

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Growing Strong in Christ**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: TMC68

I want to take just a few minutes and draw your attention, if you'll allow me that, to 2 Timothy chapter 2. For those of you who happened to have your Bible, you might want to open to 2 Timothy chapter 2.

Second Timothy, as you probably know, was the last letter that the Apostle Paul ever wrote, the last inspired letter that he ever wrote. At the time he wrote this he was a prisoner. It wasn't long after this letter that he had to give his life, in fact his head was chopped off as best we can determine and he entered into the presence of the Lord. So this is his last letter and he writes it to Timothy who is about 30 years younger than he is and who is relatively speaking a young man. And, in a sense, he's passing on his spiritual responsibility to Timothy.

Paul had founded all the churches, as you know. He administered the Word of God. He had had a tremendous evangelistic ministry. He had been responsible for imparting and codifying and putting together doctrine for the foundation of the church to come. And now he wants to pass the mantle, or pass the baton, as it were, to another man. He's going to go and receive his reward. The time of his departure is at hand. He's ready to see the Lord, but he wants to be sure somebody is going to pick up the work and the key man is Timothy. So it's very important for Paul to make sure Timothy is up to the responsibility.

Look at verse 1 of chapter 2. This is basically the general thrust that he wants to get across. "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Paul has already experienced what Timothy has yet to experience. And Paul knows it's going to take great spiritual strength to survive to be effective. And so he writes this last letter encouraging Timothy to be strong.

Now why does he say that? Well, to be real honest with you, it looked as if Timothy wasn't very strong at this particular point in his life. Back in chapter 1 he says in verse 5, "I am mindful of the sincere faith within you which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and I'm sure is in you as well." He says I know you're saved, I know you're a believer. I know you have a real faith in Jesus Christ. I'm thankful for that.

But, verse 6, "I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you." What's that? The gift for ministry, preaching, teaching, leading the church, doing the work of an evangelist, everything God had given Timothy to do. And apparently Paul is saying, "I know your faith is real but your gift has sort of dwindled, the fire of your passion has gone out and I want you to kindle it afresh.

In verse 7 he says, "God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but a power, love and discipline." This leads us to believe that not only had Timothy let his gifts sort of fall into disuse, or to backing off a little bit, but he was even a bit timid, cowardly. We know he had run into some philosophers who were teaching some heavy-duty philosophy. He had run into some very, very potent leaders in the church at Ephesus where he was when he got this letter. He was trying to sort out the problems in the church, get rid of the bad leaders, get in the good leaders. And in the process of doing that, he ran into an awful lot of opposition and in the middle of all that opposition he may have been becoming a little bit cowardly, a little bit timid about forcing the issue. So here is a man who has a sincere faith but is letting his gift fall in to disuse, is losing the boldness that he once had in the cause of Christ.

Then it even goes further in verse 8. He says, "Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." Could it be that Timothy had even manifest shame toward Christ? That he had been ashamed to speak for Christ? Ashamed even to represent Christ?

And as we look at this young man, we begin to wonder whether this is the kind of person you want to hand the baton to, right? Is it any wonder that Paul said, "Be strong?" Down in verse 13 he says to him, "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me."

What is he saying? Hold on to your theology. Hold on to your doctrine. Verse 14, "Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in you the treasure which has been entrusted to you." and the treasure was the Word of God that had come to Timothy. All that had been heretofore revealed was given to him as a treasure. So he's saying to us, you know, here's a guy who is supposed to carry on Paul's ministry, the greatest Christian apart, of course, from the Lord who ever lived. And Timothy is supposed to carry it on. And he's not using his gift as he ought to. He's a little bit timid and lacking courage and boldness. He may have been ashamed on a couple occasions of Christ and of being identified with Paul. He has to be told to hold on to sound theology and guard the treasure. It's very possible that we're catching Timothy in a weak, weak point in his life, a very weak point. He is under the gun from persecution of the outside world. He's getting heat from the inside world as the people in the church don't like what he's trying to do.

Furthermore, in the first letter he wrote to Timothy, he said, "Flee youthful lusts." And Timothy was battling the lusts that occupy the mind of a young man and probably saying to himself, "Who am I to be in the ministry when I'm battling lust in my own heart?"

Furthermore he said to him, "Timothy, the servant of the Lord must not argue and fight." And Timothy probably got in some meetings with church leaders and let it fly and lost a little of his credibility. He was really struggling.

So Paul says to him, "Look, be strong." Now you've heard that message. Those of you who have been in a church or gone to camp, you've heard a camp leader get up and say, "Now you really need to dedicate your life to the Lord. You need to recommit your life." We've all been through that. We've all heard those, you know, sort of pumping up messages about commitment, dedication, consecration, reconsecration, all that stuff. But do we understand what that means? I mean, is it enough to say, "Timothy, be strong." What are you going to do? How do I do that?

You know, you've heard those sermons that are sort of like pep talks and there's nothing very concrete, you just sort of get emotional about it. I remember being at camp, we used to throw a stick in the fire and say, "I want to burn my old life and dedicate my life to Christ," and kids would parade by and throw stuff in the fire, throw a stick in the fire.

I remember one kid went by, took his watch off and real emotional, he said, "I want to dedicate my time to the Lord," and he threw his watch in the fire. I mean, that's a nice idea, but it's not dedication, it's bad stewardship. Get that watch, quick. You know, you don't commit your time to the Lord by burning up your watch. But, you know, a lot of us are like that. We don't know what it means...somebody says, "Be dedicated, be committed to Christ." We're not sure what it means.

I remember I was standing in the back of Grace Church one time, they had put some new speakers in and they asked me to go the back and listen to the choir and see if it sounded better. And this really did happen. Of course this is Southern California where you can expect anything. But I was standing in the back and a lady came in the door and she had a Poodle, or no it wasn't a Poodle it was a Chihuahua, you know, one of those sort of little overgrown rat kind of dogs, you know. (Applause) So she came in with this Chihuahua and she came into church. It was on a leash, it was properly dressed, had a red sweater and a rhinestone thing around its neck. I mean, it was a weird looking thing. And she came in the back door, I'll never forget this, and she started right down the middle aisle.

And the usher, you know, does a double take and realizes he's got to stop this woman, you can't bring a dog in there unless it's a Seeing-Eye dog, you know, we don't have dogs in a church. And he went down the aisle and he grabbed her by the arm and he said, went down the aisle and I'll never forget, I stood there and he said, "I'm sorry, Ma'am, you can't...you can't come in with the dog." And she looked directly at him and this is a quote, she said, "Oh, it's perfectly all right, he just rededicated is life to the Lord and we're on our way to the prayer room." She was dead serious.

Now I realize that her elevator didn't go to the top floor, you know. She was a few bricks short of a load. You know, we understand that. But I just stood there and I was so jolted by that statement, you know, she had no clue what she was talking about, you know. I mean, what do you mean the dog has rededicated...you know. How do you know it's really saved to start with? No, that isn't it... But you

understand that people...people hear things, they hear things and they don't even think about whether they mean anything or not. What does it mean to rededicate your life? To consecrate your life to Christ? To be strong in the Lord?

How many times have you gone to a camp, or a youth conference, or something like that, a church service and you felt like you wanted to dedicate your life again, or you want to make a fresh commitment to the Lord and you do that emotionally but what does it mean? What are you really doing?

Well, you need more than a pep talk. I mean, a pep talk will carry you just so far. I remember I was in college we were playing a football game against another school that we should have beaten. And we were in their stadium and we were under the stadium in the locker room at the half time, the score was zero to zero and our coach was very upset...very upset because it was an important game and we weren't doing anything out there.

And so, he came in and gave one of his famous, you know, speeches where he just lost it all together, and he put his fist through a blackboard, it was their blackboard, just boom, right through the thing. And then, I'll never forget it, there were several locker banks in a row and he threw a body block into one locker and they went down like dominoes, you know. We're the visiting team, you know, we're wrecking this other team's locker room. And he got us pumped up and it was under the bleachers and I know people sitting up there during half time heard thunder underneath, you know, as all this stuff was crashing around. And he gave us that typical pep talk and, I mean, it works for a while, and if the door had been locked, we would have killed each other trying to get out of there, we were so pumped, you know. And we scored 38 points in the third quarter. We literally blew the team off the field. It works for a little while.

But Paul wants to do more than give you a pep talk, he wants to be very specific about what it means to be strong in the Lord. So he gives us four pictures, all right? Let's look at them. Four pictures flow out of this text that define a strong Christian. If you're going to be strong in the Lord, here's how you see yourself.

Verse 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."

The first picture that he wants you to have is that you are a teacher, you are a teacher. Timothy, you have been taught by me, you must teach others who can teach others. A strong Christian is one who learns in order to teach. If you want to know whether your life is really committed to Christ, and at a level of dedication, then ask yourself...How involved am I in the process of learning so I can teach somebody so they can teach somebody? That's a spiritual image that the Christian bears.

Somebody has taught you. Somebody right now is teaching you. There are people pouring their lives into you with the things of God. What are you doing with them? A committed Christian is a teacher. You're passing it on. You're discipling someone. You're discipling them, you're teaching them, you're instructing them so that they can instruct someone else. There are four generations in verse 2. First generation, Paul; second generation; to Timothy; third generation, to faithful men; four generation, to others also.

There's a process here...a process. You're in a relay race. The best way to see it is in a relay race. Somebody gave you the baton, and you are responsible to run your leg and hand that baton to somebody else. And it all started with Jesus who gave the baton to the Apostles. The things that Jesus began to do and to teach He passed on to the Apostles, according to Acts 1:1. The Apostles passed it on to somebody. Somebody passed it on to somebody. Somebody passed it on to somebody and it got all the way down and somebody has given you, is giving you the truth of God and you're in the same process of passing it on to someone else.

You say, "Well I don't know very much." Well find someone who knows less than you do and tell him everything you know. Then find somebody who knows more than you do and learn everything they know. Get in the process.

You know, when I was in college I ran on the track team. I ran the sprints and did some of the jumping events and then I ran the second leg in the mile relay, which is one lap, 400 meters, or 440 yard dash. And we got in to the Orange County Invitational Finals in the mile relay and we were pretty excited. There were about five, six teams in that final and we thought we had a good shot at it. We had a real good first guy, I ran second, first guy gets the lead, second guy loses it, you have two to make it up, you know, that's where they put me. So I was basically a baseball player but they had me do track as well. And so we got into that event and we had Smoke for an anchor, we had a guy who just really could burn up the track and we thought we could win the whole thing.

So the race, the gun went off and the first guy ran a great leg, just a great leg. Came in just holding first place. And we happened to make a perfect baton pass, just as I was taking my last step out of the lanes so I was up to speed, and he was still running strong. I got the baton and I got a real good jump coming out of the lane, I can see it vividly even today. And I ran the best leg I ever ran, I came in holding first place and another perfect baton pass, slapped the thing in the hand of the third guy, Ted, and Ted took off and we knew we were sitting pretty because we knew our anchor could win. And Ted went down, turned...came down the backstretch, half way down the backstretch, you know, we were just pumped. He stopped. Walked off the track and sat on the grass. I mean, I thought he popped his panterous, or pulled a ham string, or...I mean, I don't know what he did. Or spiked himself, or what...I'll never forget.

I ran across the grass, you know, and the race is going on and we're out, I ran across the grass and I'll never forget. I looked up at him and said, "Ted, what happened?" These immortal words came from his lips. "I don't know, I just didn't feel like running anymore." That's exactly what he said. You know, your first reaction is to take your track shoe and go..yahaa....you know. You've got to be kidding me, what do you mean you didn't feel like running? What do you mean, there's more in this than you, my friend. You don't want to run, go run in your own race, not ours. The guy who is waiting to anchor the race is standing over there, you know, wondering what in the world went on. A lot of training goes in to winning, you're not in this alone.

I look back on that and you say, "Boy, that's really tragic." Well it's not nearly as tragic as somebody investing spiritual truth in somebody who fails to pass it on, right? You've got a tremendous responsibility. Jesus said, "To whom much is given...what?...much is required."

You know, when I was a student in seminary, Dr. Charles Feinberg was a dean of the seminary, he was a brilliant Jewish man. In fact, he studied to be a rabbi and then got converted to Jesus Christ and started to study the Bible on his own. He was so brilliant, he knew 35 languages. I remember in two weeks he taught himself Dutch so he could read a Dutch theology. Just an immense mind. All his kids have double PhD's, you know the genetics in that family were incredible. But anyway, anyway Dr. Feinberg was the dean of my seminary and he just was so astute in the Scripture. He just...I was so in awe of this guy, he became my personal mentor through seminary. I took every class he taught and I broke my back to get an A in every class he taught because I just wouldn't ever imagine that anybody would get less than an A in his class and be satisfied with it.

And he took me under his wing personally. He took me to his home and he showed me his personal library. And, you know, some people have books on the Dead Sea Scrolls, he had photocopies, he read the scrolls, not the books about the scrolls. You know, did his devotions in the Syriac Peshitta, you know. I mean, he was in some other dimension.

You know, we'd ask him a question just to stump him, we'd say, "What does that verse mean in 1 Kings 4:6?" Well we didn't even know what 1 Kings 4:6 said, you know. And he'd think about it a minute in Hebrew and translate it into English and then explain it, you know. Just that kind of incredible... Dr. Louis Barry Chafer said that when he went to Dallas Seminary and graduated with his doctorate, he's the only man who ever went to Dallas who knew more when he got there than he did when he left. I don't know what that means except the fact that they must have taken something away from him.

He went on after he got a doctorate at Dallas to John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland where he got a Ph.D. under William Foxwell Albright, the leading archeologist in the world and that's

the kind of guy he was.

Well he decided to make me his personal pupil. And for some reason he believed in me and so he would bring me in his office and he'd say, "Here's a book, I want you to read it and tell me what you think." And he'd give me his own books and he'd call me in and he'd talk to me and he'd share with me. And he'd just make sure I was growing and learning and he'd stimulate me. I was his personal little project.

And one day he came to me and he said, "I'm so happy, John." He said, "You've won the scholarship award for this year." And he thanked me for that and I thought, "Boy, that's wonderful, I didn't know about that." And the next day he called me in and he said, "You know something?" He said, "We were wrong yesterday when I told you that. We had to check again and you didn't turn in a paper in some class and you didn't win and I'm very disappointed in you." I just went....puugh, I just melted.

My second year in seminary, we had to preach every year before the whole faculty and they sit behind you when you preach and they have eight-and-a-half by fourteen sheets of paper and they criticize you. You know, where are his hands, and what are his gestures like, I mean, they're in to all of that stuff, talk about his intonation, does he scratch his nose when he's preaching, does he slump in the pulpit, does he have a powerful presence, what kind of voice does he have, well how was his outline, were his illustrations good, did he rightly interpret the text? And so they're sitting there the whole time you're preaching, checking off all these boxes, you know, and drawing diagrams of what you should have done and how your gestures, you know, you should say God loves the whole world, you know, you should say the WHOLE world, you know, all that kind of stuff. And, you know, they go through all of that. And they're back there...

Well I was assigned to preach my second year and I got up and I had the passage that Feinberg had assigned me, 2 Samuel chapter 7, and I had to do a Bible exposition of that and preach a sermon and I preached my heart out the best I could. And all these guys had filled their criticism sheets but there was only one of them that I was really concerned about.

I will never forget, greatest lesson I ever learned. I walked out the door in seminary and they all stand there and hand you the sheet as you go. And then you read what they think of your sermon. And Feinberg was last and he looked at me and didn't say a word and handed me a sheet. No box was marked, nothing was checked, no lines, no comments in the spaces. In red ink across the middle of the page, "YOU MISSED THE ENTIRE POINT OF THE PASSAGE!" exclamation point.

Now there's one thing you don't want to do when you preach and that is miss the entire point of the passage. If you can avoid it all costs, it's a good idea, particularly if you have a bunch of eggheads sitting behind evaluating it. And, you know, he knew that day that he had just taught me the most

profound lesson of my life. And if there's one thing I struggle with even today in the ministry, it is to make sure I don't miss the point of the passage. That man made a tremendous investment in me. Every time I think about my responsibility as a servant of Christ, I think about that man because that man spent energy and hours and time and prayer investing in me and I have a responsibility to pass that on to somebody else. There are people in this school making that same investment in your life. There's a mother and a father and a pastor and a youth pastor and a lot of folks who have poured the truth into you and you have a responsibility to stand up for that truth and pass it on to the next generation, right? That's being a teacher.

Second picture that he gives is a soldier. Look at verse 3, "Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." Literally, suffer hardship along with me. Paul is saying, we all do it, and I'm suffering too and you've got to suffer along with me because that's what it's like to be a soldier.

Then in verse 4 he says, "Soldiers in active service don't entangle themselves in the affairs of everyday life and they do what they do to please the one who enlisted them to be a soldier."

Three things about a soldier. Number one, a soldier suffers hardship. Number two, a soldier disentangles himself from the affairs of civilian life. And number three, he does what he does to please his commander.

Now you're a soldier. If you're a child of God, if you're a believer and you want to be strong in the Lord, then you need to view yourself as a soldier. And a soldier is made for battle. A soldier is made for warfare. Soldiers made for difficulty.

And you say, "Well, you know, the Christian life is hard," that's what you were designed for. That's why you have the Holy Spirit. That's why you have the armor of God available to you, Ephesians chapter 6. That's why you have Christ as your high priest interceding for you because you do not wrestle against...what?...flesh and blood.

I'll never forget after a couple of years at Grace Church, I ran into my first demon-possessed person at the church. It was a woman and she kicked my shins until my shins bled because I couldn't prevent her from doing it, that's how strong she was under those demons' influence. She had thrown a desk over on top of one of the guys on our church staff. When I walked into the room, this voice came out of her and said, "Get him out, get him out, not him, get him out." My first reaction was, "See ya, I'm out of here. I don't need this."

My second reaction was, "Wow, the demons know who I am and they know whose side I'm on, and they don't like me. That's good news to me." I mean that was a real supernatural confirmation of whose team I was on. And we spent several hours wrestling with demons in that woman and the



demons knew me and they knew what I believed and there was a real combat. For the first time in my life I realized that spiritual warfare was a reality.

Now you may not have had it that vivid, as to be confronting the voices of demons who know who you are. But you are involved in a spiritual warfare and spiritual warfare demands soldiers and that's what you're all about. You can't expect it to be easy, you can only expect it to be a battle. And you have to be willing to suffer what comes as a faithful soldier. You're going to get misrepresented and persecuted and rejected and maligned and mocked and accused, but you're a soldier and you're on the other side from the enemy, so you expect the enemy to get his shots in. Just make sure you have your armor on and you're willing to suffer for the cause of Christ.

See, what made Timothy weaken was he wasn't willing to suffer...he wasn't willing to suffer. When it got tough, he got timid. When it got tough, he got ashamed instead of being bold for Christ. You have to be a soldier and the first thing about a soldier is, he's willing to take the heat for the commander whose name he bears.

The second thing in verse 4 is he's not entangled in civilian life. I mean, when you go into the military, that's a total commitment, isn't it? They got...they don't say to you, "Now that you're in the Army, could you show up around here now and then? We'd like you to come to the base as often as you can, we know you've got a busy schedule, but show up now and then. And by the way, put that uniform on from time to time. Will you get in line when we ask?" No, no, no.

When you're in the military, that's it. They cut your hair, they tell you what to wear, they feed you the same stuff, they put you wherever they want to put you, they control your life top to bottom. That's how it is with a soldier, that's how it is with a Christian. When you're in the service of Jesus Christ, it's a total life commitment. You serve Him. You're disentangled from the rest of the world. You've got to see yourself that way. The clearer that vision is, the more faithful you're going to be.

The third thing he says, and this is very important, is that the soldier does what he does to please the commander, the one who enlisted him to be a soldier.

One of the greatest lessons you'll ever learn in your life is to do everything you do to please the Lord. It sounds basic and it is the controlling factor in Christian living. David said, "I set the Lord always before me," Psalm 16, it controlled his life. "I only do what pleases God. Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all to the glory of God." I live my life that way, that controls everything I do. If I'm concerned about what people think, I've got problems. Paul says, "It's a little thing what people think of me," 1 Corinthians 4, it's of little concern what I think of myself, I'm biased in my own favor, it's of major concern what the Lord thinks of me.

A reporter said to me one time, "For whom do you prepare your sermons?" I said to him, "For the Lord...for the Lord." I mean, He's the one I have to please. That's consciously in my mind in my service, am I pleasing the Lord?

I had a good illustration of this when I was in college. In the days when I was in college, freshmen couldn't play in varsity sports so as a freshman you had to wait until your sophomore season. It was my sophomore season in football and we had our first game, it was our opening game, we were playing it in the Rose Bowl and we were playing a pretty good team, a formidable team and at this point I can't even remember who it was, to be honest with you. But anyway, we had a big game and I had made the first team and I was playing in the running back spot and a slot back, what they call a combination running back and wide receiver. And my job...we got the kickoff and the first play they called was a 27 power blast which was an off tackle blast where there was a double team on the outside guy and then I'm the lead guy through the hole and my job is to take the linebacker out.

Well, I mean, you know, linebackers are big, ugly people, you know. You just...and so when I was sitting in the huddle, you know, and it's sort of like everything got into slow motion, they called a 27 power blast and I looked over there...this is my first shot at a college football game, you know, and the real think and I'm looking at this linebacker and the longer I look at him, the bigger he gets, like somebody is inflating him, he just keeps getting larger and larger. And I'll never forget the situation because the hole opened up nicely and I had to go through and, of course, I didn't know what to do and I was a little bit afraid and I didn't want to blow my entire career on this one guy and he had somewhat of a reputation. So I just kind of nudged him a little bit and he just leveled me and went right through the hole and we had about an eight yard loss...a big pile of bodies everywhere and you don't want to start a game like that. That is not good.

Went back to the huddle, figured nobody will know what happens, right? Later in the game, I don't know, had about a 70 yard touchdown run or something, we won the game so I thought no one is going to bother with that deal.

Well Monday we went to the gym to get dressed, practice and the sign on the board said, "Report to the film room." And I was about to have my first experience with the film room. And I went in there and sat down, you know, we're kind of high because we won our first game. And I figured that will never be on the film because it's the first play of the game and they won't get the thing cranked up and sometimes they miss the first two plays and, you know. But anyway, it was on the first part of the film and the camera was on my side of the field, our side, so I was in full view, just full view. And I go...ping..bank, wham, you know. It's obvious what happened.

So the coach says, "Stop the projector. Let's run that again." Then these famous words, "Men, watch MacArthur." That's what he said. And he ran it five times, forward and backwards, five times, five

times. And the sad part is, I never improved, all five times I did exactly the same thing. Greatest lesson I ever learned.

I went out of there so humiliated that the rest of my career I had only one guy in mind, I didn't care what the cheerleaders thought, my girlfriend, my parents, I cared only about one guy I was going to face on Monday. That's a good spiritual analogy.

When you serve the Lord Jesus Christ, He's the commander in chief that you want to please. What does it mean to be dedicated? It means to be a teacher who passes on what he learns. It means to be a soldier who is willing to suffer hardship, who is willing to cut himself off from the world and do everything he does to please the commander.

Third picture, third picture in verse 5 ties in with the analogy I just gave, "And if anyone competes as an athlete, he doesn't win the prize unless he competes according to the rules."

The third picture is you're an athlete. You have to see yourself as an athlete. Now there are a couple of things about an athlete. The verb *athleo* implies exertion, it implies that you make a maximum effort. Russ Hodge who used to be on the staff here was a world record holder in the decathlon, one of the greatest athletes in the history of the world. Still hold five lifetime bests in the decathlon. And Russ was a coach in the U.S. Decathlon team one year, 1974 I believe it was, and we were up in Eugene, Oregon and I was standing on the Eugene, Oregon track because it was the greatest decathlete meet in the world's history. U.S.S.R., Poland and the United States had the greatest decathletes in the world. They were all there and the whole idea was to see who was the best in the world. The world record holder was there. The second, third, fourth, all of them were there. Russ was the coach of the American team.

We were standing on the infield and I was watching these guys all warm up, mammoth guy from Poland, he must have been about 6:6, huge guy. And then there was a great Russian who at the time held the world's record. There were a couple of great Americans.

And I said to Russ, "Who is the greatest athlete here?" And he pointed to a guy who really loves Christ, who is a good, good fella and a friend, he's even visited our college, named Freddie Dickson. He said, "Freddie Dickson is the greatest athlete in the world." I said, "Who will win?" He said, "See that little short guy over there, you never heard of him, he'll win."

I said, "How is it that he'll win if he's not the greatest athlete in the world?" And he said, "Because he's the most mentally tough competitor I've ever seen in my life, he will not lose, he refuses to lose. And if it take five lifetime bests, he'll do it because that's how mentally tough he is.

Sure enough at the end of the second day, in the twilight when they run the distance run, he came in at a lifetime best, either the fourth or fifth lifetime best he won that day. Two years later the whole world knew about him because he won the gold in Montreal, his name is Bruce Jenner. And he won because he wouldn't lose.

There's something to be said about that, not only in athletics but in life. And that's what an athlete does. He has this mental commitment to winning. I've often said that most Christians who don't really reach their spiritual potential don't reach it because they don't care to reach it. They're not that interested. It's indifference.

And sometimes it's indifference that separates the winners from the losers, not ability...not ability. From a spiritual standpoint, you need to want to win. And there's nothing wrong with wanting to win. The Lord says run that you may win. Run that you may obtain the prize. That's what an athlete does.

There's no honor in losing. You don't say to an athlete when he wins a race, "Oh, you're so selfish, why don't you let somebody else win?" If the guy throws a race, he's a bum. No, maximum effort is honored.

Second thing he says, he does it to win the prize and he does it according to the rules. If you're going to be an athlete, you have to keep the rules. We learned that, didn't we? With Ben Johnson, what a tragedy. Ben Johnson runs the 100 meters in the Olympics and he sets the world's record and he wins the gold. But he cheated...he cheated. There was a guy in the prior Olympics who won the foil, you know, the sword fighting deal, and he cheated, he rigged up that electronic foil so it would record hits that never happened, and they took away his gold medal. You have to keep the rules.

You can't be running the race and say, "I think it's easier if I just cut right across the infield here and it will shorten up this whole..." No, you can't do that. You can't even get out of your own lane. Paul says, "Having done all, stand, keep the rules. When the smoke clears, you've done it God's way." You're an athlete, takes maximum effort, takes a desire to win the prize, to be the best that you can be, and you've got to keep the rules. Don't be disqualified. Paul says, "My greatest fear is in reaching others I would be disqualified." You're an athlete.

Fourth picture, last one. Verse 6, "The hard working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops." You've got to see yourself as a farmer. What does a farmer do? He plants and harvests and tastes the crop. That's one of the most wonderful things about the Christian life is planting, isn't it? Sowing the seed, and getting to taste the result. Man, it's tremendous.

The thing that most excites me about the Master's College, you know what it is? Watching the fruit of everyone's labor begin to show in the lives of you young people. That is thrilling to me. It's to taste the fruit. I mean, that's the best thing about being in the ministry. That's exciting. And there are...I could

give you dozens of illustrations of what it's like to taste the fruit of the power of god in the life of a person. It's phenomenal. Story after story after story of transformed lives.

I remember baptizing one of the leading pornographers in Hollywood as he professed his faith in Jesus Christ. I mean, you've got to know that is a thrilling thing. I remember baptizing the head of the Houston Hell's Angels. I mean, he had tattoos all over him. He had been redeemed, his vocabulary wasn't really prepared yet for public testimony, as it turned out, he made the buns on the back of the little old ladies' heads unravel as he was sharing how the Lord had changed his life. He also was...it was a very interesting evening. He also said, "You know, the last time I was in church I rode down the middle aisle on my bike and I threw a rope over the pastor and dragged him out the back and down the stairs and down the road." And I'm going, "Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord," you know.

But, I mean, it's amazing to see the fruit of the ministry. Thrilling to see that happen. And you have to look at yourself as a farmer. What does a farmer do? Sows seed. Sows the seed. Sows the seed, patiently waits and then tastes the harvest.

Young people, what is a dedicated Christian? A dedicated Christian is somebody who teaches what he's learned. A dedicated Christian is someone who sees himself as a soldier made for hardship, made to be cut off from the world and made to fight to please the commander. A dedication Christian is an athlete who runs to the maximum of his ability to win the prize the Lord has promised and he keeps the rules. And a dedicated faithful Christian is one who sows the seed because he gets to taste the fruit which is the great joy in the Christian life, seeing what God does in the lives of others.

Don't get caught in being selfish. Give your life away to others and enjoy how that tastes when it starts to come back and you see how God uses you to change other people's lives. You want to be strong in the Lord? Be a teacher, soldier, athlete, farmer. If you can get those four perspectives, you can see the vision of what God wants you to be.

Now let me help you one step more. Let's pull that all into focus, okay? We've got four pictures going, let's pull it into focus, let's get one picture. Who was the greatest teacher that ever walked the earth? Jesus Christ. Who is the greatest soldier, fought the greatest battle, won the greatest victory? Jesus Christ. Who was the greatest athlete, ran the purest race, won the greatest prize and never broke a rule? Jesus Christ. Who was the true seed sower who really brings the harvest and gets the ultimate glory for everything that is done in the human heart? Jesus Christ. Do you see the point?

So who are you to be like? Jesus Christ. Remember Jesus Christ, says Paul to Timothy. Why? Because He's a composite of all those pictures, to be like Him is the issue.

And that's why we're here. And that's what we're committed to try to accomplish by God's power in

your life.

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