

The Courage to Face Hardship

by Carter Conlon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of finding strength and courage in God to face the challenges and hardships of life, and to fulfill our mission as believers.

Duration: 36:01

Scripture: Matthew 7:7, Acts 9:17-18, Acts 16:25, 1 Corinthians 1:8, 2 Timothy 2:1-4

Topics: "Perseverance", "Faithfulness"

Description

This sermon from 2 Timothy focuses on the courage needed to face hardship, drawing from Paul's exhortation to Timothy to be strong in Christ's grace, endure hardships, and fulfill his ministry. The message emphasizes the importance of not surrendering to the challenges of life, but standing firm in faith and obedience to God, knowing that a crown of righteousness awaits those who persevere and love the appearing of Christ.

Transcript

Second Timothy, please, if you'll go there. My message this morning is called The Courage to Face Hardship. The Courage to Face Hardship.

Second Timothy. I'm going to be reading from both chapter two and chapter four. Now, Father, I thank you, God, with all my heart.

I thank you, Lord, for your presence. I thank you for the touch of your Holy Spirit. I thank you, God, for your word, which truly is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.

I thank you for the great strength that so many of us have found from understanding your word and trusting you to apply it to our lives and make it a reality to us. Oh, Jesus, Son of God, I ask you, Lord, that you would overshadow my frailty and give me strength. You would give me clarity of thought and that you would cause this word to live in the hearts of every person that you brought here in a sanctuary to hear it today, and those that are listening online.

I praise you for this with all my heart. Bless this day. Let your presence be in it.

I ask it in Jesus' name. Courage to Face Hardship. Second Timothy, chapter two, beginning at verse one.

Paul is writing to a young disciple called Timothy. He's at the end of his journey. He knows in his heart that he's about to lose his life, which he did for standing for Christ at that time.

He's writing, in a sense, to throw the torch to a young disciple that's coming after him, a young man who's often been fearful. But Paul, at the end of his days, became very tender. Those who do walk with God and have walked with God in truth have a propensity for tenderness at the end of their life.

We all realize that we've needed a strength other than our own to walk with God, no matter how strong we were when we started out. Paul writes to Timothy, and he says, You, therefore, my son, verse one, chapter two, second Timothy, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things that you've heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

You, therefore, must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also, if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead, according to my gospel.

Now, chapter four, beginning at verse one. I charge you, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead that is appearing in his kingdom, preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season.

Convince, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and teaching, for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. But according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers, and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things.

Endure afflictions. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race.

I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved his appearing. These are incredibly precious verses of scripture.

This is a veteran soldier of the cross of Jesus Christ. His name is Paul, and he's throwing the torch with the power of his pen and the passion of his heart to a young disciple who had become a son to him. He told him in chapter 2, verse 1, you'll need to be strong in the strength that will be given to you as you make the choice to serve God according to the pathway that he has laid out for your life.

That's what we'll be talking about this afternoon at three o'clock. He says, you therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. When you and I found Christ as our Lord and Savior, there was something that God gave each one of us to do, and he gave us the grace to do it.

The power, the ability, the passion, the mind, the strength, the will, the courage, all of it comes from God. There are things that God has asked me to do in my life that I don't have the courage to do, and I know it. I

don't have the strength.

I don't have the patience naturally in my natural man, and so I have to turn to God and say, God, you have to give me that which I need, for I don't have that resource solely within myself. I need you to be my strength. It is the wise man, it is the wise woman that begins to realize that we have limitations as to what we can do in our own natural ability, but with God, as the scripture said, all things are possible, and what a journey this has been.

I could testify from now until six o'clock, and many of you who attend this church, you know that to be true. I could tell you, and I'd love to tell you what God has done in my life over the years and how he has taken me from places where I could not get out to places that I could not go in. It has been an amazing journey.

It always is when we choose to serve God and trust him for the strength to do it. Paul said to Timothy, the hardworking farmer must be first partaker of the crops. In other words, Timothy, you're going to be talking to people about peace and strength that's found in Jesus Christ, but you must be a partaker of it yourself.

You can't just talk to people about something that you don't know anything about in experience. Just as the gospel, he said, we preach is about the dead being supernaturally given new life. Remember, he said, consider what I say and the Lord give you understanding.

Remember that Jesus Christ at the seat of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel. In other words, Paul is saying to Timothy, remember this simple fact, the gospel we preach is about dead men living. It's about that which cannot change itself being changed sovereignly by the power of God.

That is the gospel we preach. That is the evidence of the reality of what we preach. The scripture says, if any man be in Christ, he's a new creation.

The old things in his life are passed away and behold, all things are become new. That is true. That is absolutely true.

That is marvelously true. And God help any preacher that doesn't know that. Paul says to Timothy, you've got to eat of the fruit first before you preach it to others.

You've got to know what you're talking about before you talk about it. But then he tells him in verse four, remember, if your heart is divided, the ministry that is entrusted to you will not fully fulfill its intended goal. No man, no one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

Thank God that in our military that are here today, that I don't have a picture in my mind of somebody seeing an approaching armada coming to attack the Navy of the United States of America. And they call for the captain. They call for the lieutenants.

They call for those who know their positions say would be right there. We're online ordering sweaters for Christmas for our family, not entangled, not diverted, not given to secondary pursuits. We expect those who protect this country to be fully engaged.

And likewise, we also expect that those who stand and represent God in this nation should also be fully engaged. Our minds, our heart, our will should be set upon the things of God, and we should have the courage to stand and speak what we believe and tell others about eternity in heaven with God. In today's

world of daily conflict, and it seems to be increasing all the time, I personally want the assurance that those who are called to defend us will never surrender while they still have a chance to defeat those who would harm us.

How tragic it is. I think there's a particular army in the Middle East that, at least according to my perspective, have a tendency to surrender too quickly. They have a tendency to run when things get hot.

And I think about how little confidence the people must have in this military as they see them go by in whatever formation or parade that they might have. So many people today run when they don't need to. In a similar way, you and I have an obligation to fight for those of our day who are in danger of being swallowed up by the spiritual darkness that lingers on our horizons.

That's why Paul said to Timothy, I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead? When he comes again, preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season, when it's convenient and when it's not, when it's popular and when it's unpopular. Convince, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching, for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.

But according to the desires of their own hearts, they will heap up for themselves teachers. In other words, they will listen to every and any opinion about reality, but that which comes from the mouth of God. And they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned to stories, fables.

As a church of Jesus Christ, it's imperative that we don't surrender what we know to be true. It's imperative that we stand for the sake of our children, for the sake of our families, our communities, our neighborhoods. You'd ask me the question, well, how do we surrender before the time? Well, firstly, we surrender our full calling.

We surrender the leading and the power of God when we walk away from the place of prayer. Technically speaking, in this country, many churches have walked away from the prayer time. There are not many permanents to be found anymore.

Many individual Christians don't pray anymore. And when we don't pray, we don't hear from God. We don't hear his voice.

We lose touch with his power. The supernatural life becomes very, very natural. What should cause people to look upon the church of Christ with awe? We become just another argument on every street corner.

We surrender when we rely on cleverness and not the word of God. We surrender the faith that could come from our hearts to quicken the hearts of those who hear us. When we allow our theological focus to become about ourselves, we surrender the mission of Christ, which is about others.

It's not about ourselves. It's about others. It's not about our own protection.

It's about the protection of others. It's not about our freedom. It's about the freedom of others.

When we allow our focus to be turned, which we have in measure as a nation, not everywhere, thank God, but in many places, the focus when you visit church is all about what new thing can I get from God today, as opposed to what new thing can I give? Can God give through me for the benefit, for the sake of others? There was a king in the Old Testament. His name was Hezekiah, and he got a word that evil was about to

visit the next generation after him, and he prayed a prayer which, in my opinion, was as misguided a prayer as you're going to hear at this time in history. And he said these words, as long as evil doesn't happen in my day, isn't this a good thing? We surrender.

When we say things like that, we surrender actually our next generation to a very dark and a very ominous future. Be watchful in all things, Paul said to Timothy. Endure afflictions and do the work of an evangelist.

Fulfill your ministry. Paul was telling Timothy, be careful that none of these or other faulty reasonings ever get a hold of your heart. Don't turn back because you're opposed, but lead others to the truth, the life, and the light of God.

Fulfill the ministry. That means run the race before you and finish your calling, just in the same way that you're seeing me do it, Paul said to Timothy. I am finished.

I have poured my life out as a drink offering. I have fought a good fight. I've finished the race.

I've done it by the rules. It's truly amazing. And Paul says, and now there's laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

They've loved his appearing. Have you loved the appearing of Christ? It's a bit of a feeble clap because many here don't even know what that means. The appearing.

Paul said, I've loved his appearing. I've loved those moments throughout my life when he's come to me when nobody else could, and he's been to me what nobody else would, and he's taken me where nobody else could. I've loved the appearing of Christ.

I've loved opening the Word of God, my own life, and just reading casually in the morning and have him appear from these pages, in a sense, begin to speak to my heart, begin to gladden me, begin to show me things about the future, begin to give me hope for my own house, begin to talk to me about things that he would like to do through my life. I've loved his appearing. I've loved the moments in my life when he's come to me when there was no possible way to go forward, when it seemed like everything ahead of me was as solid as stone and nothing but the voice of God could have made a difference.

I've loved his appearing, and if you walk with him for any amount of time, you have known disappearing of God. When he suddenly just manifests his victory, he makes it known, brings us back again to the source of our strength. He brings us back to the source of our life.

Paul said, there's a crown of righteousness laid up for all those who have loved his appearing, and Paul could say to Timothy, he didn't say it explicitly, but I can draw the inference. In Acts chapter 9, on the road to Damascus, when Paul was an enraged religious lunatic, hating everything unlike himself, and that's the lunacy of false religion. It always hates everything unlike itself.

Seeking to destroy men and women who believed in God, to haul them out of their houses and torture them and cause them to blaspheme God. That's who Paul was, but Christ appeared to him on a road, a road called Damascus, and he appeared to him as a merciful savior ready to forgive. Oh, I've loved the appearing of God, Timothy.

When I should have been judged, when I should have been damned, when God was justified in speaking and taking my life. Right at that point, he didn't appear to me as judge, he appeared to me as a merciful savior. He appeared to me as one ready to forgive.

Oh, I thank God with all my heart. When I was a cop, I used to go into the lunchroom and we would play cards most time at noon, and I remember explicitly cursing the name of Christ probably 40 times during every card game. He could have appeared to me as a judge, he could have appeared and said, you've blasphemed my name, you've cursed it once too often, you've mocked me longer than I'm willing to tolerate.

But when he came to me, came to me in the form of a six foot two Royal Canadian mounted policeman who came to my door one day and started talking to me about Jesus Christ, he came to me with mercy, he came to me with tenderness, he came to me with compassion, even though in my heart I wasn't really a genuine seeker of God, he appeared to me and I've loved his appearing. Paul could say to Timothy in Acts chapter 9 verses 17 and 18, after appearing to me on that road and showing me his mercy, then he came to me through a human vessel called Ananias, touched me and prayed for me and gave me my sight and gave me power and purpose for my life. Turned me from where I was going and turned me to another way.

That's what conversion means. I was going this way, but by the tender hand and by the power and by the vision of God, now I'm going this way. And this is what my life is going to be, and it's going to be a life that brings glory to him.

And surely Paul's life has been that. His writings, his epistles, the things he wrote in the scripture have been read by countless hundreds of millions of people over 2,000 years, and so many have been encouraged by the things that Paul has spoken. He gave me sight and he gave me power and he did it through a human vessel.

Could have done it sovereignly, but he chose to do it through a person, a man, actually a fearful man. When God came to Ananias in the book of Acts and he said, I want you to go down to this particular street, to this house, and there's a man there called Saul of Tarsus. I want you to pray for him that he would be given back his sight.

And Ananias turns to the Lord and says, have you not heard about this man? I love that prayer. Are you unaware, God, of this man and what he's been doing to your church? And the Lord says, no, go to him. He's a chosen vessel of mine.

Pray for him. I'm going to use your life. And you see, as the church of Jesus Christ, you're going to learn this afternoon that we all have a part in this body of his on the earth.

And that part manifests itself in helping somebody along the route or the wrong road that is blind. They can't see their way out of their situation. They're powerless.

They can't get up. Paul had to be led by the hand up to this point. But God uses people.

He could do it all sovereignly. He could do it with angels if he wanted to. But he does it through people, people like you and me, ordinary people that choose to let an extraordinary God be the source of our life and the source of our strength.

And it makes it a marvelous journey. When we let God be God through us, it takes the boredom out of the whole thing. Because we never know what a day is going to bring.

We begin to pray and never know where God's going to send you and who he's going to ask you to pray for. You might be in Ananias here today and there's going to be a Saul in your life not too far down the road. Paul could say to Timothy in Acts chapter 16, he appeared to me when I was in a prison of pain.

I was with a buddy called Silas and the both of us were beaten to a pulp for the testimony of Christ, for the things we were saying. And we were laying fastened in chains on a cold stone slab with our backs bruised and bleeding. But he gave me the power to worship.

And I began to sing and Silas joined me and he gave me comfort. And in the midst of that comfort, he shook that prison and gave everyone else freedom as well. And even the old jailer, as hard and crusty as he was, as accustomed as he was to being cruel, turned into a tender man, brought us home, fed us and bathed their wounds.

And when his children saw this old jailer so touched, they said, what must we do to have this kind of a relationship with God? And this whole, this man's whole family came to God. Oh, he appeared to me to forgive me, appeared to me to give me purpose and power. He appeared to me to be my comforter in times of pain.

He could say to Timothy in first Corinthians one 18 or one eight in Asia. As we were traveling, he appeared to us as the one who gives strength when all human strength is gone. We were beyond natural strength.

We were so opposed. The times were so difficult. We didn't know where we were going to find strength.

So we had the sentence of death, Paul said in ourselves and had to trust in the one who raises the dead. And he came to us and he strengthened us. Do you remember Paul said to Timothy in our opening scripture, the gospel I preach is about God who raised his son from the dead.

And then lastly, in Acts 27, he said, Timothy, or he could have said Timothy in the storm. He appeared to me as the one who shows away when all natural hope is gone. The ship was falling apart.

People were losing heart and hope. There was discussion in the belly of that ship about vengeance and retribution. It seemed that everything was lost when suddenly the call came and I was, he appeared to me, even in my own despair, even my own struggle and trial, my own fight, my own prayer time, he appeared and called me.

The next thing I know, Paul could say I was taken from captive to being captain. And suddenly the word that God had planted in my heart became the source of life that gave strength and provision to 276 people who feared they were about to drown. He appeared to me with a word and said, Paul, don't be afraid.

You're going to be brought before Caesar as a testimony of who I am. And on this journey, I'm giving you all 276 people that are sailing on this ship with you. I have loved his appearing.

But Paul said, there's one more appearing. I only see it now, but shortly it's going to be made manifest. Finally, he said, there's laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will give to me on that day and not to me only, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Now is that I see him appearing to me with a crown in his hand. Thank God, a smile on his face saying to me, well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your God. Life can be tough.

And some here today live in hard places. But Paul said to Timothy, you have to learn to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. You can't back away just because things are tough.

You can't back away from trying to win your family because they curse you across the table. You can't back away from trying to win your people in your apartment building because they play loud and ungodly music day and night. I had a neighbor like that.

I know exactly what that is about. Matter of fact, I spent a little too much time trying to pray him out of the building than to pray him into the kingdom of God. To my shame, met him at the elevator one day only to find out he was really hungry for the things of God.

Goodness sakes, you can't back away from your neighborhood because you look out your window and there's kids in every corner dealing drugs and violence seems to become the order of the day. You can't back away because you have the words and the keys to everlasting life. You have been given strength to lay a path of hope before this generation.

You can't back away. You can't surrender. You and I have to learn to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

We are in a season where the word of God is unpopular. You can't back away just because it's an unpopular time. We can't back away from the prayer closet where we pray for our cities.

We can't back away from the prayer meetings in church where we pray for our communities in our nation. This is not the time to draw back. It's the time to draw forward.

It's a time for you and I to find strength that only God is able to give us. In order to find that strength, you have to be able to see that in Christ Jesus, we are more than conquerors. You have to be able to understand that.

Like a football team, we're going into a game. We're going to be opposed. People are going to try to take our heads off on this journey, but there's already somebody in the end zone.

Somebody's already there who's already won the victory, and there is a crown that does not fade away reserved in heaven for us. I see one final appearing when you and I appear before the throne of God, and it might have been a hard life, and we might have been rejected, and it might very well have been a difficult journey, but we didn't back away. We learned to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

We learned that no soldier who's been enlisted in the kingdom of God gets so entangled with the things of this life that they don't become of any effect for his kingdom. We learned to stand even though others around us were running for the hills. We still stood.

We still spoke. We still prayed. We still loved.

We still preached. We still encouraged, and God gave us a vision that at the end of this journey, there is a crown of righteousness, a crown that does not fade away. It does not go into the casket with us at the end of this journey.

It's a living crown, and it lives for all of eternity, and there's a commendation awaiting those who walk with God at the end of this journey, a commendation that will live forever. Well done, good and faithful servant. Well done.

Well done. Well done. Well done.

You did what I called you to do, and not all of it is spectacular, and not all of it is public, and not all of it will be known by men and women on this earth, but I guarantee you one thing. All of it is registered on the scoreboard of heaven. I guarantee you that, and when you get to heaven, you know, I've got this secret.

I've shared it with you before. It's just a whisper that came to my heart one day. It makes me glad that when we get to heaven, there's a time, the Bible says, when those that have walked with God and done so faithfully, rewards are going to be passed.

They're sort of like commendations, medals, may I call it that, are going to be passed out, and everybody's going to be gathered. Might be millions of people from all the ages, and time, of course, doesn't exist anymore, so there's no rush. Nobody gets hungry there.

Nobody gets tired. There are no watches, and it's forever, so there's no rush. We're not even conscious of time anymore, and the awards start to be given out, the crowns of righteousness, and suddenly names start to be called.

All the big players are sitting in the finest of the places that they can get a hold of, but suddenly names start to be called in heaven that nobody's ever heard of before. For the first 10,000 or so years, Mary Jones and all the angels of heaven begin to rejoice, and everybody's looking around. Anybody ever heard of this lady? No, you haven't heard of her, but she stood firm in her neighborhood.

She stood firm for what she knew to be true. She was fearless walking home from the grocery store. She'd meet young people on the street, look them in the eye, and say, Jesus loves you.

I want you to know this. You don't have to live this way. Well done, thou good and faithful servant.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Sam Johnson. Everybody's looking around.

Who in the world is Sam Johnson? Did he ever write a book? Did he ever preach a sermon? Is he pastor of a big church? Was he a well-known missionary? Here comes Sam and his coveralls down the aisle. Gave what he had to the service of God and to the service of others, and did it with all his heart. Found his place in the body of Christ and occupied it well.

Stood for what he knew to be true. I've known men like that. I've known older men in the church of Jesus Christ.

They've never not been men who had the big positions. They didn't have the big titles. Many of them never preached the sermon, but their whole life was a sermon.

And I remember as a young Christian looking at these men saying, oh God, I would love to finish my journey like that, man. I've loved his appearing. He's everywhere if you can see him.

And he's in people if we're looking in the right places. I've loved his appearing. Oh, Timothy.

Timothy, Timothy. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Timothy, be watchful.

Endure the opposition that will come against you. Do the work of an evangelist. In other words, tell others about who I am, God says.

And fulfill your ministry. Do it in the fullness of who I'm willing to be, God would say, within you. And don't draw back.

Come on, Timothy. Paul says, follow me as I've followed Christ. Come on, Timothy.

Come on, Timothy. Don't draw back. Don't quit.

Don't give up. Don't put yourself on the sidelines. Don't do it, Timothy.

There's no life there. There's no hope there. There's no strength.

There's no eternal reward there. Everything, every crown of this world will soon pass away. Bible declares all of them to be corruptible crowns, which means that they don't last.

But there is a crown of righteousness that will last forever. You won't want to wear it when you get to heaven. The Bible does say that people will cast their crowns at his feet.

But it just keeps appearing. I happen to believe it's sort of like a rainbow. It just is there, and you try to get it off, and it just keeps coming back.

I would like to give an altar call this morning, really just for people who need strength. You need strength in your home. You need strength in your community.

You need strength on your job. You need spiritual strength. Say, God, I can't do this on my own.

You need strength just to get through the struggles you're in. Right now, you need strength. I'd like to, as we do this, I'd like to sing that song, the Battle Hymn of the Republic, because there's a beautiful verse in that song that says, In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me.

As he died to make men holy, let us live to make men free. While God is marching on, we're going to stand in just a moment. And for those who need strength, would you just come join me at the front of this auditorium? Let's all stand, please, while we sing that together, and then we're going to take a moment just to pray.

Father, I pray for these men and women that have come forward just acknowledging, and those that have done so in their hearts as well today. I need the strength of God. Lord, you yourself said these words.

You said, If a son or daughter asks for bread, will his father give him a stone or her a stone? If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask? And so, Lord, I thank you, God, that you won't turn anybody away who's looking for strength, whether it's just to love people in their own family, to love people in their community, strength to stand in the marketplace, in the workplace, in a difficult time, strength to be honest when dishonesty seems to be all around us, strength to speak when the whole world seems to be telling us to be quiet. We thank you for this, God. I ask, Lord, that these men and women would have a vision of the crown of

righteousness that awaits those who love the appearing of Christ.

God, keep it before us that we not be discouraged on this journey. Bless our homes and our families, O God. And one more time, I just ask you, bless our military, the men and women who yield their lives if necessary for us.

Help us to be willing to yield our lives for them and for others. We thank you for it with all of our heart.

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