

Focused
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2 Timothy 2:1-13

Opening question: What words come to mind when you hear the term “basic training?” What qualities do soldiers, athletes, and farmers have in common?

Paul loved Timothy like a son and knew Timothy’s strengths and weaknesses. In the face of opposition and persecution, Timothy had a tendency to be timid and weak. In this passage Paul challenges his younger “mentee” to do the hard things required of a “good soldier” for Christ. Paul’s challenge isn’t just for pastors, but for every believer.

Big Idea: Success in anything requires focus, discipline, endurance, and hard work. Practicing those characteristics only comes from passion. You won’t sacrifice for something unless you are passionate about it. The Christian life is no different. To be “good soldiers” requires focus, endurance, hard work and a passion to please our “commander” Jesus Christ.

Let’s begin by reading and unpacking verses one through nine:

2 Timothy 2:1–9 (NLT)

Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. ²You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others. ³Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴Soldiers don’t get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. ⁵And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. ⁶And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor. ⁷Think about what I am saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things. ⁸Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach. ⁹And

because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the word of God cannot be chained.

- Verse one: Paul speaks as a father to his son challenging Timothy to *“be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus.”*
- MacArthur: *“Paul is calling for Timothy to overcome his apparent drift toward weakness and renew his commitment to his ministry.”ⁱ*
- Grace (God’s favor that we don’t deserve) not only saves us (Eph. 2:8) but also provides us with the power to live the Christian life.
- Are we asking God for His favor to live in a way that pleases him?
- Verse two: God’s divine plan for multiplying and growing the body of believers (the church) is for disciples to make other disciples (Matt. 28:19.)
- Note the combination: “these truths” and “trustworthy people.” Leaders in the church must not be careless in choosing teachers and those teachers must only teach the truth of scripture and not their own opinions.
- The congregation must expect that standard in preachers and teachers.
- Verse three is a key point: “Endure suffering...as a good soldier” of Christ.
- If we are not experiencing some level of “friction” living as Christians in a pagan world, we may not be the “soldiers” we should be.
- None of us wants to think of following Jesus as a magnet for “hardship” but He told us it would be: *“Remember...‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”* (Jn. 15:20)ⁱⁱ
- We said, to be “good soldiers” requires focus, endurance, and hard work. In verses four through seven, Paul gave three relevant examples.
- One commentator writes: *“Soldiers on active duty expect hardship. Battling the enemy on the front lines, the soldier lives in harsh conditions—damp weather, poor food, uncomfortable sleep, dirt and filth, inadequate shelter, and exhaustion. The*

further one retreats from the front lines, however, the more frequent and trivial become the complaints. Those involved in the struggles of survival and the exhaustion of combat rarely complain about the food—they are simply happy to eat.”ⁱⁱⁱ

- Hardship is part of the soldier’s job; they must not be distracted from duty.
- Christ-followers should expect some hardships because we are “different” from the rest of the world. 1 Peter 2:9 in the KJV says we are “a chosen generation”, a “royal priesthood”, a “holy nation.” That all sounds great! It also says we are a “peculiar people.” That truth causes some discomfort.
- Later in 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul writes: “...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”
- Billy Graham wrote: “*The Bible teaches that we are not to be discouraged by this belligerence. We are to consider it evidence that we are identified with Christ. Jesus said, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:11-12).*
- Again, if we are not experiencing some level of “friction” living as Christians in a pagan world, we may not be the “soldiers” we should be.
- Like soldiers we must not be distracted, but focused on the mission of making disciples and glorifying and pleasing our “commander” Jesus.
- Then Paul used one of his favorite metaphors: the athlete in competition.
- The athlete can’t win unless they play by the rules. Some athletes have had to give back their medals because they didn’t follow the rules.
- One commentator writes: “*For the Christian, there are rules and principles to be observed in daily living. The moral law of the gospel is given to us as a guide for our behaviour. We are in the world, but we are not to be part of it because we follow a different code of conduct. If we fail in seeking to live a holy life, then we have no right to expect God to bless us, or to see our Christian life flourish.*”^{iv}

- We sometimes question why our Christian life doesn't seem to be fruitful and blessed. Question: Are we living by the "rule book" of God's word?
- Then there is the hard-working farmer. **What words come to mind when you think of a farmer? What qualities must they have?**
- Farmers in Paul's day didn't have tractors and farming wasn't a weekend hobby. This was farming to survive! If the farmer puts in the hard work they should enjoy the fruit. (Illustration: The deer ate my grapes!)
- Like the farmer, the Christian must put in hard work, perseverance, and patience then one day we will see the harvest of souls trusting in Christ!
- Verse seven could easily be skimmed over, but it jumped out at me.
- "Think about what I am saying" really means, "reflect on my teaching."
- Stopping, being quiet, and reflecting is becoming a "lost art."
- **When people today have a few minutes of waiting what do they do?**
- I am personally convicted by my struggle to be quiet and reflect. I wrote three statements:
 - Our minds are renewed by reflection on God's word (Rom. 12:2)
 - Today's flood of information is the **enemy of reflection.**
 - We've **abandoned reflection** and exchanged it for **distraction.**
- A New York Times article entitled "No Time to Think" reported on a study from the journal "Science," *"In 11 experiments involving more than 700 people, the majority of participants reported that they found it unpleasant to be alone in a room with their thoughts for just 6 to 15 minutes."*
- We may read scripture and hear teaching but do we reflect and apply it?
- **Do you struggle with this? How have you had success in reflection?**
- Ken Puls writes, *"It is a bewildering paradox of our day that the Bible can be so accessible and yet so marginalized. On the one hand our technology has brought God's Word close at hand. It's*

on our phones and tablets and computers and iPods. We have almost immediate access to several versions of the Bible as well as a wealth of sermons and commentaries. But this same technology also threatens to distract us and drown out God's Word. We have become a culture obsessed with noise and comfortable with clutter. So many sources are bringing input into our lives: TV, radio, online news feeds, Facebook, Twitter.... More than ever we need to make time to meditate, to dwell in God's Word."^{vi}

- Another writer: *"True Christian meditation is an active thought process whereby we give ourselves to the study of the Word, praying over it and asking God to give us understanding by the Spirit, who has promised to lead us "into all truth" (John 16:13).*^{vii}
- For you "natural students," be careful not to mistake an intellectual exercise for meditation. They are not the same.
- A couple of articles on how to meditate on God's word:
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/founders-ministries-blog/meditating-on-god-s-word.html>
<https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-meditation.html>
- We said the Christian life requires focus, discipline, endurance, and hard work. Practicing those characteristics only comes from passion.
- In verse eight Paul describes what should give believers our passion: *"...Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead."* That's why we observe communion. Jesus told us to do it in "remembrance" of Him.
- We'd like to think our hearts are always passionate about Christ's death, resurrection, and what it means for us. The truth is, our minds are "prone to wander."
- Here's a great hymn of reminder:
*King of my life I crown you now,
Yours shall the glory be;
Lest I forget your thorn-crowned brow,
Lead me to Calvary.
Lest I forget Gethsemane,
Lest I forget your agony,
Lest I forget your love for me,*

Lead me to Calvary.^{viii}

- Paul's passion for bringing others to Christ is stated in verse ten:

¹⁰ So I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen.

- Paul closes with what is believed to have been a hymn of that day:

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.

- Dying to self means living with Christ.
- Enduring hardship is in our job description as children of the King.
- Those who deny Him (unbelievers) will be denied by Him (Matt. 10:33.)
- The phrase "*If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful*" means God will be true to who He is regardless of how people respond to Him. That's a comfort if you are saved (you can't lose your salvation) and a warning if you are not (those who reject Him will suffer terrible consequences.)

So, What's the Takeaway?

- To be a "good soldier" for Christ requires focus, discipline, endurance, and hard work. Our passion should be the desire to please our "commander" Jesus Christ because of His sacrifice and the eternal life it gives us.
- Am I leading a focused Christian life that imitates Christ?
- Do I truly meditate on His word and apply it to my life?
- In this passage we've seen the job description of a "good soldier" for Christ. Let's all commit to "doing our duty" this week.

ⁱ THE MACARTHUR BIBLE COMMENTARY Copyright © 2005 by John MacArthur

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- ii [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Jn 15:20). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- iii Larson, Knute. Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon: 9 . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.
- iv Williams, P. (2007). [*Opening up 2 Timothy*](#) (pp. 41–42). Leominster: Day One Publications.
- v <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/27/sunday-review/no-time-to-think.html>
- vi <https://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/founders-ministries-blog/meditating-on-god-s-word.html>
- vii <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-meditation.html>
- viii Williams, P. (2007). [*Opening up 2 Timothy*](#) (p. 48). Leominster: Day One Publications. https://hymnary.org/text/king_of_my_life_i_crown_thee_now