

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, August 9, 2023 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



Embracing Hardship for the Gospel
2 Timothy 2:3-7

“¹You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ²And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. ³You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. ⁵And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. ⁷Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.” -2 Timothy 2:1-7 (NKJV)

Some Key Date in Paul’s Challenging Life:

- [c. A.D. 52-57]- Paul takes his third mission trip and spends three years in Ephesus
- [c. A.D. 58]—Paul was apparently arrested in Jerusalem
- [c. A.D. 61]—This is the approximate time that Paul arrived in Rome. He had spent these three years in prison, going from one trial to another before different Roman rulers
- [c. A.D. 61–62]—Paul underwent his first Roman imprisonment. We do not have this recorded in the Book of Acts, which breaks off at the very beginning of Paul’s first Roman imprisonment
- [c. A.D. 62–63]—Paul was released from prison, and during this period he covered a great deal of territory. It was during this time that he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus from Macedonia
- [c. A.D. 63-64]—Paul was arrested again. Before his death he wrote 2 Timothy
- [c. A.D. 64-67]—Paul was beheaded in Rome.

For some 2 Timothy may nothing more than a continuation where 1 Timothy leaves off. But as you can see, it is so much more. The book is the Apostle Paul’s “Swan Song,” his warning

shot, his encouragement in the face of great opposition and obstacle. It is so practical and relevant for 21st century Christians and the church... a needed word for what we face in our day.

Fast Facts 2 Timothy

- (1) **Author:** Paul
- (2) **Recipient:** Timothy
- (3) **Date:** AD 64-67
- (4) **Place:** Written from a prison cell in Rome
- (5) **Destination:** Ephesus (*Timothy was pastor of the church at Ephesus*)
- (6) **Incident:** Paul's imprisonment and pending death
- (7) **Purpose:** To encourage Timothy in the face of persecution and apostasy

Some Key Characteristics of 2 Timothy:

- (1) **2 Timothy is Paul's last will and testimony** – In our study we are referring to it as Paul's "Swan Song." The deathbed statement of any individual has an importance which is not attached to other remarks. This is what lends significance to 2 Timothy. It is the final communication of Paul. It has a note of sadness which is not detected in his other epistles. Nevertheless, there is the overtone of triumph... *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,"* written by Paul as his own epitaph (2 Tim. 4:7). Also, because this was his last letter, Paul was very personal. In these four short chapters, there are approximately twenty–five references to individuals.
- (2) **2 Timothy is Paul's warning of coming times of apostasy** - In this little book of 2 Timothy an ominous dark cloud is seen on the horizon. It is the coming apostasy. Today apostasy has broken like a storm, like a Texas tornado, on the world and in the church. What do we mean by apostasy? Webster defines apostasy as "total desertion of the principles of faith." So apostasy is not due to ignorance; it is a heresy. Apostasy is deliberate error. It is intentional departure from the faith. An apostate is one who knows the truths of the gospel and the doctrines of the faith, but has repudiated them.
- (3) **2 Timothy speaks of the ultimate outcome of gospel preaching** - The final fruition will not be the total conversion of mankind, nor will it usher in the Millennium. On the contrary, some will believe and for some there will come about a great turning away, not unlike what we are seeing today... even a watering down, compromise, and total perversion of the gospel. Don't think that what we see going on today has caught God off guard. God wrote about it and warned us about in 2 Timothy.

As the famous quote goes, "No pain, No gain!" What do you think of this quote? Is it true? Why or why not? Share your thoughts. _____

**A form of this expression is found in the beginning of the second century. Rabbi Ben Hei says, "According to the pain is the gain." This was written in The Ethics of the Fathers 5:21 (known in Hebrew as Pirkei Avot) Pirkei Avot. Rabbi Ben Hei was giving a spiritual lesson; no pain in doing what God commands, no spiritual gain.*

***“If little labour, little are our gains;
Man’s fortunes are according to his pains.”
-Hesperides 752***

So true! Most of life’s greatest achievements, accomplishments, and advances only come through much blood, sweat and tears... pain, heartache, and much striving. As a matter of fact, just growing up also includes times of pain. Nobody every escaped the process. We simply cannot become the people God intends us to be without some headaches and heartaches. Even Jesus our Lord *“leaned obedience from the things which He suffered”* according to **Hebrews 5:8**.

This is a reality for those who are a part of God’s family... a life of disappointments, mistakes, struggles, hardships, and misunderstandings; not a moment, however, spent apart from God’s watchful eye. Remember the road from earth to heaven is not an easy, downhill slide. It is, rather, a challenge that forces us to look to Him who has gone before us. He will see us through! Each tough experience simply reminds us we are on the right course.

It is surprising to many, that is seem our greatest potential for gaining ground in our spiritual pilgrimage to become all that God has called us to be as believers comes not at the easy, smooth sailing moments of our lives, but at the difficult, troubling, painful moments of our lives... we seem to learn and grow and gain the most spiritual ground through hardship (pain). Of course when troubles come we can do a couple of things with it: (1) We can gain a bitter, angry and distant heart – mad at God, mad at the world and mad at others. We can lash out and allow our pains and disappointments in life to literally defeat and stifle the life out of us. (2) Or we can gain... gain spiritually, gain a greater dependence on God, gain a healthy trust and reliance on Him, gain a renewed faith and vigor for how faithful our God is, gain, a deeper appreciation for God’s Word (the Bible) and the comfort and help it gives us. We can gain – Sound crazy? How do I find “gain” when I’m hurting? How do I turn moments of struggle, and hardship, and difficulty into opportunities of great gain spiritually and for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? Nature teaches us its true...

- Prune and cut back a bush or shrub and it grows healthier, stronger, blooms more beautifully than ever.
- Burn off an area of lawn and grass and it comes back greener and healthier than before.

- Let the bitter storms of nature blow with torrents of rain, hail, and high winds, and the following day will emerge with bluer skies and crisper air than ever thought possible.

Sometimes our most prosperous moments of gaining ground in our spiritual life and advancing the gospel come through the greatest moments of pain. So, “No Pain, No Gain!” That is where we are headed in this particular study that focuses on Paul’s words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:3-7 where Paul’ tells Timothy to “endure hardship.”

JUST FOR FUN: Try your hand at the following exercise. Beside each word, phrase or concept place a “p” for pain if you see it as a pain, and a “g” for gain if you see it as gain. Be honest with your feelings.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> patience | <input type="checkbox"/> endurance | <input type="checkbox"/> tolerance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> healing of broken bones | <input type="checkbox"/> supermarket lines | <input type="checkbox"/> doctors wait |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buda traffic congestion | <input type="checkbox"/> jogging | <input type="checkbox"/> forgiveness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lifting weights | <input type="checkbox"/> open-mindedness | <input type="checkbox"/> lenience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> discipline | <input type="checkbox"/> a flat tire | <input type="checkbox"/> sickness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> self-control | <input type="checkbox"/> a growing garden | <input type="checkbox"/> pregnancy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> getting in shape | <input type="checkbox"/> grace | <input type="checkbox"/> military service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> an H.O.A. | <input type="checkbox"/> a pay cut | <input type="checkbox"/> a pandemic |

- (1) *Go back and look at the one you marked with a “p” for pain. How might God change that into a “g” for gain?*
- (2) *Notice the ones you marked with a “g” for gain. How might that be perceived and a “p” for pain by some?*
- (3) *What do you think that each of these may have to do with your own spiritual grown and advancement of the gospel?*

Why would anyone willingly embrace suffering?

Learning from Suffering: 6 Things We Can Learn From Suffering:

Perhaps the most painful question confronting the believer is the problem of suffering. Why does a loving and wise God permit His children to suffer? Why would anyone willingly embrace suffering? Let me give you about six (6) things we can learn from suffering. This may give us a hint at why we must willingly embrace suffering

- (1) **Suffering helps bring out the best in us** - While Satan attempts to use temptation and suffering to bring out the worst in us, God uses them to bring out the best in us. The hosts of heaven and of hell watched to see how Job would respond to his first test: the loss of his wealth and children. He expressed his grief in a manner normal for that day, for God expects us to be human (1 Thessalonians 4:13). After all, even Jesus wept (John 11:35).

But then Job looked up, worshiped God, and uttered a profound statement of faith: (Job 1:21). Instead of cursing God, as Satan said Job would do, Job praised the Lord. Anybody can say, *“God gave me what I had”* or *“God has taken it away,”* but real faith says, in the midst of sorrow and suffering, *“Blessed be the name of the Lord.”*

But Satan does not give up easily, and he returned to God’s throne to ask for His permission to torment Job physically, which the Lord willingly gave (Job 2:1-7). We get the impression that God was confident that his servant would not fail the test. Satan was absolutely sure that his strategy of suffering (Job 1:11; 2:4-5) would destroy the faith of Job, which the devil consistently misunderstood (Job 1:9-10). After losing all his wealth and children, and being afflicted with painful boils all over his body, Job’s faith in God remained firm. His wife told Job to “curse God and die” which was exactly what Satan wanted him to do, but he didn’t (Job 2:9-10). The two things Job would not give up were his faith in God and his integrity. Even if God permitted evil to come into his life, Job would not rebel against God by taking matters into his own hands. God used Job’s sufferings to bring out the best in him.

- (2) **God uses suffering to silence the devil** - Satan accused Job of merely serving God for the material blessings involved (Job 1:9-11). We might paraphrase it like this: *“The only reason Job fears you is because you pay him to do it. You two have made a contract: You protect him and prosper him as long as he obeys you and worships you.”* We can see that Satan’s accusation against Job was really an attack on God. Satan was telling God, *“You are not a God worthy of worship! You have to pay people to honor you.”* So the Lord allowed the devil to torment Job to demonstrate that His servant loved God because of who He was, and not for what he could get from Him (Job 1:12). God found no fault with Job, but Satan did. God’s statement in Job 1:8 echoes the description of Job in verse 1, but Satan questioned it.

The word “Satan” means adversary – one who opposes the Law. Imagine a courtroom scene where God and Satan each deliver different verdicts. Satan said Job was guilty, but keep in mind that God said, *“Not guilty!”* The readers get the sense that Job’s life was a battlefield over which the forces of light and darkness waged war. Satan suffered a tremendous defeat, but Job never knew it. Eventually, Job’s insight into God grew, but that in no way diminished the horror of his suffering. Some of the so-called tragedies in our lives have really been weapons of God when He is “silencing our enemies and all who oppose us (Psalm 8:2).” We may not know until we get to heaven why God allowed certain things to happen. Meanwhile, we are to “walk by faith” and say with Job, “Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

- (3) **Suffering teaches us to depend on God** - In his second letter to the believers at Corinth, Paul began with a doxology (2 Corinthians 1:3). He certainly could not sing about his circumstances, but he could sing about the God who is in control of circumstances. Paul

had learned that praise is an important factor in achieving victory over discouragement and depression. Despite his suffering, Paul was confident that whatever the Father did for Jesus when He was ministering on earth, He is able to do for him and for us today. We are dear to the Father because His Son is dear to Him and we are citizens of the “Kingdom of His dear Son” (Colossians 1:13).

We are precious to the Father, and He will see to it that the pressures of life will not destroy us. God enables us to bear trials. But the first thing God must do is show us how weak we are in ourselves.

Paul was a gifted and experienced servant of God, who had been through many different kinds of trials. Surely all of his experience would be sufficient for him to face new difficulties and overcome them. But God wants us to trust Him, not our gifts or abilities, our experience, or our “*spiritual reserves*” (2 Corinthians 1:9). In 2 Corinthians 1:10, Paul says, “*God delivered us, will deliver us, and will still deliver us*” from all trials. Paul saw God’s hand of deliverance whether he looked back, around, or ahead. However, God does not always deliver or rescue us immediately, nor does He always rescue us in the same way.

Sometimes God rescues us from our trials, and at other times He rescues us in our trials. We must never think that trouble is an accident. For the believer, everything is a divine appointment. There are only three possible outlooks a person can take when it comes to the trials and suffering of life.

3 Possible Outlooks A Person Can Take in Suffering:

1. **Fate/Change** - *If our trials are the products of “fate” or “chance,” then our only recourse is to give up. Nobody can control fate or chance.*
2. **Control** - *If we have to control everything ourselves, then the situation is just as hopeless.*
3. **Trust in God** - *But if God is in control, and we trust Him, then we can overcome circumstances with His help.*

(4) **God is glorified through our trials and suffering** - When Paul reported what God has done for him, a great chorus of praise and thanksgiving went up from the saints to the throne of God (2 Corinthians 1:11). **The highest service you and I can render on earth is to bring glory to God, and sometimes the service involves suffering.** Every one of us will face various trials and difficulties in our lives. Some may suffer more but as Christians, we must take each situation as an opportunity to show the world how God is still with us and loves us. Through suffering, we have the opportunity to demonstrate to the unbelieving world how Christ is more glorious and precious to us than any pain and difficulty we might endure. While others are anxious and wallowing in depression, we have every reason to thank God and rejoice. When we place our ultimate hope in Christ

rather than in the temporary things of this world, such as trials and suffering, God is glorified.

- (5) **Sufferings will produce fruit** - If we allow suffering to accomplish its purpose, it can bring forth patience (James 1:3; Hebrews 10:36), joy (Psalm 30:5; 126:6), knowledge (Psalm 94:12), and maturity (1 Peter 5:10). Remember these familiar words from James, the half brother of Jesus in James 1:2-4, *“² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*
- (6) **Suffering can perfect our character and help us to minister to others** - In every church, there are mature saints of God who have suffered and experienced God’s grace, and they are great “*encouragers*” in the congregation. Paul experienced trouble, not as punishment for something he had done, but as preparation for something he was yet going to do – minister to others in need. Just think of the trials that King David had to endure in order to give us the great encouragement that we find in the Psalms. 2 Corinthians 1:7 makes it clear that there is always the possibility that the situation might be reversed: The Corinthians believers might go through trials and receive God’s grace so that they might encourage others. God sometimes calls a church family to experience special trials in order that He might bestow on them special abundant grace. God’s gracious encouragement helps us if we learn to endure. “Patient endurance” is evidence of faith. If we become bitter or critical of God, if we rebel instead of submitting, then our trials will work against us instead of for us. The ability to endure difficulties patiently, without giving up, is a mark of spiritual maturity (Hebrews 12:1-7). God has to work in us before He can work through us. It is much easier for us to grow in knowledge than to grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18). Learning God’s truth and getting it into our heads is one thing, but living God’s truth and getting it into our character is quite something else. God put young Joseph through thirteen years of tribulation before He made him the second ruler of Egypt, and what a great man Joseph turned out to be! God always prepares us for what He is preparing for us, and a part of that preparation is suffering.

Suffering: A Barrier to Faith?

- **C.S. Lewis** - In *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis admits that when his wife Joy died of bone cancer he felt as though the heavens had become a barrier of bronze between him and God.
- **Rabbi Harold Kushner** - Rabbi Harold Kushner in his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* reports that the issue of the suffering of people who love God is the ultimate theological question for sensitive religious people.
- **Oswald Chambers** - Oswald Chambers wrote in *Christian Disciplines*, “Perhaps to be able to explain suffering is the clearest indication of never having suffered.” He concluded that “Suffering is one of life’s mysteries that awaken all the other mysteries until the heart rests in God.”

That's the dilemma: Some conclude that the suffering of the righteous makes faith in a loving, powerful God impossible; others conclude the suffering of the righteous makes faith in a loving, powerful God imperative. Paul's words to Timothy in the face of his suffering and hardship makes faith in a loving, powerful God imperative.

“³ You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. ⁵ And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. ⁷ Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.” -2 Timothy 2:3-7 (NKJV)

- In our text, the apostle Paul wants Timothy (and us) to join him in suffering hardship for the gospel.
- That's a tough sell in our comfort-oriented culture today!
- We want ease, not exertion!
- We want comfort, not conflict!
- We want peace, not pain!
- We want happiness, not hardship!
- We want tranquility, not trouble!

But that's the mentality of the typical American couch potato: Park as close as you can to the store, so you don't have to walk more than a few yards. Drive a block rather than walk. Sit in your recliner with the remote in hand, watching all of those crazy guys on TV run all over the field. Your exercise for the day is to walk to the kitchen for more chips and drinks. And you want me to embrace hardship for the gospel?

I will warn you in advance, this is a convicting text!

- How many of us, myself included, willingly embrace hardship for the sake of the gospel?
- How many of us keep ourselves unentangled from the affairs of everyday life so that we may please our Commander-in-Chief?
- How many of us discipline ourselves as athletes for the kingdom so that we may win the prize?
- How many of us toil in the unglamorous task of farming God's fields so that we may enjoy the crops?

These are the illustrations that Paul uses to make the point: ***To be a fruitful Christian, you must willingly suffer hardship for the gospel now in view of future rewards.***

This text assumes that as a Christian, you desire to be fruitful for Jesus Christ. Is that a valid assumption in your case? If it is, you either are serving Christ in some capacity or are seeking Him about where He wants you to serve. In other words, underlying Paul's command to suffer hardship (it is a command, not a nice suggestion!) is Jesus' command in Matthew 6...

READ: Matthew 6:25-34

Matthew 6:33 says, *“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*

- *“All these things”* refers to the things that unbelievers eagerly seek: food, clothing, a nice place to live, and other material possessions.
- Jesus’ command applies to every believer, not just to those in so-called “full time” Christian service.
- Likewise, Paul’s command certainly applies to pastors and missionaries, but it also applies to every soldier in Christ’s army, which is to say, to every believer.
- The convicting word in Jesus’ command is, *first*. If He had only said, “Seek the kingdom of God,” we could have added that to our list of things to do. That would be somewhat manageable. But to seek it *first* means that we must bump it up to the top of the list. It has to control everything else!
- Many Christians view the kingdom of God as a nice slice of life. It makes them feel good to go to church on Sunday and to have a spiritual element in their lives. But God’s kingdom is not at the center. It’s not the driving force of their lives. So they dabble at the kingdom of God, but they don’t seek it first.
- This is even a trap for many pastors. It’s easy after a few years to settle into the pastorate as a comfortable career. You put in your time, get a paycheck, and save up for retirement at 65 or sooner if you can afford it. In your off hours, you pursue your hobbies. But you’ve lost that consuming passion of seeking first the kingdom of God. You’re not willingly embracing hardship for the gospel in view of eternity. The ministry is just how you earn a living.

To sell us on this difficult command, Paul uses three illustrations and then he urges us to consider what he says. First, he points us to the soldier, then to the athlete, and then to the farmer. The three analogies are similar in that there is a requirement to receive the reward or reach the goal. The soldier must be focused and avoid entanglement to please his commander. The athlete must be disciplined to compete according to the rules to win the prize. The farmer must work hard to enjoy the first fruits of the harvest. Each endures hardship for the sake of future rewards. He is actually giving us three ways we might be a fruitful Christian.

3 Ways We May Be Fruitful As Christians:

- (1) **Untangled commitment:** To be a fruitful Christian, willingly embrace the hardship of the good soldier (2 Timothy 2:3-4)
- (2) **Discipline within limits:** To be a fruitful Christian, willingly embrace the hardship of the athlete (2 Timothy 2:5)
- (3) **Hard work without payback:** To be a fruitful Christian, willingly embrace the hardship of the farmer (2 Timothy 2:6)

TO BE A FRUITFUL CHRISTIAN, WILLINGLY EMBRACE THE HARDSHIP OF THE GOOD SOLDIER: UNENTANGLED COMMITMENT (2 Timothy 2:3-4)

Early in the 20th century, an ad in a London newspaper read: “Men wanted for hazardous journey: small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, and constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.” It was signed by the famous Arctic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton and thousands of men responded. Commenting on this, Warren Wiersbe (*Be Faithful* [Victor Books, 1981], p. 13) writes, If Jesus Christ had advertised for workers, the announcement might have read something like this: “Men and women wanted for difficult task of helping to build My church. You will often be misunderstood, even by those working with you. You will face constant attack from an invisible enemy. You may not see the results of your labor, and your full reward will not come till after all your work is completed. It may cost you your home, your ambitions, even your life.”

Paul was an honest recruiter. Paul knew that if you decide to follow Christ under the false pretense of a life of ease, you will quickly go AWOL when the battle gets intense. And so he calls us to embrace hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. This requires four things:

4 Requirements for Embracing Hardship as a Good Soldier of Christ Jesus:

(1) To be a good soldier of Christ Jesus, recognize that you have been conscripted into Christ’s army to fight the evil forces of darkness - The imagery of being a soldier shows that Christ is not inviting us to a Sunday School picnic! It’s a battle zone. People are getting wounded and killed. In this case, it’s not a volunteer army. Rather, you were drafted when Jesus Christ laid hold of you.

The enemy is the unseen forces of darkness in heavenly places. To avoid being a casualty, you’ve got to put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10-17).

- In boot camp, they train you to endure hardship.
- They get you up in the middle of the night and make you run laps on the blacktop or do pushups until your arms feel like Jell-O.
- They teach you to work as a team when you are tired and upset.
- They teach you to obey orders, even when those orders seem to make no sense.
- You have to trust that the superior officers know something that you don’t know and that by obeying their crazy orders, you will help achieve the goal of victory in battle.

As a Christian, you must develop the mentality of a good soldier of Christ Jesus. You will not understand all of His orders or why He puts you into some very difficult circumstances. In the case of Job, God permitted Satan to take all of his earthly possession, kill his ten children and their mates, and afflict Job with boils all over his

body, just so that God could win an argument! But as the Sovereign of the universe, He has the right to do that!

Pastor John Piper has pointed out that, “Many believers use prayer as an intercom to have the maid bring more refreshments to the living room, when in fact prayer is our walkie-talkie to call in more support to the front lines of the battle.”

In other words, prayer isn't to make our lives more comfortable. It is to bring the forces of heaven against the forces of evil in the cosmic battle of which we are infantry soldiers. So as a believer, you've got to develop this wartime mentality. Don't be surprised when the bullets start flying!

(2) **To be a good soldier of Christ Jesus, willingly embrace the hardship of unentangled commitment** - Just as the soldier in Iraq doesn't set up a souvenir stand or a fast food business to make a little extra money on the side, so the Christian must not get distracted from seeking first the kingdom of God. This is one of the most difficult commands for each of us to apply consistently.

- To apply it does not mean that you must become a monk or a missionary.
- It doesn't require you to quit your regular job or to neglect the daily matters that go along with being a functioning member of society.
- Paul himself made tents to support his ministry.
- While it is legitimate for some to be fully supported in ministry (1 Timothy 5:17-18), you don't have to be a career Christian worker to obey this command.

The key here is the word, “entangle.” It's easy for all of us, including those of us supported by ministry, to get entangled with things that are not wrong in themselves. They're wrong because they distract us from seeking first the kingdom of God.

- There is nothing wrong with a limited use of sports or computers or recreation or hobbies, if we use them to refresh us for the battle.
- But it's easy for these legitimate things to suck you into the quicksand and before you know it, you're not seeking first God's kingdom.

In his book, *Your Money Matters* ([Bethany Fellowship, 1977], pp. 22-23) Malcolm MacGregor tells of a man who had gone into business for himself, who came to him for counsel. A tremendous opportunity had come along. Once he got this business established, he was going to have a lot of time available to minister at the church and help others. He had excitedly told his family that he had found an opportunity to be his own boss and have the freedom he wanted. They must understand that for a short period of time, he was going to have to pour a lot of work and time into getting the business started, but after that he would have a lot of extra time. He would be able to help out at church, perhaps coach Little League, and they would do things together as a family. So,

the first thing he did was to resign his position on the church council, because the council met on Saturday and that was the one day he *had* to be at work. But as soon as he got the business started, he would be back. Business was going well, but he was not going to the mid-week service any more, because that was the night he had to catch up on paper work. Then he quit teaching Sunday School, because he didn't have time to prepare his lesson. Next, he stopped coming Sunday evenings. Then a crisis set in and he was not in church on Sunday morning for six, eight, ten weeks. Now, sitting across the desk from MacGregor, his business was destroyed and he was facing bankruptcy. He asked, "Why would God put me into this business just to see it fail?"

Before we sit in judgment on that man, let's admit that it's very easy to drift into that kind of situation. But if anything—even your family—comes before seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, it is wrongful entanglement.

- (3) **To be a good soldier of Christ Jesus, live daily to please the Lord who enlisted you** - "*The one who enlisted him as a soldier*" does not refer to a lowly recruiter, but to the general who raised an army by rallying men to his cause. Jesus Christ is our general, who calls us to His person and His cause. A good soldier must be loyal to his commander. Commanders are pleased by obedient, dependable soldiers. To please our Commander is the great desire of every blood-bought soldier of the cross (2 Cor. 5:9), so that one day we will hear, "*well done, good and faithful servant.*" Keep in mind who it is that we are trying to please: Jesus Christ. Otherwise, we will try to please people or get upset because people criticize what we're doing. While we must be sensitive to people, our aim is to please our Commander, Jesus Christ, beginning on the heart (thought) level.
- (4) **To be a good soldier of Christ Jesus, remember that you are enduring hardship together with all of His soldiers** - The Greek word used (2:3) is a compound word meaning, "*to suffer hardship with*" someone, in this case, with Paul. It shows us that we are never alone in the battle. The enemy tries to make us feel that we're the only ones going through our trials. Like Elijah when he was running from Jezebel, we think, "I alone am left and they seek my life!" But the Lord always has His 7,000 that have not bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:10, 18). Read the lives of the saints who have suffered in the past and be aware of the persecuted church around the world today. It helps put your trials into perspective to realize that you are enduring hardship with all of the Lord's good soldiers.

TO BE A FRUITFUL CHRISTIAN, WILLINGLY EMBRACE THE HARDSHIP OF THE ATHLETE: DISCIPLINE WITHIN LIMITS (2 Timothy 2:5)

3 Important Observations: (from the athlete illustration)

(1) You do not become godly by accident - We're all looking for quick and easy fixes and remedies for difficult problems. Almost daily I get emails trying to sell me a pill that will take off pounds without the discipline of dieting or exercise.

Spiritually, we fall for the same easy-remedy approach... "Get baptized in the Spirit and speak in tongues and you'll instantly be transported to a higher level where you'll never struggle with temptation again." But it doesn't work.

The athlete metaphor shows that it is only by discipline that the athlete may compete and win. Every athlete knows that occasional jogging won't prepare you to compete in the Olympics. To compete on a winning level, you must daily discipline your body through exercise, diet, and proper rest. Paul writes (1 Tim. 4:7), "*discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.*" You can wish for godliness, you can try magic remedies for godliness, but you won't become godly apart from the daily discipline of making the time to spend in the Word and in prayer. There are no shortcuts.

(2) You must compete according to the rules of God's Word - If an athlete disobeys the rules of his sport, he is instantly disqualified. Yet many Christians, even Christian leaders, think that they have a special exemption that allows them to disobey God's Word and yet expect His blessing. But it doesn't work that way! To put it bluntly, men, you can't engage in mental lust or look at pornography and then pray, "Lord, keep my children morally pure." You can't cheat in your business and ask God to bless it.

(3) Your aim in competing is to win the prize - Paul tells us (1 Cor. 9:24) to run in such a way that we might win. *In the Christian race, we're not competing against each other.* And, there will be multiple winners. We all can win. But Paul wants us to adopt a mindset that says, *"I'm not going to dink around in my Christian life. I'm running to win!"*

Charles Simeon, a godly Anglican pastor in the early 19th century, saw many young men under his influence go out into the cause of world missions. One such young man was Henry Martyn, who went to India and Persia, where he died at age 31 of tuberculosis. This was before photography, but someone had painted a portrait of Martyn just before he died and sent it to Simeon. He was shocked when he saw it, at the obvious toll that the hardship of missionary life had taken on his young disciple. Simeon hung the portrait over the mantle in his study, where he looked at it often. He said that it reminded him, "Don't trifle! Don't trifle!"

Thus to be a fruitful Christian, willingly embrace the hardship of the soldier and the athlete.

TO BE A FRUITFUL CHRISTIAN, WILLINGLY EMBRACE THE HARDSHIP OF THE FARMER: HARD, UNEXCITING WORK WITH NO IMMEDIATE PAYBACK (2 Timothy 2:6).

3 Thing to Note About Paul's Farmer Illustration: (in 2 Timothy 2:6)

(1) Much Christian work is unexciting - Compared to the lives of the soldier and the athlete, the life of a farmer is rather boring.

- The soldier lives on the edge of life and death on the battlefield.
- The athlete has the thrill of the cheering crowd as he runs toward the goal.
- But the farmer works long and hard, plowing and planting, and goes home tired.

About the most exciting thing he can see is, "The corn grew two inches last week!" Whoopee! Why does he do it? He is looking for the harvest.

Spiritually, there are a few who have "exciting" ministries. They're invited to speak all over the world. They have thousands flocking to hear them or buying their books. Then there are the rest of us, out in the fields waiting for the corn to grow. Every week, I try to sow the seed of God's Word into hearts, but people don't usually change over night. Sometimes bad storms or pests destroy the plants before they bear fruit. But you keep sowing, trusting God to bring the increase of the harvest.

(2) Christian work is tiring - The Greek word that Paul uses for "**hardworking**" means "**to toil or strive so as to become weary and tired.**" He uses it to describe...

- Pastors who "work hard in preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17).
- He commends those in Rome who "worked hard" in the Lord (Rom. 16:6, 12).
- He often mentions his own labor or toil in the Lord's work (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 6:4; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; Col. 1:29-2:1; 1 Tim. 4:10).

Much Christian work is mentally and emotionally draining. Even Jesus was so tired that He could fall asleep in a small boat in a fierce storm! Expect to be tired as part of the hardship of serving the Lord.

(3) The reward comes at the end of the age, not at the end of the meeting - The harvest is at the end of the age. Often we will not know what God accomplished through our labors or our prayers or our gifts until we stand before Him. Then we will meet people who are in heaven because we sowed the seed through our words or our gifts or our good deeds. We will enjoy a harvest of eternal joy!

CONCLUSION

After giving these three illustrations, Paul tells Timothy (2:7), “*Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.*” Timothy had to engage his brain to think about the implications of Paul’s words, but if he gained any insight, it came from the Lord, who gives understanding in spiritual matters.

Perhaps we could add this as a fourth illustration—the hardship of the Christian scholar. To gain insight from God’s Word, you must apply yourself by carefully observing and thinking about what the text says. All the while that you’re laboring, you must ask God to give you understanding.

That is especially true in this difficult-to-apply text that we’ve been considering. None of us naturally is inclined to embrace hardship. But Paul directs us to look to the rewards in eternity. Jesus Christ will smile and say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” That will make all the toil and hardship worth it! He will reward you eternally for your labors. You will enjoy the harvest of righteousness in the presence of the Lord and all His saints. But you must now set aside all distractions and the sin that so easily entangles you. Seek first His kingdom and righteousness as a good soldier, a disciplined athlete, and a hardworking farmer, even though it is difficult!

3 Closing Reminders Using Paul’s Analogies of a Soldier, Athlete, and Farmer:

- (1) **Remember whose army you are in** - We win in the end! The battle may be fierce, and the fight may seem overwhelming at times, but you are on the winning side. You can trust God!
- (2) **Don’t forget to exercise your faith like a good athlete** - Be growing in your faith through prayer, Bible study, and regular worship and fellowship with other believers. Just like an athlete loses his edge and ability to compete well, so a Christian who is not growing in his or her faith through the Christian/spiritual disciplines will lose his or her edge and will have a weak faith and walk.
- (3) **Keep in mind that farmers can plant the seed, but only God can make it grow** – There is a Christian saying that was popularized a few years ago based on an acrostic of the word “FROG.” It stood for Fully Rely On God! In our Christian life, no matter what we are going through we must learn to fully trust God, be dependent on Him alone and surrender to his Sovereignty (power, dominion, rule, control) over us.

Application Questions

1. Since it is so easy to drift into an easy, comfortable Christian life, how can we avoid it? What warning signs are there?
2. What other practical ramifications do the metaphors of soldier, athlete, and farmer bring to mind?
3. Some equate discipline with legalism. Is it? Can it become legalistic? How can we avoid this?

4. Since we often can't see visible results in ministry, how can we evaluate whether or not we're being effective?