

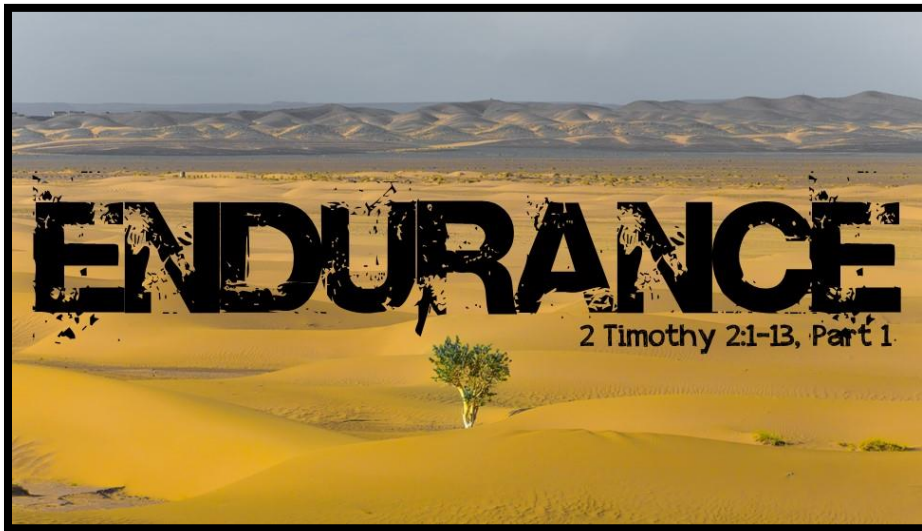
“ENDURANCE”

- 2 Timothy 2:1-13

- Part 1

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
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In this passage Paul presents the view of the pastorate to young Timothy and he does this through



several modeled pictures, all of which involves the inclusion of the critical trait of endurance.

2:1-2

The first of these pictures is that of the Steward...which is a common biblical theme and a common one to Paul. The pastorate is not something we gain and keep *for* ourselves and keep *to* ourselves. We are “stewards” ... caretakers of this treasure God has given us. It is our responsibility to guard the deposit and then invest it in the lives of others... especially the next generation of pastors and leaders.

This is one of the approximately 25 times that Paul calls upon Timothy to “be strong.” He clearly knew that Timothy needed to stand firm in the doctrine of grace and, moreover, that he had to acquire his strength from that same grace. As we read in the last chapter, Paul knew first hand that people will let you down, but God never will.

Throughout Paul’s letters, he repeatedly warned us not to move away from the doctrine and gift of grace. Paul knew the human tendency is to drift towards a works-oriented faith. He knew that men naturally seek to “put faith in a box and tie it with a ribbon,” ...all organized with a written set of instructions. The I’m ok “because I DO”, instead of the “because I AM.”

Paul knew that grace did not and does not free us from the mandate of strength in ministry. For Satan will meet the servant of God at every turn, diligently seeking to stumble us in our path of Christ. Paul, however, wasn’t telling Timothy to just ‘man up.’ We don’t find here a nebulous “be tough, Timothy” as if his mere encouragement would illicit a new backbone in this young minister! He told Timothy he needed to be strong, but he told him how to acquire that strength also. He told him where he could acquire that strength, and it wasn’t from some mere “inner discipline.”

This strength came from God’s grace. How can one be strong in grace? Grace means undeserved favor. Therefore, just as we are saved by grace, we must live by it. It means not trusting our own strength to abide and endure but trusting in Christ and his power to hold us steady. But it also does NOT mean we are freed from personal responsibility to “abide and endure” because we somehow hold no participation. God does this work, but we have to let Him and we have to respond. We can’t blame God if we fall short. That account is ours and ours ALONE.

This wasn't something Timothy had to do, but rather something that Timothy had to *allow to be done to him*. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12, "*Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power [dunamis] of Christ may dwell in me...for when I am weak, then I am strong.*" (2Cor 12:9, 10)

Timothy was being called to **pass on** these opportunities, knowledge, and training, but not to just anyone and everyone. The call was to pass the baton on to "faithful men." Men who have demonstrated faithfulness to the things of God and to the ministry He has called them to. 1 Timothy 3:10 calls us to test them first, and *then* let them serve. This is especially true of those who will then lead others in the way that *they* should go. It is important that they have a track record of strength, endurance, and faithfulness.

The work of the ministry of God essentially is three-fold. One, is to share the Gospel to lead others to new life. The second is to teach the Word in such a way as to raise up committed disciples. And lastly, to grow those disciples into faithful men who will go out and begin the process again. Paul practiced what he preached and ministered himself in this same method that he was now encouraging Timothy. He worked diligently to not just preach the gospel but to gather around himself a group of men who had interest in being more than pew-warmers. They were 'witnesses' of what Paul did and what Paul taught. But what separated the sheep from the goats here was not just seeing it, but stepping out and actually doing it. The latter is the 'faithful.' They were the ones who were not only able, but followed through by actually doing it.

Timothy was to "commit" to these men, the things he was taught. It means to "entrust." The biblical term "entrust" describes the setting of food before those who were hungry. It goes further in the idea that such is done with the confidence that what is being given is safe and secure in the receiver's care. And that can only happen through a track record. The actual *practice* of faithfulness. It only comes through time and consistency of living. John Wesley said, "*If I had 300 men who feared nothing but God, hated nothing but sin, and were determined to know nothing among men except Jesus Christ and Him crucified; I would set the world on fire.*"

2:3-4

Paul's second picture of the faithful pastor is that of a soldier. Paul often used military illustrations in his letters. His call here to Timothy is not just to "be a soldier" but to be a *faithful* one. He described in these verses the characteristics of a "good soldier of Jesus Christ." One that endures hardship (v. 3). Many people have the idea that the ministry is an easy job requiring only minimal time and effort. But a committed Christian minister is in a battle that requires spiritual strength and certainly spiritual endurance. He must be a man of integrity and be uncompromising as to what God's church...*his assigned fellowship*, is to be.

He is to avoid worldly entanglements. He has to be totally committed to his Commanding Officer, the One who enlisted him, who, in our case, is Jesus Christ. A pastor cannot afford to become distracted by things that divide his passions and weaken his ministry. We are soldiers. We do not live to please ourselves but rather to please the Lord.

Paul calls upon Timothy to actually join him in this suffering. Join him in the hardship. Note that he uses the word "must". He is not really giving Timothy an option. Perhaps because there isn't one! Oh, how we wish there was, and how mankind has relentlessly searched for one! Many folks have even believed they have found that elusive path, seeing the Christian life as the road to relief from life's problems and difficulties. But scripture tells us a very different story:

Matthew 5:45 "...he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike."

Acts 9:16 "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Romans 8:17 "...if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering."

John 15:18-21 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me."

It's been said that "A Christian without affliction is only like a soldier on parade."

Preceptaustin.org says:

"This idea of suffering for one's faith is foreign to most believers in Western Christianity and it's easy to forget that the Christian life entails continual warring against the forces of evil. Paul wanted young Timothy to have no illusions but to understand that being faithful to the truth, unwilling to twist it or compromise it for personal gain, and constantly preaching it even against threat of persecution would inevitably lead to suffering. This truth is well known to those who have come to faith in countries where conversion is punishable by imprisonment, beating and even death."

Too often Christianity is presented to non-believers as the cure to all anxieties, difficulties, and trials. This so-called "gospel" will result in false disciples and/or false expectations. Paul's call to Timothy and all believers is to stand true *in the midst of trial, testing, and tribulation*. To take up our armor and join him in a lifelong struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. A fruitful Christian life is, *inevitably and absolutely*, accompanied by intense spiritual warfare and opposition. The Bible promises us that hard truth. Paul wanted to encourage young Timothy...and subsequently all of us today, to stand strong, as he himself had done for so long.

Matt 10:38-39 *"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."*

Timothy got the message. For in chapter 3 of this letter, Paul points out to Timothy: *"...you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions..."*

Perhaps the most effective advertisement ever written appeared in a London newspaper early in the 20th century: *"Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger. Safe return doubtful." Those were the words written by Sir Ernest Shackleton, the famous South Pole explorer. There was such an overwhelming response that, Shackleton said, "It seemed as though all the men in Great Britain were determined to accompany us."*

Thankfully...not everyone is seeking the safe path through life. There are still those who desire meaning above safety! To embrace the soldier's life is to embrace a life that is never about comfort and ease. It is difficult, dangerous, costly, and often painful. Despite such, Paul does not flinch, calling Timothy to step up to the plate of the soldier as I am calling you.

1 Peter 5:7-11 *“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are. In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. All power to him forever! Amen.”*

A soldier knows the dangers that are out there. He is not sleeping. He cannot risk inattentiveness, nor distraction. He knows that the situation he deals with holds high stakes...life or death, victory or loss. Not just for himself but for all those with whom he fights. He must be alert and active. If he fails to fulfill his duty, he would be counted as a deserter or unworthy of holding the position. A soldier's focus must always be to fall under the authority of, as well as living to please, his commanding officer. The one who had chosen him to be a soldier.

Notice the careful language in verse 4: “No one...” No one is exempt unless you aren't really a soldier! How many of us today are indeed so “entangled” in the “affairs of this life” that we cannot effectively be a soldier...? We can't, in reality, serve God in such a manner because we are simply too tied up and involved in the temporal issues and activities of this earthly life. Does your confessed love of God elicit your first and best, or does Jesus just get your “leftovers?” What excuse are we using to avoid our duty to God and kingdom? These questions are critical and could well determine your eternal standing.

Remember Lot? He first LOOKED at Sodom, then pitched his tent "TOWARD Sodom" and finally he was "LIVING IN Sodom." Little by little, Sodom actually began to move INTO Lot and entangle him to the point that he did not please the Lord, eventually costing him dearly. Remember, the things we speak of don't have to be innately evil, just “entangling.” Things and practices that are time consuming and keep us from a God and kingdom first living.

Some believers think they can be a Christian but not have to fight as a soldier. But they are deceiving themselves, for all believers are on "the front line" whether they realize it or not. Those Christians who do not realize the Christianity is a war are essentially "asleep at their post." A real soldier in active service does not have a 9 to 5 job but is in fact on duty around the clock. Such a soldier is *always* a soldier! He can't call a “time out” in the middle of the battle. But how many of us have actually joined up with this spiritual fighting force only to eventually go AWOL?

2:5

3) THE ATHLETE

A runner, or any athlete, must follow the rules in order to be eligible to win. Certainly we have seen this fact lately as the sports world has been so troubled through the use of steroids and cheating in general. A true athlete must not participate in activities that will tear down his strength, or endanger his ability to compete. In order to be a winning athlete, he must be dedicated to his sport and the training and participation that goes along with it. He must invest himself. He must practice self-control. He must be willing to pay the price if he wants to win.

Can he indulge in eating fattening foods, and hanging around outside the track smoking cigarettes? Of course. He's free and he's an adult. He can do these things; he just can't do them and win. The fact is, so many of us are spiritual overweight and out of shape. No one wins without a lot of activity, conditioning, and sacrifice!

What drives such a person to sacrifice so? The love for the game, and an eye on the future prize. They sacrifice through pain, giving up of their time, finances, other worldly pursuits in order to have the joy of the competition and the goal to win.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 "Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified."

This is the kind of self-discipline necessary in order to win spiritually. We have to bring our minds, our bodies, and our passions into subjection so that our flesh, with its evil desires, does not dominate us and lead us into sin that will divert us from the goal of godliness, Christ-likeness, and furthering the kingdom of Christ. When we place Christ first in all things, the essence of the Christian life, and focus on the joy of the race as well as the eternal reward that awaits those who run with faith, the eternal perspective elicits our best. And make no mistake: it will require effort, but as Paul has already emphasized it is possible ONLY by being continually strengthened with God's grace and the passion of our love for Him.

I see the runners out on Sunday mornings when I come to church. They sacrifice for the conditioning and the benefits of being in shape. Yet what about their spiritual condition? One day, no matter how good of shape they might be in, they are going to die. But as believers, we train and run for an eternal prize!

The lack of such commitment quite clearly says that it is not that important. No matter what we say, our actions tell the truth! In every task you consider undertaking in this short life, perhaps you should evaluate such with Paul's "weight test". Ask yourself the question: "Could this task or activity slacken or sidetrack me from running the race with endurance, from finishing well and from winning the prize?"

2:6

4) THE FARMER

Unlike the athlete or the soldier, the farmer spends his life free of glamour and glory. This guy spends his life in quiet diligence. He spends his time in patient labor. He labors...he toils...and he waits. Through the plowing, the planting, the tending, and one day finally the harvest! Without the daily work and care there will of course be no harvest! Because there is one thing that is a must when being a farmer: *you have to actually work*. If you leave a field to itself, it will produce mostly weeds. Solomon had this truth in mind when he wrote about the field of the sluggard (Prov. 24:30-34). The farmer cannot sit in the barn playing video games ignoring his fields, and still expect a crop. You cannot be lazy and be a successful farmer!

Choosing the life of a farmer is a tough life. You have to love the land and love the work. The farmer works hard...all on the 'front end' ...for a harvest at the end of the season. And as we reach our own personal "harvest time," what will you have? Godly parenting and diligence results in faithful children...and as a 'farmer parent' that is a great harvest!

Paul is drawing a picture here that is far from popular today in the Christian community. Service, work, and sacrifice are taboo words! Yet they weren't for Paul. He didn't mind his church being labeled as such! He loved Jesus and he loved being able to be 'on the field.' Paul was serious on this matter. The original word found here as "hardworking" speaks of intense, hard, wearisome toil even to the point of utter exhaustion if necessary. The work described by this word left one so weary it was as if the person had taken a beating. This word describes not so much the actual exertion as the weariness which follows the straining of all one's powers to the utmost. Paul wasn't talking about the weekend hobby farmer. He was referring to the guy who is in it for his life.

Paul knew where this kind of 'mo' came from. It wasn't some sort of muster or "inward strength." In 1 Corinthians 15:9-10, using the same word for our "hardworking" herein, he says, "*For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored [I worked harder] more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*"

It's there in Paul's letter to the Corinthians that gives us the "secret" of the Christian life in a nutshell! It's not your striving in your own strength to live the Christian life, but learning to die to self that He might live His life through you.

How many of us are spending a lifetime trying to find balance to our lives, and the life we live for Christ and kingdom? But therein lies the problem: because as disciples of Christ there is no balance. It all belongs to Him, and His to give back to us as He desires and he sees need.

2:7

"Consider" means to fix one's mind upon, to think about carefully, to give careful examination with a view to discerning and arriving at a judgment or conclusion. The idea is to ponder or examine attentively or deliberately. It was imperative that Timothy keep considering carefully, pondering and mulling over all that Paul had just said. And for us, it is just as critical that all believers seriously consider what Paul has written in this passage - for we need to make this our continual practice and lifestyle.

Paul is commanding Timothy to not just look at what he had written but to actually perceive what was said by reflecting on it and giving it consideration so that he would gain insight. Timothy is told to put his mind on that which Paul has just said.

What about us? Are we willing to be so challenged in our thinking? Reading it is not enough! Ponder it. Chew on it. Digest it. And be assured that when we do, we are promised that the Lord Himself will bring the understanding to our hearts not just our minds!

Jesus, speaking to his apostles in Mark 8:17, said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?" Do we see? Do we understand? Or have we too "hardened our heart" against this scriptural truth and call of God?

"People only truly think when they are confronted with a problem," said John Dewey. "Without some kind of dilemma to stimulate thought, behavior becomes habitual rather than thoughtful." But so often, we don't really want to understand for fear of accountability. Sort of an "ignorance is bliss" idea!

MacArthur applies Paul's command to all believers: "Think over and carefully ponder what Paul has said. Look at your life and ask yourself if you are a faithful, trustworthy, spiritually mature believer? Are you devoting

yourself to guarding and teaching God's Word? Do you deny yourself and count your life as nothing in order to faithfully serve the Lord? Do you put some distance between yourself and the routine business of the world? Do you continually prepare yourself to serve your Master? Do you understand self-denial and self-sacrifice? Are you willing to pay the price that He demands?" "If you can answer yes to those questions," we are promised, the Lord will give you understanding in everything. You will be led with wisdom and insight through the challenges to victory."