

Like Good Soldiers of Christ Jesus

2 Timothy 2:1-13

Key Verse: 3

“Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

In today's passage Paul encourages Timothy through the good qualities of a soldier, an athlete and a farmer and to be strong in the grace of Jesus. I don't know about all of you, but I love movies. And we can break them down into 2 categories: chick flicks and guys movies. Chick flicks are those movies that have love stories, they are mushy and sentimental. And then there are the movies of men. They usually involve explosions and blood and are usually centered around acts of valor. And since I'm a guy, I like movies about fighting with some of my favorites being: Saving Private Ryan, Braveheart, the 300, The Matrix, The Lord of the Rings, Star Wars. And of course there are sports movies like, Rudy, Remember the Titans, Facing the giants and Chariots of Fire. But I am finding it difficult to remember movies about farmers. Why do guys like movies like this? We like them because the protagonist overcomes hardship and in the end they win the victory. We like to see their struggle and experience their victory. Their story encourages and inspires us in our own personal struggle in the hopes that we too will overcome our hardships and catch the victory.

1. Be strong in Jesus' grace (1)

Take a look at verse 1. “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Paul was Timothy's mentor and he was writing this letter to Timothy to help him carry out his task of leading a church in Ephesus (modern day Turkey). This is possibly the last letter that Paul wrote. Most scholars believe that Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison awaiting execution in Rome. In this chapter the first thing Paul encourages Timothy is to be strong in the grace of Jesus. It was imperative that Timothy had to be strong. Living in the world you must be strong. We can't afford to be weak. The weak get swallowed up. We have to be strong like iron that gets hammered again and again. In football, a good defense may bend but doesn't break because it's strong. Likewise we must be able to take everything that our enemies can throw at us and still be standing when it's all done. But the question is how? Most people would think that you have to be strong in your own will or endeavors. Our strength comes from the grace of God, not in anything that we've done. Paul shares this secret in verse 1. This can only be done, when we are strong in Jesus' grace. When I was younger I thought that grace was something that was gentle or fragile. But I now believe that grace is anything but fragile. Grace is powerful. And as the song writer John Newton wrote, grace is amazing. For only grace has the power to change a person's heart. One example of the power of grace can be seen in Paul's life. Paul didn't know a thing about grace, because as a Pharisee he lived and breathed the law and he condemned others if they didn't do the same. Grace was simply not in his vocabulary. However when Paul came to know Jesus, on a personal level, he tasted God's grace for himself and it changed his life. He began to love instead of condemn, he had compassion instead of competition, he began to care for others instead of rule over them. What else can change a person's heart like this?

Timothy had been chosen by God and appointed leader of the Ephesian church. This was God's grace to him. Grace is God's free gift to us. It's something that we don't deserve nor have we earned it. And yet God gave it to us all the same. It was God's grace to call Timothy to live a holy life. So Paul wanted to encourage him to be strong in that grace so that he could have

confidence that he was approved by God. And just as God's grace changed Paul from a persecuting Pharisee into a humble servant of God, it changed Timothy from a fearful, timid man into a leader and disciple maker. And the more Timothy knew the grace of Jesus, the stronger he would become. This is the secret to a powerful Christian life. As a result, he didn't have to be fearful in serving God's work.

Paul wanted Timothy to be strong in the grace of Jesus so that he wouldn't become shaky in his faith and abandon it. At the end of chapter 1, Paul described how everyone in the province of Asia had deserted him. So Paul was encouraging Timothy to be strong in the grace of Jesus so that he would remember God's grace to him personally and how much God did for him. When we remember what God has done for us, we are thankful and our faith is strengthened and we can carry on in our life of faith. It was by God's grace that the gospel was entrusted to a small group of disciples over 2000 years ago and it has grown to about a third of the world's population.

And lastly, Timothy needed to be strong in Jesus' grace in order to be gracious to others. As I mentioned earlier, Timothy was the leader of the Ephesian church. Whenever you lead, you will soon learn that you cannot please everyone all the time, and nor should you. You will have conflicts. And since he was on the younger side, he had to interact with people who were older, wiser, wealthier and had more influence than him. Surely, that was not easy. Maybe they would argue with him or not accept his instruction. Whatever the case, it is only when he remembered God's grace could he be sincerely gracious to others and be an effective leader. We too should learn from Paul to be strong in the grace of Jesus.

2. Entrust to reliable men (2)

Take a look at verse 2. "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." As a pastor, Timothy's primary responsibility was to share God's good news of salvation with the people around him. As a leader, Timothy had to have wisdom and discernment especially when it came to raising disciples. In a leadership role, Timothy may be tempted to be superman with the attitude, "I can do it all! I don't need anyone else." But if he goes like that, he won't last very long. So Paul teaches him to entrust the gospel to reliable, qualified people. What does it mean to entrust? The root is trust. Timothy had to give the gospel to others and trust them to carry out God's work. There are two things that Timothy had to trust here, God & men. That's how Paul planted so many churches. He simply planted the seed of the gospel into people's hearts and trusted that God would carry out his work and men would carry out their work. The best leaders are those who co-work with and trust the others around them. They don't try to micro-manage them to death. When we trust someone, this empowers them and builds them up and gives them confidence because we are building a trusting relationship.

However entrusting is not a one way street, it has got to go two ways. If we have been entrusted with something, we must be reliable. What does it mean to be reliable? The Bible says that one who is reliable is faithful. I had to get rid of my old car because it was unreliable. I kept getting stranded and a couple of times Julia had to come to aid because it stranded me at the most unexpected and inconvenient time. I can tell from experience that it doesn't take long for someone to replace unreliable things, even people. Timothy also needed to choose men who

were able to teach the truth correctly and keep the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ. (2 Tim 1:13) This also tells us that although Timothy was responsible for the correct spreading of the truth – he was not to just entrust anyone, but those who can correctly handle the word of truth. He was a guardian of the good deposit, the gospel.

I would like to say that as Christian's this is also our responsibility. However it may not be the same as a pastor like Timothy. God has put each of us in our own unique spot for a purpose. Not everyone should be a pastor like Timothy but we have a mission of our own. Maybe our mission is to be a student, a mom, a teacher, whatever mission God has given us, we must carry it out to the best of our ability by being reliable and faithful.

3. Soldier / athlete / farmer (3-6)

Let's take a look at verses 3-6. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. ⁵ Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.” Paul uses rich imagery of a soldier, athlete & farmer to help Timothy to understand and take to heart what he is saying. And we can learn so much from each of them. There are some good common elements and some unique ones to learn.

What can we learn from the soldier? The first point Paul makes is that soldiers endure hardships. If you want to be a soldier, you will have to be able to endure difficult circumstances. I recently read a book called, “A Seal for God.” It is the story of how Chad Williams became an elite Navy seal. Not only did he have to go through the Navy's basic training but he had to go through the Seal program as well. In his book he describes, in detail, the training he had to endure. And let me tell you, it's not for the faint of heart. A Seal has to go through the most difficult training out of all the military organizations. And they claim the whole world. The training lasts for six months and the climax is called “hell week.” Hell week starts in the middle of the night, when you are in the dead of sleep and least expect it. It starts with gun fire and hand grenades exploding all around you. It's designed to disorient and confuse you. They say that it takes six months to recover from just that one week of training. And as I read about this incredible ordeal, I realized that all their training came down to one thing. It came down to the ability for them to overcome their physical and mental desires. When everything in their body and spirit cried out for them to stop, they could push on and over come. That's it. But it was clear that that's is easier said than done. To train your spirit to overcome the body's natural desire of hunger, or warmth, or rest is most difficult. Verse 3 says to endure hardship. Most people want to avoid hardship. But the problem is when we do that, we miss the opportunity to learn the lesson that God has for us through that hardship. For enduring hardship produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character produces hope. (Ro 5:3-4) This doesn't mean that we should run out of here and look for every hardship that we can find, just so that we can endure it. That would be crazy. But what Paul is saying is that when we encounter hardships, our first reaction shouldn't be to try and get out of it, but to learn from it and grow in character through it instead of just thinking, “why me?”

How about an athlete, what can we learn from them. Of course athletes go through training just like soldiers but verse 5 points out, playing by the rules. Every athlete knows that the first thing

you have to do is to know the rules and secondly don't argue with the umpire or referee. It doesn't do any good to argue because what he says goes. And if you argue too much, you will get thrown out. And there are those guys who don't like to play by the rules and try to cheat their way to victory. But if you do happen to get away with cheating, that's an empty victory. However many people don't get away with it. This week Lance Armstrong had his 7 Tour de France victories taken away from him. They claim that he was taking steroids and was not competing according to the rules.

From the farmer we learn to work hard. And because of their hard work, they are the ones who get the first shot at the harvest. They get to pick the ripe fruit / vegetables right from the vine. Sorry that I don't have much to say about farmers. But I know that without them we would starve.

What do these 3 share in common? They don't take the easy way. They do it the right way, no cheating, not taking short cuts, doing all the hard work that it requires even if we don't really want to do it. They work together as a team. Some people like to do everything by themselves. The soldier depends upon his fellow soldier. In the movie 300, it showed how the Spartans battle formation of their group made them one unit. Each one depended upon the one next to them to protect their vulnerable side. In foot ball, the offensive line has to work together as a single unit in order to move the ball against their opponent. All of them work for a goal, a reward. The soldier works to please his commander, the athlete works for the victors crown and the farmer works for the harvest.

4. Reflect & remember (7-9)

We need time to reflect. We need to meditate and give God a chance to speak to us, to guide us, to inspire us. We can't do this without his help, we need to reflect and remember the gospel. In verse 8 Paul lays out the gospel, and the effects of that gospel – he was suffering like a criminal. Jesus Christ, the Son of God came to earth as a man and died for our sins, then rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of God was not a popular message back then, and is not a popular message today. This truth may cause suffering for some people even today but God's word has power and isn't chained. It can work in people's hearts.

5. The purpose of endurance (10-13)

So why did Paul do all this? Let's read verse 11. "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory." The reason Paul endures everything, is for the sake of others. This is the whole point. We are to love God and love one another. However Satan is our great enemy and he wants to destroy the work of God. However Paul wants to teach Timothy that we can always trust God, even if there are times when faith seems difficult. We must endure and trust that God will not abandon us, so we must have faith in him. I remember that scene in Saving Private Ryan near the end, when it seems like the soldiers have lost all hope, and Tom Hank's character has been wounded and he's trying to shoot at the German tank with his little pistol, but he believes he's going to die. At the very last moment, the tank blows up – he looks surprised, but in a few seconds we see and hear an airplane go over his head, his fellow Americans have come to rescue him. How much more can we trust in God, and endure everything for the sake of his chosen people.