

2 Timothy 2:3-7 | “Commitment to Christ”
Preached on February 5, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

Turn in your Bibles this morning to 2 Timothy 2, verses 3-7. *[pause]*

A soldier is in a foreign country.

He's serving out of love for country, and a desire to please his commanding officer. *[pause]*

On his mission, he risks his life and endures hardship.

He has to sit and wait for the enemy in 100 degree weather, with bugs biting him all day long. *[pause]*

At another point, he has to crawl in thick mud filled with twigs and rocks throughout.

He feels the pain and discomfort, but continues on, for the mission is the goal. *[pause]*

That's his focus.

He doesn't take a week off to go and make some money in a local town, but remains single-minded with the mission in his sights. *[pause]*

When he encounters the enemy, the enemy doesn't hold back.

The enemy is ruthless, and inflicts harm upon him: hitting, punching, and scratching.

But this is his role, so he does it faithfully focused, for he's committed. *[pauseeee]*

An athlete has the Olympic gold in mind.

She trains and disciplines her body for years.

She gets up at 4 in the morning, eats breakfast, and is off to train for hours each day. *[pause]*

It's brutal, as she pushes her body to its limits.

At times, she feels like she can't keep going for another second, yet she endures. *[pause]*

Over time, she becomes better trained and disciplined, and her body can handle more. *[pause]*

She also takes lots of time making sure she knows exactly what the rules are so as NOT to ever get disqualified. *[pause]*

She undergoes all of this demanding training and discipline because she has the goal in mind.

She faithfully continues, for she's committed to gaining the gold. *[pauseeee]*

A farmer is thinking about the abundant harvest that is to come in the Fall.

From before the sun rises to even after sundown, he is working continually. *[pause]*

He rarely, if ever, gets a day off.

The work must be done, or else he won't have enough money to continue on.

Harvest time isn't going to wait, the cows need milking, the eggs need collected, the fence needs repaired.

Some of the machinery needs serviced, or else he won't be able to even gather the harvest.
[pause]

Everyday he is covered in dirt and sweat, his muscles and body ache after a long day of hard work.

Calluses and cuts characterize his hands, and his face and arms show evidence of being out in the sun all day. *[pause]*

Why does he work so hard? Why does he put himself through such hardship?

He has the end goal in mind: when the crops finally come in, it will all be worth it.

He knows that hardship is part and parcel of the territory.

He works hard day-in and day-out, for he's committed, and he knows that, as is often a part of many aspects of life: "no pain, no gain." *[pauseee]*

A soldier, an athlete, and a farmer.

They each take hard work, faithfulness, and commitment.

And it's actually in difficulty that you see if someone is committed to being a soldier, athlete, or farmer, for some quit altogether.

But those who endure, do it because they know that the difficulty is worth it. *[pauseee]*

Those three positions are actually the examples that Paul uses to encourage Timothy on in faithfulness.

He doesn't want hardship and suffering to lead Timothy to give up in ministry, so he reminds him that suffering is worth it in the end. *[pause]*

Let's READ the passage to see this. [\[READ VERSES 3-7\]](#)

Before Paul gets to those 3 examples of soldier, athlete, and farmer - he first tells him to "share in suffering". *[pause]*

A big temptation for Timothy, as well as us, is to try to avoid suffering at all costs.

In fact, being Americans, it is ingrained in us that suffering and discomfort should be avoided.
[pause]

We live in a culture obsessed with safety, comfort, and ease.

That seems to be the goal in many of our minds, and the result is that suffering and hardship become inherently bad things, to always be avoided. *[pause]*

But Paul is seeking to help Timothy (and us) to see that suffering and hardship are actually a part of the Christian life. *[pause]*

Suffering and hardship in following Christ are actually NOT things to be avoided, but things to be endured...

*...For avoidance of suffering for Christ equals unfaithfulness to Christ. *[pauseeee]**

If you don't focus on Christ and don't serve in the church because you don't want to come across as too "churchy" and weird to others, then you aren't being faithful.

If you keep quiet about Christ in order to avoid being mocked, scorned, and humiliated by others, then you aren't being faithful. *[pause]*

As you can see, not all suffering and hardship are to be avoided at all costs.

Some suffering is necessary in order to be faithful to Christ, but in order to endure that suffering and not avoid it, we must be committed to Christ. *[pause]*

And so we see Paul's main point is this...

We should be so committed to Christ that we are willing to suffer for Him.

While I was in seminary, I was a manager at a fast food restaurant, and I saw something astonishing.

*Once in a while, we would hire someone, and so you'd be excited about another crew member. *[pause]**

They would start their first day, and everything seemed to be going well - until about lunch time.

They would go to lunch break, but they would never come back. *[pause]*

The person had quit on their first day on the job. *[pause]*

Why would they do this?

They weren't committed, so when the job proved to be harder than they expected, they quit.
[pause]

That can't be us in the Christian life and ministry!

We need to be willing to share in suffering with the many other Christians who are suffering for Christ. *[pauseeee]*

We are to do this "as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." *[pauseeeee]*

We see here that we are soldiers *of Christ*.

He is our commanding officer, He is our leader, and we are to follow His commands. *[pauseeee]*

Think of soldiers...

A *good* soldier is willing to go through hard times for the mission and for his master.

So we must be willing to go through hardship. *[pause]*

A soldier is exposed to injury and death in his vocation - that's what the Christian life is like.

A soldier is sent on a mission, and must be committed to that mission - that's what we do for Jesus. *[pause]*

A soldier expects and is willing to go through hardship, don't they?

So also, we are to expect suffering for our master, and should be willing to endure it for Him. *[pauseeeee]*

Think with me about the *why*.

Why do people enlist in the military and serve as good soldiers, enduring hardship?...

They love their country. *[pause]*

So we endure hardship as a soldier of Jesus Christ because we love Him.

It's worth the risk!

It's worth the cost because Jesus Christ has graciously saved us and has given us a new life and a new calling.

We are His; He is our Lord and King.

And we can't cowardly give up, for our Lord is worth every pain along the way. *[pauseeee]*

He has given us so much - how could we flee the battlefield? *[pauseeee]*

When you think of a Christian that is doing well in their spiritual life, who do you think of?

Do you think of the person who seems to have it the easiest?

The person, who isn't facing hardship?

The person whose Christian life looks so easy and smooth?

That's all wrong. *[pause]*

There's certainly peace, joy, and stability, but it's not easy, for there's toil and suffering.

All you have to do is just look to Paul and Jesus and your thoughts about that will quickly be dispelled. *[pause]*

Paul faced trials, hardships, sufferings, and beatings for Christ.

Jesus was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."¹

And yet some people preach that if you come to Christ all of your problems will just go away.

They preach that your life will just go so well, and you won't face hard times. *[pause]*

That's not only clearly unbiblical, but also completely harmful.

It doesn't prepare people for hardship, as good soldiers of Christ Jesus. *[pauseeee]*

Never forget that you are a soldier of Christ Jesus, and you must be willing to follow His orders and be committed to His mission.

And like a soldier, our comforts and desires are to be submitted to our Master's will, for He is King of kings and Lord of lords.² *[pauseeeee]*

He's our commanding officer, but here's the thing, he's not a hard, mean master.

He's a gracious, loving commander, who gave His life for us!

He's a master, who is gentle and lowly,³ and who sympathizes with our weakness.⁴ *[pause]*

He doesn't command and leave us, but He commands, equips, and never forsakes us, saying, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."⁵ *[pause]*

We have the best and most perfect Leader there is, God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. *[pause]*

He knows our pains, our sufferings, our commitment.

He cares for us through it all, and He's with us wherever we go.

¹ Isaiah 53:3.

² A reference to Revelation 19:16.

³ A reference to Matthew 11:29.

⁴ A reference to Hebrews 4:15.

⁵ Matthew 28:20.

He has given us what we need to fight, and someday, if we fight faithfully, He will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”⁶ *[pauseeee]*

Christian, be willing to share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

He is worthy to be served, even if the whole world is against us. *[pause]*

After giving the main command to share in suffering, Paul gives 3 examples to expand further upon what this commitment to Christ looks like.

And the first one is...

A. Being focused like a soldier.

In verse 4, he says, “No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.” *[pause]*

The point is that a soldier can’t be distracted and unfocused.

A soldier who is not focused is a defective soldier, a deserting soldier, or a potentially dead soldier. *[pause]*

A soldier must be focused on the mission.

As Paul says, “No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits.” *[pause]*

Commentator Jay Adams gives a vivid example of this when he says, “Can you picture a soldier out on the battlefield with a cell phone conducting business while fighting?”⁷

That’s the idea.

A soldier on active duty can’t get entangled in the affairs of everyday life.

He can’t be intertwined between both civilian and military affairs. *[pause]*

This doesn’t mean that the soldier can’t ever do anything with regards to civilian affairs, but he can’t get *entangled* in them.

That is, he can’t be focused on business dealings, and typical civilian pursuits of sports, hobbies, and other activities while actively serving in the military. *[pause]*

The reason is because it interferes with his mission.

He won’t please his commanding officer, if he is not single-mindedly focused on serving. *[pauseeee]*

⁶ Matthew 25:21.

⁷ Jay E. Adams, *I Timothy, II Timothy, and Titus, The Christian Counselor’s Commentary* (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 59.

That's what God is calling us to in the Christian life.

Since we are soldiers of Christ, then we can't be consumed or preoccupied with the things of this world. *[pause]*

This is so very relevant for our day.

So many of us are so focused on sports, career, possessions, our clothes, and our hobbies that we distract ourselves away from being a soldier of Christ.

We are entangled in what the world values. *[pause]*

I'm not saying that there's no place for any of those things, but I'm saying that often we get entangled in them - our focus is too much on them. *[pause]*

Often our focus on trivial, earthly things is big, and our focus on spiritual, eternal matters small. *[pauseeee]*

How much of your day is thinking about and pursuing your image: your clothes, your looks, or your possessions?

How much are you consumed with sports? How much are you preoccupied with your hobbies? *[pause]*

Think about it this way...

Compare the amount of time that you spend concerned about what other people think of you with how much you spend seeking to please Christ.

Compare the amount of effort and focus you put into hunting, fishing, sports, and hobbies with how much you put into serving Christ.

Compare the amount of time you spend scrolling on social media, watching or looking at insignificant things that don't matter, with how much time you spend seeking to be on mission for Christ. *[pause]*

Our world has conformed our thinking and values into its own image, and we don't even notice. *[pause]*

Again I'm not saying we can't do these things, but the emphasis is that we can't get entangled in them so much so that they interfere with serving Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this focus on serving Christ is not only for pastors or for those super spiritual people - it's to be the focus of all Christians.

Christ doesn't merely demand an hour a week on Sunday, but a life of service. *[pauseee]*

Remember who enlisted you - Jesus Christ!

He bought you with His blood, and now you are enlisted in His army, to be serving His mission and focused on His kingdom tasks. *[pause]*

Remember who enlisted you!

He chose you to be His!

He graciously saved you and chose you to be His soldier for His mission!

There is no higher calling than serving the King of the Universe, so let's be focused like soldiers, seeking to please Him in all that we do.

Let's not waste our lives on things of little importance, but let's step into our calling and purpose, serving our Lord Jesus Christ with our lives. *[pause]*

Not only does Paul give the example of a soldier, but also of an athlete, showing us that commitment to Christ entails...

B. Being disciplined like an athlete.

Paul says in verse 5, "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules." *[pause]*

In the 1904 Olympic games in St. Louis, an American runner named Fred Lorz, crossed the finish line of the marathon first. *[pause]*

There was a problem though: he had hitched a ride in a car for 10 miles of the marathon.

When the car broke down, he ran the final 5 miles and crossed the finish line before anyone else.

However, the cheating was quickly revealed, and Lorz readily admitted to his automotive assistance.

He, of course, didn't end up winning, but got himself disqualified.⁸ *[pauseeee]*

In order to be victorious, athletes must compete according to the rules. *[pause]*

So what do they need? Integrity and discipline.

They can't cut corners, or they won't win the prize. *[pause]*

So also, that's true in the Christian life.

With the prize in mind, we must be disciplined and self-controlled. *[pauseeee]*

So many of us are too casual about the Christian life.

⁸ <https://www.history.com/news/shortcuts-to-the-gold-9-cheaters-in-olympic-history>.

We do not see the need for discipline and self-control. *[pause]*

Do we think that things will just come easily and we will miraculously grow into a mature Christian in a moment?

Are we lazy Christians, trying to cut corners? *[pauseee]*

We need to remember that the faith is like a marathon, and we, the runners.⁹

It takes disciplined endurance. *[pauseee]*

You can't expect to run well if you do not run by the rules.

You can't just think, "Oh, God doesn't care how I live."

No, there's a reason why God commands us and tells us what's pleasing to Him. *[pause]*

The Word of God shows us how we ought to live, but are we living according to what He has said?

It shows us how we ought to be faithful, but will we say, "How about I cut some corners here?" *[pauseeee]*

Be continually disciplined and self-controlled in your Christian life because if you just take it easy and become lazy, it's not going to be good.

Let's see ourselves as athletes, who need to stay disciplined. *[pause]*

There's that organization in schools called, "Fellowship of Christian Athletes".

Well if you think about it, Paul is showing us that every Christian is a part of the fellowship of Christian athletes.

We may not be running literal marathons, but we are running a marathon nonetheless.

And when we remember that, it will remind us that we need to be disciplined and self-controlled as we go through each day. *[pauseeee]*

So commitment entails being focused like a soldier, disciplined like an athlete, and thirdly...

C. Being hard-working like a farmer.

Farmers are well-known to be hard-workers because you have to work hard to be a farmer.

The work doesn't take a break, but things need to be done, and need to be done on time.

And we all know that hard work deserves the fruit of your labor. *[pause]*

⁹ See Hebrews 12:1-2.

So also, it's obvious that a hard-working farmer should receive the first share of his crops, and that's what Paul brings out in verse 6. *[pauseeee]*

The point is that if a person puts in the work, they deserve the reward.

And that's the case in the Christian life -- there's hard work involved, but there's great reward for that work, too. *[pauseeee]*

There are some of us who think that we don't need to expend effort in the Christian life.

We think that we can continue skipping our Bible reading, prayer, church services, and service to Christ and expect to grow in leaps and bounds.

We think that we can just kind of cruise through life, and expect all to go well, but that's not how it works.

The Christian life takes *effort*.

It's a battle and a marathon, as we just learned earlier, but it's also painstakingly slow, hard work, like a farmer. *[pauseeee]*

A farmer doesn't get applause and praise, but he silently works hard.

So also, many people may not even know the work that you put into the Christian life, but continue on, because it's worth it! *[pauseeee]*

The farmer also works hard, but he doesn't see the fruit right away.

So also, you will put in laborious work in the Christian life, and you won't always see the results right away.

But we keep patiently and steadfastly putting in the work.

James makes this point in his letter, when he says, "See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient."¹⁰ *[pauseeee]*

Even though it takes effort and patience, the result is worth it, isn't it?

When those crops come in, the farmer is overjoyed.

And we will be thrilled when the fruit of our labors is finally rewarded. *[pauseeee]*

In the Bible, God makes it clear that Christians will be rewarded in Heaven for their service.

¹⁰ James 5:7b-8a.

This work DOES NOT gain our salvation, but this work is noticed and rewarded by God.
[pause]

In the parable of the ten minas, each person is rewarded for how they stewarded the ten minas.

For the one who made ten minas more, he is given authority over 10 cities, and the one who gained 5 minas is given authority over 5 cities.¹¹

That clearly shows us that Christ rewards Christians according to their faithful service.

Some day, if we are faithfully hard-working, we will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”¹²

And what a joy it will be to hear those words. *[pauseeee]*

A soldier, an athlete, and a farmer - what do all of these have in common?

Each takes commitment, focus, discipline, hard work, and hardship.

But also, each involves some sort of reward for enduring: pleasing the commander, crowning, and crops. *[pause]*

Paul’s point is that this is much like the Christian life.

It takes enduring hardship, focus, discipline, and hard work, but it’s totally worth it!

We should want to please our Lord and Savior, and we should endure, so that we can be recognized for our faithful service. *[pauseeee]*

Isn’t it such a great thing that God doesn’t neglect our faithful service, but He sees and rewards it!

The effort put into your Christian life is totally worth it, and it will pay off. *[pauseeee]*

Now does this mean that we are called to just put our head down, roll up our sleeves, and work hard in our own strength?

No, because we remember verse 1, which told us where to get the strength for our tasks, as it said, “...be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” *[pause]*

This shows us that all of our focus, discipline, and hard work doesn’t come from ourselves, but they come from Christ!

We look to Him to give us the strength to be focused, to be disciplined, and to work hard.

¹¹ See Luke 19:11-27.

¹² Matthew 25:21.

So that means that any effort, focus, and work that we do, and any fruit and reward that we receive, are only because of grace! *[pause]*

If we please Him, if we get the crown, if we get the crops, it's only because of His grace working within us.

He gets glory for our work, and He gets glory for our reward because the work and reward were only because of Him.

That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."¹³ *[pause]*

Any focus, discipline, or effort on our part should be recognized as from Him, and therefore, any reward that we receive should be cast before His throne.¹⁴ *[pauseeeee]*

So many of us aren't putting in the grace-empowered effort needed in the Christian life.

We are focused on the things of this world, not disciplined when it comes to our spiritual life, and lazy followers of Christ.

And yet we expect fruit and results! *[pause]*

May God work in our hearts to see the need to be committed to Him with our whole lives. *[pauseeee]*

Reliant upon His empowering grace...

May we be willing to suffer for Him.

And may we be focused like soldiers, disciplined like athletes, and hard-working like farmers - all for His glory. *[pauseeee]*

I'll end this morning the same way that Paul ends his statements in verse 7, "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." *[pause]*

Will you think about these things? Will you reflect upon your commitment to Christ?

When you take time to think upon these things, the Lord will help you to understand them deeper and He will help you to see how you can apply these things to your life.

So I pray that you would really take time to think over these things. *[pause]*

Don't just go back to the old routine of life, but dwell upon these truths, and may God cultivate in you a deeper commitment to Him with your life.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 15:10.

¹⁴ An allusion to Revelation 4:10.