

MONDAY, 4/24

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2.

Today marks our second week in Second Timothy. Before we launch into chapter two, I want to extend an opportunity to you. You don't have to do it, but I think you'll benefit from it if you choose to do so. The opportunity is to read Second Timothy again before moving into today's devotional.

Last Monday, we read the entire letter in one sitting. The idea is to get a general picture of the letter itself. This practice helps build context. I liken scripture reading to putting a puzzle together. When you assemble a puzzle, it is common to spread out the pieces on a table and sit with the picture of the puzzle in front of you so you can begin to put the pieces together. Now imagine how difficult it would be to put a puzzle together without the picture of what it's supposed to look like. This is often how we read the Bible. We begin without a picture of what is happening. We just look at the pieces. This is one reason the Bible confuses people. Building a greater context for what is happening is like having the puzzle picture. With that in view, you now have a better vision of where the pieces fit.

Now let's look at chapter two. Paul just made his first appeal to Timothy. After lauding Timothy's faith, which was instilled in him from his family, Paul encourages Timothy to not be ashamed of the good news of Jesus. He calls on Timothy to embrace the suffering that comes from following Jesus and living out His mission. Paul knows that what he is asking the young pastor to do is not easy, so he tells Timothy to rely on God's grace. "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," Paul said.

The idea that Paul is bringing home here is that we have been shown grace through Christ. Grace as evidenced in the cross is the pathway to a new life with Jesus. But grace is far from a "one and done" transaction. Grace is a constant resource for us as we grow into our new life with Jesus. He continues to pour His power, love, and wisdom into our lives as we walk with Him. So Paul is telling Timothy to rely on this grace that Jesus gives to us. Timothy should avoid trying to be strong in his own strength, but he should trust in the Lord's strength. This is Timothy's only hope to endure hardships as He follows Jesus.

Paul is speaking a word of encouragement for us all here. We have access to this gift of God's grace in our lives. However, my fear is that many may not make use of this grace. In my own personal experience, I am more likely to seek Jesus' grace when I'm going through something really hard. However, when things are relatively calm and my need is not as immediate, I don't seek it. I figure I can manage those times.

That is not the vision Jesus has for our life with Him. We are to be connected to Him and to His grace. Think of the image Jesus uses in John 15. In speaking to His relationship with His disciples, Jesus said He is the vine and they are the branches. They are to be connected and tapped into Jesus' life. They are to pull resources from Him that are vital for their life with Him. This is what Jesus wants for us.

I wonder how you can seek Jesus' grace in your everyday life. I wonder how His grace can open up a new way of living for you.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, You have poured out Your grace for us. You desire that we enjoy Your grace and seek Your help in our lives. You not only died to save us, but You are also alive so that we can be filled with Your life. Give me the grace I need for this day. Amen.

TUESDAY, 4/25

Read 2 Timothy 2:3-4.

Paul has already made a plea with Timothy to join the work of spreading the good news of Jesus. Here, Paul doubles down on the call. "Join with me in suffering," he says.

That is an odd request when you think about it. Our immediate answer to that is no. Who wants to suffer? We instinctually reject hardships we can otherwise avoid. So Paul brings home the call to endure trials for Jesus with several images that will ultimately draw out the joy that is ours when we suffer in service to Jesus.

The first image Paul uses is that of a soldier. Soldiers are the perfect example of someone who's willing to give themselves to a greater cause. They are willing to put themselves in harm's way for their country. They are driven by the greater good rather than personal ambition. This is a great perspective for us. As those who have been sought and found by Jesus, we embrace His mission to reach others. We welcome the hardships that come with the call because we see the beauty of the cause. We are willing to endure troubles because we know that God is restoring this world. We want others to experience the life-changing love of Jesus.

Paul also holds up the soldier as an example of commitment. A soldier has one focus: to please their commanding officer. They recognize that their commanding officer has authority over them, so they are willing to take orders regardless of the outcome. This means they don't think of themselves and their wants. They think only of what their commanding officer tells them to do.

In this image, Jesus is our commanding officer. Jesus has shown courage in the face of trial in the cross. We know that Jesus sacrificed for us, and we know the power of His love. Having been blessed by His love, we have a desire to honor Him. As such, we embrace His authority over us and follow Him into battle, so to speak. We are willing to sacrifice for Him because He sacrificed for us.

It is worth noting that our serving Jesus is not driven by the sense that we have to earn anything from Him. The good news of Jesus is that He loves us. He has saved us by His mercy and grace. When we put our trust in Him, we receive life in Him. That is how grace works. So when we serve Jesus, it is purely a response to His love. Grace frees us to respond out of genuine love for Jesus. We, like the good soldier, want to please Him.

Praying Together:

"Lord, I am thankful for Your love that has redeemed me. I see the sacrifice You made for the world. I want to bless You as You have blessed me. I give myself to Your work. I do not need to earn from You, but I do want to honor You as you deserve. Show me how I can be more involved and committed to Your mission. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 4/26

Read 2 Timothy 2:5.

Paul's next example of how to follow Jesus is that of an athlete. This is a fitting illustration as athletes were held in high esteem during this time. There are aspects of their lives that carry over into service to Jesus.

With that being said, I must confess this verse took me some time to process. I kept getting hung up on the word "rules". Following the rules of the game doesn't always lead to victory. Look, I

could follow every basketball rule in a one-on-one against Michael Jordan, but I would still get creamed. So after some digging, I think I get what Paul is speaking to here.

While the NIV translates the term as "rules", the idea has more to do with the athlete's strict training regimen. It was understood that if you wanted to win, you had to follow a program that would lead you to success. You needed to get stronger, faster, and leaner. You watched what you ate and trained hard because you couldn't expect to win without putting in the work. These are the unwritten rules to success in sports.

Paul's point is that the life of an athlete is marked by discipline and focus. Their eyes are on winning the prize, and everything they do is driven by that goal. The sports world gives us some good examples of this. In his personal gym, quarterback Tom Brady had a clock that counted down to the next year's Super Bowl. He would reset it every time his season ended. Michael Jordan was determined to win at all costs. With his eyes on the next championship, he outworked everyone and pushed his teammates to do the same.

Those are great examples, but the question for us is this: how does that translate to our service to Jesus' mission? I'll let Paul answer that question. In Philippians 3, Paul is talking about joining Jesus in His mission and suffering. In verses 12-14, Paul said, "Not that I have already obtained all of this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Paul is fixed on his goal of a life of faithful service to Jesus. He is aware that there is more to do, so he focuses on what is in front of him each day. He doesn't let past failures become stumbling blocks for his present service. He presses on with the goal in mind.

I wonder what goal you have in mind for serving in Jesus' mission. I wonder how you can allow that goal to drive your daily actions.

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, I pray that You would enable the goal of faithfully serving Jesus to stay planted in my heart and mind. I want an athlete's focus when it comes to doing Jesus' work. I want to give myself to this work and not miss opportunities because I'm distracted. Keep my past failures from causing me to stumble today. Help me leave those behind for new faithfulness today and in the future. Amen."

THURSDAY, 4/27

Read 2 Timothy 2:6-7.

Paul is drawing out the attributes of different vocations in order to paint a picture of how we can faithfully serve Jesus. The next example he uses is that of the hardworking farmer.

I didn't grow up on a farm, and I'm glad I didn't. I've known farmers whose daily routines involved waking up at ungodly times and putting in days from dusk to dawn without much, if any, time off. I'm thankful God called me to ministry.

You don't have to be a farmer to respect the work they put in to produce crops. They make sacrifices each day and orient their lives around the goal of growing crops. No one would argue that they deserve the first share of crops they harvest.

Again, as with the other images, Paul is holding up the example of discipline and sacrifice. The example of hard work also comes out of this particular example. It might be a little confusing since Paul is talking about trusting in God's grace. We often make sure that grace is distinct from works. There is good reason for this as grace is different from good works when it comes to salvation. However, Paul isn't talking about salvation. His focus is on serving Jesus even to the point of suffering for Him.

Dallas Willard helps shed some light on what Paul is saying. He once said, "Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action." Grace means we do not have to earn God's favor. That has already been given to us in Christ. Grace doesn't mean that we don't have to put effort into service to Christ. In Philippians, Paul said he put in more effort than all the other apostles. While we do not depend on our efforts to save us, we do put in great energy to serve the Lord. It is our gift to Him.

Verse 7 calls us to reflect on the virtues highlighted in these images. He wants Timothy to dwell upon how they can inform him and inspire him to faithful service to Jesus. I wonder which image meant the most to you. What can you take away from the soldier, athlete, and farmer to apply to your own ministry to Jesus and to the world?

Praying Together:

"Father, I want to work hard for Your Kingdom. I know that the Kingdom doesn't depend on me, but You invite me into the eternal work You are doing in the world. This work is worth the energy and effort I put into it. Supply me with the grace and energy to invest in Your mission. I want to share in Your work and bring You glory. Amen."

FRIDAY 4/28

Read 2 Timothy 2: 8-9.

What is the value of sharing the gospel if one weren't willing to sacrifice for it? Paul writes this letter to Timothy, as his mentor and as a fellow Christian. It is as if he wants Timothy to see past what his own two eyes could see. Paul wanted him to understand that there was a good reason why he was where he was. Much like Christ, Paul knows that in his suffering, there is a greater call playing out here. Paul is accepting consequences for his own choice to follow God in this way.

Paul's priorities seem to shift over time. At one time, he might have shouted the gospel from the rooftops and even judged people for their lack of faith, but now his focus has changed. His isolation in prison, coupled with a continued sense of responsibility to encourage the churches he had established, has led to deep frustration. He now recognizes that suffering is a necessary component in a closer walk with God. His isolation in prison and a continued sense of responsibility for encouraging the churches he planted over time must have made room for deep frustration. After all, the new church members had not seen the risen Lord as he had. Perhaps they weren't as committed to full ministry as he felt he was. He wanted to keep these churches up and running, placing theology first.

Once he knew that he would not be leaving the confines of his prison cell, the shackles of a criminal became real to him. Maybe his diminishing physical strength or his slight stature began to weigh on his ability to survive. Maybe he knew he would be killed for his faith. So he did something amazing. He shifted his priority once again as he placed his faith before anything else. With God in his heart and soul through Jesus Christ, Paul found freedom. He found grace. He found love. He found mercy in the deepest sense. He knew that his freedom was grounded in the word of God as he said, even while he had felt hardship and suffering, "even to the point

of being chained like a criminal. But the Word of God is not chained" (2 Timothy 2:9). As the dust of sin cleared, Paul knows peace, because Paul knows the risen Christ.

Paul chose to live by his faith regardless of the outcome. Have you ever experienced a time where the burden, the regret, and the suffering were almost too heavy to carry by yourself? Have you ever invited God into your suffering? If so, what happened?

Praying Together:

"Gracious God, I am amazed that every time I call out to You, You answer. It may not be the answer I want to hear, but I trust that You are always at work for my good. There are those times when I forget to ask for help, yet You know my needs. Be patient with me as I continue to deal with my own suffering and forget to make room for You. It is in Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

SATURDAY, 4/29

Read 2 Timothy 2:10.

When I was a child, I watched my dad read the Bible every morning. One day, I asked him if he understood all that he was reading. After a long pause, he told me that, in truth, he did not. But he said that we will never understand everything we read in the scriptures. When asked why he read it anyway, he said he read it to know God better than he did right then. He told me that it was important to spend time in scripture every day to honor the God who created us.

My dad's faith carried him through multiple back surgeries, neck surgeries, the removal of a railroad spike through his left arm, and a motorcycle accident or two. He knew pain I can't even imagine. And he lived through and died from a disorder that he feared for as long as I can remember, one that took his memory and function away a piece at a time--Alzheimer's. Near the end, he could not see to read the Bible every morning, yet he still kept it next to his bed on the night stand within reach. Maybe this was out of habit, or maybe he wanted to be whatever example of Christ he could be when his family came to visit or his favorite caregivers came to check on him. Those of us who knew what he had gone through and knew the strength of his faith knew why the Bible sat close enough to read every day. Dad never planted churches or encouraged crowds like Paul did, but his faith raised four kids and four grandchildren reading that Bible every morning, rain or shine.

How do you exemplify that level of faith? What do you do encourage others in theirs?

Praying Together:

"God, I love You. I see You in all that You created. Sometimes I forget to thank You for all that You've done. I forget to tell others about You. I forget to read scripture regularly. I get so caught up in my own mess that I cannot see above it. There is discipling work to be done. Focus our efforts on the salvation of many. May Paul's example of strength in the midst of hardship be a reason to lean into our faith so that we might find a way to serve You best. Amen."

SUNDAY, 4/30

Read 2 Timothy 2:11-13.

There are several reasons listed here that capture the need for endurance during suffering and what happens when we are able to come out on the other side, guided by our faith. First, we are suffering as we struggle with our biggest sins, including the ones that shield us from grace, that hide us from joy, that expose us as the sinners we are, yet we can endure such suffering,

knowing that Jesus' victory over death allows true believers forgiveness and new life apart from sin.

Second, if we are living a life of deeply rooted faith, our physical death is only temporary. The idea here is to endure all temptations and trials so that we can know life eternal. If we refuse to live by faith, if we deny the importance of placing our relationship with God ahead of all others, and if we refuse to believe that God is with us in all that we do, we have deliberately denied Him access to us. If we do not invite Jesus into our struggles, how can we hope to have a relationship with Him? When Jesus comes back, whom will He choose to take with Him?

Third, we are reminded of the Old Testament connection between God and His chosen people. God remained faithful to His people, even when they proved faithless time and time again. God was committed to His people. This is the foundation of Israel's covenant with God. We are made in His image. We are saved by enduring all obstacles and fighting our way through suffering with our faith still intact. Because we are all God's creation, He cannot disown what is created to be His to begin with.

This is a matter of endurance. There is a spark of God, awaiting discovery in all of us. Our Christian faith grows from this light. What can we do to encourage that light in others, especially those who do not know it's there?

Praying Together:

"Father God, You have given me the strength to endure the biggest challenges I've ever faced with grace. Give me the vision to encourage endurance in others. Reveal Your light in others so that I may find a way for them to reconnect to You as they face hardship. Thank You, Lord, for Your presence in this. Amen."