

# Endure Hardness

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Date: 26 December 2010

[0:00] 1 Timothy 2, verse 1.

1 Timothy 3, verse 1.

2 Timothy 3, verse 1.

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They do what they are told, not what they want necessarily. They don't have a life of their own.

They belong to the king. They live in conformity, in loyalty to the one cause, to the same uniform.

[2:00] They are trained, they are deployed where the king says and for as long as he says. And we are part of the army of our Lord, of the King of Kings, of the Lord of Hosts, of the Kingdom of God.

We are called. We are engaged in that wonderful army of the Lord, enlisted in his service for his cause.

And we've not signed up for a holiday camp. It's a military force that is aggressively engaged in an active warfare.

That's the picture throughout the scriptures of you and I as soldiers in this wonderful army of God. And we are at war. We are at war. This is not just some quaint language or some illustration of sorts.

It is a war. It is a real war. And we have a real enemy, a hostile enemy. And we have our marching orders. We have the battle plan that God has given to us.

[3:09] And we have the best weapons. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper. And we have a sure defence system and a perfect commander-in-chief. Not one who will fail us or mess up.

He's the perfect commander-in-chief. And our soldiers we call to face hardness. To face hardness. And that's along the theme I'd like to take tonight.

Of hardness. Of hardness as a good soldier. It makes us stronger for the fight. The hardness. The softness. The soft times are very pleasant and pleasing and comfortable and comforting.

But what about the hard times? The hard times. And we all know that. I know there's some saints here that have been through some hard times. Through some hard years. Some hard days.

Some hard experiences. And that's the time when we just need to cry out to him, isn't it? When we go through those hard times. And yet it makes us stronger when we go through them.

[4:13] And some of the hard things about being a Christian. Some of the hardness that we are called to are part of the Christian testimony.

One of them is the hardness of the message. The hardness of the message itself. God's message is a heart message.

It's the truth. It's not something you can toy with or change or manipulate or twist or turn. The truth is the truth.

It doesn't change with the seasons of men, with the opinions of men. And we are called to be valiant for the truth. There's some referred to in that context.

In Jeremiah 9 verse 3. They weren't valiant for the truth. But we as God's people, we ought to be. We're called to be valiant for the truth. It means it's something worth standing for.

[5:11] Something worth fighting for. Something worth boldly declaring and delivering to the world around us. And if we look back in the scriptures at the preachers of old, what was their message?

Often it was repent. John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus himself. Repent. They didn't turn their words to some phrase that was more easy to swear.

Swallow. Repent was the message. We see Paul in Acts 24. He gave a three-point sermon. I love three-point sermons.

Paul's three-point sermon was very simple. It was very two-point. In Acts 24 verse 24 he reasoned with Felix. Felix was there, the governor of the land.

Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and he heard him concerning the faith in Christ. In Acts 24 verse 25, Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come.

[6:22] A simple three-point message. Righteousness, temperance or self-control and judgment to come. Felix trembled and answered, go thy way for this time.

When I have a convenient season, I'll call for thee. It was just getting a bit too personal for Felix. It was getting a bit too uncomfortable for him. When I've got a convenient time, I'll listen to you again. But Paul didn't water down his message. It was straight down the line. It was a hard message. But it was a message that the governor had to hear. It wasn't a message that was palatable, but it was a message that was a call of righteousness, of temperance, of judgment to come.

And Felix trembled. We need the hard truth today. We need the hard message. The straight shooting message. Not soft-soaked. Not seeker-friendly. Not a careful you don't offend kind of approach.

But a bold message. A forthright message. A hard message. Sometimes all of us can feel, wow, that's getting a bit too close to the bone. You know, that's a little bit challenging.

[7:30] But it's what we need, isn't it? We need that. We must have that. When the soldier is called, when the soldier gets a commission, it's straight to the point.

And there's no messing with that. And with God's message likewise, it's a no-nonsense message. It's a no-compromise message. It's the unvarnished truth.

That's what we need in these days when truth is being eroded on every hand. And the counterfeit prevails. Now, we know there's good and bad in every degree of shades of grey and whatnot.

But we see, by and large, you could say much of what is being foisted on the Christian public today through the Christian TV channels is very questionable.

It's very questionable. That's not to say there are some good preachers too. But we know there's certainly some very questionable things because error has crept into the church and we almost can't perceive it sometimes.

[8:37] Where really the ministers of God must expose error. They must speak against error. And that can mean naming names. That can mean speaking against certain teachers and teachings.

Because there's time to do so. To warn the people. To warn of wolves. To warn of danger. And to expose wrong teaching. And likewise, while we must employ compassion, there's a sense where the message has to be hard and strong and forthright.

To sound the alarm. When there's alarm, when there's a warning needed, it must be sounded loud and clear. And friends, as God's people, you and I, we hold the key.

When we see what is wrong with our nation, we've really got the answer in our hands. What will fix our nation? What will fix our society, our culture in its downward spiral?

The answer is the message. The message is the answer. And yet today, with many skill in the art of tickling ears. Tickling ears.

[9:43] Masters at marketing. Man-made. Soft, shallow. Smooth, soothing words. That really don't speak to the problem and deliver the answer.

Rather, we ought to, as the word says in Hebrews 10, provoke one another to love and to good works. It's got the sense to stir one another. Provoke one another.

Incite one another. Provoke one another to love and to good works. There's a sense where a provoking is something a bit discomfiting. It's a bit unsettling.

Think of how our Lord spoke in one of his messages. For example, in John 6, 53. He says, Verily, verily. This is truth. Amen.

Amen. He says, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

[10:41] That was a hard message. That was a hard message, wasn't it? He wasn't beating around the bush with that message. And then we read verse 66. Many left him. It just got too hot in the kitchen.

It just got too up close and personal for some. He didn't want to eat his flesh and drink his blood. It's a hard message, isn't it?

Some would prefer that broad and easy road, the wide way, instead of the narrow. And many today, they want the same. They want the soft gospel.

They want a kinder, gentler message. They want pleasantries. They don't want confrontation. They don't want anything that offends. But we as God's people, as God's church, we must be forthright. As God's spokesmen and women, as we have opportunity to witness in personal lives, to be that one that declares the message loud and clear that others can hear and to fulfill our God-given responsibility, preaching the word of God as a sharp two-edged sword.

[11:48] Our Lord Jesus, he offended oft times as he constantly corrected and reprov'd and rebuked the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the priesthood of the day.

He called them liars, hypocrites, blind guides, vipers, the hard truth. The hard truth must be told. The hardness of preaching.

The hardness of forthright witnessing. The courage to declare the message as it is. And that can mean calling to repentance. And it can mean for us as God's people a calling to servanthood too. That's not a popular thing. People want to be served. But what about serving? We're all called to serve. It's a hard message.

But the soldier must answer the call. The truth must be declared. It's invincible. And we must have the courage to declare it. That passion for the lost. That wanting to issue the call to repent to others.

[12:54] And we must heed the call to arms. Brothers and sisters, this is a call to arms. Not to mediocrity, but to commitment. And to the message.

We must be true. So endure hardness. Endure hardness. And receive and deliver that hard message. What about the battle itself? The soldier is called up.

You know, sometimes people think of the military life. It is reasonably paid and catered for. But the soldier has to go to the battle front. The soldier has to go to the place of battle.

And it's like that for we, as God's people too. We are called to battle. We are called to the battle front. And 2 Timothy 3 verse 12 it says, Paul writes again to Timothy, Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

I read a good couple of books lately. Someone gave them to the church and I've put them in the library. A couple of books that talk about the persecuted church. The persecuted church.

[14:02] There's a couple of good books for those that are interested. I can point them out later. You can borrow them. I don't often get time to read books as far as dedicated time to get through a whole book without some interruption of sorts.

But these were so encouraging to me. I just read them pretty much straight through. And it was so challenging to me to read about our persecuted brothers and sisters. The hardness of the battle front is the hardness of persecution.

It's real. It's real. I was just reading this afternoon of a lady in North Korea. A lady, one of your sisters in North Korea.

And she said this. They pulled out my nails one by one. Then they started on my teeth.

These are our brothers and sisters in these countries. And this is happening in our time. In our day. In the present day. In countries around our world.

[15:05] And there's much more awesome and awful things we could read. And yet awe-inspiring things of their faith. That they could go through. Such tests.

What are we to suffer in this land? Nothing really at all. The hardness of persecution. Will you face it? We know as brothers and sisters in other countries, they face it in a reality.

In a real way. And we have giants to face too. Nothing compared to some of our saints overseas. But we need to take up our cross daily.

And how we can be stirred. We read back of the martyrs of old. Now we sung of the martyrs as it were in one of the songs we sang. And we read of them in books such as Fox's Book of Martyrs.

And we read, if you'd like another good read, as the Fox's Book of Martyrs. Of some who endured the persecution of the papacy.

[16:05] Of those dressed in religious vestments of the recognised church of the day. These non-conformists who chose rather to conform to the scriptures instead of Rome were suffering and dying for the cause of Christ.

And friends, what of you? What of me? Will we endure the hardness of the battle? In 2 Timothy 4 verse 5 it says, But watch down on all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

Paul says, endure afflictions. How we need to enter into the school of the disciples, enter into the school of Paul, enter into the school of hard knocks.

Paul knew what he was talking about when he says endure afflictions. We read of that, for example, in 2 Corinthians 11 from verse 24. What Paul went through, five times, he received 39 stripes.

Three times beaten with rods, one time stoned, three times suffering shipwreck, a night and a day in the deep, in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness, in painfulness, in watchings often, or sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

[17:40] Paul was stoned, beaten, rejected, yet he never lost that joy of the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice.

He was thrown in the Philippi jail, beaten with many stripes, and yet, even at that midnight hour, bound in stocks, his back bleeding, he was able to send praises unto the Lord.

He did not take the easy part. He chose the hardness of the battle as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. When you face the battle, will you be a good soldier?

Will you be a first class soldier? Will you be an excellent soldier? A good soldier of Jesus Christ?

We can learn from these ones that have gone before. Read the scriptures, Hebrews 11, that men and women of faith, they endured, and they proved their love for Christ.

We can learn to even thank God, even for the hard things, even for the hard things. Brother and sister, we can look back, and even those hard things, we can learn from and grow from.

[18:47] Another hardness, as well as the message which is hard, the battle, is the hardness of self-denial. The hardness of self-denial. The soldier has to deny himself.

The soldier has to deny that which is really his own worst enemy, which is himself. Our own worst enemy is really sometimes ourselves.

As we engage in that cosmic battle, as it were, we need to hear our Lord, who says, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

For whosoever shall save his life, will lose it, but the same, whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

Friends, we can be encouraged by our Lord's challenge to us. Deny yourself. Take up your cross daily. It's the call to discipleship.

[19:51] To follow him at any cost. As some have said, we need to be stretched and challenged in order to grow. God loves us too much to leave us like we are.

If you only ever do what comes easy, you will never grow. It's those hard times that will make you grow. It's those hard times when you're extended, when you're stretched, when you're tested, that God will see you through, and you'll shine at the close of that chapter.

And friends, are you a soldier today? To whom do you declare your allegiance? Sometimes it's to me, myself, and I, isn't it? It's number one.

Look out for number one. But who is truly number one? Our commanding officer. He deserves our all. He calls for your all, for your unreserved commitment.

And we're not called to please ourselves, but our commanding officer. As Paul wrote there, that no man that wreath and tangleth himself in the affairs of this life, that he may please him.

[20:57] Please him, not yourself. Please him, who has called you to be a soldier. Our commanding officer, he's worthy to obey. He's the perfect commanding officer. He's already been there and done that.

He's been through the battle and taken the brunt of it. And our duty is to face danger. As a soldier, to even take risks. As a soldier does to take risks, to defend his own country, we must be prepared

to step outside the comfort zone and to do our duty.

And that means the hardness of self-denial. In Colossians 3.5, Paul says to mortify. Mortify, we get the word mortician. It's to do a death.

Mortify means to put to death. Put to death. Mortify, he says. Therefore, your members, your body, which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil constipation, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

What do these words mean? It means sensual appetites. It means unholy desires. Put them to death, he says. Put to death those unholy things. And covetousness, which is idolatry.

[22:11] He says, put those to death and be made in his likeness. Be brought to life in him. It's drastic measures, friends. Drastic measures.

Think of the soldier as he or she is trained for warfare. As the soldier goes into that time of training, that time of boot camp, that time of preparation.

Will we go the extra mile? Will we go the distance? I read of late of a missionary. There was a missionary. They were traveling by foot and speaking about Christ all over the region of this place. They were ministering. And what did they receive? Just mocking and laughter and scorn. The people just mocked and scorned the message as this man faithfully labored, traipsing across the jungle.

And worn out, he went to sleep under a tree. And the next morning, he woke up with people gathered all around him. He thought, oh, they've come to kill me. They've come to kill me at last.

[23:21] But they were staring at his sore, blistered, dirty feet. And I think, that was what won them over. The suffering that he went through just to bring the gospel to them.

And I think as we read, as we share these letters from our mission friends, we see the testimony of their lives. That they would leave the ease and comfort and go to these fields of fun and labor, sometimes unrewarded, unrecognized, with little to see at times for their labor, yet God sees.

And God will reward them faithfully for their faithfulness. And it was this man's suffering that won them to the gospel. Sometimes we stop just short enough when it's comfortable.

We just go to as far as it's comfortable for us and then we stop. But we need to go beyond our comfort level and be willing to do the hard things.

And that's what we see through history. Those that are God's men and women of history were those who gave the greatest service, who gave of the most of themselves, who endeavored, who labored, who did not turn aside from difficulty, but they went beyond their own strength and overcame.

[24:44] And we need to, likewise, no matter how hard it is, we need to go beyond our own strength. And a good soldier does not entangle himself with those things of the world, those things of the civilian affairs, but he devotes himself to the obedience to pleasing his commanding officer, to pleasing the one who's literally enlisted him into his service.

And friends, we've got a wonderful joy to be soldiers in the kingdom of God. This is not just symbolic language.

This is real. It's real. You have a uniform. You are wearing the armor of light. And friends, we know God is raising up an army today.

And thank God, there's still opportunity for people to enlist, as it were, to be signed up, as it were, in this army of the Lord.

God is looking for men and women who are willing to go beyond their own comfort zone. Men and women with the capacity to go through those rugged times, times of testing, of trial, of toughness, of adversity.

[26:02] Paul says, endure adversity. Endure affliction, he says. Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Who will stand fast? Who will stand the test? The test of character. One thing's for sure. The victory is assured.

The victory is assured. Whilst through the Christian life, we may slip and slide and not always measure up as much as we ought, that the victory is assured.

Because he has won it for us. We read of that in 1 John 5, verse 4 to close. For whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world.

And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world? But he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.

[27:01] This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Either your faith will overcome the world. Leon, your faith will overcome the world.

This is the victory. Gene, this is the victory, even our faith. Not by any virtue of our own, but by virtue of his blood. By virtue of his victory won for us.

His all-conquering act of Calvary. It's like someone said, when we really look at our lives and what we can do, this is how this statement goes.

It's not about what I can do. It's about what he has already done. It's not about what I can do. It's what he has already done.

The victory is assured. He has obtained it for us. And friends today, think of the hardness that you may face. You may face some hardness tomorrow, next week, next year, maybe in the present time.

[28:07] You're enduring hardness. He says, endure it. Endure it. Endure it. As a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Be prepared to not shy away from the hard message that he's called you to deliver.

At times, your friends and family and loved ones, those around about, they need the hard message. And you are the one to be his messenger. They need that hard message in this day.

And we need to endure the hardness of the battle. As we face at times, whilst only in a measure, some persecution, endure it for his sake.

And don't shy away from self-denial. As our Lord says to you, take up your cross daily and follow me. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you went the way of the cross in your son. You suffered and endured the mockery and scourging that undeserved penalty of ours you took in Christ, Lord, for our sin.

[29:14] Lord, we thank you for that mercy you gave, that you give still. Lord, that we can join, as it were, this wonderful army. Unto you, the Lord of hosts, the Lord of armies, that you are the one that we can pledge our allegiance to.

Lord, we thank you that we have the privilege to be serving as your subjects, King of kings and Lord of lords, and that we can obey you as our commanding officer.

Lord, help us not to shy away from the battle front, but Lord, to endure those hard things, to endure that hardness at times. We think of our brothers and sisters in bonds, in chains, in prison, some facing the death penalty for their faith, Lord, in you.

We know that we have much less to suffer here. Help us, Lord, to endure that hardness and to go beyond our own limits, Lord, as these ones, as we think of that dear sister who endured such hardness that she was tortured as she was, Lord, we know we have nothing to face in comparison to that.

Help us, Lord, to put up with our mild affliction, as it were, in contrast to that. And, Lord, to step out of our own ease and comfort, to beckon others to come and follow while they can, that they might trust you too.

[30:44] Lord, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you. Thanks, Greg. I love to tell the story of haunting things of haunting and things as it a