

A Call to Endurance, Part I

by David Roper

Paul writes to Timothy, encouraging him to be strong in the grace of Christ Jesus, to pass the truth on to others, and to endure suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Duration: 36:32

Scripture: Joshua 1:5, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:17-18, Romans 8:28, 1 Timothy 2:8, 2 Timothy 2:3

Topics: "Endurance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker recounts a terrifying experience where a group of high school students went to the plaza to talk to people. He notices one boy reading a passage from Joshua 1:5, where God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous. The speaker interprets this as a call to endurance. He then goes on to explain three commands in the passage that are part of this call to endurance, which are amplified by three metaphors and further explained by three illustrations. The metaphors used are that of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer, emphasizing the importance of perseverance and hard work in the Christian life.

Transcript

As you remember from last week, Paul is in Rome. He is imprisoned in the Mamertine dungeon in Rome, awaiting his second and probably his last trial. He indicates from the last chapter that he had already had one encounter with what he calls the lions in Rome.

It's a bit difficult to know to what he was referring to, specifically, whether he is speaking metaphorically of Satan as the lion, or to Caesar, or whether he had actually had some occasion to meet the lions in the Colosseum. But in any case, his life had been spared, and now he is writing to Timothy, writing in the face of wide-scale defection from the truth. As he says in verse 14 of the first chapter, all who are in Asia have turned away from me.

Many of his friends, people who had responded originally to the call to come to Christ, were turning away because of persecution and pressure that was put on them by the Roman government. And Paul is feeling the full force of this rejection. He writes to Timothy, who is in the city of Ephesus, pastoring a church that the Apostle Paul planted and established in Asia Minor.

And of course, since Timothy was in Asia, he himself was experiencing the same defection from the faith that Paul was concerned about. Timothy was weak in spirit, frail in body, timid in disposition. And being a young man, he needed these words of encouragement from the Apostle Paul.

So it is in view of this almost universal declension that Paul writes these words in the second chapter. They are words to encourage. I have called them a call to endurance.

There are three commands in the first paragraph that are a part of his call to endurance. These commands are amplified by three metaphors and then further explained by means of three illustrations. The first command is found in the first verse.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Be strong in grace. You, Timothy, in contrast to those in Asia who are turning away from the faith, be strong.

No matter what others may think of you, no matter what you may think of yourself, no matter how weak, how inept, how inadequate, how ill-equipped you may consider yourself to be, you, Timothy, be strong. But it's not a call, as we pointed out last week, to be strong in himself. It's a call to be strengthened.

The verb is a passive mode. In the present tense, to keep on being strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. It would be absurd indeed to ask Timothy to be strong in himself, to clench his fists, to set his jaw, to muster his own resources, and to be the man that God wants him to be in Ephesus.

He simply did not have it within himself to be strong. You might as well ask Grace Studman to sing Grand Opera, or Dave Roper to grow hair, as to tell Timothy to be strong. One of my boys asked me the other day, Dad, why don't you let it grow out on top? I said, Son, there is no way.

I don't have what it takes. I can't do it. And to say to Timothy, be strong, without this corresponding promise to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, would have been ridiculous.

He was to find his resources, not in his own nature, but in the nature of Jesus Christ. This is not a call to be stoical. It's a call to be dependent upon an indwelling spirit.

And a beautiful illustration of this just recently, we took a group of young people to Lytton Plaza to talk to students that are gathered at that place. If you've been down University Boulevard lately, you've noticed that that's where the action is these days. Numbers of students gathered around Lytton Plaza.

We took a group of about 20 high school students into the plaza to talk to people that were gathered there. It was a terrifying experience for all of us. As we gathered, a number of the young people got out of the car, and I noticed that one boy was standing there with his Bible in his hands, and I'd asked him not to take their Bibles into the plaza, so I walked over to talk to him about it, and I noticed that he was reading, and he showed me what he was reading.

It was a passage from Joshua, Joshua 1-5, where the Lord says to Joshua, Be strong and of good courage, be not frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. And he said, that's it, isn't it? And I said, that's it. He put his Bible down, and as he walked away, I distinctly heard one knee say to the other, let's shake.

But he went, he went in fear emotionally, he was frightened to death, but he went, he went in the strength of God. He didn't have it within himself to be strong, but he went in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. What a wonderful statement.

And what a privilege we have to walk in the same strength, no matter how weak you may feel yourself to be, no matter how ill-equipped, no matter how timid, how lacking in resources, we can be strong in the

grace that is in Christ Jesus. As someone has described grace in terms of an acrostic based on the letters G-R-A-C-E, God's resources at Christ's expense. All that God has available to us to meet whatever pressures we have.

The second command is found in verse 2. And what you have heard from me before many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. The command is to entrust the truth to others. It has been told earlier in the chapter preceding this that he is to guard the deposit that has been entrusted to him.

And now Paul says, Timothy, pass that deposit on to other men. The process is described. Paul passed the truth on to Timothy.

We know from reading through the book of Acts that Timothy was the constant companion of the apostle Paul. He had picked up this young man on his second missionary journey as he traveled through Asia Minor. Timothy lived in Lystra, perhaps, or Derby.

He met him there and took him on through Asia Minor into Europe. He had an opportunity to associate with the apostle, to see his life. He says later on in this book, you saw the way I lived among you, you saw what I endured.

You heard me teach. Paul passed the truth on to Timothy. Timothy then is told to pass the truth on to other men, faithful men, teachable men, men who will respond to the truth and who in turn will teach others.

Four generations considered here. Paul teaching Timothy, Timothy teaching faithful men, these faithful men teaching others. And the process goes on from the apostolic era until today.

It's still going on. It's still our responsibility to pass the truth on like an Olympic torch from one generation to the next. This was a pattern that the Lord employed.

You can see it in his choice of the twelve and then his ministry to the inner circle, the three with whom he spent the bulk of his time. As the Lord's ministry grew to a close, he was spending more and more of his time with this inner circle of men who constituted his group of Timothy's to whom he transmitted the truth. He lived it before them and he taught them.

You can see it in the life of Paul, the associates he gathered around himself. He didn't look to his ministry at large as the only means of proclaiming the gospel. The priorities, as far as the Apostle Paul considered, was his men, the men that he spent his time with.

It just speaks to me of the need to be teaching others, to discover those that are teachable, who will be channels of truth, who will take the truth that we impart to them and share it with others. This is not just the responsibility of apostles or pastors, not just the responsibility of professionals, but all of us have this responsibility. We need to be looking for people that are teachable, people that will be purveyors of truth, who will teach others also.

Eugene Nida says in one of his books that there are basically four types of people. There are innovators, the creative type person who initiates ideas. There are purveyors, people who are channels of information, who can be taught.

They, in turn, can teach others. There are people who are receivers, who simply become dead ends. The truth stops there.

And the fourth that he calls againners, which is a term that those of us from the South would recognize, people who are again anything, who don't respond to the truth, who are simply negative. And what Paul is saying is that to turn the end to us, that we need to be looking for people who are purveyors and innovators of truth, who will respond, faithful men, that we can spend time with, and who in turn can spend time with others, investing their lives in their life and equipping them to do the work of the ministry. I spoke to a young man this last week who has this kind of ministry of disciplining others.

He was telling me of a young man that he led to Christ some time ago. He began to meet with him weekly. They began to study the Scriptures together and pray together.

The young man that he had introduced to Christ led his wife to Christ, and then his sister. His sister led her husband to Christ. Now they're all meeting together in a Bible study, and two other couples have found Christ.

And the chain is going on and on. And this man who started the chain said, I'm so happy that I can be a part of this kind of a ministry because I see it as a ministry of multiplication. I can invest time in a young man, and he can do far more than I could ever do in reaching others.

Now we need to be asking God for Timothys, people that we can spend time with, that we can train in this way, in a ministry of multiplication. There's a third command. It's found in verse 3. Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Literally, too. Endure suffering with me. See, Paul is suffering in Rome for the gospel.

People are turning away from him. And he says you must be identified with me in this suffering. Take your share of suffering for the sake of the gospel as a good soldier.

Soldiers expect to suffer. It's part and parcel of their calling. You don't expect a soldier to live a life of ease.

Because he's in a war, any type of austerity is justified. It's a part of his life. Now Paul says, you must be a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Then he gives three illustrations, or three metaphors that he uses to explain a bit more what he means by endure suffering as a good soldier. He uses the example of a soldier in verse 4, an athlete in verse 5, and a farmer in verse 6. In each case there is a requirement and there's a reward. Verse 4, Paul says, No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him.

The requirement is that he be unencumbered. There's nothing wrong with civilian pursuits. It's just that he can't become entangled in civilian pursuits, because they constitute a drain on his time and his energy.

He's to concentrate, Paul says, on pleasing his commander-in-chief. In the Roman army, very often the man who enlisted other men became their commander. And Paul says, Just as a good soldier pours out his life to please his commander-in-chief, and he cuts himself off from anything that would encumber him, so a good soldier of Jesus Christ makes his first priority his desire to please the commander.

He's a good soldier, because he is dedicated. And the reward is that he receives the approval of his commanding officer. So without dedication, there can be no approval.

The second metaphor that he uses is that of an athlete. In verse 5, An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The requirement is that he observe the rules.

There must be no random displays of skill. That he's not to pursue his own life. He's not to do his own thing, to use the contemporary idiom.

He's to be disciplined. He's to place himself under the disciplines of the game. Any game has ground rules.

And in order to play the game satisfactorily, we have to comply with those rules. No one has the right to do as he pleases. The only freedom an athlete has is the freedom to follow the rules.

If he doesn't, he destroys the game. And the scriptures speak of freedom, that believers have a liberty in Christ that we can never enjoy under the law. But that freedom is not the freedom to do as we please, but the freedom to obey God.

We're like a train on a track. It's only free as long as it stays on the track. You see, you look at the Lord.

He was the most free individual who ever lived. He was under no constraint whatever. No one ever limited him.

He said of his own life, No one can take my life from me. And yet, he says the secret of his freedom is that he always did those things that pleased the Father. The picture that I have in my mind is that of a creative God, the most creative individual who ever lived, who is utterly free.

No restraints or restrictions at all. And we're tied into Him. We obey Him.

And therefore, we're utterly free. The world may not understand us. We're able to do things that the world can never do.

We're utterly free, but our freedom is defined by our relationship to the Father. We do what we see Him doing, Jesus said. We obey Him.

This is true of an athlete. He's only free to enjoy the game and to get all that he's intended to receive from that game as he observes the rules. And the reward, Paul says, is that he is crowned.

Not with a medal or with a cup that we use today, but with a wreath. He receives the evergreen wreath. That was the picture of having achieved in the games.

But Paul is saying that we'll have no wreath if we don't observe the rules. And then the third metaphor that he uses is that of a farmer in verse 6. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. The requirement here is that the farmer works hard.

Toil is indispensable to a farmer. In an undeveloped country such as Palestine, there was no such thing as a gentleman farmer. They worked.

No matter how inclement the weather might be, no matter how disinclined the farmer might be to go into the fields, he worked. And the reward, Paul says, was the harvest. The harvest would never appear if a farmer had not logged the time in the field that was necessary to produce the harvest.

This figure of farming is so appropriate to the Christian life because, again, there's the idea of human responsibility in God's provision. The farmer goes into the field and he works. He sows the seed.

He labors to cultivate the field. But the growth ultimately is dependent upon God. The life that's inherent in the seed, God sending the rain, the sunshine, the things that are necessary to cause the harvest to come to fruition.

His responsibility ultimately is to bring the harvest. But our responsibility is to toil, to work, to spend the hours necessary to produce the harvest. The Scriptures speak, of course, of two types of harvest in our life.

There's the harvest of Christian character. Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance. These are characteristics of a life that is sown to the Spirit.

It does involve effort on our part. It involves turning away from sin and from the desires of the self-life and yielding to the life of Jesus Christ. But the toil is necessary.

It's the Lord that produces the fruit. But there's effort required on our part. Then there's a second harvest, that of people, referred to as fruit, the products of our ministry, people that come to know Christ and then grow in relationship to Him.

And again, the requirement from our standpoint is that if toil doesn't come easy, requires time and sacrificial friendships, setting aside our own personal needs and investing time that's necessary in the lives of these people. Now ultimately, it's up to God to produce the harvest. But it's our responsibility to be a hard-working farmer.

No harvest without toil. Now the theme of all of these metaphors is that there is no reward without fulfilling the requirements. We cannot please the Master unless we have the dedication of a soldier.

We can't receive the reward unless we have the discipline of an athlete. We cannot reap the harvest apart from the diligence of a farmer. We must expect to labor if we hope to achieve.

We require patient, conscientious, diligent effort on our part. We cannot hope to live desultory lives and expect God to pour it in. He does not operate that way.

He cooperates with our will. In verse 7, Paul says, Think over what I say, for the Lord will grant you understanding in everything. Again, a requirement on our part, a promise from God.

And if we will give ourselves to meditating on these things, God will cause us to understand what's here. There are a couple of interesting things about this passage, this one verse, that I'd like to say in passing. Number one, it's an interesting statement of the authority of the apostles.

When you think of what Paul is saying, essentially it's that it takes the Lord to understand what I'm saying. But these are not just the words of men. They require the activity of God in helping us to understand what the apostle is saying.

The second thing that occurs to me is that this is an interesting statement of, I think it's the biblical statement of Bible study. It involves thinking on our part and the activity of God in our mind by which He causes us to understand the truth. We have to apply ourselves to the truth.

We have to think. And God grants us understanding. Now in the remaining verses from 8-13, Paul gives us three illustrations, again to reinforce the idea that a good soldier of Jesus Christ must endure suffering.

It's a call to endurance. It speaks in verse 8 of the experience of Christ, in verses 9 and 10 of the experience of the apostle Paul himself, and then in verses 11-13 of the experience of all believers. First, the experience of Christ in verse 8. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David as preached in my gospel.

Why should he remember Christ? Well, it may be because this is part and parcel of the gospel. This is the heart of the gospel. That Christ died, that He was buried, and that He rose again.

Perhaps Paul is doing in this section what he does in chapter 1, reminds Timothy of the nature of the gospel, the essence of it as it's preached. I'm inclined to think, however, that he's saying that Christ demonstrated the principle that Paul is transmitting to Timothy. That is, life can only come through death.

Glory only comes through suffering. That achievement ultimately comes through labor, through endurance, through suffering. Because Jesus had to die in order to be raised.

For Christ there was no crown apart from the cross. The book of Hebrews says of Jesus that for the glory set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the Father. He could never receive the glory apart from the cross.

He had to suffer. There's an encouraging note for Timothy as well as for us. Paul reminds Timothy that Jesus has descended from David.

Highlights His humanity. He's saying, Timothy, you must remember that it was in His humanity that Jesus suffered. It wasn't His deity that he's referring to.

It's no encouragement to us to know that God suffered, but to discover that Jesus is the man dependent upon the Father, suffered and endured. He held fast the face of death itself, endured the cross, and now receives the glory. And Paul is saying whenever we're tempted to give way under pressure, we need to remember Jesus Christ who suffered as we suffer, who endured all that we will have to endure, who shared our experience totally as a man who understands, and who conquered.

At this same, Jesus is available to us today to supply the strength that we need to endure. He is a risen Lord who understands and who strengthens in time of need. When you're inclined, Timothy, to shrink from suffering, remember Christ.

There is no cross, no crown, without a cross. And then in verses 9 and 10, he refers to his own experience, the experience of the Apostle Paul, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal, but the word of God is not fettered. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, which in Christ Jesus goes with eternal glory.

Paul links his own suffering with glory. He says, I'm suffering. The result of my suffering will be glory for the elect, for those elect of God who have not yet responded to the gospel.

He speaks of the humiliation of wearing chains, and yet he says the gospel is not fettered. I think he's doing more than just setting up a contrast. There's a cause and effect relationship.

He's saying because I suffer, others are responding to the gospel. Now it's not that Paul's suffering is in any way redemptive because it's only the death of Christ that redeems men. But I think what Paul is saying is this.

There's only one thing that will ultimately meet the needs of these people that I minister to, and that's the gospel. Only the gospel can make them men. Only the gospel can set them free.

Only the good news about Jesus Christ can cause them to be the men that they want to be. Therefore I must preach the gospel. That's all I can do.

I must preach the gospel. But Paul knows that in preaching the gospel, he will suffer. He is presently suffering for it.

He will continue to suffer for it. And so Paul says, therefore, in order for those out there who have not yet come to Jesus Christ, God's elect, for them to come to know Christ, I must suffer. There's no other way.

If they are to be saved, I must suffer. Now you see, this is where we stand as well. In our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our offices, on our campus, there are people who do not yet know Jesus Christ.

There's only one thing that can meet the need, ultimately, of those people, and that's the gospel of Jesus Christ. But as we saw last week, if we're going to proclaim the gospel, we're going to suffer. It's an inherent part of the gospel that we will be ostracized, we'll be misunderstood, we'll be excluded from certain circles, we will be hated and opposed and ridiculed.

But we have no alternative. If they are to be saved, we must suffer. There is no salvation, Paul says, apart from suffering.

No crown without a cross, no wreath without runes, no salvation, no glory apart from suffering. And then finally, in verses 11 through 13, he refers to the experience of all believers. It seems to be a bit of a Christian hymn, starting with verse 11.

The saying is sure, if we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. I would have loved to have heard the early church sing this hymn. And perhaps it was sung down through the ages when they were persecuted.

You can hear it ringing through the catacombs wherever they sang their hymns. There are four things that Paul says in this hymn that are the common experience of all believers. The first, if we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him.

That life comes through death. There is simply no other way. The cross is the symbol of the cutting off of the old life, a laying down of our programs, our plans, our goals, setting these aside and pouring out our life for Jesus Christ.

Paul says there can be no life apart from this type of death, constantly acting upon the principle of the cross in our life. Second, if we endure, we shall also reign with Him. We can't reign unless we endure.

James says, Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has tried, he will receive the crown of life. The crown of life is a symbol of the authority that we have to reign in life. God puts us through periods of

trial to teach us not to depend upon ourselves and we retreat to a position of confidence in Jesus Christ.

We draw upon Him. We discover His strength and His ability. And thus we discover how to reign in life.

We receive the crown of life because we've discovered that Jesus Christ is our source of life. He's the source of power and authority. But we can't learn to reign unless we've learned to endure.

Suffering will be our lot. We learn to endure by depending upon Him and we reign. Third, if we deny Him, Paul says He also will deny us.

Scriptures say that some will deny Him. Jesus Himself said that some will turn away. These are not true believers.

These are those whose hearts have never really been changed. Their commitment to Christ is either superficial or self-centered. And ultimately they turn away.

They deny Him. And therefore He will deny them. These are not truly regenerated individuals.

They are those who have come to Christ but have never placed themselves under His authority. And when the pressures come, they deny Him, which is the indication that they've never really wanted Him to be Lord in their life. And therefore He will deny them.

And finally, if we are faithless, He remains faithful. Some feel that He means that He will be faithful to His threats of wrath to those that are faithless, but I'm inclined to think that this is a word of encouragement to those who are weak in faith. There were many times that Jesus exhorted His disciples to believe they were weak in faith, but He didn't rebuke them.

He encouraged them. He stoked the fires of faith. He encouraged them to respond in belief.

This hymn then summarizes any Christian experience in two words. Dying and enduring. We're constantly dying to self, forced to endure hardship, and yet we're living and reigning.

If there's one lesson in this entire section, I think it's this. That blessing comes through toil, that life comes through death, and that glory comes through suffering. That Christian growth and Christian service is not easy.

Much is required. It will cost us in terms of time and toil and energy and tears and in terms of sacrificial friendships. It will cost us.

So if it's costing you today and you're frustrated and discouraged, this is your lot. We can expect it. But the promise is that this is the route to glory.

There is no crown without a cross. There is no glory without suffering. There is no harvest without toil.

There is no gain without pain. Shall we pray? Our Father, we thank you for the promise of life that there is in Christ Jesus. We thank you that you are our life.

And we know that no matter what trials may come into our life nor how difficult things may be, we know that this is part of the process that you're using to glorify us, to make us all that you intend us to be. And therefore, Lord, our request is that we may not be discouraged, but see this as part of the process, that this is standard operating procedure. And the promise is that in your strength, we will achieve all that you

desire us to achieve.

Our lives will be all that you intend them to be. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

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