

## The Rest of the Sermon

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Several weeks ago, I preached a sermon about the grace of God. I discussed how God's grace saves, transforms, and sustains. However, as some will remember, I lost my voice during that sermon. I preached a condensed version of what I had intended to present. In this article, we will notice the rest of the sermon!

In second Timothy chapter two, the apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to be strengthened by the grace of God (2 Tim. 2:1). God's grace has the power to reinforce our faith when we become weak. Then, Paul offered three illustrations of the effect of God's grace to strengthen Timothy. We will note each of them.

### God's Grace Can...

**1. Strengthen us like a soldier:** "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him" (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

Roman soldiers were an ever-present fixture in the ancient world. They were visible reminders of the power of the Roman Empire. While they were intended to strike fear in the hearts of people, Paul frequently used this image as an analogy for the Christian.

Being a Christian is not an easy life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned about how His followers would become recipients of persecution and injustice. Such hostility would test the commitment of Christians. Therefore, Christians had to be prepared to endure hardships.

God's grace can embolden our strength like a devoted soldier. Soldiers are committed to a set of ideals. They are devoted to their commander and fellow soldiers. They are mission-minded. Therefore, they willingly subject themselves to battle.

God's grace can give us the courage to endure the struggle of life. Grace can keep us focused on the mission at hand. We can advance the Gospel. As Paul writes, soldiers do not get entangled in civilian pursuits. They do not negotiate with the enemy. By God's grace, we serve the One who enlisted us at all cost.

**2. Discipline us like an athlete:** "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules" (2 Tim. 2:5).

Many people view grace as their freedom to sin: they can live without rules. Those who have this view of grace do not know grace. If we believe in the cross of Jesus, how can we live in sin? The cross of Jesus demonstrated God's self-giving love to save us from the penalty of sin. If we grasp the enormity of what God has given us by grace, we will seek to live a new life.

In this passage, Paul uses the image of an athlete. Similar to soldiers, athletes were fixtures of the culture of the Roman Empire. Athletes were trained and well-disciplined. In victory, they were celebrated. Of course, to be given the crown of victory, the athlete had to compete according to the rules of the race. If rules were violated, the athlete would be disqualified from the event.

Likewise, God's grace disciplines us like an athlete. God's grace trains us morally and ethically. In a letter to Titus, Paul wrote, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" (Tit 2:11-12).

Before receiving the grace of God, we lived according to our impulses. We lived without moral restraint. Grace trains us to reign in lust. Grace disciplines the heart and mind. Grace conditions us for the race of life. Grace governs our ethics. And, if we choose to live according to the rules of grace, we will receive the crown of life.

**3. Feed us like a farmer:** "It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops" (2 Tim. 2:6).

Farmers are essential to society. We have food to eat because of what farmers produce. However, no one eats as well as the farmer. The farmer gets the first share of the crops. The farmer is blessed by what he cultivates.

Paul uses the analogy of the farmer to illustrate the transformative and sustaining properties of grace. When grace is sown in our hearts, we are blessed by its fruit. Grace only yields good results in our lives. Grace will give us a fulfilling life and a sustaining hope.

In his letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul wrote about the contrasting results of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Make no mistake: we are sowing something in our lives. To summarize the results of sowing, Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7-8).

### **Conclusion**

On the surface, we might expect the life of a Christian to be easy. Yet, such is not the case. The apostle Peter came to understand the warnings of Jesus when he wrote, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Pet. 4:12). Yet, dealing with persecution and ridicule is not easy. Such can weaken our faith.

Timothy was discouraged in his life. Paul wrote this letter to fan the flame of faith in Timothy (2 Tim. 1:6). To do this, Paul reminded Timothy of God's grace. Faith can only be

strengthened by refocusing on God's grace. Grace can empower us to endure hardships, reshape us morally, and fulfill our sense of purpose.