

“Stay the Course”

2 Timothy 2:1-10

Big Idea: Stay the course; the mission is worth it.

Characteristic of completeness: Disciplined Life

► Video Clip- The Patriot

“Stay the course.” That’s a phrase used throughout this movie to express the idea: Our mission isn’t completed yet. As Mel Gibson is mourning the loss of his second son to this war, he makes the comment, “I have run my course.” And yet, he finds the flag his son has spent months repairing and is again reminded of their mission and the reward that comes when the mission is complete. So he takes that flag and hoists it as a symbol of their mission. Forget for a moment the sappy American patriotism. What he did was inspire and motivate his fellow-soldiers. He inspired them to stay the course. He inspired them to believe that their sacrifice was worth it. Armed with a simple flag and the memory of his sons, he instilled a determination that would not go quietly.

The Bible book of Second Timothy is the last letter Paul wrote before he was executed by Nero. In chapter 1, we learned that God has equipped and empowered us for a mission that he has called us to.

► 2 Timothy 1:6-7 says,

6 “For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.”

At MVBC, our mission is to love God in a way that reaches another generation. And within that mission is an understanding that God has given each of us a divine assignment and the divine ability to carry that assignment out. While we all seek to love God in a way that reaches another generation, we each play a separate yet equally important part in that mission. But Paul ends chapter 1 by describing how he was deserted.

► 2 Timothy 1:15 “You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me...”

This morning we come to chapter 2 and verse 1.

► “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

“You therefore” is an emphatic word that means “you then.” The emphatic “you then” creates a contrast between Timothy and Paul’s deserters from chapter 1. “You therefore” is Paul’s way of saying, “Timothy, don’t you be a deserter too.” Now Paul doesn’t have a flag to wave; he has instead a pen. And in this letter, Paul does what Gibson’s character does in the movie clip we saw this morning. He says to Timothy, “Stay the course.” In fact, that is the big idea of my message this morning. ► Stay the course. And in this section, Paul gives Timothy some very practical principles for “Staying the Course” and the ► word STAY will serve as the basis for our outline this morning.

But let me pause right here for a disclaimer. “Staying the course” is not required to have eternal life. The Bible is very clear regarding eternal life:

► John 6:47 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”

By his death and resurrection, Jesus promises eternal life to anyone who will simply believe him for it. That is it. You can’t earn eternal life by doing good things and you cannot “unearn” eternal life because you haven’t lived right or stayed on course. That is the nature of God’s grace. It isn’t about you; it’s about Him and what he

promised. Jesus required belief; not right living. So as we look at these verses, please don't get confused and think that you must do something to stay "saved" or keep eternal life. That isn't what Paul is talking about, and I want to make sure that is clear before we start.

So how does Paul teach, challenge and motivate us to "stay the course?" Look at verse 1 again...

▶ "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 2:1

The phrase "be strong" is in the present tense in Greek. It means to "keep on being empowered" or strengthened. Paul uses this word 5 other times and all but 1 time refers to God being the provider of strength. For example, later in this letter, Paul describes the desertion of some and writes,

▶ "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me..." 2 Timothy 4:17

And in our text, Paul again ties the strength to the "grace that is in Christ Jesus." When we believe in Jesus for eternal life, God's spirit comes and resides in us.

And even in this letter, Paul reminds Timothy of that truth.

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline."

The salvation, spirit and strength available to us when we believe in Jesus for eternal life is an act of God's grace. God's favor comes to us through one channel: Jesus Christ. We don't earn it or deserve it. And we can be guided by God's Spirit or we can be guided by our own spirit. When we rely on our own devices, we are left with our own strength. When we rely on God's Spirit, we experience God's ▶ supernatural strength.

▶ 1Co 15:10 "I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

▶ Col 1:29 "And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."

I am not sure if that means I can be more effective in the hours I work or that I can get more done or that he will give the strength to work longer. But I am not sure it matters. I think Paul's emphasis is on the supernatural power of God, not on how it is evidenced in our life. We keep being empowered by continuing to rest in the guidance and wisdom of God's Spirit. That's where we experience his grace. Only the Supernatural strength of God will allow us to stay the Course. Everything God asks us to do is based on His strength. Our strength can come and go based on weather or not we ate breakfast or took our vitamins this morning. God's strength is not limited by our physical or mental capabilities. If you think you can do it alone, you most surely will fail.

▶ After Paul tells Timothy to keep being empowered by God, he gives him 2 more commands. We find these commands in verses 2 and 3. And both of these include ▶ teamwork.

▶ 2 Timothy 2:2 "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Timothy had the gift of teaching and had been entrusted with his gift and a block of knowledge. Now Paul wants Timothy to pass that on to others who could in turn pass it on. God's mission requires teamwork and he chooses **us** to pass his message and wisdom on to the next generation. And I believe that applies to each of us, not just Timothy. God has entrusted you with some gifts and skills and experiences that he wants you to pass on. The word *entrust* here means to deposit or commit to one's charge. Wherever you are in your Christian life, someone

deposited or committed to you what they had already learned or experienced. And you have an obligation to do the same.

That's how God designed the system to work. That is how God perpetuates his message to the world. That is how He grows his church. Working together as a team helps us stay the course.

► Paul's next teamwork command comes in verse 3.

3 "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

"Suffer hardship with me" comes from one Greek word that means "to suffer with or suffer together." This word is only used twice in the NT and both times it is in this letter to Timothy.

In 2 Timothy 1:8, Paul writes,

"...but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,..."

"Join with me in suffering" is our same Greek word. While chapter 1's reference to suffering seems to indicate what we should suffer for, chapter 2's reference to suffering seems to indicate how we should suffer: as a good (or commendable) soldier would suffer." And like Timothy, each of us will suffer hardship. It is the nature of life. Sometimes it may be for our faith, and sometimes it won't. Sometimes those hardships are caused by our own actions. Sometimes they are caused by other people's actions. Some hardships are God testing our faith. But suffering and hardship is a part of this life. And it doesn't matter if you are a Christian or not. But, as a Christian, as a soldier of Jesus Christ, as a person who has the help of God's Spirit, we can suffer differently than those who aren't believers. And the expectation is, "stay the course"- even when we suffer. And one main reason we can stay the course through suffering is because we don't suffer alone. One author writes this about the Roman army. "The core of the Roman legion consisted of heavily armored infantry. Disciplined and well trained these soldiers fought in closed ranks. At every level the men of a legion fought together toward ultimate victory. In contrast most of the armies Rome faced were warrior based where each man fought for personal glory. This combination of superior organization and disciplined armored infantry gave the Romans a tremendous advantage in battle." Soldiers don't suffer alone. They are part of a unit; they fight together; they stick together; they never leave a fallen soldier behind. When one soldier suffers, every soldier suffers. Suffering alone can be discouraging, debilitating, and unhealthy. It can cause depression, anxiety and a host of physical problems. But that wasn't God's design. His design was that we suffer as a team.

1 Corinthians 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it;

When we suffer together, it helps us be good soldiers. That is, it helps us stay the course.

► So, staying the course requires supernatural strength from God and teamwork. But staying the course also requires an ► attitude. In the next 3 verses, Paul gives 3 metaphors to further explain how to "Stay the course." Let's look at this first metaphor.

► 4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."

► Watch this- Patriot clip 2.2

“I’ve done nothing and for that I am ashamed.”

In the clip, Mel Gibson’s character is torn between raising his family and fighting for “the cause” with his son. And this tension has been building throughout the movie as Gibson’s character struggles with the principle in this verse.

“Soldier in active service” actually comes from a Greek word that means to war or struggle or battle or fight.

“Entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life” means what it sounds like. A soldier in war is single-minded: pleasing his commanding officer; it’s his duty. Since Paul described us as “soldiers of Christ Jesus” in verse 3, it seems obvious that Jesus is the One who enlisted us as soldiers. He is the One who gives us our mission. He is the one we strive to please. A soldier’s duty is to obey- one command at a time- one day at a time or one hour at a time. And our life as believers isn’t much different. God does not show us the game plan for our life. But we know it includes some victories, some defeats, some courage, some fear, some tension and some peace. When we are focused on doing what God has asked us to do right now, we please him. And it is usually one day at a time. Consider a soldier who kept asking his commanding office for next week’s assignment in a war. Yet, we do that to God all the time.

In James 1, James writes that a double-minded man cannot expect to receive anything from the Lord.

► 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,
8 being a ^(A)double-minded man, ^(B)unstable in all his ways.

A divided allegiance makes one a poor soldier. I have never been in a physical battle, but I know I don’t want to be with someone who isn’t committed to following orders.

“Staying the Course” means you are single focused on doing what God has gifted you or called you to do. A divided allegiance, by its very nature will keep you from staying the course. Our attitude should be one of single-minded focused loyalty to do what God has called us to do. This doesn’t mean we don’t get married or have families or get jobs. The question is, “Is that what God has for me?” The focus is on pleasing God, not fitting God into our plans.

Paul’s next metaphor is found in verse 5.

► 5 Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

In First Century Rome, athletic contests were popular. To compete, an athlete had 2 sets of rules to follow. First, every sport had a set of rules that one must follow. But in addition, athletes had rules for training. To compete in the Games, athletes were required to spend at least 10 months in strict, disciplined training. It is unclear which rules Paul is referring to, but I am not sure it really matters. Paul’s emphasis is more about the prize. When competing, when battling, when staying the course- there is a prize for those who follow the rules and no prize for those who don’t.

The word for prize in this verse actually means crown and Paul uses this metaphor often to indicate a crown we will receive in heaven.

So, what are the rules one must follow to win the crown? The phrase “according to the rules” is one word that means “lawfully or properly.” The crown comes when you compete or battle lawfully. That is, you stay the course. You keep doing what God has called you to do.

► James 1:12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Persevere here means to remain, not to recede or flee. I think this is one of the times we may have to do what we know instead of what we feel. As Jeff mentioned last week, Jesus grows our faith in the storm. It is never fun in the midst of the storm. Oftentimes you can't see over the next wave. So we are forced to live by what we know, instead of how we feel.

► 1 Corinthians 9:25 describes it this way

Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath (*our same word for crown*), but we an imperishable.

Self-control is an attitude that helps us stay the Course. When the pain comes, self-discipline is what helps us stay the course. Many athletes push the limits of their bodies to attain a little medal. If they only trained when they felt like it, they would not succeed at athletics. Athletes do this for a medal or fame. How much more should we who are working for an imperishable, eternal crown. We need an attitude of self-control that propels us through the pain.

But self control also keeps us on course when things are going well. How many of you saw the snowboarder crash near the finish line a few weeks ago at the Winter Olympics. She had a several second lead for the gold medal. On the last jump before the finish line, she did one of these showboating things, landed wrong and crashed. She got up and back on the course in time to watch the 2nd place snowboarder pass her and claim the gold medal. We need self control when things are going good and when they aren't. Self control is an attitude that forces us to follow the rules, to do the right thing, to endure well; it is the attitude that leads to action that keeps on the right course.

Then we get to Paul's third metaphor. We find it in verse 6.

► 6 The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.

"Hard-working" means to grow exhausted. And when he does, he gets to reap the benefit of his crops. The one who stays the course is the one who works hard trusting that the crop will come. Farming is hard work. But that hard working doesn't have an immediate reward. There is no instant gratification. He just goes out and works hard. And "staying the course" in the Christian world is much like the farmer. We don't do it for the instant gratification. Sure, I think most farmers get some gratification from a hard day's work. And so might we. But he does it for the reward. And so should we. We may get some gratification in this life, but just like the athlete, the farmer works hard now so he can enjoy later. Staying the course means working hard at what God has called you to do.

► 2 Timothy 4:7-8 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day;"

Again, it is an attitude- a work ethic- that leads to certain actions that help us stay the course.

► Then in verse 7, Paul writes this,

7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Now, I don't know about you, but to me that sounds a lot to me like, "I know this doesn't make any sense, so ask God." And I think that is the point. How this gets applied to your life depends on where you are in life. "Consider" means to ponder, think on, to perceive with the mind. "Understanding" means to bring or set together. By thinking about these things, God can bring them together to give you understanding as to your part.

Maybe you don't rest in the supernatural strength God has given you.

Or maybe you haven't been willing to join the team. You're sitting on the sidelines watching.

Or maybe you need an attitude adjustment.

Maybe there are more important things in life than what God desires for you.

Or maybe you lack self control in some areas.

Or maybe you are lazy when it comes to spiritual matters.

All of these things are personal matters between you and God. Only He can give you understanding in this regard. Staying the course is more than, "I will when I feel like it." Did Paul actually expect Timothy to "Stay the Course" out of duty? I think so. A soldier, an athlete, a farmer- they all have an attitude that leads them to the right actions, even when they don't feel like obeying or training or working hard again. Sometimes we need to do the right thing, even when the right thing goes against what we feel like doing.

► And that brings me to the Y in stay. And that is what it represents- ► why? Why does Paul want us to stay the Course? Look at the next 3 verses.

► 8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, ► 9 for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.

► 10 For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.

► Why did Paul stay the course? Why did he tell Timothy to stay the course? Why does he want us to stay the course? ► Because the missions worth it. I think I'd like to amend my big idea: ► Stay the course; the mission's worth it. To bring God's message of salvation and eternal life to those whom God has chosen to hear it.

So does Paul expect us to "Stay the Course?" The answer is yes.

By supernatural strength, teamwork, attitudes that lead to actions and a mission designed by God, we can and should "Stay the Course; the missions worth it"

As the worship team comes back and plays a song, I ask you to consider verse 7

7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Ask God how you can "Stay the Course" or maybe even get back on course because the mission is worth it.