

Ready! Set! Go!
Pictures of Perseverance
2 Timothy 2:3-7

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Text Introduction: We are going through this wonderful book called 2 Timothy which is actually a letter from Paul to Timothy. Paul writes from prison. He is preparing Timothy to take the mantle of leadership. His general theme is a call to perseverance. I am calling this series: Ready, Set, Go. We have learned of a basic foundation of perseverance. We said you must know what you believe, build upon what you believe, and guard what you believe. We learned how that faith is passed on from one generation to another. In fact, we said that it is life's highest calling. Last Sunday, we spoke about some not so obvious keys to perseverance including listening to reliable teachers, leaning on those who refresh us, and learning to reproduce in others what we have learned. This morning, in the text before us, we see 3 pictures of perseverance.

Text: Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the recruiter. ⁵Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops. ⁷Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Introduction: If a picture is worth a 1,000 words then perhaps 3 pictures is worth 3,000 words. As Paul continues to develop his theme of perseverance with Timothy, he uses some word pictures. I think they are useful as we continue to consider what it means to persevere.

3 Pictures:

- A Soldier—A soldier's life then and now is a full-time life. What is interesting is that other philosophers of the first century world had used this soldier analogy to communicate the struggles of life itself. One philosopher said, "Life is a kind of campaign." Another said, "To live is to be a soldier."

Roman soldiers took what was called the *sacramentum militare*—the oath of loyalty to the emperor.

One other thing that is of note that is helpful is that, in these ancient times, the captain was responsible for recruiting his own army. So, you can see why Paul says here all that he does about the soldier.

- An Athlete—At first glance in our English text, we might think that the issue of analogy is in regard to the athlete and his discipline. Or, we might think that it is of "keeping the rules." Actually, Paul employed a phrase that other writers used for the purpose of distinguishing professional and amateur athletes. The Olympic Games had a contract of sorts that indicated

that each participant went into strict training for 10 months prior to the Games. This was a way in which the organizers made sure of the competitive nature of the Games. The “competing according to the rules” seems to directly relate to training.

- A Farmer—The adjective that is used in association is “hard-working.” I spent some time in conversation with a farmer this week. Not for purposes of this sermon, but for other purposes. This man is 84 years old and still works full-time as a farmer. His work ethic inspired me and helped me to understand this analogy.

Now, notice verse 7. ⁷ Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. We always want to do that with Scripture. That’s our goal always, but we sense it a little deeper this morning. What are we supposed to understand through these three pictures?

3 Principles:

I sought to understand the common denominator. I am convinced that it is the compounding nature of these ideas that we are to see rather than isolate a particular lesson from each one. As we do that, we understand several things.

The one who perseveres understands...

- Priorities must be established and followed. The priority of the soldier is to not get entangled in the affairs of everyday life. The priority of the athlete is the same, but also to be fully involved in the competition. The same is true of the farmer. Paul’s point is that every Christian must make Christ and His purposes for your life the priority. There is no such thing as a part-time Christian. The things of God are not things that we do in our spare time. Following Christ is to be the priority of our life.

When Nick Saban was coach of the Miami Dolphins, President George W. Bush was in Miami and wanted to meet Saban. Saban said that he did not have time. That might sound arrogant. Saban said, “It’s not political for me; it’s football for me. It’s my job. My job is to prepare my team to play and I don’t have time to meet the President. Say what you will, but I will say there is a man who has identified his priorities and was sticking to them.

- Paying the Price precedes reaping the reward. It is pretty obvious the price that soldiers must be willing to make. On a lesser level athletes and farmers pay a price to achieve their goals. Jesus said that we are to count the cost.
- Persistence ultimately brings the reward.

Charles Simeon was a pastor in the Church of England from 1782 to 1836 at Trinity Church in Cambridge. He was appointed to his church by a bishop against the will of the people. They opposed him not because he was a bad preacher but because he was an evangelical -- he believed the Bible and called for conversion and holiness and world missions.

For 12 years the people refused to let him give the afternoon Sunday sermon. And during that time they boycotted the Sunday morning service and locked their pews so that no one could sit in them. He preached to people in the aisles for 12 years! How did he last?

In this state of things I saw no remedy but faith and patience (Note the linking of faith and patience!). The passage of Scripture which subdued and controlled my mind was this, "The servant of the Lord must not strive." (Note: The weapon in the fight for faith and patience was the Word!) It was painful indeed to see the church, with the exception of the aisles, almost forsaken; but I thought that if God would only give a double blessing to the congregation that did attend, there would on the whole be as much good done as if the congregation were doubled and the blessing limited to only half the amount. This comforted me many, many times, when without such a reflection, I should have sunk under my burthen. (Charles Simeon, by H.C.G. Moule, p. 39)

Where did he get the assurance that if he followed the way of patience there would be a blessing on his work that would make up for frustrations of having all the pews locked? He got it, no doubt, from texts like Isaiah 30:18, "Blessed are all those wait for the Lord." The word conquered unbelief and belief conquered impatience.

Fifty four years later he was dying. It was October, 1836. On October 21 those by his bed heard him say these words slowly and with long pauses:

Infinite wisdom has arranged the whole with infinite love; and infinite power enables me--to rest upon that love. I am in a dear Father's hands--all is secure. When I look to Him, I see nothing but faithfulness--and immutability--and truth; and I have the sweetest peace--I cannot have more peace. (Charles Simeon, p. 172) (All taken from sermon on the web by John Piper, Piper's Notes.

When these things are part of our lives, we make it. Victory is ours. That constant hope of victory drives us.