

2 Timothy 2:3-7 "Engaged Or Entangled?"

Last week we highlighted 2 key elements that are critical concerning the Christian life. If you want to follow through & finish well there are 2 essential elements that need to be harmonizing in your life & they are these: God's grace & your faithfulness.

Now we could spend our entire time focusing in on the importance of faithfulness as it pertains to it's benefits both *spiritually* or even just in life *generally*. However as it pertains to Vs 2 the point that Paul emphasized was in the spreading of the gospel. Making sure the message of J.C. (the Word of God in truth) was passed on to the proceeding generations. Raising up & pouring into faithful men who will ensure that the message makes it's way to the next generation.

It's w/in *that context of faithfulness* that Paul now points to 3 different people to describe some of the *key characteristics* of faithfulness, what it looks like, what it doesn't look like & the fact that faithfulness comes w/a price tag. I would go so far as to say that the very word "faithful" or "faithfulness" implies difficulties, complexities & struggles. Because if it were easy it would describe us all, if it were always fun there would be no need to emphasize the essential need of it. If "faithfulness" implied convenience we'd *all* be about it. But because it can come w/such a high price tag attached to it, the bible underscores it's importance over & over & over again.

Jesus said we're to "count the cost", we're to consider whether or not we are prepared to go the distance before we begin... If you're not faithful, you won't finish. It's like so many marriages today, people entering into an agreement that demands faithfulness, but because of difficulties people will many times forsake faithfulness & the relationship fails.

Over & over & over again the bible exhorts us unto faithfulness. Be it to our employer, our employees, our spouse, we're to be faithful to our word (being people of integrity) & we're to faithful to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of us & we're to run w/endurance this race that is set before us. We're to faithfully follow through w/God's plan for our lives... In these next few Vs Paul points to 3 figures of faithfulness; the soldier, the athlete & the farmer... Each demands discipline, each encounters hardship & each involves labor & sacrifice that precedes the reward...

Vs 3-4

As we read through Paul's letters we get the impression that he loved using the metaphor of the soldier to represent the life of the believer. He told Timothy to "fight the good fight" to "wage the good warfare". In his letter to Philemon in Vs 2 he called Archipus, "our fellow soldier", here he speaks to Timothy of what it means to be a "good soldier" of J.C. ... & the illustration is apropos because as you know, in reality the Christian life isn't a *playground*, it's a *battleground*!

That's why when you read Eph Ch 6 you discover Paul describing each article of the Roman soldier's armament as an object lesson regarding spiritual warfare. He said you're fighting *not* against flesh & blood (it's not a physical battle we're engaged in) but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places... *That's why you've got to put on the whole armor of God, that you might be able to stand against the wiles (the schemings & wicked ways) of the devil... You need to have at your center the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, having shod your feet w/the preparation of the gospel of peace (you're prepared to share the gospel when necessary). You've got to take up the shield of faith w/which you'll be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; the helmet of salvation & the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...*

To the Corinthians he said, *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"*¹

So the soldier was a favorite image of Paul's paralleling the Christian life... & if there was anyone qualified to call on that image, he was the man. This is the guy who was chained to (or guarded by) a Roman soldier 24/7/365 for two years under house arrest... This is the guy who when Claudius sent him to Felix for trial (Acts 23) he had as his personal escort 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen & 200 spearmen... He was being guarded by or was chained to a soldier even as he wrote these words... So he understood the nature of a good soldier, their behavior & their unquestioning loyalty/obedience to their commanding officer.

Now by the very fact that he speaks of being a "good" soldier that tells us that it's possible to be a "bad" soldier, right? But what Paul focuses on here is the qualities necessary to be *good* soldier... the overarching theme being "faithfulness".

¹ The New King James Version. (1982). [2 Co 10:3-5]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

If you're going to be a good soldier *faithfulness/commitment* is critical.

However if you're to be faithful you will inevitably "endure hardship". There are some key words here in Vs 3 that correlate to the context of being a "good soldier of J.C." & they are these, "You... *must...endure...hardship.*"

It's not a *suggestion*, it's something that *he*, that *you*, that *we must* do, it's simply part of the job description. I don't know too many soldiers who have ever been deployed to Cancun, or the Bahamas & ordered to hang out in hammocks & sip sweet tea... They're deployed to Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, perhaps Korea, they dig trenches in sand, they hunker down in the Mts. They dwell in miserable conditions they are conditioned to take the attitude in which hardship is simply something they expect to endure for their cause... & no *good* soldier ever gave up simply because they were confronted w/hardship. It's part & parcel w/the job, if you're unwilling to endure hardship, you'd better not enlist into the military. **Even so, if you're not willing to undergo hardship, difficulty, distresses & affliction, than the Christian life is not for you (it's not a playground, it's a battleground). If you're the type to toss in the towel at the 1st sign of stress, or you won't follow through if something hard/difficult is required of you, you won't accomplish much for Christ.**

Remember these words? **"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me".**² That's what Jesus said... The Christian life is not about *pleasing* self, it's about *denying* self. What is the cross? It's the instrument of death to self, it represents fulfilling the will of another, not your own. Jesus was very clear, **"... narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."**³ You must endure hardship as a good soldier of J.C.

I have discovered over the years that it's not uncommon for people to feel overwhelmed when it comes to ministry. They "tap out" when placed under stress, the pull the rip-cord when the pressure is on (which means they throw their load on someone else's shoulders, doubling *their* responsibilities and pressures). But listen; stress/pressure hardship... these are things you simply sign up for when you enlist yourself as a soldier in the kingdom of God. Now is it plausible that some people get involved in ways that God never intended & because of that they do well to back off & reassess their calling? **Sure it is... But most people simply don't like the heat. That's the problem w/being a "living sacrifice" isn't it? We slide off the altar when the "heat kicks up".**

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 16:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 7:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We don't like being under pressure, feeling the stress... Yet the bible says, **"If you faint in the day of diversity, Your strength is small."**⁴ If we toss in the towel because times are tough than what does that say, how does that speak of us? God told Jeremiah, **"If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, Then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, In which you trusted, they wearied you, Then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?"**⁵ Think about that... If you're breaking down due to a little bit of stress, than what will you do when it's poured out like a flood? How will you hold up when the heat is turned up?

"You, therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of J.C." Don't settle for being an "average" soldier. Be a *good* soldier, medals of valor, of honor, enter God's kingdom as a decorated war veteran...

So if you're taking notes; **The Good Soldier: #1** (Vs 3) **Endures Hardship** (he shares in the suffering) & **#2** (Vs 4) he **Avoids Worldly Entanglements**.

Why? "That he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier." Who enlisted you as a soldier in the kingdom of God? (J.C. [Joshua Ch 5, the Commander of the army of the Lord]) Do you want to be *pleasing* to Him; *loyal* to Him, *committed* to & *faithful* to Him? Than you will (as a good soldier) *Endure Hardship, & Avoid Worldly Entanglements*.

"No one engaged in warfare *entangles* himself w/the affairs of this life," a soldier will willingly detach himself from the things of civilian life. There are all kinds of things that a soldier has to give up, some good, some bad. He will give up his pride, his self-will (that he might execute the will of another, namely his commanding officer), he will give up independence to learn how to work as a cohesive unit... He will also give up his family, his home, the creature comforts of life... If one is not willing to give these things up than they're really not a soldier.

Try to imagine a soldier saying to his commanding officer, "Sir, I need to go, I got a date tonight," or "I gotta business deal I need to seal up, I can't make the battle tonight." Yet how many Christians are trying to fight like that today? On the level of convenience rather than commitment, sacrifice & faithfulness...unwilling to endure hardship & entangled in the things of this world...

Write it down, look it up later Mark 4:3-20. You'll discover a # of people who hear & receive the word of God; they allow it to impact & influence them.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Pr 24:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Je 12:5]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But some, although they receive it *initially, eventually* it gets crowded out by the cares of this life, the desire for riches & other things entangle them so that the word of God is no longer fruitful in them.

But if you're to be pleasing to your Commanding Officer (J.C.) you've got to detach yourself from the things of this world, maintain the eternal perspective, this world is not your home...

Vs 5

Romans & Greeks were big into the games, Olympics were huge in Paul's day. It was another favorite illustration of Paul's, the athlete. In his letters he spoke of wrestling, of boxing, track & field; but here's the common bond that ties all athletes together... They have to compete according to the rules, if they deviate from the prescribed form of performance in any way they will not be crowned, but rather disqualified.

Paul wanted Timothy to fight this fight, to "run this race", but not just to run it, but to win it, to run in such a way as to win the prize, putting everything he had into it. Pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. It would demand discipline, focus, endurance, self-control.

You see, not everything that slows you down is necessarily sinful... The writer of Hebrews said this, *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance (there's that word again) the race that is set before us,"*⁶

You see some things are sin, other things are simply weights that slow us down. It may not be sin in & of itself, it's just not advantageous to God's call upon your life (it's a weight).

This is where we need to learn to discern between good things, & the best things. There should be a singleness of mind, a proper priority in the child of God. You don't want to be "disqualified". Remember what Paul said? Leave 2 Timothy & turn to 1 Cor 9 (vs 24-27).

You've got to stay focused, you've got to be disciplined & you have to compete according to the rules. There are no shortcuts toward living the Christian life. There are 66 books in your bible & each one of them are critical to your growth & development as the man/woman God has called you to be. It takes the composite picture to give you the heart & mind of God, the whole counsel of the Word of God...

⁶ The New King James Version. (1982). (Heb 12:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

An athlete can't cut a corner of the track, or go around the hurdles, a baseball player can't make it to 3rd if he doesn't touch 2nd & if you're going to "win the prize" as a child of God you can't take any short cuts. You must compete according to the rules (meaning you can't make up your own).

Meaning you can't be all, "Well I know the bible says this is sin, but God understands in my case so it'll be ok." You're making up your own rules; you're not leading a life of obedience to the Word of God & that's what we're talking about. No short cuts, straight up obedience.

Vs 6

Finally the Farmer. The "hard-working" farmer. Serving the Lord is hard work, it's not easy to bust up fallow ground, to sow seed, water the crops, pull the weeds... ministry takes work.

It takes patience. James said, *"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain."*⁷ The results of the farmer's work doesn't pop up over night, it takes patience, persistence, & even at that there are things that are simply out of his control, if it doesn't rain there's nothing he can do about it. He's subjected to certain elements that are beyond his control. He has to do his best & commit the rest to the Lord, the increase comes from God. One may plant, another may water, but it's God who gives the increase. The farmer is met w/regular disappointments, pests, pesticides, frost, drought, he did his best & it yielded little to nothing, other times it may yield 30-60-100 fold.

Here's something else to think about; unlike the soldier or the athlete, there's nothing glamorous the work a farmer does. Each of you could probably name a famous historical soldier or an athlete, but if I asked you to name the greatest farmer of our time you probably wouldn't know his name or really even care. Yet His work radically impacts your life! His work isn't exciting, it's often tedious, he doesn't sign autographs or gain recognition, but he has to work hard nonetheless.

If I'm not willing to work hard, to do my best & commit the rest in my Christian life, if I'm only putting forth a little effort than I can only expect a little result. With measure you use (Jesus said) it will be measured back to you... What you sow, you will reap.

⁷ The New King James Version. (1982). [Jas 5:7]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Now when he says that the farmer must be the 1st to partake of the crops you can take that a couple of ways (both of which are true). One thing Paul is saying is that the pastor should be supported by the ministry; its part of the “yield” of his work in the field. He said the same thing in 1st Cor 9.

The other thing that can be taken from this is that the Pastor will glean from his studies before anyone else does & that if he's not being fed from the word of God than he can't feed anyone else.

Vs 7

I love this Vs (I say it all the time when I'm seeking to illustrate a point to someone ☺). But Paul is telling us that interpretation & application of the word comes many times through mediation & contemplation/consideration. Think it through, let it permeate you, let God bring illumination as you meditate & think about His Word.

Each of these illustrations needed discipline, endurance, single-mindedness & perseverance to succeed.

The soldier who stops fighting before the battle is over will never see victory, the athlete who stops running before the race is over will never win & the farmer who stops working before the harvest will never see the fruit of his labors.

So don't get entangled w/the affairs of this world, stay engaged in the battle, in the race, working in the fields of the harvest, that you might please Him who has enlisted you as a soldier in the kingdom of God.

“...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...”

Prayer Points:

Father would help us to stay focused & maintain the eternal perspective? It's so easy for us to become entangled w/the things of this life when in reality we should be detached from the things of this life. We want not only to run this race, but to win it. So help us, strengthen us by Your grace, give us patient endurance that we might endure hardship & be good soldiers to the glory of Your name.

Jesus said, Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head. Jesus never made any claims that following Him was easy. But if you're willing to deny yourself, take up your cross & follow Him, you can be where He is. He is the way the truth & the life & no one comes to the Father except through Jesus. He will forgive you of your sin & make you brand new. Turn from your sin & trust in Him.