**How To Study the Bible**

**Pastoral Epistles**

**2 Timothy 2:1-7**

**What is your favorite sport and why?**

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2 Timothy 2.1. What exactly does it mean to be strong in grace?

Because of his natural timidity, Timothy needs to be exhorted and encouraged to stand fast and to be strong (1 Tim. 4:11f.). The source of this strength is not to be looked for in Timothy himself, but in Jesus Christ who strengthens all his servants for all their tasks (Phil. 4:13). An honest acceptance of our own weakness is the way to experience Christ’s enabling power (2 Cor. 12:9f.). — Milne, D. J. W. (1996). 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus. Focus on the Bible Commentary (144). Scotland; Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications.

2 Timothy 2.2 is a classic. How would you paraphrase this teaching?

I take a bit of an exegetical leap in my interpretation of 2 Timothy 2:2. I think it has the force of a command. Paul is not only giving Timothy a command, but, by example, he is giving the rest of us a command as well. He is commanding every teacher to take the stuff they heard when they were a student and teach others. In that group of others, find a Timothy who can take that stuff to still others.

By way of example, I think it is true of every other spiritual gift as well. People who have the gift of mercy are to scope out others who have the gift of mercy and teach them what they know. People who have the gift of administration are to recruit and disciple other administrators. People who have a gift for hospitality need to reproduce other hospitality people.

The process of reproduction works on every level. It works on the small group level where little platoons reproduce little platoons. It works on the congregational level as congregations give birth to new congregations. It works on the individual evangelism level. It works on the level of inreach leaders recruiting other inreach leaders. There is some evidence to support the idea that it even works on denominational levels; that the hope of the next generation is in new denominations; that the next generation will not be reached by the denominations of their parents. — Josh Hunt. Enjoying God.

This verse speaks to the dream of growing and dividing groups. Where would this group be in 20 years if we doubled every two years or less?

How many people do you think a group of ten could reach in ten years by doubling every eighteen months?

It is an important question, because in a group of ten, it won’t look like much. In fact, someone will have to be measuring very carefully to see if the group is, in fact, growing at all at this rate. If your group was growing at this rate and I asked you how your group was doing, you might say to me, “It is doing well. We are rocking along. We have a few new people. It is going well.” What you would not say is something like this: “It is amazing! We are in the midst of a huge revival and many are coming to faith in Christ! God is doing an amazing, incredible, unprecedented work!”

But, the truth is, you are in fact in the middle of an amazing movement. Project it out. Imagine that a group is able to grow and divide, grow and divide, grow and divide, and they do this consistently over a ten year period of time. How many people could a group of ten reach in ten years by doubling every eighteen months? Let’s work it out.

Start 10 people

1.5 years 20 people

3 years 40 people

4.5 years 80 people

6 years 160 people

7.5 years 320 people

9 years 640 people

10 years 1000 people

You can reach a thousand people for God by giving yourself to a small group–a Sunday School class or a home group that doubles every eighteen months. — Josh Hunt. The Amazing Power of Doubling Groups.

What keeps groups from growing and dividing?

Reproduction is painful. It is painful on any level. It is painful on the physical level, and it is painful on the spiritual level. On a spiritual level, it is painful because of the pain of saying good-bye. When we create new groups, we must say good-bye. Saying good-bye is the highest price we ever pay in church growth. But it is necessary in order to punch the Devil’s face. We must grow and reproduce and grow and reproduce and grow and reproduce. In order to reproduce, we have to be willing to say good-bye.

Saying good-bye is difficult because we really do love people. Heck, we not only love them, we actually like them. We enjoy them. We have them into our homes. We go bowling together. We have come to enjoy God together. And it hurts, it really hurts to say good-bye to such friends. As well it should. — Josh Hunt. Enjoying God.

Verse 3. What do soldiers know about Christian living that the rest of us might not know?

If people are not involved in the war for souls, it is because they do not see themselves as soldiers of the cross. “Who are you?” must always come before, “What do you do?” One might say, “I am a plumber, I work with pipes,” or, “I am an engineer, I build bridges,” or “I am a writer, I craft words into meaning.” Being must proceed doing. If people are not doing right, we do well to start from the inside out. By helping people to embrace the right identity, they will almost automatically come to live rightly.

There are several things that every soldier knows. Soldiers never get confused, for example, and get to thinking that this whole deal is supposed to be a picnic. They do not complain about the quality of the food rations or that their sleeping bag is a bit moist from the rain. They understand. There is a war going on and that is the way it is. This is war, not Disney Land.

Soldiers know who the enemy is. They never confuse the enemy with a friend. They are never tempted to become palsy-walsy with the enemy. He is the enemy. Soldiers don’t do that. They never, never confuse their fellow soldiers with the enemy. Then never use any of the weapons against their fellow soldiers, or try to hurt their fellow soldiers. No matter if their fellow soldiers are brusk or rude or have some distasteful habits. They understand that they are fellow soldiers with a common enemy. It does no good to hurt anyone on our side. Personalities are not an issue. We have a war going on.

Soldiers never get confused about their objective. Bullets are flying overhead. Soldiers hands clinch tightly around the weapon they hold. The smell of gunpowder is in the air. All these are constant reminders of the reality that there is a war going on. We have a glorious cause that we are involved in. It is the consuming passion of our lives. For many, this cause means life and death.

How different this is than the mind set of the bureaucrat. How different the life of those whose occupation is that of shuffling paper from the life of the soldier. The life of the soldier is full of constant exhilaration. Rockets flying overhead and hand grenades going off nearby have a way of keeping the adrenalin level high. Soldiers live with the constant rush of adrenalin.

The Bible teaches that we are soldiers: “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please his commanding officer.” (II Timothy 2:3, 4) We sing, “Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war.” How many of us, however, really see ourselves as soldiers?

We often recruit people to the battle on the basis of, “Will you please. . .” and “It is really not all that much trouble.” War is trouble. Far better simply to teach people to see themselves as soldiers and then ask them, “How goes it in your section of the battle? How goes the battle for souls of men?” We must begin on the inside. Identity always determines behavior. — Josh Hunt. Disciplemaking Teachers.

What is the opposite of a solider mentality?

Let me take the gloves off and get right to it. We have too many crybabies in the so-called Christian army. We will never win the world with crybabies. We will never win the race with crybabies. We will never punch the devil’s face with crybabies. — Josh Hunt. Enjoying God.

Verse 4. What exactly does it mean to get entangled in civilian affairs?

Paul now extended the soldiering analogy further: “No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer” (v. 4). Perhaps he was referring to the Roman code of Theodosius: “We forbid men engaged in military service to engage in civilian occupations.” Whether this is the case or not, his spiritual application is perfectly clear: “A good soldier of Christ Jesus” (v. 3) has single-minded devotion to Jesus Christ, the “captain of … salvation” (Hebrews 2:10, KJV). Single-mindedness, the ability to focus, to shut everything out when necessary, is the key to success in virtually every area of life. It is the essential ingredient of the manic virtue of basketball heroes Michael Jordan and Tim Duncan or of golf great Jack Nicklaus or the creative musical genius Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

But here the focus is not a basketball rim, a flag fluttering on a distant green, or a musical score—it is Christ himself and how to please him. The single-minded disciple is in the world, but he does not get “entangled” (literal translation) in the world. He avoids anything that will hinder single-minded dedication to his Master. Paul put it this way to the Philippians: “But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (3:13, 14). Paul was fervent!

Single-minded devotion to a thing (a sport, a philosophy, or a cause) can turn you into a machine. But when it is given to Christ who is perfect God and perfect man, whose commands are consonant with perfect love and wisdom and our highest good, then we become what we ought to be and can stand tall even in suffering.

We must purposely focus on him and willingly join with his followers in suffering hardship like good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Charles Spurgeon expressed the point with such power:

Up, I pray you now. By him whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and yet were wet with tears, by him on whose head are many crowns, and who yet wore the crown of thorns, by him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, and yet bowed his head to death for you, resolve that to life’s latest breath you will spend and be spent for his praise. The Lord grant that there may be many such in this church—good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

— Hughes, R. K., & Chapell, B. (2000). 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To guard the deposit. Preaching the Word (195–196). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Verse 5. What can we learn about Christian living from athletics?

In speaking of an athlete Paul singles out the fact that an athlete strives to win his race fairly. The apostle had often used this picture to speak about the Christian life. He told the Philippians that he pressed on towards the winning post. He forgot everything which was behind him, and he strained towards what was ahead. He did this so that he could ‘win the prize’—that is, the enjoyment of Christ’s presence now, and the glories of heaven in the future. In using this figure Paul is not saying that believers should seek to be selfish and push every other Christian into second, third, fourth or fifth place, as they strive to win the race. He means that we should all live our lives as though winning the applause of God is what matters to us, rather than the cheers of the crowd. — Bentley, M. (1997). Passing on the Truth: 1 & 2 Timothy Simply Explained. Welwyn Commentary Series (231). Darlington, England: Evangelical Press.

What exactly does he mean by “competing according to the rules”?

When it comes to the discipline, integrity, and dedication of the Christian life, the picture of the athlete is very appropriate. Paul is probably thinking of the Greek games—the Olympics—which had their own rules just as sports do today. Today, much is said about the use of drugs in sport, which in effect is breaking the rules. As a result, some athletes have had to return the medal (victor’s crown) they had won—but won by cheating.

For the Christian, there are rules and principles to be observed in daily living. The moral law of the gospel is given to us as a guide for our behaviour. We are in the world, but we are not to be part of it because we follow a different code of conduct. If we fail in seeking to live a holy life, then we have no right to expect God to bless us, or to see our Christian life flourish. This applies especially to the pastor’s ministry. He must obey the rules in preaching the eternal truths of the gospel, and not be content simply to express his own opinions on the problems facing the world. — Williams, P. (2007). Opening up 2 Timothy. Opening Up Commentary (41–42). Leominster: Day One Publications.

Verse 6. What could farming teach us about Christian living?

The image here is not of the man who enjoys working in his allotment or garden as a hobby on summer evenings. It pictures the ‘hardworking farmer’—the man who toils and labours without any thought of the glamour and medals associated with the soldier and the athlete. In Psalm 126, there is a picture of the painful anxious care with which the farmer of ancient times sowed the seed.

‘Those who sow in tears  
will reap with songs of joy.  
He who goes out weeping,  
carrying seed to sow,  
will return with songs of joy,  
carrying sheaves with him’ (vv. 5–6).

This is still true today for those in third world countries where mechanization has not yet been introduced to agriculture. The peasant farmer has to toil endlessly with primitive tools if he or she is to get a share of the crop. The main point of the illustration is all too clear. The Christian cannot expect a fruitful spiritual life without perseverance and effort. In the following quotation, J C Ryle uses the colourful phrase, ‘no gain without pain’.

‘I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no spiritual gains without pains. I should as soon expect a farmer to prosper in business who concerned himself with sowing his fields and never looking at them till harvest, as expect a believer to attain to holiness who was not diligent about his Bible reading, his prayers, and the use of his Sunday. Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them’. — Williams, P. (2007). Opening up 2 Timothy. Opening Up Commentary (42–43). Leominster: Day One Publications.

The farmer receives a share of the crops. What is the “crop” of Christian living?

First, holiness is a harvest. True, it is ‘the fruit (or ‘harvest’) of the Spirit’, in that the Spirit is himself the chief farmer who produces a good crop of Christian qualities in the believer’s life. But we have our part to play. We are to ‘walk by the Spirit’ and ‘sow to the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:16; 6:8), following his promptings and disciplining ourselves, if we would reap the harvest of holiness. Many Christians are surprised that they are not noticeably growing in holiness. Is it that we are neglecting to cultivate the field of our character? ‘Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap’ (Gal. 6:7). As Bishop Ryle emphasizes again and again in his great book entitled Holiness, there are ‘no gains without pains’. For example:

‘I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no “spiritual gains without pains”. I should as soon expect a farmer to prosper in business who contented himself with sowing his fields and never looking at them till harvest, as expect a believer to attain much holiness who was not diligent about his Bible-reading, his prayers, and the use of his Sundays. Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them.’

As Paul puts it here, it is ‘the hardworking farmer’ who has the first share of the crop. For holiness is a harvest.

Secondly, the winning of converts is a harvest too. ‘The harvest is plentiful,’ Jesus said, referring to the many who are waiting to hear and receive the gospel (Mt. 9:37; cf. Jn. 4:35; Rom. 1:13). Now in this harvest it is of course ‘God who gives the growth’ (1 Cor. 3:6, 7). But again we have no liberty to be idle. Further, both the sowing of the good seed of God’s word and the reaping of the harvest are hard work, especially when the labourers are few. Souls are hardly won for Christ, not by the slick, automatic application of a formula, but by tears and sweat and pain, especially in prayer and in sacrificial personal friendship. Again, it is ‘the hardworking farmer’ who can expect good results. — Stott, J. R. W. (1973). Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy. The Bible Speaks Today (56–57). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Is Christian living hard work? How so? What is hard about it?

This notion that Christian service is hard work is so unpopular in some happy-go-lucky Christian circles today that I feel the need to underline it. I have already mentioned that the verb signifies to ‘toil’. Arndt and Gingrich say that it means first of all to ‘become weary, tired’ and so to ‘work hard, toil, strive, struggle’. Both the noun (kopos) and the verb (kopiaō) were favourite words with Paul, and it may be healthy for us to see what strong exertion he believed to be necessary in Christian service.

It goes without saying that the word can be used of manual labour, and Paul applied it to his tent-making. ‘We labour,’ he could write, ‘working with our own hands’ (1 Cor. 4:12; cf. Eph. 4:28; 1 Thes. 4:11). But in his view spiritual work involved exertion too. He was quick to recognize thoroughness in others and sent special greetings at the end of his Roman letter to ‘Mary who has worked hard among you’ and to ‘the beloved Persis who has worked hard in the Lord’ (Rom. 16:6, (12b). Not that Paul expected more of others than he was prepared to give himself. His exertions for the gospel were phenomenal. He could write of ‘labours, watching, hunger’ because, like his Master before him, he was often too busy to sleep or to eat, and could claim in respect of the other apostles, ‘I worked harder than any of them’ (2 Cor. 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:10; cf. Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16). If we were to press him about the nature of this toil, I think he would reply in terms of those two apostolic priorities ‘prayer and … the ministry of the word’ (Acts 6:4). For he alluded in his first letter to Timothy to those elders ‘who labour in preaching and teaching’ (1 Tim. 5:17), and described to the Colossians his ‘toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me’ (Col. 1:29–2:1; cf. 1 Tim. 4:10) in a context which seems to refer to the prayer-battle in which he was engaged on their behalf. — Stott, J. R. W. (1973). Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy. The Bible Speaks Today (57–58). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Matthew 11.30. Didn’t Jesus say his yoke was easy? Is Christian living easy or hard?

As far as I am concerned, this question can be answered either way, depending on what you mean. Experience will teach most people to naturally react that it is difficult, and there are verses that point in this direction. But, Jesus said, “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” ( Matthew 11:30). In my opinion, Christianity is either easy or impossible. It is like good dancing. It requires discipline and practice. But if you are struggling with it, you are probably losing. We serve God best when we enjoy him the most. He is most pleased with us when we are most delighted in him..

Christianity ought to look easy. There ought to be a grace and a poise and a joy in it that makes it easy. This is why the Puritans taught us that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Christianity is at its best when we enjoy it. Yet, it demands everything. We must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. We must give up everything to be Christ’s disciple. So, in a way it is easy and in a way it is hard. — Josh Hunt. Disciplemaking Teachers.