

Hockey or Jesus

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Date: 11 June 2006

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[0 : 00] Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Ken. I'm one of the youth leaders here. It's going to take us about 30 seconds to get set up. Please say hi to the person next to you if you haven't already, or grab a Bible and turn to page 198 in the New Testament.

We good? It is great to be with you this morning.

There is a thermometer here in the pulpit. I'm not quite sure why, but it may get hotter in a few minutes. We're going to play a game.

I'm going to read you a quote, and it might be somebody that you can guess. So please don't shout out the answer. If you don't have a clue who this quote is about, I'm going to give you a couple of seconds to try and guess in your head, and then I'm going to tell you at the end.

In 1997, Time magazine said this. He has been likened by overheated journalists to Jesus, Mozart, and Gandhi.

[1 : 27] And his father has said, blank, will do more than any other man in history to change the course of humanity.

So don't shout out the answer. Think about it. He has been likened to Jesus, Mozart, Gandhi. His father has said, my son will do more than any other man in history to change the course of humanity.

Yes, if you are wondering, he is an American. I can say that. It is excellent to be with you this morning.

I'm here in your capacity as one of the youth leaders. I'm also here as a little bit of a wrap-up to the year and to talk to you about the young people of this church and the year that we've just had.

And as we do this, I want to use three well-known images from the New Testament images that some of you will be very familiar with, biblical images. And these are the image of a soldier and an athlete and a farmer.

[2 : 29] And as we do this, I want to ask you this question. And this is the question behind everything that I say this morning. And the question is this. What do we really want from our children?

What do we really want from the youth of this church? What do we really want for the youth of the lower mainland? Or for Vancouver?

Or for Canada? Sports? Scholastics? Music? Wealth?

Now, gentlemen, here's a statistic for you. Ladies, don't worry about it. It's a guy thing. And that's really not a great thing. But here we go. Gentlemen, it's just been released that 70% of us have uttered these words or think these thoughts.

Quote, unquote, I could have gone pro. I could have gone pro. But you see, I had this bad coach.

[3 : 35] Or he put the other guy ahead of me. Or I never got a chance. Or if I would have only, or my knees, or my back, I could have gone pro.

Now, what stands before you is not a prime athletic specimen. I ran cross-country and track for four years. I was hopeless at it. I ran in the final state cross-country meet.

And I came second from the last. And to this day, I'm perplexed. How did he beat me? How did that guy do worse than I did?

That whole race, three point something miles. I'm thinking, for four years I've done this. I've hated every minute of it. Why am I doing this? Well, I'm doing it because my brother did it.

And he was excellent at it. Still holds the high school record for the mile. I was not any good at it. I would forget to kick. My mind would wander as guys are running past me.

[4 : 36] I thought about joining the Navy. And my dad took me aside. He said, over my dead body. My dad was a 60s and 70s lefty. And he said, over, you're not joining the armed forces. Over my

dead body.

I thought, okay. I have tried to be a farmer. I discovered growing vegetables years ago. I've tried to be a farmer. But when I tried to poison the slugs in my garden, I ended up poisoning my fox terrier. My little dog ate the poison. Ate the snail bait. Laid there frothing at the mouth with these bubbles coming in. I thought, Julie, that doesn't look good. And about \$5,000 later, our dog is not that much. Came back to life. My mother said, don't use a snail pellet. Just put dishes of beer around. The slugs will drink that, get drunk and drown. And that seems to me to be a rather poor way to use beer.

I seem like a waste. I have not been a good athlete. I have never been a soldier. I don't want to be a soldier.

[5 : 44] And I have never really been a good gardener. And here are three images that Paul says that we have to be. Now, when I became a Christian, I've told many of you about it, when I became a Christian at 19, suddenly everything cleared up.

Everything about my life cleared up. It was the most amazing experience. Drugs, forget it. Getting drunk, forget it. Bad relationships, forget it.

I now knew what road I was going to walk. It was a narrow road following Jesus. It was a rocky, bumpy, tight squeeze of a road that I had to walk following Jesus.

But it was the road that I had to walk, come what may. And Paul says to me, as he says to us all here, if you're going to follow Jesus, be a soldier.

And if you're going to follow Jesus, be an athlete. And if you're going to follow Jesus, be a farmer. And that's what we're going to look at this morning. If you've got your Bibles open, page 198, 2 Timothy, chapter 2.

[6 : 48] And I want to read you the two bookends on this passage. There's a bookend of verse 1 of chapter 2. You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Let Jesus strengthen you. Let your strength come from the Lord. Be strengthened daily in your relationship with Him. He is your strength giver. We're going to look more at that in a second. Drop down to verse 8. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the word of God is not fettered. You see, remember Jesus, who's died on the cross, who has risen from the dead. That is who you follow.

And that is who you preach. And you will suffer for it. And he says in verse 3, share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

[7 : 51] Now I have a friend named Craig. He was a commando in the Australian Army. The Australian Army is actually quite a good army. It's a volunteer army. Highly professional. Highly skilled. And Craig was a commando.

And he's now intelligence. He's a major in the army. And he talks about his training and things that you've probably heard before. They would take him out and deprive them of sleep for nights on end. And after two nights without sleep, they'd say, gentlemen, it's fantastic. You're going to get a hot cooked meal. And they would hand them a live chicken in a cage and say, prepare your lunch. You see, they're preparing them.

And the guys can't complain. They have to get on with the job. They have to kill the chicken, pluck the chicken, clean the chicken, and eat the chicken. No sleep. He talks of spending nights out in the Aussie bush with no mosquito repellent.

Because, you see, the enemy can smell it. And so they've got to sit there. And they can't be slapping themselves for obvious reasons. And they've got to sit still. Can you imagine that?

[8 : 53] But he's a soldier for Christ. He's now an intelligence officer. He works someplace secret underground in Sydney. And I'm always trying to ask him about the good stuff that's happening. Because he knows everything. Hey, what's happening in Iraq, man?

And he gives me this look. And at first it's a smile. And then it's, I'm going to snap your neck like a twig. It's a commando. You can. He's not going to tell me he's been trained.

He's been trained for water dripping on us. He's been trained for fingernails being pulled out. Silly Ken going, what's happening? He's not going to crack under that pressure. Craig got a message a few weeks back.

He has a six-month-old baby son. First child. Beautiful wife. And the commanding officer said, at any minute, we're going to send you to East Timor. Now, if you know East Timor, it's not a nice

place. It's flared up.

And here's the deeper story. You're going to leave at a moment's notice. You can't even tell your wife. One day, your wife is going to come home from work or from shopping or whatever she's doing.

[9 : 53] And you're not going to be there. And you're going to be gone on deployment for six months. Now, does Craig say, hold on. That's not right. I didn't sign up for this.

My baby. He's a soldier. He's a soldier. That's what a soldier does. If he doesn't do it, he's not a soldier. And read the next bit of the verse three.

Or verse four, sorry. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlists or enlisted him.

See, what does a soldier do? They sign up. He or she signs on the dotted line and says, I'm going to serve my officer. And if I have to go, I go.

If I fight, I fight. If I go hungry, I go hungry. Because that is what I do. And Paul says, no soldier gets entangled. And the word there is a word like an animal getting his horns in some bushes.

[10 : 56] And the more it does this, the more it can't get its head out. And it's tangled and tangled and stuck. Now, the picture is of a soldier of Christ.

And Paul says, don't get entangled. Now, by the way, just to help you here, I think Dave and I have a picture. Of a soldier for you. A bit of visual imagery might help you along the way.

There's a picture of a soldier. Welcome back, David. Good to have you with us. Now, there's a soldier who doesn't get entangled by civilian pursuits.

A soldier of Christ stays moving for his officer. You see, the image is of vines growing up around your feet and keeping you from serving your officer.

Now, a soldier will have hobbies. But they're hobbies. A soldier will have pastimes or extracurricular pursuits. But that's all they are.

[12 : 00] A soldier can be a gardener. But once the soldier says, gardening is going to now take over, he or she ceases to be a soldier.

And what do they become? They become a gardener. Once they get entangled by it. Now, a soldier is focused and works with a team of other soldiers.

A soldier trains. A soldier stays sharp. A soldier wants to please those above him. And that is the image here of Christians. Our aim and our goal and our life and our job is to be godly.

And to follow Jesus. And to follow him with focus and training and work. Even when we suffer.

Verse 3. Share in suffering. And do you know why Paul says that?

He's suffering. And we suffer. Anybody who tries to be a soldier for Jesus on the playing field. In the business. Maybe even at home.

[13 : 11] Suffers. And Paul says, keep with it. Stay with it. Stay focused. Paul then moves on to a second image. He says in verse 5.

An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. Now here's a similar idea. An athlete has to suffer. I think that's the theme behind this verse.

An athlete trains and works. You know it. Many of us have done it. If you were with me in spirit this morning. It was go the Dutch. But really go Australia.

But anyway that's tomorrow at 8.30. But you see. When an Australian or a Dutch World Cup player gets on the field. Harry Kuhl. Australia's premier striker. He's fantastic.

He doesn't just think. You know I'm going to play World Cup. What the heck. They'll take me. He doesn't. He doesn't just say. Well I don't care what the rules all are.

[14 : 06] When I see a beautiful header. I'm just going to smack it in with my hand. Like a volleyball. Unless of course you're Maradona. In 1986 quarter finals against England. I still don't want to talk about that. Sorry if you don't know what I'm talking about.

Hit the ball in the net with his hand. Beat England. You see what does an athlete do? They train. They work. They're focused. They play by the rules.

And it's hard. It's hard to be a good athlete. And the image here is. Dave I think we've got a picture of an athlete. I think. I think. Do we have a picture of an athlete?

Yeah there we go. We've got a great picture of an athlete. Welcome back Dave. Good to have you with us. Good to have you with us. Paul is saying.

Your playing field is following Jesus. Play on that field. The next image is an image of a farmer.

[15:15] Verse 6. It is the hard working farmer. Who ought to have the first share of the crops. Now a farmer doesn't just get some land. And throw some seeds out.

And stomp them in on the ground. And say please grow. Come on guys. We all know what a farmer does. They prepare the ground. They look at the seasons. And the weather. And they figure out how much to water.

And we all know that farmers work very hard. They're up early. Whether it's milking. Or planting. Or harvesting. During harvest season. It's hard. Hard. Hard. Work. And that's the key word.

In this verse. Hard working farmer. It's what undergirds this whole verse. The farmer here is hard working. Why? Because he wants fruit. He's not working hard because he thinks there's something Protestant work ethic-y good about working hard.

No. He says I want to work hard because I want corn, man. I'm hungry. Or I want to make some money so I can pay off this debt. Or whatever. Now Dave, do we have a picture of a farmer?

[16:17] I think we might actually have a picture of a farmer here. Do we have a picture of a farmer? I think. Yes, we do. We've got a picture of a farmer there.

Yeah. Pretty good looking farmer too, I think. Now I think I'm being clear.

Hopefully I'm being clear because I think the Apostle Paul who wrote this book is being crystal clear. If we want to follow Jesus, it's hard work. And if we want to follow Jesus, we have to focus.

And if we want to follow Jesus, we are going to suffer. Because that's what is promised to us. Now with our young people here, think. Please think with me.

What do we want from our young people? You see, the young person has to be vigilant. Because the young person's horns get tangled in the world.

[17:21] And what the devil has done in this generation, and I've spoken with many of you about this before, is I don't think the devil is now saying sex, drugs, and rock and roll. That was a 70s thing for the young people.

The devil has, I think, changed tack. And the devil has said sex, drugs, and well, it's still around, and it's still effective in its place. But now it's study, music, and sport.

Hockey. That's what's going to tangle them. This is what I'm going to use. Because you see, now practices are on Sunday, because you're all so busy during the week that we're now going to put it on Sunday morning.

This will tangle. The kids up. Now these are excellent hobbies, and they are excellent pastimes. But they are now becoming tangles, and they take us away.

And I think that Christians have lost our spine completely. You see, when the hockey coach says, sorry to pick on hockey, when the field hockey coach says, who can have practice on a Friday?

[18:31] Nope, nope, nope. Who can have practice on a Wednesday? Nope, nope, nope. Who can have practice on a Sunday morning? Yep, yep, yep. The Christians go like this. Well, of course it's going to be on Sunday morning.

And when students are doing a school project, and they say, can you meet on Wednesday? No, I can't. I've got scouts on. Can we meet on Friday? No, no, no. I've got musical practice on. Well, can we meet on Sunday? Sunday. Sunday it is, then.

Sunday it is. And we need to say, no, I've got Christian stuff on. And in my experience, a number of people will say, okay, well then how about Monday?

Well then how about another time? But we just say, take my spine. Take my spine. Now that story is the same for me.

Julie and I have just bought a house in Point Roberts. Don't know if you know Point Roberts, but it's quite possibly the weirdest place on the planet. I can't figure it out.

[19:39] The Americans said, we want this little bit of useless land, but you can take all the rest of those fantastic islands. It makes no sense to me, if you look at the geographic line. It is the largest gated community in America.

It's fantastic. You can leave. We left our front door open for a whole week. We came back, oh, that's not good. Nobody's going to take anything. I've read the crime report, and it's like one drunk guy fell off his bicycle.

That's the crime report for the whole of the month. Now I look at this house, and I am not a home renovator, but I look at this house, and I said, Julie, we are on Roosevelt Street.

I don't know if you know Roosevelt Street. It's right on the border. And here is this house. Behind us in Tawasson are houses that are going for \$450,000. This house is going for \$86,000. How that

works, I'm not quite sure.

So we bought this house. I'm very proud. We painted it Canadian red. I didn't even know there was a color called Canada red, but there evidently is. And I look at this house, and I love it.

[20 : 41] And when I'm stressed, what do I think about it? Oh, oh, oh, oh. Point Roberts. And it can be weeds growing up my legs.

And I say, I don't want to go to that. It's a 28-minute drive. Too far. I don't want to go to this. The border might be packed. I don't want to go to that.

And all of a sudden I see that what was God's gift can suddenly get my horns entangled in the bushes. And all the time I've got to say, Ken, it's just a shack.

It doesn't even barely have a ceiling yet, parts of it. It's just a shack. At least she's laughing.

She's laughing. Now we've had a great year in the youth ministry here at St. John's. I'm going to tell you about it in a couple of seconds. It's been profoundly amazing.

[21 : 48] And one of my concerns is one of the main complaints we've had. Now I really want you to listen to this bit, okay? Because I just want to see if you're with me. One of the main concerns we've had is this.

Ken, let me get this straight. You want our kids to go to Bible study every week. Yeah, I do. And so you want our kids to go to youth group every week.

Yes, I do. Of course I do. Why wouldn't I? What's the issue? We've got young people studying the Word of God.

We've got young people voluntarily coming to study the Word of God. We've got young people bringing their friends to study the Word of God. What is the issue? If I was a hockey coach, if I was a field hockey coach, if I was running a school musical, these are the standards that we are used to. But suddenly, when we're in anything spiritual, the standard's gone. You want my kid to come under the Lordship of Christ every week. Now, is anybody with me?

[23 : 03] Can anybody say, that's weird. Why would anybody complain about that? Wouldn't we say, finally! This is awesome!

Praise be to God! Young people are becoming soldiers and athletes and farmers for Christ. They're growing spiritually. They're shining Christ in their schools and their friends.

This is fantastic. It doesn't get any better. It doesn't get any better. Now, our church here has suffered like every other church in the Western world by something called the pyramid effect.

It was actually a task force from this church, from this congregation, I think, that said, we've got a lot of Sunday school kids and we have less junior high kids. We've got almost no grade 11 and 12 kids and university students, they're gone.

They're like a tumbleweed blowing through the ghost town. Why? Why? Why? Why? And you know, the sad statistic of youth ministry in this world, it's a statistic you've heard, is that at best, 70% of our youth fall away and go to hell.

[24 : 18] Probably it's more like 98% of our young people who ever set foot in the door of a church. Stop.

Stop following Jesus. And there are serious consequences for that. And that is because youth groups have preached this message. Come and play.

Come and play. Listen to the good music and we'll have fun. Come and play. And they come. And they play.

And they go. And they go. And they go. And they go. And Paul's words to young Timothy It's not play time, buddy.

There is no play here. You follow Christ. You dodge a bullet. You follow Christ. You sweat. And you breathe hard. And your muscles get tired.

[25 : 13] You follow Christ. And your hands get dirty. And you fight the thorns. And you fight the bugs. And you fight the weather. That is what it's like to follow Christ. It is hard work.

Now imagine being in a youth group full of soldiers and farmers and athletes. It's absolutely fantastic.

If you're going to drive 40 minutes to a hockey match drive 15 minutes to Bible study. Now fathers can I please ask you we need to set the tone.

Keep setting the tone. Work is great but it's just work. And pursuits are fantastic. But they're just pursuits and we need down time.

any golfer who's ever lived I guarantee that the tiger my hand now hurts after these grade 12ers there are 11 grade 11s it's awesome after these grade 11s our 14 grade 10s they love Jesus they love to pray they love to study his word they have a great time if you were any of us who were with us last night they have a great time we have two young men in a bible study who rarely speak it's quite common with young men in fact I don't even know if there's a tongue in their mouth I've got to be honest with you but they've started to pray I don't know if you've ever run a bible study of young men and suddenly silent child suddenly says thank you Jesus for the camp it's like the heavens have opened up and everybody's holding hands singing I'd like to teach the world to sing it's fantastic we have one young man who apologized to a number of people who are not from his racial origin because he said I have had racist humor toward you guys he's 16 can you imagine saying that it's unbelievable it's fantastic we have one person I can only describe as they've had a personality transplant their face beams they are such a just a tremendous person to be around it's like there's a glow around them it's fantastic one young man shared at the all in he said you know I used to go on summer camp and I'd come back high as can be I'd have this great camp buzz but after a couple of days it's gone I now have that high every Friday night when I go to Bible study it's fantastic soldiers athletes farmers please continue to support us please continue to pray for us please continue to support this church financially it's very important please if there are anything that you disagree with or would like to talk to about the youth ministry please find us and let's have a cup of coffee and talk through this tiger woods huh let's pray Lord Jesus we do thank you you are so merciful and kind to us we do praise you [34 : 35] I ask you in your mercy to pour your spirit upon us help us to think through what it means to be soldiers and athletes and farmers Lord Jesus we thank you with all our hearts for the young people of this church the children we thank you for the present we thank you for the future we just do thank you and praise you please help us to continue to follow you with our hearts our minds our soul and our strength and we pray this in your name amen