

2 Timothy 2:3-7 “What It Takes to Live for Jesus in the Real World”^{**2}

Main Idea: According to 2 Timothy 2:3-7, if we’re going to live for Jesus in the real world, it takes three things.

- I. Living for Jesus in the real world takes the discipline of a soldier (3-4).
 - A. The soldier’s life is marked by duty.
 - 1. You can’t be a soldier if you live by your feelings.
 - 2. You must do what’s right no matter what the cost.
 - B. The soldier’s life is marked by denial.
 - 1. In Christ’s army, you cannot be a weekend soldier.
 - 2. In Christ’s army, you must be ready for action every day.
 - C. The soldier’s life is marked by delight.
 - 1. You must refuse to live for personal comfort.
 - 2. You must choose to live to please your Commander.
- II. Living for Jesus in the real world takes the determination of an athlete (5).
 - A. An athlete knows about the present grind.
 - B. An athlete knows about the future gain.
 - C. An athlete knows about the guidelines.
 - 1. You must know God’s standard.
 - 2. You must obey God’s standard.
- III. Living for Jesus in the real world takes the diligence of a farmer (6).
 - A. Farmers know about hard work.
 - B. Farmers know about the harvest.
 - 1. A lot of people want the easy approach to the Christian life.
 - 2. The truth is, there is no such thing.

An Encouraging Word: Living for Jesus in the real world is possible because of grace.

It’s graduation time. That means it’s a great time to ask an important question. *What’s it take to live for Jesus in the real world?* Every graduate needs to know the answer to that question. And so do the rest of us.

On a dreary winter day in 1943, 903 troops and four chaplains, including Moody Bible Institute alumnus Lt. George Fox, boarded the SS Dorchester. World War II was in full swing, and the ship was headed across the icy North Atlantic where German U-boats lurked. At 12:00 on the morning of February 3, a German torpedo ripped into the ship. "She's going down!" the men cried, scrambling for lifeboats.

A young GI crept up to one of the chaplains. "I've lost my life jacket," he said. "Take this," the chaplain said, handing the soldier his jacket. Before the ship sank, each chaplain gave his life jacket to another man. The heroic chaplains then linked arms and lifted their voices in prayer as the Dorchester went down. Lt. Fox and his fellow pastors were awarded posthumously the Distinguished Service Cross.³

Jesus said in John 15:12-13, “Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

That’s true Christianity. Jesus gave His life for us and He calls us to do the same for Him.

I want to tell you at the beginning of this message where we're going. This morning, we will see from God’s Word what it takes to serve Christ, in plain and simple terms.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

² For a fuller treatment of the subject, see the series preached at WBC in 2003, “*Living with a Wartime Mentality.*”

³ *Today in the Word*, April 1, 1992.

Then at the end I'm going to ask this question, "Are you willing to serve Christ on His terms?"

So what does it take if you are serious about living for Jesus Christ daily? This morning, I want you to see a passage from God's Word that lays it on the line. It's black and white. It's a no nonsense text. It's up front, plain and simple language. According to 2 Timothy 2:3-7, if we're going to live for Jesus in the real world, it takes three things.

I. Living for Jesus in the real world takes the discipline of a soldier (3-4).

We are jumping into a text that needs a context. This letter was written by the apostle Paul to his junior associate Timothy just prior to Paul's execution. Paul is passing the baton of leadership to his partner. But Timothy wasn't so sure he wanted it.

Friends, ministry is hard. It's costly. How can anyone do it then? It starts here, with verse 1, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." You can't do the ministry in your own strength. You must depend on the Lord.

Please notice that. The challenge you are about to hear is for people who know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, as Timothy did. A person enters a relationship with God by grace through faith in the work of Christ, not by their own works. Likewise a person does the ministry by the grace of Christ, not by personal merit.

But grace is a wonderful motivator. If you've experienced the grace of God you have ample reason to give your all as a soldier.

Yet a soldier does not fight his battles alone, nor must you as a soldier. Paul told Timothy to recruit and train other workers who could join him in this awesome assignment. Notice verse 2, "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."

That's God's design for preserving His church under enemy fire. Timothy was to depend on the Lord and develop other workers to make known the message of Christ. It's no different for us. And it won't be any easier for us than it was for Timothy.

Friends, if we're serious about this God-given agenda, we can expect hardship. If you are serious about giving your life to serve Christ, it won't be easy. It doesn't cost you anything to be saved, but it costs you everything to serve the One who saved you.

What does it take? Here's the answer Paul gave Timothy. He used seven images or metaphors of a leader in chapter two, as he passed the leadership mantle on to Timothy. A leader must see himself as a teacher (1-2), a soldier (3-4), an athlete (5), a farmer (6), a workman (15), a vessel (21), and finally, a servant (24).

We'll focus on three in this study, starting with the *soldier*. If you are serious about living for Jesus in the real world, it will take the discipline of a soldier.

Notice verse 3, "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." Timothy, be like a soldier! The Roman Empire was full of soldiers. Paul spent several years of his life chained to soldiers while under arrest. As the apostle looked at the soldiers, he realized the soldier illustrated several key ingredients of the Christian life. Soldiers are marked by three characteristics which we need serving Christ:

A. The soldier's life is marked by duty. Notice the beginning of verse 4, "No one *serving* as a soldier." The KJV says, "No man that warreth." A soldier is consumed by one reality. The word "warreth" means "to make war". The NASB translates it, "No soldier in active service."

Paul's not talking about the Army Reserves here. He's thinking of soldiers in active duty. What's true of that kind of a soldier? He knows it's a life and death matter, and so he prepares himself. He stays alert. He trains. Why? It's his duty.

So it must be for the Christian. Duty is not a popular word, but it's vital for the Christian life. Just what is our duty? Paul spells out one piece of it in verse 3, "Endure hardship with us," he says. The term means "to suffer evil treatment along with."

Paul used the same word back in 1:8, "Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God."

Timothy had a problem that plagues some of us. He was intimidated by the crowd. Though needed on the front lines, he was prone to hang out in the barracks. So Paul urged him, "Come on Timothy! Don't put down your weapon. Be a good soldier! Get in the battle. It's your duty!"

Allow me to make a couple of observations about duty for the Christian soldier.

1. *You can't be a soldier if you live by your feelings.* My hunch is that few, if any, soldiers have ever felt like going into battle.

2. *You must do what's right no matter what the cost.* Philipps Brooks once said, "It does not take great men to do great things; it only takes consecrated men."

Yes, the soldier's life is marked by duty. Secondly...

B. The soldier's life is marked by denial. "No one serving [the "no one" is emphatic] as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs." The KJV says, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life."

The term "entangles" or "gets involved" means "to weave in, to entwine with." It was used of sheep whose wool got caught in thorns.

What does a good soldier not get caught up in while the battle is raging? Paul says, "civilian affairs" ["the affairs of this life" in the KJV]. What does Paul mean? Soldiers are civilians, too, aren't they? They need the things of this life, too, don't they? The Greek word is *pragmateia*. Guess which English word we get from that? PRAGMATIC. The term refers to any activity, occupation, undertaking, or business dealing in everyday life. That's why the NIV uses the phrase "civilian affairs." We could well paraphrase this, "If you are a soldier of Jesus Christ, don't get wrapped up in the pragmatics of this world."

The Roman code of Theodosius said, "We forbid men engaged on military service to engage in civilian occupations."⁴ A soldier is a *soldier*. That is his identity and it supercedes everything else. He may be a husband and father, but if his commander says to go to the battle front, he goes.

So for the Christian. To say that a Christian doesn't get involved in civilian affairs doesn't mean we refuse to have civilian jobs and other interests. We do live in the world. But it does mean this...

1. *In Christ's army, you cannot be a weekend soldier.* Rather...

2. *In Christ's army, you must be ready for action every day.* If your idea of serving Christ is showing up for church for an hour and a half on Sunday morning, you have settled for a cultural rather than biblical brand of Christianity.

That's why I don't like the term "full time Christian service." That term implies that there's what? *Part-time* Christian service. But every Christian is called to FULL TIME

⁴ Barclay, p. 159.

SERVICE. Granted, God intends for some to serve as pastors and missionaries, and others to serve as teachers, nurses, and factory workers. But all who know His Son are to serve Him. How often? *All* the time.

In his book *One Crowded Hour*, Tim Bowden describes an incident in Borneo in 1964. Nepalese fighters known as Gurkhas were asked if they would be willing to jump from airplanes into combat against the Indonesians. The Gurkhas didn't clearly understand what was involved, but they bravely said they would do it, asking only that the plane fly slowly over a swampy area and no higher than 100 feet. When they were told that the parachutes would not have time to open at that height, the Gurkhas replied, "Oh, you didn't mention parachutes before!"⁵

In contrast to those men who clearly understood the radical nature of being a soldier, it's not uncommon in our day to see a weekend-warrior version of Christianity. Listen to what Peter had to say about the precarious condition of the so-called weekend-warrior Christian in 2 Peter 2:20. "If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning."

We must face the fact that many self-proclaimed Christ-followers today are notoriously careless in their living. This attitude finds its way into the church. We have liberty, we have money, we live in comparative luxury. As a result, discipline practically has disappeared. What would a violin solo sound like if the strings on the musician's instrument were all hanging loose, not stretched tight, not "disciplined"?⁶

A soldier knows all about self-denial. But why? What is it that motivates a soldier to deny himself? That brings us to a third characteristic...

C. The soldier's life is marked by delight. Just what is the soldier's delight? Verse 4 concludes, "He wants to please his commanding officer." So it's not just duty. It's duty combined with a fervent desire to please the commander, the one in charge.

Now answer this, my fellow Christians. We have a Commander in Chief, too. Who is it? Who gave us this duty? Who motivates us to deny ourselves? Who is it we long to please? It's Jesus Christ.

I need this reminder, and you do, too. My commander is someone who literally went to hell for me, and if I'm going to please Him, it's going to take the discipline of a soldier.

I remember visiting my brother years ago when he was at the Air Force Academy. I couldn't believe what I saw. At the time I was attending a Christian college and had heard people say *we* had a lot of rules. We were on a picnic compared to the Air Force Academy! Rules abounded! My brother had to dress a certain way. He had to chew his food a certain way. He had to walk a certain way. He had to make his bed a certain way. And life for him boiled down to this: duty, denial, and delight.

So it is for the soldier of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me (Luke 9:23)."

Simply put, if you're going to be a faithful soldier, you must make two daily decisions.

1. You must refuse to live for personal comfort. And you refuse that because you're operating by a greater delight, namely...

⁵ *Our Daily Bread*, January 30, 1994.

⁶ A.W. Tozer, [Men Who Met God](#).

2. *You must choose to live to please your Commander.* Not just on Sunday, but 24-7. The goal of life is to please Him. Where He leads, I will follow.

It boils down to this, for each of us. Is it your goal in life to be secure, comfortable, and self-fulfilled, or is it to please the One who enlisted you, Jesus the Christ?

We're talking about what it takes to live for Jesus in the real world. First, it takes the discipline of a soldier.

II. Living for Jesus in the real world takes the determination of an athlete (5).

That's verse 5, "Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules."

I love sports, too much so at times. I enjoy participating (or at least used to in younger days) and watching. As with the military, there are a lot of lessons from athletics that transfer into the Christian life. That's why Paul used it to help Timothy.

An athlete knows about three things (note the three clauses in verse 5).

A. An athlete knows about the present grind. Phrase 1, "If anyone competes as an athlete" [KJV, "If a man also strive for masteries"]. The Greek verb is *athleo*. It means "to compete in a contest in an arena." We get the English term "athletics" from it.

Any athlete knows this. Before the glory comes the grind. And there is no glory in the grind. I marvel at the Olympic athletes. They are totally dedicated. They spend four years doing the same thing over and over and over. The grind.

I don't like especially like to run. But, every morning, by the grace of God, it's the same routine. Get up. Get the soul stirred in the Word. Get the body moving on the elliptical or out on the road. You may be different from me, but to be honest, there are many mornings when I don't *feel* like doing either. The present grind is real, and there's no escaping it.

Paul talked about it in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

Did you catch those verbs? Fight, beat, make it my slave.

John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*, once made this astute observation, "When people are right with God, they are apt to be hard on themselves and easy on other people. But when they are not right with God, they are easy on themselves and hard on others."

He's right, isn't he? You can't live the Christian life without, in the right sense of the word, being hard on yourself, without the *grind*.

But why? Why does an athlete subject himself to the grind?

B. An athlete knows about the future gain. Phrase 2, "He does not receive the victor's crown." An athlete knows this. There's a crown, a prize. In Paul's day, Olympic victors received a wreath and the honor that went with it. That was his gain. And he knew this. No pain, no gain. But the gain was worth the pain.

Paul knew about the gain. Later in this same letter he wrote (4:7-8), "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.⁸ Now there is in store for

me the *crown of righteousness*, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

The songwriter is right, “It will be worth it all.” When? In this life? No. The gain doesn’t come in this life. When? “When we see Jesus.”

Now a word of caution. Not every athlete wins the prize. Who does? An athlete knows. Insight #3...

C. An athlete knows about the guidelines. Phrase 3, “Unless he competes according to the rules” [KJV “except he strive lawfully”]. What rules? There were two sets of rules for athletes in Paul’s day. There were the rules of *competition* (for the particular event). There were also the rules for *preparation*.

Before an athlete could even compete in the games of Paul’s day, he had to adhere to a strict list of training rules for 10 months. He had to eat certain foods. He had to avoid certain foods. He had to train in a prescribed manner. And he had to sign his name to the fact that he trained and competed “according to the rules.” No rules, no wreath.

Do you know the most tragic words for an athlete to have to say? In my estimation they’re not, “I lost,” but, “I was disqualified.”

Several years ago I watched the State Track meet from the stands. On the track was the previous year’s mile champion and state record holder. She was the definite favorite. Yet for some unknown reason, when the starter raised his hand, this previous state champion jumped the gun and stepped across the starting line. She was disqualified. The crowd booed, but the judge had no option. She had broken the rules.

Sad, yes. But not nearly as what’s happening to Christians these days. Right and left, people are disqualifying themselves from God’s service. How? By violating God’s rules, God’s qualifications.

We’ve turned Christianity into just believing a few facts about Jesus. Give a nod to those facts and you’re a Christian. But the Bible says that living for Jesus involves determination, the determination of an athlete.

You say, “What’s it take to develop this determination?” Two things.

1. *You must know God’s standard.* That requires time in His Word.
2. *You must obey God’s standard.* Not to merit His favor—that’s impossible (remember we are saved by grace)—but *because of* His favor.

Here’s the question again. What will it take if I am serious about living for Jesus in the real world? First, it takes the discipline of a soldier. Second, it requires the determination of an athlete. And third...

III. Living for Jesus in the real world takes the diligence of a farmer (6).

I grew up watching and at times working for farmers. Men like Wes Miller, Charlie Moore, Jim Yoder, Cyril Woodard. If farmers know anything at all, they know that farming involves two things: first, the hard work, and then, the harvest.

It’s no different in the Christian life.

A. Farmers know about hard work. “The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.” The term translated “hardworking” means “to become weary, tired, toil, strive, struggle.”

Dairy farmers amaze me. They live a very predictable life, and I used to see it when I visited my dairy farmer friends. Every morning at 5:00 they were in the barn for two to three hours. And then they did it again every evening. Milking the cows. Hard work.

Grain farmers know about hard work too. More than once I've driven along a farm road at night, glanced over into the field, to see the headlights of a tractor shining a path so the farmer could work his field.

Farmers know all about hard work. Why do they do it? Because...

B. Farmers know about the harvest. Paul says, "The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops." A farmer would throw in the towel if he didn't get to enjoy the harvest. The harvest is what makes the hard work worthwhile.

I used to work quite a bit for one particular farmer named Wes. We'd bale hay in the summer. I can still remember in the heat of July how we'd crawl up in the haymow and stack that dry, dusty hay. The temperature had to be over 120 degrees!

Why'd we do it? It wasn't a love for the farm, I can assure you. My friend, Wes, knew how to motivate teen guys. He was a wise man. His family owned the local Tastee Freeze, and the standing deal was always this. You work for me, and you can eat all you want at the end of the day! Foot longs. Fries. Milkshakes. Whatever you want!

And so the harvest made the hard work worth it all! The following says it well...

*Press on.
Nothing in the world
Can take the place of persistence.
Talent will not;
Nothing is more common
Than unsuccessful men
With talent.
Genius will not:
Unrewarded genius
Is almost a proverb.
Education will not;
The world is full of
Educated derelicts.
Persistence and determination
Alone are important⁷*

We have a problem today. We have a low view of diligence. Yet the Christian life is impossible without it. It takes diligence to get out of bed and be in time for Sunday School. It takes diligence to get to bed at a decent hour Saturday night so you feel like getting up on Sunday morning. It takes diligence to set aside quality time each day for personal fellowship with God in His Word. It takes diligence to overcome bad habits.

If we're in Christ we can do these things. We have the potential in Christ. Grace makes it possible. The question is, are we willing to exhibit the diligence of a farmer? Simply put...

1. *A lot of people want the easy approach to the Christian life. But...*
2. *The truth is, there is no such thing.*

One of the best pieces of counsel I've ever received came from my New Testament professor in seminary. Dr. Hoch warned, "Look out for books with titles like, 'The Secret of the Christian Life.' There is no *secret*."

He's right. There's nothing secretive or mysterious about it at all. The Christian life boils down to this. First, make sure you are *in Christ*. Then find out the potential you

⁷ Anonymous. Charles Swindoll, *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, p.93.

have in Christ (that takes the hard work of studying God's Word). Finally tap into that potential day by day by day. That demands diligence. And diligence involves hard work. Just ask the farmer!

Now answer this. Are you *in Christ*? The fact is, none of us were in Christ when we entered the world. We were *in Adam*, separated from our Maker and cut off from Him. In that state we could not please God. We were running to our own destruction in hell, and powerless to stop our momentum.

But in His grace, God chose to send His own Son into the world to rescue hell-bound sinners. He sent Jesus the Christ to redeem lost sinners from every nation and people group, and He died on the cross in their place, and rose from the dead for their deliverance.

If you want to be in Christ, you must come to grips with what Jesus did on the cross. You must believe that He died for your sins and rose again for your salvation. You must repent and accept Him as your Savior and Commander. The moment you do He will give you new life.

My non-Christian friend, today is the day of salvation. Look to Christ and you will be saved, saved from the eternal penalty of your sin. And you will begin to experience His power for living.

Many of you are in Christ today, and you've experienced His saving power. What do you need to do? What you need to do today is the same thing Timothy needed to do. Look at verse 7, "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this."

We need to *reflect*. The term *noeo* means "to think." Paul is saying we need to use our *minds* and ponder these illustrations. If we're going to be used of God, here's what it takes. We must have the discipline of a soldier, the determination of an Olympic athlete, and the diligence of a farmer.

I told you at the beginning of this message that we would conclude with a question. Here it is. Are you willing to serve Christ on His terms?

A woman rushed up to famed violinist Fritz Kreisler after a concert and cried: "I'd give my life to play as beautifully as you do." Kreisler replied, "I did."⁸

How about you? Are you willing to do what it takes to live for Jesus, to invest the discipline of a soldier, the determination of an athlete, and the diligence of a farmer?

You say, "But I'm not strong enough. I don't have what it takes."

I want to finish with a word of encouragement, a word designed to put some courage into your heart. If you are in Christ, you can do it, and here's why.

Living for Jesus in the real world is possible because of *grace*. It's not your strength. It's His. Paul began this section on that note, and it's here we finish, with verse 1, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

⁸ *Bits & Pieces*, Vol. F, No. 41.