

Soldiers, Athletes and Farmers

by Zac Poonen

The Christian life requires being real, serious, and motivated by love, rather than fear or other motivations.

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Scripture: Matthew 22:37, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 6:9, 2 Timothy 2:3-6, Revelation 22:12

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being real in the Christian life, avoiding hypocrisy and pretense. It encourages believers to be themselves, not seeking to appear more spiritual than they are, but to be content with who they are. The sermon also highlights the need for believers to trust in God's acceptance, regardless of worldly achievements or appearances, and to focus on being faithful soldiers, disciplined athletes, and hard-working farmers in their spiritual journey.

Transcript

Very, very good and a lot of rich material that we have heard and received. You know, it's very, very important in the Christian life to be real. There's a lot of unreality in Christendom today.

Most Christians I have met, including most people in CFC, pretend to be real and a lot of people try to act spiritual, using spiritual language. It destroys you. It's very difficult for me to fellowship with people who are not real.

We must learn to be ourselves. I don't mean that we should be carnal. I'm not saying that we should not, you know, I'm not saying we should speak everything that comes to our mind.

Only a foolish man speaks everything that comes to their mind. I'm not saying we should confess our sins in public, but we must not be unreal. We must hate unreality because Jesus condemned hypocrisy more than anything else.

We should not have a desire to be known as more spiritual than we really are. You must be content, be known for what you are. I don't mean confess your sin, but what I mean is, if you ask a little eight-year-old boy, what class are you in? He says, I'm in 10th standard.

10th standard? You know he's only in the 3rd standard. That's what I mean by being unreal. Now, no eight-year-old will say that.

He won't even say he's in the 4th when he's in the 3rd. He's not ashamed to say, I'm in 3rd standard. But I find a lot of Christians are not willing to accept and face up to what they really are.

They want to be known by others as more spiritual than they really are. And I'll tell you something, that works against you. It destroys you spiritually.

And that's the number one reason why many people don't grow. And it's a tendency in all of us, you know. And then, another thing I find particularly among young people is, many feel when you're young, you know, particularly when you're a student, you haven't really accomplished anything in life.

Maybe you failed a few times in school or in college and you're not so brilliant like others. You didn't top the class. You don't have any achievements to boast of.

You haven't received any awards in school or college. You are not good at games. You are not good at athletics.

And then you begin to feel inferior. And then if you're surrounded in the church by other people who are clever or who pretend that they are very clever, you begin to feel inferior. And then you sort of clam up and sit quietly because you feel that everybody else is superior to you.

And again, you don't grow spiritually. You must believe that God accepts you just as you are. If you didn't come first in your class, it's because God gave you only that measure of intelligence for some wonderful reason.

I'm absolutely sure Peter and Andrew and I will never come first in my class. I wonder if they even came in the first 50%. I have a strong feeling that they came in the lower 50%.

If you can understand Paul's epistles, you know that Peter found it difficult to understand them. He says that in one of his letters. He says, Paul says some things that are very difficult to understand.

Peter couldn't write like Paul. He didn't feel inferior. I said, well, that's okay.

Thank God he's got that gift and God came in with that gift. But I don't have that gift. It's very easy to feel inferior because you can't play a musical instrument.

You can't speak like somebody else. And then also maybe you're from a very poor family. And that also can make you feel very inferior because other people can afford things that you can't.

They can go to restaurants that you can't afford to go. I'll tell you honestly, thank God you can't afford to go. God has chosen the poor of the world, rich and poor.

I have seen some brothers in Tamil Nadu who can't speak English at all. But there's such a profound word that they share when they share, which is more than many educated people in CFC can share. I find some of the PhDs in CFC pretty boring.

Some don't speak at all and some they do. There's nothing much to it. But I hear some of those people who haven't even passed 10th standard in Tamil Nadu.

I see something edifying. God has chosen the poor of the world. He's the God of the widows.

He's the God of the orphans. He's the God of the fatherless. He's the God of those who are on the fringes of society, not those who are in the center.

And so you must never feel inferior because this is your God. This is your father. You can feel inferior because you're dark or not good-looking or not so attractive, whether you're a husband or a wife.

All these things, you know. But if you can say, well, God made me like that, it's fine. I accept myself as God made me.

I'm perfectly happy the way God made me. I have no complaints. It'll bring such a rest into your life when you realize that, I've often said this, there are only two circles.

One is a very small circle. The circle in which you can do something about your life or events, etc. And the other is a massive, huge circle which deals with people and circumstances over which you have no control at all.

You know, when you ride down the road, there's only one little vehicle, your own, that you can control. It's a very small circle. You have absolutely no control over the way other people drive, what they're going to do.

The world is like that. In your office, you have no control over your boss. You have no control over your circumstances.

You know, like we saw those pictures of the terror attacks in Bombay. What can you do? If you happen to be in that hotel or happen to be in that railway station, it didn't make a difference whether you're rich or poor. One place or the other, you're there.

There are circumstances in life over which you have no control. That's a huge, massive circle. And there's another very small circle, which is the areas where you have control.

And I've learned through the years to leave all those things in that big circle to God. Say, Lord, I can't do anything about that. I can't do anything about it if I happen to be in a railway station where suddenly there's a terror attack.

What can I do about it? That's your circle. You take care of it. Maybe you'll make me miss the bus or taxi I was supposed to take to the railway station, so I'm not there when the terror attack takes place.

Or something or the other like that. God's got so many ways of doing it. Leave that in His hands.

So often, if you ask yourself what you worry about, very often you worry about all the things in that huge circle over which you have no control. Leave it to God. Deal with that very small area over which you can do something.

And even there, you may not do it perfectly, but if you have a desire to do it, and don't lose that desire by getting discouraged or condemn yourself, it'll get better and better. And don't ever get into competition with somebody else. Never, never, never.

You have a unique function in the body of Christ. And say, Lord, I'm going to fulfill that. I'm not in competition with anybody.

So, it's very important for these little things to be, I've said that so many times, but I feel it's very important for us to recognize that each of us is valuable to God. You know, it's like a family. God's like a father with many children sitting around the table.

Let's imagine that the father is here now, and all of us are his children sitting around this table. Tell me, which of these children is the one who doesn't love? Maybe someone in one of the children is not doing too well at school. The father doesn't love that one.

Of course he loves that one. Another one is very smart and brilliant. I don't think the father loves him anymore.

Not God. He loves us all equally. So, once we find a security in that love, it makes a tremendous difference to us in our life.

We must root ourselves in that. We must meditate frequently on it. And say, Oh, Lord, I believe this is true.

This is the God of the Bible. I'll tell you something. There is no God in any religion like this.

The gods of other religions are all fearsome, wholesome beings who have no personal interest in them. So, the Bible says, there's a verse in Daniel 11.32, which says, those who know their God, Daniel 11.32, those who know their God will be strong. So, you must seek to know God better.

Then you'll be strong spiritually. And the response that comes from your heart, you know, you hear so many challenging things in a camp or in a meeting. Come on, you've got to do this.

You've got to do that. You've got to do the other thing. It's not only in a camp.

The Bible is full of exhortations. Be diligent to do that and this and that and the other. Every episode, be diligent to present yourself as a workman approved under God.

That's just one exhortation. There are many like this. And, you know, we can, underneath it all, what makes it easy is motivation.

Motivation. A mother does not feel it's a burden to look after a sick child, to go all over town to find the right injection that the doctor said is needed to save the life of your child. Goes from one medical store to another medical store to another medical store and gone to a hundred medical stores in the city, still hasn't found it.

And that mother or father go around, still take leave. What are they doing it for? Love is a tremendous motivating power, I tell you. There is no motivating power like the power of love.

People will do anything for love. Look at all these stories you read about some father or mother, parents did not allow some boy to marry a girl so they both have a suicide pact and they both commit suicide. Haven't you read about that? You read about that all the time in the papers.

It's a tremendous motivating power, love. And I believe it's the greatest motivating power in the universe. Money is also a motivating power.

A lot of people fight and kill for money but I don't think it's as strong as love. Love is the greatest force and, you know, fear. Fear can be another motivating power.

Children, they're afraid they'll get a spanking so they do something or you're afraid you'll get caught by the police so you do something. That's also a motivating power. But it's not as great a motivating power as love.

And most of, not most, all religions motivate people to obey God out of fear. God's a policeman, according to them, who's out to get you. So you better do it right.

Go around the circle, don't cut corners because he's watching. And a lot of Christian religion is also like that. The motivating force is fear.

If you do this, you'll go to hell. That may be true. Jesus himself spoke about hell so I'm not afraid to speak about it.

I'm not one of these modern type of Christians who doesn't believe in hell. I believe in hell 100%. There was a great man of God in the 19th century called William Booth.

You know, you fellas should read biographies of these great saints. Particularly the ones who lived in the 19th century like Hudson Taylor and D.L. Moody and William Booth and some of the 20th century too like Jim Elliot. You must get into the habit of reading biographies of Christians and missionary biographies.

Those are the things that challenged me in my younger days tremendously. They challenged me more than the Bible. Because I saw these guys really accomplished something with their life.

And I thought, what am I doing with my life? Motivated them. And even women. There was a woman called Mary Slessor who went out as a missionary out in the middle of Africa all by herself.

And she did great work for God, bringing so many people to Christ. Amy Carmichael who went down to Tamil Nadu, lived there for 50 years and the work that's going on even today. There were people who, you must read the biographies of these people.

They're all available. And all you need to do is miss a few trips to the restaurant and you can buy a book. That's all that's required.

It doesn't cost much now. That's all. And I tell you, your life can change if you read.

Very good habit to read. And there was this man, William Booth. He used to train people at the end of his training.

He would tell them, I wish I could, at the end of the last day of the course, suspend you over hell for 24 hours. Just, you know, I wish I could take you and make you look into hell for 24 hours. And just watch what's happening and what's happening there.

All those people, their regrets, their this and that. All the people who thought they were very holy and everybody else over there. Then I send you out to preach the gospel.

You'll never do the same. So I believe in hell. But I say, if you give your life to Jesus merely to escape hell, you're not going to go very far.

It's like a battery that will die out after some time. Love is a much more powerful force. If you try to do right things in the church out of the fear of the elders, yeah, you'll go somewhere.

But it won't go very far. That battery will die out after some time. And the engine will splutter to a stop.

But love is a force that will keep you going all your life. I'll tell you, because that's how I started my Christian life. I didn't become a Christian 50 years ago to escape hell.

I'll tell you honestly. And that's why it's made my Christian life so exciting and happy. I'll tell you honestly, it is.

Because from the beginning, I decided I want to give my life to Jesus, because He loved me. It's love that is a motivating power. And love is willing to make any number of sacrifices, particularly when we see how much the Lord loved us.

My favorite meditation as a young man was to meditate on how much Jesus loved me. To think about various aspects of it, picture it with various illustrations I made up myself, of how Jesus loved me. And that was such a tremendous motivating force in me.

It delivered me from fear of men. It delivered me from desiring a lot of things in this world. It would displease the one who loved me so much.

And in the long run, I found that it was good for me too, as a by-product. But love was the motivating force. You know, another motivating force can be this, what I just said.

What's good for me? Okay, let me do it. See, we are basically selfish creatures. So if I can tell you something good for you, you'll do it.

You know, if people are fat and they want to get thin, and say, this type of food is not good for you, this type of food is not good for you, then stop eating it, because you want to get thin. Because that's good for them. And I can tell you in the same way, it's good for you to live like, live for Jesus, because that'll do you good in the long run.

You may live like that. It's a good motivating force, but it's not the best. The best is, I love Him because He loves me.

And I don't care if I don't get any reward in heaven. And I don't care if I, you know, whether it's good for me or bad for me, it's not important. He loves me, and I love Him in return.

And if He wants me to do something, I'm going to please Him. That's the thing that'll keep you going when others have given up. That's the thing that'll keep you going on and on and on and on and on all your life.

That's what Paul, made Paul go right on to the end. I want you to turn to 2nd Timothy, the last letter that Paul wrote. 2nd Timothy chapter 2. He says, You therefore, my son, verse 1, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and the things that you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will teach others also.

Timothy was his favorite spiritual son. It's great to have a spiritual father who cares for you like Paul cared for Timothy. And he tells, he uses three examples here.

He says, Timothy, I want you to remember how a soldier, how do soldiers fight? What do they live for? So one example is what you should be. That's in verse 3 and 4. Then he talks in verse 5 about an athlete. Think of an athlete.

And then in verse 6, he talks about a farmer. And these are very simple illustrations, which all of us know what they involve. What does it mean to be a soldier? You know, we know, even if you have not been in the military, you know what a soldier is.

People don't join the military if they are cowards. And sissies who want an easy life. No.

If you are a soldier, if you join the army, you have to be willing to perhaps face an early death. Even in this latest terrorist attack, you read of some young people who died. So Paul is telling Timothy, remember, following Jesus on this earth, which is an enemy territory, means you got to be like a soldier.

You got to be tough. You got to not think of, oh, is that easy for me? Am I going to have a cushy time? Am I going to have good food? Am I going to have a nice bed to sleep on? Out in the battlefield, am I going to have this? Am I going to have that? I mean, if you are not interested in all that, Paul tells Timothy, forget it. If you are serious about being a Christian, and I'm talking about people who really want to be serious Christians, I don't want to talk to the backsliders here.

Backsliders, as far as I'm concerned, they can go to hell, to tell you honestly. Because you say, what a terrible thing to say, Brother Jack, go to hell. I'll tell you why I say that.

If after all that they have heard in CFC for so many years, I'm not talking about newcomers, people who have been here even two or three years. If after all that they have heard in CFC for two or three years, they're still playing the fool in Christianity, as far as I'm concerned, they can go to hell. They're not serious.

They can sit in the church and occupy a chair, but I'm not interested in them at all. I'm interested in seeing people who are wholehearted. You say, can you give me a scripture for that? Yes, I can.

Revelation 22, verse 11. Revelation 22, verse 11. Do you believe there's a verse in the Bible which says, do wrong? Here's a verse in the Bible which says, keep on being filthy.

Amazing verse. And the Lord's not being sarcastic. He can be sarcastic and tell somebody to be filthy, but He's serious.

He says, you should keep on being filthy. You should keep on doing wrong. The Holy Spirit says, let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong.

Is that the Bible? I thought the Bible says, let the one who does wrong repent and turn around. No, the Bible says, let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong. And let the one who's filthy continue to be filthy.

You know that verse, I never understood it for many years, but you heard me quote it and you know the answer. The answer is this. If you have read the 1,000 pages of this book called the Bible telling you to be holy, telling you to give up sin and you're still no interest in giving up sin, then there's only one exhortation for you.

Be filthy. Do wrong and go to hell. That's why I said what I said at the beginning.

If you're not serious about the Christian life, after all that you've heard in CFC, I have one exhortation for you. Be filthy. Do wrong.

Watch those filthy movies. Go to internet pornography and go to hell. I'm serious.

And you probably will go there. If you don't take your Christian life seriously, Revelation 22 11 will be fulfilled in your life. It's the last page of the Bible.

God's saying, if you're not serious after all that you've read in this book up to this page, there's no hope for you. You better give up. It's serious, brothers and sisters.

Holiness is not something we play around with. Sin is not something we fool around with. It's the most serious thing in the universe.

It's the thing which God sent His Son to hang on a cross to save us from. It's not something we've got to play around with. We've got to take it seriously.

But on the other hand, there are people who come to the end of this book and they say, God, I want to be righteous. I want to be holy. Go ahead.

The Bible says, be holy. And don't look at all these other people who continue to be filthy. Ignore them.

I'm coming quickly, Revelation 22 12. And I will give to every man according as his work shall be. Those who wash their robes, they may have the right to the tree of life, will enter the gates of the city.

And those who are immoral, those who tell lies, verse 15, will all be outside the city. And they'll go to hell. That's it.

So that's how scripture ends, by the way. So what does it mean to be a soldier? A soldier is one who's recognized that Christian life is not a picnic. We've got to take life seriously.

We've got to deny ourselves a lot of things. It says in 2 Timothy chapter 2, we've got to suffer hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. A soldier is not one who's living a comfortable life.

A soldier is out there fighting for his country. Very often, maybe it's love of country, love of money. In our case, it says a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

It's not money. It's not country. It's because Jesus loved me.

I give myself to Him. I want to count for Him in this one life I have. And I don't want, if others want to be filthy, they're wealthy and filthy, but I'm a good soldier.

I'm going to fight. I'm going to fight against my lust. I'm going to fight against the devil.

I'm going to fight against everything that hinders me from possessing all of God's kingdom. A soldier is one who fights. He fights, but he doesn't fight human beings.

Ephesians 6 and verse 12 it says our fight is not against human beings, not against flesh and blood. Dear, my dear young brothers and sisters, stop fighting with human beings. Stop fighting with others in your college.

Stop fighting with others in your place of work. Stop fighting with your boss. Stop fighting with your parents.

Just stop fighting with human beings and concentrate on fighting your lust and fighting the devil. We do not fight against flesh and blood. Make that resolution in your life.

My life has changed the day I made that resolution that I will never fight with a human being. Never. They may come to fight with me, but I'm not going to respond.

People who want to come and have an argument with me will find that I'm not going to argue. That's the end of the argument. They say, ah, you don't know the answer.

So, I say, okay. Please consider that you won the argument. Fine.

Have the satisfaction that you won the argument and you defeated Brother Zach in the argument. Go ahead. I'm not here to win any argument.

I'm here to manifest Jesus and I'm not going to fight with flesh and blood. It's completely out of the question. Make that decision.

Be a soldier who fights against your lust and fights against the devil. That's all. This is a new covenant and the old covenant they fought human beings.

They fought Philistines and Amorites and Canaanites. Don't be an old covenant person. If you fight human beings one day in a year, you are an old covenant person.

And if you're married, don't ever fight with your wife or husband. No. If they want to fight, they can fight.

But you say, I'm not going to fight. Sorry. I finished.

I'm a new covenant. I finished with the old covenant long ago. I'm not in the old covenant.

I'm not going to fight with human beings. They can come and fight with me if they want. They can insult me.

Has anybody insulted you more than they insulted Jesus? They called him the prince of devils. Who's called you a prince of devils? You know what Jesus said to them? You called me a prince of devils? I'm just an ornery man. You're forgiven.

What a way to live. Refuse to feel offended if people insulted you, spat on you. They spat on him.

He said, it's okay. Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.

That's what it is to be a soldier fighting against one's lust. We have only a limited amount of energy. Don't fight.

Don't use that energy to fight the wrong things. Use it all against the lust and the devil. A soldier is like that.

One who has decided that he's not going to seek comfort and ease on this earth. Rest is in heaven. He's inwardly at rest in Christ.

He knows his life is a battle. I'll tell you something. Having been a Christian for 50 years now, it's a battle still.

But it gets easier. It gets much easier. Don't think that that battle you're fighting now will always be like this.

It'll get easier if you're faithful. But if you're not faithful, then of course it remains difficult even after 50 years. If you're faithful, it'll get easier and easier and it'll be more and more exciting in this battle.

There are many things. When you find yourself in a difficult situation in your office for example, where your colleagues are cracking dirty jokes, I'm not asking you to stand up and give a lecture to all those people. Just quietly go away from there so they realize that you're not interested in that type of conversation.

Let them see that you're different. Let your bosses see that you're upright and you will not compromise and you will go by your conscience and you're ready to lose your job if necessary. Because you're a soldier for Christ.

I'll tell you something, if you lose your job because you stood up for Christ, you can be sure of one thing, that God will honor you because you honored Him. That's for sure. God will never let you down if you honor Him.

Be a soldier for Christ. God needs a lot of soldiers on this earth. Soldiers are people who implicitly obey.

One of the things that they taught us in the military was, you know, I used to think, why do they make us parade so much? The military is full of parades every day. Right turn, left turn, about turn, quick march stop, mark time and keep on doing that day after day. Haven't we had enough of this? No, we haven't.

Next day it's the same thing. And I learned, the reason is this, it is to change people who live by their own opinions to just implicitly do what you're told. You know, the sergeant major says, Havildar major says, right turn.

And you say, well, why? Ah. You will learn such a lesson that day that for the next 50 years you will do right turn immediately. Now, I won't tell you how they teach that lesson, but it will be such a severe lesson you'll never forget it all your life.

You'll dream about it at night, the lesson they teach you. You know, little things like stand upright. If you don't put out your chest and stoop like this and stand over there, you're finished.

You'll never stoop like this for the rest of your life. No. Ah.

So, it's to teach implicit obedience. And from these soldiers, they select another special group called commandos. Have you heard of them? The elite commandos.

And I remember how they used to one of the things they tested soldiers in Britain during the Second World War was to select these were all soldiers who had already turned left turn, right turn, about turn. They knew all that. But to teach them don't use your common sense.

Just do what you're told. You know? They were asked to march on a jetty. You know what a jetty is? Something that sticks out into the sea where the ships come and tie up.

Quick march. They march, march, march, march. And when they come to the end of the jetty, there's no command to halt.

So all sensible people, what do they do? They halt. About five or ten of them, non-sensible people, marched right into the sea. They were the ones who were selected to be commandos.

People who don't question. They didn't get a command to halt. They marched right into the sea.

You ten qualify. The rest can go home. The ordinary soldiers.

That is the type of training. And they tested them in certain other things which I will not tell you. Which is pretty horrible.

What they tested them in courage and things like that. But implicit obedience. Be a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

If God has said something, I have learned not to question it. Either you say, I don't believe this is God's word. Or I think we should modify it for the 20th century.

It's not exactly. It's not important. It's not important.

The main thing, brother, is to fight the enemy. Not whether we march into the sea or not. Well, okay.

Those people will be soldiers. They were not sacked. They remain soldiers but they are not commandos.

So, God has certain people on earth who will do exactly as he says. And won't question. Those are the real top soldiers in God's army.

But you won't know what he says unless you read the scriptures. You need to know the orders. The other thing we were taught in the military was ignorance of orders is no excuse.

You know, the orders would be posted on the notice board. And if you don't go to the notice board and read it, you can't get up the next morning and say, sir, I was ignorant of that order. Well, we'll send you into jail for a few days and you'll never again be ignorant of any order for the rest of your life.

Be without food for a few days and go on a route march for 20 miles or something. Come back and you'll never again miss reading the notice board. That's it.

It was really tough, I tell you. Being a soldier is not like going and working in some office. It says, be a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

You must know your orders. You must know what the commander, Jesus Christ, the captain of our salvation has ordered. And there's no use saying, I didn't know.

That is not an excuse. I remember once in the military, I think I said, somebody asked me, a senior officer asked me a question. And I said, I don't know, sir.

He said, don't ever say you don't know. Say, I'll find out, sir. You know the difference between I don't know, sir, and I'll find out, sir.

What's the difference? I don't know, sir, means I don't know and I'm not bothered whether I'm going to know it or not. I'll find out, sir. If you've asked me that question, it must be important.

And I don't know it right now, but I'm going to go and find out. Has anybody asked you a question from the Bible, which your answer is, I don't know. Or will your answer from today onwards be, I'll find out.

That's how I started studying the scriptures. When I used to witness to people, they'd ask me things from the Bible, which I didn't know the answer. And I went to some of the elders in our church, they didn't know the answer either.

The answer was always, I don't know. What do you mean you don't know? If the answer is in the Bible, you should know it. If you don't know the answer, you should find out.

And that made me want to dig into God's word to find out whatever there is. I want to know the orders. So it says here, suffer hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

And a person who is decided to be a soldier does not entangle himself in the affairs of everyday life. He's always available. If the army calls up, I don't know whether you know this, that if a war suddenly comes up and a soldier is on vacation, he's called up, he has to drop everything and go the same day.

Whether he gets a reservation in the train or not, get into an unreserved compartment, he's got to report the next day to the office. There's no such thing as I didn't get a reservation and all these silly excuses. You've got to just turn up.

You've got to be always available. It's not easy to be a soldier, but to be a soldier of Jesus Christ is a wonderful thing. And when you're in the battlefield, you've always got to be alert.

The world is like a battlefield for a soldier. You see, you can't be a sleepy type of soldier in the battlefield. You'll be the first one to be shot.

And I find a lot of Christians very sleepy spiritually. They don't know something today and one year later they still don't know. I find that they don't have any discernment about the various types of things going on in Christendom.

They accept a lot of things as if it's all scriptural. There's no discernment. They're sleepy Christians.

You shouldn't be a sleepy Christian. You must be alert. You're a soldier, you're alert.

You're always available. You may not have much ability. That's okay.

If you're available, that's fine. There may be soldiers who are technical and soldiers who just carry equipment, whatever it is. But you don't have to have ability as much as availability.

That's all that God requires. Are you available for me, the Lord says. Ability, I'll give you.

But are you available? When I started serving the Lord, I certainly didn't have the ability I have right now. God gave that to me. But I said, I'm available.

I'm available, Lord, to whatever you want me to do. I remember those days when I was in a church in Bombay and there was one family that came from way out in the suburbs. It took a couple of hours those days to get there.

To get a bus and then a train and another bus and walk some distance to their house. And you get to their house and there'll be three people who want to have a Bible study once a week. Who wanted to go there? Nobody.

I said, I'll go. Travel all that distance and speak to three people. By the way, a couple of them are in our church today in Bombay after so many years.

This is going back nearly 47 years. But when God sees that you are willing to do those small things to help one person, to help two people. You know, Jesus once traveled walked 50, 80 kilometers to Syro-Phoenicia, which is beyond the northern border of Israel to help one woman whose daughter was demon possessed.

You know, she's the one whom Jesus said, I can't give the children's bread to the dogs. He just went there, healed that one person and next day walked 80 kilometers back. Who would walk 160 kilometers to help one person? Would you do that? I remember reading that you know, and I said, where does it say 80 kilometers? If you got a map at the back of your Bible, you can find out pretty quickly the distance.

It challenged me. Imagine looking at a map and getting challenged. I said, Lord, I say, follow, follow I'll follow Jesus, I'll follow Jesus.

Will I walk 160 kilometers to help one person? Walk Walk Don't say easily, I will follow Jesus. It's so easy to sing it in the choir. But say, Lord I really mean this.

I want to be a soldier. I'm not going to look for convenience. You can't serve the Lord.

The other thing I want to mention about being a soldier is you know, you can't get into the army and say I want all Malayalis around me or all Canadians or all Anglo-Indians or all Canadi guys or I don't like this guy, I don't want to sit next to him. They'll kick you out the next day. No, but before they kick you out, they'll teach you a lesson that you won't forget for the rest of your life.

Put you in jail for a few years and then kick you out. They ask you, why in the world did you join the army? You go and sleep at home. You're not fit to be a soldier.

You know, if you join a soldier you can't decide I want to be with this group. I want to be with that group. I don't like this guy.

I don't like that guy. I can't work with him. I can't go to the battlefield with him.

There is no such thing. You're with a mixed group of people all types of people. They smell bad, some of them and they have bad habits and all types of things.

You got to live with them. You want to be a soldier? Or you want to go on a picnic? Now you know the reason why it's not going so well in your Christian life. You come for a picnic, not a battle.

You determine today man or woman that you're going to be a soldier for Jesus Christ. It's the best life you can ever live. And then secondly he said, think of an athlete.

That's the other picture Paul uses in 2 Timothy 2 in verse 5. An athlete. And then you know we just had the Olympic Games this year and there were these people who got gold medals and they were trained for years and years and years in this terrific discipline to be able to win a gold medal in an Olympic Games. That's what you think of when you think of an athlete.

Discipline. They give up so many things. Think of a person who wants to run the marathon 40 kilometers or even 100 meters.

They have to practice such a lot. It says in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 that in those days they didn't get gold medals. They'd get a wreath on their heads.

An olive wreath or something. Which was what the award they gave. Nowadays it's a gold medal.

The gold itself doesn't have any value. It's the honor of having won an Olympic gold medal. 1 Corinthians 9:24 don't you know that many run in a race but only one receives a prize.

You must run in such a way that you win means all of you Corinthians if you run, all of you can come first. This is the only race where everybody can come first. The Christian race.

But those who do it they exercise self-control in all things. That's how they get the prize. So that's the second picture of a true Christian.

Discipline. Self-control in your eating habits. In your sleeping habits.

In your conversation habits where you don't keep on spending hours and hours and hours in useless conversation. Don't waste your money on frequent trips to restaurants. There's nothing wrong in it.

It can be a terrific waste of money. Once in a while okay but you know when people have a lot of money I find nowadays particularly. I'll tell you what I feel sad about a lot of young people today.

To tell you honestly I feel sad they earn so much that they have so much money that they can throw it around. That's fine. I'd like to see what type of Christians they become after a few years.

If they're not disciplined. If they don't seek to save money. If they don't, if they're not frugal and careful with their money just because they have a lot of it and waste it here and waste it there.

No. I don't think much will come out of that. There's a lack of discipline in the financial area with a lot of young people nowadays and when they get married they'll discover serious problems.

These are the people who get into debt when they get married. You must make it a point that you'll never get into debt. I've never been in debt for a single day nearly 70 years of my life.

Because I decided I'm not going to waste money. I never wasted it when I was young. I didn't waste it even today.

Whether I have much of it, it makes no difference. You're just careful. It's part of discipline.

Eating you can enjoy a good meal but don't become a slave to food. Be a disciplined person. An athlete is one who disciplines himself to win a prize.

And he says, I do the same. He says, I also discipline my body, verse 27. I make it my slave so that I don't get disqualified in this race.

So it's very exciting. It's wonderful to see these fellows coming first in the 100 meters or the marathon or something like that. But you don't see the hours and hours and hours and years of training that went behind that.

That went behind that prize. I mean it's just a few seconds there and they get the prize but there are hours and hours that went behind it. Be a soldier and be an athlete in the Christian life.

Be a disciplined runner. You got to run a race. We got to finish it.

We don't want to slow down. We don't want to start walking when we should be running. He says, let's run the race right after the finish.

Don't worry if other people have given up. There are a lot of people who give up in the marathon. A lot of people who give up in the Christian life.

A lot of people who started out with me who gave up or went and married some person because that was very important to them. See that's another thing that can happen in the Christian life. You're running and running and running in the marathon and all of a sudden you see a pretty girl and so you stop the marathon and say, hey if I don't get off the track right now I might miss her.

Forget the race. That's exactly what's happened to some people. Or they want to go after some man who could be the other way around.

They forgot all about the race. Do you think you'll miss God's best when you're running the race? I'll tell you no. You won't miss Him.

Along the way He'll give you someone else's run in the race and you'll catch up with her or she'll catch up with you and say hey, both of you get together and run together now. Don't get sidetracked. It could be money.

It could be a job. Say, Lord, the race is primary. Everything else is secondary.

As long as these things fit in with my goal to reach the finishing line, fine. Otherwise, I have no time for it. I'm going to give up on it.

So, be an athlete. Be disciplined. It also says in 2 Timothy 2 that He competes according to the rules.

There are rules, 2 Timothy 2 5. He doesn't win a prize unless according to the rules. We read recently in some of the Olympic games that a guy who came first finally discovered he got into somebody else's track and lost the prize. He thought he won it.

No, they checked out the video and all that and found he just cut into another person's track a little bit. In other words, he didn't mind his own business. That's what I mean by cutting into somebody else's track.

Mind your own business. Don't get into somebody else's track. Let him run his race.

You run yours. Stick to the rules that are in Scripture. Otherwise, you don't get a prize.

There is a prize and I'll tell you something, that prize is far greater than any gold medal on earth. It's worth everything and Jesus himself said, well done, good and faithful servant. All the trials and sufferings on earth will vanish.

All the criticism you got from men and all the misunderstanding will all disappear. You will hear Jesus say one day to you, well done. I really appreciate what you did for me.

I appreciate all the sacrifices you made. Boy, what wouldn't I give to get those words from my Savior. What about you? The third picture here is a farmer.

The hard-working farmer. I tell you, farmers are hard-working like fishermen. Hard-working.

They work hard. They dig the ground. They sow the seed.

They keep on working, working, working, working, working. And they don't get a crop very soon. Think of a farmer who is planting coconut trees or you know there are a lot of people who have fields of coconut trees.

They plant little coconut trees and it's years before they get a crop. Or mango trees. It's years before they get their first crop.

But they go ahead and plant it. Are you willing to wait many years before you get your first crop? Are you willing to be a hard-working farmer who keeps on slogging away in faith, watering that coconut tree, watering that mango tree, knowing one day it's going to produce tremendous fruit? The hard-working farmer, the person who does that, deserves, it says here, to get his first share of the crops. So such people, God blesses them in a special way.

He doesn't bless other people. Let's turn to Galatians chapter 6. In Galatians 6 it says, verse 8, speaking about a farmer language here, the one who sows to his flesh will reap from the flesh corruption. The one who sows to the spirit will reap from the spirit eternal life.

So what are we supposed to sow? What does it mean to sow in the spirit? So it says, let us not lose heart, next verse, in doing good. That's the sowing in the spirit. Sowing in the spirit, you don't have to use your imagination, it's explained in the next verse, it's doing good.

If you keep on doing it, in due time, after many years, you'll get a harvest. If you don't give up. And so, as long as we have opportunity.

What does that phrase mean? As long as we have opportunity. As long as you're alive. Before you've gone to the grave.

As long as you're alive, and when you have the opportunity, let us do good to all human beings, but especially to those in our local church. Yeah. I want to do good to all, but especially to my fellow believers.

That's what the Bible says. So that's the sowing to the spirit. And I sow, and I sow, and I sow, maybe I don't get a crop, maybe I'm not going to give up, I'm not going to give up, I'm going to be a farmer.

You know, there's a lot of opportunities for you to sow right in the church where you are. There are people much younger than you, to do good to them. You know, if you want to, for example, win the heart, or supposing you want to win a six-year-old boy or girl to the Lord.

You've got a burden. Forget the teenage years. Okay, let's start with a six-year-old.

You know how to win a six-year-old to the Lord? Which verse will you give him first? Chocolate. Your one is heart. Before you give John 3, 16, and all that.

You've got to win the person's heart. There are many ways of doing good. It doesn't cost much.

To win a person, I'm not saying, you pray to the Lord and say, Lord, will you give me a burden for somebody whom I can be friendly with? Just help. And you may try and you find that there's no response.

Okay, forget it.

Thought I didn't get any response there. Maybe it's somebody else. I just want to try and be friendly with someone who I can encourage.

Don't spoil them. They get bad teeth if you give them too many chocolates. You know that.

But to win their heart, to win them, that's the sowing. That's the farmer. Sowing, sowing, sowing, sowing.

If you don't reap a harvest, don't worry. Think of the farmer who's planted a coconut tree. It's years before his season, but when it comes, boy, what crops! You know that every one of you, my brothers and sisters, can be soldiers, athletes, and farmers.

And boy, what a blessing you can be to CFC. Study the Word. Work hard in studying the Word.

In the midst of your spare time, I studied all of Scripture in the middle of my working days when I was in the Navy, especially when you're single. You'll find very little time to study the Scriptures once you get married. Very little.

If you don't study it in your single days, it'll be very difficult. I'm so thankful I studied the Scriptures before I got married. But now in your single days, devote yourself to the study of the Scriptures and to do good to people wherever you can.

Discipline yourself and say, Lord, I'm ready. I'm a soldier. I'm not looking for a life of ease.

I'm willing to face battle with the devil in my lust and I'm going to overcome. Okay, let's pray. Everything out of love for Jesus.

Everything. If it's not out of love for Jesus, you're not going to go far. You'll get tired in the race and give up.

But love is a very powerful, motivating factor. So meditate on the love of Jesus for you. Think of how much He has forgiven you.

And say, Lord, I'm deeply grateful. I want to live the rest of my days for you. I don't want to look around and see whether other people are wholehearted or not.

I'm not interested. I want to be wholehearted myself. Don't worry.

Don't be discouraged. There are many half-hearted people around you. It doesn't matter.

Ignore them. Be wholehearted yourself. Heavenly Father, thank you for those lovely young people.

I think of the tremendous potential there is right here in this room for the kingdom of God to shake so much of the devil's kingdom in India. The devil sees that potential too and I see that he's going to try and ruin some of them. Please give us all discernment that they'll never be discouraged and never condemn themselves because you did not send your son to condemn the world.

Lord, we thank you that you came to love us and deliver us from all the wretched things we inherited from Adam. Thank you. You're a good God.

You've got something good in store for us. You've got pleasant surprises for us around the corner. We thank you that you're always silently planning to do some good for us.

We believe that. We rejoice in it. Thank you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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