



“STAYING THE COURSE”

2 Timothy 2:3-7

Theme: *Faithfulness is essential to "staying the course" as servants of Christ.*

Introduction: Most of us enter marriage with the thought that we will stay committed until death parts us or our Lord returns. Then something can happen that is so offensive we renege on our commitment, or perhaps we just slowly and neglectfully drift apart until we have no more interest in being with “this person.” The odds of staying the course in a marriage are currently between 45-50% - and that is after considering that the number of people marrying has dropped drastically because of the number of couples who decide to live together without marriage.

Consider the number of people who quit their jobs, drop out of school, abandon diet restrictions, cancel gym memberships, resign from volunteer roles, and so on. The ability to “stay the course” is becoming increasingly rare to see. People bail out of difficult situations as the option of choice in handling difficulty, stress, or adversity. This is true even with reference to faith. We observe people who turn to Christ Jesus to save them from their sins, but when the demands of discipleship become difficult, some bail. When ministry opportunities become challenging, some resign. When sacrifices become too great, some abdicate their commitments. When temptation becomes too strong, they yield. The ability to stick with it, to persevere and endure difficulty, is becoming increasingly rare – even among those who claim to love Jesus. In most cases, if not all, this is a result of a condition we will call “immediacy” – that is, a desire for instant gratification. Our focus is too frequently on seeking “our best life now” and concluding that having to wait until Heaven to gain some commensurate reward for what we endure is not “worth it.” We can be guilty of making a half-hearted effort to follow Christ because whole-heartedness will only cause a lack of benefits commensurate with the effort. When a person is not “all in,” it often results in a person becoming “not in.” If we are going to be “all in” for Christ, we must go “all out” for Him.

Our text today provides examples of characteristics of faithfulness – characteristics of those who will know the staying power needed for lifelong service to Christ. It teaches us, ***“Faithfulness is essential to “staying the course” as servants of Christ.”*** Let us turn our attention to it ...

I. WE MUST HAVE THE DETERMINATION OF A SOLDIER – 2:3-4

A. The Determination to Endure – v. 3

1. Having admonished Timothy to allow his faith to be fortified through His pursuit of Jesus Christ to the point where he was able to pass on the truth of the Gospel to others, Paul now identifies these characteristics that must be true both of him and those to whom he entrusts the gospel.
2. He begins by talking about the determination that we must possess as

believers – *“suffer hardship with me ...”*

3. *“Suffer hardship”* [συγκακοπαθέω] – is from a compound imperative that means to bear evil treatment along with someone else.
4. He is calling on us to be willing to endure whatever our faith may produce – whether affirmation or rejection and even persecution where we are targeted by opponents of the Gospel.
5. He uses the analogy of a soldier – *“... as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”*
6. One of the marks of a *“good”* [καλός] soldier is his willingness to sacrifice himself for the cause victory in the battle – the Spartans standing their ground at Thermopylae against the Persians or the English at Agincourt against the superior numbers of the French, the storming of a beach in Normandy, a countercharge by the men at Gettysburg, or the Soviets at the Battle of Stalingrad in brutal urban warfare turning the tide against the Germans.
7. Likewise, believers must formulate a devotion, a determination that we will remain true to Christ, engaged in the service of our heavenly nation, and willing to sacrifice ourselves for the promotion of the glory of God, not as rear-guard but as frontline participants in what God describes as a war – cp. [2 Corinthians 10:3-4](#).
8. To quit because it gets hard is to abdicate one’s faith, turn away from the direct orders of our Commander, and perform dereliction, which will cause consequences.
9. The lies that declare that God desires us to have lives of ease, prosperity, wealth, and “our best lives now” cause us to fail to see the reality that hatred for Christ will result in hostility toward us – cp. [2 Timothy 3:12](#).

B. The Detachment from Entanglement – v. 4a

1. In order to succeed as a “good soldier,” we must detach ourselves from the priorities of the enemy, passions of our flesh, and pressures from the world – *“No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life ...”*
2. Even though there is nothing necessarily inherently wrong with something, it becomes wrong when it interferes with your ability to obey Christ – cp. [Matthew 13:22](#).
3. The virtue advocated by Christ here was displayed by Uriah prior to David’s murder of him – cp. [2 Samuel 11:7-11](#).
4. Our commitment is that anything that interferes with your obedience to Christ must be seen as a way you are *“entangle[d] in the affairs of everyday life.”* –
5. Obviously sin itself is the greatest means by which we remain *“entangle[d]”* – cp. [2 Peter 2:20](#).

C. The Desire for Endorsement – v. 4b

1. The motivation for this is the desire to be pleasing to the Lord – *“... so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.”*
2. Our desire is to please Christ Jesus, not other sinners – cp. [Galatians 1:10](#).
3. We must be constantly striving to be found pleasing to the Lord – cp. [2 Corinthians 5:9](#); [Ephesians 5:7-10](#).

II. WE MUST HAVE THE DISCIPLINE OF AN ATHLETE – 2:5

A. The Discipline for Competition – *“Also if anyone competes as an athlete ...”*

1. Paul now highlights another characteristic of the Christian who would “stay the course” in a life of faithful service to our Lord – *“Also, if anyone competes as an athlete ...”*
2. The *“if”* [ἐάν] together with *“competes”* in the subjunctive mood indicates a universally accepted principle – this is what is true in athletics; thus Paul presents this as something no one will dispute.
3. *“competes”* [ἀθλέω] – referring to the wrestling match in which each of us constantly struggles - [Ephesians 6:10-12](#).
4. All of us who are called by grace and through faith have been reconciled to God enter a contest against our flesh, the devil, and the world, which is seeking not only to defeat us, but it is a death match – they seek to kill us!
5. To avoid disqualification, we must do all we can to be strengthened to prevail in the match – conditioning ourselves by making ourselves available to the strength to be found in the Lord – cp. v. 1.

B. The Discipline in Competition – *“... he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.”*

1. In addition, we must continue to seek to avoid disqualification – *“... he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.”*
2. The *“rules”* [νομίμως] – refers to the norms established by which everyone is assessed during the competition.
3. Violations of the rules result in disqualification – cp. [1 Corinthians 9:24-27](#).
4. The spiritual discipline called for by Paul here is inherent in being described as a disciple – one who disciplines oneself according to the instructions of the teacher – cp. [Matthew 28:20](#).
5. It means that we exert Spirit-driven self-control over our affections, emotions, priorities, objectives, habits, and occupations.
6. The failure to exercise such self-discipline does not result in condemnation, but disqualification here is to be “benched” as unable to serve the Lord for reward.
7. It is to be considered unfit by the Lord to be used and rewarded – cp.

Psalm 101:6.

C. The Desire in Competition – “... he does not win the prize ...”

1. Our motivation is clear – we desire to run the race successfully and finish our course knowing that there is a prize awaiting – cp. **2 Timothy 4:7-8.**
2. **“The prize”** referred to in our Christian faith is the day of blessing and reward when we see Christ – cp. **Philippians 3:14.**
3. It is the joyful entry into the ultimate approval of the Lord – cp. **Matthew 25:21.**
4. It is our desire to gain the approval of Christ.

III. WE MUST HAVE THE DILIGENCE OF A FARMER – 2:6-7

A. The Diligence in Hard Work

1. Finally, the third characteristic of one able to know staying power in faithfulness to Christ is the farmer.
2. Paul says, **“The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.”**
3. First, his diligence is noted – one must be **“hard-working”** [κοπιᾶω] – one who strains until they are wearied to exert oneself in toil.
4. The Christian life is not a life of ease, laxity, or leisure, but is one of “hard work.”
5. This is the willingness to do the next right thing regardless of how difficult it is or how remote the gratification might be.

B. The Delay in the Harvest

1. The patience required by a farmer is notable – cp. **James 5:7.**
2. The reaping is not something that is immediate, but we must wait until we receive the harvest – cp. **Galatians 6:9.**

C. The Delight in the Harvest

1. Finally, we are able to receive the harvest and then the farmer will **“be the first to receive his share of the crops.”**
2. For the Christian, we are gratified by the benefits of the things we have sown, many of which will bless others as much as we ourselves are blessed.
3. Even as the soldier gains the approval of the commander and the athlete wins the prize of victory, the farmer receives the benefits of the harvest of righteousness – cp. **1 Corinthians 3:13.**
4. Paul then admonishes us to pay attention to these things, allowing them to influence the way we conduct our lives – **“Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”**
5. If we order our lives like the soldier, athlete, and farmer, we will know **“understanding in everything”** – the insights needed to possess “staying

power” in our faithfulness will be ours.

So What?

- 1. What interferes with my obedience to Christ?**
- 2. Does the desire for the prize of commendation by Christ motivate me?**
- 3. Do I struggle with patience in fruitfulness in my obedience to Christ, expecting immediate benefit or it isn't worth it?**
- 4. Can I be characterized as faithful to Jesus Christ?**

Faithfulness is essential to "staying the course" as servants of Christ.