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No Pain - No Gain
II Timothy 2:3-7

(Pray) God when trials come, when doubts creep in...we become very weak and frail. We are so prone to wander, Lord I feel it..wander from the One we love. We wonder if we will ever feel your presence...we wonder if we will ever experience your power...and yet you continue to woo us, draw us slowly, gently, quietly back to yourself. You promised to be with us always. You promised to carry us through the tough times. God remind us of the future glory. Remind us that one day we will live with you. Give us the strength we need every day to do what we need to do even when we do not feel like doing it. AMEN.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of II Timothy chapter 2. In the Christian life it can be very tempting to feel all alone. It can be tempting to want to drift when doubts and fears creep in. When the enemy start disrupting, confusing, attacking, ridiculing all that I once held true...When the world, the flesh and the Devil all start ganging up on me. It is tempting to want to run away, to go AWOL. to give it all up. When day after day..devotions and time spent in the word continue to be a desert, dry and fruitless...it's easy to give up and sit down on the sidelines. When we sweat and labor and strive..seeing no results, getting no praise...no bright lights...no glamour..no immediate results, it can get pretty discouraging. Maybe there are those who look at you and say, now there is a gal, there is a guy who really has it together, they are outstanding in their field. But deep down you feel desperately alone, terribly inadequate, out standing in your field. Slogging it out in the trenches when it continues to rain on your expectations. Fighting the rain, running the endless miles when it hurts and there is a fire in your side. Sweating in the soil, patiently working hard even when no one is around to applaud. Paul says to Timothy. You....Be....different. If you are hoping to be solid and brave like a soldier. If you want to be victorious like the elite athlete. If you want to enjoy the provision of an effective diligent farmer. Timothy you can't let yourself wallow in apathy and

selfism. You....Be....Different. Being different is not only helpful..it is essential to living a victorious Christian life. Whether you are a pastor or a full-time Christian, and all of us who are believers, fall into one of those two categories.

There are some Word pictures that will cement in our minds the actions and attitudes that it takes to continue strong to the end. Paul who was on his death bed knew those attributes and he wanted Timothy to get it. To understand what it takes when times are difficult. When you don't feel like going on. When everyone around is packing it in and giving up. You Timothy must be different. Listen as I read the three metaphors, or word pictures that Paul shares with Timothy..and we get to listen in. (READ) Pick up in verse 1.

Timothy, Paul says. If you wish to have something worth passing on to others, your children, your friends...you will be different from the rest of the crowd. Here are three word pictures that will help fuse in your mind the qualities you need to pursue. Verse 7 says, "Consider what I say for the Lord will give you understand in everything. JB Phillips translation, "consider these illustrations of mine, counting on God to give insight into the full implications of the teaching." We are to learn from the metaphors, three of Paul's favorite that he uses all through his writings. Taking care that we not stretch them farther than God would want us to. There are things that a soldier does that God does not want us to be about. We are never called to murder the enemy outside a government sanctioned war. But there are many helpful applications for us that we can learn from the dedicated soldier, the determined athlete and the patient hardworking farmer. These three illustrations are given to help keep us on track. We need to be reminded that we are not the only ones in the world that must work hard, endure difficult things, self sacrifice for a greater good. The prize of God does not come to the lazy. No pain, no gain. Jesus said it best, Discipleship comes with a cost. If you wish to be my disciple, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. In fact after these three metaphors on single minded determination toward a goal..the ultimate example of Jesus single-mindedness on a mission is given in the following verses.

The Soldier, the Athlete and the Farmer. all three given so that we may consider, v.7 what we can learn about living the Christian life from

them. To consider here means that we approach this far beyond mere chance. We don't just hope it happens, but take strategic efforts, plan and do it. Most things that are worth while except the free gift of salvation, involve hard work and dedication. The fruit, the victory, the prize of the high calling of God does not reveal itself to the lazy and apathetic. Engage your mind as we unpack these three metaphors together. Be thinking how living a victorious Christian life might be similar to a soldier, an athlete and a farmer.

Look at verse 3 as this morning we explore the word picture of a good soldier. Suffer hardship with me. Paul sees himself as a soldier on the front lines of battle suffering hardship for the cause of Christ 1:8 hear he repeats his invitation to Timothy. We quote the phrase misery loves company..but here we see a team aspect. Don't desert me like the rest Timothy..Don't give up when things become tough. Stand with me. Suffer with me. A good soldier expects to suffer, experience discomfort. He expects some to take some flack. Al Portukalian and I were talking in his garage this last week about World War II and hitting the beaches of those small pacific islands. It was the guys in the first wave that took most of the flack. Those out front expected to be shot at. Those who were involved in the battle could count on expecting resistance. The enemy was firmly entrenched and they were not about to give up ground easily. No one expected it would be easy..they were good soldiers and they kept at the task. Good soldiers don't desert and go AWOL when things get tough. They dig in and fight back. They are not surprised when they encounter resistance from the enemy. They expect it. Timothy you too don't grow soft...expect to be put down at times, expect ridicule, expect to be verbally shot at, passed over, ignored, snubbed and excluded because you are standing strong for God. Tozer said, "Show me an individual, show me a fellowship who is committed to spiritual progress and I will show you where there is strong and immediate defiance by Satan." Those on the front lines will always take the biggest hits. But it is those who are on the front lines that get the most done. Don't let that extinguish your drive...continue to fight for ground. Continue to keep the faith. The soldier must expect to endure hardship, but not alone.

Second thought from this word picture. The good soldier has a different set of priorities. No soldier in active service entangles himself in

the affairs of everyday life. If you were called to serve in Desert storm, in the middle of the initial assault, your commanding officer would not allow you to call home on your cellular phone to see if your wife took out the garbage that Monday morning, or paid the bills. A soldier in the heat of battle has a different set of priorities. My parents told me about going through World War II and they said everyone at home was well aware of what was happening overseas. They blackened the windows at night to minimize the threat of bomber strikes. They endured rations of food, gas and oil. It was all understandable that certain luxuries were not enjoyed because "there was a war going on." Husbands and sons were risking their necks for freedom...we must do everything we can to help the war effort. A good soldier has a different set of priorities.

This war analogy does not negate civilian affairs, this does not mean the Christian should shun all secular work, all hobbies, all sports...but the idea here is focus. We need to be profoundly aware of the mission we are called to, that we are part of a battle for minds and hearts. Christianity is not a playground, it is a battleground. It is the idea of Luke 9 when Jesus called the young man to follow him and he stumbled, hesitated to follow because he was looking back at his old life. If you are a soldier and you are caught looking back, hesitating you are going to get shot in the back of the head. It is the entanglements that diminish our usefulness in God's army.

In our technical age of information explosion we have so many devices to ease our life and remove the toil...but it has not simplified us..we find we can simply do even more and more and more. The things that were invented to simplify have become in some ways temptations to entangle our lives from what is truly important. Instead of providing more time so that we can spend it with people. Those very things sometimes drive us apart. Those very things can become entanglements that drive us away from seeking the presence of God, solitude with Him.

Entanglement. That word holds the idea of a soldier's sword getting caught up in his cloak when he tries to retrieve it for use. II Peter 2:20. I think we as good soldier must be focused on the task at hand and never forget that there is a war going on. We must not be content with the land the enemy has taken over, but intent on recovering lost ground to the enemy. We must begin to do some internal reconnaissance, seeking out

those strongholds where the enemy continues to be dug in, those mountains, those hills, those entanglements that threaten to keep us ineffective and useless in God's army. What are those hills that you need to take back by storm. What are those stronghold in your life that Satan has taken over and uses to control you. Where are those places that you have not experienced freedom in a long time. Is there a hill of bitterness? A mountain of resentment, a valley of fear, maybe a bridge of jealousy, a cliff of hatred. Maybe you need to begin to take back some of that territory right now. Maybe you have been in the cave of yourself, shaking your fist at God, asking Why this, why me, why why why. And that is exactly where the enemy wants you to stay. For when you continue to lick your selfish hurts and pains, and resentments and fears...you will continue to be useless. God wants to reach down, lift us up, dust us off, put the sword back in our hand and have us stop asking the question why God and begin asking the question what now God. Where do I go next? What do you have for me now? What can I learn from what I've just been through. Who can I help? Where is the next hill you want to tackle with me?

Some of those entanglement hills may be things that are basically good things, but for you they are tripping you up, keeping you from following God 100 percent. It could be an occupational pursuit, an investment, a relationship, an interest or hobby could be your entanglement, it could be a habit or activity, it could be your clinging to some past pain, hurt or fear. The disentanglement process will not be easy, expect to encounter resistance and hardship. If you are not sure where those entanglements are? Maybe you should take a look at your calendar, your daytimer, your checkbook. I can tell alot about a person by the way they spend there time and their money. How a person spends what is most important to them will reveal a lot about there priorities in life. Take a look. The good soldier of Christ Jesus has an entirely different set of priorities.

Are you prepared to disentangle yourself from anything? Are you prepared to let God have his way in disentangling you from anything that is hindering you from following Him 100%? There will be certain things we simply cannot be involved in, if we truly want to live a victorious Christian life. Others may...we may not...because it doesn't make any

sense. It does not assist the ultimate mission. It may well be something perfectly legitimate for another person to do, but terrifyingly explosive and damaging for you to be involved in. Paul says in verse 7 Consider what I say, think about it very carefully...for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. If he has just revealed an entanglement hill, you will be wise to begin strategically planning how you are going to take over that hill and once again gain freedom in your life.

A good soldier not only has a different set of priorities, he not only expects to experience hardship and discomfort. A good soldier has a different motivating force. His motivation is to please his commanding officer. In fact, his commanding officer will be different from much of the world around him. Look at the end of verse 4. He avoids entanglements that skew his focus away from the mission at hand...so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. If you are a believer you have been chosen, enlisted, hand-picked by the Great Commander...the God of the Universe. Do you find yourself highly motivated to please, to obey, to love the One who loved you and sacrificed even to the point of death for you? Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind? Is your love for him above all the other loves in your life? If your love is not supreme and incomparable above all the other loves in your life, then you continue, I continue to struggle with areas of entanglement, areas of idols. Anything that may come in priority over your love and obedience to the Great Commander.

Are you motivated with a great desire to respond in obedience to the one who has chosen and loved you unconditionally. The New English Bible translates it, are you "wholly at the commanding officers disposal?"

Those who have endured the rigors of boot camp tell me that there is basically one thing they wish to teach you. Obedience. Complete and immediate obedience. During that 8 to 14 weeks, you are not trained to think for yourself..that comes later. You are trained to obey. No matter how foolish the command appears to be, when your drill sergeant say bark like a dog...you are immediately saying woo, woof. When the sergeant says eat dirt, you are grabbing a spoon asking how much sir! When the sergeant says run 10 miles in full combat gear..your response is to be? (Yes Sir!)

You are trained to carry out orders. All of self must go. Any pride any vestige of the former life, hair, ear rings gone. You now have a new decider in life..that is your drill sergeant. You fear him. But he is being tough on you for a reason..so that you will survive and thrive in the heat of battle. Soft, weak soldiers are the first to get themselves hurt or someone else killed. So the drill sergeant will run you to the point of exhaustion, till you are tired and ragged..till you come to the end of yourself where you are teachable and ready to obey.

While the in the United States army, you are taught to obey solely out of fear. In God's army the motivation of fear is coupled with a strong aspect of love. Unconditional love. We know, by direct example that he loves us so much...that even though we are allowed to go through some very difficult things, hardship, suffering...we know that it will strengthen us and prepare us for future struggles. We know that he will not desert us in the heat of battle but that he has promised. I will never leave you nor forsake you. The good soldier looks to the eyes of his commanding officer for honor. That is the one he desires to please, and our obedience gives our great Commander great pleasure.

Why must we be trained and taught to obey with complete and immediate response? Why must we slog through day after day after day of training, discipline and work? Because in the heat of battle there is no place for a soldier to question his commander. The soldier has a very limited perspective on the total mission, the total view of the battle, the whole plan is not given to the soldier. We don't always get to see the purpose, the answers to our why questions. After the battle it often makes great sense. Oh I see why God allowed me to go through that. Oh I see why he allowed that painful circumstance to occur in my life.

A good soldier looks to a different set of eyes for honor. His motivation is to please his commanding officer. He has taken on a different set of priorities..in fact it's the same set of values and priorities as his commanding officer. A good soldier has a different set of expectations..he expects hardship, he expects it will not be easy. He expects to experience a certain level of discomfort. He realizes that taking back, recovering enemy territory of entanglement hills will not be easy...but it will be worth it. No pain..no gain. If we wish to make a difference we must be different. You therefore my son, be strong...not in

your own effort, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Consider what I say...for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Good Soldiers of God remember there is a war going on. May we all be able to state with Paul in chapter 4 verse 7 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."