

Fight the Good Fight

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[0:00] 1 Timothy 6, verse 12.

Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

You could flick a few pages further there to 2 Timothy 2, verse 3.

He says, Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. And then 2 Timothy 4, 7 to 8. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing.

[1:08] It's saying there, fight the good fight. Paul says, Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. And at the close of his life, he writes, I have fought a good fight.

I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. We are chosen to be God's soldiers, to be God's men in God's army, men and women, called to active service, to fight the warfare that the Christian life should be, to wage war.

It's combat. It's engaging in warfare. And Paul, that battle-scarred hero, writes a combat manual here for young Timothy. He aims to strengthen and encourage Timothy to boldly go on, despite the hardships that he might face and the challenges.

And the Christian life, Christian living, means conflict. If you thought it was going to be easy, it's not so. It means a cosmic conflict that's been raging since the Garden of Eden, where we have an enemy, a committed enemy.

And he continues to battle against God and God's people. And the Christian life, Christian living, it means conflict. It means battle. It means battles.

[2:24] It means the front-line battlefield of opposition and engagement with the enemy. A struggle, a strife, a front-line action. It means battles.

For you, maybe those battles might be, you might have worries in your life. You might have sadness you've had to battle through. Temptations. Marriage problems. Job problems. Financial problems. Health worries. Stress. Maybe you're suffering battle fatigue. Now you see, when people come back from a place of conflict, whether they've been civilians there or soldiers in the conflict, they're often scarred.

It's mental scars, isn't it? Through being in a country in a time of war. It affects everybody, even those that aren't on the front-line. As God's people, as God's men and women who are God's soldiers, you have a battle to fight.

And you've got an enemy who's wanting to hinder you every step of the way. We need to take back turf from the enemy and get behind the enemy lines and advance.

[3:31] God is looking for a people who will go forward to the front line. And the gospel is not for wimps and sissies. The gospel, the good news, is for real men and real women who will follow that one, the great hero of them all.

The absolute superhero, the Lord Jesus Christ. And, you know, it belittles him to compare him to the superheroes of comic books, as we know. But he is the absolute and ultimate one that we can commit our lives to and know that he will lead us forward in a conquering army over the enemy of our soul, the enemy who is Satan.

And it's not for the limp-wristed and the effeminate. Christianity is for real men and real women who want to fight that ultimate fight that is being ways, whether you like it or not, whether you realise it or not.

There is a war on for your soul. Someone wants to take you to hell with him for eternity. And someone wants to take you to heaven with him for eternity. And it's really, you're torn. There's a battle, really the battle's going on in the inside of you. It's like Paul said, the good that I would, I do not, and the bad that I shouldn't do, I do.

[4:45] As he had that battle raging within him, he knew there was a conflict. There was a fistcuff fight going on within his heart. And like that too, there's a fight going on for truth. There's a fight going on for godly principles.

There's a fight going on for the family. And there's things to fight against. As a Christian, we know there's many things that we have to fight against. Most of all, it's the ego.

It's the I. It's the self. The middle initial of sin. It's me. Myself and I. That's the greatest enemy. It's carnality. It's selfishness.

Sometimes it's the fear of man. When we've got mates that we don't want to be seen to be associating with Christians. It's the fear of man. We need to fight that and overcome it. We need to be an out-and-out Christian, not a hidden one.

Easy believism is another fight. In the church scene, where there's an easy-believerism kind of gospel about. Where it's a false gospel. Because the real gospel means take up your cross and follow me.

[5:45] Deny yourself and follow me. The Lord Jesus says day by day by day. As a fight against deception and ungodliness in church circles. Because there's much that abounds that is not scriptural.

And we know largely it's that which predominates the airways and the TV creatures. There's very few that you could take any hit to. Because there's a lot of danger there.

There's a lot of falsehood there. Because the enemy's crept in and taken over in many circles today. And I want to urge you today, if you haven't already, to sign up.

Sign up today. Enlist today. You see the old posters of Uncle Sam or Colonel Kitchener pointing his finger. Saying, sign up. Enlist now.

Join the army. If you're not a Christian tonight, join the army of God. Join that mighty army. Onward Christian soldiers. Be that one who will say yes.

[6:40] I'll answer that call to action. That call to arms. I'm going to join up and enlist in his all conquering forces. I'm going to sign up under the command of the commander in chief of the universe.

And I'm going to be his soldier. And I'm going to say yes sir. You know that's colourful language. My appeal there. But it's real. It's real. This is not just fanciful kind of movie world kind of talk.

There is a real fight going on. There's a real battle. Many people don't realise this is real. They don't realise this is not Hollywood. This is real life.

Everyday life. And you don't always think of it. But really there's a committed enemy who's waging war against you. We need to grapple with that enemy. We need to come to blows with him.

The question is what makes a soldier? What makes a soldier? What makes an army? Some of the characteristics of that. In order to fight. In order to be a soldier. We need to have courage.

[7:46] We need to have courage. In Hebrews 11.34. It talks about God's people who waxed valiant in fight. They grew valiant in their fight.

Have we lost the fight? Or are we going to grow valiant in the fight? Have you given up the fight? I think a lot of Christians have. It's a bit like my little dog sometimes when he misbehaves and he knows he's going to get shouted at.

And he pulls his little tail in behind his legs. And he goes and hides. And that's what some Christians are like today. They just pull their tail in and act like a wimpy little dog.

But God wants you to be a man. A woman of God. He says I'm going to obey God. I'm going to have courage in this combat. And I'm going to advance into the thick of it and attack.

In order to fight. In order to be a soldier. You need to have obedience. And that's a dirty word in the world today. Especially for young people. But for us older people too. Nobody likes to obey.

[8:48] Obey the law. Obey the government. Obey the teacher. Obey the parents. But obedience is vital on the battlefield. Because if you don't obey the senior officer when you're facing the enemy.

Then you're going to be in big trouble. It's going to cost you your life. It's going to cost your unit. The fight. The battle. And you're going to be defeated. And we need to have obedience. As a Christian we need to obey God.

It's interesting that in the terms that are used to describe a Christian. They're called believers four times. Four times. They're called disciples 275 times.

A disciple means one who is a learner. Who is a follower of Christ. He says come and I'll make you my disciples. And he's called saviour 24 times.

But he is called Lord 711 times. We can think of him as our saviour. But much more to think of him as our Lord. That means master.

[9:50] That means the one who is our king. Who is our ruler. The one who is our captain. We should stay close to and obey his marching orders. Someone said without discipline.

A body of men becomes rabble. Rabble dies either on the battlefield or in a POW camp. We don't want to be a rabble.

We want to be a disciplined army unit. Obeying the voice of our commander in chief. Our commanding officer. Staying close to him.

Listening for his voice. And this is where we get his instructions. Heed it. Obey it. And you'll be blessed for that. Another thing about an army is they need to have a recognition of the enemy. To recognise the devious tactics and be alert for all the enemy's sneaky ways. Sometimes he'll try to infiltrate. Sometimes we might make the mistake of fraternising with the enemy.

[10:48] You know, the Lord says in his word that if you're going to be a friend of the world, you're actually an enemy of God. Don't make friends with the world. Don't copy or mimic or chase after the ways and thinking of the world and its wrong ways.

Instead, refuse that and choose God. Recognise the enemy. When I was a young lad, I had an interest in planes and aircraft of different countries, and especially World War II planes and World War I planes.

And you could see them in silhouettes. You know, the old anti-aircraft gunners had to look at these planes just in a silhouette form, just the outline of the plane, to be able to recognise, because they wanted to shoot down the right thing.

They wanted to shoot down the enemy, not the friendly planes. And like that too, we need to recognise the enemy. We need to have our eyes peeled and alert. But, you know, when we're on sentry duty, you know, you've got to be alert.

You've got to have your wits about you and recognise the enemy. Sometimes we don't recognise the enemy that he's about. Sometimes it is fiery darts like Ephesians 6.16, but sometimes it's actually things that we don't even realise we're under attack.

[11:59] Or we're facing temptation, and it could come in sneaky ways. And as a spiritually weak or an immature Christian, we may not even realise that.

When our feelings are affected, when we're feeling depressed or hopeless, when we feel like our emotions are afraid, that's probably the enemy that's behind it.

He might be behind some of those feelings. And we need to recognise the enemy for what he's about. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, not against human beings, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places, Ephesians 6.12.

Satan is a thief. He's out to steal from you. He wants to rob you, rob you of fellowship, take you away from church, rob you of ministry by your getting in sin, rob you of time.

You can waste it so readily. Rob you of spiritual life. He'll divert you and distract you any which way he can. He'll try to stunt your growth.

[13:10] He'll try to damage your testimony. He'll try to hit you where it hurts in your everyday life. And the world around us today thinks Satan, the devil, Lucifer.

It's just a big joke. It's just like some ghost, some make-believe, some mythical creature. But no, he is someone to take seriously. He is seriously after your soul.

He's chasing after your soul. And he wants to take you to hell. Some think he's not a someone at all. He's just an impersonal force or a concept. Some imaginary concept.

And of course I'm not meaning to scare anyone here today or to glorify Satan in any way, but just to say he is real. He's not imaginary. And as a Christian, we need to have our wits about us and recognise him to be alert for his sneaky ways.

In order to fight, we need to have conviction. It's a fight for the truth. Because the truth is under attack, we need to stand up and fight. There's a battle going on for the word of God.

[14:13] In Jude it says, Now this word, earnestly contend for, it means to have an intense force.

An intense force. This is not some casual, half-hearted attempt to follow the truth. He's saying, Intensely contend for it.

Earnestly fight for it. It's worth fighting for the truth. And the verb is in the present sense, so it means now, in the present day. Moment by moment, actively, continuously, contend.

The question for everybody here tonight, everybody hearing this, is whose side are you on? Whose side are you on? Whose uniform are you wearing?

Whose flag are you flying? On the way to church tonight, I saw an Aussie flag flying in someone's front yard. They've got patriotism. They've got a loyalty to their flag, to their country, to their nation.

[15:22] Whose loyalty do you have? Whose loyalty do you consider? When you live your life, have you got a loyalty to Christ, or are you really just playing around with the things of God?

Maybe it's just some casual interest. For many younger or older people, church can be just a casual interest, a bit like a social club, a bit like a community club, that you just come and be friends, and have a cup of tea.

Church, the real church, God's church, is an army, made up of soldiers, committed to a cause, worth living, worth dying for. Really, there's only two powers in the world, the sword and the spirit. And Napoleon said, the sword is always defeated by the spirit. The sword is always defeated by the spirit. It's the spirit of the man.

It's whether you've got the spirit to fight, that counts. Not so much the armour that you carry. You know, we know in World War II, the French resistance, they had nothing really to fight the Nazi invaders with, with all of their high-tech weaponry of the time.

[16:36] And yet, who won? The resistance did, because they had the spirit to fight. They had the spirit to fight. Do you have the spirit to fight? Have you got the character to fight? To stand?

To stand tall? When you're under attack? When the battle saps your strength with weariness? When all around you, everyone's caving in to the pressures of the world, and worldliness, and Christlessness?

Are you going to stand against the tide? Have you got Christianity with a conviction? That's going to be aggressive? That's going to fight under fire? Will you be at your post?

Or will you cave in? Will you desert? Will you go AWOL from your post of duty? The second coming of Christ is approaching. He's coming back, and he's going to be looking for people ready.

And dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. 1 Peter 2.11 Peter urges them, abstain, steer clearer, have a wide berth, avoid it like you would, put a barge pole between you and fleshly lusts.

[17:49] He says abstain from it, keep away from it. It's going to hurt your soul. It's warring against your soul. And this world, as we know, is bent on evil, it's bent on sin.

Don't buy into that. There's a war on, abstain from, sin. A war for your soul. And the devil wants to steal, maybe he'll steal from you, by ungodly activities.

You know, we can get busy in all kinds of pursuits, and neglect our soul. Just getting drunk out. Getting drunk, going stupid, whatever it might be.

It could be, you know, sometimes it could be innocent pursuits too. We might have a hobby, a sport, or a job that takes us away from what God wants us to be up to.

And you've got a fight on your hands. Are you going to be a victim, a survivor, or a victor? Someone who actually wins through. And how do we get the victory? Christ is our victory.

[18:48] He's the one. He's won it all. It says that he leads captivity triumph. He's an all-conquering captain that storms into the city as everything gives way to him.

How has he won this victory? Because of the cross where he bled and died and rose again, conquering sin and death and hell, triumphant.

And we can be a part of that. Again, where's your loyalty? Have you got a commitment to the army? We're not meant to be lone rangers, but part of a fighting unit. As God's church, it says we're to fight together.

And you see pictured in some ways that it's shown on the movies of Roman armies where they get together as a fighting unit and their shields were like the size of a small door.

And they locked these shields together in a battle formation. And they were locked together as a hundred-man armoured box of phallings with the...

[19:54] Everyone was covered by the shields of their neighbours. In the front, the sides, the back, and above them there was enough shields to lock together so they were all safe as a fighting unit.

And in order to be a soldier, we need to have endurance to fight on. In 2 Timothy 2.3, Paul didn't say to Timothy, he didn't say, Christian, enjoy softness.

He didn't say, Christian, enjoy softness. He said, Christian, endure hardness as a soldier, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

We're defeated very easily. I know any one of us can think of times where we're throwing the towel in, you know, I mean, Satan hasn't won the war but he's part of won a few battles along the way where we've given in and we've let God down, we've not stuck to our guns like we should have done, as a soldier should have done.

Sometimes we turn tail. We've given up too easily when temptations come, when trials have come, when troubles have come, too easily given up the fight. We've lost our fighting spirit.

[21:07] And friends tonight, whilst you may have suffered some defeat, get back in the fight. Get back in the fight. That's important. As a good soldier, you're a fighter, not a quitter.

You'll battle through. You'll endure hardness. You'll battle through those hard times, those tough times, the uncomfortable, the testing times. Twice, Timothy was urged by Paul to fight the good fight.

And Ephesians 6, he says that the fight is against the powers of darkness. There's a whole arsenal of enemy forces arrayed against you, bent on your destruction, bent on defeating you, on overwhelming you.

People tonight, be aware of that, that it is real. We're at war, and we better realise it. Sometimes we forget there's a war on. We're called to fight, and we need to fight.

And it's a bit like the story told of a young boy that noticed a moth coming out of his chrysalis, and he thought he'd give this little moth a bit of a helping hand, so he helped cut away a bit of the chrysalis so the moth could get out of the container that he was birthed in into the world.

[22:22] And yet, that moth was sickly and weak and powerless because it hadn't had the struggle of getting out of that container of the chrysalis that it needed to build up the strength in its wings and in its body.

Like that too, as a Christian, you need the hard times. You need to endure the hardness so that you can be stronger, so that God can strengthen your faith through that.

Another thing about a soldier, in order to fight, we need to have the will to please our commanding officer in 2 Timothy 2.4. Paul writes, no one serving as a soldier gets involved in the affairs of the world, the civilian affairs, because he wants to please his commanding officer.

Now, we can get distracted so that we neglect those things that count. We know man that wroth entangleth himself in the affairs of this life that he may please him who had chosen him to be a soldier.

We want to please our commanding officer, don't we? When all is said and done, don't you want it to be said of you, well done? Don't you want it to be said of you by the Lord Jesus when he opens heaven's door to you, he says, well done.

[23:41] Not that I'm letting you in by any works that you've done, but your faith in me, you've been faithful, welcome. I'm pleased with you. Or

will he say of you, I never knew you.

I never knew you. Some people think they've done all kinds of major things like dramatic miracles and wonders and all things that they could brag about and yet he says to them, I never knew you. Depart from me. Sometimes we can be a make-believe Christian where we can make people believe we're a Christian and there's many that do that and just because you walk in this room and sing a song or two and look like you're a Christian doesn't make you a Christian.

You could be a make-believe Christian. I'm saying that for anyone, younger and older. Don't make that mistake of being a make-believe Christian. Be a fair dinking one. Be a real one. A real dinky-dye, true blue, Aussie Christian.

Make Christ your saviour. Make him your commanding officer so that one day he'll say, well done, well done, you've done well. One thing every soldier better realise is who is in command.

[24:56] That's what counts. When you become a Christian, you resign as the master of your own destiny, as the boss of your own life. You hand over the car keys of your life and you let him be the driver of your life.

You let him be the pilot. You let him be the controller. You let him be the master. Let him be the commanding officer. Let him be the Lord. And realise that he is in command.

That's when we become a Christian. We let him, we resign and he takes over. And Satan is not out there playing games. It's not rubber bullets.

It's not, you know, this paintball. You know, it's real bullets he's firing. It's fiery dance of the wicker, it says in Ephesians 6. He's out to get you, to hurt you, to wound you, to demoralise you, to make you a defeated man or woman tonight.

But if we pay attention to what our commanding officer says and what he wants us to do and do it, we'll be blessed with that. Think of it, again, in that analogy of peacetime and wartime.

[26:06] And to be effectively able to fight, we need intensive training. There's a quote here, it says that the unit that sweats more in peacetime will bleed less in battle.

It's a thought, isn't it? Sweat more in peacetime, you'll bleed less in battle. And people, we need to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Why? Because it's going to get tougher.

You ain't seen nothing yet. It could well be that we're going to face some real fights in the days ahead. Who knows? I'm just anticipating that it could happen and preparing.

We need to prepare for that. It could well be as it is for our brothers and sisters in other lands that they don't have the easy ride we have. If you get baptised publicly in some countries, it means you're signing your death warrant because you're a marked man.

If you're a Christian, friends tonight, in some countries, it means you face the death penalty for your faith and we don't know how easy we have it. Paul doesn't talk about some kind of casual, smug, comfortable, easy, leisurely, channel surfing, armchair kind of Christianity.

[27:21] He says, this is a fight. You've got to run a race to win. You've got to fight a fight to win. We don't always think of that. I think we neglect to think of that.

Think of this warfare again. Are you in the fight? Think of the weapons of your warfare. It says that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. But sometimes, it's been said that sometimes the weapons that the devil uses against you, they are carnal.

For example, he might use carnal things to attack you, to tempt you, to dissuade and discourage you as a Christian. Could be things like newspapers. They can take your time away from God. Fishing rods, family excuses, worldly friends, work excuses, soft pillows, televisions, doctrinal arguments.

There's all kinds of things that can distract and deter you and get you off track when really he wants you to be in the fight. Get in the real fight.

[28:27] And Paul says it's not like a shadow boxer fighting the air. Not a pretend fight. This is real. There's real enemies to fight the world, the flesh, the devil.

Paul says, I keep my body under. I discipline it. It literally means to hit under the eye. He figuratively would give his body a black eye, knock it out if need be.

I know there's some in training in different disciplines where they do really punish their bodies and the reason is to make their bodies stronger. Think of the soldiers who fight. They've had to go

through intense training to get ready for the real fight.
And we can miss that. We're closing now to think of this fight