

## Beyond the Tassel Sermon Guide

This graduation sermon from Carl Gulley challenges all of us, but especially graduates, to embrace three God-given identities that will anchor us through life's seasons of uncertainty and change. Drawing from 2 Timothy 2:20-21, we're reminded that we are instruments for special purposes, made holy and useful to the Master. Whether you're navigating the transition from high school to college, entering the workforce after graduation, or seeking to rediscover your spiritual identity, this message offers biblical wisdom for staying faithful to God's calling when life gets difficult and our identity feels uncertain with new change.

### This sermon emphasizes:

- **God has a special purpose for each of us:** we are called to be instruments for special purposes, made holy and useful to the Master, not just ordinary vessels for common use
- **Our identity gets challenged during transitions:** graduates and all believers face seasons where life's pressures cause us to question who we are and drift from our calling
- **Three biblical identities anchor us spiritually:** Paul calls Timothy (and us) to embrace being a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer rather than settling for civilian, spectator, or consumer mindsets
  - **Soldiers focus on pleasing their commanding officer:** the goal isn't just avoiding sin (civilian thinking) but actively pursuing what pleases Christ through devoted service
  - **Athletes compete according to God's rules:** our spiritual pursuits and lifestyle choices reveal what we truly love and are working toward
  - **Farmers work hard for lasting fruit:** we can't force spiritual transformation but we can sow kingdom seeds through intentional choices and trust the Holy Spirit for the harvest
- **Purpose isn't just personal:** our faithfulness impacts future generations, as Gen Z's spiritual hunger demonstrates how previous generations' faithfulness prepared the way
- **Suffering is part of the calling:** Paul's honest words to Timothy remind us that following Christ involves challenges, not just comfort

### Key Scriptures:

"In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the master and prepared to do any good work." 2 Timothy 2:20-21

"Join with me in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer." 2 Timothy 2:3-4

"Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules." 2 Timothy 2:5

"The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops." 2 Timothy 2:6

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." Galatians 6:7

### **Lifegroup Questions:**

- What is something God is doing in your devotional life this week?
- Break up into 2's and 3's and ask each other:
  - How is your devotional life going?
  - Is it both the time and quality you want?
  - How can we help each other?

### **Table Questions:**

1. The sermon mentions that during transitions, our identity gets challenged while we're trying to find our purpose. Can you share about a season when you felt unsure of your identity or calling? How did you navigate that uncertainty?
2. Paul calls us to be "soldiers" focused on pleasing our commanding officer rather than just avoiding bad things. What's the difference between living to avoid sin versus living to please Christ? How might this shift change your daily decisions?
3. Carl Gulley shared how his physical body revealed what he truly loved and pursued. If someone examined your life like a spiritual "body scan," what would it reveal about your priorities and passions?
4. The message contrasts being an athlete versus being a spectator. In what areas of your spiritual life are you tempted to "sit on the sidelines" and critique rather than actively participate? How can you move from spectator to participant?
5. Think about the farmer identity, someone who does hard work for future harvest. What are some practical ways you can "sow kingdom seeds" in your current season, trusting God for the spiritual fruit?
6. When we drift from "farmer to consumer," our prayers shift from bold, kingdom-focused requests to just hoping for basic needs. How have you seen this pattern in your own prayer life during different seasons?
7. Carl Gulley warns against disassembling our theology to line up with our difficult experiences rather than aligning our experiences with God's word. Can you think of times when disappointment tempted you to lower your expectations of God rather than trust His faithfulness?

8. The message emphasizes that our faithfulness impacts future generations. How does knowing that your spiritual choices affect others (family, friends, future generations) motivate or challenge you?
9. Which of the three identities — soldier, athlete, or farmer — resonates most with you right now and why? How can your small group pray for you to grow in that area?
10. Paul encourages Timothy to "join with me in suffering" for the gospel. What does it look like practically to embrace rather than avoid difficulty in your walk with Christ? How can we support each other when following Jesus gets challenging?