

Persevere in the Approved Pattern

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Bible Text: 2 Timothy 2:1-7
Preached on: Sunday, August 8, 2021

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Turn to 2 Timothy 2. We are going through 2 Timothy verse by verse, chapter by chapter, unpacking these quite practical instructions the elder Apostle Paul is writing to his disciple and pastor of the church in Ephesus, Timothy, and we come to chapter 2, verses 1 through 7, all right? Chapter 2, 2 Timothy 2:1-7. I'm reading now,

1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 3 Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. 5 Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. 7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

I've entitled this exposition "Persevere in the Approved Pattern." Persevere in the approved pattern. I, I was driving home from the country about a week ago in my relatively new truck, and I started to hear a noise kind of beneath my feet and kind of in front of my feet, and it sounded like a hammer was hitting on the side of the engine block, and I drove further and it got louder and then the truck began to jerk a little bit, and it started losing power off and on. Well, it limped on home and as I thought about it, I thought, "You know, I think that's the transmission and I think I need to get it checked out." Well, that's a good thought for us this morning because you know what a vehicle transmission does? It takes what's given to it and it passes it on further. It takes the power of the engine and transforms it back to the continuance of the drive train of the vehicle so the vehicle can go forward. Well, that's the central thing, it's not the only thing taught in this section but the central thing taught in this section is the idea that all of us are transmissions. We are to take what's been given to us, hold it and treasure it, but pass it on to others. Every single one of us has an important role to play in taking what we've received of the faith and practice of Christian truth and passing it on to others. Often we call it passing it on to the next generation.

Now let's look at the outline this way. I. He tells Timothy, "I want you to persevere in this prescribed pattern and you must rely on sustaining grace to do it." That's the first thing. "Timothy, you're gonna have to make sure you're looking to God's power, God's strength from within you in the Holy Spirit, and not relying to your own natural energies." In verse 1 he says to Timothy, "You therefore." Now we gotta stop right there because what he's doing, he's saying, "I want to do a contrast here, Timothy. The things I've said so far in chapter 1, I want you to be a contrast to that and you hold on to the prescribed pattern." Because what did he, what did he lay out in chapter 1? He laid out things like Phygelus and Hermogenes were men who had abandoned him. He says in chapter 1, "All departed from me." He said, "I've experienced those, I've seen those who didn't stay with the prescribed pattern and I've seen them fall away and, Timothy, don't you be like them."

Now he does have a positive in chapter 1 before we get to chapter 2, Onesiphorus. He talks about how Onesiphorus literally put his own life on the line to support him and, and greet him and, and minister to him while he was in the Roman prison. By the way, if you haven't been with us, Paul's writing this from a prison cell and he knows he's going to be soon executed and in that context he had people falling away from him, no longer supporting him, some like Phygelus and Hermogenes who are mentioned in chapter 1 were likely very prominent men who went on in their church ministries but arrogantly and wickedly undermine the Apostle Paul's credibility and said, "Well, ah, well, Paul is, you know, he's on the wrong track. Paul's teaching some of the wrong things and that's why he's come to this fate, being imprisoned, and we're really doing things the right way." Well, that's a tough thing to handle. Well, Paul's writing to Timothy saying, "In the back drop of all of that, you, Timothy, you be different."

He calls him "my son. You therefore," verse 1, "my son." I think the point is, "Timothy, of all of those that I have high expectations for, Timothy, I have the highest expectations of you. You are a true son in the faith." And first and foremost, I'm convinced the text is not saying he's just Paul's spiritual son in the faith, though that's true. He's saying, "You're a true son of God. I know you're the real thing. I know you're genuine, Timothy." By the way, they had been together 16 years at this point.

There's a little note of application here as we think about Paul discipling Timothy in the work of the ministry by doing the work of the ministry together for these 16 years, and that is if you're in discipling men and women, and that's what small groups are for, discipleship should be occurring within the overall structure of your, your local church. You must make sure you're discipling one who is a true son, that's what he's saying here. I can't tell you the number of men "I disciplined" who turned out to not remain faithful. I had a, a, a real shortcoming in my discernment of what true conversion was and I disciplined men who were going through maybe a, an awakening or religious experience only to find out months and years down the road it wasn't the real thing and they fell away. So when he says, "You therefore, my son," he's emphasizing, "Yes, you're my son in the faith but even more than that, you're a true son of God." Actually two ideas here. The word "son" can easily be translated "child," so it does show Paul's deep affection for Timothy but, again, it says, "You're God's true son also."

Now here's the exhortation about him relying on sustaining grace if he's gonna persevere in the approved pattern. He says, "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." First of all, this is a command. We need that command, by the way. If you're gonna live faithfully for Christ and in the context here, if you're gonna be a good servant and minister in your own domain, that is, in the local church like Timothy's doing, you're gonna, you're gonna need to keep looking to and holding to and relying on the grace God put in you at conversion. That's what he says. "I'm commanding you to do that."

Not only is it a command, it's in the present tense which means, "Timothy, this never ends. You will have to keep striving to say, 'Lord, let me function according to the strength You give me. I can't use my personal charisma and talents and winsomeness and giftedness.'" We all have some of that and God does use that but in the final analysis that's not what makes an effective ministry. You have to have the Spirit of God empowering you and working through you. That's what Paul's getting at here.

It's a command and it's to be a, a continual thing you're seeking, and also it's supernatural. He says, "the grace in Christ Jesus is what you must look to." I can't exactly explain that but this is along the same lines of what he's been saying to Timothy in other ways earlier through chapter 1. For example, in verse 6 of chapter 1, he says, "Timothy, kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you." In verse 7 of chapter 1, "God's given you a spirit of power, love and discipline." In other words, "This is something God supernaturally has put in you, Timothy," which by the way, generally all Christians share. There is a unique gifting for the call into the ministry but all of us have the Spirit of God in us if we're God's children so we have these same basic things. In verse 9 of chapter 1, he said, "you've been granted grace." Verse 14, "you've been entrusted with this treasure, there's something placed in you that is supernatural, didn't come from, from the earth, it didn't come from your birth parents, it came in the new birth."

So here again along this same line of exhortation, he says, "Now you hold to the grace that is in Christ Jesus. You must, Timothy, continue to work to hold to that grace. Burn that fuel." Boy, as a young minister, you, you have to learn the difference. It is quite a process to learn when you're burning the fuel of human ability, your natural talents versus trusting the Spirit of God to reach the hearts, to sustain the faithful through your preaching or teaching ministry, but that's true for all of us. It's true for you as parents who are trying to instill the faith in your children. It's, it's true of small group leaders. It's, it's true of you brothers as, as we're talking about in the Philemon fellowship who want to be a, an impact for Christ in the workplace. It's not just your abilities, it's, matter of fact, it's not that at all, it's, it's something greater than that, it's the treasure God put in you. That old song I referred to this song a few weeks ago in my sermon, "The arm of flesh will fail you, you dare not trust your own." Good word for pastors, good word for elders in the church, it's a good word, word for small group leaders, it's a good word for any Christian who's serious about having an impact on anyone else for Christ.

You see, we leak out, do we not? You can be on a mountaintop of spiritual vitality one day and just moments later be in the valley of despair and failure. One of the reasons for that is that teaches something about that it's not us, it's him. But brothers and sisters,

though we leak out – listen to me – we never run out. Our supply is infinite. We serve a God who is rich in mercy. We have the very infinite, Almighty God living in us in the person of the Holy Spirit. "Timothy," Paul says, "Timothy, look to that strength in you to keep you going so you can persevere in the prescribed pattern of what the local church ministry is supposed to be."

Now let me give you a real quick conclusion for practical application at this point. Now sometimes I do this at the end but, uh, this is like a 2 ½ hour sermon so I'm just gonna do one here and do some later, okay? No, I won't keep you that long. I may just have to chop this thing off and pick it up later.

First of all, if you feel you need God's power. Now wait a minute. You see, some of you are really gifted, some of you are really talented. I mean, you've got personality oozing out your earlobes. You have sweet winsomeness and persuasiveness. You know how to look people in the eye and care for them. And if you're a small group leader or a Christian, you can use those things to win a following or win a group but God hasn't done anything yet. Are you hearing me? Just because you can build a group doesn't mean God's doing it. Just because you can grow, grow a big congregation and call it a church doesn't mean God's doing it. That's why I get back to my title of my sermon, what's the prescribed pattern the way God wants it done? First of all, you've gotta, do you, do you feel like, look, if you're talented and gifted to be able to lead men or lead women or build something, God will use that, but at the same time you've gotta say, "Oh God, help me!" That's not what really does the work. Are you with me, church? Keep that balance. God did give you those things but you've gotta walk in the reality, "God, it's, it's You in me." That's why so often God calls weak men into the ministry so the people will learn not to look at him but look at the God that's working through him.

You feel you need it, secondly, you seek it. You seek that power from God that's in you to get this work done and make you effective for Christ. Uh, what I mean by that is you read your Bible. You, you memorize and meditate on Scripture to try, to try to keep the truth rich in your heart and mind. You're faithful to your small group and just sit under the word of God. You, you work toward God revitalize as he told Timothy earlier to kindle afresh, blow the bellows on the flame and keep it full. That's a command, brothers and sisters. You've gotta keep working at it. "I don't feel like going to church. I don't like my small group but I'm gonna do it because I need the bellows flowing on the flame of the power of God in my heart and that's God's prescribed means to keep me faithful." God help the many brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who are wanting to serve God and they go into a church and they get silly nonsense on Sunday morning, and amusements and entertainments and cleverness but they don't get the word of God and the flame is not bellowed on, if you will, blown on. Church, it's so important.

Well, you've gotta feel you need it and if you seek it, you'll get it. You'll get it. You'll get it. Do you know how many times I contemplate preparing to preach on Sunday and I think, "I don't want to do this again"? And literally, 10 minutes into it I think, "This is the most wonderful thing in the whole world. I can't believe I get to do this!" What happens? I, I realized I need something more than what I had going on and, and I sought it. I, I did.

Look, are you learning, child of God, you don't wait to feel like it, you do it and then God let's you feel like it. You do what's right. We live in a world, a wicked, vile culture that says every man's his own god. You've heard this expression lately, "Well, according to my truth. According to my truth." There is no "my truth." You don't have your truth. God is truth. Truth is objective and it's outside of you. Truth doesn't arise within you, truth is in God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." We discover truth outside of us. "Well, according to my truth, I'm a man today, I'm a woman tomorrow, I'm bisexual today, I'm homosexual tomorrow." All this vile, all this is is looking God in the face and saying, "You will not be my God. I will be my God." That's all that is. That's all it is. It's not complicated. That's all it is. Now granted because we live in a world that is pushing this filth everywhere. You watch the Olympics and they just glory in it. You go to a movie, we went to a movie and should have been a decent family movie and they were just glorying in political correctness and all the other junk that's out there. So, yeah, granted there's some maybe the younger people are who are innocently deceived but, church, you must not be. You must not be.

The truth is found in God's word. The truth is outside of us and the truth is objective and we find it and we yield to it and we find great joy in it, great strength in it, and great power in it. Well, secondly in our outline, if you're going to persevere in the approved pattern, the prescribed pattern, you need to be transmitting the faith in practice to others. That, that's the prescribed pattern. There's more to it than just that part but that's a, a key part that God saved you to, to bless you, yes, but to get it through you. He gave it to you to get it through you. He tells Timothy in, in verse 2, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will teach others also." You're, you're, you're transmitting it forward. It's like a transmission takes the energy from the motor and brings it on through to the drive train. You're to take the truth God's given you and give it to others.

Now when he says it this way, "the things you've heard from me in the presence of many witnesses," let me back up, let me says this. I agree with the scholars very strongly that this means more than just teaching that you might find on a piece of paper. It means the way God designed the church to be structured and to function. Doctrine, structure, and function. I call it faith and practice, okay? Right doctrine which creates the right structure which creates the right practice within the church. These things are prescribed by God. "Stay with them," Paul's telling Timothy, "and then teach them to others."

So one of the points he's making when he says, "Timothy, you've heard me teach this in front of many witnesses," here's what he's saying, "Timothy, I've taught it over and over and over and over. I teach the same basic thing in Corinth. I teach in Rome, I teach in Jerusalem, I teach in Ephesus, you've seen it over and over." In other words, there, there is no question as to what is core or sound doctrine and what is core and sound structure and practice for the church. "There's no question about it, Timothy. We, we, we've been doing it over and over and, Timothy, you more than all the rest." So I think one of the key points here, "Timothy, there's no need to adapt God's truth and practice in the church. There's no need to manipulate it, to adjust it. Just as I've taught the same basic doctrine my entire ministry, the same basic structure is the same basic practices over and over

again, you, Timothy, do the same thing and then teach it to other men who will keep teaching it. Stay with the stuff." He basically said this up in chapter 1, verse 13 when he said, "Timothy, retain the standard of sound words." That means the faith and the practice. Faith there meaning the, the body of doctrine. "The faith and the practice you've seen me establish all over the world, now, Timothy, you hold to it, and then, Timothy, you teach some more men that they'll go even further with it."

I always have to bring up Jude 3 because it's such a powerful reaffirmation. "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity," notice how he's saying that, "the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for," definite article, "the faith," the doctrine, "which was once for all handed down to the saints." You and I live in a day when Baptists and Evangelical churches are not holding to the prescribed pattern. Now there's a lot of things we can do in a variety of ways but there's some things that shouldn't change and I'm very fearful today we're changing things that shouldn't change, and the Scriptures are so clear that we must not do that.

Put up, put up the wheel for just a second as we refresh ourselves and this is over three decades old, it's what we, it's the structure from sound doctrine that we function by here at Grace Life Church and, and there's just been no reason for 30-35 years to change it. Now you can say it better, you can use something other than a wheel, I'm not saying there, but the basic things, the prescribed patterns ought to stay there.

Now so we remind ourselves that the standard never changes because the standard must not change to meet the world, the world must change to meet the standard. It does not – are you listening to your pastor this morning – it doesn't matter to me if the whole world screams in our face along with many professing churches screaming in our face, "You must change your teaching here, you must lighten up on this doctrine, you must..." I don't care because truth can't change. If it can change, it's not truth.

What he says, then he says, "Timothy, these things you see me teaching over and over, these entrust," that's the next part of the phrase there in your text, "these entrust to faithful men." The word "entrust" there means "to lay before." It can have the idea of deposit. It has the idea, "Now Timothy, I've literally ground this into your bone marrow." You might feel like your pastor's trying to do that to you for years. "Timothy, I've, I've literally just mashed this into the marrow of the bone of your heart and soul. Now Timothy, take it. Don't mess with it, take it and deposit it in more men, and you watch them now, you, you oversee them like I'm overseeing you, and then you help them get some other faithful men and teach them to do the same thing." Transmitting it on. Multiplying it forward.

Now I'm doing great. Here, some, now let's back up from this a minute and let's talk about a broad application of, of passing on the faith or transferring the faith and practice, all right? So backing up and looking at that general truth like Matthew 28:18-20, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations," that's for all of us. That's generally true for all. In some fashion, you

have your role in that commission. And by the way, it's radically centered in starting local churches, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," which makes them a part of a local church congregation.

So generally we're all involved. Now let's talk for just a second about parents. Parents. Parents, we must be intentional that we transmit to our children, to our grandchildren, to our great grandchildren the prescribed pattern including the doctrines we teach and hold and the way we're to structure ourselves and function as God's church. You know, um, on the wheel illustration, one of the spokes is called home life discipleship. Did you notice that in the bottom spoke? What it means is you moms and dads have to take the Sunday sermon home and not – now listen to me – not in a rigid, formal fashion but as a lifestyle fashion bring up the truths and discuss them in your home. And therefore in doing that, you're helping transfer or transmit the faith forward to the next generation. Home life discipleship right there on the bottom spoke.

Without question in my mind, the, the best text to give us guidance on how to do this is Deuteronomy 6:4-9. As God was telling the men of Israel what to do to keep their children in the faith, here's what God said, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Now stop right there. First of all, mom and dad, you must learn to treasure the doctrine. Dr. Seal, that's one of the things that we don't know how to teach is how to teach these boys when they preach to treasure it. I mean, we can teach all the mechanics and that's gotta be done but God has to get ahold of you and God has to move on your heart to where there's something in you, mom, and there's something in you, dad, that says, "These things are more important than the meatloaf. These things are more important than Johnny's scholarship." They're on your heart, then you, verse 7, "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them," notice, "when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." Then he talks about binding them on their forehead etc., on the door post. But that aspect of, of you just talk about these things when you sit, when you rise up, when you sit down, when you walk around, when you go back to bed.

Now, now don't be a legalistic, um, cold, sterile overlord on this but look at ways you can take the Sunday sermon home and just talk about it. "You remember when the pastor said this? Boy, I've, I've struggled there and I've had to repent there but I'm so glad I was taught that this morning." Talk about these things. That's home life discipleship. Matter of fact, it's been, it's been my experience that even well-intended fathers who try to have real strict, formal training in the home, it usually leads to young people rebelling. They need just to see it in our lifestyles that it's real to us and I think that's what Deuteronomy 6 among other things points to. Whatever else Deuteronomy 6 says, it's telling us that Christian truth, God's truth affects the totality of our lives and the most familial and familiar parts of our domestic life ought to have God's truth just reverberating in it. It's not to be switched on at church and switched off at home. I charge you – are you listening to your pastor – I charge you to be a church integrated family, that your family understands the center of our life is what God is calling us to be and do in our church. You won't regret it if you do as your children grow up, trust me.

So take the pastor's message, take the small group lesson, and take it home with you and talk about some things not forcefully, not legalistically but just as you sit in your house and as you walk by the way and as you lie down and when you rise up. This will show the children some, a couple of important things. It'll show them that you're serious about Sunday morning's worship service. You see, children naturally think church is something you do so you can check that off and go do something else but, dads, when you come home and on Tuesday, you think, "You know, on that second point, I've learned I need to do this better." Always be humble, dads. Let your children know you're listening, you're repenting, you're applying what you heard. That let's your child know, "My dad goes there to learn how to please the Lord." And that's powerful. Powerful. So it teaches them that you're getting something out of the sermon and that it's important to you, that it's real in your heart and in your life. Well, too, I've spent too much time there.

So you're transferring it in your home life but also small groups in our local church. Is that not true here, that as you lead a small group, as you participate in a small group, we, we try to slosh as much Bible truth as we can out there but also always be looking for that extra hungry lady or that extra hungry man in your small group, or young person, who just wants more and you can pull them aside and even maybe have an accountability group or whatever you want it to be so that you're helping to transfer this over.

Now the third point here is that, um, boy, I want to say something but my time is too short. He says here, "Timothy, the things you've heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men." Faithful men, unique kind of men. In one sense, you could say men of super-faith and what I mean by that is God's worked on their hearts and he's calling them to something more than just faithfulness as an average church member. These are men called into the ministry, I'm convinced, and that's really what the text is saying. That's really what Paul is telling Timothy, "Find the men that come to you or are raised up in your congregation that are called into the ministry and, Timothy, you make sure they persevere in the prescribed pattern and then they can teach others also."

This, this verse, this statement represents the first pastoral training institute. You thought I thought that up, didn't you? No, no, it's God, God's intention has always been primarily to train men in the context of the local church. I mean, notice Paul doesn't write to Timothy and say, "Timothy, get some of your businessmen together and put, get some money raised and buy some land. Uh, find some good influential men who are, are godly enough but have the money and let's form a Board of Directors. And let's build some brick and mortar buildings and some classrooms and we'll start this graduate school of theology or seminary and we'll train men." I'm not suggesting that's wrong or evil, I'm just suggesting it's not essential and it's not enough. They need the equipping in the laboratory of God, the laboratory of the local church because, after all, we don't need a Board of Directors for our school because we already have elders. Isn't God smart? Everything in the early church that was a problem, they brought it to the elders of Jerusalem and they, they made judgments and cleared it up and fixed the stuff. And while we do have to have some classrooms, that's important, even essential, you might say, but more than that the church already has its classrooms, it's the everyday workings of the

local church. That's the classroom. It's a both/and thing but if you gotta leave off one, leave off the formal school, don't leave off the local church training. But let's get both of them which is what God's given us in our pastoral training institute.

And then these men will be able to teach others also to persevere in the prescribed pattern, to hold to the faith, the structures and the practice of what a church ought to be. But maybe we need to, Matt and I have been talking about this to keep this in front of you, Luke 10:2, "And He was saying to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" God, give us the men whom we're supposed to do what you told Timothy to do. We're to take them aside and train them and equip them and teach them in the laboratory of the church to carry on this work. Well, that's the primary understanding of the text here, though again there's applications for all of us.

III. "Timothy," Paul says, "if you're gonna stay with the prescribed pattern, you're gonna have to press through hardship." As our guys go out to pastor churches and plant churches and some of them have been wonderfully successful and doing a wonderful job but without exception they're just like me, they think they're gonna go out there and pastor a true, glory of God focused, Christ honoring, Bible saturated, uh, local church and it, they're not gonna have hardly any problems at all. That ain't gonna happen. That's why I tell them constantly, "You better have a 20 year vision because at year 3 you'll think you're gonna go under, at year 8 you'll think you're gonna go under, at year 12 you'll think, well, this will get me, this problem in the church, this will sink me." Year whatever. And sometimes you do leave. Dr. Seal had to leave a church in Louisiana because basically they said, "You've got to compromise essential doctrine." He said, "I can't." And they said, "Well, you're gone." He said, "Goodbye." And then God let him plant a true church and that was God's plan all along. You don't know what God's gonna do but you, you've gotta, Brother Tim, you've gotta bear through some hardship. That's part of it.

Now let me get on with this. Um, first of all, we gotta understand that hardship in the ministry, now listen, if you're a faithful minister, is a part of the process. It's a part of the journey. Notice how Paul words it, verse 3, "Suffer hardship with me. Timothy, you know what I've gone through and you know where I am right now in this prison facing execution. You know it's just part of it." But I'd like to point this out to, to maybe church leaders and pastors out there. Listen to me: if you will persevere in the prescribed pattern burning the right fuel, there will be hardships but God will bring you into seasons of rich rewarding blessing. That's, I'm not saying that's absolute but I'm saying that's a general pattern. There will be for you in those latter years sweet unity and blessedness in your ministry if you press on and don't compromise in the early years.

Now IV: you must remember your role. The apostle now uses three metaphors, three illustrations to further emphasize to Timothy your role as God's minister. Of course, then again there's application for all of us here. Now in all three of these metaphors, we have one basic truth that comes out in all three and that's to persevere on through. That's the basic truth but there are secondary truths with each one of these that are also important.

So number 1 of the three metaphors or illustrations: God's soldier must avoid outside entanglements. Here's how he words it there in verse 4. He says, "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." Now the word "entanglements" there, Vine's in his dictionary says it has the idea of weaving together. Don't get, you don't, if you're, if you're, if you're a dedicated soldier, you don't go weave your life into the entanglements of other things, you want to be available for your commanding officer on a moment's notice. And so very often this is a matter of the heart. For example, there are those who would say if you have any kind of employment or, uh, gainful engagements outside of your local church, you're in sin. Well, the Apostle Paul was a tent-maker. He had a business. He didn't give it up because he needed the money from time to time. So it wasn't just not doing secular things, it was a heart issue. I guarantee you though the Apostle Paul could tell you, "I was a good tent-maker and I made good money at tent-making. I had an excellent product but I've always made sure I wasn't so entangled in the business that I couldn't quickly get to my ministry when it was time to do that." Matter of fact, there's no real separation between the two. We, we can't divide our lives. When Paul was making a tent, he was still a faithful minister and servant of God. But it was the matter of the heart. We must not get involved in the affairs of the world so as to get entangled and held back from the work God's called us to do. And by the way, that's not just for the minister, that's for you, small group leader. That's for you, homemaker. That's for you, dad. You have roles and duties to Christ and work, work at not being so entangled. It doesn't mean you can't do it, but guard your heart from getting too knitted together in stuff out there so that you begin to neglect your Commander in Chief, you're his soldier. Your heart's joy must be Christ, not the things of the world. Now the man of God and all Christians can enjoy the common graces God's given us. All of that is good but we enjoy them but they're never our joy. We want to be pleasing to the Lord in all that we do.

He says in verse 4 that he might be pleasing to the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Boy, this right here, man, I want to run when I get to stuff like this. Paul says, "Uh, Timothy, I've got your attention now, don't I?" Paul says, "Timothy, you're, you're God's soldier and you didn't sign up, you were drafted. You didn't vote on getting in or getting out, God put you there." And child of God, if you're one of the predestined elect children of God, you didn't start this thing and you can't stop it. He's enlisted you and you've got some work to do as a dedicated soldier of Jesus Christ. Woo, it's good stuff!

Now you know, bless his heart, Brother David's in Birmingham and hopefully out of that surgery by now and, boy, he's just got a knack for just damaging his body. He goes through so much and we tease a lot. We love each other. We tease and cut up a lot and he said, "I'll tell you what, I'll just quit!" I said, "Okay. Remember you can't quit what you didn't start." He said, "You're right."

He enlisted you as his soldier. You were drafted. You didn't have a choice in it. I love that. I'm just bound in omnipotent love and belonging in family. Wow.

Okay, B, the next metaphor, God's disciplined athlete must compete by, thus compete rather by the rules. God's disciplined athlete must compete by the rules. Verse 5, he says, "Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules." That's the difference there. Now both the soldier and the athlete have to persevere on through stuff, that's the main truth, but unique to the athlete he brings out, he has to go by the rules.

Now Paul and Timothy understood this because they were familiar with the Greek games and in the Greek national games, actually they began in the city of Olympia in 776 BC, and the Greek games were to the honor of Zeus which they called the king of all gods. I've been watching our Olympics and I'm amazed at how pagan and ungodly it is at times. Thank God for those who've given some faithful Christian testimonies, though, amen? But boy, there's a lot of pagan wickedness in the whole thing and that's the way it began, by the way. I'm not saying Christians shouldn't be in the Olympics, I'm just saying that's the way the Greeks viewed it when they started it.

Now what would happen, the city states of ancient Greece were often at odds with each other and often warring against each other but every time they would hold these Greek games, they would form a truce so that their athletes could go compete in the Olympics. Now unlike modern-day Olympics, in that day only the men competed and they all competed nude. No clothing. I have no idea why. Today, women compete in our Olympics yet far too often the women and the men compete almost nude and it's shameful. God help me, why in the world do they have to wear such things to compete in the Olympics? It doesn't help them. Just vulgar. Just wrong. Just wrong. Well, that's not my point.

He says the athlete has to compete according to the rules. What's his point to Timothy? "Paul, what are you bringing out?" He says, "Timothy, there's a prescribed pattern. God gave it to me. You've heard me preach it everywhere. You know it well. Now you hold to it and you get some men and transfer it on and make sure they hold to it too." There are specific doctrines that cannot be altered and cannot change and must not be compromised and there's structures and practices every church should strive to do first and foremost, whatever else they may do, they must do those things, and for us based on the clear teachings of the word of God, that's congregational worship centered on the preaching of the word in the power of the Spirit. That's every member ministry through small groups. That's personalized strategic world missions. And it's home life discipleship. Those things must be done well.

I'm still waiting. It's been decades for anybody to tell me that's not balanced biblical understanding of the structure and function of a true local church. Now a lot of people say, "Well, yeah, we agree with that but..." And what they do is they kind of give a wink and a nod to the foundational things and they go do these fun things and the foundational things are lost, and soon the faith is lost, and soon it's no longer a church. As John MacArthur says, we have to call them non-churches. Well, I'm fighting that we never go that way, amen? I'm fighting that we never drift that way because there's a strong current that wants to pull us that way.

He says the athlete must work, go according to the rules. Now the rules in ancient Greece for the Greek games was you must be a true born Greek, boy, there's a parallel there, isn't there? The rules to be in God's kingdom, you must be a true born again son or daughter of God. Secondly, you must swear before Zeus that you've put in 10 months of rigorous training. And thirdly, you had to abide by the regulations, the rules of your particular context. There's one contest called the ultimate fighter event and the ultimate fighter event, you won if your other, the guy you were fighting against quit or if he died. But there are rules. You couldn't poke out his eyes and you couldn't bite him. You can break his neck but you couldn't do the other things. I mean, that's literally the truth.

So Paul knew that Timothy knew how the rules of the athletes in the Greek games were and he said, "Timothy, it's the same way in Christianity. There's the prescribed pattern been handed down from the Father through me and the other apostles. Now Timothy, you hold to it and you prescribe it to others and make sure they hold to it because they multiply." Brothers and sisters, it should care for you, brother, it should care to you if the church is done right. I care deeply. I've given my life for it. I'm so grateful that you've given your life to join me in that pursuit.

So God has his regulations for the church. We don't get to make up our own rules and we don't get to change the rules, and we must not abandon the rules. We must, as he's already reiterated that in chapter 1, verse 13, retain the standard of sound words. Now the third metaphor he uses here is he says, um, "I want you to continue on, know what kind of role you're to play." He says, verse 6, "The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops." Well, like the soldier in verse 4, there must be a faithful duty and a perseverance on through. Like the athlete in verse 5, there must be a faithful commitment to your job and a pressing on through. Now the hard-working farmer, not just, not just farmer. He's working hard too but there's a uniqueness to what's at the end of this verse: he'll be the first to receive his share of the crops. I think he's emphasizing that, "Timothy, the men God calls into the ministry, if they're faithful, they're gonna have more hardship than the average Christian church member. Satan points his missiles at the leader. Timothy, if you won't quit, you'll keep holding to the prescribed pattern, pass it on to others, just like the hard-working farmer, nobody questions that the hard-working farmer who owns the land, who does the work, nobody questions that he should receive the first of the reward of the harvest." And by the way, I want to be careful in how I say this. These folks who are trying to push socialism and communism on us, the Bible teaches person property rights. That's what Jesus was talking about. You own the property, you grow the crop, you get the first reward. Now that you can share it after that and be gracious, but the idea that it's not really yours, it's not really your property, that's not of God. Socialism and communism violates a basic principle of Bible truth. Well, let's get to our point. "Timothy, there's a sense in which if you'll stay faithful, there's rich rewards coming to you down the road. Rich blessings."

So through the new birth and our discipleship under the ministry of the word and helping one another, we have the Holy Spirit in us, we have a treasure in us, we have the doctrines we've learned and the Spirit's power, and now we're supposed to take that

empowerment of the Spirit and the truths we know, we're to, we're to transfer it on just like the transmission in a car, it receives it, it pushes it on through the drive train. As I took my truck to the shop and I said, "As I go down the road it sounds like somebody's beating on the engine block with a hammer, and as I went further it got louder, and then it started jerking and losing power, and I limped into the service department here. So, um, I tell you what I need you guys to do, I need you to..." And I was convinced it was the transmission. "I need you to check out the transmission." You know what they did? They checked out the transmission and it was fine, it was the motor. Not the transmission at all. And as I was thinking about that and thinking about our text this week, I thought, "No doubt about it, the Bible says we'll give an account for the deeds done in the body and one of the key things at the judgment seat of Christ where we as Christians will give an account, will be that God's gonna check out your transmission." Did you transfer these truths on to your children? Did you teach them to your children's children? Did you make sure they were sitting under sound preaching? Did you help transfer these truths to those in your small group and those in church with you? We're all a part of the transmission process. You will be examined partly, I will be examined, by the way, at a much higher standard than you, did you pass these things on? The prescribed pattern including the doctrines, the structures and the pattern of biblically spiritually healthy local churches.

Do you think it's just coincidence that this was my text when I came back from my July break on promotion Sunday? No. I didn't save this up but God wanted us to be stirred with it. Now by the way and I do this a lot because it's true, so many of you, in my opinion, get good marks as one of God's transmitters. Well, let's stir ourselves afresh to do still more for the glory of God.