



Central Peninsula Church

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2 Timothy 2:3-7
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Suffer Hardship With Me

SERIES: *A Life That Counts: Studies in 2 Timothy*

Nobody really likes pain and hardship, but most of us understand there are some things we simply can't have without it. If you want a nice meal, you have to take the time and the effort to prepare it. If you want a college degree, you have to spend lonely hours in the books. If you want an attractive physique, you have to spend some time in the gym. No pain, no gain. It's kind of a fact of life. Yet our aversion to pain is so great we still go to great lengths to bypass it.

In 1996 staff members at the Bridger Wilderness Area in Wyoming solicited feedback from visitors to their park. The following are actual responses from comment cards given to the staff:

Trails need to be wider so people can walk while holding hands.

Trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid building trails that go uphill.

Too many bugs and leeches and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the areas of these pests.

Chair lifts need to be in some places so that we can get to wonderful views without having to hike to them.

The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals.

A small deer came into my camp and stole my jar of pickles. Is there a way I can get reimbursed? Please call...

Reflectors need to be placed on trees every 50 feet so people can hike at night with flashlights.

Escalators would help on steep uphill sections.

A McDonald's would be nice at the trailhead.

The places where trails do not exist are not well marked.

Too many rocks in the mountains.

As humorous as this is, it's a fairly realistic portrayal of how many of us approach life. As someone said to me once, everybody wants the ice cream, but nobody wants to turn the crank. Of course, we don't have to turn the crank any more because our ice cream makers are electric! But the fact is there is no technology that can subvert this fundamental law of life: no pain, no gain; no guts, no glory; no cross, no crown.

It's true in the Christian life as well. We celebrate grace - God's free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. We can't earn that. It's a gift. No amount of pain and suffering can merit God's favor. But, having placed our faith in Christ, and endeavoring to follow him, it's impossible to avoid hardship. Pain and suffering have nothing to do with receiving salvation but they're an inevitable part of working out our salvation. Listen to some of these statements:

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it" Lk. 9:23-24.

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life" Mt. 19:29.

"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" Acts 14:21-22.

"For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ" 2 Cor. 1:5.

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him" Rom. 8:16-17.

"To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation" 1 Pt. 4:13.

It was this very truth that young Timothy was having a hard time swallowing. We've learned that Timothy was a young pastor in the city of Ephesus. He was timid by nature, prone to frequent ailments. He felt terribly inadequate for the task at hand. His church was rife with conflict and false teaching. His critics were many. On top of all of that, the Roman Empire was becoming more and more opposed to Christians. They were being rounded up and thrown in prison. His mentor awaited execution at Nero's command. It was a tough time to be a Christian.

So Paul writes Timothy and reminds him of this fundamental law of life in Christ. To enjoy the reward of Christ you have to endure the sufferings of Christ.

“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 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. Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything” (2 Tim. 2:3-7).

I. We are to take our share of suffering

The controlling command of this paragraph is found in v. 3, **“Suffer hardship with me...”** Paul isn't just telling Timothy to endure hardship; he's telling him to *take his share* of hardship; to join with him and others in participating in the sufferings of Christ. Sometimes when we suffer we think we're the only one, but we're not. There are others with us; we're in the battle together; we'll also share in the victory together.

On Sept. 2, 1945, the documents of surrender officially ending WW II were signed by the Japanese and representatives of allied nations. General Douglas MacArthur officiated the ceremony aboard the USS Missouri and was the last to sign on behalf of the United States. Flanked by his military colleagues, he took his Parker fountain pen and simply signed his name “Douglas.” He then passed the pen to General Wainwright, who signed, “Mac.” Then he passed the pen to General Percival, who signed “Arthur.” This was MacArthur's way of honoring those two Generals who both had suffered as prisoners of war. Together they had persevered, and together they shared in the glory of victory.

Paul says, “Timothy, share with me in the suffering so that we can share together in the victory.”

Paul then goes on and he illustrates this truth for Timothy. He takes three powerful images and

shows how enduring hardship and enjoying victory are inexorably tied. Each of these images connect a requirement with a reward.

II. We are to be like dedicated soldiers

First, he gives us the image of a soldier. This image points to the need for *dedication*. Remember, Paul was in prison. He was being guarded by Roman soldiers. He saw their dedication firsthand. Roman soldiers were expected to be devoted to their service for over 20 years; only about half survived to retire.

Soldiers expect to suffer. It's part and parcel of their calling. War is not a picnic. A soldier doesn't expect to live a life of ease. He doesn't enlist to enjoy life, to see the world, despite what the recruitment posters say. That may happen, but if warfare breaks out, he'll be faced with some hard realities. What kind of soldier would get out on the battlefield and say, “Hey, can I sleep on something a little softer? I could also use a hot bath. And this food stinks! How about some prime rib? I didn't sign up for this.”

Paul is saying that we did sign up for this. The Christian should expect to face the same thing as a soldier. We don't become Christians to merely enjoy life. Certainly there is joy in this life, and we can enjoy the things of this world that God has created for us. But the Christian life is not a playground; it's a battlefield. So we shouldn't be surprised when there is hardship and deprivation. We have an enemy. That enemy won't let up until the day you die. His aim is to destroy you. In Ephesians Paul says, **“Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil”** (Eph. 6:11).

Paul says something else here about what is required to be a soldier. He says a good soldier will be single-minded in his dedication. A soldier in active service doesn't get entangled with civilian pursuits. A soldier must be unencumbered. Soldiers were not allowed to marry during their term of service. The Roman code of Theodosius said, “We forbid men engaged in military service to engage in civilian occupations.” To become entangled in civilian pursuits would drain his time and energy. Can you imagine a soldier, in the midst of a battle going up to his commanding officer and asking for some time off to tend to his business, or to take his girlfriend out for a date?

My father was only 18 when he was shipped over to the Pacific to fight on the front lines of WW II. He was an only child, and his mother was so distraught with the fear that he would be killed, that she took her own life. When news of her death reached him on the battlefield, he tried to get a leave of absence to go home and be with his father. But, guess what? They wouldn't allow it. They couldn't afford to lose him from the battle. There was nothing he could do.

A soldier must be single-minded. What does this mean for us? Should we totally opt out of everyday

responsibilities? No. This is an issue of priorities and focus - the call to serve Christ takes precedence over worldly affairs when the two are at odds. What is forbidden is not all secular activities but *entanglements*, both mental and physical, which though they may be perfectly innocent in themselves, may hinder from serving Christ.

This has been a big challenge for me personally, as a pastor. My challenge is not so much falling into some major sin, although that could happen. My biggest challenge is just letting the cares of this world - paying bills, coaching baseball, keeping the cars running - distract me from my primary purpose of serving Christ. Satan is clever. If he can't destroy us with bad things, he'll try to destroy us with good things. Good things become bad things when they entangle us and keep us from focusing on our call to serve Christ.

So that's the requirement, what is the reward? The reward is to please the one who enlisted us a soldier. That was particularly true in the Roman army; a commander would gather around him men who knew him, loved him, trusted him and would follow him anywhere. Those were the ones who won the great battles for Rome. Paul picks that up and says that's the way Christians ought to be. Our one objective is not to please ourselves or even to please other people, but to please the Lord. Paul says in Gal. 1:10, **"For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ."** And then in 2 Cor. 5:9 he says, **"Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him."**

Can you imagine, standing before the Lord and hearing him say, **"Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master"** (Mt. 25:21)? What a powerful motivation that is for us.

III. We are to be like disciplined athletes

Second, he gives us the image of an athlete. Paul knew all about athletes. He loved using athletic imagery. Listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians, **"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified"** (1 Cor. 9:24-27). As you can see, this is an image of *discipline*.

Every athlete expects to deny himself certain things if he wants to win. He can't eat just any kind of food; he has to give up chocolate chip cookies and all the rich food that others can freely have. He may have to sit and eat nothing while others enjoy dessert. Although the behavior of some athletes today may contradict this, athletes can't indulge in

certain pleasures. They can't be out late at night. They can't go in for wild living and drunkenness without that effecting their performance. They determine beforehand they're not going to be involved in those things, so that when the occasion arises they say, No. All those things are just part of being an athlete.

Once again, we're dealing with expectations. Do you see yourself like an athlete, or do you expect to be able to do pretty much whatever you want? When the Lord asks you to give something up for him, something that's harming your spiritual fitness, do you say, "You can't ask me to give that up Lord" or, "Of course. That's just part of being a Christian."

Paul says the thing about athletes is they have to compete according to the rules. This is one of the requirements. If you don't compete according to the rules, you'll be disqualified. We've seen some poignant examples of that this past week, haven't we? There are strict rules about performance enhancing drugs which can disqualify an athlete. There are rules both for the race itself and for preparation.

This was true in Paul's day as well. Severe penalties were imposed on those who infringed on the rules, not just during the race but before the race. Athletes were pledged to 10 months of strict preparation prior to competing in the Olympic games. If they backed out at any point along the way, if they neglected their training, they were disqualified.

You and I have to compete according to the rules. We have to stay disciplined and obedient to the Lord both before the race and in the race. There is really no place to take a break from the training and the effort and the discipline. You can't back out five months into training. You can't take a break on the fourth lap of an eight lap race. Timothy is not to quit half way through the contest; he's to keep striving his whole life through, and so are we. Along the way, we have to say "No" to many things. There are visual stimuli on every side that tempt us to give in, to indulge ourselves, to seize hold of life and enjoy it now. But a Christian athlete has to say, "No! I won't do it. Those things lead to distraction, to disruption and to a lessening of spiritual intensity in my life; I won't do them." That's the discipline of an athlete.

The reward? Athletes who compete according to the rules will win the prize. In Paul's day that was a victor's wreath placed over his head. Have you heard of Rosie Ruiz? In the 1980 Boston Marathon she was a young unknown runner. She shocked everyone when she was the first woman to cross the finish line after 26 miles. People were so shocked that an investigation was done and they discovered this was only the second marathon she'd ever run. She had no coach. While others trained by running 120 miles a week, she'd only trained on an exercise bike. Not only that, she'd not

been seen by any other woman runners in the race. Finally they figured out that she'd rode the subway for the first 16 miles of the race, had been dropped off close to the finish line, and strode across with her arms in the air as if she had run the whole thing! Needless to say, she was disqualified.

That's what we want to avoid. We want to cross the finish line, having trained and run the race with discipline. But it's hard, isn't it? I think of those of you that are single. What a challenge you have. It's so easy for those of us who are married to shake the finger at you, but we don't know what it's like. You'd love to be married, and that longing represents a deep pain in your life that never goes away. And the hardest thing is that you probably could be with someone now if you compromised your standards. Some of you are right in the middle of having to make some hard decisions in that regard. I want you to know that there is something worse than being single your whole life. Do you know what it is? It's being disqualified from the race. It's missing out on the crown of life because you wouldn't take up your cross. Run the race in such a way that you can win the prize!

IV. We are to be like diligent farmers

The third image Paul gives us is one that communicates diligence. It's the image of a farmer. Just like soldiers and athletes, farmers expect hardship. You don't go into farming if you don't want to get your hands dirty. And that's what Paul emphasizes here. Just as a soldier has to be single-minded and an athlete has to compete according to the rules, so a farmer has to work hard.

When I was in college I had a roommate who grew up in Lodi on a dairy farm owned by his father. One day he told me about what that was like. Dairy farmers work seven days a week. They get up so early in the morning that most of them are taking their lunch break when we're eating breakfast. They can't take a break from the relentless routine because if the cows don't get milked, they could die. So every day - morning noon and night - they work.

The verb that Paul uses here for hard work means to toil intensely, to sweat and strain to the point of exhaustion. The hard working farmer endures the cold, heat, rain and drought. He plows the soil whether it's hard or loose. He can't do things when he feels like it or when it's convenient, because the seasons don't wait for him. When it's time to plant, he'd better plant. When it's time to harvest, he'd better harvest.

While the soldier has the excitement of the battle, and the athlete the thrill and applause of competing, the farmer's life is basically devoid of excitement. His work is tedious and humdrum and unexciting. Most of the time no one is watching. He usually works alone. There are no soldiers to fight with him. No teammates to work out with him. No commanding officer to pat him on the back. No crowd to cheer him on.

Serving Christ can be a lot like that. A lot of times it's just hard work. A lot of times it seems like no one is watching and no one cares. Sometimes it's tedious and boring. Last night we had a few hundred people here for a dinner put on by John Stott Ministries. This place was cleared out and tables were set up and they all got out of here about 10:00 pm. What do you think happened between 10:00 pm and 1:00 am? Clean up and set up. Who did that? Elves? Some people in the church. Nobody showed up this morning and gave them a round of applause.

That's what it's like sometimes. The good news is that farmers who work hard will receive the first share of the crops. The requirement is hard work, the reward is the harvest. Farmers know that; that's what keeps them going. The harvest comes later, but it does come. That's the reward we look forward to.

Paul ends with a final command: "**Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.**" Here's another requirement and reward. The requirement is to reflect on and think about what Paul has just said. The reward is that the Lord will give you insight and understanding. Once again, you can't have one without the other. If you don't think, the Lord won't open your eyes. Some of us want inspiration without perspiration, but it doesn't work that way. Understanding into the Scripture comes *because of* not *in spite of* study and meditation.

CONCLUSION

It's a law of life: To enjoy the reward of Christ we must endure the sufferings of Christ. Are you as single-minded and unencumbered in your devotion to him as a soldier? Do you have the mindset of a disciplined athlete in training? Does your work for the Lord resemble that of a diligent farmer? It would be nice if we could bypass these things, but life doesn't work that way. So we have tough choices to make, and the only way we can do it is to go back to v.1 - be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Let his grace strengthen you for the battle. Let his grace strengthen you for the race. Let his grace strengthen you for the work.

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