

READ: 2 Timothy 2:3. **ASK:** What happens to a soldier if he gives up during hard times? (Question 4)

Paul used the same word for “endure hardship” in 2 Timothy 1:8. Paul used it ask Timothy to be a partaker with him in the afflictions of the gospel.

READ: 2 Timothy 1:8. **ASK:** How can one endure hardness or partake of afflictions? (Question 5)

Living for God and being a faithful testimony of Jesus Christ brings hard times. The soldier of Christ must endure that hardness without fleeing in retreat, and God will provide the strength to do so.

READ: 2 Timothy 2:4. **ASK:** What word in this verse speaks of a very arduous task? (Question 6)

B. Singleness of purpose (2:4)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:4. **ASK:** What is the danger of becoming entangled as a soldier? What are three things you would never lug around with you if you were on a battlefield? (Questions 7, 8)

Singleness of purpose is the main thrust of the illustration of faithfulness as demonstrated by a soldier. A Roman soldier did not get himself entangled

in the affairs of this life, but gave himself wholeheartedly and undividedly to the one who chose him to be a soldier. Likewise, the soldiers of Christ are to be separate from love for the world, dedicated to the Lord, having a single purpose in life and that purpose, to please the Master. A focused purpose of pleasing God will increase our faithfulness.

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 12 with the left third revealed. Write a statement on the transparency that summarizes what we learn about faithfulness from the soldier.

II. The Athlete (2 Tim. 2:5)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:5. **ASK:** What evidence of hard work do you see in this verse? What would you think if you saw a person who was fifty pounds overweight standing at the starting line with a group of world-class sprinters? (Questions 9, 10)

The second illustration of faithfulness is that of an athlete. The words “strive for masteries” and then “strive” (v. 5) are both the same word in the Greek—*athleo*, from which we get our English word “athlete.”

If a man competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes lawfully, according to the rules. The point of this illustration is found in the word “lawfully.” Our faithful service to Christ must be done in accordance with the laws of Christ. Faithfulness is more than working for God; it is working for God within the boundaries of God’s rules. Sometimes we speak of doing God’s work in God’s way.

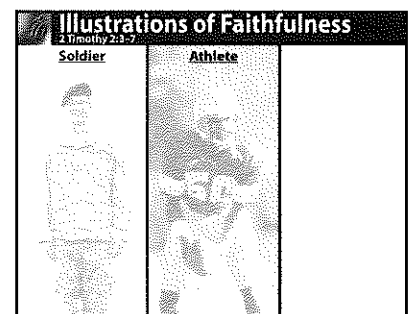
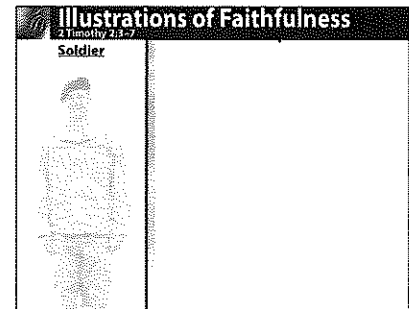
ASK: What measures have sports taken recently to ensure that athletes are playing by the rules? **READ:** 2 Timothy 1:13. **ASK:** How would you connect 1:13 and 2:5? (Questions 11, 12)

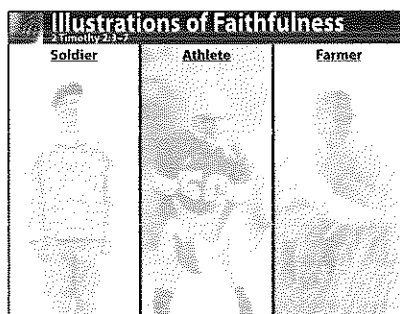
TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 12 with the right third covered. Write a statement on the transparency that summarizes what we learn about faithfulness from the athlete.

III. The Farmer (2 Tim. 2:6)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:6. **ASK:** What were some tough jobs that a farmer in Paul’s day had to do? (Question 13)

The third illustration of faithfulness is that of a farmer. The key idea in verse 6 is the word “labor.” It means to work to the point of exhaustion, pain, fatigue;





to pour yourself into the toil until you are exhausted. One is reminded very pointedly that faithfulness involves hard work. It is keeping at it constantly like the farmer keeps tending his crops.

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 12. Write a statement on the transparency that summarizes what we learn about faithfulness from the farmer.

The three illustrations of soldier, athlete, and farmer show that faithfulness involves single-minded purpose, careful obedience, and hard work. What a challenge!

A sub-theme runs through these three illustrations: Faithfulness will be rewarded by God. Paul said that the soldier has the single-minded purpose of pleasing him who has chosen him. The Christian soldier wars so that he may hear the words of a pleased Commander, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

The athlete strives for the masteries that he might be crowned. The farmer who works hard is the first partaker of the fruits. He is the first one to enter into the rewards of his labor. The words of Jesus Christ at the end of the Beatitudes come to mind. Having just spoken about being persecuted and reviled and suffering, He said to rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great reward awaits in Heaven (Matt. 5:12). If works are of the quality of gold, silver and precious stone, they shall receive a reward from God (1 Cor. 3:11-15). God will not forget a person's labor, but He will remember it and so reward it (Heb. 6:10).

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 22:12. **ASK:** Who will reward us for our faithful service, and when will we be rewarded? (Question 14)

IV. Paul Himself (2 Tim. 2:8-10)

Paul suffered trouble (v. 9). He was counted as an "evil doer." This word is found only four times in the New Testament (here and in Luke 23:32, 33, and 39). It is translated "malefactor" in Luke and was used of those thieves who were crucified along with Christ. Paul suffered for the gospel as someone who had committed a capital crime. In fact, he was facing death as he wrote. However, Paul endured all these troubles and did not let them turn him from being faithful to God (v. 10a). He revealed two factors that aided him in being faithful.

A. Faithful because of God (2:8, 9)

Paul showed that the faithfulness of God motivated him to be faithful to God. He said to remember Jesus Christ as an encouragement. Jesus was born of the seed of David in fulfillment of prophecy. He suffered to the point of death, but God vindicated Him and raised Him from the dead, again in fulfillment of prophecy. God is faithful to His Word.

READ: 2 Timothy 2:8. **ASK:** If David were to appear with a message of God's faithfulness to his promises, what do you think would be part of his message? (Question 15)

These truths were according to the gospel that God had entrusted to Paul and for which Paul suffered (v. 9), so Timothy and believers today should take heart. Even though suffering occurs, God will be faithful to His Word to vindicate and reward the sufferer.

Paul sat in bonds as he wrote to Timothy, "But [strong contrast] the word of God [was] not bound." The Word of God cannot be bound. Throughout history people have tried to bind, ban, or destroy Scripture, but they never succeed. God's faithfulness in raising Christ and working through His Word incited Paul to faithfulness.

ASK: What often happens to the spread of God's Word in an area where people are trying to suppress it? (Question 16)

B. Faithful for the elect (2:10)

Paul endured all things for the sake of the elect, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (v. 10). Paul taught the doctrine of divine election—that God had sovereignly chosen some, out of all who deserve Hell, to be saved.

Perhaps the most frequent and sincere objection to the doctrine of election is the claim that it stifles evangelistic zeal. There is some truth to this charge, but only because sinful flesh perverts the doctrine and uses it as an excuse for indolence.

Just as we must not reject the doctrine of God's grace or freedom in Christ because some twist it into an excuse to sin (Rom. 6:14, 15), likewise, one should not reject the doctrine of divine election on the grounds that it has led some to laziness. The solution is to reject the misuse of Scriptural truth.

Far from being a hindrance for evangelism in Paul's life, election was a motivation to evangelism (2 Tim. 2:10). And that is precisely what Paul said to Timothy. Paul viewed himself as God's messenger to take the gospel of salvation to all men, so that those whom God had chosen would hear it and believe. He knew there would be results from his preaching. And since he was assured that people would be saved, he was willing to go through any kind of opposition so that those whom God had chosen would hear the message, believe it, and obtain salvation.

God ordains not only the ends, but the means as well. He has ordained that the chosen will be saved through the hearing of the gospel and the setting apart of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13). Paul wanted to be part of God's program to bring His chosen to Himself, by letting them hear the gospel. The doctrine of election was a motivator to faithfulness for Paul.

ASK: Whose job is it to save people? Whose job is it to witness? Is either one less important than the other? (Question 17)

Paul's experience in Corinth (Acts 18) illustrated that God's election was a motivator for evangelism. When opposition arose and the people blasphemed, the Lord spoke to Paul in a night vision. He told Paul not to be afraid but to be faithful. He said He would be with Paul and that He had many people in Corinth. God would protect Paul because He had many elect in Corinth and He planned to use Paul to reach them.

V. A Famous Saying (2 Tim. 2:11–13)

A well-known saying illustrates faithfulness. Verses 11–13 of 2 Timothy 2 may have been a hymn that the early Christians sang. If not a hymn, it must have been a saying so well-known that it was almost a cliché. The saying was one that could be counted upon because it remained accurate and true.

The saying is made up of four couplets, each one beginning with "if." The first two couplets refer to faithfulness, and the last two couplets refer to unfaithfulness.

A. Faithfulness (2:11, 12a)

The saying begins with the words, "If we be dead with him" (v. 11). Romans 6 contains the great truth that every saved person is positionally dead to sin. It also says that Christians should reckon themselves dead to sin, which is the practical application of that truth.

If the believer has committed himself as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1) so that he daily serves God as one who is dead to sin and alive to righteousness, then he will also live with Christ. If one is dead with Him in his service on this earth, he will live with Him in Heaven.

The second couplet also refers to faithfulness. The word translated "suffer" (2 Tim. 2:12) is exactly the same word found in verse 10 and translated "endure." If one is faithful in suffering or enduring difficulty with Christ, he shall also reign with Him. Those who suffer with Him will be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:17). The light affliction, which is but for a moment, works a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17). There is affliction, and there is glory. Affliction is light and momentary, while the glory is far more weighty and eternal.

EVALUATE: Affliction for Christ is always bad and we should pray that we never have to experience it. (Question 18)

B. Unfaithfulness (2:12b, 13)

Paul's last two couplets deal with unfaithfulness (vv. 11–13). In the final couplet, the word "believe" (v. 13) can mean either "believe" or "be faithful," so the couplet could be translated "believe not" or "be unfaithful." Perhaps the idea of unfaithfulness would be more appropriate. First of all, the general

context of the book is faithfulness. Secondly, the immediate context says that God abides faithful, an adjectival form of the same word as “believe.” Of course it would be absurd to say that God continues to believe; He continues to be faithful. The same adjective in verse 11 means a faithful saying, not a believing saying.

If we are unfaithful, God still abides faithful. He cannot deny Himself. There are some things God cannot do, not because He lacks the strength but because they would be self-contradictory. God will never contradict Himself. He always operates in harmony with the totality of His attributes. He cannot lie, because He is truth.

Some have interpreted this final couplet as a word of encouragement—that if we are unfaithful, He still abides faithful, and so He will keep us and save us even if we are unfaithful. That interpretation seems to violate the flow of thought. The first two couplets spoke of faithfulness and the blessings that result. The last two speak about unfaithfulness and the judgment that results. Just as living with God and reigning with Him fit together as the two blessings of faithfulness, so His denying us must fit together with His abiding faithful.

ASK: How can God’s faithfulness be a warning?
(Question 19)

It is not possible for a genuine Christian to be lost. The Bible clearly teaches eternal security, or the perseverance of the saints. True believers are saved forever. But the Bible also clearly teaches that there are many false professors. There are people who say they believe in Christ but who do not. The evidence of true faith is good works or godliness in living, as we saw in our study of Titus (Titus 3:8) and as James so forcefully says (James 2:14–26). John declared that we have assurance of salvation because we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3, 4).

Paul warns, by use of this faithful saying, that if one makes denial of God the theme of his life, that one was never saved in the first place. God will deny Him in faithfulness to His own warnings and judgments. He cannot do otherwise, for that would be to deny Himself.

This moves faithfulness out of the realm of the optional and puts it into the realm of the necessary. Paul did not pour out his heart here merely to say that faithfulness is a nice option and things would be much smoother if Christians practiced it. No, faithfulness is necessary as evidence of genuine conversion, as well as because God commands it. It is also necessary for the continuation of the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints.

READ: 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2. **ASK:** What is a basic requirement for stewards? (Question 20)

VI. Conclusion (2 Tim. 2:7)

Paul notified Timothy to consider what he was being told; the apostle’s words were the very message of God. Timothy was to consider the message and then the Lord would give him understanding.

Here Paul alludes to meditation and illumination. Timothy would fully grasp the message of God as he meditated on it and God enlightened him to understand it.

DISCUSS: Why will faithfulness to God never precede faithfulness to reading and meditating on God's Word? (Question 21)

It is difficult for Americans in the "rat race" to find time for meditation. And with miniaturized electronic devices of all kinds, the mind can be constantly bombarded from without. Christians today should carve out time to consider God's Word, with prayer for the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. The renewing of the mind through meditation and illumination makes faithfulness to God a practical possibility.

Use the case study for lesson 9 as desired.

Marks of the Faithful	
1. Forgives others as God forgives.	8. Guards and teaches sound doctrine.
2. Remembers and shares God's forgiveness.	9. Ministers with energy and commitment.
3. Seeks and supports godly leadership.	10.
4. Lives a genuine, godly life.	11.
5. Serves zealously in light of Christ's Return.	12.
6. Ministers thoughtfully and intentionally.	13.
7. Serves faithfully in the face of fears.	

Making It Personal

Faithful Meditation

Ask: When was the last time you spent more than a few moments considering God's Word? (Question 22) If you are struggling with being faithful to God, the first thing to consider is your time in His Word. We cannot expect to be faithful to God without using His agent for change—the Bible.

Give It Your All

Knowing the importance of faithfulness to God and the exertion displayed by faithful people in this lesson, plan a specific way you can give your all to faithfully serve Christ this week. (Question 23)

Review Transparency

Use transparency 1 to review the Mark of the Faithful for this lesson: Ministers with energy and commitment.

Memory Verse

Distribute copies of the 2 Timothy 2:3 verse card from the resource CD. Encourage the learners to memorize the verse.

NEXT LESSON

Encourage your learners to complete lesson 10 before the next class.