

“Running to Win”
2 Timothy 2:5-7
(Preached at Trinity, April 10, 2022)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I've pointed out, Timothy is struggling much against the false teachers who had gained prominence in Ephesus. Paul admonished him in **Verse 1** –
2 Timothy 2:1 NAU - "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."
2. Then beginning in **Verse 3** Paul gives three metaphors that describe the discipline necessary to press on in the hardships that often accompany the Christian life.
The Christian must fight the good fight like a faithful soldier called to service.
The Christian must discipline himself like an athlete training for an event.
The Christian must labor long and hard like a farmer working to bring in his crops.
3. The immediate context emphasizes the Christian ministry – “faithful men who will be able to teach others.”
It is to Timothy that Paul encourages with the words of verse 1:
"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."
But it is also true, every Christian has been called to a life of service to Christ, a life that demands steadfast courage, faithful commitment.
4. Last time we looked at **Verses 3-4** that describe the Christian life in military terms—it's like the life of a soldier.
 - A. The good soldier is not hindered by hardship.
2 Timothy 2:3 NAU - "Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."
 - B. The good soldier is actively engaged in the war
2 Timothy 2:4 NAU - "No soldier in active service "
The difference between the counterfeit Christian and the true believer is that the true believer has entered the war – both defensively and offensively and he has properly equipped himself for the battle.
 - C. The good soldier stays focused – he is not distracted by things not pertaining to the war. The affairs of this life do not draw him aside.
2 Timothy 2:4 NAU - "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life"
 - D. The good soldier strives to please his Commander –
"so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."
5. Christianity demands boldness and courage. The Book of Revelation describes those who are lost. The Christian has entered the war like a valiant warrior.
Revelation 21:8 NAU - "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

6. In **Verse 5** Paul uses another metaphor to describe the Christian life. The Christian is to be compared with an athlete.
This morning I want us to examine how the Christian life is to be compared with the life of an athlete.
- I. First, consider the qualifications of an athlete - "if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules."
Like with the soldier, the context draws our attention to the Christian ministry, but every Christian needs to receive this instruction.
- A. Paul would have been very familiar with the major athletic contests of his day
1. In ancient Greece there were two great athletic festivals.
 - a. One was the Olympic games that were held every four years beginning in 776 bc. At the height of the Olympian games, over 40,000 spectators gathered for the five day event. There were strict rules. Penalties included fines and flogging. Each athlete trained under a professional trainer who knew the best diet and exercises for success. Few records were kept. The idea was to be first among the best, not to break some record. Winning was everything.
1 Corinthians 9:24 NAU - "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win."
Philippians 3:14 NAU - "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."
 - b. The other was the Isthmian Games which took place every two years in the city of Corinth. It was a prestigious event. There were no second and third place prizes. Like with the Olympics, winning was everything. The prize was a celery crown – a perishable crown.
1 Corinthians 9:25 NAU - "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."
 2. In these Greek games there were three qualifications that every athlete had to meet
 - a. Proper birth – he had to be a true born Greek
 - b. Proper training – he had to train for at least 10 months of intensive training and swear before a statue of Zeus that he had.
The last month of training was held at Corinth and was carefully supervised. Only the best were allowed to compete.
 - c. Proper competition – he had to compete according to the rules of the given event
 3. Christians also have to meet these three qualifications before they are prepared for service to Christ. This is particularly true for the minister of the Gospel but each of you must also consider this.
- B. Proper birth. The Christian has had a new birth. He is born again—regeneration.
1. It is essential that the laborer in the Gospel first be converted – the new birth. The Biblical model is disciples making disciples.
 2. This message has been delivered to us and to none other.
The great commission is given only to believers.

3. Only Christians can demonstrate the message with their lives.
Only Christians can have a right discernment of the Word of God.
Only Christians can preach with the right motives.
Only Christians can rightly share the Gospel of Christ.
 4. Although God can use the words of a heathen, the preacher of the gospel must be a believer.
- C. Proper training. We must be rightly equipped to do Gospel work.
Again, this is of great importance for those in the ministry.
2 Timothy 2:2 NAU - "entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."
All of us are committed to a Book – The Word of God. We must be skilled in the proper use.
1. Biblical study must be a high priority.
2 Timothy 2:15 NAU - "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."
 - a. It is essential that we know what we believe.
1 Timothy 4:15-16 NAU - "Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.
¹⁶ Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."
 - b. The minister must dedicate himself to much time in study.
 - c. We must not worship education, but we must also not despise it.
 2. The Christian must give attention to spiritual disciplines
 - a. The athlete cannot afford to live an undisciplined life. He trains hard, eats a proper diet, gets adequate sleep, etc.
And he does these things even when he does not feel like it.
 - b. The Christian laborer pays close attention to spiritual disciplines
Study, prayer, worship, fasting, evangelism must continue even as our flesh cries out in weariness.
1 Corinthians 9:25-27 NAU - "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."
- D. We must follow the rules - Proper methodology – We must use the biblical means
1. If an athlete doesn't strictly follow all of the rules he will be disqualified. (illegal drugs, false starts, the rules have to be followed exactly.)
2 Timothy 2:5 NAU - "Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules."
 2. The Christian too must strictly follow the rules
 - a. We must speak according to sound doctrine.
Titus 2:1 NAU - "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine."

- b. There are many who have great zeal for service but they are running around without understanding.
Romans 10:2 NAU - "For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge."
- c. Sincerity alone is insufficient

II. The athlete cannot win unless he crosses the finish line

A. Athletes can fail to finish

- 1. Through disqualification
- 2. Only one comes in first place to win the medal
1 Corinthians 9:24 NAU - "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win."
- 3. In some marathons athletes have been known to crawl past the finish line - the body completely exhausted and literally in danger of death – all for the sake of a temporal prize.

B. Christians must persevere until the end

- 1. The mark of a genuine Christian is perseverance
We persevere because we are being preserved
Philippians 1:6 NAU - "*For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."
- 2. The religious pretender will not, cannot persevere. He can continue in religion that makes no demands, but he is entirely unsuited to meet the demands of Christian discipleship. His counterfeit faith is entirely insufficient to withstand the assaults of the world and the devil. His carnal flesh will demand to be satisfied.

C. We must not see true perseverance as just continuing to come to church. That would be equivalent to calling yourself an athlete just because you show up at the gym to visit with the other athletes.

- 1. True perseverance is a striving, an active pressing on – it's running towards the finish line
- 2. The Christian life can be grueling, difficult
A life of ease is not Biblical Christianity
Acts 14:21-22 NAU - "After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
- 3. The fact that we continue to press on is a great source of confidence that our faith is genuine. Many believers cannot give the precise time of their conversion, yet they can surely see the progress of God's grace in their lives. They have continued to persevere in the Christian life.

III. The Christian Must be Driven by a Sense of Purpose

1 Corinthians 9:24 NAU - "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win."

1 Corinthians 9:26 NAU - "Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;"

- A. Some athletes train their entire life for a single event.
 1. Their goal is clear – nothing is allowed to interfere.
 2. They maintain a consistent focus.
 3. In **1 Corinthians 9:26** Paul states that his race is not without direction. "Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not merely beating the air.
- B. The Christian must be purpose driven – he must maintain an intense focus
The Christian must live under the reality of eternity
 1. He must keep an eternal perspective
Philippians 3:20-21 NAU - " For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."
 2. We must never become bogged down with trivial matters
We are in a great spiritual struggle with eternal consequences
 - a. What occupies your attention? What directs your life?
What do you consider as being of the greatest importance?
 - b. What occupies your time?
- C. What about the work of the Kingdom?
 1. What about reaching lost souls for Christ?
 2. What about laboring for the good of the church?
 3. What about an intense focus upon being holy?
 4. These are the things worth fighting for, contending for
- D. Is Jesus the focus of your life? Are you God centered – Theo Centric.
 1. This is in contrast to being egocentric or self-centered
 - a. The self-centered man is motivated chiefly by the desire to satisfy his own needs, wants, desires.
 - b. Paul describes the counterfeit Christians as being lovers of self and of being lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God
 2. The Theo centric man centers his whole life upon God
Matthew 6:21 – "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."
 - a. God is his chief interest – his highest hobby.
 - b. His greatest desire is to be closer to God.
 - c. He has committed all that he has to God.
 3. This is our goal, pressing for the prize.
1 Corinthians 9:24 NAU - "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win."

Conclusion:

1. The life of a Christian is a life of rigorous training, of perseverance, of giving careful attention to spiritual matters.
2. Some complain this is too demanding and too legalistic. The truth is only the Christian is truly free.
True freedom demands the willingness to give up your liberty.
3. Those who possess great physical skills and abilities have often spent a lifetime working toward their goals. They make it look easy because their bodies have been so trained that every joint and muscle work together in perfect harmony.
 - a. How does a musician become skilled in their instrument? The violinist that plays so beautifully. His fingers seem to move effortlessly. He plays with such freedom because he has spent years training himself and denying anything that would hinder his pursuit of excellence.
 - b. The same is true for athletes. The quarterback and receiver work together as a well-tuned machine because they have spent countless hours training together. The professor teaching complex mathematic equations makes it look so easy.
 - c. People who have amazing skills have gained them after endless work and training.
4. The same is true for the Christian. And our pursuit of excellence has much greater importance.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 NAU - "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."