

Lesson 6 | July 7, 2024

Exemplify Faithful Christian Service

Study Text: 1 Timothy 4:9–13; 2 Timothy 2:11–16; Philemon 8–16

Central Truth: Christian servants teach by both word and deed.

Key Verse: 1 Timothy 4:10

Therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe (KJV).

This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to describe Paul’s continual focus on Christ.
- Students will be transparent with one another in their struggles.
- Students will disciple (or be disciplined by) fellow believers in evangelism and Christian decision-making.

Introducing the Study

Say: Basketball superstar Charles Barkley once made an infamous commercial in which he declared, “I am not a role model.” His point was that dunking a basketball didn’t make him someone kids should emulate. However, many felt he was excusing poor behavior and avoiding real responsibility. As God’s people, we are meant to be role models, showing the world what it looks like to follow Jesus.

Opening Activity—Role Models

Ask. Who are some current role models in today’s world? Who has served as a role model in your life?

Say: Paul told the Corinthians, “You should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, NLT). It is a Christian’s responsibility to speak and act in a way that shows others how to follow Jesus. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul’s instructions for Timothy—by way of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration—continue to speak to us today. Timothy had been a firsthand witness to much of Paul’s life and ministry, and Paul’s actions clearly spoke as loudly as his words. We must also live as conscientious examples for fellow believers, honestly sharing our struggles and victories. This is how the DNA of faith is passed from generation to generation.

Part 1—Be an Example to Fellow Believers

Acknowledge the Struggle

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Timothy 4:9. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.

10. For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.

11. These things command and teach.

12. Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

13. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

2 Timothy 2:11. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

12. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:

13. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

14. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

15. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Philemon 8. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,

9. Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

10. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:

11. Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:

12. Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:

13. Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

14. But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

15. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

16. Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

New Living Translation

1 Timothy 4:9. This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it.

10. This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers.

11. Teach these things and insist that everyone learn them.

12. Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.

13. Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them.

2 Timothy 2:11. This is a trustworthy saying: If we die with him, we will also live with him.

12. If we endure hardship, we will reign with him. If we deny him, he will deny us.

13. If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is.

14. Remind everyone about these things, and command them in God's presence to stop fighting over words. Such arguments are useless, and they can ruin those who hear them.

15. Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

Philemon 8. That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do.

9. But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.

10. I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison.

11. Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us.

12. I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

13. I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf.

14. But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced.

15. It seems that you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever.

16. He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

1 Timothy 4:9–10

Say: Paul acknowledged that Christian life and ministry involve hardship and struggle, yet his letters convey a profound sense of joy. His most famous joy-filled epistle, the letter to the Philippians, was penned from a Roman prison where he contemplated the possibility of execution. Paul lived out the principle he shared with them: “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21, KJV). Being open and honest about our struggles is an important part of being an example to fellow believers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The trustworthy saying in 1 Timothy 4:8—that “training for godliness” (NLT) promises benefits “in this life and in the life to come”—led Paul to reflect on the hard work and struggles that were part of his own training. In 2 Corinthians 11:22–33 he detailed a long list of hardships he had undergone in his ministry. His was not an easy road, and he explicitly invited Timothy and other ministry associates to join him in suffering.

But Paul clearly understood his purpose, which gave meaning to his suffering. God had called him to declare the good news of salvation, especially to the Gentiles. Every mile he walked and every rejection he experienced were worthwhile if he “might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22, KJV) from the bondage of sin. Considering himself to have been the worst of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), Paul knew the life-transforming salvation of God and was desperate to see others receive the same blessings. “This is why we work hard and continue to struggle” (4:10, NLT).

The living God is “the Savior of all people” and “particularly of all believers” (verse 10, NLT). Paul wanted to move people from the first category to the second, because while Jesus is indeed the only Savior, God’s desire is that all would come to Him for salvation (2:4). God is patient and “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, KJV). Paul felt keenly both the responsibility and the privilege of sharing in that ministry of reconciliation as an ambassador of Christ.

Like Paul, we must put our hope in the living God. This hope puts every present suffering into heavenly perspective. We still struggle, but sharing those struggles with fellow believers helps both us and them. Despite the inevitability of hard work and difficulty in this world, we can have hope because of who God is and all He’s done.

Discuss

? Paul told Timothy, “This is why we work hard and continue to struggle” (1 Timothy 4:10, NLT). What was the “this” he was referring to? What is the reason in your own life?

? What struggles have you faced with the Lord’s help that you could share to encourage others? Have others been genuine and real in sharing their struggles with you? If so, what effect did that have on you?

Resource Packet Item 1: Paul’s Hardships

Distribute the worksheet and read the passage it references. Then discuss the questions together or encourage students to answer them on their own.

Live, Love, Lead by Example

1 Timothy 4:11–13

Say: Paul instructed Timothy to be an example others could follow. We should strive to live exemplary lives as well. The goal is for all of God’s people to become the kingdom of priests He intends, embodying His character so the world can see the light of His love and truth. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Teaching is more than transferring information. Explaining doctrine to someone isn’t enough; we must put it into practice. Paul modeled faith and service for Timothy, and he insisted that Timothy do the same for others.

Timothy was a relatively young man. This Greek term translated “youth” could refer to anyone up to the age of forty, but it was most commonly used for people under thirty. Since Timothy had joined Paul’s ministry team in Lystra before ad 50, perhaps in his mid-teens, and this letter was written in the early 60s, he may have been around thirty. Timothy did not yet merit the status granted by the culture to older individuals, but Paul encouraged Timothy not to let that deter him. Instead, he should exercise leadership in the community and set an example for all to follow.

Paul challenged Timothy—and God charges us—to be an example “in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity” (1 Timothy 4:12, NLT). There were plenty of deceptive religious examples in Timothy’s day, just as there are today. Instead of giving in to foolish arguments, Timothy’s speech was to “be gracious and attractive” (Colossians 4:6, NLT). His behavior should align with the true message of the gospel so he could be a conduit for God’s love. And his faith had to be strong and true, translating into a life of purity (1 John 3:3). So must ours.

Until Paul arrived, Timothy’s tasks were to “focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers and teaching them” (1 Timothy 4:13, NLT). In that era, literacy was low and access to manuscripts was limited, so public reading was the only way for many people to encounter Scripture. As Timothy carried out his mission, they would hear the Word of God and be instructed in it.

Discuss

- ? What ministry role would someone of Timothy’s age likely be filling in a modern-day church?
- ? Paul told Timothy, “Don’t let anyone think less of you because you are young” (1 Timothy 4:12, NLT). In what ways might we be guilty of looking down on younger ministers? Why?
- ? What is the difference between exhortation and teaching? How do both relate to the reading of the Scriptures?

Part 2—Suffering, Dialogue, and Teaching

Joint-Heirs with Jesus

2 Timothy 2:11–13

Say: The believer’s primary example is that of Christ Jesus himself. Paul gave a memorable, poetic description of what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and be held by His faithfulness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

All of Paul’s New Testament letters are Christocentric (meaning Jesus Christ was at the center of them). Being “in Christ” is the essence of what it means to be a Christian. It has been suggested that this theme comes from Paul’s initial encounter with Christ when he heard the words, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4, NLT). Reflecting on that Damascus Road event, the concept that persecuting Christians meant persecuting Jesus himself took firm root in Paul’s theology. He understood a Christian’s life is to be completely “in Christ” in a dynamic sense. The trustworthy saying in this passage reflects this reality.

“If we die with him we will also live with him” (2 Timothy 2:11, NLT). Similarly, Paul reminded the church in Rome that “when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death . . . we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives” (Romans 6:3–4, NLT).

“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12, KJV). Paul had told the Romans that we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17, KJV). The Christian life is partaking in the life of Jesus; we are “joint-heirs” with Him—both in what He had to endure and in the glory to come in His kingdom.

“If we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Timothy 2:12, KJV). This comes directly from the warning of Jesus himself, that “whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:33, KJV).

“If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is” (2 Timothy 2:13, NLT). Paul, always aware of the faithfulness of the Lord in his own life, chose to conclude this trustworthy saying on a positive note. Our hope of salvation is grounded in the very character of God.

Discuss

? Did the final sentence of the trustworthy saying surprise you? What might be the significance of the way Paul changes the pattern in that final line?

? How does our suffering change when seen in the light of Jesus’ suffering? What meaning does it acquire?

Resource Packet Item 2: Trustworthy Sayings

Distribute the worksheet and read the Scripture passages. Then answer the questions and work together as a class to write your own “trustworthy saying.”

Seek God’s Approval

2 Timothy 2:14–15

Say: The false teachers in Ephesus wanted to engage others in useless battles over words. Timothy was to shut down these vain arguments, and instead pour his energy into studying God’s Word in order to correctly handle the gospel message. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Timothy was to keep reminding people of the kind of faithful endurance in Christ Paul emphasized in his trustworthy saying (2 Timothy 2:11–13). Along with this, he was to confront those who were causing problems in the church. Their “word-fighting” was not only useless, but it was damaging, leading people into speculative, mythical nonsense. Those who listened would be dragged down to spiritual ruin. Paul’s word choice—“Command them in God’s presence to stop” (verse 14, NLT)—shows the serious danger of such pointless arguments and the division they cause.

Paul’s command to “study to shew thyself approved” (verse 15, KJV) often leads people to think he was specifying research or other methods of acquiring knowledge in order to interpret Scripture well. Although that’s a good idea, it is not Paul’s point. English word meanings have changed since the King James Version was translated, and “work hard” (NLT) captures Paul’s meaning more accurately than the overly specific “study” (KJV).

The aim of this hard work—whatever form it may take—is to “present yourself to God and receive his approval” (NLT). Such a good worker has no reason to be ashamed, and they are equipped for “rightly dividing” (KJV) or “correctly explaining” (NLT) the word of truth, which Ephesians 1:13 defines as “the gospel of your salvation” (KJV). Salvation is the centerpiece of the gospel, and with its eternal consequences, it is the most important message for us to be able to explain correctly. Working hard toward that ability certainly includes “study” (in our sense of the word), but it is not limited to that.

Discuss

? What is comparable in our own day to the useless and speculative “word-fighting” Paul sought to prohibit? What is its effect on those exposed to it? What should be done to rid the church of it? ? How can a believer “work hard” to receive God’s approval? Why is this important since we are accepted already by God “in Christ,” on the basis of His saving work?

Part 3—Commit to Disciple Fellow Believers

Appeal to Accept Onesimus Back

Philemon 8–12

Say: Jesus called His first disciples with the words, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” (Matthew 4:19, NLT). All of Jesus’ followers should know how to bring people to Him. And we should model and teach evangelism to others, encouraging them to grow in this area. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Because Philemon and his church were intimately acquainted with Onesimus’s story, Paul didn’t include all the details we might want to know. We do know Onesimus, Philemon’s slave, had likely wronged Philemon in some way—perhaps stealing from him—and then ran away.

Onesimus may have sought Paul out and come to him for counsel, even requesting that he act as a mediator with Philemon.

We also know Paul led Onesimus to the Lord: “I became his father in the faith while here in prison” (Philemon 10, NLT). Onesimus, whose name was common for a slave and meant “useful,” had become useful on another level. When Paul made this play on words in verse 11, he was not implying Onesimus was someone to be used; rather, he was explaining that coming to know Jesus had brought real change and imparted true worth to Onesimus’s life.

Paul wrote this letter on behalf of Onesimus to Philemon and the church that met in his house, probably in the city of Colossae. Whatever the prior relationship and conflict between Philemon and Onesimus, they were now brothers in the Lord (verse 10). Paul never overtly questions why Philemon didn’t lead Onesimus to the Lord, but by setting this example of “fishing for people,” Paul challenged Philemon and his church to do better. He sent Onesimus back to face Philemon so that Onesimus could repent and Philemon could show kindness.

Discuss

? How should Paul’s method of handling Onesimus be an example for us?

? What are some ways we can show the kind of radical forgiveness and hospitality that Paul asked Philemon to show?

Appeal to Philemon as a Brother

Philemon 13–16

Say: You’ve probably heard the saying, “Give someone a fish and you feed them for a day; teach them to fish and you feed them for a lifetime.” This sums up the way Paul disciplined Philemon. He did not merely want to get Philemon to act like a Christian in this situation; he wanted to teach Philemon how to think like a Christian. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul had made plain in Philemon 8–9 that his authoritative position gave him warrant to command Philemon’s obedience, but he preferred to make it a request. Paul reiterated that he wanted Philemon to want to comply, not to be compelled (verse 14). Verse 13 implies that Paul wanted Onesimus to join his missionary efforts, working alongside him while he continued to minister from prison. If Philemon would allow this, it would be like Philemon himself was helping Paul.

Verses 15 and 16 indicate Paul’s heart for reconciliation between these men who were now brothers in Christ. This was a new relationship, transformed by the gospel and infused with God’s love. The King James Version follows the Greek quite well in verse 16, declaring Onesimus “a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord.” It suggests that this brotherhood should not be confined to the spiritual, but should make a difference in the daily, practical world. It seems Paul desired not only Philemon’s consent to allow Onesimus to work with Paul, but for Onesimus to be free, as well: “He is no longer like a slave to you” (verse 16, NLT). Their working relationship needed to change.

Paul did not compel Philemon's obedience. Rather, he embodied the gospel of Jesus Christ, demonstrating what it would look like if Philemon continued to learn and grow, becoming more mature and Christlike. This experience would change both Onesimus and Philemon. The fact that the church preserved this letter suggests that the outcome was indeed positive. There can be incredible benefits to the Kingdom when believers exhort one another to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

Resource Packet Item 3: The Rest of Onesimus's Story

Distribute the worksheet and have students consider how God might use them to bring someone to Jesus and change the trajectory of their life.

Discuss

? In what ways do you relate to Philemon? To Onesimus? To Paul?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God desires for us to be living examples to fellow believers, acknowledging the struggles we face and guiding others to meet their own challenges. Jesus' suffering gives meaning to our struggles, and His resurrection gives us life. As we follow Him faithfully, we should continually teach and learn from one another so that the Kingdom continues to grow.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Identify three believers who you know are following your example as you follow Jesus.
- What is one way you could be a better example for those three people?
- Begin each day this week with the prayer, "Conform my life to Yours today, Jesus!"

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Will You Commit to Discipleship?

1 Kings 19:11–21

Tuesday:

Will You Remain Faithful?

2 Kings 2:1–9

Wednesday:

Will You Choose to Disciple Others?

2 Kings 2:10–18

Thursday:

Will You Follow Me?

Mark 8:27–36

Friday:

Do You Understand My Example?

Matthew 26:26–35

Saturday:

Will You Follow My Direction?

John 21:15–23

