

OpenTheo

Making Faith Personal



Message For The Young - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg shares insights on how to make faith personal and relevant for young people in the church. He emphasizes the importance of holding fast to sound teachings and investing in spiritual growth, rather than simply going through the motions. Gregg reminds listeners to prioritize eternal values over temporal desires and to sow seeds of spiritual fruit that will reap a harvest in due time.

Transcript

The last few times I've spoken here, I've been working on the same set of, the same outline. There might even still be a few of them on the table back there. I don't know.

The stack's pretty much picked through. But it was some time ago when I was asked to speak here, I felt inclined to prepare a message directed especially to the young people. Especially to young people in Christian families.

And I only got through a very small part of it that Sunday that I had prepared for. And so a few weeks later when I was asked to preach again, I took another part of it. And now it's been a few weeks again, and I'm intending to take another part of it.

Last time, we looked at 2 Timothy chapter 1. And really what I was, what I'm in the course of doing is going through the whole book of 2 Timothy. Not verse by verse, but nonetheless drawing certain exhortations and lessons from the book. In my outline, I've, you know, I'm not very good at making three-point sermons.

I have 15 points, which is one reason why it's taken so many weeks to get through it. But there are about 15, that's almost verse by verse through the book of 2 Timothy. There's not many more verses than that, but I am, I'm wanting to draw certain passages out and speak about them that particularly relate, I say particularly, but not exclusively, relate to young, genuine Christians.

Timothy was a young man when Paul first met him. Now, he's probably not very young anymore when Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy, since these were the last epistles Paul wrote in his own old age. But Paul was considerably older than Timothy.

And he still, apparently Timothy was young enough when Paul wrote these letters that Paul would have to say to him, let no man despise your youth. Now, when Timothy began to travel with Paul, there's a good chance that Timothy was in his late teens. We don't know the exact age, but since it was many years later, Paul wrote to Timothy and said, let no one despise your youth.

It certainly indicates that even many years after Timothy had begun to accompany Paul on his missionary journeys, that Timothy was still a young enough man that there would be some in the church that might be tempted to disregard him. And so, even though Timothy was not in his teens anymore, at the time that this letter was written, he was still a young man, a comparatively young man. And there's a good chance that even if he had been in his teens at this time, Paul would have said the same things to him.

Because Paul, in the first chapter, says, I remember the true faith, the genuine faith that is in you, and that was in your mother and your grandmother before you. And that, he says later on, that from a child you were brought up in the Scriptures. Certainly that was true of Timothy when he was in his teens as well as at a later time in his life.

And not all of us are young. I'm no longer young. And there are some here probably even a little older than me, not many.

But there are a lot of people here younger than I am. And even those who are my age and older can find that what Paul has to say to Timothy is as applicable to older people as to younger. And that being so, you might say, well, why even then mention the young people? If the message is applicable to all, why even single out young people? Why call it a message to young people? Well, simply because the letter was written to a young Christian.

And although the same truths apply to older Christians, it's not always the case that young people can feel that something is directed specifically toward them in the Scripture. Much of what is written in the Scripture is directed toward the whole church, or, you know, the mature in the church, the fathers, the mothers, the wives, the husbands. But here we have a book, actually two books, written that are directed specifically to a young Christian.

Not young in terms of his chronological age from his conversion, but his actual physical age. Last time, I managed to take, I think, the first four of the 15 points I'd like to go through. I might take maybe the same number today.

I don't know. I will make no prediction. But those points that we took last time were all found in the first chapter.

And so we'll be turning to chapter 2 of 2 Timothy today. But I'll just remind you that we looked at chapter 1, verse 5, where Paul said, When I call to remembrance the genuine

faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded in you also. And the point I was making here is that one who is raised by Christian parents needs to come to the point where the faith that was in their mother or father or grandparents is in them also.

That this is a faith that is not second-hand. It's not a hand-me-down faith. It's a first-hand owned faith.

It is a faith that's been transmitted and owned by the younger party. All of us, of course, received knowledge of the faith originally from somebody else. It might not have been someone older than us.

It might have been one of our peers or even somebody younger than us. But most children in Christian families have learned of the faith from their parents. And the danger is that because Christian children are raised in a Christian environment, raised in the church, raised knowing scripture, raised with morals that reflect an awareness of God's standards, it is very possible for those young people to feel that they are Christians, when in fact, maybe they're not.

You need to own the faith yourself. I suppose I've made that point the last three or four times I've preached here. And I'm not going to pound on it again, but that was the first point in 2 Timothy I wanted to bring up.

Paul said he was persuaded that this faith was not simply something that existed in Timothy's mother and grandmother, but he was persuaded that it was a genuine faith in Timothy as well. And that is not true of all young people in the church. It is true of some, but not all.

And as I direct my comments, especially to the young, I would urge you to see to it that it is true of you, that you are not riding on the coattails of your parents or your grandparents or your friends in the church faith, but that you know Jesus yourself. We talked about that in the first of this series of talks. And I gave examples from 1 Thessalonians 1, verses 4 through 10, where Paul said to the Thessalonians, We know, brethren, your election of God, because... And he gave examples of why he knew they were really saved, not just pretending.

And you need to look at those again if you haven't seen those, if you weren't here for those early things. In the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians, Paul gives several reasons why he knew some of the people there were genuinely saved and not just professing. The second point in chapter 1 was in verse 6, where he said, Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

So, the need is to stir up the spiritual gift that is in you. And I preached on this last time, I won't go into it in detail, but let me simply remind you that you have opportunity every

day, in whatever time may be counted leisure, or elective time, time that you do not have something appointed to you to do. And it's true of adults and children as well.

Everyone has certain things they have to do. It's their duty. It's assigned to them.

They've got to do that. But everyone also has some time where there's nothing particular assigned to them, and they have what we call elective time. You can make a choice.

The word elective has to do with making a choice. You can choose what you're going to do with that time. Well, you can waste that time, or you can devote that time to something.

Wasting that time just means you sit around and do nothing, or you just vegetate in front of the television or something. But you can also devote that time. Time is a commodity, just like money is.

And as you can take money and invest it profitably in some future return, you can take time and invest it properly in a future return. And you have a stewardship of it to do. And you can stir up in yourself, in those times when you're not required to do anything else, you can devote yourself to stirring up and cultivating in yourself just about anything you choose.

Paul says to this young man, stir up your spiritual gift. When I was a youngster, I read my Bible all the time. I loved to read the Bible.

I wasn't always spiritually minded. I had attraction to worldly things too much more than I wish, in retrospect, that I had. But I did feel from the time I was about in junior high that I was called to the ministry.

And even before that, I was fascinated with reading the Bible. That's one reason I thought I was called to the ministry, because I had a fascination for the Bible. But I never neglected the study of the Scriptures, because I believed that I was going to be called to a ministry in the Word someday.

And I could have devoted more time if I didn't have a television in the house I was raised in and some other distractions. But I have to take responsibility for that. My parents had a TV.

I wish they hadn't. But I watched it by my own choice. And I'm responsible for any time I didn't devote to stirring up that spiritual gift that was in me.

Now, not everyone here is called to be a preacher. Not everyone is going to be called to be in some kind of visible, up-front kind of ministry in the body of Christ. But everybody has something spiritual that God has invested in you that He intends for you to use to

advance the kingdom of God and to bless and edify the body of Christ.

And for you to develop... if you don't know what that gift is, I'm not one of those who says you need to take one of these inventory tests and find out what your spiritual gift is. I just don't see anything like that in the Bible. I think what you do need to do, however, is devote yourself to cultivating your spiritual life, cultivating your spiritual awareness, your walk with God, your knowledge of the Scripture, your ability to hear God's voice in your life as you're seeking to make decisions and so forth.

To develop your spirituality and your spiritual gift will be manifest. Because even if you don't know what your spiritual gift is, God does. And rather than having people take something like personality profiles and then tell them at the end, okay, you have this spiritual gift, I'd rather just say, well, when you're walking with God, when you're walking in the Spirit, what is it that's happening? What is it that's happening through you? Once we see that, there'll be no question what your spiritual gift is.

You don't learn what some spiritual gift is by what they write down on a piece of paper. You learn what their spiritual gift is by when they are walking in the Spirit and they're serving God, what is happening? What is being contributed? And the answer is, whatever it is, God's gifted them to do. But if you don't know what gift you have, I'm not going to say you have to find out as soon as possible what your gift is.

I would say this, though, to stir up your spiritual gift, even if you don't know what it is, stir up your spiritual life. Cultivate your spiritual life. Cultivate your closeness to God and your submission to God.

That is the spirituality that will provide a context in which your gift will be manifest. And you might say, well, I'm not as fascinated with spiritual gifts as some people are. I want to be a football player.

Well, you can outgrow that. But even if you don't, even if you don't, when you are old and on your deathbed and looking back, you're going to be much more interested in being able to catalog the ways in which you impacted other people's life for Christ than you are going to be concerned about how many touchdowns you made when you were young enough to do that. What's going to matter at the end of your life is what you need to be wise enough to anticipate now.

Young people don't feel like they're very near the end of their lives. They feel like they're about as far from the end of their lives as they will be in their life cycle. And therefore, thinking about, you know, well, what am I going to think about today 70 years from now? It's not a really common thing for young people to think about.

But it's a wise thing for young people to think about. Because all people who eventually serve God and die with a godly attitude always wish that they had started earlier, doing

the will of God in their lives. And you might as well anticipate that now so you can have fewer regrets later on.

In verse 7 of chapter 1, he says, Basically, the point I wanted to bring out from that last time was that you need to be fearless. You need to be fearless walking in the Spirit. You'll not only be contributing something spiritually to the overall benefit of the kingdom of God, but you've got to be fearless for God.

You've got to not care what people think about you. And that's what Paul was saying to Timothy. Timothy was young.

Timothy was timid. Paul had to write to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 16, said, What a strange thing. When I visit a church, the first thing they have to be mindful of is not that I have to be among them without fear.

I mean, I'm not particularly a fearful person. I doubt if, you know, when I'm invited to come speak in a church, I doubt if the pastor has to speak to the audience before I come and say, Now, Steve Graves will be here. Make sure you don't scare him.

Make sure you don't intimidate him. Probably the opposite is true. They probably have to say, Now, Steve's coming.

Don't be fearful. We'll get through this. You know? He's only here for a little while.

But when Timothy was coming, Paul had to write to the church and say, Now, make sure you don't intimidate him. Make sure you don't scare him. And now he writes to Timothy and says, Listen, God has not given you a spirit of fear.

You need to be fearless. And it's good to know that someone as remarkable as Timothy, as a young Christian man, wasn't so perfect that he didn't need to be exhorted about this, too. I mean, if you're sometimes intimidated and fearful, remember, well, apparently Timothy had that problem, too.

But the solution was, and he was required to find a solution and walk in it, was to walk in the Spirit. Because the Spirit of God is not a spirit of fear. The Spirit of God is a spirit of boldness and power and love and a sound mind.

And the last point I made last time was about what Paul said in verses 13, or, yeah, about 13 through 15 there in chapter 1. He says, Now, hold fast to that pattern of sound words that you've learned. It's so easy for young people to take for granted the things that they have learned from childhood. They figure, well, anything you grow up with all the time, it's easy not to recognize the value of it.

And not to realize that's something to hold on to. And later on in life, when you don't have that anymore, you might say, you know, I had something of great value back there

my parents gave me, and I didn't really value it, and I kind of lost it. I let it slip through my fingers.

You need to recognize that if your parents have taught you, or if anyone has taught you, or if you've taught yourself from the Scripture, the wisdom of God and the ways of holiness of God, if you've learned that, hold on to that. Because you live in a generation, and this applies to all of us, we all live in a generation that has very little knowledge of God. And it seems to me, without trying to be overly cynical or critical, it seems to me that would apply even to most of the churches.

It seems to me that most of the churches I've been in, it is also the case there's not a great surplus of the knowledge of God in these places. Many times they know about whatever the passing fad is in evangelical or charismatic theology, but they don't know very much about who God is. Which is why these fads take hold.

If someone knew who God was, then when a fad comes through that's really unlike God, they'd recognize that. I don't like to be, I don't make it my business to be highly critical of Christians who see things differently than I do. I don't mind discussing or critiquing or letting them critique me, but I mean, to me, they're another man's servant, it's not mine to criticize necessarily, unless they're doing some serious harm.

But there is, I will say, there are some things that come through the body of Christ that are pretty unsound. And I don't think I have to name them. Some of them have been named from this pulpit by others before, and I'm not going to single them out and say about them.

But I will say this. I'm on the radio and people call in my show all the time and ask what I think about things. So for the past several years people have been asking me, what do you think about the holy laughter? What do you think about falling under the spirit? What do you think about the gold dust? What do you think about whatever the latest fad is? Teeth getting filled with gold and services without a dentist.

Those are things that have been happening over the past, oh, ten years or so. And I've been asked about them a lot. And the simplest answer I can give is, you know, whenever something is presented to me as something that God is doing, it could be very confusing to me to know, is this God or is this not God, unless I know God well.

If I know God well, then I know what He is like. If my children or my wife know me well, they know what kinds of things are in character for me and what things are not in character for me, what things are not like me and what things are like me. And you can know God like that.

And if you know what God is like, then when some new fad comes through, you can say, well, this is just like God to do this. Or you can say, this is not very much like God to do

this. That's the best way, I think.

You have to get to know God through what He reveals about Himself in the Scripture. And once you know Him, you can say this. Someone says, well, what do you think about people barking like dogs in the Spirit? Well, all I can say is this.

There is a God who revealed Himself in the Bible. And He did a lot of remarkable things, supernatural things, strange things in some cases. But everything He did was like Himself.

Everything He did was in character with the way He is, the kind of God He is. And while I never read of anyone barking like a dog in the Spirit in the Bible, I will not say that everything God might do, He must necessarily have done in biblical times. I mean, God's alive.

He can maybe do something a little different, but He will always act like Himself. When it comes to barking like dogs, those things have forever been associated with demon possession. Forever.

They've always been signs of demon possession. They've never been signs of work of the Holy Spirit in the Bible or in church history. But they've always been like demon possession.

Now, I'm not going to say that people who bark like dogs are demon possessed. I don't know. I'd have to take it case by case.

Some of them might be. Probably some of them aren't. All I'm saying is, if you ask me, is this God? I say, well, if it is, He certainly isn't acting like Himself.

He's acting like the demons have always acted. You know, He's acting more like the devil today than He did throughout history. Now, I would say sound knowledge of God is fairly lacking in our land.

And if you, as a young person, have been raised in the sound ways of God and have the pattern of sound words and trust you by your parents, hold on to those things, because you live in changing times. Religiously changing times. Things, you know, movements are coming and going and so forth.

And you're going to see a whole bunch of them come and go. And some of the things that come might really be from God. You can't just say that everything that's new to me can't be from God.

Because a lot of things that God did in the Bible, if He did them now, it'd be new to me. Because I haven't had those things happen yet to me. So I have to be prepared for the fact that not everything that's unfamiliar to me is not of God.

But a great number of things that people claim are of God might not be of God. And how do I know the difference? I certainly want to go along with God. Well, hold fast to the pattern of sound words that's taught to you in the Scripture.

You will get to know the kind of God God is. It'll give you a great advantage in discerning specific things that haven't yet arisen that you'll be confronted with. You'll need it.

You'll need this pattern of sound words. Don't let it slip through the fingers. Now, that's a lot of time talking about stuff I talked about last time.

And you might say, well, Steve, you always do that. Well, I do always do that. But I especially did it on purpose this time because we didn't have a tape last time.

And I hate to have that gaping hole in our tapes of the series. Now, let's look at chapter 2 and verse 2. Paul says, And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Now, the truth of God is like a river.

In Ezekiel, we see the imagery of a little stream trickling over the threshold of the house of God. But as it goes out into the world, it becomes deeper and broader and fuller. And it's a raging river.

And the movement of God, the kingdom of God, is a growing, advancing phenomenon. It's like a mustard seed that started out really small and grew into a big tree. It's like a little bit of leaven that started out being put in a lump of dough, and it's spreading out and affecting the whole thing.

It's like a little stone. Daniel's interpretation of the day-be-pleasured dream. It's like a little stone started in the days of Christ.

It struck the pagan nations in the feet, the Roman Empire in particular, and has been growing ever since into a great mountain to fill the whole earth. This is a growing thing. It's not just for you and me to get a hold of it in this generation and hold on to it until we die.

Oh, I found the truth. Now I'm going to heaven. I sure hope the next generation finds it too.

Well, we got to see to it that they do. We got to see to it that we aren't just a fixed point in our own self-opinion of, I got to get me saved. Oh, I got it.

I've got that under control now. I can just go about the rest of my life, and I'm going to heaven when I die. Now, I need to see myself as one of the persons caught up in this great river.

It's flowed as far as reaching me, and it's got to flow beyond me through my efforts to

other generations. Paul said to Timothy, you've heard a lot of things from me. Timothy had the great advantage of traveling with Paul here and preached probably hundreds of times.

He probably knew what Paul preached a lot better than we have any way of knowing, because we only have a few letters from Paul. He traveled with Paul, talked with him all the time. Paul had invested a great deal of the truth of Christianity in Timothy, and he says, now listen, I'm an old man, Timothy.

I'm going to die. When he wrote this letter, he was shortly thereafter going to be executed, Paul was. He says, now, of course, I'm concerned about all that stuff I've invested in you.

I don't want it to die with me, and I don't even want it to die with you when you die. I want you to take what you've learned from me, the things you've heard in the presence of many witnesses, that is, they can confirm that this is genuine stuff that I said, and I want you to pass that along. I want you to teach that to other people, faithful people, people who will be faithful and reliable, who will then, when you're gone, they'll pass it on yet another generation.

The Roman Catholic Church believes in something called apostolic succession. They believe that when the apostles died, they appointed other men to be the next generation of apostles, called bishops in the church. And then after, when they died, they pass it on to someone else.

And the Roman Catholic Church has a list, starting with the apostle Peter, and all the way up to the present time of those that they say were the bishops of Rome who sit in Peter's seat. They believe that whoever sits as bishop in Rome today, or whoever holds any of the offices of bishop in the Roman Catholic Church, is in the apostolic succession from the early apostles, and that the way the authority of the apostles was passed along to later generations was by the appointment of new apostles in each generation. Or they called them bishops, but the Roman Catholic Church says they hold the office of the apostles today.

Now, I don't see that actually taught in the scripture. I don't see any evidence of apostolic succession. I see Paul saying, now here's how we're going to pass along the authority after I'm dead.

Timothy, I'm not going to appoint you to be the next apostle Paul, and then you appoint someone else to be the next apostle Paul. No, the truth that God has shown me, you pass that truth along to another generation, and they'll pass it on to another generation. The apostolic authority is passed down through their teachings being perpetuated, not by their office being perpetuated.

That's how Paul seems to be approaching the concern about this thing continuing to grow and expand through the future generations. You need to see yourself not as somebody whose duty it is just to get saved and stay saved, but as somebody who's been entrusted with something of great value that you needed desperately and everyone else needs too, and that you are here to see to it that when you go, you have passed it along to someone else. Now, you may do that in a way that's so ordinary that you don't think of it as so spectacular.

You might merely grow up and get married and have kids, and the only people you'll ever pass it along to are your kids. Well, that's great. That's no small matter.

That's no small matter. Or you might in some way have some evangelistic calling or something else, or you may just be able to communicate with neighbors. But the idea is, Paul says, pass this along.

You've been given a trust. Don't just hold fast to those sound words, but pass them on down to another generation. Make sure that when you die, this doesn't die with you, but that you've already handed it down, handed it off to the next receiver, and they're running toward the goal with it, and they're going to have to probably hand it off and so forth.

It depends on how long the Lord carries. But we have to recognize our role here is not just to get ourselves saved. It's to make sure that we play the role of continuance of that which has been passed down for 2,000 years to us, from the time of the apostles to now, and we are not allowed to drop the ball just because we're concerned about very little else than our own salvation and our own other interests.

We have to be taken up with the interest of the kingdom of God and making sure it gets passed along through us. The next verses in chapter 2 are another point I'd like to bring out in verses 3 and 4. Therefore, you must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him to be a soldier.

Also, in verse 5, he says, And also, if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. And then verse 6, The hard-working farmer must first be partaker of the crops. Now, these are actually three of the points, three separate points.

I thought I'd give them all at once. He says, Be like a soldier, be like an athlete, be like a farmer, in some respect. And he tells us what respect.

How am I to be like a soldier? I'm supposed to endure hardship like a soldier endures hardship. For the Lord. It's a very important thing that we see ourselves in this role rather than in some other roles that people sometimes are fond of trying to help us see

ourselves in.

For example, when I was a young minister in the 70s, it was common to encounter people saying, You're a child of the king. You should be living like a child of the king. You shouldn't be driving a Volkswagen.

That always made me feel bad. Because ten of the cars I first owned were all Volkswagens. The first eight were Volkswagen buses.

I lived in some of them. But you shouldn't be driving a Volkswagen. You should be driving a Lincoln Continental.

You shouldn't be living in some little shack on the wrong side of the tracks. You should be living in a mansion. You're a child of the king.

What kind of testimony do you think it is to the unbelievers when you tell them that you're a Christian and they see that you're just making it from paycheck to paycheck. You're just barely getting by. What testimony is that to God in your life? Don't you realize that it makes God look like a poor provider? Don't you know you should be living the life that all the world will envy? So that they'll see that God is a great king and that His kids are well provided for and so forth.

That was a very common thing to hear preached in the 70s when I was a young minister. But there was something that just didn't sit right with me about it. I thought, okay, I am a child of the king, that's true, but so is Jesus.

And He said He had not where to lay His head. Jesus, when He wanted to make a point from a coin, He had to borrow a penny and say, whose face is on this coin? Jesus, it didn't look to me like He was living the way that most princes of the world live. And likewise the apostles.

Paul said, you know, I think God has set us apostles last. You know, at the bottom rung. You know, we're in nakedness, we're in hunger, we're homeless.

You know, didn't sound like the description of what your quintessential princely lifestyle would be. And what I came to realize was, oh yeah, okay, I am a child of the king, but I have another role too. The king is at war and his sons are on the field in the trenches.

This is the war. I am a child of the king and my destiny is to, when the war is over, to go back and live in the palace. In the meantime, I'm in the trenches.

I'm supposed to endure hardship like a soldier would. Not to demand a life of luxury for myself. For me to demand a life of luxury for myself today is to renounce my calling as a soldier in the trenches.

There is a life of luxury that I anticipate when the war is over. It's not time, however, for

me to take an early discharge so that I can be comfortable here. This life is exceedingly short.

Eternity is exceedingly long. Paul said, if we have hope only in this life, then we are of all men most miserable. What a thing to say if he was living like a king.

Kings don't seem very miserable. Paul seemed very miserable. He said, if in this life only we have hope in Christ, then we are of all men the most miserable.

Would you say that? Are you among the most miserable of the people you know? Now, I'm not saying you have to be. I'm not saying that you have to make yourself miserable. Paul didn't say, bring hardship on yourself.

He said, endure hardship. It comes to you. You don't have to go looking for it if you're living for Christ.

For one thing, the Scripture says, all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. You say, well, I'm not suffering any. Well, put it together then.

You know, two plus two equals what? If you're living godly in Christ Jesus, not everybody's going to be happy with you. Jesus said, woe unto you when all men speak well of you. And so be prepared to suffer.

Let me show you a cross-reference from Peter on that point about enduring hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Over in 1 Peter 4, the opening verses. 1 Peter 4, starting with verse 1. Peter said, therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves.

That's soldiery imagery there. That's what a soldier does. He arms himself, right? He's got to be armed.

Arm yourselves also with the same mind. What mind? Well, the mind of Christ who suffered in the flesh. Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind.

For he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. Now, what's that mean? Well, you don't understand that last line until you read the remaining verses. I've met a lot of people who tried to expound, he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

They've tried to make sense of that without reading the rest of the paragraph. He expounds it in the rest of the paragraph. Until then, you can get really confused.

Because I've suffered in the flesh, but have I ceased from sin? I mean, am I sinless? Well, here's what he means by that. That person who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men. That he's not living to please men anymore, but for the will of God.

For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles. That's the deal. We're suffering persecution from the pagans because we're not living to please them anymore.

We have ceased from that. We've ceased from a life of sin, and because of that we're suffering. That's what he's saying.

When he says, he that suffers in the flesh has ceased from sin, what he's saying is the reason you're suffering persecution as you are is because of your decision you made to stop living in sin. You no longer see it as your duty to please men, to live for the lusts of men, but you're doing the will of God. That time of the past of our life, that was enough time doing the will of the Gentiles.

That shouldn't be our concern at all. To please men should not be even one of the items on our agenda. Paul said in Galatians 1.10, if I were still seeking to please men, I could not be the servant of Christ.

He said, I would not be the servant of Christ if I was seeking to please men. You've got to make up your mind. Whose pleasure do you want? Now, a lot of people say, well, you can't please everybody, so you've got to please yourself.

Well, that's the wrong answer. It's true you can't please everybody, so you might as well not try doing that. But you're one of the people that you can't always please, and you shouldn't necessarily try that either.

In Romans chapter 15, I think it's the first verse Paul says that we should, where there's people whose wishes interfere with our happiness and so forth, we should defer to them. We who are strong should bear with the infirmities of the weak. That means defer to their sensitivities and so forth, even though it cuts into our freedom.

He says, and not please ourselves, even as Christ did not please himself. We're not here to please ourselves. We're here to please, as it says over in 2 Timothy 2, him who called us to be a soldier.

No man that woe'th entangles himself in the affairs of this life, like trying to make oneself comfortable or happy, or necessarily trying to make other people happy. You're on a commission, and your duty is to only please the person that commissioned you, and who is still your superior in this war. You need to see your role in this world the way Paul said we need to see it.

I am not here to enjoy, I mean, I'm not saying there's anything wrong with enjoying, but that's not what I'm here for. I'm not here for the purpose of enjoying the fruits of the Lamb. I'm here to continue the campaign to take the Lamb for God.

The campaign is a spiritual war where we are seeking to bring every man's thoughts into

captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10, verses 4 and 5. And so this is what we're up to. This is what we're here for. Now, I have lived as a civilian in the natural sense, of course, all my life.

I've never been in the armed services. If I went into the armed services, it'd take a tremendous adjustment in my thinking. For one thing, I'd have to have a tremendous adjustment in my thinking before I would allow myself to go into the armed services.

But if I could do that, and many Christians are able to do that, if I could go into the armed services, an additional adjustment, I think, would have to take place. And that is that before I went into the service, I was at my own liberty. I could start a business, I could work for someone else, I could get married, I could live over here, I could live in Florida, I could live wherever I want, I could do whatever I want because I'm a free man.

When I enter the military, I'm no longer free. I have some freedoms, but most of the ones I just mentioned, I'm really not that much at liberty to do. I can't choose where I'm going to live for the next whatever years I'm in there.

My meals, a lot of things, the time I wake up in the morning, what I do with my day, a lot of that is all going to be decided for me. And I've got to change my whole way of thinking. I've got for the next three, four years or however long I'm in the service, I've got to think always of what do they want me to do, not what do I want to do.

What am I expected to do? What is the objective here? Are we going to war? What are the objectives of the battle? Who's the enemy? How am I to keep myself always in the place that my commander wants me to be to accomplish what he wants me to accomplish? Anyone who wars does that. That's what Paul says. No man who wars entangles himself in the affairs of this life so that he might please him who called him to be a soldier.

And Paul is saying that's what you need to be. That's got to be your mentality. You're not here to decide all these kinds of things as a free person.

You are free in one sense. You've been set free from sin. But you are now a slave of righteousness, it says in Romans 6. You're now a servant of God.

You're now here to do the will of God, not your own will. So, think like a soldier. Be like a soldier.

Also, he says, be like an athlete in verse 5. Anyone who competes in athletics, he's not crowned unless he plays by the rules. Well, okay, you've got to... there's a crown that you want. There's a wreath.

Now, when he talks about athletics, he's got the Olympic Games in mind here, as he does also when he speaks about the same subject over in 1 Corinthians 9. The Olympic

Games were a very prominent interest in the pagan world in those days. Christians didn't believe in participating in them, and godly Jews didn't believe in it either. Many of the godly Jews, the Hasidim, were scandalized when Israel became so paganized that they actually built a Colosseum in Jerusalem.

And many of the young Jewish boys who were not very pious actually began to run in the races there. The older Jewish people who feared God realized that that was a real mark of corruption. Now we build gymnasiums in our churches.

But anyway, I'm not saying... but they did run naked in those days, and that might have something to do with it too. We don't do that in our gymnasiums in our churches. But the point here is that Paul did see something in the commitment of athletes that paralleled something in the attitude of the Christian who's thinking as he should be.

Over in 1 Corinthians 9, beginning at verse 24, Paul said, Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is self-controlled in all things. Or temperate is what the King James says in the New King James.

It means self-controlled. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown. But we are running for an imperishable crown.

Therefore I run thus, not with uncertainty. Thus I fight, not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified or cast away.

King James says. Once again, we have Paul appealing to the athletic analogy. In 2 Timothy, he says, you know, people who run in a race, they want to win the crown.

They want to win the prize. They might even be so eager to win the prize that they're tempted to cheat. But if they do cheat, they don't get the prize.

Even if they cross the line before all the other runners, if they cut across the field to do it and don't keep the rules, they don't get the prize. The only way you win is by staying strictly in accord with the rules of the race. And God wants you to run the race, as it were.

One of the songs we sing when we see Christ said something like, so boldly run the race. Okay, we do need to boldly run the race. We need to run it with other godly characteristics too.

We need to run the race we're in with the determination that befits those who are seeking an imperishable crown. Again, Paul does this all the time. He holds before us the contrast between that which is time-bound and that which is eternal.

These athletic champions in the Olympics, they are running for a corruptible crown. Now, these days they get gold medals and silver medals and stuff, and those don't corrupt quite as fast. In Paul's day, the runners were actually getting a crown which was made out of leaves, branches and leaves, a wreath.

Now, no matter what you do that, unless you're going to encase it in bronze like you do your baby's shoes, those leaves are going to fall off in a very short time. It doesn't matter. Just the twigs there that remain on your mantle after the leaves are gone, that reminds you, I won.

But what a worthless thing it is that you've won. The thing you won isn't even the same anymore. It's perished.

But Paul says these people who are running for a crown that's going to just disappear, it's temporary, they look at the effort they put in. Look at the temperance they exhibit. I mean, if you ever see men who are seriously trying out for a triathlon, they're in training for a triathlon or for that race up in Spokane that a lot of the brothers run in.

What's it called again? I haven't been here long enough to know these local customs. But, you know, Keith, are you in training yet for Bloomsday? Yeah, see, I mean, that's a few months off, isn't it? Yeah, when you know that you're going to be competing and that you're going to want to win something, and you know, okay, not everybody wins this thing, all run, but only one obtains the crown, then you know that, you know, unless I'm just naturally so gifted that everybody else pales by comparison, I'm going to have to work mighty hard to win that crown. I'm going to have to curtail my normal eating habits.

I might have to curtail my normal sleeping habits or change them. I might have to even change my... Well, I'm certainly going to change my habits about what I do with my free time, because I have to be out there running in my free time instead of watching TV, vegetating. I'm going to have to get myself into shape.

I'm going to have to reorganize my whole life around this goal of winning this one competition. Now, they do it for a corruptible crown, but Paul says we're running for something that the reward we get will last forever. Is that worth it? We need to reorganize our whole life.

We need to be temperate in all things. That means we need to exercise self-control. The other people around who aren't running this race, or even some who say they are, they may be indulging in all kinds of worldly things that interfere with their spiritual victory, but you don't have to be like them.

Think like an athlete. Think like a soldier. Think like one who has one objective in mind, and that is to win this prize and to forsake everything else that's necessary to do so.

Jesus said in Luke 14, 33, He says, unless you forsake all that you have, you cannot be my disciple. That doesn't necessarily mean you have to actually get rid of everything. Forsaking means to renounce.

You renounce your ownership of it, and in some cases, you actually divest yourself of some of it, if God wants you to. But the point is, everything has got to be on the altar. Everything has to be re-evaluated.

You don't say, well, I'm a Christian now, and I guess I just won't go out and go to parties and drink and get drunk like other people do, but I'm still going to hold on to my worldly entertainment and my worldly goals, and the way I spend my money is still my issue, not God's. No, those things don't work. Everything has to be restructured, so that everything in your life is devoted to the one thing of winning that prize.

That's what Paul said. If earthly athletes do that, and what they get is of such non-abiding value, how much more, he says, should I... Well, Paul says, here's what I do. He says, I run thus, not with uncertainty.

Thus I fight, not as one who beats the air. I'm not just beating... I'm not shadow boxing. I've got real enemies here, not imaginary ones.

He says, I discipline my body and bring it under subjection. Now, he's not talking about actually jogging and building up his ability to run physically. He says, I discipline my body.

He means, I do not allow my flesh to determine what I'm going to do today. The things I want, the lusts of the flesh are not going to be the things that are going to govern me today, because I care about this race more than maybe some others do. You cannot decide, you young people and adults alike, you cannot decide how you will live your life by the way the other Christians around you are doing it.

If there are godly Christians around you, they're more godly than you, more power to you, they can inspire you, they can create an accountability, a standard for you to try to measure up to. But in all likelihood, if you get serious about running this race, you'll find that most of the Christians that you meet are not as serious. And they may be doing many things that you're not sure you should do.

They might be going to movies a lot. Now, does the Bible say you can't go to movies? No, I never read anything in the Bible against going to movies. But I do read in the Bible that I need to direct everything in my life toward the goal of pleasing Him who called me.

So the issue is, should I watch a movie today? Should I watch TV today? Well, is there anything else I could do that might please God more than that? Is there anything I could do that might change me more into the image of Christ than doing that would do? Well, but everybody's watching as much TV as I do. In fact, most Christians I do watch a lot

more than I watch. So what? Others may.

You cannot. If you want to win, they may not want to win as much as you do. And Paul says you've got to want to win.

Don't worry about what others are doing. I mean, you need to be concerned about them. But don't let what they're doing set a standard for you.

When you stand before God on the Day of Judgment and He's handing out His commendations and His rebukes, He's not going to say, you know, you did a lot better than a lot of those people around you. He's not even going to make reference to them. They're not going to be in the picture at all.

It's just going to be you and Him. And He's going to measure you against Jesus Christ, not against the other Christians in the church. Don't fall into the trap of allowing the standards that other Christians are willing to live by to become the standard by which you judge your own Christianity.

Whether you look down on them because you're doing better or up to them because they're doing better, look to Jesus and that's the goal. We're looking unto Jesus and we're running this race with patience. He is the goal.

To be like Him is the goal. There's also that statement about the farmer. And with that, I'm going to close it.

We're told to be like soldiers and like athletes and like farmers. Paul said that he was like a farmer. He and Apollos both.

Paul said he came to Corinth and he planted seed. That means he preached the gospel and some people got saved and the church was started. Apollos came after and watered the seeds.

That means Apollos came after Paul was gone and preached some more and the church grew. The crop increased. Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a sower sowing seeds.

The seed is the word of God. But sowing seeds may not sound too hard to some of us. I've never really gone out with a bag of seeds and thrown seeds.

Some people here, I'm sure, have done it. Some may make their living doing that. I've never done it.

It doesn't sound like it takes that much exertion. I guess maybe if the bag is pretty heavy, it could. But sowing seeds isn't all there is to it.

There's also the tending the young plants. Making sure they get watered through the summer. Making sure that the weeds don't come up.

Jesus talked about the different kinds of ground and the produce that they bring forth because of the presence or absence of weeds and thorns and thistles and appropriate depths of soil and things like that. If you haven't broken up the fallow ground, if you haven't sown the seeds, if you haven't watered the seeds, if you haven't guarded them from the predators, the birds and the weeds and so forth, then that's not going to produce any fruit. That's what the parable Jesus tells us.

We've got to be like farmers. It's more than just tossing seeds out. It's tending a crop.

And it's just like a runner seeks to win a prize. The farmer seeks a crop. And Jesus said, in this my Father is glorified that you bring forth much fruit.

Once again, the spiritual fruit that God wants from us, it doesn't just pop up just because we happen to wake up and breathe through another day. It has to be cultivated. And you will bear fruit.

Paul said in Galatians 6, Be not deceived, whatsoever a man sows, that will he reap. If you sow to the spirit, you're going to reap of the spirit eternal life. If you sow to the flesh, you're going to reap of the flesh corruption.

The things you do in any given day are sowing and tending a crop of some kind, your spiritual life and the spiritual life of others around you. And the way you spend your time, the choices you make are either going to sow to the flesh and encourage a fleshly crop and make it all the harder to get a spiritual crop out of there, or they're going to sow to and encourage a spiritual crop. And you need to be patient.

Paul said the long, hard-working farmer must be the first to take part in the fruits. Now, I don't want to go into specifically how Paul's applying that to the ministry Timothy's in. It's sufficient to say that he expects Timothy to be a hard-working farmer.

There will be fruit. He'll get to partake of it. But, like any farmer, it says in James, The husband waiteth, that is the farmer, husbandman, he waiteth for the fruit of the earth.

He has long patience for it until he receives the early and the latter rain. The farmer works a long time before he gets a crop. Many of us have never farmed, me included.

When I want fruit, I just run down to the market and I get it the same day. If I want it now, I only have to wait as long as it takes me to drive to Grangeville or maybe down to the harvester's store. And I can get what I'm hungry for.

Not everyone, certainly in biblical times, had that luxury. They had to grow it. They had to wait for it.

And there's still people who are doing that now. That's why I can go to the store and get it. Because there are people who are patient and hard-working and growing that fruit.

And he says that's what you have to be like. Like the one who's putting in that effort. The one who's waiting patiently, looking for that harvest.

And so these are a number of the things that Paul told this young man, Timothy. Obviously, as we look at them, we think, those of us who are old men, we think, well, you know, I can't see how that applies to young people any more than it applies to me. It applies to us all.

But it certainly is a word that is most valuable to young people because they have the opportunity of having most of their choices yet to be made in life. And these things that Paul tells us that would govern the choices we make, the earlier we can apply these, the fewer choices we'll live to regret. And so, I guess my word to the young here is that, don't think, well, when I'm my father's age, I guess I'll get as serious about God as he is.

Or my mother's age. Your father and your mother no doubt wished that they were as serious about God as they are now. When they were your age.

And you might think, well, I don't see how that can be so important yet. Until I get older, closer to death, like my parents. You know, they're on death's door practically.

In their late forties. But a wise child will look ahead just like a wise adult will and say, you know, what things that I can do right now are going to be things that forever I'll be glad I did. Rather than I'll be glad now that I'm doing them.

Like a soldier, like an athlete, like a farmer, you work, you sweat, you're in the trenches, you exercise temperance and self-control and self-denial. Someday you get a crown. Someday the war is over and you move into the palace.

Someday there's a harvest and you get to eat the fruit. But you've got to not be too impatient about it. It is your whole lifetime that you're in the battle and on the race.

It was at the end of Paul's life when he spoke of himself as Paul the aged. They said, I have run the good race. I have fought the good fight.

It was over for him. But it's not over for us until it's over. And so until then, we need to have patience.

We need to continue. We need to labor. And we need to make the right choices.

And you're never too young to start doing that. I'm not too young to start doing that.