



Unit 2: What Matters Most
Session 4: Winners Don't Quit (see pp. 136-139)

The Question: What do I need to remember when I feel like giving up?

The Point: Nothing matters if I don't endure to the end.

Background Passage: 2 Timothy 2

Focal Passage: 2 Timothy 2:4-13

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, "What do I need to remember when I feel like giving up?" and drive home this one truth: Nothing matters if I don't endure to the end.

Focus These Points

The Discipline of Endurance
(2 Tim. 2:4-7)

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy were written as personal letters from Paul to Timothy. The challenges to live a godly life and exercise leadership through his spiritual gifting given to Timothy by Paul have application for all of us. A common misconception is that believers can mature spiritually to the point they are able to live and serve God in the strength of their own Christian commitment and character. The truth is that spiritual maturity means to rely constantly on the Lord to enable us to be and do what He desires. Paul acknowledged this by exhorting Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ. He called Timothy to step up and share the kind of suffering other faithful believers were experiencing, and he reminded Timothy that he was not alone.

The soldier demonstrates loyalty to his recruiter or commander by doing that which pleases him. Paul emphasized the single-minded focus of the soldier who refused to get entangled in the concerns of everyday life. His illustration expresses what Jesus meant in Mark 4:19 about the distractions that choke out fruitful service. (See also Matt. 6:24.) We will not persevere in the service of Christ if we lose sight of His purpose for our lives. The imagery Paul used in verse 4 regarding being entangled can be represented by a sheep that wanders off and gets its wool caught in thorns, unable to free itself. This powerful image represents what can happen when a believer wanders from their commitment to Christ and gets caught up in the affairs and activities of the world.

Paul turned to the world of sports for another illustration of Christian faithfulness. The athlete's goal was to be crowned as the champion of an event. The real prize was recognition of the victory won.

A third illustration is the hardworking farmer who does strenuous, backbreaking, exhausting labor. Planting, cultivation, and harvest require endless planning and effort. Just as farmers are rewarded for tireless efforts, the Lord rewards believers for staying with the tasks of ministry until the work is done. While all three illustrations are different, they all imply the importance of persistence and discipline in holding out for the eventual reward of the faithful followers of Christ.

The Deception of Endurance ***(2 Tim. 2:8-10)***

Paul offered his own motivation to faithfulness. He called for Timothy to keep in mind Jesus Christ, who served as the apostle's model of endurance. Jesus was placed in a tomb, but He did not stay there. He has risen from the dead. Christ's death and resurrection comprise the essence of the gospel Paul preached.

Jesus was legally descended from David. Early on, some false teachers affirmed that Jesus was divine but denied that He was human. Paul emphasized the truth that Jesus came as a real human to live among us. He is the One who fulfills God's promise to David that his descendant would forever be on the throne (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Luke 1:31-33). He is the King of kings.

Even though the messenger of the gospel was restricted because of prison, God's message is not bound. Enemies can harm God's people, but they cannot stop God's message. Because of the unstoppable power of the gospel, Paul was willing to endure all things for the elect. He accepted the suffering involved in advancing the gospel. If his struggle called attention to the gospel, then suffering served a higher purpose. If bringing the gospel to people so they could be saved meant enduring adversity of all kinds, Paul was willing to pay the price.

The Dividends of Endurance ***(2 Tim. 2:11-13)***

Paul used another trustworthy saying to further explain the importance of perseverance in the faith. It consists of four statements that describe an action and a result (2 Tim. 2:11-13).

First, "For if we died with him, we will also live with him" (v. 11). Jesus sacrificed His own life to redeem us. This death with Him could mean literal death through martyrdom; if so, the life with Him would be the "eternal glory" (2:10). The statement could have been part of a baptismal confession—baptism symbolizing died with him (dying to sin) and live with Him indicating a life of righteousness. (See Rom. 6:1-14.) Second, "If we endure, we will also reign with him" (v. 12).

Again, the struggle of Christian living receives emphasis. What do Christians endure? Persecution, hatred, and rejection all require spiritual stamina. Many missionaries endure separation from families for years at a time. The result of remaining committed to Christ regardless of circumstances includes a reign with Him. (See Rev. 5:10; 22:5.) This seems to imply that we will have opportunities to serve our Lord in eternity. Third, "If we deny him, he will also deny us." Jesus declared this truth in Matthew 10:33. This is not the kind of denial Peter practiced out of fear (Matt. 26:69-75) but the denial rooted in unbelief. Paul often alluded to people who professed Christ and later turned from Him. Does this mean Christians can lose their salvation? No, but

people can profess Christ without truly trusting in Him. Many such individuals ultimately deny Christ (1 John 2:19).

The literal meaning of the word for “faithless” (v. 13) means “unbelieving” (see Rom. 3:3). Taking the term in its literal sense, the saying could mean that the unbelief of some cannot change God’s willingness to save those who believe in Him. The faithfulness of God depends on Himself, not on the behavior of humans. However, the meaning of the word for “faithless” could be governed in this context by the meaning of the word translated faithful (in the sense of “trustworthy”). If this is correct, and it likely is, the intent could be: (1) If a believer fails to endure, God faithfully judges that failure; or (2) If a Christian is unfaithful, God’s faithful grace is not negated. This encouraging truth seems the better interpretation in this context.

God rewards those who persevere, and Paul used himself as an example of perseverance. Those who follow that example receive the benefits of faithfulness to God and avoid the dangers of those who are unfaithful.