

DARING TO GIVE

Think for a moment of the most worthless or unnecessary purchase you made in the last year. Perhaps it was an electric shaver that you never use. Perhaps it is an article of clothing that you have never worn. It is important to realize that these items were not purchased with your money; they were bought with your time, which you traded for money. In effect, you swapped a certain portion of your allotted days on earth for that piece of junk that now clutters your home. For that purchase, you traded time you could have spent doing something else of greater significance.

2 Timothy 2:1-7 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. 3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs -- he wants to please his commanding officer. 5 Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. 7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Today we are continuing in our series called Daring Faith. Today I want to talk about Daring to Give. I want to talk about priorities. What are you investing your life in? What are you giving your time to?

Paul begins by saying "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." This is what the Christian life is all about. We receive the love and forgiveness that Jesus offers, we grow in it and then we seek to share it with others who will also grow in it and share it. But how are we to do this? In this scripture Paul uses 3 examples of how we do this. All three examples have three things in common:

1. You have to have DEDICATION (worth it) give your life

Paul says "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." Being a soldier, athlete and farmer all require dedication. They are tough occupations. You do not enter into these occupations thinking that you will not have to make sacrifices. You have to believe that what you are working for is worth it.

What are you willing to sacrifice as a child of God? What are you willing to give up in order to be the man or woman that God intends you to be? Let me ask this of you in a different way. What is it that you would be willing to die for?

Luke 14:25-27 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters -- yes, even his own life -- he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

To live a life of meaning and purpose you have to have something that you are willing to die for. You're not ready to live until you know what you'd die for. If you've never clarified what's worth dying for you really are not fully alive.

"If a man hasn't found something he will die for, he isn't fit to live." — Martin Luther King Jr.

Soldiers know there are some things worth dying for. Freedom is worth dying for. Family is worth dying for. Faith is worth dying for. There are some things more valuable even than my own life and they understand that and are willing to give their lives to preserve that. Last Nov marked the 100th anniversary of the end of WW1. A few weeks ago marked the 75th anniversary of D Day – the landing of allied forces in Normandy. So many were willing to give their lives so that we could live in freedom today.

Athletes also understand this. They know that to win they are going to have to sacrifice. Winning is going to cost them. You have to intend to win. Winning is intentional. It is not going to happen just by accident. It is not going to happen without effort. You have to have a goal. If you intend to have a great soul, you must first have a great goal.

This is the difference in being a casual Christian and a committed Christian. It is the same difference as being a casual golfer and a competitive golfer. The competitive golfer takes it serious. They are playing to win. They are not just out there having fun, hitting the ball around and smelling the roses. It is not just a pastime for them. It is life.

Philippians 3:13-14 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

How serious are you about being what God made you to be? Is it just a hobby to you, something you think about on Sundays but forget the rest of the week?

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

You should be living your life in a way that you're running to win. The truth is there are some people listening to me right now that are never going to become the person God intended them to be. Why? Because you are not willing to pay the price to become it. You do not want it badly enough. How do you start?

1 Timothy 6:11-12 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

What does it mean when you professed your faith before many witnesses? It's talking about your baptism. When you are baptized you are professing your faith in front of many witnesses. You are telling the world that you are serious about your faith.

If you have been baptized but you know that you are not really living for Christ, I want to hold you accountable today. If you were baptized and you said at that time that you were going to live for Christ, why are you not doing it?

If you have ever watched HGTV you may have seen a show with Mike Holmes called Make it Right. He will go and look at a home where the people have either bought a house that was built cheap or someone tried to do some work themselves and messed it up. If you cut corners or take short cuts or build without knowing what you are doing it will cost you. Like the man who built his house on the sand, the problems are not always apparent, but they show up eventually because the foundation is bad. Following Jesus means counting the cost. It has to be on the right foundation. It is not easier or cheaper to build on the rock, but it is always better in the long run.

2. You have to have DISCIPLINE (eliminate distractions) Give your focus

Being a soldier, athlete and farmer not only requires dedication, it also requires discipline. Each one of these occupations requires strict training and concentration. When you are focused on one thing, that means you cannot be focused on another. Soldiers have to give up comfort – they march and sleep in the rain and often face intense conditions. Athletes have to give up certain types of foods. They often have to be on a strict diet so that they can compete at the top of their ability. Farmers have to give up their schedule. There are times when you have to be on the field planting or harvesting.

This is true in every area of life. You don't become great without sacrifice. No one coasts up a mountain. You get there by climbing, and that requires effort. You do not become successful by doing what is comfortable. Often in life, the greater your sacrifice the greater your character will be.

Being a follower of Jesus will cost you. So let me ask you this morning, what has being a follower of Jesus cost you personally this week? How has being a disciple of Jesus cost you? What is the hardship in your life? What is following Christ making difficult for you? Perhaps it is cost you your reputation. Perhaps it has cost you a relationship. Perhaps it has cost you your job.

I can't think of sacrifice without thinking of one of my favorite stories that really touched me as a young man. The story of Jim Elliot and five missionaries.

Jim Elliot and four of his best friends heard about a tribe in the deep jungles of the Amazon in Ecuador who had never heard the name of Jesus Christ. A very primitive tribe. No Bible, no believer, no church. So these five guys said we're going to give ourselves as missionaries to reach this tribe that nobody has ever shared the good news with. They knew they couldn't just walk in. They were a pretty violent tribe. So they started dropping gifts overhead from planes that they'd fly over the jungle. They were trying to soften them up.

Finally after about six months of preparation they decided to make first contact with this tribe. They found a little sand barge on the river, on the Amazon river, where they could land a plane. They flew in and they met the Indians for the very first time. That meeting did not go well. When those five missionaries were martyred in their very first attempt to share the good news with those Indians the world was rocked. It was on the cover of every magazine. Many people said, What a waste! Those people went to tell them the good news and they didn't even get to share it and they gave their lives for nothing.

But that wasn't the end of the story. As Jim Elliot was being murdered he looked up at the tribal chief who was killing him and offered words of forgiveness. That action and those words stuck in the heart of the chief. His heart began to soften.

The rest of the story is that some of the wives of those missionaries said, We're going to go in now. And Elizabeth Elliot, Jim Elliot's wife, took her young daughter and Rachel Saint, the sister of one of the other missionaries, those brave, courageous, daring faith women moved to that tribe, and moved in with them. They began to share the good news. The people were so shocked that the wives would come after they'd killed the husbands. And they began to share the good news. And the tribe converted to Christ.

The man who was the leader and who killed Jim Elliot, he later had Steve Saint who was the son of one of the men killed come and lived with him and Steve Saint adopted him as his father, the man who killed his own dad. The leader became a devout Christian and then became a preacher and began to travel the world telling people about the good news of forgiveness.

How did that man come to Christ? Because somebody was willing to sacrifice, willing to die for what he believed in. There are some things worth dying for.

God may never ask you to give your life for Jesus Christ. But would you be willing? Or are you just a casual Christian not a committed Christian. Are you willing to sacrifice your own comfort for the greater good of other people? That's what it means to be like Jesus.

No athlete becomes a pro athlete without discipline, without training. It requires focus. You don't become great by doing whatever you feel and trying to do everything. You pick one thing and that becomes your life. There are no short cuts to maturity. There are no short cuts to greatness.

2 Tim 2:5 Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.

No one has ever said, "well, I am not doing anything this summer, I guess I might as well go compete in the Olympics." To become an Olympic athlete and win a gold medal must be your whole world. Athletes of that caliber pretty much put their life on hold. They put their social life on hold. They have a rigid schedule of when I get up in the morning, when I go to bed at night. They have a rigid schedule at the training table – what they eat and what they won't eat, what they do, what they don't do. They make enormous sacrifices to win gold or silver or bronze.

God says nobody's even going to remember those awards and they gave their whole life. They gave their whole life for something that's just going to vanish. It's not going to last. But he says it is a wise move to do that for something that's going to last forever in eternity and to make your life count.

I again ask you this question: What am I willing to do without in order to be the best? Am I willing to do without popularity? Am I willing to do without wealth? Am I willing to do without comfort? I once saw a poster that said, "The pain of regret is always greater than the pain of discipline." That's a pretty profound statement.

How would your life be better if you were just a little more disciplined. Ouch... I would say start now. "How do I be more disciplined? I try for a while and then I give up." No. It is not simply about willpower. It is about training. Like running a marathon, it is not something you just get up one day and decide to do. Willpower will get you so far, but training is essential. You start small and then gradually build endurance. To do this first requires focus. You must be willing to make it a priority.

Story of the time management instructor and putting the rocks in the jar. Unless the big ones go in first there will not be room. Being a Christian requires dedication and discipline...

3. You have to have DETERMINATION (eye on the finish line) give your heart

Being a soldier, athlete and farmer lastly requires determination. That means perseverance. You have to keep your heart focused on finish line. You need to have resilience, which means you get up when you fall down.

What do soldiers think about when they are in the trenches and things are tough? They remember why they are there in the first place. They think of the end of the war and peace. They think of home. They imagine the day they will finally get off the plane and be greeted by their loved ones.

What do athletes focus on when they are in the race. They focus on the finish line. They remember that races do not last forever. They picture themselves standing in the winners podium getting the medal.

What do farmers focus on when they are in the middle of planting? Long days and night of getting the seed into the ground. They remember the harvest. They picture themselves enjoying the benefits of their labor.

2 Tim 2:6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

In a race, you focus on the finish line. If you do not, you may get discouraged and give up.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

If you want to finish the race you have to focus on the crowd. That means dedication. It must be something worth dying for. You also have to focus on the course. That means discipline. You must be careful how you run. Lastly, you have to focus on the crown. Keep your eyes on the prize. Remember the finish line.

In the Boston Marathon, there is a legendary obstacle called Heartbreak Hill. Starting at mile thirteen of the Boston race course, there are a number of hills, climaxing at mile nineteen with Heartbreak Hill. It's the longest, steepest hill in the race. What makes this hill even worse is that world-class runners "hit the wall" around mile eighteen or nineteen. That is, their bodies have depleted the glycogen stored in the muscles. That glycogen has been replaced with lactic acid. The muscles are screaming for oxygen. And when you hit the wall, you just feel like you're going to die. Heartbreak Hill tests runners to the very core of their determination and their strength. There are Heartbreak Hills in life. Life is not on a level grade. We have problems. We have bigger problems. And at times we face Heartbreak Hill.

For the Christian, heaven isn't simply a destination; it's a motivation -- Warren Wiersbe

Likewise, as believers we need to keep our eyes on the prize. We need to remember the finish line.

The Bible has a lot to say about not focusing on things that do not really matter. How much of your time is invested in things that will not matter five years from today, much less 500 years from today. Is your focus on where you are at in your life right now, or is your focus on eternity? How much of your energy, time and money are you investing in eternal things?

If you want to be great, if you want to be the best, you must start spending more of your time, more of your money and more of your energy on things that are going to last forever and less on things that don't really matter.

Paul understood what it was like to face trials and discouragement. His focus on the crown motivated him onward.

2 Tim 4:6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

The race for Paul had been a long and difficult one. He had faced many obstacles and trials. As he rounded the final bend he saw the finish line and Jesus waiting there for him. The word used here for departure means the "loosening of the ropes". The picture is of a ship which casts off the mooring lines and heads out to sea. I know something of what that is like since I lived on a ship for 2 years. It was always hard when the ship left port. There were lots of tears as friends and loved ones were left behind. However, soon the new port would come into view and those who had gone before the ship would be there on the dock and band would start to play.

So what are you willing to give in order to live the Christian life as God intended you to live it? Are you willing to give your life, to make Jesus Lord and master of your life? Are you willing to give your focus, to put aside other things and to make it your single goal? Are you willing to give your heart, soul, mind and strength, to live for Christ no matter what it costs and no matter what hardships you will have to endure or how difficult the road you will have to face?

Back in 2008 a team went from our church in Kuwait to help a Korean pastor in Almaty Kazakhstan run a Missions conference. Hundreds of students came, mostly from China. Since they could not get entry visas, most of them had snuck into the country across the China/Kazak border. The conference was part of the Back to Jerusalem movement. Over the past decade thousands of Christians from China have become missionaries seeking to follow the silk road from China back to Jerusalem. They have gone to nations like Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Syria seeking to take the gospel. On the last night they had this map on the wall of the church the conference was being held in. These hundreds of Chinese students wept and laid on the floor in front of that map, dedicating their lives to taking the gospel to these nations. For everyone who was there that night, it was a very humbling experience.