

# 3D Discipleship

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. 2 Timothy chapter 2.

2 Timothy chapter 2. And if we read again in verse 3. 2 Timothy 2 and verse 3.

Where Paul writes, Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

These verses, verses 3 to 7, they present to us 3D discipleship. 3D discipleship. As you know, 3D means three-dimensional.

[ 1 : 11 ] And in recent years, there have been several 3D movies produced which seek to make the movie more appealing and more attractive to the viewer, to the point that when you're watching the 3D movie, it's as if the objects are leaping out of the screen towards you.

But of course, as you know, a 3D movie, it's only effective and an enjoyable experience if all the audience are wearing those 3D glasses.

I'm sure you've seen them before, those 3D glasses with the blue and red lenses. Where together they create this three-dimensional effect and give you that 3D image.

And in many ways, that's what Paul is telling us this evening. Paul is saying to us, put on your 3D glasses. Put on your 3D glasses so that you'll have a three-dimensional vision of discipleship.

Put on your 3D glasses so that you'll have a three-dimensional vision of discipleship. Because 3D discipleship involves devotion, discipline, and diligence.

[ 2 : 17 ] 3D discipleship involves devotion, discipline, and diligence. And there are three headings this evening. So first of all, he says 3D discipleship involves devotion.

Devotion. Look at verse 4 or verse 3. He says, share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

So as Paul explains and emphasizes to Timothy the importance of 3D discipleship, he does so by using three very familiar images and illustrations.

He uses the image and illustration of the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer. And of course, this isn't the first time that Paul has used these images and these illustrations in his letters.

He's used them many times before in order to explain and emphasize the importance of discipleship. But as you know, in this letter, Paul is exhorting Timothy, young Timothy.

[ 3 : 23 ] And he's saying, as he did in verses 1 and 2, he said, Be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. You need to be strengthened by the grace of God so that you will pass on the gospel baton to the next generation.

Because, Timothy, you must guard the gospel. You must glory in the gospel. You must not be ashamed of the gospel. Because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

And so Paul is exhorting Timothy to fan into flame as God-given gift as a pastor and preacher of the gospel. And with that, Paul reminds Timothy, he says there in verse 3, that he's to serve as a good soldier.

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

And notice Paul says that a good soldier must suffer. A good soldier must suffer. You know, Paul, he doesn't hide the fact that suffering for the gospel, or that he's suffering for the gospel, and that others will suffer for the gospel too.

[ 4 : 36 ] Because, you know, he mentions it throughout many of his letters. He repeatedly says that he's suffering for the gospel. And he also says it again and again in this final farewell letter, that he's suffering for the sake of the gospel.

And for Paul, the subject of suffering is not, it's not ever written in the small print. It's not ever written in his letters as a footnote. No, Paul always puts it out front, bold and underlined, that he is suffering.

And he says to Timothy, share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Timothy, Jesus suffered. Timothy, I'm suffering.

And so Timothy, expect suffering. You're going to suffer too, so expect suffering. He says, share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

Now, most modern commentators at this point will say that in comparison to the persecuted church in places like North Korea and China and Nigeria and Afghanistan, they'll say that we know nothing about suffering in the West.

[ 5 : 47 ] Which in many ways is true. But as we see, as time is going on, persecution is coming. It's filtering in slowly.

Persecution is coming. I was reading just this afternoon, a Christian teacher in Ireland jailed only yesterday for refusing to refer to a transgender pupil as they.

So they were put in prison. Persecution is coming. But as Jesus said, we learned it in the Sermon on the Mount, in those Beatitudes, Jesus said, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And as Paul highlights here, every disciple of Jesus Christ, they will encounter and they will experience persecution in some form or another. Because if you're prepared to follow in the footsteps of your commander-in-chief, if you're prepared to nail your colors to the mast, if you're prepared to say to people, I am a Christian and I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation, if you're prepared to confess that there's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved, except the beautiful name of Jesus Christ, my friend, if you're prepared as a good soldier of Christ Jesus to stand up and to speak out, Paul says you will suffer.

You will suffer for it. You may not experience a martyr's death, but you will most likely encounter resentment, rejection, and ridicule for the sake of Jesus Christ.

[ 7 : 38 ] But you know, is that not what Jesus said? The great call of discipleship. Jesus said, if anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

And when Jesus said, take up his cross, take up your cross, see, he wasn't talking about wearing a necklace around your neck. No, he was emphasizing and explaining that the path of salvation is a path of suffering.

The path of salvation is the path of suffering. And you know, this is something I think we often forget, that we are in a warfare, a spiritual warfare.

It's not something Westminster Confession of Faith reminds us and reaffirms to us that as Christians, as Christians, we are part of a continual and irreconcilable war.

As Christians, we are part of a continual and irreconcilable war. And you know, you think about it, and you think, well, it's so true, isn't it?

[ 8 : 46 ] Because when you weren't a Christian, you think back to when you weren't a Christian.

And when you were still dead in your trespasses and sins, and when you were walking according to the course of this world, and when you were blinded by the devil, back then, back then, you weren't a threat to the devil.

You weren't a threat to his rule or to his reign in this world. But when God's grace so worked in your heart and your life, and he brought you from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, from death and sin to life in Christ, from the dungeon of the devil to liberty and freedom in Christ, in that moment, you were a target.

You became a target for the devil. Satan had you in his sights straight away. And since then, you have encountered and experienced, because of your faith, maybe not to the extent of those persecuted in Eastern countries, but you have experienced trials and tribulations, obstacles, and maybe opposition, rejection, and ridicule, all for the sake of Christ.

But you know, my friend, that's why we're to be devoted and dedicated to our King and His kingdom. that's why Paul is saying to us and to Timothy that we're to stay faithful to Jesus, our

commander-in-chief, and stay focused upon the task in hand.

Because, my Christian friend, we have been enrolled and we have been enlisted, as Paul says, we've been enlisted in the Lord's army. We have been enrolled and enlisted in the Lord's army. [10:30] It's not what we teach our children. We often sing it in the school. I may never march in the infantry, ride in the cavalry, shoot with the artillery. I may never zoom over the enemy, but I'm in the Lord's army.

I'm in the Lord's army. And of course, being in the Lord's army, it's not a walk in the park. It's a warfare. It's a warfare.

That's why Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, the church that Timothy was serving in. And he said to them, Ephesians chapter 6, he said, Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God. Put on your armor that you may be able to stand against the schemes and the scams and the seductions of the devil, because we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

So my friend, just like Christian, when he was in Palace Beautiful, he was sent into the armory. We're to do the same. We're to go into our armory and put on the whole armor of God so that we are dressed from head to toe in armor, the whole armor, that we may be able to stand firm as a good Christian.

[11:54] Soldier. That we might stand firm as a good Christian soldier. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

But whatever you do, Timothy, don't become entangled in civilian pursuits. Don't become ensnared by the affairs of this life. Don't become enslaved by pleasing people or the pleasures of this world. No, remember that you've been requested and recruited to serve in the Lord's army. Therefore, be devoted. Be dedicated to your commander-in-chief.

Keep fighting the good fight of faith because it's a fight to the finish. Timothy, put on your 3D glasses because 3D discipleship, it involves devotion.

It involves discipline and diligence. Put on your 3D glasses because 3D discipleship involves devotion and secondly, discipline. Discipline.

[12:58] He says in verse 5, An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

And so after using the image and illustration of the devotion of a soldier, Paul then introduces the discipline of an athlete. And you know, we're familiar with Paul's image and illustration because although we didn't have much of a summer, it was a summer of sport, whether it was football with the Women's World Cup or tennis with Wimbledon or even the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

It was a summer of sport where we saw athletes from all over the world they were competing in different sporting competitions. But of course, what makes them an athlete is their discipline.

They're disciplined as athletes. They may be naturally gifted, but they have to work on their gift. They have to nourish and nurture their gift. They have to be disciplined.

They have to be disciplined in their exercise routines, in their training, in their eating habits, in their sleeping patterns. They have to be disciplined because that's what makes them an athlete.

[14:14] And you know, I believe that Paul, he was someone who either enjoyed exercise or he admired athletes. Because when you read through his letters, he's always using the athlete as his image and illustration for discipleship.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul writes, he says, Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run, he says.

Run that you may obtain the prize. In Philippians chapter 3, Paul writes to the Philippians and says, Forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead.

Press on towards the goal. Keep running, for the prize is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. In Hebrews 12, verses we know well, we're exhorted and encouraged to, like the athlete, lay aside every sin and weight that doth so easily beset us and run this race with endurance.

Run the race set before us looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. Paul comes back to this image and illustration of the athlete time and time again.

[15:27] Even in his first letter to Timothy in chapter 4, you'll remember how Paul said, Bodily exercise profits little. but godliness is profitable for all things.

In other words, he was saying to us, get into the godly gym because train yourself for godliness because godliness is the goal. Train yourself for godliness because godliness is the goal.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we're to be spiritually fit and focused, not spiritually fat and flabby.

We're to be working out in the godly gym by burning fat and building muscle.

We need to be training and toiling as disciples of Jesus Christ. We need devotion and discipline in order to be spiritually fit and focused in our discipleship.

Because if we don't, Paul teaches us, we'll become spiritually fat and spiritually flabby. We'll become lazy and lethargic and lackadaisical in our Christian lives.

[ 16 : 38 ] We'll lack commitment. We'll have no interest. That's why as disciples we need discipline. The discipline of an athlete. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

We need the discipline of the athlete. Now sadly, in the 21st century culture and Christianity that we have, we don't like the word discipline.

We don't like that word discipline, especially when it comes to Christ or His church or His cause. But you know, the purpose of Christian discipline or church discipline, it's not condemnation.

It's correction. It's not about, it's all about redirection and repentance and restoration. Therefore, as disciples, we need to be disciplined.

Disciples. Disciplined. And I know it's hard. Disciplined in our Bible reading. Disciplined in prayer time. Disciplined in church fellowship.

[ 17 : 39 ] Disciplined in our Christian character. Our Christian conduct. Our Christian conversation. We're to be disciplined. We're to be disciplined disciples.

Not that our salvation depends upon these things. Because it doesn't. But discipline is all about discipleship. Discipline is all about discipleship.

In fact, the word discipline is very closely related to the word disciple. As you know, the word disciple means learner. Whereas Christians, we're all to have our L plates on.

I think sometimes we should actually be wearing them. We're to be learners. We're to remember that we're all learners. We're all learning with one another and from one another. We're all learning together.

And the thing is, our L plates, they never come off. It doesn't matter what tests or trials or tribulations we go through in life. We're always learning. And we're learning more about our sinfulness and we're learning more about our Savior.

[ 18 : 41 ] because we're always learning. My friend, we're to be disciplined disciples, like the discipline of an athlete. And you know, when Paul writes this, he's not saying something to Timothy or to us that he didn't do himself.

Paul is practicing what he preached. Or he's preaching what he practiced. Because Paul says, right at the end of this letter, he speaks about the soldier and he says, I have fought a good fight.

Then he speaks about the athlete here and he says, I have finished the race. So he's practicing what he's preaching. And so, Paul then applies it to Timothy. He says, Timothy, you need to run too.

You need the discipline of an athlete. You need to run according to the rules of the race because an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

Did you know that at the London 2012 Olympics, there were nearly 40 athletes who were stripped of their medals for breaking the rules?

[ 19 : 56 ] 40 athletes, nearly four, 39. So they were stripped of their medals for breaking the rules and many of them, they were caught using performance-enhancing drugs in order to receive the crown, but only two days later to have it removed.

And that's what Paul is saying here. Discipleship is not about bending or breaking the rules to suit yourself and to make you look good. That's not what it's about. No, discipleship is about devotion, personal devotion.

It's about personal discipline. Because an athlete is disciplined. Discipleship is about devotion and discipline. And you know, as my good friend J.C. Ryle would say, if we will not carry the cross, we shall never wear the crown.

It's about devotion. It's about discipline. If we will not carry the cross, we will never wear the crown. Timothy, put on your 3D glasses because 3D discipleship, it involves devotion.

The devotion of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete, and the diligence of a farmer. Put on your 3D glasses because 3D discipleship involves devotion, discipline, and diligence.

[ 21 : 11 ] Diligence is the last one. Verse 6. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

So Paul is setting before us 3D discipleship. He's using the images and the illustrations of the devotion of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete, and now the diligence of a farmer.

And again, we're familiar with this image and illustration. We're familiar with it not only from Scripture, but also from our island setting and living within crofting communities.

And as you know, when it comes to farming or crofting, there are no overnight results unless you are a dairy farmer. There will definitely be overnight results. But you know, by and large, arable farming or crofting, it's hard work.

If you're a crofter, you know it's hard work. The Bible reminds us that it's hard work because the ground is cursed. It's hard work because the ground is cursed.

[ 22 : 19 ] After the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam, by the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread. And that's still the case today. There's no harvest without hard work.

There's no harvest without hard work. And that's the point Paul is making here too. He says, there's no harvest without hard work. There's no discipleship without diligence.

Diligence in the means of grace. There's no harvest without hard work. There's no discipleship without diligence at the means of grace. And you know, my friend, the Christian life, and we know it, it requires our energy, our effort, our exertion.

It requires commitment. There's no room for being stationary or static or stagnant as a Christian because it requires energy. It requires effort and our exertion.

It requires diligence as a disciple. Diligence as a disciple. He says it is the hardworking farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

[ 23 : 31 ] Now, as many of you know, my favorite parable is the parable of the sower. I love the parable of the sower. It was Spurgeon who said that every preacher should preach upon the parable of the sower at least once a year.

Because the parable, it's not actually about the sower or the seed. The parable is about the soil and onto what type of soil the seed fell. But what always encourages me as a preacher about the parable of the sower is that there's nothing wrong with the sower and there's nothing wrong with the seed.

All the energy and the effort and the exertion of the sower in sowing the seed, it's completely dependent upon God. who gives the increase.

And was that not what the Corinthians were reminded? Paul may plant, Apollos may water, but it's God who gives the increase. And it's true there's no harvest without hard work.

But it's also true that farming involves three Ps. Plowing, planting, and patience. Farming involves three Ps.

[ 24 : 40 ] Plowing, planting, and patience. And patience is the hardest part. You read the parable of the sower. The good soil bore fruit with patience.

Patience. Patience is the hardest part. But in our patience, in our sowing, in our diligence, in our patience, we must plod on.

In our patience, we must plod on. That's what William Carey, the 18th century missionary to India, that's what he said as he neared the end of his life.

William Carey, he served as a missionary in India for over 30 years. And in that time, he translated the Bible into many different languages and dialects. But William Carey, as a Persian, he also contracted malaria.

His five-year-old son died. And then he watched his wife deteriorate with a mental illness. All in India. And yet through it all, Carey, we're told, he persevered.

[ 25 : 45 ] And he was patient in tribulation. And late in life, Carey said that if anyone should write his biography, this is what he said, if the author gives me credit for being a plodder, if the author gives me credit for being a plodder, he will describe me accurately.

Anything beyond that will be too much. I can plod. I can persevere in any pursuit. To this, I owe everything.

I can plod, he said. My friend, Carey was a plodder. He knew that there was no harvest without hard work. He knew that sowing the seed of God's Word involved the three Ps, plowing, planting, and

patience.

Thirty years of patience. But as a devoted and disciplined and diligent disciple, Carey persevered by plodding.

Carey persevered by plodding. And you know, my Christian friend, you look at it and you think, well, that's what discipleship is all about. We are not in a sprint.

[ 27 : 00 ] This is not a hundred meter race. This is a marathon. This is an ultra marathon. And we are to persevere by plodding. We're to persevere by plodding.

We're to be devoted. We're to be disciplined. We're to be diligent in our discipleship and persevere by plodding on.

So plod on. Timothy, put on your 3D glasses because 3D discipleship, it's all about devotion. It's all about discipline. It's all about diligence. Timothy says, verse 7, think over what I say.

Think over what I say for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Be devoted. Be disciplined. Be diligent.

Plod on. Plod on. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for these images and these illustrations that remind us about the importance of discipleship.

[ 28 : 09 ] And Lord, that we are all learning. We are learning together. We are learning from one another. And Lord, we pray that Thou wouldst continue to be our teacher, that we would be taught of God, that we would submit to the Lordship of Christ, and that the Holy Spirit would take the things of Jesus and reveal them more and more to us, that He would give to us understanding, that we would have that teachable spirit to learn more and to serve more and to seek to bring glory to Thy name.

O Lord, watch over us, we pray. Guide us, we ask, and do us good. For Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to sing again this time in Psalm 119.

Psalm 119, it's in the Sing Psalms version. Psalm 119, it's at verse 27 down to the verse marked 32.

It's on page 158. Psalm 119, page 158.

The reason we're singing Psalm 119, as I said, Psalm 27 draws our attention to the soldier. Psalm 119 draws our attention to the athlete.

[ 29 : 40 ] It says there in verse 32, I run the way of your commands because my heart you have set free. And then we'll sing in the last psalm is Psalm 126, which is obviously the illustration of the farmer.

But before we sing, I'll highlight the prayer points. As you know, please be mindful of the Matheson family, not only today, but also in the days ahead.

Pray for them. They're no strangers to our congregation or to our prayer meeting. So please remember them. I would also encourage to pray for North Harris Free Church to give thanks for a full creche.

So they've had a baby boom in Harris. They didn't have any babies and then all of a sudden they have four. So pray for them and the young children and also the Rase congregation.

Rase Free Church. They're very small, very fragile congregation. They don't have a minister. I'm not sure how many would attend even on the Lord's Day. But please pray for them that they'll know the Lord's blessing and the Lord's help.

[ 30 : 47 ] We're also encouraged to pray for the Dumasani Theological Institute in South Africa to pray for them. And they're having electricity cuts, so please remember them and the struggles that they have as they keep on teaching and sharing the gospel.

It's wonderful to pray for one another. It's a great privilege that we have. So we're going to sing Psalm 119. We're singing from verse 27. Instruct me in your precepts way.

I'll think upon your works at length. My soul with sorrow is worn out according to your word. Give strength. Down to the verse marked 32. To God's praise.

It struck me in your peace and strength.

I think upon your works at length.

[ 31 : 51 ] my soul with sorrow is worn out according to your work is great.

Be gracious to me through your love.

From lying ways keep me apart. I chose to take the way of truth.

I keep your love with all my heart.

I cling to your decrees, O Lord.

[ 33 : 03 ] Do not let shame take hold of me. I run the way of your commands because my heart you have set free.