

Dear Friends and Family,

Sam Kendricks.

Maybe that name doesn't mean anything to you.
Perhaps, however, you recall the 2016 summer Olympics.
Sam Kendricks is a US track and field athlete.
He competed in the pole vault during the Rio games.
He won the bronze medal with a jump of 19 feet 2 ¼ inches.
He became the first American to win a medal for pole vaulting in 12 years.
He was also one of 18 US military athletes participating in the games.

This almost did not come to be
because Sam believed in something greater than himself.
Greater than his desire to play a sport,
greater than his career,
greater even than winning a coveted medal from the Olympics,
Sam believed in honoring and respecting his country.

During one of his qualifying runs,
Sam heard the US National Anthem playing in the stadium.
He stopped his run,
placed his pole on the ground,
quickly located the American flag,
and came to attention.

Sam could have been disqualified at that moment.
Instead, the judges allowed him to run again.
Sam qualified.

He went on to win the bronze medal.

You can watch this powerful moment here:

<https://www.military.com/video/off-duty/sports/reservist-hears-national-anthem-stops-mid-attempt/5094001689001>

Pastor's Point of View

The big question: **How can you be strong in Christ and demonstrate your belief?**

Day 1 - READ 2 Timothy 2:1-3

1. Paul instructs Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Go back and read the end of chapter 1, why is Paul admonishing Timothy to be strong?
2. Verse 2 outlines a very simple discipleship model. Timothy heard from Paul that he is to teach others, who will in turn teach others. What do you need to be doing to learn from others, and to whom do you need to be passing that knowledge on?
3. Paul then advises Timothy to suffer hardships with him, not a very reassuring message at this point, no sugar coating of the Christian life here. Instead, we have a duty and an obligation to serve Christ which is often accompanied by suffering.

Day 2 - READ 2 Timothy 2:3-4

1. Why does Paul liken our Christian service to that of a soldier?
2. What does a soldier in active service do?
3. What does he NOT do?
4. You can't stop living your life. God calls us to minister and serve where we are. Read Psalm 90:17, Colossians 3:17, 1 Corinthians 10:23-33.
5. What things, however, do you need to give greater attention to as a soldier for Christ?

Day 3 - READ 2 Timothy 2:5-6

1. Paul provides two more examples in this passage, that of an athlete and a farmer. Like a soldier, these roles come with rules to follow.
2. What if Sam Kendricks had been disqualified from the competition after stopping for the National Anthem? Would there have been backlash? Would he have regret?
3. What might you be willing to or required to give up for the sake of service to the Lord? Have you already had to do this? Sometimes our pride must be sacrificed for a hefty dose of humility, sometimes we are called to turn the other cheek, no matter how difficult that may be. Sometimes it is a career move or the approval of one you love, that is forfeited for a relationship with Christ. In other situations, especially for our international brothers and sisters in Christ, homes, families, children and their very lives, have all been given in service for Christ.

Day 4 - READ 2 Timothy 2:7-13

1. *Pray for understanding!*
2. Paul gives a beautiful outline of the gospel in these verses and what we must suffer for its sake.
3. What does it mean that the word of God is not imprisoned?
4. Look at what Paul says about the preaching of the gospel in Philippians 1:12-18.

*For if we died with Him,
We will also live with Him;
If we endure,
We will also reign with Him;
If we deny him,
He also will deny us;
If we are faithless,
He remains faithful,
For He cannot deny Himself.
2 Timothy 2:11-13*

May we be faithful in the gospel in order to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. During this Christmas season, it is easy to get caught up in busy preparations, long shopping bills, and “holiday” commitments. However, may I challenge you to stand strong for Christ, as he is the light of the world and desperately needed.

My daughter’s 10th grade class was recently asked what Christmas meant to each of them. As the students went around the room, the answers went back and forth between being thankful for friends, family, and presents. When her turn finally came, my daughter said the one thing that no one else had said, “Christmas means the birth of Jesus!”

May we be that bold! May Jesus bless you with his presence this season!

In joy and thanksgiving,

Pastor Matt

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*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **RUN** with endurance the race that is set before us -- Hebrews 12:1*