Focused

Believers can find strength for life’s hardships by focusing on God’s grace and the gospel.

2 Timothy 2:1-13

We all face seasons of disappointment. As followers of Christ we don’t receive an exemption card that allows us immunity from hardships and heartbreaks. The Lord assured us that we would face tribulation. He also promised that He would never forsake us no matter how menacing the tribulation. Every trial provides us the choice to focus on the problem or to focus on His empowering grace. The decision we make can make a difference between victory or defeat.

What factors contribute to a hardship sharpening or souring a person’s view of life?
UNDERTAND THE CONTEXT

2 TIMOTHY 2:1-13
There were many things that Paul wanted Timothy to know and do. Nothing was more essential to Timothy’s effectiveness, however, than being strengthened in the grace of Christ. The gift of grace was not a commodity to be kept hidden but a treasure to be shared and invested in the lives of dependable men who would entrust it to other reliable believers. Paul offered Timothy three examples to inspire his work for the Lord. The first was a soldier who was obediently loyal. The second was a disciplined athlete who was trained to compete according to the rules. The third was a farmer who, as a patient laborer, worked and waited in expectation of a harvest.

Timothy needed to intentionally fix his focus on Jesus and not shy away from the inevitability of suffering. Paul told him to embrace a trustworthy saying and remember four truths:

- Death with Christ results in life with Him.
- Endurance for Christ ensures reigning in Christ’s kingdom.
- Perpetually denying Christ leads to separation from Christ.
- Human unfaithfulness does not alter the faithfulness of Christ. He remains faithful and true in consistency with His character.

As you read 2 Timothy 2:1-13, notice the three vocations identified by Paul. How does each vocation highlight Paul’s point?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

FUTURE FOCUSED (2 TIM. 2:1-2)

1 You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.
VERSES 1-2

Timothy faced perils in Ephesus that required a strength beyond his natural ability. Paul’s exhortation was not a summons for Timothy to rely upon his own strength but to be continually strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Paul expected Timothy to depend on all that Jesus could do through him more so than what he could do for himself.

Timothy had heard Paul declare the gospel to the Jews and Greeks in Ephesus, to believers at Troas, to women gathered outside Philippi, to Greeks at Thessalonica, and to philosophers in Athens. Consequently, he urged Timothy to pass along to others the truth he had heard and received.

The word commit carries the idea of investing. Timothy needed to invest the truths of the gospel into the lives of others. Given Paul’s impending death and the strong likelihood that Timothy could be arrested, Paul wanted him to be focused on the future and to train others to carry on the mission. Two qualifications were essential. First Timothy needed to invest in faithful men. Reliability was a crucial factor. Men who were trustworthy and dependable could be counted on to spread the gospel. A second qualification Timothy needed to look for was men who would be able to teach others.

The message of the gospel was never meant to be hoarded. It was intended to be transmitted and propagated to all generations. Reliable men, full of integrity would stand firm against the assault of any antagonists. Competent men who were gifted to teach could inspire others to guard the gospel against heresies and equip them to defend the truth.

Why was it so important for Timothy to prepare another generation to lead? How is this strategy used today?

MISSION FOCUSED (2 TIM. 2:3-7)

3 Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer. 5 Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer ought to be the
first to get a share of the crops. 7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

VERSES 3-4
Paul viewed hardships as opportunities for the sufficiency of Christ to be seen in his life, and he encouraged Timothy to do the same. The phrase share in suffering conveys the idea of mutual participation in the pain and agony of another person. For Paul and Timothy, suffering for the mission of Christ was not an incidental matter. It was expected. In order to remove any vagueness about the mission, Paul provided Timothy with three illustrations.

The military image of a soldier offered a clear picture of duty united with devotion. A good soldier was focused on the task assigned to him. He did more than the minimum because he pursued excellence. He desired to please his recruiter, who in this case was the Lord.

A good soldier was focused on the orders of his commanding officer and avoided getting entangled in the concerns of everyday life. Paul was not indicating that a soldier should avoid his family and friends. He was clarifying that the primary mission should not be compromised by irrelevant activities. The operative word is entangled, and it referred to someone snared in a trap from which it was hard to escape. A good soldier concentrated his attention on the mission and kept himself free from enticements that would hinder his service. Seemingly harmless diversions held hidden perils that could sideline a soldier and thwart the victory of a campaign. Obedience and loyalty were essential attributes of a soldier. When a Roman citizen became a soldier, he took an oath of loyalty to the emperor. He accepted the necessity of obedience and the execution of orders beyond his understanding. At all times, but especially during combat, a good soldier shared in the suffering of fellow soldiers. In doing so, he not only proved his loyalty, he pleased his commanding officer.

VERSE 5
Another illustration Paul used to rivet Timothy’s focus on the mission was that of an athlete. The word competes emphasized rigorous training and steadfast commitment. Greek and Roman culture celebrated competition in athletic events as attested by the popularity of the Olympic and Isthmian games.
A competitive athlete was known by his discipline. He refused to indulge in pleasures that would weaken his resolve or interfere with his training. Furthermore, an athlete was known by his devotion to the rules of a game.

Athletic rules defined what was allowable by the judges during a contest. Furthermore, rules governed the behavior of players in order to prevent bribery, lying, cheating, and other practices deemed as inappropriate. Ancient Greek athletes were required to take oaths regarding their practice and performance.

Paul applied the metaphor of an athlete competing for victory to a believer striving to live victoriously for Christ. Rules of holiness were important to the effectiveness of anyone desiring to serve the Lord honorably. Just as a noble athlete would not desire to bypass or violate the rules of a contest, so also a faithful follower of Christ would not ignore or minimize the rules for godly service. Individuals who substitute their own rules and preferences for the discipline and directive of Christ cannot expect the victor’s crown. For believers, crowns are not icons earned by merit but rewards based on grace received from the Judge over life and death. For, Paul, a crown was a recognition of faithfulness and devotion to Christ.

In what ways are the disciplines required to be a soldier and athlete similar? How are they different? How does the discipline of being a believer compare?

VERSE 6
Paul’s final illustration involved a hardworking farmer. The adjective hardworking denoted strenuous labor to the point of weariness. First-century farming was exhausting toil that required perseverance through all types of weather. The farmer had to plow the soil and plant the seed in the opportune season and wait patiently for the crop to mature. Working and waiting were twin virtues that faithful farmers needed in order to celebrate the harvest.

Paul emphasized to Timothy that the mission of Christ required hard work every day. Laziness was not an option if a good harvest
was expected. Patience stirred hope in the heart of a Christian leader as it did in the heart of a diligent farmer.

Just as the fruit of the harvest was a reward for a farmer, the diligent servant of Christ could expect the blessings of a spiritual harvest from his labor for Christ.

**VERSE 7**

Paul wanted Timothy to reflect on the obedient loyalty of a good soldier, the training of a disciplined athlete, and the painstaking work of a faithful farmer. There could be no commendation for a soldier unless he pleased his commanding officer. There would be no crown for an athlete unless he followed the rules of competition. There could be no harvest for a farmer unless he invested long and fatiguing days of patient toil in his fields.

Paul was confident that as Timothy pondered the relevance of the three illustrations, God would provide the necessary illumination. God delights to grant believers **understanding in everything** when there is a desire to glorify His mission His way. Receptivity to God’s Word creates the spiritual fertility for grasping and applying His truth in the confusing details of daily life.

**BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible concordance.**

Identify passages listed under “endure” in a Bible concordance. Review the passages, narrowing your search to New Testament passages. Write a summary of what you discover. How do these passages help you understand Paul’s words to Timothy?

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**CHRIST FOCUSED (2 TIM. 2:8-13)**

8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and descended from David, according to my gospel, 9 for which I suffer to the point of being bound like a criminal. But the word of God is not bound. 10 This is why I endure all things for the elect: so that they also
may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

11 This saying is trustworthy: For if we died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; 12 if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

VERSES 8-10

The verb *remember* carries the meaning “remember and keep on remembering.” Paul was challenging Timothy to fix his full and continual attention on two foundational aspects of the gospel. First, Timothy needed to remember the victory of Christ who was *risen from the dead.* Second, Timothy needed to remember the role that Jesus fulfilled as a descendant of David. Jesus’ resurrection served as proof that He was fully God. That He descended from the lineage of David served as proof that He was fully man. Jesus faced temptation, endured human suffering, and is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Timothy could find motivation to continue serving by remembering these things.

Paul was suffering in prison because of his unflinching devotion to Christ. His chains intensified his misery and limited his movement. Paul’s focus, however, was not on the injustice of his bondage. Instead, he took delight in the fact that *the word of God is not bound.* He assured Timothy that neither the imprisonment of the messenger nor his death would stop the spread of the message of the gospel.

Paul was willing to *endure* suffering so that others might hear the gospel and *obtain salvation.* He understood that taking the gospel throughout the Roman Empire meant encountering opposition. He counted the cost of obedience and remained faithful because the salvation of others was at stake. Paul was willing to endure hardship so that people of every tribe and nation could have the opportunity to be saved.

VERSES 11-13

Once again, Paul used the phrase, *this saying is trustworthy* to affirm the absolute reliability of its truth. All four statements of truth begin with a conditional conjunction *if* and end with a resulting declaration. The tense of the word *died* likely indicates the way that, in salvation, believers have died *with* Christ to their old ways. If in Christ we have died to our former lives, *we will also live with him.* The future tense
of will also live not only touches on the aspect of eternity but also the state of life we enjoy in Him now.

The second conditional statement relates to the believer’s willingness to endure. Referring back to suffering for the gospel, Paul used the plural pronoun we to include Timothy with himself. The word endure literally means to “stay under.” To endure means to remain faithful to the gospel task even when under the pressure of opposition. Believers who persevere will also reign with him. Just as Jesus endured the cross and rose again to His seat in glory, even so in Him believers can share His triumph (Heb. 12:2).

On the other hand, if we deny him, he will also deny us. Jesus said whoever denies Him before men will be denied before the Father (Matt. 10:33). The term deny carries the idea of disavowal. Paul was not referring to temporary denials such as Peter made on the evening before the crucifixion. He had in mind those who continue to reject Christ in this life. They will face Him in the judgment when He will also deny them.

Verse 13 reminds us that when we are at our worst, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. The attributes of Christ are far greater than our failure. The faithless actions of humans do not alter the faithful character of Christ. He is faithful to deliver judgment and justice to unbelievers, and He is faithful to sustain believers who neglect to rely upon Him during spiritual battles. Jesus never fails to remain true to His promises. He consistently and forever acts in perfect concert with His nature. Believers cannot always rely upon their strength, but they must always rely upon the strength of Christ and His faithfulness.

How does focusing on Christ’s faithfulness to us help us persevere in faithfulness to Him?

**KEY DOCTRINE: God’s Purpose of Grace**

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation (John 10:27-29).
IN MY CONTEXT

• Believers are to invest in the lives of future church leaders.
• Believers must remain focused on the gospel when facing hardships, knowing God will reward their faithfulness.
• Believers can take strength in knowing that their faithful witness opens doors for the gospel to be heard and believed.

*In whom are you investing as a future Christian leader? How are you doing so?*

*Discuss as a group ways your group can minister to people facing a crisis of faith in your community. What one action can your group take to encourage them?*

*Identify the challenges you currently face. How can you use each challenge as a vehicle for sharing the gospel with others?*

Prayer Needs