

Sharing Your Faith In Spite Of Opposition

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2 Timothy: Passing On The Faith Series

2 Timothy 2:1-13

One of the great sports stories of overcoming obstacles is the story of Lance Armstrong, the five-time winner of the Tour de France. Most of you know the story. Seven years ago, doctors told Armstrong there was a 60% chance that he was going to die of cancer. It was apparent to the doctors and to everyone that Lance Armstrong would never race again. But as you know, he not only miraculously beat the cancer, but he went on to win the Tour de France every single year since 1999, a race that he had never won before he had cancer.

His skull has two big six-inch scars as a result of surgeons drilling into his head. He has a huge scar on his chest from surgery and from the catheter. And his body has dozens of scars from falling off his bike and hitting the pavement.

Lance Armstrong's aerobic capacity is absolutely legendary. He can pedal a bike 32 miles an hour for an hour straight. That is at age 32. A very fit 21-year-old college student can pedal a bicycle at 32 mph for about 45 seconds. For about the first 10 seconds they feel great. After 20 seconds they feel like they are going to die. After 40 seconds they fall off their bike and throw up.

Among professional athletes, Armstrong's abilities are of mythical proportions. A professional hockey player read that Armstrong could pedal a cybex bike at 2700 revolutions per minute and he could do that for an hour. The professional hockey player tried to pedal that quickly. He said, "I lasted two minutes and then I had to quit. I was totally exhausted. My whole body was aching. The man simply is not human."

How does Armstrong win the Tour de France five times pedaling 2300 miles over the course of two weeks, climbing 6000 ft. mountains that have dozens of hairpin turns? Well, not only does he have great genetics for bicycling, he simply outworks everyone else. Last December 1st, Armstrong got a call on his cell phone from David Millar, who is a young British bike star and someone who has won several stages of the Tour de France, but has never won the entire Tour. They chatted for a while. David talked with Lance about a party that he had gone to the night before. Then Lance said, "Just a second. I need to pass a truck that's going too slowly up this mountain."

David asked Lance, "Lance, where are you now?"

Lance said, "I'm on my bike. Where do you think I am?"

“How long have you been on your bike, Lance?”

“Oh, I don’t know, about four hours.”

David screamed into the phone, “Lance, it is December bloody first, the Tour isn’t for seven months.” David Millar said, “It’s just not fair.”

While he rides his bike on long Texas roads, people don’t shout encouragement to him. They are angry because there is a bicyclist in their way. And Texans don’t respect bicyclists the way they would in Berkley, California, or Boulder, Colorado. Folks throw pop cans at him and Big Gulp cups. Cars have hit him six times. People curse at him continually. They regularly make obscene gestures. One trucker got out of his truck swinging a baseball bat.

What keeps Lance going in spite of so much opposition? He said, “After the cancer I just decided to live every day as fully as I possibly could. It is not a matter of God or faith, or adulation. I just want to live life every day as fully as I can.”

As I read the Lance Armstrong story, I thought what would a Christian athlete say? Is there a difference between someone like Lance Armstrong and a Christian in terms of their fundamental motivations? Does being a follower of Christ change your perception of work, athletics, and success? What keeps a Christian going in spite of the opposition that he or she might face?

I thought back to the story of Eric Liddell, the sprinter from Scotland, whose Olympic victory was immortalized in *Chariots of Fire*. Liddell’s most famous decision was during the Paris Olympics of 1924 when he refused to compete in a 100-meter race because the event was held on Sunday. The 100-meter race was Liddell’s best chance for getting a gold medal. But he simply would not violate the Lord’s Day and so he refused to run. People all across Great Britain criticized him. The press had a field day charging Liddell with being unpatriotic and legalistic. They said he was taking the letter of the law to the extreme. He received pressure from the Royal Family to compete. “Do it for your countrymen. Do it for your nation.”

But eventually Liddell won the admiration of his opponents by sticking to his principles in the face of opposition. Liddell wrote about an incident and challenged Christians when he said, “Ask yourself, if I know something to be true, am I prepared to follow even though it is contrary to what I want, or to what I have previously held to be true? Will I follow it, if it means being laughed at? Will I obey God even if it means personal financial loss, or some kind of hardship?” Eric Liddell’s motivating principle of life was obeying God, no matter what it cost. He believed that God would uphold his end of the deal, so long as he obeyed his Master Jesus Christ.

And as *Chariot's of Fire* suggests in a historically accurate portrayal, Eric Liddell decided to not run in his best race, the 100 meters. But instead, at the last minute he signed up for the 400-meter race, which was not his distance at all. During warm-ups, an opponent from another team slipped him a note. The note read, "In the old book it says, 'He who honors me, I will honor.' Wishing you the best of success always."

God honored Eric Liddell's obedience. He ended up winning the gold medal. Most folks don't know that he didn't spend the rest of his life living off his Olympic glory. Instead, following his graduation from college, he immediately went to China as a missionary. He poured himself out to see the gospel message extended to the Chinese. At the beginning of WWII, along with other foreign missionaries, Eric Liddell was arrested by the Japanese and interned in a prison camp. What Eric Liddell didn't know was that, much like Lance Armstrong, he also had cancer. And it was in that prison camp in 1945 that Eric Liddell died of a brain tumor.

What motivated him to face down the Royal Family, the press, the Olympics? What kept him going for 20 years in China, sharing his faith, caring for the poor, ministering to others in a prison camp? It wasn't Lance Armstrong's, "I'm just trying to live life to the fullest without regard to God." Eric Liddell had given his life to Christ. His biographer said as a dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ, he spent his days asking how he could honor Christ that day. His biographer wrote, "Liddell was a man who could rest short of nothing but the introduction of those who were within his sphere of influence to his Savior and Master, who had come to mean so much to him." He was driven to share his faith out of love for God and love for people, despite the opposition.

Today I'm going to continue my series from Paul's second letter to Timothy. I've called today's talk, "Sharing Your Faith In Spite Of Opposition." Let's pray.

2 Timothy 2:1-13

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. Here is a trustworthy

saying, "If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself."

Last week I talked about the opposition that a follower of Christ would face if she or he decides to talk with friends or family about the need to accept Christ. Christ will often run counter to someone's sexual appetite. Accepting Jesus and coming under his will may run counter to someone's marriage plans, or divorce plans. Christ's will, in so many areas, may run counter to your will.

Christ tells us to not retaliate when we are offended, to forgive when we are sinned against, to not pay back in kind those who are cruel to us. We learned last week that if you want to bear witness for Christ in this world, you need to be prepared for opposition. As a follower of Christ, you cannot naively and blindly go into the world sharing your faith as if everyone is immediately going to say, "Thank you. Thank you for telling me about Jesus and my need for him. Thank you for calling me to repentance. Thank you for telling me that the will of God may be counter to my will, that God may not approve of everything I do or everything I want. Thank you for calling me to surrender control of my life and telling me that apart from Christ I have no hope."

We live in a culture that is hopelessly committed to pluralism. Any belief is an equally valid alternative to any other belief. We live in a culture that is hopelessly committed to relativism. Nothing is true. Everyone has the right to declare what is moral or right. Opposition is part of what we must expect if we are going to obey Christ and share our faith with others.

Let me set the context for you of 2 Timothy 2. Timothy faced the opposition of false teachers in Ephesus. He was young and temperamentally shy. His spiritual father, Paul, was in jail. And many who had professed faith in Christ were leaving the church and turning their backs on the Lord, in the face of increasing social pressure. In fact, the apostle Paul, perhaps employing a little bit of hyperbole, says in 2 Timothy 1:15:

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

There is massive defection from the faith. How does Paul call Timothy to sustain continual loyalty to the gospel? How does Paul call Timothy to keep passing on the faith, to keep sharing, to keep adding links to the chain despite the opposition that Timothy was facing? Let's look at verse 1:

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

The power to keep praying for your spouse's salvation, or for your parent's salvation, for your sibling's salvation after years of rejection doesn't come from

within us. The power to keep sharing your faith in your workplace, or your classroom, even if you've been shot down, does not come from a Lance Armstrong-like iron will to keep going. The power to persevere in praying for someone's salvation, and continuing to share your faith in the face of opposition, or in the face of radical indifference comes from Jesus.

I would parenthetically say that indifference is sometimes harder to deal with than flat-out opposition. Have you noticed that? It is extremely difficult for some of you as wives to keep trusting God when you have a husband who is not at all interested in spiritual things. Some of you have husbands who are quite content to have you go to church on your own. "Have a good time. I'll be here when you come back. I'll be reading the newspaper, or watching the football game."

A few of you men have wives who you've been praying for for years, who have simply not yet opened the door to receive Christ. Some of you have parents who simply turn you off when you try to talk with them about what really matters to you, your faith in Christ, and then there is no response. How do you deal with indifference over years, or opposition over years?

Paul says the way to keep going is to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus – not strong in yourself, not strong in your resolve, not strong in your will, not strong in your opinions, strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Paul writes:

My son [daughter], be strong in grace.

In other words, build your life on a foundation of grace. Plant your life in the soil of grace.

I have found that most Christians have at least some understanding of grace in terms of their initial salvation. Most Christians understand that acceptance and right standing with God cannot be earned or merited. Most Christians understand that salvation has to be received simply as a gift. It is a product of God's unmerited, unearned favor and love.

But then I've discovered that many of us go on to live as if success in life depends totally on us, upon our performance, upon our goodness, upon our wisdom. We are so used to performance-based living that coming to Christ sometimes doesn't change that and we are not strong in grace and we don't live out of grace. We think if my child is going to come to Christ, or if my child is going to turn around, it is entirely up to me. I've got to find the right formula. I've got to find the right words. I've got to act exactly the right way. Otherwise, my child will never turn around and embrace Christ. If my dad or my mom or my spouse is going to come to Christ, I've got to do this on my own.

How many of you feel that the reason that a coworker, classmate, or someone in your family is not yet a Christian is because simply of your imperfection, your failure?

Paul says:

You then, my son [daughter], be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Live out of a place of God's acceptance of you. Live out of a strong sense of God's favor and God's love. And live out of a strong sense of God's favor and love for the person you are praying for. Friend, do you believe and do you live with the certain knowledge that God loves your unsaved family member, your unsaved roommate, coworker, or classmate more than you do? Do you live with the rock-solid knowledge that God wants people to be saved infinitely more than you desire them to be saved?

Do you know that God's grace is a sure antidote for us seeking the approval of others? One of the things that absolutely crush Christian witness is our continual desire for the approval of others. I say this with all affection, but many of us are people pleasers. We share our faith in Christ with wisdom and sensitivity. We are not overbearing. Even when you share with wisdom and sensitivity, a person may not respond positively. Perhaps they've had a bad experience at a church, or with another Christian. Perhaps the person we are attempting to talk to is very secular in their viewpoint, or they are coming from a different faith tradition. Maybe they are Jewish. Maybe they are Muslim. Maybe they rarely attend church. The person we are attempting to reach may be a big-time party-er, or super-successful and find no need for God at this point in their life. Maybe they are intimidatingly smart.

So the temptation in the face of opposition is to lay low – To go undercover and to become a chameleon Christian, just blending in to the local colors of your office, and to blend in with the background of your class.

So, I ask this question with all affection for you: Why is someone else's opinion of your faith so important to you? Why do you find it necessary that everyone approves of you and everyone approve of your Christian convictions?

Paul's answer is very simple. It is because you are not strong in the grace that is yours in Christ. The surest remedy for needing people's acceptance is knowing that God your Father accepts you. It is okay if a coworker, or a classmate doesn't agree with your faith. God agrees with your faith. He's the one who gave it to you as a gift, and he loves you. It is okay if you experience a little negativity. God, the Creator of the universe, God the Judge of all men and women, approves of you. Grace is the fuel that keeps us going. It is much better fuel than what burns in the body of Lance Armstrong.

And Paul shares his strategy for evangelism in a world of opposition. It is a strategy of multiplication. Live out of grace and live with this strategy in mind. Verse 2 says:

What you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Notice, Paul doesn't say, "My strategy for reaching this world in the face of opposition is to try to train up 100 Billy Graham's, or 1000 Billy Grahams." He simply tells Timothy to pass along the faith to faithful men [women], not fabulously gifted people, but faithful men and women, reliable men and women, who will be able to pass the faith along to others also. See, Paul's strategy is a strategy of multiplication.

Someone in my home group shared this illustration just a few nights ago. Take the most successful evangelist, perhaps in world history – Billy Graham, who has been ministering for 60 years. Let's say that Billy Graham led one million people to Christ each year for the last 60 years. Actually, the numbers are much lower. But let's say he led a million people to Christ each year for the last 60 years. That means through Billy Graham's ministry 60 million people would have come to Christ over the course of 60 years.

Let's say instead of the brilliantly gifted Billy Graham, we had one faithful Christian who decided that they were going to share their faith with coworkers, family, and friends. They prayed to see people come to Christ and two people came to Christ.

Let's say those two people began praying for friends, family, and coworkers. They shared their faith faithfully and each of them led two people to Christ. So in year 3 we have four Christians.

They pray and share their faith openly and each of them leads two people to Christ. So in year 4 we see 8 people come to Christ.

Now, how many years will it take to reach not that 60 million people, but the 6 billion people that live on planet earth? Answer: About 32 years. You can reach 100x more people than Billy Graham could have possibly reached in half the amount of time, if followers of Christ were simply faithful and led just two others to Christ over the course of their lives. Just two others. The power of multiplication is just awesome.

Let me illustrate it a different way. If you took a sheet of typing paper and you folded that sheet in half, and then folded it in half again, and were somehow able to keep folding that sheet of paper in half 41 times, how high do you think the stack of typing paper would be? It would reach from here to the moon.

Do you get it? Do you understand God's strategy for reaching the world? It is faithful people who are reproductive in their faith. Or as I've been putting it, people who will not have the chain of faith end with them, but who are prayerfully and faithfully attempting to add one more link in the chain, extending the gospel to others.

Let me share with you a story about some people in this church who just this last year added links to the chain of faith. There is a Vineyard member named Patricia, who is a small group leader here. She works in sales at Bank One. Patricia decided to start a Bible study at her office at Bank One. She spoke openly, sensitively and wisely about her Christian faith. She became friends with a woman in her office named Cathy. She invited Cathy to attend her Bible study. Well, Cathy was raised Roman Catholic. She knew nothing about the Bible. Cathy began to not only learn about the Bible through this Bible study and through Christians in her office, but she also began learning about parenting, personal family issues and developing a personal relationship with Christ. Patricia invited Cathy to Christmas Eve services in December 2002, where Cathy embraced Christ.

Cathy began talking with her husband, Larry, about her faith. Larry started to notice changes in his wife and he was very cautious about this. Finally, reluctantly, Larry decided to accompany Cathy here to the Vineyard in the Spring, and Larry embraced Christ. Both Larry and Cathy were baptized here at the church last spring.

Then this Christmas Eve, a year after Cathy's decision, they invited their son, John, to the Christmas Eve services, and John embraced Christ as his Lord and Savior. And now John, who lives in another city, is taking his girlfriend to a Vineyard church and praying for his girlfriend to receive Christ.

It's the principle of multiplication. I want you to hear about Larry's conversion in his own words. Is this not a great story? Patricia to Cathy; Cathy to Larry; Cathy and Larry to their son, John; John now reaching out to his girlfriend. Wouldn't you like to have a story in your life like Patricia, Cathy, and now Larry have in their lives? Wouldn't you like to be a person who gets to add a link in the chain of faith?

I want to invite you to participate in God's strategy for reaching this world with the saving message of the gospel. Would you do this? Open up your bulletins. There is an insert that's titled "Frank." Frank is an acronym for "Friends-Relatives-Associates-Neighbors-Kids." Take a few moments after church to put together a little list of folks that you might pray for in each category. Are there some friends that you want to pray for and spend time with, who don't yet know Christ? Are there any relatives, or work associates, neighbors or kids? Fill that out. Be part of the chain of faith.

There is one thing that I'd like to ask you to do on your way out; pick up some of our church's business cards and put them in your wallets or purses. As you have opportunity when you are going to the hairdresser or barber, when you are talking with your waitress or a friend at work, hand him one of our Vineyard cards. Invite people to church.

Well, Paul recognizes when you begin to invite and include folks in your circle, this building of the chain of faith, involves opposition. It will incur hardship for the Christian witness. And so we read in verses 3-6:

Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

Paul uses three illustrations of people who endure hardship. Actually verse 3, "Endure hardship with us," is not a great translation. Literally it reads, "Share in suffering with us." He uses three illustrations or metaphors to communicate occupations that require enduring hardship, or enduring suffering. The first example is a soldier in verses 3-4, then the athlete in verse 5, and finally the farmer in verse 6. Not only are these three metaphors for folks that share in suffering, he also speaks about rewards for each of these occupations.

For the soldier, the reward is in verse 4, "He wants to please his commanding officer."

For the athlete, the reward is the victor's crown, "He does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules."

And for the farmer, the reward is a share of the crops. "The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops."

Three metaphors of suffering and three illustrations of rewards. Now Paul frequently refers to these three metaphors – soldier, athlete, and farmer – when he talks about the Christian life. We find these three metaphors in 1 Cor. 9 and we find them individually mentioned in other texts. Apparently, these three occupations captured a lot of Paul's understanding of what it meant to be a follower of Christ.

Now, let's be honest and say we 21st century Americans wish we could supply three very different metaphors for being followers of Christ. We wish that the passage read something like: Enjoy life like a woman at a day spa, who is getting therapeutic mud applied to her face. Or extending the faith is like a man lying on an inflatable raft in the Caribbean sipping a Pina Colada with a little

umbrella stuck in it. Or following Christ is like being seated in separately heated, buttery leather seats in your new Cadillac Escalade.

You get the point, we would prefer different metaphors for the Christian life other than soldier, athlete, and farmer. All of these imply hardship.

My father-in-law was a WWII veteran. Actually, he was something of a hero. He won a couple of Silver Stars, marched across North Africa, participated in the invasion of Sicily, and then entered France in the Normandy Invasion. He said that the worst part of the war for him was the Battle of the Bulge. He was in Belgium. It was Christmas 1944. They were going through the coldest winter in 40 years. He was sitting in a foxhole that was frozen. Men could not use their sleeping bags at night. They used to call them "Purple Heart Bags." If the Germans counter-attacked at night, the Americans would be bayoneted in their sleeping bags before they had an opportunity to grab their rifles. Their feet got absolutely frozen. He said he was never so cold in his life sitting there in the snow and the cold of a frozen foxhole.

Here's the picture of being a follower of Christ. It is the picture of a soldier enduring hardship.

We read stories of WWI soldiers on the Western Front in trenches. It would take 40 days for bread to get to the front. By the time the bread got there, it was absolutely hard as a rock. The soldiers used to break up their biscuits with their rifle butts, or try to smash them against a wall, so that they could eat them. The trenches were filled with lice and rats.

What's your image of the Christian life? Does it include being a soldier? Paul says:

Endure hardship with us, share in suffering with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer.

Literally, no one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. The soldier is a picture of someone who endures hardship. It is also a portrait of single-minded devotion. They don't get entangled with civilian affairs.

Have you ever seen a follower of Christ get entangled? The picture is of a plant whose life is choked off by entangling weeds. It is very reminiscent of Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed, when he talks about the seed that falls among thorns. The thorns come and choke the seed out. He describes the thorns as the deceitfulness of wealth and the worries of this life.

Have you ever seen someone who is active in sharing their faith, who is excited about the Lord, who is attending group each week and then they miss a week. They come back, but you can tell that something has happened in their life. The fire is burning less brightly. They may miss a week at church. You see them and they say they're doing fine, but there doesn't seem to be the enthusiasm for Christ that they once had. They talk with you about movies or a new car they bought. You discover that they've been working 65-70 hours a week for the last few months, or they've begun dating someone outside the faith.

What's happened is they've lost the understanding of the Christian life as being that of a soldier who is required to have single-minded, whole-hearted devotion to their commander. Instead, this person has gotten entangled in civilian affairs.

Are you entangled friend? Is your Christian life choked off? You know what is right, but you are so caught up in this world's system, or in a relationship, or in a business, or in the pursuit of making money, or a hobby that you don't feel very motivated to extend the faith. You know it is a right thing to do. Maybe you used to share your faith, but you just aren't very energized about it now.

What is the goal of the soldier? It is not only to escape entanglements, it is to please the commanding officer. See, the goal of the Christian life is not what is the least I can do for Christ and still be saved? The question that a Christian ought to ask themselves is not how far can I go in sin without incurring God's wrath or discipline. The question that will free you from entanglements is this: "How can I please the Lord?" The goal of the soldier is to please his commanding officer.

Do you ask yourself this question often, friend? Is this relationship that I'm involved in pleasing to the Lord? Is this activity pleasing to the Lord? Is this conversation that I'm having, is the way that I am speaking, is what's going on in my mind, is what I'm exposing myself to, pleasing to my Lord?

And there is an extraordinary reward, friend. Imagine that somehow you get to increase the joy and pleasure of God. I don't understand that. The Bible tells us over and over again there are things that please the Lord, that bring him pleasure and there are things that bring about God's displeasure. According to the Bible, faith pleases God. Trusting him pleases him. Obeying him pleases God. Ethical business practices please God.

In contrast, Jeremiah tells the people, "Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me." God does not take any pleasure with a bunch of religion that is accompanied by disobedience. Simply coming to church and raising your hands, singing at the top of your voice, when you are disobeying God, does not please the Lord.

Paul describes being a follower of Christ and extending the faith not only as the life of a soldier, but also the life of an athlete. Verse 5:

Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.

In ancient Greece, there were the Olympic Games that involved foot races, wrestling, boxing, and discus throwing. Athletes would not get a gold medal, but they would be crowned with a victor's wreath. In those days, it was just not enough to win the event, there were very strict rules regarding the athlete's preparation. There was a requirement of ten months preparation and strict behavioral rules before a person was permitted to compete in the Olympics.

See, Vince Lombardi was wrong when he said, "Winning is not everything; winning is the only thing." What the Bible is teaching here is how you win the game of life is just as important as winning. The president referred in his State of the Union address the other night of the use of steroids by athletes. We have shortstops that have the bodies of pro-wrestlers. We have pro-wrestlers who didn't get those bodies simply by lifting weights.

There is a great Old Testament illustration concerning Paul's point here regarding competing according to the rules. The Old Testament illustration is that of Jacob. Jacob wanted to obtain his father's blessing. And so he got his father's blessing by cheating, by manipulating, by lying.

Many of us can identify with Jacob. We think so long as the end is legitimate, we can use any means to get it. We can break the rules. Women can manipulate men. Men can cheat on tests. You can cheat on your taxes. You can cheat on your resume. Or you can lie to your spouse or lie to your customers. So long as you get what you want, it is okay for you to sleep with your boyfriend or girlfriend outside of marriage. Or it is okay for you to get out of your marriage, even though you have no biblical reason to do so.

Jacob suffered for his manipulation. He spent 20 years being disciplined by God. One evening in the desert he had a meeting with God and he finally discovered that God always wanted to bless him. He didn't have to manipulate and cheat or lie to get the blessing. If he had only done life God's way, he wouldn't have wasted 20 years.

May I ask you an affection question? Have any of you wasted a decade, two decades, or three decades trying to get in your life love, success, or money? You haven't competed for those things according to God's rules? Be honest. Have any of you wasted literally decades trying to get a blessing that God would have been only too willing to give you had you done life God's way?

It's never too late to repent. It's never too late to do life God's way.

The third metaphor Paul uses is that of the hardworking farmer. He says,

The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

Farming is often used in the Bible to describe the Christian life. We have the opportunity to obtain a harvest - The harvest of holiness, if we sow obedience. We harvest peace in our life, if we follow God's plan for our life. We get to harvest people for the kingdom, if we sow evangelism and the gospel. What kind of harvest are you reaping in your life right now?

You know, I believe that one of the main reasons people suffer mid-life crises is that they begin to reap all of the effects of sowing weeds for 20 years. It's only so long that you can get away with a lack of self-control, a lack of faithfulness in relationships, a lack of forgiveness. We just keep moving and trying new things. You are going too fast to recognize that you are sowing weeds. But then you hit middle age and you suddenly reap a crop of weeds. You realize that you are not enjoying the fruit of long-term investment in a faithful marriage. Or you are not enjoying the fruit of long-term investment in key friendships. You are not enjoying a sense of God's favor in your life.

There are all these weeds – weeds of bitterness, addictions, shallow relationships, broken commitments. I think that's why people have mid-life crises. If you sow to God when you are young, when you hit middle age, you begin to reap the fruit of that. And instead of life going downhill, life just keeps getting better and better.

Concerning the expectations regarding the faith, Paul says the metaphors for the Christian life are that of soldier, athlete, and hardworking farmer.

Quickly, Paul goes on to tell us even though there is hardship, even though you face opposition, you can expect ultimate success and victory. Verses 8-10:

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

He says if you are enduring opposition, remember Jesus Christ. He endured opposition. He suffered. He overcame death. He was raised from the dead. As a descendent of David, he was crowned the Messianic King. No amount of hardship will keep you from ultimate victory.

And this is Paul's hope. He is chained like a criminal. But he knows God's word has an effect. God's word is never chained. If you share with your spouse or

your parents, or your children, God's word will have an impact. His electing purposes will stand.

And so Paul closes with this charge to Timothy. And Paul closes with this charge to us – the charge of our continuing to share the faith in spite of any opposition. Paul closes with a promise and a warning. Verses 11-13 – these verses may be borrowed from an ancient Christian hymn:

Here's a trustworthy saying, "If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

If we died with him, we will also live with him. If we are joined to him, in other words, through faith in baptism, we go under the water and die to our old way of life, we will rise out of the baptismal water in newness of life. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we hang in there, if we don't get entangled in civilian affairs, if we don't give up, if we don't try to manipulate our way to the goal, we will reign with him.

There is the warning that if we disown him, he will also disown us. If we refuse to acknowledge him, if we turn our backs on Christ, if we apostatize and walk away from the faith, then he will disown us. And I believe that only those who were never his can disown Christ and be disowned by him.

But here's the promise. If we are faithless, he remains faithful. For he cannot deny himself.

Friend, do you find yourself having slipped up, having taken the wrong fork in the road? God will remain faithful to you. Today, return to the grace that you can find in Christ Jesus. Today find yourself in God's global strategy for reaching this world through reproductive Christians. Take your place as a soldier, as an athlete, as a hardworking farmer because God will reward you. Let's pray.

Sharing Your Faith In Spite Of Opposition

Rich Nathan

January 24-25, 2004

2 Timothy: Passing On The Faith Series

2 Timothy 2:1-13

- I. A Foundation Of Grace (2 Timothy 2:1)**

- II. A Strategy Of Multiplication (2 Timothy 2:2)**

- III. A Willingness To Suffer (For The Sake Of A Reward) (2 Timothy 2:3-6)**
 - A. The Soldier (2 Timothy 2:3, 4)

 - B. The Athlete (2 Timothy 2:5)

 - C. The Farmer (2 Timothy 2:6)

- IV. An Expectation Of Success (2 Timothy 2:8-10)**

- V. A Warning And A Promise (2 Timothy 1:11-13)**