What Every Pastor Must Determine

A Study Guide

Based on 2 Timothy 2:1–6

Sermon by Grace Life Church

Scripture Text

2 Timothy 2:1–6

1 You therefore, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these 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 And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.

Overview

Gospel ministry is meant to reproduce itself. God raises up faithful men, strengthens them by His grace, and sends them into the harvest. This study guide walks through five non-negotiables every pastor must determine—truths that apply to every believer who serves Christ. Use it for personal reflection, small-group discussion, or leadership training.

Sermon Outline — Five Non-Negotiables

I. **Depend upon God's Grace** (v. 1)
II. **Develop Faithful Men** (v. 2)
III. **Determine to Fight** (vv. 3–4)
IV. **Decide Against Compromise** (v. 5)
V. **Dedicate to Hard Work** (v. 6)

I. Depend upon God's Grace (v. 1)

Key Truth: Pastoral ministry (and all gospel work) is impossible in natural human strength. Paul commands Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"—literally, to grow strong by continually drawing on Christ's enabling power.

Key Ideas

- The verb "be strong" is an imperative: we are commanded to seek God's grace continually.
- Ministry battles unseen enemies far greater than our own ability.
- Primary ministry is first to the Lord—Jesus before ministry.
- Many gifted pastors fail because they neglect dependence on grace.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it look like practically to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" in daily life?
2. Why is it dangerous for a servant of God to rely primarily on natural ability, training, or experience?
3. How can we keep devotion to Christ first when ministry demands are urgent and constant?

Personal Application

1. Where are you currently tempted to operate in your own strength rather than Christ's grace?
2. What specific practices (prayer, Scripture, fellowship) will help you stay filled with His gracious supply this week?

II. Develop Faithful Men (v. 2)

Key Truth: Ministry is never meant to be carried alone. Paul instructs Timothy to entrust ("deposit") the apostolic gospel to faithful men who will be able to teach others also—creating a chain of multiplication.

Key Ideas

- "Entrust" (paratithēmi) means to set before or deposit—like serving a meal.
- Faithful exposition both culls and calls: it separates goats and draws Christ's sheep.
- Raising up leaders takes time; the "cream rises" through consistent teaching.
- Discernment is required—not every man is humble or submissive (cf. Diotrephes in 3 John).

Discussion Questions

1. Why is isolation in ministry so dangerous, both for the leader and for the church?
2. What qualities mark a "faithful man" who can be entrusted with the gospel and able to teach others?

Personal Application

1. Who has invested gospel truth in you? How are you currently investing in others?
2. Identify one person you could intentionally encourage, teach, or mentor in the coming months.

III. Determine to Fight (vv. 3–4)

Key Truth: Ministry is spiritual warfare. Paul calls Timothy to "suffer hardship" as a good soldier of Christ Jesus—enduring difficulty without entanglement in civilian affairs so that he may please the One who enlisted him.

Key Ideas

- Reformation and gospel advance invite intense spiritual opposition.
- Good soldiers endure deprivation, hostility, and relentless attacks without quitting.
- There is no retreat to civilian life; the call is lifelong.
- *Example of William Borden: "No reserve. No retreat. No regrets."*

Discussion Questions

3. In what ways does the "soldier" metaphor help us understand the nature of Christian ministry?
4. What are some common "civilian affairs" that can entangle a believer or a pastor and distract from the mission?
5. How does remembering Christ's victory strengthen us when the fight feels overwhelming?

Personal Application

6. Where are you currently facing hardship for the sake of the gospel? How are you responding?
7. Is there any entanglement that is hindering your wholehearted service to Christ? What step will you take?

IV. Decide Against Compromise (v. 5)

Key Truth: Like an athlete who competes according to the rules, the servant of God must not cut corners in doctrine, ministry, or personal holiness. The crown is only for those who compete lawfully.

Key Ideas

- Cultural pressure pushes preachers toward softer, less doctrinal messages.
- The whole counsel of God—including hard truths—must be taught and applied.
- Private life must match public proclamation; the preacher is an example to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3).
- "Others may, but you may not"—the standard for leaders is higher.

Discussion Questions

8. What are some modern forms of compromise that churches and leaders face today?
9. Why is it essential that a leader's private character align with the message he proclaims?
10. How does refusing to compromise doctrine and ethics ultimately serve the health of the church?

Personal Application

11. In what area of life or ministry are you most tempted to take the easier path?
12. What "rules" (biblical standards) do you need to guard more carefully this season?

V. Dedicate to Hard Work (v. 6)

Key Truth: The hard-working farmer (kopiao—to labor to exhaustion) is the first to receive a share of the crops. Ministry requires diligent, often unseen, exhausting labor before fruit appears.

Key Ideas

- Pastoral work is seven days a week—study, counseling, prayer, planning, evangelism.
- Unlike the soldier or athlete, the farmer's labor is often monotonous and without applause.
- Hard work precedes the harvest; God does not bless where labor is absent.
- Paul himself "labored" (kopiao) according to God's power working in him (Col. 1:28–29).

Discussion Questions

13. Why does Scripture use the ordinary, unglamorous image of a farmer for ministry?
14. How can a church encourage and support the hard, often invisible work of its leaders?
15. What is the relationship between human hard work and God's sovereign increase?

Personal Application

16. Where has your diligence in serving Christ waned? What would renewed "hard work" look like?
17. How can you better balance the primary work of the Word and prayer with the many secondary demands of ministry or service?

Memory Verses

2 Timothy 2:1 — "You therefore, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

2 Timothy 2:2 — "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

2 Timothy 2:3 — "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

Closing Reflection

Depend on God's grace. Develop faithful men. Determine to fight. Decide against compromise. Dedicate to hard work.

These five determinations are not only for pastors. They describe the posture of every believer who desires to follow Christ faithfully and see the gospel advance.

For Further Reflection

- Which of the five points most challenges you right now? Why?
- How does the partnership between churches (as seen in Acts 11 and in this sermon's context) encourage you?
- Write a brief prayer of commitment based on one of the five determinations.
- How can your small group or church better support those being sent into gospel ministry?

"May God receive glory in His church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever." — Ephesians 3:21