

Paul and Timothy and the Life of the Faithful

II Timothy 2:1-7

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Well, good evening, everyone. It's good to see you all again tonight. And this is a sort of a part of a series I'm calling Practical Theology. We're mostly (when I'm here with you at night) mostly going to look at II Timothy, chapters one, two, three and four. And today we'll be looking at II Timothy 2:1-7 -- One of my personal favorite passages. You may possibly wonder why I say that, but it is. And I hope to show you why. The text describes the Christian life.

Your series of images and metaphors, farmer, athlete, soldier, and also gives context for those images. Listen, as I read God's word to you.

Paul speaking to Timothy, his brother and successor and child in the faith.

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And what you've heard from me in the presence of many witnesses and trust to faithful or reliable men who will be able to teach others, also share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. And it is the hardworking farmer who ought to have the first fruit or first share of the crops. Think over what I say for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Let's pray for a moment,

Lord, give us understanding into everything we know. We can never fully fathom your word, but I do pray that we would lay hold of it, understand it, love it, and live it as well. We pray in Jesus' name.

If you like to know what's coming, and I know some of you do. We're going to look first at verse one that tells us that we are strengthened by the grace of God. That's the first point. Be strengthened, Paul Command.

Second, we're going to look at the imperative to pass on the faith from one generation to the next.

And third, we'll look at faithful work as a soldier, an athlete and a farmer. And then we give some practical thoughts about how we go about doing that.

One year, my daughter, the runner, a lot of runners in our family. But I've got one who runs more than the rest. One year, my daughter, the runner, not a runner, was in a half marathon and she had serious hopes of placing I'll just say on the podium when it was done, it was, you know, one of those races with hundreds of runners and bibs and timers and so forth. And she was in the secondary pack behind the lead pack and decided to join the lead pack, which she did, but

burned too much energy around the ten mile mark and found herself flagging badly. A man came up beside her who had been in the pack. She had left a couple of miles earlier and said to her, It's just one more mile now, let's go. And those simple words, just one more mile. Let's go. Gave her the strength, the endurance, the willpower to finish strong. She loved to tell that story to her dad.

Today we learn about how we get strong, how we stay strong, and we learn about it through a series of metaphors that have to do with working hard or being strong. A farmer works hard. An athlete strives hard. Soldier certainly puts himself in the way of danger. But it doesn't say this passage does not say what the Bible says in a number of places. Be strong. It does not say be strong. It says be strengthened by the grace in Christ Jesus, not go forth and demonstrate your strength, but let God demonstrate his strength in you. Now what Paul writes, He writes to his child. Paul calls very few people a child. Timothy is one of them. It's a sign of deep love. Earlier in, the Apostle Paul says that Timothy is like a son to him. And so he's speaking to someone he loves of God's grace, he says, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

So, evening folk, I feel free to give you a little extra load. Theologically. I want to help you know that the word grace actually has three overlapping meanings in the Bible. The first meaning is general or unmerited favor or God giving you things, doing things for you that you simply don't deserve. And God, of course, gives his unmerited favor to unbelievers. He sends his rain, his sun on them. He might give you the favor of wealth or prosperity or the perfect job, or you know, you're looking for a job and you just bump into somebody that doesn't really have a big role in your life and they tell you that they have the job for you or an opportunity for you. That's generic favor. That's grace - number one.

Number two, there is redeeming grace, and it overlaps with the first one. But redeeming grace is the grace that saves people like Noah and Jacob and Moses and David and Peter and Paul, who are sinners. Now, God gave most of those people prosperity. Most of those people are well-off financially. It's the first kind of grace.

The second kind of grace is to say people like them who got drunk, schemed, committed adultery, denied the new Jesus, killed people. I mean, there are a lot of sins that God save those people. That's his redeeming grace. The first kind of grace is without merit. God gives you prosperity or favor or, you know, all the lights turn green for you when you're late.

The first is favor without regard to merit. The second is favor despite demerit, despite the fact that we owe the God knows us nothing because we deserve the opposite of his favor. The third grace is what's in view here more. And that is the empowering grace that God gives us. So we can please Him, do his work, become strong, stay strong after we're redeemed. We need power for daily life, and that is the grace of enduring strength and power and grace.

Now, Paul says, be strengthened, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus in two one. So you notice, first of all, that this is you might notice I'm a I teach Greek, so maybe you don't notice, but I notice that this is a present tense be strengthened. Let that be the case. Now.

Always be strengthened not you have been strengthened or you will be strengthened. Be strengthened right now by God's grace, when it's a passive right. It doesn't say be strong. It says be strengthened. It means God strengthens you. God is the one who's doing the strengthening when it says, but it gives us command of that passive voice in the Bible. It means God is the one who is doing it, and He does it because we grow weak daily. He says you need to get strong daily, but actually you need to be strengthened daily by my ongoing grace. And we do that. Paul says, Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus in Christ. Jesus means through your union with Christ.

I know you've heard about this many times and maybe heard this verse quoted too many times, but here it is one more time. Paul says, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live. I live by faith in the Son of God. That's union with Christ. We died with him, We rose with Him, with reign with Him by Union, with Christ we are transformed. Now, that doesn't mean all sin goes away. You know, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. But we do get stronger by the grace that is in Christ. Jesus. We change by union with him.

Some of you know, I was pastor of a church vaguely like this one, not as big, but big and similar from for about 11 years. About ten years ago I finished that, went back to being a seminary professor. And one of the things I noticed as pastor is that people got my wife and me confused. Not that they looked at her and said, Dan, but they ascribe some of my traits to her. So, you know, they know I'm a trained theologian, a pastor and so forth.

I know the Bible well. But it was very interesting to me that a lot of women went to my wife for spiritual counsel. Can you imagine that? Why did they go to her? Well, they went to her because she's an intelligent woman who's been spending time with theologians her entire life, not just me, but my various friends and being intelligent and a woman of faith and spending time reading the Bible, studying the Bible her whole life. She's actually a good lay theologian. So I realize it's not nonsensical. It actually is plausible for them to go to her for spiritual counsel. The part that I could never get over is that they would tell me from time to time that I'm good with names. This is demonstrably false. But they had this idea because I would stand next to my wife, who is good with names, and she would help me, someone to be walking toward me on the sidewalk. I'd say name. She'd say, You know, Linda, Belinda, Melinda, whatever the exact name is, I'd get the name and then people would maybe walk toward us and she'd say, Well, hello, Marie. And then, of course, I knew Marie's name, right? And so I said, Marie, how good to see you. And Marie actually thought I knew her name. It was marvelous. But the interesting thing is, because I hung out with her all the time, I actually became slightly above mediocre at names. And so slowly it became I won't say true, but it became partially true that I was pretty good with names, at least the names of the people in the church. What I'm talking about is union, because we spend time together are attributes go to each other. My wife became more like me. I became more like my wife. When we spend time with Jesus, become more like him, we become strengthened by the graces in Christ Jesus in Christ. Jesus were united to him. And of course, the

more we spend time with the Lord, the more we pray and meditate on His Word and read the Bible and the other steps we can take to live in Union with Christ.

The more we are like him and strengthened by grace.

Now, I know that this church knows this, but it definitely deserves to be stated again and understood clearly what you've heard. I'm going ask you to count your fingers how many generations Paul has here. You ready? What you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, Paul says in trust to faithful or reliable men who will be able to teach others Also how many generations that you hear Don't rush to answer. How many generations do you hear? I see fingers going up like this. The answers for Paul spoke to Timothy. Timothy spoke to Reliable Men who share the faith with others also. That's 4 generation. So Paul is looking down. The quarter of time should be from a great grandfather to the great grandchildren in today's terms. Now for generations, 25 years, which over the span of human history, it has been then the church is in its 80th generation, which is, you know, a lot-- if the church was founded around 30 A.D. We're almost ready for the 81st generation.

Now. The Bible likes to use 40 is a big number. So we've had 40 that took us to, you know, 1030 A.D. And if you get another 40 to 2030 and you all have the privilege of being part of the next generation of generations, you all soon will be 81 passing on the next ones. That's, of course, what's behind our missions program is that we're deeply aware that our responsibility is to pass on the gospel to others.

I have a friend at the seminary. His name is Bob Yarborough, and he teaches at the seminary and he preaches in churches in Saint Louis and does all kinds of things. But for many years now, almost every year of his adult life, he should have gone to Romania or Romania and Africa. And he was in Sudan for a number of years before that became too dangerous. And then he moved to South Africa. And when he comes back, he almost always says something like this. I think I might have done more good in one week, teaching hundreds of African pastors than I do in a semester at Covenant Seminary. That's not meant to run the seminary down. But he knows what I imagine many of you know. And if you don't, you're going to know in about 10 seconds. The vast majority of all pastors in the world have no formal theological training. The center of the world, the Christian world, right now is no longer in Europe or North America. It's not really clear where the center is. Actually, nobody knows whether there's 50 million or 120 million Christians living in China. It's impossible to tell because the Chinese government doesn't want us to know. And how many in Indonesia and the Philippines and in Brazil, by the way, there's more conservative Presbyterians in Brazil than there are in America. It's not even close. So Christianity is going through the world, and it's our responsibility to take the gospel and entrusted to reliable men who will be able to teach others also. Now, there's something else I love about this passage, and that is that Paul says The things you've heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, you know, in a lot of religions, there's sort of level one for the ordinary people, and then there's a level two the secret things like the Masons, for example, and you have to be initiated to get the real truth. And there are Christian heresies over the

years who've said, you've got the four gospels, we've got more gospels, you get the secrets Jesus told his disciples, **You need to know there are no secrets in Christianity.** There is nothing that goes on in the pastor's office, nothing that's said nothing. This plan in the theologians office that isn't said out loud right here, there is no inconsistency. We don't believe one thing in the back room, in another room, in public, it's the same. And Paul says, you've heard me say these things in front of many witnesses. Many witnesses means public proclamation in maybe amphitheatres in front of hundreds and thousands of people also means a small rooms of five people and two people and 12 people. You've heard me say these things and you pass them on to people who are faithful or reliable. I keep saying it's both. The word that's used there is faithful and faithful, as you know, has two meanings. It means full of faith, right? So people who are strong believers, but also the word faithful to us and in the Bible language as well means reliable, someone you can count on --so full of faith and reliable. That's who we look for in our leaders remains our core task. Never want to minimize preaching or teaching but passing the truth the gospel to the next generation is always a main thing because the church is not alive and this generation is supposed to be, but it will be alive in every generation until Lord comes. I've heard people here tell me Briarwood has a multi-generational perspective. Praise God. Keep up the good work. I'm looking at Ryan right now. He's sorry. This is ad lib, obviously. But you know, he's training young men and young women who are soccer players. How old are they? They're 7, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18 years old. That's the next generation. We've got the ballet company. Kids are seven, ten, 11, 12, 17 years old. That's the next generation. That's what we're supposed to do. That's what we want to do. We want to give to that with a multi-generational perspective.

Now, Paul gives us three images about that perspective, and they're all important. The first one is we are like soldiers. You are like soldiers. If I were in a Baptist church, I'd say, Repeat after me, we are soldiers. What do you think? Can we do it? We're not in a Baptist church who thinks we can do this. All right, let's do it. Benny said yes. Okay. Ready? We are soldiers one more time. We are soldiers. Now, what does a soldier do? A soldier pleases his commanding officer, his enlisting officer. There's somebody whom he wishes to satisfy, to please. That is to say he doesn't have an unlimited number of interests or pursuits. There's some things that are far more important to others. So soldiers -- we please one, we please the Lord, we please our king who enlisted us and commands us. Soldier also does not get entangled therefore in civilian pursuits. That is to say there are things we don't.

There are things we don't go after, things we don't do. Let me let me give you an example here. When people talk about the Christian life, they sometimes talk about the disciplines of abstinence. That fits here. The sense of the sort of disciplines of abstinence, spiritual disciplines remind us are some things that are perfectly good in themselves. Nothing wrong with them, but they aren't good for you. So social media scrolling or watching a movie every night on whatever platform you choose is not necessarily evil at all. There's nothing wrong with it at all. But it can become wrong for you because you indulge in something for an hour or 2 hours every day that's not accomplishing anything. My wife and I sometimes joke when we play cards. We play cards

once a year whether we need to or not, with people who think it's fun to play cards. And we, you know, we try to go along with it. And then we notice dedicated Christians who shuffle cards really well. And at some point we'll look at each other and whisper a sign of a misspent youth. There's nothing wrong with being really good with cards, but if you spend hundreds and hundreds of hours learning how to play cards, you are probably pulling yourself away from something else that's more important.

So we don't get entangled in civilian pursuits, ordinary things that can pull us away. We're also willing to suffer in other places, Paul says. Fight the good fight because it is a fight and you have to be willing to suffer. I want to tell you that I've been a large church pastor and I've run with large church pastors. If you talk to ten or 20 large church pastors, most of them will say they've been seriously threatened with physical harm. People. A good friend of mine got into his office one evening and there was a man lying in wait for him, intent on beating him to a pulp. Talked to more than one pastor who's pulled a gun out of somebody's hand. I've talked to deacons at churches that have had to bring men down who brought a rifle to church intent on killing the pastor while he preached the sermon. I mean, I could unfortunately go on. And the truth is, pastors know that. They know that, you know, if you stand up in public in a big church, you're a target. And they continue. None of them quit the ministry because of that, because their goal is to please the commanding officer and fight the good fight. That's one. We're soldiers.

Number two, by the way, that's not self-referential. When I'm with 20 pastors who've been harmed, I'm the one who hasn't been harmed, threatened with harm. But one of my friends have. Number two, the pastor, the leader, Timothy Titus, the elders, the deacon, the women's ministry leader is also like an athlete. Paul says an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. Now, in sports are two kinds of rules. There's subject of rules and object of rules. The subject of rules are things like be a good teammate, be unselfish, endure. If you're in a race, for example, you endure to the end. You don't quit. If you're a swimmer, you endure while in the water. That's the subject of rule. Prepare yourself stretch exercise according to the ways that make you a better athlete. The object of rules are things like in your sport. Is a ball hitting the line in or on a foot hitting a line in or out. In soccer, the line is in. In baseball, the line is in. In basketball and football, the line is out. You got to know the rules. They're arbitrary. If you're a runner, you've got to run in your lane. You go outside your lane, you're disqualified. If you throw a javelin and your javelin is too light, you're disqualified. Those are the rules. So they're objective of rules to the Christian life, Ten Commandments or so forth. We know those. And there are subjective of rules. And that is. Be prepared, be strong, be courageous, Be strengthened by the grace in Christ Jesus. Expect to exert yourself as a believer. So let's see. We're warriors and we're athletes.

The third thing we are is farmers. Now, I don't know how many farmers there are in this church. There's not nearly as many farmers as you used to be in America, because farmers are taking larger and larger parcels of land and have bigger and bigger machinery. But we know what a farmer is or what a farmer does. We can understand the call. A farmer is marked by intensive

labor in certain seasons and patience in other seasons. So you prepare the soil you plant, maybe your water depending on the crop intensively some times, and then you wait for the seeds to germinate. There are other things you do during that time, but it's a season of waiting. The Bible mentions that more than once and then the harvest comes in. And as the book of Proverbs says, You better get out there during the harvest. So grateful that it wasn't out there harvesting the crops in their season and so the message is be ready to toil and to wait to pour yourself out and then to do far less and trust God, toil. Paul could work very hard. Jesus worked so hard. He was so exhausted. He fell asleep in a boat during a storm or just crossing the Sea of Galilee. He was exhausted from his labor. But there are other times when you pull back on a journey quietly. Paul says, Think over what I'm saying and ask the Lord to give you understanding and everything. That's verse seven. I was reading a commentary on this once, and the author who was, I don't know, smart aleck, I guess, said, I don't know why you have to think this over. This is all perfectly clear. What is there to think over here and I thought there's actually a lot to think over here. Not in the sense that it's incomprehensible. These are easy metaphors, understand, but think it over in order to apply it to yourself. Because there are a lot of things we know that we need to think over anyway. For example, does anybody here know anybody? Don't raise your hand who takes off clothes that are still basically clean, you know, a shirt or something. You wore it for 4 hours and you're going to wear it again. And so you hang it up in the closet so you can wear it again. Right. But there are some people who take a shirt that's clean and they throw it on the floor and or sweater. This is perfectly fine to just throw in the floor and you say to them, Well, don't you know, it's less work just to hang it up right away. Parents are known to say this to their children sometimes. Do you do you know that it's easier to just put it in your closet than it is to throw it on the floor, along with 40 other shirts and sweaters, and then untangle them and, you know. You know that, right? And the child says, Well, I know it and I don't know it. I know it intellectually, but obviously, if I'm not doing it, a lot of things like that. So this is one of them. You know, you now know intellectually you're like an athlete, like a farmer, like a soldier. But do you know what in your heart? That's what Paul's asking, because, of course, there's this there's this tension that we know, things that we don't practice. That's why Paul says things like work out your salvation with fear and trembling, because God is at work in you and God is working. He's strengthening you, but you still have to practice your skills, he says, Be strengthened by the graces in Christ Jesus. He also says, You're a farmer, work hard, you're a soldier, be willing to work hard. There's a verse in Hebrews 10 that captures this beautifully. It says this

By one offering, Christ has perfected those who are being sanctified.

You get it. There's a sense in which every Christian is perfect. In Christ, we're strong and Christ is by one offering. Christ has perfected those who are being sanctified. You are perfect and you are being perfected. You're perfect in Christ, and you have to live it out. You have to work it out. How do we do that? Well, there's variety of ways you do that. And I won't just give you a little sample. I call this practical theology beginning of what people call the means of grace. And if you've studied the Westminster confession and catechism, you know the phrase the means of

grace and the Westminster confession and catechism rightly say that the means of grace are the Word of God, the sacraments and prayer.

And so people have written many books about prayer and about the sacraments and about the word of God. But over the years, people said Westminster is right in the tradition that led Westminster to say that is right. But there are other means of grace. I just want to mention some of them to right now beyond the common means of grace.

The book by a man named Dallas Willard called *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. And in one of the chapters, he says, I'm going to describe all the unusual disciplines of grace that some people have embraced. Not many, but some. So I'm going to list about five or six of them right now real quick.

Number one, keeping a spiritual journal. Write down how you're doing before the Lord revisited some time.

Number two, vigil or watching that is an appropriate activity when there's something great occurring in your life, maybe some great topic of prayer or hope or some great difficulty. You spend a night meditating on one thing, praying on one thing. Some people enter into physical labor in order to have time to work and to contemplate as they go through the day.

Probably some of you've read some of the works of Henry Nowlin, who spent about a decade after being a professor and a theologian. For years, he spent about a decade working in the morning, taking care of people who had, I'll say, extra deep developmental difficulties, people who are adults who are mentally five or seven or even three years old. And he spent half his day doing that every day. And the other half was in his ordinary work as a pastor and a theologian, a writer and a speaker. He felt that God was calling him to that devotion to an impoverished area of your city, Dallas Willard mentions, to give you compassion, to give you not a taste, but an ongoing taste of an area, , a physical area near you that can sensitize you to the plight of people in your region.

People also mentioned disciplines of abstinence that I mentioned one to you earlier, and that is laying aside things that are perfectly good in themselves that could nonetheless harm you like too much cards or too much media. You can decide what that might be or too many spectator sports or too much shopping or too much interest in my comfort. You get the idea. These are all things that are perfectly good. But you might say to yourself, my interest in my comfort never being inconvenienced in any way is getting in the way of my spiritual maturation as I'm going to put it aside. Another one is solitude and silence.

About a year ago, I tried the discipline of silence. I was very bad at it because I talk all the time for a living and I found it was basically impossible. But I still wanted to go after this idea. Talk less than you used to when you're in a group of people and you have an idea of what you might say or a story to tell, just don't tell it. Let other people tell their story. People who need more time. Because the distance between my brain and my tongue is very short and there's a greater

distance between some - It's not literally it's a joke - Some people have a greater distance between their brain and their tongue. That just takes them a while to think of what to say and just be quiet while those people formulate those thoughts. And we're having a discussion, and I know what I want to say, but somebody else in the room probably knows it. Just wait for them to say it and see how much the people around you know. That was the discipline of silence. It lasted about three or four months. I probably would give myself a C- but it was still an interesting discipline to try to talk less.

There are many other disciplines. We'll talk about them on other occasions. But I want to mention two more quickly – There are positive and there are negative disciplines. We lay something down like fasting or not eating some kind of food for the period of Lent, which some people in some places do, but they're also positive disciplines. I mentioned two to you. The first one is worship. Worship is a discipline. Now the music here is so wonderful that it's kind of easy to come and worship here. Maybe you would agree with that, but that doesn't mean your heart is always tuned. Sometimes you come to church and you know the music's going to be good. But honestly, you aren't in a mood to sing and you discipline your mood. Or you came to church, you didn't really want to hear a sermon or hear a prayer, but you discipline yourself to come and worship God whether you're in the mood or not, because you know it's right to worship God. And in that spirit, of course, many of our songs are celebratory songs we celebrate praise God, give thanks to God, and that discipline of celebration, which can be hard, you know, if you're if you're very sick or you have a dear relative who is very sick or your work is very complicated, it's hard to sing songs of praise or praise. The Lord is like, I don't praise the Lord today I'm going to discipline myself to praise the Lord. I'm not pretending bad things aren't happening but I'm going to discipline myself to praise the Lord because it's good. Is anyone happy? James says, Sing songs of praise. Is anyone sad? Let him pray. So we discipline ourselves when we're happy to celebrate. We also discipline ourselves when we're not as happy. Did you know that the Old Testament festivals were actually times of festival? Now, when we study them today, we tend to emphasize how they point to something in the New Testament, which they do, and how they were times of sacrifice for sins or or giving thanks to God or offering something to God. And they were. But there are also times to eat and drink whatever your heart desires, to be joyful and celebrating God's presence. So, it's good for us to celebrate God's graces to us. Those are some of the disciplines of grace. Why am I telling you about this? I'll tell you again, because the Bible says be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. So, to be strengthened is God's act. We also participate in it because we're being strengthened by the grace it is in Christ Jesus. We're united to him, and so God strengthens us. But through the years, the church has long said there are disciplines of grace. That is to say they don't earn God's grace, but there are common channels of grace.

Keeping a journal, serving others and meditating on it. Celebrating when you're not in the mood. These are ways in which God strengthens us by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. So, I commend them to you so you can be good soldiers and farmers and athletes in God's kingdom.

Let's pray for a minute. Father, we thank you. I thank you for this passage in your word. You know, it's one of my favorites. And I hope, Lord, that it is a favorite to the people here, not just because they like it, but because it tells us how we live. We live a multigenerational life, a multigenerational ministry, and thank you for the way in which this church organizes itself to pass the faith on through the generations. I pray that we will be strengthened by your grace for it even as we live as soldiers and athletes and farmers in your kingdom, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.