

2 Timothy 2:1-7 — Spiritual Strength

February 7, 2021

This past week, one of our nation's top athletes announced his retirement. I suspect many of us have never heard of him. His name is Matt Fraser. He is a CrossFit competitor. For those of you who haven't heard of CrossFit, it is a



combination of aerobics, weight lifting, and gymnastics, designed to create some of the fittest people on Earth.



Every summer since 2007, the CrossFit Games bring together the toughest athletes on the planet to see who is No. 1. The competition is designed to be as grueling

as possible. While the athletes know some of the ways they will compete, they don't learn about the rest of the events until minutes before they happen. In addition to the traditional weight lifting, gymnastics and aerobic competition, unexpected elements are thrown in such as obstacle courses or an ocean swim. The winner of the games earns the title of the fittest person on the planet.

That brings us to Matt Fraser, the man who announced his retirement. What is his significance in the CrossFit world? Matt entered the CrossFit Games seven years ago. He was in such good shape that for the first two years he placed second at the CrossFit Games, making him the second-fittest person on the planet. For the last five years he placed first, making him the fittest person on the planet for half a decade. For most of the CrossFit Games' existence, Matt Fraser has been the big-dog-on-the-block. He is the man to follow.

As I read about Matt's incredible shape and the retirement of the fittest man on the planet, I thought that would be an appropriate lead-in to this morning's study in which we are not going to talk about what it takes to be in top physical shape, but what it takes to be in top spiritual shape for Christ.

If you are new, as a church we are studying our way through the book of 2 Timothy. This is a short letter written by the apostle Paul to young Timothy. Timothy was pastoring the problem-filled church in Ephesus. Paul planted the church in Ephesus but left Timothy in charge of it. Things had not gone well. The problems in the church were not Timothy's fault. Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy to help Timothy bring order to that chaotic church. That is the letter of 1 Timothy in our Bible. Shortly after writing that letter, Paul was arrested and taken to Rome where he was tried on the crime of being a Christian. Paul knew he would soon be executed. Before he died, he wrote a second letter to Timothy. That is the book of 2 Timothy we are studying this morning. The purpose of this second letter was to encourage a discouraged Timothy who was facing a ton of leadership challenges and difficult people. In this letter, Paul encouraged Timothy to be faithful to the end of his life.

This morning, we come to the second chapter of this letter. In this chapter Paul unveiled the main point of this letter, which is encouraging Timothy to be strong under pressure.

What kind of pressure was Timothy facing? Besides the pressure of a church that was disorganized and filled with infighting, people not just in Ephesus but in all of Asia were disassociating themselves from Paul because they didn't

want to get arrested like Paul. They were also disassociating themselves from the gospel message.

In addition to pressure from a difficult church, and pressure from Christians around Asia for Timothy to turn his back on Paul and the gospel, Timothy was also facing pressure from the larger culture.

Nero, the emperor of Rome, lit the great fire of Rome that burned down half the city. Like a typical politician, he blamed someone else for the problems he made. He blamed Christians for the fire of Rome. This led to empire-wide persecution of Christians for their faith because Nero used Christians as his scape-goat for the fire.

As we come to 2 Timothy 2, Paul was encouraging Timothy to be strong in the face of all this opposition. This chapter is especially applicable to Christian leaders who are in Timothy's shoes, such as pastors and elders. While this chapter is focused on Christian leaders, as we will see, it is applicable to all of us.

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. 2 Timothy 2:1–7 (ESV)

Paul told Timothy that he needed to be strong. He needed to be spiritually fit. Let's look at where Paul told Timothy about spiritual fitness — that is, the spiritual strength he needed and where it is found.

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus... 2 Timothy 2:1 (ESV)

Timothy didn't need CrossFit strength. Timothy needed spiritual strength. Where does spiritual strength come from? It comes from God's grace that is found in Christ Jesus. That rolls off the tongue and sounds good, but what does that mean? Let's break this down.

The word "be strengthened" is in the passive tense. Paul wasn't telling Timothy to get a stiff upper lip and try harder. Paul told him to put himself in a position where he could experience more of God's strength, rather than just his own strength.

I think Paul learned what it meant to be at the ends of his wits and to have God's enabling strength carry him through tough times. That is what he wanted for Timothy. We see Paul talking about coming to the end of his strength and God carrying him when he was weak in 2 Corinthians.

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:10 (ESV)

He went on to talk about the weaker he became, the stronger God's strength and grace became in his life. That is what he wanted for Timothy as he was getting to the end of his rope.

How could Timothy put himself in a position to experience more of God's strength in his weakness? How can we put ourselves in a position to experience more of God's strengths when we are too weak to stand? Some of that answer is so straight forward that Paul does not include it in the following verses, but since it is foundational truth, let me cover it before we go farther.

Timothy needed to read his Bible. God strengthens us from his Word when we read his Word. Haven't we experienced this in our lives? We are full of

stress and anxiety, and as we read the Word of God it seems like the Holy Spirit takes the words right off the page and applies them to our lives. God strengthens us from his Word as he speaks to us from his Word. Haven't we also experienced being strengthened by the grace of Christ through times in prayer? Haven't we faced seasons when we are overwhelmed and we get on our knees at the foot of our beds, and with tears in our eyes, pour out our anxieties to God? As we finish, there is an overwhelming sense of peace that surpasses all understanding that washes our hearts, where we know God has heard our prayers and has our future in his hands. Things will be OK. That is being strengthened by God's grace.

When we think of God's grace, we often think of it in only one dimension, when God's grace has at least two dimensions. The first dimension of God's grace is God's saving grace. This is God sending his son to die for our sin and forgive us of our sin. There is more than just saving grace. There is also God's empowering grace, where God empowers us to serve him. He gifts us to serve him. He carries us through times when we are weak. This is what Paul wanted Timothy to experience in the high-stress life he lived. It is what Paul wanted us to experience in the high-stress lives we live. It is when we walk with Christ that we experience the empowering grace of Christ in our weaknesses.

Walking with Christ to experience the empowering grace of Christ in our weaknesses is not just something we see in the New Testament. We find it in the Old Testament as well. As I was thinking about this, the verse that came to mind was Isaiah 40:31.

...but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31 (ESV)

It is those who turn to the Lord and wait upon the Lord that experience the empowering grace of the Lord.

This means there is good news for us this morning. If you are here today and you are struggling with wayward children, COVID fatigue, loneliness, discouragement, sickness, or a difficult marriage, you need to know strength is available to you. Strength is there to help you make it through your tough time. It is not found in a bottle of beer. It is found in Jesus. Turn to Jesus. Pour your heart out to Jesus. Put your finger in the Bible and ask God to speak to you from his Word. God's strengthening grace will flow into your life in your weakness. That is the good news we need to hear today.

Timothy needed to be strengthened by God's grace for the hard work of pastoring Ephesus. We need to be strengthened by God's grace for the difficult times in our lives. How was Timothy to get more of God's strengthening grace in his life beyond Bible reading and prayer? That is the question Paul answered in the next six verses, where Paul taught Timothy, and he taught us, where we can find more strengthening grace for leaders in their time of need. To show us where more strengthening grace comes from, Paul gave Timothy one command and three metaphors to follow. Let's dive in and see what they are. We will begin with the command.

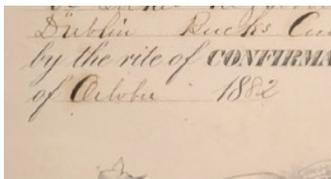
I need to see myself as a teacher of teachers.

...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)

The most important word in this verse is “teach.” That is the point of the verse. Paul said to Timothy, “Just as I taught you, now you need to teach faithful men. They need to teach other faithful men.”

"Timothy, you need to see yourself as a teacher of men who will be teachers. You are the next link in the gospel chain that goes all the way back to Jesus. Jesus taught the gospel to the twelve. They taught the gospel to the next generation. That generation taught the next generation. Timothy, you are not just a link in the gospel chain but your job is to create the next link in the gospel chain."

In my home office, I have a confirmation certificate hanging on the wall. It is the confirmation certificate of one of my relatives. It is from October 1882. I keep it



framed on the wall as a reminder that I am not the first



Christian in my family. I am fortunate that for many generations on both sides of my family my relatives

knew Christ and taught their children about Jesus. They knew their job was not just to be the next chain in the gospel link but to forge the next chain in the gospel link by teaching their children about Jesus. The gospel chain led to both of my parents, and I was fortunate to grow up in a home where both of my parents loved Jesus and taught me about Jesus. My job is to teach my children about Jesus. The church is always one generation away from extinction, which is why we always need to be reaching people with Jesus.

Timothy's job was not just to follow Jesus but to be a teacher of the next generation of teachers about Jesus. The same is true for us. There are no guarantees there will be good elders in the church of the next generation. We need to help form them.

It has been said the Christian faith is like a relay race. Somebody put the baton in our hands by telling us about Jesus. Now we are running our best to follow Jesus. After we run our lap, we need to place the baton into the hand of the next generation. It doesn't matter how hard we run our lap, if we can't pass the baton into the hand of the next generation, everything falls apart. This is why we are always about reaching people with Jesus at CrossWinds, especially the next generation. We can't run well with the baton, then drop it. We need to run well with the baton, then successfully pass it!

This is why Paul said to Timothy, "Don't bail on me. Don't give up on ministry. Recruit the next generation. The things you have heard me teach in the presence of many witnesses, now it is your turn to entrust the gospel message to faithful men who will then be able to teach others." This was at the front of Paul's thought life because he knew he didn't have long to live when he wrote this letter. Paul passed the gospel baton into the hands of Timothy. Then Timothy had to plan to pass the baton of faith into the hands of the next generation.

Timothy was to entrust the gospel message into the hands of faithful men. The word entrust means to put on deposit for safe keeping. We would say, "Put it in the bank." It is the same term used last week that was translated as guard when Paul told Timothy to guard the gospel.

Last week, we learned one of the primary responsibilities of spiritual leaders is to guard the truth. In a culture where people want to change the gospel to make it less offensive, we are to guard it to make sure it doesn't change to a different gospel that is a powerless gospel. We are only saved by grace alone, faith alone, by Jesus alone. Here we see the second big responsibility of spiritual leaders which is to entrust that gospel message to faithful men.

So the two big roles of spiritual leaders are to guard the purity of the truth and to pass the truth into faithful men who will guard it for the next generation.

We should also notice that Paul was not talking about the public proclamation of the Bible, such as I am doing this morning. What Paul described is the responsibility spiritual leaders have to choose some young men to take under their wings to build them up and prepare them to lead in the future.

Paul didn't expect Timothy to work with everyone this way. He told Timothy to be selective. He told Timothy to select a few faithful, trustworthy men and develop them.

As I thought about these verses during the week, I found them very challenging. These verses remind me that as a pastor, I do not just have a public ministry where I teach the Bible, but I am also to have a private ministry where I work with a few young men, pouring into their lives to raise up the next generation of leaders. I want to admit, I haven't done a great job in this area. That is something I need to work on. I often find myself too busy, so I neglect this area, which is something I must not do.

Let's briefly look at the qualities of the men Timothy was to pour into.

Invest my life in faithful men.

They were to be faithful men. That could also be translated trustworthy men. This speaks of men with proven spiritual character. These were men who were reliable and loyal to the Word of God. Nobody wants to invest his life into people that will walk away from the faith.

One of the hardest parts of being a pastor is investing yourself in people, meeting with them for breakfast week after week, then watching them walk away from the faith. When I was a youth pastor, there was one student I invested in that was filled with potential. When home from college in the summers, I had him work for me as a student ministry intern. The problem was his faithfulness. He was not a reliable person. Ultimately, he walked away from the church. I don't know if he has ever returned. This is why Paul instructed Timothy to be careful about who he chose to pour into. Don't just look for gifted people. Look for faithful and trustworthy people.

Invest my life into men who will be able to teach.

We are not to only invest in faithful men, which describes their character, but we are to invest in men who will be able to teach. Notice it doesn't say to invest in men who can already teach but to invest in men who will be able to teach. Paul did not expect the chosen young men to be fully formed but to have the right raw material in their lives so they could develop into teachers. Timothy was to invest in people who had the character to stay faithful to the truth and the giftedness to reproduce themselves in others to form the next link of the chain.

Paul gave Timothy his first command that would enable him to have spiritual strength in times of weakness --- it was to become a teacher of teachers. When Timothy gave himself to forming the next link in the gospel chain, God flowed his grace into Timothy's life in a powerful way when he was weak.

How does God strengthen teachers of teachers? If you teach, you know what you teach always produces more spiritual growth in yourself than your audience. Whatever we give away to others, we get to keep in our hearts. If we read a book, we forget a book. If we have to teach a book, we get to keep it in our hearts.

How does this relate to me? What Timothy was to be, what pastors and elders are to be, is to set an example for everyone else to follow. If I am to be taking the time to develop the next generation of leaders, all of us should be taking the time to develop the next generation of leaders. Maybe we do that at different levels in the church. Maybe we do that in a different fashion in the church, but all of us are to develop the next generation of leaders in the position where we serve.

At CrossWinds, we have core values called the CrossWinds Fingerprint. Let me read our fifth core value.

5. We believe God called us to not just be disciples but to make disciples.

Every one of us is called to not just follow Christ but to work to develop the next generation of leaders for Christ. That is especially true for pastors and elders, but it is also true for all of us in every area where we serve.

Some of you say, "I don't know much about Jesus. I don't have much to pass to others." That is OK. Find someone who knows less than you and teach

him or her what you know. Find someone who knows more than you and learn what he or she knows. Get in the process. God will strengthen you as you try to teach and mature others.

Remember, we are in a relay race. Our job is to not just run with the baton of the gospel but we must pass the baton of the gospel to the next generation. The church is always only one generation away from extinction.

I need to see myself as a soldier.

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. 2 Timothy 2:3–4 (ESV)

The remaining three ways to grow strong in the grace of Christ are metaphors. Paul used the same metaphors in 1 Corinthians 9.

Paul said that if Timothy was to grow strong in God's grace, he needed to see himself as a soldier. He needed to realize we are in a war and are fighting on the front lines of the battle. Ephesians 6 reminds us to be



strong in the Lord and in the power of his might and to put on the whole armor of God so that we may take our stand against the schemes of the devil because we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.

As Christians, if we think of ourselves as soldiers we realize we are not living in peacetime. We are living in wartime. This changes the way we think about life. If we think of ourselves as soldiers at war, we expect hardship, risk, and suffering as a matter of everyday life. No soldier goes to war expecting a La-Z-Boy and a video game controller. Let's look at some of the ways seeing ourselves as soldiers changes life.

No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits.

This does not say that Christians cannot enjoy a movie or cannot be involved in sports. This doesn't forbid secular activities but it reminds us we have to be careful about how much we involve ourselves in the fun of this world and how much we let fun in life take us off the mission of Jesus, especially when we are at war.

The key word is entangle. This means to weave something together. It means to make a hairball or knot out of something. We need to be careful how much we weave our lives into the fun and ordinary things of this life because they can slow us down for Jesus and take us off the mission of living for Jesus. This is especially true for a pastor. A pastor needs to give his life to ministry. A half pastoring life and half a life of doing something else just doesn't work. This is like a soldier pretending he can clock in and clock out of the office. This doesn't work. Being a soldier is a full-time job. You cannot tell the enemy to stop shooting because you are off the clock.

Years ago, I pastored in a small town with a large downtown church. The pastor at that church had a great gig. At 5 p.m. Thursdays he left for his hunting cabin. He didn't return until Sunday morning. He had the rest of Sunday off after the sermon. He worked four days a week and preached on Sunday. The rest of his life was hunting and fishing at his cabin. I kept wondering how he pulled this off. How did he pastor people when he wasn't around on the weekends? How did he serve as a soldier of Christ when he was off duty so much of the time? He

was so involved in hunting and fishing that he didn't do much pastoring. He was entangled. He did the least amount of work possible. He wasn't a good soldier.

This doesn't just apply to pastors. It applies to all of us. We are not just Christians on Sundays. As Christians, we are always at war. We are always in battle. Satan wants to render us ineffective by getting us so entangled in hobbies and fun things that we are off mission for Jesus.

If you are in your teens or 20s, let me speak to you. Today, much of a young person's time gets suck away by social media, YouTube, and the Internet. So much time gets sucked out of young adults' lives into things that entangle them that they are neutralized for Jesus. The things on the Internet that entangle young adults are not necessarily wrong things. They are just a waste of time, so people become distracted and ineffective.

I look back on my teens and 20s and wish I had read my Bible more. I wish I had started reading Christian books much earlier in life. It wasn't until I started reading good Christian books that the light came on in my brain. Why didn't I read good books when I was younger? Let me be honest. It was because I spent too much time on video games and watching television. Those things are not necessarily wrong. They were just entanglements that wasted my time and my life, making me an ineffective soldier for Jesus when I should have been on the front lines for Jesus.

I am to be a good soldier.

Paul also sai we are to be good soldiers. The word "good" means noble or excellent. We are not to be soldiers that do the minimum amount of work and

give the minimum amount of effort. We are to be excellent soldiers. We are to be the kind of soldiers that have awards pinned on our chests for valor and bravery. We are to be purple heart soldiers.

We live in a culture where heroics for Jesus are not required and are seldom seen. If we lived in China, where we would be put in a concentration camp for following Jesus, that would be heroic. If we lived in India, where Hindus would burn our houses down for following Jesus, it would be heroic to follow Jesus. While we seldom have opportunity for great heroics for Jesus, we have opportunity for everyday heroics for Jesus when we speak of our faith on social media and endure the backlash. We are heroic when as high school students we don't join our friends at a party and don't go along with the crowd even when it feels like everybody is doing it. Paul said to Timothy, and to us, "Remember, you are a soldier at war fighting for Jesus. You are a heroic soldier doing your best."

I am to take my share of sufferings as a soldier.

Paul also reminded Timothy, and he reminded us, that we are to share in affliction together. That means we are to be ready to take our fair share of sufferings because we are at war. Soldiers at war expect to get shot. They expect to have wounds. That is what happens in war. Paul said to Timothy, and to us, "Remember to expect difficulty when it comes to following Jesus." When tough times come our way as Christians, that is a normal part of being at war. Don't be surprised or upset when it happens.

Some people tell you that once you become a Christian, everything will be perfect and all problems will go away. Nothing could be further from the truth.

When we become Christians, life gets more difficult. For the first time, Satan starts shooting at us instead of ignoring us. Expect wounds!

I am to please my commanding officer.

I was not in the military, but I have an idea of what it means to please a commanding officer. Many of you know I wrestled in high school and college. Wrestlers have a burning desire to please their coaches. After a tough match that went into overtime, when I came off the mat and looked in my coach's face and knew he was proud of me, that made all the pain of the match worth it. I can still remember my coach being proud of me to this day.

Just as every athlete wants to please his or her coach, as a soldier of Christ, we want to please our commanding officer, who is Jesus. One day we will stand before him and the smile on his face for how we lived for him and how we pleased him will make all the suffering we endure for Jesus worth it!

I need to see myself as an athlete.

An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 2 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)

Paul frequently spoke about athletics in his letters. If the Super Bowl was around when Paul wrote the Bible, I am sure he would have included it. Some of the sports Paul talked about were wrestling in Ephesians 6 and boxing and running in 1 Corinthians 9.



I am to follow Christ by giving my best in training and competition.

The essence of athletics is effort. That is what separates winners and losers. It is not just talent that wins; it is effort mixed with talent that wins. Athletes

do not just need effort during an event; they also need effort in training before an event. If anyone is going to be a successful athlete, there is a tremendous amount of discipline and preparation that must happen before an event in training, then in an event during competition.

Why do athletes put so much effort into training and competition? They want to win. They want a gold medal. As Christians, we are also competing for a reward. It is not the reward of salvation. The only way anyone is saved is by grace and faith in Jesus. That is the way to be forgiven and enjoy eternity with God. While Christians already have salvation, we will stand before Jesus and be judged by Jesus for how we lived. That is not a judgment of salvation, which is taken care of by Jesus. That is a judgment of rewards that are given to us because of how we live for Jesus. Look forward to the day when we will stand before Jesus and be rewarded by him!

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 1 Corinthians 9:24–25 (ESV)

Paul's point was the Christian life is not about floating in an inner tube down the lazy river after we trust in Christ. After trusting in Jesus, we strive to do our absolute best to serve Jesus, knowing one day we will stand before him and be rewarded by him for how we lived for him!

I am to compete according to the rules if I want to obtain a reward.

Paul reminded us that as athletes competing to be rewarded by Jesus, cheaters will never win. No blood doping is allowed. No steroids are allowed. Some of you may remember Ben Johnson. He



competed for Canada in the 1988 Olympics. He won the gold medal in the 100-meter dash. He had to give it up after three days because he tested positive for steroids. He tried to make a comeback a few years later but again tested positive for steroids and had to give up the medal he won.

This is why Paul said when you compete, you need to compete according to the rules or you will lose your reward.

The Bible tells us that as we are living for Christ and doing our best to be rewarded by Christ, we must be careful how we live so we don't lose our reward.

Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. 2 John 8 (ESV)

How can a Christian lose his or her reward? One example is the life of Ravi Zacharius. He ran an extremely successful apologetics ministry sharing the gospel for more than 40 years. He wrote more than 30 books. It was a sad day when Ravi, a man who competed so well for the kingdom of God, came down with cancer and went home to be with Jesus.

Later, it came out that he didn't compete according to the rules. In 2017 he was accused of sexual misconduct with a woman. He seemed to address that properly. Four months after his death, multiple allegations of sexual misconduct were brought forward by multiple women. Ravi Zacharius' own ministry launched an investigation into what happened and it turns out the allegations made by these women are true! Ravi was a star athlete for Jesus, who will be rewarded by Jesus because of all that he did for Jesus. Unfortunately, he will lose some of his reward for what happened in his private life.

I need to see myself as a farmer.

It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. 2 Timothy 2:6 (ESV)

Farmers work hard. While farmers work hard today, their work is much easier today that it was years ago. Tractors and hydraulics are wonderful inventions.



When Paul wrote this letter, tractors were not invented.

Hydraulics were unknown. Farmers worked very hard. A farmer's life was constant sweat, work, and pain. Farmers fought the weeds by hand. They watered crops by hand. They fought the bugs by hand. A farmer was up early in the morning and worked late into the night. There was not much excitement to farming. It was long, tedious work looking to the harvest.

Paul said to Timothy, and he said to us, the work of a pastor is similar to a farmer. It is a lot of hard work. It is long hours. It is tending to the crop of people growing in the church. Many times you will not see big steps of spiritual growth. The harvest grows imperceptibly slow and is only seen at the end of the season. Much of a pastor's time is spent watering Christians with the Word of God so they can grow healthy in Christ. It is time spent pulling the pesky weeds of false teaching and discouragement that chokes the spiritual life out of people. Just as a farmer only sees the result of his work after a long time, the pastor only sees the result of his work after years of caring for the crop of Christians in his church.

In addition, a farmer often works alone in relative obscurity. In the same way, a pastor often works alone in obscurity.

"Timothy, you need to think of yourself as a farmer," Paul said. "Expect that pastoring is a lot of long, slow, tedious work behind the scenes without much glory as you grow a healthy harvest of Christians."

What benefit does the farmer receive? The farmer is the first to receive the harvest. He or she is the first to enjoy the crop. In the same way, the hard-working pastor is the first to enjoy the blessing of spiritually healthy men and women who love Jesus in the church. I can tell you, nothing does my heart better than to see you maturing in Christ, falling more in love with Christ, and telling others the good news of Christ. You are the crop I am farming.

This obviously applies to more than just pastors and elders. It applies to all of us. Those who work long hours in AWANA doing the hard work, the behind the scenes work, the phone calls, and the setting up the games in the gym may not see the result of their work from week to week, but they will be the first to enjoy a harvest of children growing up who love Jesus as they go into high school.

Those high school workers who tirelessly pour into the students on youth group trips and discussion groups after the lesson may not see the difference they are making from one week to the next but they will see the difference they make when those students graduate and continue walking with Jesus.

Let me sum it up. If someone wants to be strengthened by God's grace in tough times, Paul gave Timothy one challenge and four metaphors to experience and abundance of God's empowering grace in his life.

1. They need to commit themselves to not just being disciples but making disciples. They need to not just be teachers but invest in making teachers. It is as we develop others that God matures us.
2. They need to think of themselves as soldiers in the battle. They need to expect suffering because that is what happens when you are at war. They need to not get themselves entangled in civilian affairs to the point where they are distracted from the battle or ineffective for the battle.
3. They also need to see themselves as athletes. They are not casually following Jesus but doing their absolute best for Jesus looking forward to the day they will be rewarded by Jesus based on how they lived for him.
4. They also need to think of themselves as farmers. Farming is not glamorous work. It is long, hard, tedious and slow work. The reward is the crop that grows over time. The farmer is the first to enjoy the benefit of his hard work. The pastor or spiritual leader is the first to enjoy the harvest of Christians they have raised for Jesus.

Conclusion

Paul said:

Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. 2 Timothy 2:7 (ESV)

This week Matt Fraser, the fittest man on the planet, retired. As Christians, we never retire. We press on to become more fit for Jesus with each passing day.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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