

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Everybody in the Game

(Serving Jesus Together)

The Rewards of Service

(2 Timothy 2:1-6)¹

Study #6

Introduction: Putting the cart after the horse...

In recent weeks, we've been focusing on service. Jeff and I have been stressing the importance and the beauty of serving Jesus.

Here at the start of this last message in the series, I want to ensure that we don't put the cart before the horse and focus on a more important service: The service Jesus performed for us.

In the tenth chapter of Mark's Gospel, we read these words from Jesus **[10:45] "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."**

That's Jesus claiming to be the glorious Son of Man, sent from heaven to earth. But not to reign. He came to serve. And He left no doubt as to the specific act of service in view.

He will give up His life on a Roman cross to ransom us. He will pay the penalty for our sin. He, the Lamb of God, will take away our sin.

¹ This morning marks the first time I have ever spoken from 2 Timothy 2:1-6 at Northwest. But the first message I ever delivered was from this text when I was a High School senior in Dallas, attending Grace Bible Church, at the church's annual Sunday evening "Youth service" (FYI, 1974)

That ransoming act turned away the wrath of God. God is turned toward us, with arms outstretched to welcome anyone and to give eternal life to anyone who simply believe in Jesus.

Our works play no part in this drama. The only work that matters is the service Jesus performed on our behalf when He gave His life on the cross.

The message of the Bible is that salvation is a gift of grace. If before today, you have never understood that message, embrace it now. The Lord Jesus served You by His death and resurrection so that you, believing in Him, will have life with God.

Now, just before Jesus clarified that He was going to serve us by giving His life for us, He told a rich young man that if he wanted to have treasure in heaven (not GO to heaven; Jesus was telling the man how to have a rich reward from God IN heaven), he should sell his possessions and give the money to the poor.

After hearing this, Simon Peter turned to Jesus and said, **[Mark 10:28] "Behold, we have left everything and have followed You."** leaving the implied question unstated, *"So, what in it for us?"*²

What do you think Jesus would say to you if you asked Him, *"What's in it for me if I serve You?"*

Would that be a good question? We've all been told that the only bad question is the one we don't ask. Or is Peter's a bad question?

Before we're finished this morning, we'll see that it wasn't at all a bad question. In fact, while serving Jesus play no part in earning salvation, God is gracious to richly reward us when we serve Him.

Today is the final Sunday in our "Everybody in the Game" series of studies on serving Jesus. And, today, to wrap up, we are turning to the last letter we have from Paul.

Background

² In Matthew's account, Peter does ask, **[19:27] What then will there be for us?"**

Who is Timothy?

Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, who was Paul's younger brother in Jesus, and we do know a few things about Timothy.

He grew up in the city of Lystra, in what is present-day Turkey. (Acts 16:1-3) Timothy's father, a Greek man, was likely not a Christian.

But his mother, Eunice, was a Christian (also a Jew), as was his grandmother (Lois). They brought Timothy up to know Jesus, and his faith was strong from his early years.

Timothy's spiritual giftedness was recognized by church leaders. They spoke prophetic utterances over him (1 Timothy 1:18). Church Elders laid hands on him, ordaining him to pastoral ministry.³

The Paul / Timothy team

We believe that Timothy and Paul met while Paul and Barnabas were spreading the Gospel and making disciples on what we call the First Missionary Journey. (See Acts 13-14)

When they met, Paul was instantly impressed by the much younger Timothy.⁴ And, from the Second Missionary Journey forward, Timothy accompanied Paul most everywhere he went.⁵

They were together in Philippi⁶ and Corinth and Ephesus and Rome and Jerusalem. Timothy was with Paul when he wrote letters⁷ to the churches at Philippi and Colossae.⁸

³ When Paul wrote this letter (2 Timothy), we believe that Timothy was serving the church at Ephesus in a pastoral role.

⁴ Fifteen years after they began traveling together, Paul told Timothy to let no one look down on him because of his youth (1 Timothy 4:12), meaning that he must have been *really* young when he started out with Paul.

⁵ Early on, Paul circumcised Timothy for the sake of the Jews, so that he would not be a stumbling block to them since he was, after all, half Jewish.

⁶ The assumption is that while Timothy was in Philippi with Paul and Silas, he was not imprisoned as they were because of his youth.

⁷ Some think that he was a co-author.

Timothy was a leader of the first order in the early church, had a ministry in lots of churches, and pastored at Corinth and Ephesus.

Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy to instruct him in pastoral ministry. The second letter - our focus today - was written shortly before Paul was martyred for his faith.

Paul hoped that Timothy would be able to visit him in his jail in Rome before he was put to death, but we don't know if he made it. So, we hear what we read today as Paul's final charge to his spiritual son.

Paul was heavily invested in Timothy. He poured his knowledge and faith and values and priorities into Timothy. They had an intensely personal "next step" relationship.

We listen as Paul urged Timothy to keep moving forward in his walk with God.

A Life Vision: Serve Jesus! (vv. 1-2)

Be a Disciple (v. 1)

[1] You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Paul wanted Timothy to grow in character - in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity⁹ - and in his areas of giftedness.¹⁰

He urged Timothy to both pray and to promote prayer,¹¹ to discipline himself for godliness,¹² and to fight the good fight of faith.¹³

⁸ He was at Paul's side when Paul wrote to Philemon, a church leader in Colossae.

⁹ See 1 Timothy 4:12; 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:20-26.

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 4:14-16; 2 Timothy 1:6-7, 14.

¹¹ 1 Timothy 2:1-8.

¹² 1 Timothy 4:7-8.

¹³ 1 Timothy 1:19; 6:12.

Timothy seems to have had a timid side, so Paul told him to be bold,¹⁴ to teach and preach biblical truth with confidence,¹⁵ and to do the work of an evangelist.¹⁶

By following this path, Timothy would walk straight into the epic journey of Christian discipleship. This is what it means to be ***“strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”***

But Paul went on to make it clear that he expected more from Timothy than personal growth. Timothy was to help others grow, too.

He was to BE a disciple and he was to MAKE disciples. As Paul had invested in Timothy’s life, so Timothy was to invest in others’ lives.

Make Disciples (v. 2)

[2] The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.

Paul’s words to Timothy - pass the baton!

There are five generations listed in that one verse.

Truth was passed from *Jesus to Paul to Timothy* (and to others witnesses). Now, Timothy is to pass the truth on to other *faithful people*, who will keep spreading the word to *others*.

As Timothy had been taught, so he was to teach. As Timothy had seen the faith lived out by Paul, he was to live it out for others. Using the words we often use around here, Timothy was to help others take their “next step with Jesus.”

The most pointed application of what Paul was writing here had to do with equipping teachers to teach sound doctrine in a church.

More broadly, most people who look at this passage understand Paul to be urging that Timothy help other Christ-followers grow in Jesus.

Or, using the imagery of a race, Timothy was to pass the baton of the faith to others. You and I are to do the same.

Paul’s words to us - pass the baton!

Think of yourself as a runner in a relay, racing around a track. In a typical relay, four runners form a team and take turns running against other teams.

When one runner finishes, he or she passes the baton to the next runner and then stops running. When all four on the team have run, the race is over.

When it comes to life in Jesus, we are to pass the “faith baton” on to someone else.

The difference between the track and the faith is that after we hand off the baton to someone else, we keep running and look for others to whom we can pass off the “amazing, multiplying faith baton”.

With each handoff, there is another runner, there is another Christ-follower. Eventually, there are lots and lots of runners, all with batons to pass on.

Baton-passing. It’s how the faith has always been passed.

Biblical baton-passing

In the Old Testament, Moses passed the baton to Joshua and the prophet Elijah did the same for his replacement, Elisha. Deuteronomy 6 calls parents to pass on the faith to their kids, and Solomon passed the baton to us by the wisdom of his proverbs.

In the New Testament, the husband/wife team of Priscilla and Aquila mentored Apollos. Barnabas invested heavily in the life of John

¹⁴ 2 Timothy 1:8.

¹⁵ 1 Timothy 1:3-4; 4:3; 2 Timothy 2:14-19; 4:1-2.

¹⁶ 2 Timothy 4:5.

Mark, just like Paul passed the baton to Timothy and Titus and Silas and many others.¹⁷

And, of course, Jesus, the Master Baton-Passer.

Jesus, the Master Baton-Passer

He invited twelve men into a discipling / mentoring relationship. They learned His ways and watched Him at work. He called them to increasingly serious levels of commitment.

He taught them about God, how to pray, and the importance of servanthood. He modeled a heart for people who were far from God. He called them to trust God in everything.

He gave them total access to His life as they traveled together.

At the end, after having been with Him for three years and after having received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they were fully equipped to pass the baton to others who would pass the baton to others.

Baton passing is how organizations gain momentum and grow. It's how progress is made.

Baton-passing / Mentoring / Disciple-making = serving Jesus

Organizations

Alcoholics Anonymous has "sponsors" who pass the sobriety baton to friends. Businesses mentor by interns and apprentices. Athletes are coached.

Families

Families are in the business of baton passing.

I watch the way you parents carefully and prayerfully nurture your children. It's a beautiful thing to behold as you pass batons of character and faith to your kids.

Wives and husbands take pains to press Jesus into their marriages.

Me

Speaking personally, lots of people have passed faith-batons to me, dating back all the way to my High School and college days.

I'm not the man I should be or could be. But any positives about the man I am now is because of the batons that have been handed to me by brothers and sisters in Christ.

In every arena of life, baton-passing, passing the torch, mentoring is crucial.

The world works because of the magic of mentoring. One person grows and then helps someone else grow.

It is exactly how the work of Jesus moves forward. In fact, I would argue that serving Jesus is always, ultimately about passing a life-in-Jesus baton to someone else.

And I'm not alone in thinking this.

The work of Jesus

Over the many years that Northwest has partnered with Duane and Sharon Miller, they have served in a variety of capacities and in different places.

They currently live in Madrid, Spain, where their aim is to serve Arab-speaking Muslims in Jesus' Name.

Duane sees what he is doing as nothing other than obeying Jesus' command to make disciples / pass the baton. He says that every Christian's and every church's mission is to make disciples. Period.

¹⁷ The missionary trips that Paul took which we read about in the book of Acts were more disciple-making trips than church-planting trips.

He believes that everything about living for Jesus fits under the umbrella of “make disciples” AND that “make disciples” it to be the organizing principle around which the life of every Christian revolves.

Amen!

What Paul told Timothy to do is exactly what Jesus told His disciples to do in the Great Commission and it is exactly what you and I are called to do.

In every way that you might serve here at church - nursery, children, youth, missions, worship, tech, small groups, Food Pantry, Deacon or Elder, Women’s or Men’s ministry, or local outreach - you are passing a baton of faith, love, obedience, worship.

Your aim is to press Jesus into the life of your family? Great - that’s Great Commission stuff. You take advantage of open doors to point someone to Jesus at work or school? That’s disciple-making.

You serve at the Food Bank, help out at a Crisis Pregnancy Center, help refugees navigate life in San Antonio, and while doing it, let your light shine for Jesus? It’s all disciple-making and baton-passing.

In fact, there is no end to the ways in which you can help someone take their next step with Jesus, because everyone you know is, spiritually speaking, somewhere. Everybody can take a step from where they are forward. And you can help them.

Your friend might be *antagonistic* to God, or he might *not believe* in God. She might *know about* Jesus and have *heard* the Gospel, but she *doesn’t believe*.

They might be a *young believer*, or a *believer who is not walking with God*. They might be *on fire for Jesus*. Maybe they are quite *mature*.

Everyone you know is somewhere, and you could hand them a baton that will help them take a “next step” with Jesus.

The truth is that if you have any experience walking with Jesus, if you have followed Jesus at all, if you have learned anything about Jesus, you have a valuable baton you can pass on to someone.

Everybody can take a next step with Jesus. And, in the circles in which you run, well, “*Tag. You’re it!*”

That’s what 2 Timothy 2:2 is all about. Paul is saying to all of us Timothys who have been passed a baton by some Paul, that we are also each Pauls who are to pass a faith baton to some other Timothy.

That’s the serving-Jesus mission that has come to each of us.

Now, in what follows, Paul gives us three powerful images filled with encouragement for those times when serving Jesus is inconvenient, exhausting, and hard.

A Life Dream Come True: Rewarded for Serving Jesus (vv. 3-6)

A Soldier’s Reward (vv. 3-4) (vv. 3-4)

The honor of suffering hardship

[3] *Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*

My father and my grandfather served in the US Army, but I have never served in the military.

I have, though, lived in and served in San Antonio for a long time. During these years I have come to greatly appreciate the military and its culture by living in what we call, “Military City, USA.”

I’ve gained a lot of respect for the armed services - and for police and firefighters - by attending induction and promotion and retirement ceremonies. There is something very special about serving in uniform. Those who serve consider it an honor to serve.

Soldiers understand loyalty in the service of country and cause, and they understand that their service will often involve hardship.

The life of a Roman soldier involved low pay, physical danger, and long periods of time away from home and family.

And the Apostle Paul knew what he was doing when he used military language to describe serving Jesus. It had nothing to do with inflicting pain; it had everything to do with suffering as a disciple. (Remember that as he wrote these words, he was awaiting execution by Rome for his strong Christian witness.)

Paul wrote to Timothy and called him to be willing to endure hardship in serving Jesus and His Great Commission. Same for us.

A separated life

Paul also pointed out that soldiers don't concern themselves with non-military matters: The mission is their focus.

[4] No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life...

This parallels our life calling as disciples of Jesus. We are to be single-minded in our commitment to our mission of baton passing / disciple-making.

But Paul ends his soldier comments with a tantalizing image for all soldier-disciples.

A commander's commendation

[4] No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him.

Now, a throat-clearing "Ahem..." may be required to clarify.

In 2021 most American soldiers feel very little loyalty toward **"the one who enlisted"** them as a soldier. In fact, I've talked with lots of military men and women who describe what went on at the enlistment office in very unflattering terms.

But, from what I've been able to learn this week, the first century "enlistment officer" was often also the "commanding officer." The Roman officer is the one who recruited, put together, and then led a team that became a fighting unit.

So, Paul wants us to imagine Roman soldiers who were all about loyalty to their recruiting / training / equipping / commanding officer.

They desperately wanted to please him and longed to hear, "Well done!" from him - just like we who follow Jesus want to hear "Well done" from Him.

He did, in fact, lovingly enlist us. He saved us! And He is now our Commanding Officer.¹⁸

In the days ahead, you'll be giving yourself to service. You'll pass a faith baton to a friend. You'll pour your life into someone who needs time, attention, care, resources.

In lots of what we do as disciples, we serve others. Ultimately, though, we're serving Jesus.

All of this will often be hard, and it won't always turn out well. There will be losses along the way, and we won't always see how the story turns out. The service will cost.

But here is a promise that if we give ourselves to baton-passing, to disciple-making, we have pleased Jesus.

As you sit, exhausted at the end of a day after having served someone in His Name, picture your Savior / Commander breaking into a big grin and shouting a thunderous, "Well done!"

Keep pouring your life and Jesus into the lives of your friends. Keep helping those around you take next steps. Jesus loves it when you do that. Soldier on. And play hard.

¹⁸ We don't use often militaristic language to describe following Jesus these days because we don't want to be misunderstood. There is no sense in which Jesus calls us to violence.

An Athlete's Prize (v. 5)

[5] And if anyone likewise competes as an athlete, he is not crowned as victor unless he competes according to the rules.

It's important to compete according to the rules in sports.

Not like the 1919 Chicago White Sox baseball team. On that team were eight players who threw the World Series to the Cincinnati Reds on purpose.

They were all a part of a gambling ring led by a well-known Chicago gangster.

And don't be like the New York runner, Fred Lorz, who was the first to cross the finish line in the 1904 Olympic Marathon. Race officials took the gold medal away from Fred when it was discovered that he had covered eleven miles of the race...in a car.

You could spend days reading stories on the Internet about runners taking shortcuts, cyclists and baseball players taking steroids, and more creative ways to win outside what the rules allow.

Lots of times those who cheated didn't get to keep their medals. But undoubtedly, some did get away with it.

Paul says that in the race we run for Jesus, in the contest in which we are competing for Jesus, we don't win the prize unless we compete ***"according to the rules."***

Of course, ***"rules"*** refers to character. We are to lead a life of integrity, exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, and be a model of Christlikeness. (2 Timothy 2:1)

But, given the context, I think ***"rules"*** also refers to strategy. It implies that we are intentionally passing the baton and helping other people take next steps with Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:2)

When we compete for Jesus and play by the rules of discipleship and disciple-making, we can expect a prize.

In some places in today's world, where Jesus-following is not esteemed, those who serve Him won't receive public recognition or affirmation. No prize at all. Not now. Not here.

In the United States, where living for Jesus is still mostly honored, we can expect some affirmation. There will likely be some positive recognition for serving Jesus, at least in the church.

But, even for us, the awards ceremony won't be complete here and now. The full prize will be awarded later by the Judge, our Savior, Jesus. You have that to look forward to when you give your life to passing the faith baton.

The images of being a soldier who brings a smile to our Commanding Officer's face and an athlete who wins a prize are wonderful.

The third image Paul gives us is also mouth-watering and is especially sweet to me. I think it will be to you, too.

A Farmer's Harvest (v. 6)

[6] The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.

I've got a garden, and if things don't pan out in my garden, I've also got H-E-B. But, yes, I did pick a few small tomatoes and the last of the summer's peppers this week. And I have planted my fall garden of broccoli, Swiss chard, kale (yes, I did), spinach, and lettuce.

I enjoy gardening - all aspects of it. I like turning the soil over before planting, adding nutrients to the dirt of my South Texas garden. I love planting and I even get satisfaction out of weeding. (I really hate weeds.)

But I especially like harvest time. I love bringing big heads of broccoli inside and picking enough greens for a dinner salad.

Writing to Timothy, Paul says that a life given to serving Jesus brings a harvest that the hard-working farmer / disciple-maker / baton-passer will get to enjoy.

I have the privilege of watching a lot of you serve Jesus. Watching you enjoy a harvest is especially sweet.

- There is the harvest of **JOY** we all get to see on the faces of the Praise Team while they sing and play.
- There is the harvest of **SATISFACTION** for those who carefully prepare the grounds outside so that it looks beautiful and who give loving care to the presentation of the sound and light and imagery and live streaming for our times of worship.
- There is the harvest of **FRIENDSHIP** for those who pour themselves into serving babies and kids, who get involved with teens, and who lead ABF's and Women's and Men's studies and who lead Care Groups.
- There is the harvest of **PURPOSE** and **MEANING** for those who serve Jesus in precisely the arena they care most deeply about.
- There is the harvest of **IMPACT** for those who lead.
- There is the harvest of **GRATITUDE** for those who passionately pursue life-changing relationships with hurting people.
- There is the harvest of **PARTNERSHIP** for those who serve together on teams to accomplish together what no one person could do alone.
- There is the harvest of **CROSS-CULTURAL CONNECTION** for those who give to and pray for and correspond with those who have gone out for the sake of the Name of Jesus.

Conclusion:

After Jesus' instruction to a rich young man to sell his possessions if he wanted treasure in heaven, Peter asked Jesus a question.

[Mark 10:28] "Behold, we have left everything and have followed You." ... "So, what's in it for us?"

What's in it for you? Jesus promises great reward for your service to Him.

Your service will bring a *"Well done!"* and a smile to your Savior's face. An awards ceremony that is out of this world and a prize beyond your wildest dreams awaits you. And you'll enjoy harvests all along the way.