



Please turn to 2 Timothy 2:1-7 (p. 935, pew Bible). Ruthie and I missed the breath-taking Northern Lights spectacle Friday night. We thought it was a typical night and went to bed at the best viewing time. I think there's a spiritual parallel for us as we gather for worship. It's easy for us to treat this day as another typical Sunday and miss something beautiful that God has for us. *So, Lord, we pray that you would open our eyes, that we may behold wonderful things from your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Second Timothy is the last recorded letter of the apostle Paul. As the time of his death draws near, he focuses his energies on passing the baton of gospel ministry to Timothy, his beloved protégé. In the first seven verses of chapter two, Paul writes,

<sup>1</sup> You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup> No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. <sup>5</sup> An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. <sup>6</sup> It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. <sup>7</sup> Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

- 2 Timothy 2:1-7

When I was a kid, we used to play a game called "Red Rover." Two teams would line up facing each other. Each would form a chain by holding hands. Then one team would call out to the other, saying, "Red Rover, Red Rover, send [name] on over!" The player whose name was called would spring toward the other team and try to break their human chain by running through the clasped hands of two teammates. If the opponent failed to break the chain, he had to join the team. If he succeeded in breaking the chain, then he got to bring back one of the two people from the broken link.

I remember what it was like to have someone from the other team run full speed toward me. I would tighten my grip with the players on either side of me, determined to keep our chain unbroken. The stronger the opponent, the tougher it was to keep our chain intact. As we absorbed the hit, it hurt, but it was worth it to see our chain remain intact and to have another person added to our team.

When it comes to the gospel ministry, similar dynamics are in play, but the stakes are much higher. People's lives and eternal destinies are at stake. Paul knew this well, for he had once been on the opposing team, attacking Jesus' followers. One of them was Stephen, a bold witness who got murdered by an angry mob. And Paul (formerly called Saul) had "approved of their killing him" (Acts 8:1 NIV). But shortly thereafter, Paul himself was miraculously converted. Churches throughout the region began hearing the report, "The man who formerly persecuted us is not preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (Gal. 1:23). Unable to break the gospel chain, Paul became a member of team Jesus!

Now, after years of spreading the gospel and suffering for Christ, Paul is about to be put to death himself. But he's okay with that. In fact, he's more than okay. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21). But before Paul dies, he wants to pass the baton to Timothy, and Paul wants Timothy to pass it on to others.

Paul envisions a human chain of reliable people linked together to preserve the gospel throughout the coming generations. What Paul had taught Timothy in the presence of many witnesses, Timothy was to entrust to reliable men who would be able to teach others also. This pattern would continue from generation to generation until the Second Coming of Christ. Every generation is a link in that chain, and it's critical that the chain not be broken!<sup>1</sup> Hence the title of today's sermon:

### *UNBROKEN CHAIN*

2 Timothy 2:1-7

In 2 Timothy 2, Paul presses upon Timothy his personal responsibility in keeping this chain unbroken. In fact, throughout the rest of this short letter, Paul issues around thirty exhortations to Timothy. Several of them appear in the first seven verses of chapter two. Taken together, they forge one dynamic appeal:

By God's grace, keep the chain  
of gospel teaching strong.

To do this, Timothy – and by extension every Christian – must do three things: (1) Power up by grace, (2) pass on the gospel, and (3) persevere toward the goal. Consider with me how Paul emphasizes all three of these imperatives in the passage.

#### 1. *Power up by grace* (v. 1).

After calling on Timothy in chapter one not to be ashamed of the gospel but to share in suffering for the gospel, Paul begins chapter two by reaffirming his love for Timothy and pointing him again to God's grace "in Christ Jesus." John 1:16 says, "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."

Typically, we think of grace as *undeserved favor* – and that's what it is! Praise God! Romans 3:23-24 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." By his perfect life, atoning death, and triumphant resurrection for sinners, Jesus opened the door back to a right relationship with God. This is a gift received by faith. It is undeserved favor. *Grace*.

But God's grace goes beyond the forgiveness of our sins. It provides power for living! Second Corinthians 9:8 says, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." If you feel weak, you're in a good spot! Jesus said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul harnessed this energy, and it worked

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<sup>1</sup> NIV, *The Grace and Truth Study Bible*, gen. ed. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 1686.

wonders in his life! So much so that Paul was able to testify, “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

Having experienced this power in his own life, Paul now tells Timothy, “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Paul is reminding Timothy – and the Holy Spirit through this Scripture is reminding us – that our strength is not found in how long we’ve been a Christian or how well we know our Bibles or how much we serve in the church. Our strength is sourced in Christ alone and is supercharged by our daily communion with him.<sup>2</sup> That’s how we *power up* by grace. I chose the expression “power up” because when that term is used in reference to people, it means “to begin to make good use of or take full advantage of.”

That’s what God wants us to do with the grace that we have received “in Christ Jesus.” That is our responsibility. “Be strengthened” (Gr., *endunamoó*) is a present imperative – “keep being filled with power.” Paul has emphasized power throughout chapter one (see vv. 6, 8b, v. 12: “he is able...,” v. 14a). Now, he tells Timothy to make good use of it. Take full advantage of it!

Why? Because even the most gifted believers will grow weak if they are not frequently refreshed by God’s power. Paul wrote to believers, “I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit” (Eph. 3:16; NLT). Paul wrote to the Romans, “all glory to God, who is able to make you strong” (Rom. 16:25 NLT).

Christians who move forward spiritually and make a lasting impact on for Christ are those who rely on God’s strength rather than their own. David Livingstone, the 19<sup>th</sup> century physician, missionary, and explorer, was quite industrious, but even he was amazed at all the work that Charles Spurgeon could accomplish in a typical day. When Livingston asked Spurgeon how he could do it all, Spurgeon replied, “You have forgotten, there are two of us,”<sup>3</sup> meaning himself and the Holy Spirit!

If you’re a believer in Christ, this same Spirit lives in you. So, power up by God’s grace! *Realize* that this grace is already yours in Christ. *Read* and *reflect* on “the word of his grace, which is able to build you up...” (Acts 20:32). *Request* a fresh supply of grace at the start of the day and multiple times throughout the day, by seeking the Lord in prayer. Then *rely* on it, believing that God has made “all grace abound toward you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” *Power up!* “Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (v. 1)!

## 2. *Pass on the gospel (v. 2).*

“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 Tim. 2:2). As Timothy traveled with Paul, he repeatedly heard his biblical teaching in the presence of Paul’s other ministry companions (Silas, Luke, Aristarchus, Gaius, Tychicus, Trophimus, and others).

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 160.

<sup>3</sup> Piper, “Spurgeon.” Cited in Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition*, 160.

What Timothy heard from Paul he was to “entrust to faithful men.” The Greek word for “trust” (*paratithemi*) carried the idea of *depositing something valuable for safe-keeping*. Paul used this term twice in the previous chapter to refer to the *treasure* of gospel truth that the Lord had entrusted to Paul (1:12) and that Paul had entrusted to Timothy (1:14).

Now Timothy was to entrust this treasure to “faithful men.” The word “faithful” is the plural of *pistos*, a Greek word with a rich variety of related meanings, like “believing,” “loyal,” “reliable.” These are men who not only believe God’s word but embrace it and can be counted on to teach it faithfully – by what they say and how they live.” Proverbs 20:6 says, “Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?” This goes to his character. Timothy is to entrust the treasure of God’s truth “to faithful men...

“... who will be able to teach others also.” This has to do with their competency. So, there are two qualifications for men who would serve as faithful ministers of the gospel: *character* and *competency*. Paul already spelled out these qualifications in detail in his first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:1-8), so now he is reiterating the need for such men here.

Such men are rare,<sup>4</sup> but God uses such men to build his church. That’s why personal discipleship is so vital. Pastor Tony Merida provides a helpful analogy from golf, saying,

You could think of teaching like the three types of golf clubs. You have woods, irons, and a putter. The woods are ... like preaching publicly. You are able to cover a lot of ground, talking to lots of people. Then you have irons. They require a lot of finesse and accuracy. Irons are like class-rooms and smaller groups, where you get feedback and dialogue. Then there is the putter! This is the club that poor golfers misunderstand and so often fail to practice with. It is personal. It is for short distances. I liken it to the third way of teaching described in 2 Timothy 2:2. ... While you need all three clubs in your bag, my observation has been that many pastors have a pulpit ministry (a driver), and sometimes have a classroom (irons), but few use their putter (mentoring a few “faithful men”). But good golfers remind poor golfers (like me) that “you drive for show and putt for dough.” An important lesson from the book of 2 Timothy for Christian leaders is that we should remember the importance of all our clubs. Do you have a few “blokes worth watching” in whom you are investing your life and instruction?<sup>5</sup>

I do. This year I’ve been working on my putting – mentoring a few men who can multiply themselves through their Christ-like testimony and teaching. This is the strategy Jesus employed in his public ministry, and it’s woven into the fabric of the Great Commission. So, it applies by extension to all believers. In their book, *The Trellis and the Vine*, Tony Payne and Colin Marshal capture the essence of Christian discipleship, saying,

Through personal relationship, prayer, teaching, modeling, and practical instruction, we want to see people grow in:

- *conviction* – their knowledge of God and understanding of the Bible

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<sup>4</sup> “For there are,” as Calvin put it, “few who sincerely labor to preserve and perpetuate the remembrance of the doctrine entrusted to them.”

<sup>5</sup> Merida, 162.

- *character* – the godly character and life that accords with sound doctrine
- *competency* – the ability to prayerfully speak God’s word to others in a variety of ways.<sup>6</sup>

This is how we keep the chain of gospel teaching strong! Every Christian must look on himself as a link between two generations. Each of us are a link in the chain of faithful witnesses that goes all the way back to Christ and will continue until his return!

***By God’s grace, keep the chain  
of gospel teaching strong.***

To do so, we must *power up by grace, pass on the gospel*, and . . .

### **3. Persevere toward the goal (vv. 3-7).**

I remember how verses 3-5 in particular inspired me as a 12-year-old boy. I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and in my first year of our church youth group, which incorporated the Word of Life memory pack as part of our discipleship program. I memorized them in the KJV, and they became my life verses at the time:

<sup>3</sup> Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. <sup>5</sup> And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

- 1 Timothy 2:3-5 KJV

I didn’t know what “masteries” were, but they sounded like something worth striving for because they had something to do with getting crowned! Plus, my dad was a Marine, and other family members had served in the military, so I had great respect for soldiers.

A dedicated soldier and a disciplined athlete are two of the images Paul uses to convey the importance of perseverance in the Christian life. The third image is that of a diligent farmer. Let’s consider each one briefly.

#### **a. the dedicated 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 Tim. 2:3-4). The picture of a man as a soldier and his life as a campaign was known well by the Greeks and Romans. Seneca, the first-century Roman statesman said, “To live is to be a soldier.” The apostle Paul<sup>7</sup> said, “To me, to live is Christ...” (Phil. 1:21). Paul often used military language to depict the Christian life. He talks about fighting the good fight, waging a good warfare, putting on the whole armor of God. He refers to Archippus and Epaphroditus as “fellow soldiers” (see Phi. 2; Phil. 2:25). Paul uses the same sort of language in 2 Timothy 2.

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<sup>6</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine* (Matthias Media, 2009), 78. Cited by Dave McDonald in his review of this book on *The Gospel Coalition*, Australia Edition [online] at <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/book-review/the-trellis-and-the-vine-by-colin-marshall-and-tony-payne/>.

<sup>7</sup> Paul met Seneca’s older brother Gallio, who was the proconsul of Achaia, in Corinth (see Acts 18).

When a Roman joined the army, he had to take a *sacramentum*, an oath of allegiance. This sacramentum was the strictest of all Roman oaths and was considered an act of consecration. It stressed obedience to the commanding officers. William Barclay notes the importance of such conformity, saying, “Involved as [the soldier] is in the midst of battle, he cannot see the overall picture. The decisions he must leave to the commander who sees the whole field.”<sup>8</sup> The same is true of the Christian in our obedience to Christ.

My father-in-law was only two when his father, Private Robert Boger, was killed at the Battle of the Bulge in World War II. A few days ago my wife got a copy of the letter that Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War, sent to Robert’s wife (Ruthie’s grandmother) on February 3, 1945. He begins by saying,

My dear Mrs. Boger:

At the request of the President, I write to inform you that the Purple Heart has been awarded posthumously to your husband, Private Robert E. Boger, Infantry, who sacrificed his life in defense of his country.

After expressing his sincere condolences and words of profound appreciation, Secretary Stimson closed by saying, “When the medal, which you will shortly receive, reaches you, I hope that time and the victory of our cause will finally lighten the burden of your grief.” Think about the ultimate victory of the Christ’s cause! Jesus said, “Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). Just as a dedicated soldier will sacrifice his life in service to his country, so the faithful Christian will “deny himself, take up his cross, and follow [Christ]” (Matt. 16:24). The greatest words that every Christian lives and dies for is to hear the Lord Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.... Enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:21).

Second Timothy 2:3-4 are key verses because allegiance to Jesus requires a measure of suffering. If you make it our aim to please him, you will fall out of favor with others. You must face this reality, because many Christians are tempted to be people-pleasers. They are more concerned about pleasing their fellow workers, friends, and neighbors than they are about pleasing the Lord. But remember Paul’s words in Galatians 1:10. He said, “Am I trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? ... If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10 NIV). When Christ is our first love, “we [will] make it our goal to please him...” (2 Cor. 5:9 NIV).

### **b. the disciplined athlete**

“An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Tim. 2:5). If Paul were alive today, he might say, “Athletes cannot use performance-enhancing drugs. Baseball pitchers cannot scuff the baseball.”<sup>9</sup> Electronic equipment cannot be used to record another team’s signals. You don’t get the prize unless you compete according to the rules! We have seen this principle play out in the world of sports many times. Nearly

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<sup>8</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. The Daily Study Bible Series, revised edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), 160.

<sup>9</sup> Merida, 165.

160 Olympic medals have been stripped for various infractions. The same sort of thing happened in Paul's day. He related this principle to his own life as a Christian, saying,

<sup>25</sup> 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. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. <sup>27</sup> I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

- 1 Cor. 9:25-27<sup>10</sup>

At the end of this letter, which Paul wrote near the end of his life, he could say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up 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 loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). This promise is for every Christian. So, run hard! Go for the gold!

### **c. the diligent farmer**

"It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops" (2 Tim. 2:6). The Greek word translated "hard-working" is *kopiáō*, which means "labor to the point of exhaustion." That's what a farmer does. He works and waits. There's no such thing as quick results. But the harvest makes all the hard work worth it. The same is true of the Christian life, whether you're raising a child or mentoring other believers. There is a deep reward in disciplining others! Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers, "What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our pride and joy" (1 Thess. 2:9-10; cf. Phil. 4:1; 3 John 4). Making disciples is hard work, but it is deeply rewarding. So, do it *right* with all your *might* with the end in *sight*! That's Paul's point throughout these three analogies. Just as the dedicated soldier strives for the commendation, the disciplined athlete for the crown, and the diligent farmer for the crops, *persevere for the goal* of receiving the prize for which God is calling us – all because of what Christ has done for us.

***By God's grace, keep the chain  
of gospel teaching strong.***

Don't be the weak link in the chain. *Power up by grace, pass on the gospel, and persevere toward the goal!*

Paul concludes this paragraph by saying, "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." Paul says this not because his words are difficult to grasp but because they are massive in their implications. One can comprehend what Paul says *intellectually* without grasping it *experientially*. So, take more time to ruminate on this text and how it applies to your life. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:9).

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<sup>10</sup> Verse 25 [NIV], verses 26-27 [NLT].