

Strength to Suffer

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 May 2024

Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] Alright, so we are back into 2 Timothy. So if you have your Bible, you can open it up to 2 Timothy. And we're in chapter 2 this morning.

And we're looking at the first seven verses of chapter 2 here this morning. Let me just read it for us and then we'll dive straight into things here. So Paul's writing to Timothy and he says, No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

Reflect on what I'm saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. So the Apostle Paul is continuing to give instruction to the younger Timothy.

And we see here this morning that there are four imperatives, four commands, four instructions. And we're just going to work our way through these things one at a time.

[1 : 41] And the first one we find is right up at the top in verse 1. Paul says, Now why does Paul say this?

What does Timothy need strength for? Well, Paul has just finished giving examples of other believers in the previous verses. Some who have turned their backs on him and are ashamed of his chains.

And the example of one man in his household who has stayed true to Paul and to the Lord. Onesiphorus. All of this is with persecution going on.

And we noticed a couple weeks ago that both of these are examples of men that Timothy knows right there from his own province. His own region. So Timothy and the household of Onesiphorus, they're living in the midst of a province where the majority of Christians have turned their backs on Paul.

And Paul has been writing to Timothy up until this point in this letter, urging him not to give in to fear. Not to let his spiritual gift go unused.

[3 : 04] He's been urging Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel. And then he gave these examples of these men. Some have turned away.

And the household of Onesiphorus, which has stayed true. And so this is what Timothy needs strength for. You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. So Timothy needs strengthening from God. In order to persevere. In order to keep on preaching. In order to keep on teaching about Jesus while he's surrounded by opposition.

He needs strengthening from God to keep going while the majority of the Christians in the province are floundering in their faith. Paul's reminding Timothy here that even though things are really difficult, Timothy, you're not alone.

It's not just up to you and your own resources and your own strength. There is strength. There is power. There is help to be found. And it's look to heaven, Timothy.

[4 : 16] That's where you'll find it. Be strengthened in the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus. Look to him. Well, what is grace? Grace, by definition, is that unmerited goodness or favor of God.

And we notice here that Paul is not so specific about this. He just says, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And so Timothy might be thinking, well, what grace is that?

We might be thinking the same thing. What is the grace that is in Christ Jesus? And as I was thinking about that this week, I thought, maybe that's the point.

Maybe he had deliberately left it unspecific so that we would begin to ask the question, what grace of God is there for us in Christ Jesus?

What goodness, what blessing, what undeserved favor, what help comes to us through Christ Jesus? And I think as we start to think about that, we realize that that's a long list.

[5 : 26] And forgiveness is just one of the things on the list. We might wonder, Paul, are you telling Timothy that he should be strengthened in the grace that's already shown through Christ Jesus?

Like, look back on what Christ did for you when he lived among us and when he died for us. Or are you telling Timothy to be strengthened in the grace that God gives us right now in the present?

Like the day-to-day meeting of our needs and help and sustaining that he does by his spirit who lives in us. Or are you talking about the grace that God intends to give us in the future?

The hope of resurrection, eternal life, heaven. And I think Paul might have left it open so that Timothy and we might reflect on all of it.

Past, present, and future grace. All the good things that are given to us freely and generously as gifts from God through our relationship with King Jesus.

[6 : 36] And when we begin to reflect on all of these things, when we begin to fix our eyes on these things and trust in these things with all our heart, that's when we are strengthened.

That's how we are strengthened. The countless gifts of God's grace that are ours in Christ Jesus give us strength to face whatever challenges, whatever hardships, whatever difficulties come our way in life.

And sometimes when those things come, it's just easy to lose our way, lose our focus, lose our sight. But when the going gets tough, don't forget, Timothy.

Take courage, take strength in remembering all that God has given in his son, through his son to us. This is going to help you stay true.

This is going to help you walk faithfully. So that's the first imperative. Very simply, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Next, in verse 2, Paul says, And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

[7 : 47] And Paul, we heard something similar to this already back in chapter 1 just a couple weeks ago. Let's look back for a second to verse 13 and 14 of chapter 1.

Paul said there, What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

And we talked about how that good deposit is the gospel. It is the teaching that has come from Christ through the apostles to us and to Timothy. Well, here again in verse 2, Paul's saying it again.

He's saying, I know it says people on screen there, but men is going to be the better translation.

We've talked about this looking at some of the other epistles and letters. The word is masculine. It's men. You can blame the translation. I won't be offended.

[8 : 49] So, here he says it again. The things you have heard me say and trust to reliable men. So, let's hear this again.

Timothy's not to come up with his own original teaching. He is to carefully and faithfully pass on the things that he has heard from Paul.

Paul is the apostle of Christ Jesus. It's Paul that speaks authoritatively on behalf of Jesus himself. And so, Timothy's job is to just take those things that he has heard through the apostle, through Paul, and pass them on.

This ought to be the role of the teachers and the preachers in the church. Simply to pass on the things that Paul has said and taught. Because Paul was speaking on behalf of Christ.

We're not looking to reinvent. We're not looking to refresh. We're not looking to change the teaching of the church from generation to generation. Because what we have here in the apostles' own words is the good deposit.

[9 : 58] It is the blueprint for sound teaching that's been given to us. And so, we need to follow this blueprint. We need to teach these same things from generation to generation.

And not just try to come up with our own new thoughts, new ideas. But we do notice at least one new emphasis of Paul here. The things you've heard me say in the presence of many witnesses.

Entrust those things to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. So, don't just guard it.

Don't just keep it. Don't just teach it to everyone. But specifically, be sure, Timothy, that you teach these words, this truth of Jesus, to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach it to others.

This is a bit of a new focus in this epistle. So, Timothy's not just done his job by getting up on Sunday morning and giving a good sermon from what Paul has taught him.

[10 : 59] It's also his job to see that this teaching is passed on to others who will then be able to teach it to others, to still others. This is one of the evidences that the time of the apostles was drawing to a close.

That God didn't intend to send and gift apostles through every generation right up until today. What is the succession plan for Paul?

I mean, he's near the end here. He's soon to die. Paul doesn't say, Timothy, when I die, Jesus is going to make you an apostle. And then speak directly through you, just as he has through me.

He didn't say, Timothy, when I die, God's going to raise up a new generation of apostles. And you should listen to them because they are going to speak directly on behalf of Jesus, just like Jesus has through me.

No. If that was the case, there'd be no need to guard this good deposit and be so careful to entrust it from generation to generation to reliable men who are able to teach it to others.

[12 : 03] No, it seems that God's plan was that the time of the apostles would draw to a close. It would come to an end and that for the generations that would follow, we would just keep passing on these same words, this same good deposit from generation to generation, from reliable men to reliable men and so on and so forth.

Notice Paul's double emphasis on the quality of the men. Entrust to reliable, or as another translation says, faithful men, that's probably more literal.

Entrust to faithful men. These are to be trustworthy men. Men who can be depended on and counted on. This brings to mind the words that Paul wrote to Timothy in the first letter, which we looked at a while back, about elders and how they must be men of proven character.

They must be men of integrity. They must be faithful to their wives. Faithful overseers of their own households. Faithful in their interactions with outsiders.

And, remember back then in 1 Timothy, elders are to be able to teach. It also brings to mind the words Paul wrote to Titus about elders, where he said that they must be men who hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that they in turn can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

[13 : 33] So, entrust these words to faithful men. Men of good, godly character. But also men who will be qualified, who will be literally able to teach others.

This is the plan of God for his word. For his gospel to be passed on from generation to generation. Not new apostles in every generation, but faithful men in every generation.

Passing the words of the apostles on to faithful men, who are then able to teach it to others. And it just keeps going on and on, from generation to generation.

Which means that we need to not be just concerned about having a pastor. And keeping a pastor. So that the teaching of our church will be good.

But we need to be concerned about training up new elders. New pastors. New teachers for the generations that will follow ours. And there are a few different ways to do this.

[14 : 38] One of those ways is through supporting Bible colleges and seminaries. Training up faithful men who are able to teach is not an easy thing. And so that's probably why we do this.

We partner together as churches and support our Bible colleges and seminaries. And some of them do a very good job. That's one way we can do it. But we can and we should also do this within the local church.

Perhaps in our Christian culture we've maybe gone a little bit too far into this idea that the teachers in the church must be professionals. Must be the paid pastor who has completed at least four years of theological study in a good Bible college.

I mean think about this. How many Bible colleges were there in Timothy's day in the province of Asia that he could send his faithful men to where they could become able to teach?

We can and we should be doing this within the local church. Nurturing, growing, encouraging faithful men into able teachers for future generations.

[15 : 48] We often lament the decline that we see in various denominations and churches around us here in North America. Could it be that one of the big factors in some of those stories is simply a failure to entrust the good deposit to reliable men who were able to teach?

So let's continue to support our Bible colleges. But let's also look to the men among us. God is calling all of us as men, at the least, to be faithful men.

Men of character and integrity. And from among those who are faithful, some must rise to the challenge of teaching others. And so may the Lord give us courage.

May the Lord give us wisdom to know how and who in our little local church here. So this is the second imperative. Entrust the things that you have heard me say to faithful men who will be able to teach others.

The third imperative comes in verse 3. Paul says, join with me in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. This is now the second time that Paul has called Timothy to suffer with him.

[17 : 06] Look back to chapter 1, verse 8. Whoa, I got the wrong verse on screen there. It should be 2 Timothy. But if you look in your Bible, 2 Timothy 1, verse 8, Paul says, Join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

So are we noticing a theme here? Are we noticing an emphasis? Do these words make you squirm a bit? Join with me in suffering.

It's not every day a person earnestly pleads with you to suffer with them. That's exactly what Paul, though, is saying here to Timothy.

Paul is under heavy fire from his opponents because of his preaching the name of Jesus. He's firmly in their sights. He's in their crosshairs. The first big Roman trial in the sequence that will lead to his death has happened.

And what's Paul asking Timothy? He's saying, come stand with me here in the crosshairs. Here in the sights of these opponents where I am under heavy fire.

[18 : 19] Come into the trench with me. It's a big ask of Timothy. But let's not forget the first imperative. There is strength to be found in the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus so that Timothy can say, yes, I'm willing to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.

So this is the third imperative. Suffer hardship with me, Timothy. And with this imperative, Paul gives Timothy three analogies. That of the soldier in verses 3 and 4.

That of the athlete in verse 5. And that of the farmer in verse 6. Let's look at these for a moment. First, this analogy of the soldier. He says, 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. So what we're experiencing right now, Timothy, is like a battle.

A great battle. And we're like soldiers. Good soldiers. On the good side. Soldiers of King Jesus.

[19 : 36] That's what this persecution that's happening, that's what this suffering that we're facing is all about. It's because of this conflict. It's because of this battle that we're in. This great spiritual battle.

Think for a moment of the allied soldiers in the trenches of Europe in World War II. Fighting to liberate. Fighting to put an end to the tyrannical madness and violence of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.

If you were out there as a soldier, I mean, danger just comes with every day. It's to be expected. Suffering is part of the cause. Sometimes I imagine what it would be like to live in those trenches for days, hunkered down.

The sound of bullets being fired off and the spraying of them across the battlefield. The pounding explosions of artillery. The wounded there and the dead all around.

Would they be enjoying a good night's sleep every night? Would they be enjoying a good home-cooked meal every day? There were no lazy boys in the trenches.

[20 : 49] No pillows in the trenches. It was about staying alive and, if possible, fulfilling the mission. Completing the assignment. Carrying out the orders. We're in a great battle, says Paul.

We are soldiers. We are like soldiers. Good soldiers of our commanding King, Jesus Christ. And doing our duty as soldiers of the King may require us to suffer at times, says Paul, who is chained up in a jail cell right now.

And speaking of soldiers, I mean, what else about soldiers? Paul has one more thing to share with us about this in verse 4. And I just put it in another translation on the screen there.

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. What is Paul's point here?

He seems to be saying that a good soldier is focused on doing his duty. He doesn't let the stuff of everyday life interfere with his job.

[21 : 58] I imagine Paul had all kinds of time just to observe the soldiers in and around where he was being held prisoner. Did he try to talk to the guards on duty?

Did he find them to be super friendly with him? Did they play cards with him through the bars? Or were they just focused on the job? Maybe, have you ever seen those soldiers standing guard in the UK with the big black fur hats?

Sometimes it's amazing to watch them, just how still they stand. Sometimes people even try to make a game of trying to distract them or trying to get them to smile.

But no, they're focused on doing their duty. What's the point here? I think Paul's saying that there are many good things in life. There are many comforts in life.

Things we might feel inclined to pursue, but a good soldier doesn't let any such thing distract or entangle him such that he's not able to do his duty. There are at times competing desires.

[23 : 10] There is the desire of the commanding officer, and then there is the desire and will of the soldier, and sometimes those things don't match up. And a good soldier, while he's on duty, he just may have to lay aside his interests and desires and focus on doing the will of his commander, pleasing his commanding officer.

By way of illustration, David, who's sitting in the back there, one of our RCMP guys out at the local detachment from Crake, he and I have been talking about going kayaking one of these days here.

And as I've discovered, not just from David, but from others as well, the schedule of an RCMP officer is challenging at times. There are times when you're on duty.

There are times when you're on call, and occasionally you get an actual day off. But when you're on duty and when you're on call, in both cases, there's a required readiness.

There's a required readiness. Can you imagine if David and I went kayaking while he was on duty, out in the middle of the lake, and then all of a sudden some emergency happens, and before he can even get into his police cruiser, he's got to paddle for like 15 or 20 minutes before he can even get into the vehicle.

[24 : 32] That would be a failure on his part to do his duty as an officer on active duty. That would be an example of entangling himself in the stuff of life such that what he's doing interferes with his ability to perform his job.

Not to mention that it would be quite unpleasant to paddle around the lake with all that gear on. Take this principle and apply it to our Christian lives.

We all have a king, Jesus. He is our commanding officer. He has given us his word, clear orders on what we have to do, and in many cases, the commands that he gives to us, they come with a good deal of freedom so that we can kind of go about our business and our daily lives as we do these things, where we are, in whatever situation we find ourselves in.

But now there are times when the commands of the king conflict with the desires of our hearts or the cravings of our flesh, and we really can get all tangled up in the stuff of life, in the stuff of this world, such that we're no longer able and ready to do these things.

Do you remember the parable of the soils? Some of the seed, Jesus said, fell among the weeds, and the weeds grew up and choked out that plant, making it unfruitful.

[26 : 04] What did that represent? Jesus said that it represented those who hear the word of God, but then God's word bears no fruit in their lives.

And the reason why? Because the word that they heard was choked out by life's worries, by riches, by the pursuit of wealth and pleasures and the desire for other things.

We can so easily get entangled. This world offers us so much. We can get entangled that we're not even able, we're not even ready to do the things that the Lord has commanded us to do.

Maybe you would have had opportunity to help someone in real need, but you emptied the bank account on another thing that you didn't really need, just for your own comfort or pleasure.

Maybe you have the chance to serve others and make disciples right in front of you, and you see someone, but you don't have time for that because you're too busy, already committed to many recreational pursuits or hobbies.

[27 : 13] Sometimes, many times, in service of the king, we must give up what we want, what we desire, so that we can do what he wants and what he desires.

Jesus, the king himself, said it like this, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. That's another way of saying what Paul's saying.

Join with me in suffering, Timothy, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Next, he gives this analogy of the athlete. Similarly, he says, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.

Now, it's a bit debated what exactly Paul means by this. I mean, the principle itself is true, it's obvious, but then how does it apply to Timothy? How does it apply to us?

[28 : 22] When it comes to the Christian life, what are the rules that we must compete according to? One commentator suggests that the rules of the race are simply that those who want to compete and win must be willing to endure the difficulty and hardship of training for it and then running it according to the parameters of the race or the competition.

there are no shortcuts. You do not get to hold to have the gold medal at the end of the race if you used doping or performance enhancing drugs.

You do not get the prize if you cut across somewhere in the course just to save time and make it easier on yourself. You must endure the hardship of training. your body must suffer to get stronger and faster and then you must run according to the rules of the course.

You must suffer your body through all of it otherwise you will not receive the reward even if you somehow managed to cross the finish line first. If we think of how this applies to Timothy's situation Paul may mean that there is simply no way around suffering and hardship in the Christian life.

At times we must face it and to receive that victor's crown that wonderful glorious reward from the Lord Jesus to receive that well done good and faithful servant we must be willing to push through the pain.

[29 : 56] We must be willing to endure opposition and hardship and being uncomfortable and even suffering. We must be willing to discipline ourselves for godliness and say no to things that otherwise we might like to have or do.

Things like the pursuit of wealth the pursuit of comforts the pursuit of pleasures in this world. And so the Christian life is both a battle to be fought and a race to be run.

And sometimes there just are no shortcuts. The course laid out before us takes us right through the path of suffering. Finally he gives the analogy of the hardworking farmer.

He says the hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. And again with this one there's some debate on precisely how Paul means this and how it applies to Timothy.

it doesn't really help that our modern day farming is so different from how farming was 2,000 years ago. Today we've got lots of wonderful expensive machines that can do some of that work for us make some of it easier.

[31 : 11] But back then you were driving animals. I mean you were holding the plow steady with your forearms and your muscles were screaming by the end of the day. You were swinging the sickle by hand and you were bundling the sheaves by hand and picking them up and carrying them by hand long days in the hot sun.

And you didn't do all that for nothing. You wouldn't subject yourself to that kind of grueling labor for nothing. You did it to receive your share of that harvest that you were working on.

Your reward for the work you did. And when it comes time to divvy up the first portions after we take out the first fruits of course when it comes time to divvy up the first portions of the harvest as it's coming in are you going to give the lazy guy who just worked slow and stood around looking at everybody most of the day are you going to give him the first share of the harvest or are you going to give it to the guy who busted his buns doing two to three times as much as that lazy guy.

In a day. Timothy be like that hard working farmer says Paul. The Christian life our service to King Jesus is like a great undertaking in the fields and we aren't laboring we aren't enduring all of this for nothing.

We're working for a great harvest for our Lord and we are looking for the reward that will be ours for our portion our share our reward for laboring faithfully.

[32 : 52] This is not saying that somehow we can earn our salvation of course we can't but it's saying that on top of God's amazing grace that all he has given us in salvation he really does reward us for persevering and working hard and faithfully for his sake.

Finally we come to the fourth imperative in verse seven. Reflect on what I'm saying for the Lord will give you insight into all this. Timothy think about these analogies I'm giving you.

Think about them as you face the difficulty and the trouble. It might not be especially clear at the first reading of this how these things relate to our lives.

Soldier, athlete, farmer. But as you think about these things day by day God's going to open your eyes to see how these really are the analogies these really are the metaphors that capture the true essence of our lives in service of Jesus.

God's going to give you understanding he's going to give you insight he's going to help you see how to fight this battle how to run this race how to persevere in this field work.

[34 : 08] So these are Christ's instructions for Timothy just to sum up again. Be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus and trust the things that you heard me say to faithful men who will also be able to teach others join with me in suffering like a soldier like an athlete like a farmer.

We're looking to please our commanding officer. We're looking to get that victor's crown. We're running to win. We're looking to get that share, that reward of the harvest crop and continue to reflect over these things.

Mull them over. God's going to help you see. He's going to help you understand just how they apply to your situation. We may not have the same role as Timothy had in his church 2,000 years later.

We may not have the same climate of persecution as he did in his province here in ours, but we have the same good deposit. We have the same gospel.

We have the same Lord and Savior and King. May we not be found asleep at the wheel, checked out, disengaged, distracted from the cause of Christ.

[35 : 24] If in our corner of the world right now it's easy to run and there's minimal opposition, then let us be running. let us be working while we are still unhindered. May we not be found entangled in the stuff of this world.

May we not be found unprepared to use the gifts that God has given us in the service of our King. May we not be found lollygagging in the race that's set before us or lazing around in the field we're given us to do as Christians here in Davidson, here in Craig and from wherever else you're visiting from.

May we be found focused like that soldier on the mission the Lord has given us, carrying out his commands, using our gifts, playing each of us our part in the body of Christ, running our race as best we can to win that victor's crown, working hard toward that harvest.

Do you want to hear that well done, good and faithful servant from the Lord Jesus when he returns? I do.

And so let's keep on pressing on, pressing forward for Jesus day by day, answering his call. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you that even though you give us these challenging words, this difficult call, that there is grace that you offer alongside of it.

[37 : 02] Please give us that grace, fill us with that power and strength that we need to see these words, to hear these words and be encouraged by them, to be spurred on by them.

Our desire is your pleasure, it is your glory. And so we ask that you would work in us, work in all of us as a church, and that you would take for yourself a great harvest for your glory here in Davidson and Craig and in surrounding areas.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.