Diligent

Believers find truth and direction by studying God’s Word.

2 Timothy 2:14-26

MEMORY VERSE: 2 Timothy 2:15

READ 2 Timothy 2:14-26, First Thoughts (p. 94), and Understand the Context (p. 94). Note the different words and phrases used to encourage Timothy to focus on God’s truth.

STUDY 2 Timothy 2:14-26, using Explore the Text on pages 95–99. As you read, focus on how to be diligent as a worker for Christ. Reflect on the following statement as you prepare: One of the catastrophic consequences of word wars is the precious time and energy it wastes on useless arguments (PSG, p. 84).

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 100–101) and More Ideas (p. 102). Consult QuickSource or Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible for additional ideas. Consider how you might use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 102) with your group.

GROW from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible).

GATHER the following items: ☐ Personal Study Guides; ☐ Everyday bowls and a special bowl; ☐ Bible concordances for the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 88); ☐ Articles on people who are diligent for Focus Attention under More Ideas (p. 102). Prepare to display the following Pack Items: ☐ PACK ITEM 3 (Poster: Metaphors in Paul’s Letters); ☐ PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: First-Century Heresies); and ☐ PACK ITEM 6 (Key Verse: 2 Timothy 2:15). Make copies for the group of: ☐ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: First-Century Heresies).
KEY DOCTRINE
Evangelism and Missions
The new birth of man’s spirit by God’s Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others (Gal. 5:6).

FIRST THOUGHTS
Diligent. We use this word to describe a hardworking brick mason artfully stacking brick upon brick to frame a house. We see it in the sweat of a dutiful athlete who endures painstaking workouts to improve performance. Diligent is an adjective referring to conscientious and attentive devotion. We can also use the word to point to someone who refuses to give up. Paul reminded Timothy of the importance of remaining diligent as a follower of Christ.

(In PSG, p. 82) **Name some examples of diligence you see in the world. What are some ways in which diligence is needed in the Christian life?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT
2 TIMOTHY 2:14-26
Paul’s point of view shifted abruptly in verse 14. After focusing on Timothy’s personal faith, Paul moved to how Timothy should deal with the false teachers. The apostle pulled no punches when he attacked the forces arrayed against the church. He did not hesitate to name individuals who exemplified people who had abandoned him and the gospel.

At the beginning of chapter 2, Paul urged Timothy to invest himself in the lives of faithful men who, in turn, would disciple others in a cycle of spiritual reproduction. Part of that instruction warned these church leaders about the pseudo-gospel and instructed them how to deal with the false teachers. One of the best approaches to teaching requires providing a good role model. As Timothy stood firm in his ministry of the Word, his charges would witness the courage and faithfulness they should follow.

We must look forward to chapter 3 to understand the context that provided such urgency in Paul’s words. His passion for Timothy and his concern for the church lay in the anticipation of perilous days. Their struggle would not only involve the latter days before Christ’s return but also the current antagonism of a worldly culture determined to destroy them. The church was birthed in a counter-cultural revolution against which the secular system would rage.

Paul’s love for his son in the ministry brought him back repeatedly to pointed pleas for diligence. Timothy received Paul’s charge to be conscientious in his handling of the Word and in his personal deportment. Not only did Timothy’s ministry require his faithfulness, but the well being of the church was also at stake. The vulnerable believers at Ephesus needed their pastor to show the way to follow Christ and to protect them in the process. This section of the epistle helped to provide a strategic road map for the preacher and his people.
EXPLORE THE TEXT

TWO GROUPS (2 Tim. 2:14-19)

Like Timothy, believers often feel the tension between a Christ-less culture and our commitment to Jesus. As we consider Paul’s instructions to Timothy, we not only gain insight into the dangers arrayed against our faith, but also we are emboldened to a diligent defense of the gospel. We can learn from Paul as he directed Timothy to diligently study God’s Word in contrast to those who were distracted by worldly philosophies. Paul told Timothy to warn people against the danger of basing one’s life on something other than the gospel.

VERSE 14

The pronoun them may refer to the church at large but more likely points back to the faithful men Timothy was to train (v. 2). The admonition to remind suggests new ideas were not needed but rather reinforcement of truths previously taught. The reference to these things included the fundamentals of the gospel laid out in verses 8-13 as well as the admonitions about staying focused on what really mattered to the faith.

Paul’s caution about how they should not fight about words harkens back to the opening of his first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3-4). Apparently, the false teachers had continued to engage members of the Ephesian church in debates that Paul termed useless. Pursuit of these ideas would result in the ruin of those who listen. The idea of ruin does not mean believers could lose their salvation. It might refer to Christians whose effectiveness was lost in the confusion of unprofitable debate. More likely, it included non-believers who were deceived by the false teachers.

The gospel enterprise cannot be undertaken as a hobby.

VERSES 15-18

To refute improper doctrine, Timothy needed to be diligent in studying Scripture. The gospel enterprise cannot be undertaken as a hobby. Understanding and teaching God’s Word correctly involves significant effort. Timothy was a worker in the Lord’s fields. God entrusted Timothy with a flock of believers. His primary responsibility was to use the Word of God to feed, guide, and protect them. If he were faithful, he would have no reason to be ashamed before the Lord.

Because of the importance of his work, Timothy had to avoid anything that detracted from the centrality of Scripture. Paul specifically addressed irreverent and empty speech. By irreverent the apostle meant profane talk that was disrespectful and blasphemous. The phrase empty speech translates a single compound word referring to speech that contains no substance. Not only are people who engage in such conversation not edifying, but also they hinder people who are trying to follow the truth.
Paul’s reference to their teaching (v. 17) infers the people described in verse 16. These people employed blasphemous and empty speech that opposed the gospel of truth. Paul likened false teaching to an infection that would spread like gangrene. If believers do not take diligent measures to avoid and refute such heresy, it will contaminate person after person, church after church.

Two examples of such false teachers included Hymenaeus and Philetus. Paul had warned Timothy about Hymenaeus in his first letter (1 Tim. 1:20). Along with Alexander, Paul had turned this evil person over to Satan because of his blasphemous talk. Apparently, Timothy had not been able to restrain Hymenaeus in the time between the two epistles.

We do not know anything about Philetus apart from this reference. As seen in the following verse, he and Hymenaeus were engaged in heretical teaching about the resurrection. Interestingly, in this second epistle Paul did not mention Alexander. Since Paul’s first letter to Timothy, Alexander may have left the church or died. Another possibility is that Alexander repented and broke away from Hymenaeus. In any case, Hymenaeus had found another collaborator in Philetus.

Paul’s indictment included the fact that these two men had departed from the truth. The doctrine of the resurrection includes anticipation of Christ’s resurrection and the bodily resurrection of believers who die. While Christ had experienced resurrection three days after His crucifixion, the resurrection of believers is a future event that will take place at His Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:16). This second application of the term resurrection was the crux of the heresy that Paul wanted Timothy to oppose.

The two troublemakers began teaching that the resurrection has already taken place. In essence, they misled believers into thinking that the issue of resurrection applied only to Christ and not to the future state of Christians. In doing so, they were ruining the faith of some. This phrase should not be taken to mean that people were losing their salvation by this doctrinal confusion. Rather, the word picture Paul painted suggests the controversy was upsetting their understanding of the truth.

VERSE 19

Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, bearing this inscription: The Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness.

Thank God for the powerful word nevertheless. In spite of determined efforts to contradict the truth, the gospel remains God’s solid foundation. In his first epistle, Paul claimed that the church itself was part of that firm foundation as it championed the gospel (1 Tim. 3:15). Both analogies point back to Christ who is the foundation of the truth and of the church (1 Cor. 3:11). No matter what onslaught the enemy might make against the gospel, it stands firm.

An inscription might commonly be written on a prominent structure. In the case of God’s foundation, the inscription points to two primary precepts. Both are reminiscent of a Mosaic statement (Num. 16:5). First, the Lord knows those who are his. The reference in the book of Numbers refers back to the Hebrews who rebelled against Moses and, consequently, forsook God’s lordship. God knew those who belonged to Him and those who said they believed but whose lives belied their professions.
Second, the Scripture insists that everyone who calls on the name of
the Lord should demonstrate his or her authenticity by turning away from
wickedness. The faithful ones would prove to be holy before the Lord. Like
Korah of Moses’ day, Hymenaeus and Philetus failed the test.
If we would avoid being led astray, we must continue to study God’s
Word. We can stand firm only by diligent investigation of Scripture and
faithful obedience to it.

(In PSG, p. 86) How does faithfully studying the Bible help a believer avoid
useless and false debates? Can a person know the difference between
empty speech and edifying speech without studying the Bible? Explain.

TWO VESSELS (2 TIM. 2:20-22)

VERSES 20-21
The various kinds of vessels in a house demonstrate the importance of
being prepared for God’s use. Some of the implements were made of gold
and silver, while others were wood and clay. Each had a purpose, but some
had an honorable use and others were dishonorable. The distinction of
honorable and dishonorable could simply refer to special versus ordinary
uses. Yet, Paul used a word for honorable that means “precious,” while the
term translated dishonorable means “shameful.” His point was that within
the house, perhaps a representation of the church, some people fulfilled
God’s purpose while others were not so faithful.

Paul wanted Timothy to encourage anyone who was engaged in
dishonorable activities to purify himself by eliminating such elements
from his life. Purification is two-fold. First, the blood of Christ purifies
believers from sin upon their repentance from sin and faith toward Him.
Second, believers participate in purifying themselves by removing sinful
matters from their lives. As a result, they will be a special instrument,
like the gold or silver vessels.

Paul used three descriptive words and phrases to describe why such an
instrument is honorable before the Lord. First, it is set apart. The Greek
word used here is the same one from which we get “holy” or “sanctified.”
Someone who repents from sinful acts and attitudes and turns to the Lord
is set apart from worldly matters and is set apart for God.

Second, such a person is useful to the Master. God will not use people
who cling to sin. His Holy Spirit grieves over believers who live unholy lives.
However, when we experience genuine contrition and ask forgiveness,
God’s Spirit empowers us to fulfill His plans. Notice, the vessel is not useful
in and of itself, but as it is employed by the Master. In His hands, we find
purpose and value.

Third, the purified person is prepared for every good work. This
statement should not be seen as a promise that godly people can do
everything, but rather that the work of purification prepares them for

VERSES 20-21
20 Now in a large house
there are not only gold
and silver vessels, but
also those of wood
and clay; some for
honorable use and
some for dishonorable.
21 So if anyone purifies
himself from anything
dishonorable, he will be
a special instrument,
set apart, useful to the
Master, prepared for
every good work.
anything God wants to do through them. The concept of *good* does not mean intrinsic goodness but employs the idea of moral goodness as imparted by God. The works are *good* because they are accomplished by the Lord through His people who have been prepared through purification and holiness.

**VERSE 22**

Similarly, Paul urged Timothy to purify himself for God’s continued use. His admonition did not suggest that Timothy had succumbed to worldly temptations. Knowing the rigors of spiritual battle, Paul cautioned his protégé to be diligent in maintaining the right course in life. He used two contrasting images to make his points.

First, Timothy should **flee from youthful passions.** The imperative nature of the word *flee* demonstrates the urgency of this issue. Knowing the dangers, believers cannot play around with such desires but must take deliberate action to remove themselves from any temptation. Although some scholars suggest the word *passions* refers to immaturity rather than sensuality, Timothy was subject to the same physical drives as any other young adult.

Next, Timothy should **pursue** a lifestyle that would be godly and useful for the Lord. The four elements were not meant to comprise an exhaustive list of virtues but were examples of the kind of traits Timothy should seek. This statement calls to mind a similar warning in Paul’s first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:11).

By **righteousness,** Paul meant the quality of being right with God. This kind of righteousness is imparted by God to believers through Christ. It is His righteousness that the Christian lives out in a way that honors God. (See Titus 3:5; Phil. 3:9.)

Similarly, **faith** not only is the means of salvation, it is needed in serving God. God’s righteousness and faith are wound intrinsically together. The just, or righteous person must live by faith (Rom. 1:17). This kind of faith endures despite temptations or persecution (Heb. 10:23,38).

A godly person also pursues **love** and **peace.** God’s love stands in stark contrast to the passions of worldly love. God’s love gives; the world’s love takes. God’s love seeks the good of the one loved; the world’s love selfishly fulfills personal desires. When believers love with godly love, they naturally experience **peace** with God and with other people.

The concluding phrase of verse 22 could apply in two different ways, both of which would be true. First, Paul may have emphasized that **those who call on the Lord from a pure heart** should also flee worldly passions and pursue godly virtues. A second approach would mean Timothy should seek these godly qualities as he serves alongside people who call on the Lord. In either case, the focus of this group involves people who (1) call on the Lord, and (2) do so from a pure heart. As opposed to carnal people, genuine worshipers seek the Lord with wholehearted sincerity.

To be useful in God’s work, we must intentionally flee sin and pursue righteousness. As we seek God with all our hearts, we will experience His righteousness, faith, love, and peace in the company of fellow believers.
What steps could you take to be more useful to the Lord?

**TWO APPROACHES (2 TIM. 2:23-26)**

**VERSES 23-25**

Returning to the theme of verse 14, Paul encouraged Timothy to avoid useless quarrels and instead to offer the truth of the gospel. He described such disputes as **foolish and ignorant**. The word *foolish* means the arguments lacked common sense and basic understanding. The term *ignorant* suggests a lack of education. Believers should reject being drawn into such debates. They only breed quarrels, causing dissension rather than edification.

Whoever claims to be the **Lord’s servant must not quarrel**. Instead, even while avoiding being caught up in these kinds of disputes, we must **be gentle to everyone** in the hope that even the opponents of the gospel will repent and turn to Christ. The person who serves Christ will gently teach people the way of truth. Helping people who initially reject the gospel requires us to be patient.

Verse 25 completes the idea of being **able to teach** mentioned in the previous verse. The result of Timothy’s teaching involved **instructing his opponents with gentleness**. Human nature pushes back against anyone who comes across as aggressive or antagonistic. Better results happen in ministry when we use kindness to teach God’s truth.

The ultimate goal is not to win an argument but for God to grant **repentance**. People will only come to a **knowledge of the truth** if they experience a change of mind regarding erroneous ideas they previously held. They will not arrive at a right understanding without help. Paul described a method for God’s servants to be part of leading unbelievers to the truth with love and gentleness, trusting God to work through them.

**VERSE 26**

Repeating an image from his first letter (1 Tim. 3:7), Paul used the phrase **trap of the devil** to describe the danger unbelievers encounter. The enemy sets his snares about unsuspecting people, taking them **captive**. Instead of following the Lord, they do the will of the devil. Their hearts and minds are darkened, preventing them from seeing the truth. (See Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:18.) Believers are to present God’s Word with love and kindness so unbelievers may come to their senses and escape Satan’s snare.

(In PSG, p. 89) What are the benefits of a kind and gentle approach to communicating the gospel message? How does this approach break down barriers?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
INTRODUCE: As group members arrive, ask them to give examples of people who are diligent. Direct their attention to reading the paragraph on page 82 of the PSG.

ASK: Name some examples of diligence you see in the world. What are some ways in which diligence is needed in the Christian life? (PSG, p. 82)

TRANSITION: Last week we discussed the value of enduring for Christ and remaining focused; today we’re going to discuss how Paul reminded Timothy of the importance of remaining diligent as a follower of Christ, giving careful attention to remain faithful to the truth of God’s Word.

EXPLORE THE TEXT
READ: Call for a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 2:14-15.

HIGHLIGHT: Paul emphasized that there’s nothing worthwhile about verbal squabbling. Moreover, he indicated that those who engaged in it drifted toward ruin—referring to a catastrophe. Then, Paul implored Timothy to deliver God’s truth with forthright precision that cut through obstacles and made a straight line to the heart and mind of listeners.

DISPLAY: Direct the group’s attention to Pack Item 6 (Key Verse: 2 Timothy 2:15). Guide the group to explain the importance of this verse for the church.

ASK: If God tested the diligence and devotion of today’s believers to His truth in what ways would we meet His approval? Explain.

TRANSITION: Next we’re going to see not only the call to refuse to be ruined by words but also the call to be courageous with those who mislead with their words.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 2:16-19.

CLARIFY: Paul encouraged Timothy to put an end to the internal conflict the church was facing. Use Pack Item 5 (Poster: First-Century Heresies) and Pack Item 13 (Handout: First-Century Heresies) to give an overview of the false teaching that was occurring at that time.

ASK: How does faithfully studying the Bible help a believer avoid useless and false debates? Can a person know the difference between empty speech and edifying speech without studying the Bible? Explain. (PSG, p. 86)

TRANSITION: Paul turned the focus from the teachers to the call for the individual believer to be aware of how he or she lives for Christ.

READ: Call for a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 2:20-21, as you show everyday bowls and a bowl used for special occasions.

EXPLAIN: Paul used the illustration of two kinds of vessels in a house to emphasize the importance of godliness. The bowls were gold and silver and designed for special use while other bowls made of wood and earthenware served the purpose for ordinary occasions. Similarly, some believers honored Jesus worthily by their behavior and belief while others dishonored Him by their lifestyle.
GUIDE: Direct attention to Pack Item 3 (Poster: Metaphors in Paul’s Letters). Clarify the meaning of metaphor and call on volunteers to identify and compare each verse’s metaphor. Then ask: In Paul’s illustration about vessels in a house, what was the relationship between purity and service? Explain.

TRANSITION: A part of being a clean vessel is learning how to remove the influence of sin from the individual’s life.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 2:22. Then lead the group to share three honorable actions they heard in these verses with a neighbor.

EXPLAIN: Timothy’s discipline of fleeing and pursuing would find welcome company from others who called on Jesus from a “pure heart.” Fellowship with like-minded believers would help Timothy run away from inappropriate passions and run toward holy virtues. Moreover, it would inspire Timothy to be an honorable vessel, suitable for the Lord’s purpose.

STUDY: Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill on page 88 of the PSG: Use a Bible concordance to identify the passages in which Paul used the word flee. Note the audience and the action from which he directed them to flee. What, if any, common traits do you find in the things Paul directed his readers to flee? What would a person need to pursue to counter what Paul called for them to flee in each passage?

ASK: How are the ideas of “flee” and “pursue” in verse 22 connected? How does pursuing the things identified by Paul help a person flee ungodliness? (PSG, p. 88)

TRANSITION: The final call from Paul was for Timothy to lead the church toward purity.

READ: Identify a volunteer to read aloud 2 Timothy 2:23-26, as the group listens for character traits in these verses.

EMPHASIZE: Paul’s call to reject the fighting within the church was coupled with the exhortation to model three traits to minimize quarreling: gentleness, a teacher, and patience. Paul further emphasized that God was not unwilling to provide repentance, but the opponents might refuse to accept it. Therefore, Paul advocated a gentle and calm approach that corrected the error of the heretics and set free those who were prisoners in the devil’s trap.

ASK: What are the benefits of a kind and gentle approach to communicating the gospel message? How does this approach break down barriers? (PSG, p. 89)

HIGHLIGHT: Emphasize the Key Doctrine (Evangelism and Missions) on page 89 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

RECAP: Review the bulleted statements from In My Context (PSG, p. 90) with the group. Guide the group to silently reflect on whether there are areas in which they are being led astray that need to be addressed in their lives.

REFLECT: Lead in a discussion of the second question set from In My Context on page 90 of the PSG: Discuss steps your Bible study group can take to avoid unedifying conversations. Create a set of guidelines based on the discussion.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking for help living out God’s Word to others with love and kindness.
PRACTICE

• Support the session by contacting your group members and encouraging them to remain diligent in their Christian lives.

• Prayerfully consider those you know who need to hear that despite the past, Jesus is always willing and ready to lovingly receive and forgive us.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Prior to the session, search online and print articles of people who are diligent. Create teams and give each an article to read. Allow time for discussion, and then call for volunteers to share what characteristics they discussed.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• For further insight into 2 Timothy 2:14-19, reference James 2:12-13 for the discussion about the value of guarding the tongue in speech. Compare and contrast the two passages.

• To supplement 2 Timothy 2:20-22, reference 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to discuss the call to carry the gospel as a vessel.

• To enhance discussion of 2 Timothy 2:23-26, go to Paul’s sermon in the Areopagus in Acts 17:22-31 as an example of how he called people to repentance using a gentle means. As a group, brainstorm common issues today that need a gentle reminder from a friend to change and how one should go about such a discussion.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Reread this session’s memory verse (2 Timothy 2:15) or point to Pack Item 6 (Key Verse: 2 Timothy 2:15). Review the bulleted summary statements under In My Context on page 90 of the PSG. Brainstorm practical ways to maintain focus on being God’s vessel for each of the bulleted statements.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Play for the group the hymn, “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us,” by Stuart Townend. Emphasize how the song calls for us to remember God’s love and for us to show that love to others.