

# FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

## Lesson 1 | We Are at War

*“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” – 2 Timothy 2:3*

“We are at war.” Those words send a chill through the spine of anyone who has any familiarity with the horrors of war. Perhaps nothing in life is more grueling or horrifying or exhausting than war. Reading through the New Testament you will frequently come across the analogy of war. Christians are called soldiers, Christ is called our captain, the devil and his angels are our enemies, and spiritual realities are described as armor. A careful reading through the letters of the New Testament will make it clear that Paul, Peter, John, and the other writers of Scripture thought of the Christian life as a battle. Yet many believers today simply don't think about their Christian life like this, at least not very seriously.

***Why do we as believers rarely think of ourselves as being in a war?***

***What will change in our thinking and in our lives when we realize that we are at war?***

The Bible doesn't portray the Christian life as an academic exercise, where believers sit around sipping coffee and debating theology. The Bible doesn't portray the Christian life as merely a set of religious duties, where if you do everything right God gives you a thumbs up and good things happen instead of bad things. The Bible doesn't portray the Christian life as a social club, where we get together with people who think like us and have a great time. The Bible portrays the Christian life as a war, where the stakes are life and death.

Now of course as Christians we must study the Bible, and there are spiritual disciplines which will bring greater stability and blessedness, and God does want us to gather with other believers and enjoy deep and meaningful fellowship. But while we do all of that we have to keep in mind that there are spiritual bullets whizzing by our head. In fact Bible study, spiritual disciplines, and fellowship actually become all the more urgent because they are key parts of winning the war in front of us. In this lesson we will begin by looking at the bigger picture of what it means to be in God's army, and then we will specifically examine 2 Timothy 2:1-4 and see what it means to be a soldier in God's army.

***What other Scriptural passages can you think of that address spiritual warfare?***

## **Christians must see themselves as soldiers.**

The Bible repeatedly describes the Christian as a soldier. In this analogy we see that there is an ongoing battle which was introduced right after the creation of the world. We also see that this war is relentless. Nobody gets a break, and typically when people feel the safest is when the greatest danger is lurking. Finally, it's important to realize that there are real casualties in this war, a reality which should make us sober and help us to fight fiercely. We will take some time to briefly look at how thinking of ourselves as a soldier implies each of these truths.

### ***1. Being a Soldier Means There Is an Ongoing Battle (Genesis 3:1-7, 15)***

The battle in Scripture begins in Genesis 3 when Satan boldly and flatly contradicts God's Word. He uses the same tactic then that he does now – he lies and seeks to pit humanity's desires against God's holy and good Word. When Satan succeeded, God warns in Genesis 3:15 that the children of the serpent and the children of the woman will be locked in a perpetual battle. There are those who follow Satan (both demons and the world) and those who follow God (the people of God), and now there is a constant battle between these groups.

***What exactly does battling the world look like for the Christian?***

***What is our ultimate goal in fighting in this war? What does success look like as we battle the devil and his forces?***

### ***2. Being a Soldier Means There Are Constant Attacks (Ephesians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5)***

The battle that we face has no breaks. Ephesians warns that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of wickedness. Paul tells the Corinthians that we tear down every reasoning and high thing that exalts itself against God. These battles are continuous; Satan doesn't quit and there is no end to wrong thinking about God and His world. Sadly, many people get exhausted by this constant onslaught and some have served faithfully for years before finally giving up because they felt it just got to be too hard.

***How do we keep from quitting in this long, grueling, life-long battle?***

### ***3. Being a Soldier Means There Are Real Casualties (John 17:12; 2 Timothy 4:10; 2 Peter 2:7-8; 1 Corinthians 9:27)***

As we will see at the end of the series, God is going to win this war and He will win it decisively. But we need to be careful that God's ultimate victory doesn't mean we don't take our enemy seriously. The war will be won by Christ, but Satan will win victories along the way. Sometimes this means that someone who looked like they were a Christian falls away and show they had never truly bought in (like Demas or Judas). Sometimes it means that a Christian wastes his or her life and is saved but has little to show for it (like Lot). Both cases should give us a healthy sense of fear and keep us vigilant and fighting.

***What is the right way and the wrong way and what is the wrong to think about the possibility of losing in this fight?***

## **Christians must rely on their captain (2:1)**

Paul begins his instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1-4 with a call to be strong. This is not surprising considering that Paul is about to call on Timothy to be a good soldier. What is interesting is where Paul instructs Timothy to look for strength: the grace of Jesus Christ. Grace is the undeserved favor of God – that is, God shows us His favor when we deserve far worse. But grace can also refer to the strength God gives to us because He favors us. In other words, God not only calls us to serve as soldiers in the army, but He Himself gives us the strength we need to fight.

***What happens when we forget this and try to fight in our own strength?***

***How do we get this supernatural strength from God?***

We will spend time later in this series examining what it looks like for us to depend on God's grace as we fight in this battle. But at this point it's important to realize that while Jesus is our leader and captain, He's more than that. He not only tells us what to do, He gives us the power to do it. The Christian theologian Augustine captured this dynamic well when said "Give what you command, and command what you will." In other words, give me the power to do what you command, and then command me to do whatever you want. We should listen to whatever our Commander says, but we also must look to our Commander for the strength to fulfill those orders.

***How are God's roles as Commander and the One who empowers us related?***

## **Christians must see themselves as part of an army (2:2).**

For a while the U.S. Army ran an ad campaign about being "an army of one." The goal was apparently to appeal to the individualistic nature of Americans. Yet even if this phrase worked as a successful ad campaign, the idea is a somewhat silly one. After all an army is, by definition, a group of soldiers. If you tried to single-handedly take on an entire country, you would lose horribly. Sadly, many Christians view themselves as an army of one. They are trying to fight the good fight, yet they don't think they need the help of others and they don't try to help others. Paul was clear to Timothy, however, that when he fights he is not fighting alone.

***Why do you think some people try to fight their spiritual battles alone?***

This verse initiates a famous chain where the truth of the gospel is passed on from one generation to the next.

***How many generations are present in this verse?***

In this verse there are four generations present: (1) those whom Timothy heard, namely Paul and the other witnesses (2) Timothy (3) the people Timothy taught (i.e., "faithful men") (4) the people those men taught (i.e., "others"). This passage is a call to generational faithfulness, which means everyone must be both looking behind to a previous generation and looking ahead to the coming generations. Such a perspective should create a healthy humility, as I realize that those who have gone before me have wisdom that I need, and a healthy sense of sobriety and fear, realizing that there are those coming after me who will follow my example, good or bad.

***Why do you think people today tend to downplay the importance of generational faithfulness?***

***Why is the importance of looking to the previous generation so often downplayed?***

***Why is the importance of thinking about the coming generation so often downplayed?***

Interestingly, the word translated “suffer” in verse 3 has the preposition “with” attached to it in the original language, and so many translations will say something like “share in suffering” or “suffer hardship with me”. In other words, our suffering is part of this group effort Paul has been talking about. God does not expect His children to suffer alone. The load that we are called to bear as soldiers is a load that is shared by our fellow soldiers.

### **Christians must be ready to pay the price (2:3-4).**

After calling on Timothy to be strong in the grace of Jesus Christ and reminding him that he was an important link in a chain of faithfulness, Paul called on Timothy to be willing to endure hardness as a soldier of Jesus. This is the main point of Paul’s analogy of war – being a soldier will require a lot of sacrifice, hardship, and even suffering.

***What are some of the ways a soldier suffers?***

***In what ways is that similar to the life of a Christian?***

In verse 4, Christians are warned about the danger of allowing the matters of everyday life to crowd out their focus on the war they are currently fighting. Soldiers who are in the middle of a war must keep a strong focus on what is required of them or they will become casualties. They usually aren’t too concerned with the kinds of everyday things that occupy the attention and time of civilians, because they are focused on issues of life and death. Similarly, while we are called to be good stewards of what God has given in this life, it can be all too easy to become consumed with these matters so that we aren’t focused on our role of fighting in the war that is going on all around us. And as with soldiers, the stakes are too high to not take this war deadly seriously.

***What are some ways the matters of everyday life could distract us from our role in the eternal war we are in?***

### **Christians must sacrifice to please their captain (2:4).**

The greatest honor for any soldier is to be recognized by the leader of the country for their service. In Roman times, to be honored by the emperor would have been the greatest honor a soldier could receive. For Americans this is the medal of honor, given by the president to those who show outstanding service to their country. As believers, our great desire is that we serve our Captain in such a way that at the end of our fight we hear, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Our suffering and hardship and struggle are ultimately done with a person in mind; we want to please Christ. Ultimate success looks like obedience that honors and pleases Christ.

***What happens if our service becomes self-focused or seeks to impress others rather than to please Christ?***

***How do we balance God's unconditional love and grace for His children with the reality that we are called to please God?***

God calls on us to have a wartime mentality. That means we must take seriously the battle we are in and realize that there is a real enemy, real casualties, and a real battle that we must be fighting daily. We do this by following our Captain, empowered by His grace, and desiring to please Him with our effort. Throughout this series, we will add more detail to this picture, but the main takeaway will be that we are called on to endure hardship and fight consistently because the battle never lets up. But as we battle, we battle in hope knowing that He who is in us is greater than He who is in the world.