

## Suffering Soldiers, Honest Athletes and Diligent Farmers

2 Timothy 2:3-7

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**Paul compares the struggles of the Christian life to that of soldiers, athletes and farmers.**

### **I. Paul again encourages Timothy to remember that suffering will be a part of the Christian's life. (v. 3)**

*<sup>3</sup> Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. (2 Timothy 1:8)

Soldier (Gr. strat-ee-o'-tace): refers simply to a common foot soldier, a warrior in an army. Metaphorically it came to be used by Christians as a champion of the cause of Christ.

C-list homophobe Candice Cameron Bure hopes new gay denying film gets viewers to “turn to Jesus.”

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands. (2 Corinthians 11:23b-33)

Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. (James 5:10-11)

John Kitchen suggests that “suffering well is a ministry in itself.”

John MacArthur warns” “It is difficult for Christians in most of the Western world to understand what serious spiritual warfare and suffering for Christ mean. The secular environment in our society is becoming more and more hostile to Christianity and to religion in general. But (so far 1995) most are not faced with job loss, imprisonment, or execution because of our faith. With few exceptions, being a Christian will not keep a student out of college or a worker from getting a job. But the more faithful a Christian becomes and the more the Lord blesses his work, the more Satan will put roadblocks, hardships, and rejection in the way, the more evident the spiritual warfare will become and the more frequent and obvious the sufferings will become.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

## **II. We need the disciplined focus of a member of the military. (v. 4)**

*<sup>4</sup>No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.*

Soldier (Gr: strat-yoo'-om-ah-ee) to make a military expedition, to lead soldiers to war or to battle, (spoken of a commander)

2) to do military duty, be on active service

3) to fight, wage war or battle

NASB: No soldier in active service

Involved is really a stronger word that is more accurately rendered by a number of English versions as entangled.

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well... (1 Timothy 1:18)

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:12)

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Bible Knowledge Commentary: A Roman soldier's single-minded purpose, rigorous discipline, and unquestioning obedience to his commanding officer combine to make the figure of a soldier an apt one for a servant of the gospel.”

Kitchen remarks that “God’s pleasure should be our first and highest calling.”

MacArthur correctly warns: “The strong desire to please other people is an integral characteristic of fallen mankind. And because of the continued influence of the old self, even Christians are tempted to be people pleasers. Many Christians succumb to that temptation and become more concerned about pleasing their fellow workers, their neighbors, and their friends than about pleasing the Lord. And for the same reason, many pastors fall into the trap of wanting to please their congregations or their communities more than the Lord. That desire inevitably leads to moral and spiritual decline, because pleasing the world, including worldly Christians demands compromise of God’s truth, God’s standards, and personal holiness. It demands forsaking Christ as our first love.”

### **III. We need the dedication of an Olympic competitor. (v. 5)**

*<sup>5</sup> Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules.*

Competes as an athlete (Gr. Athleo) to engage in a contest, contend in public games, contend for a prize. 2) to endure, suffer

Victor’s Crown (Gr. Stephenos)

1a) the wreath or garland which was given as a prize to victors in public games

1b) metaph. the eternal blessedness which will be given as a prize to the genuine servants of God and Christ: the crown (wreath) which is the reward of the righteousness

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Athletic competitions require discipline, self-control, endurance and toughness.

MacArthur explains: “In the Greek games, which continued for centuries under Roman rule and were still being held in Paul’s time, every participant had to meet three qualifications: of birth,

of training and of the competitions. First, he had to be a true-born Greek. Second, he had to prepare at least ten months for the games and swear that he had done so before a statue of Zeus. Third, he had to compete within specific rules for any given event. To fail in any of those requirements meant automatic disqualification. Comparable rules apply for Christians. We must be truly born-again, we must be faithful in study and obedience of God's Word, in self-denial, and in prayer, and we must live according to Christ's divine standards of discipleship. The very fact that we are Christians means we have met the first qualification, but the other two are far from automatic and involve constant dedication and constant effort. Together they constitute spiritual discipline, which comes from the same root word as disciple. These are the foundations of spiritual maturity. The disciplined Christian has control of his or her affections, emotions, priorities and objectives."

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. (Hebrews 2:9-11)

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Wiersbe writes of Paul: "From the human point of view, Paul seemed a loser. There was nobody in the grandstands cheering for him, (all had deserted him he wrote in the previous chapter). He was in prison, suffering as though he were an evildoer. Yet, Paul was a winner! He had kept the rules laid down in the Word of God, and would day he knew he would receive a reward from his Lord Jesus (as we will see him write in chapter 4 – the crown of righteousness). Paul was saying to Timothy: "The important thing is for you to obey the Word of God, no matter what people may say. You are not running the race to please people or get fame. You are running to please the Lord Jesus."

Day and night [the four living creatures] never stop saying:

““Holy, holy, holy  
is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come.”

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

“You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,

for you created all things,  
and by your will they were created  
and have their being.” (Revelation 4:8b-11)

#### **IV. We need the diligence of a devoted farmer. (v. 6)**

*<sup>6</sup>The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.*

I went past the field of a sluggard,  
past the vineyard of someone who has no sense;  
thorns had come up everywhere,  
the ground was covered with weeds,  
and the stone wall was in ruins.  
I applied my heart to what I observed  
and learned a lesson from what I saw:  
A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest—  
and poverty will come on you like a thief  
and scarcity like an armed man. (Proverbs 20:30-34)

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. (James 5:7-8)

Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.” (Matthew 13:3-9)

“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” (Matthew 13:18-23)

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but

God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field... (1 Corinthians 3:5-9)

MacArthur writes: The industrious farmer starts his hard and demanding work early and quits late. He endures the cold, the heat, the rain, and the drought. He plows the soil whether it is hard or loos. He does not wait for his own convenience, because the seasons do not wait for him. When the time comes to plant, he must plant; when weeds appear, he must remove them; and when the crop is mature, he must harvest it, for what drives a man to such hard labor is the reward of the harvest."

Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? (1 Corinthians 9:7b-13)

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. (1 Timothy 5:17)

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

## **V. Biblical meditation will help us grow in Christ. (v. 7)**

*<sup>7</sup> Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.*

Illumination often requires prayerful consideration.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. (John 16:13a)

I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. (Philemon 1:6)

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. (Colossians 1:9-12)

Kitchen shares this encouragement that falls in line with our message last week regarding the aids for personal revival: “What an exciting interchange takes place over the written Word of God when we come with humble, teachable, and hungry hearts, crying out for insight that we might know, obey and follow God. Let us therefore regularly pray as with the Psalmist:

Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law. (Psalm 119:18)