



## 2 Timothy 2:1-7 Life is Hard, Relationships Are the Answer

**Summary:** Life is going to be hard, but if you suffer with others and for others, God's grace will get you through.

Second Timothy is a letter written by the apostle Paul to a pastor he has been mentoring. Timothy leads a church in the city of Ephesus which is a rough town. The place is swarming with idols and idolatry. There were seven wonders in the ancient world and one of them was the Temple of Artemis (Greek) or Diana (Roman) located in Ephesus – that's what the city was famous for. It's a hard place for Timothy to live and lead as a Christian. In fact, the Christians there were recently the target of a riot because they were suggesting that people shouldn't worship at the city's big, famous temple.

Now, I want you to think about that for a moment – Ephesus was a hard to place to live and lead as a Christian. The culture is definitely against Timothy and what he believes and what he is teaching, and Paul tells him *yeah, I know, but go ahead and sort it all out*. Church, Paul doesn't say, so go ahead and bug out, see if you can find a better place to live, maybe move to a red state, he gives him a gospel-centered pep talk and says keep going.

The point is: yes, it's a tough climate, but Paul believes *Timothy can overcome all these obstacles in Christ*. Read with me:

**2 Timothy 2:1** You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. **2** And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. **3** You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. **4** No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. **5** And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. **6** The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. **7** Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

### 1. Life is Hard

The first thing I want to point out here is that Paul had no illusions. He understood – life is hard. There is opposition. There are setbacks. There is a lot of work to do. Don't think that's odd. Don't think that's strange. Friends, I would tell you the same, just because it's hard doesn't mean what you're doing is wrong.

Those of you caring for small children, it's hard at times. Those of you caring for aging parents, it's hard at times. Trying to be faithful at work is hard at times and your boss and your co-workers or just business and economic conditions can make it even harder. The

people in your dance studio or on your team may be hard to deal with at times – your teachers and classmates - or to spin it around, your students - may be hard to deal with at times. Your marriage might need to be pushed up the hill before it coasts down the other side. *Friends, just because things are hard doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. Life is hard.*

Paul makes that point using three examples. Which means you should think of yourself this way: as a warrior, an athlete, or a farmer. I don't which one appeals most to you, or maybe you like them all – but we'll work our way down the list and see what any of them have to do with us.

The first is the soldier.

Remember the Roman Empire is in the background of everything happening in the New Testament. So, Paul is thinking of a Roman legionnaire. These were all unmarried men. The Empire stretched from England in the Northwest down through Spain and into North Africa, then reaching East as far as modern-day Saudi Arabia and Iraq – an area roughly the size of the United States with a big swimming pool in the middle called the Mediterranean Sea and then a kind of hot tub over on the side known as the Black Sea.

A legionnaire could be assigned anywhere across the Empire – in much the same way as those of you who work for the State Department or the military or other government agencies can be assigned all around the world. Sometimes you're happy about it, sometimes you're not. But you go where you're sent and you do what you're told. Because that's the oath you took, that's the promise you made.

And for Roman soldiers, if you could reach twenty years of service, you could retire, again not unlike what we're familiar with. And then you could get married, maybe settle down, and figure out what to do with that pension. But not until your service was up.

Roman soldiers and government servants today, especially members of the military accept the fact life will be different. There are things you are not going to have that other people will. You accept the fact that you are not going to put down roots. You accept a life that involves sacrifice and suffering in service of a greater good.

Your life is more difficult *so that* the lives of others might be better, safer, more secure. There is a certain nobility to that. It's not always at the forefront of your mind, but it's there. That's how the system works. You give up certain freedoms in order to provide them for others. Well, that's exactly the point Paul is making here – Christian, you're giving up certain things for the sake of the Kingdom *because you believe in its core principles, its core values, and you believe in the benefits it provides* and so, although it's a sacrifice, you're also happy to serve.

But maybe the military or government service isn't really your thing, let's look at another example. The athlete.

It's 2024 and that means it's an election year but also a year for the Olympics. Some of you already know this, but we get the Olympics from the ancient Greeks and Romans. Two thousand years ago they were getting together to run track and field and challenge each other in wrestling. The marathon comes to us from ancient Greece. These are not new things they were familiar to Paul and Timothy and other early Christians.

They even had professional athletes who were a big deal, in fact, they're who Paul is talking about here. The kind of athletes who signed up to compete at the biggest events, like the Olympics and the Isthmian games. They pledged themselves to a 10-month program of preparation including prescribed exercises and a strict, separated life and diet focused entirely on the goal of competition. If you violated the protocol you were disqualified.

You see, the thing is, sports have rules. Everyone has to play by them. You don't get to make your own and then claim that you're a champion. You accept the restrictions, you accept the standards and then you seek to operate within them and excel – ignore them, or violate them, and there are consequences.



Just a few weeks ago the US Olympic figure skating team learned it would be receiving gold medals for their performance *in the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022* after a member of the Russian team was disqualified for drug use traced back to 2021, before the Olympics where she had won gold. With her disqualification, her team dropped points meaning the US team which had taken silver was now bumped up to gold. Notice this graphic produced by US Figure Skating highlights the words Integrity and Excellence – in that order. Yes, you need to perform well – that's the excellence, but you also need to play by the rules, that's the integrity.

And here's where I fell down the rabbit hole for a minute, but learned a lot about disqualification and the Olympics. Did you know that medals have been stripped away 157 times since 1949? Men are slightly worse than women, losing their medals 85 times versus 72 for women.

Thirty-eight countries have been stripped, but Russia is the king of them all, having been stripped of 60 medals, and if you put them back together with all the former post-Soviet states from the Soviet Union, they've been stripped 97 times, or 67% of all infractions. In terms of events, Track and Field, also known as "Athletics" leads the list with 53, followed closely by weightlifting with 52 and then things drop off sharply. Wrestling has thirteen and most sports have only one or two. Interestingly, they split evenly across Gold (54), Silver (50), and Bronze (53).

OK, more than some of you ever wanted to know about athletes and competition, but for some of you, it really makes a point – playing by the rules matters. And that's true spiritually too. I have a note in my old Bible written next to this verse – it says, you're in training for reigning! I don't know who I heard say it, but it's catchy and it's meant to encourage us to embrace the struggle of the Christian life.

People kill themselves in the weight room or on the track, the field, or the floor for the sake of a medal or a cup or in the ancient days, a wreath of laurel and flowers that was already dying and wilting by the time they got it home. And you can find champion after champion in every kind of sport that will tell you – even if they played by the rules, even if they won fair and square, even if they set a new record – the thrill lasts about five seconds and then they need something else to chase. *You can never win enough.*

If they put that much time and effort and energy and sacrifice into pursuing something that doesn't last, why not spend your life mimicking their effort but pouring it into pursuing Christ and His Kingdom? You see, don't miss the point: *it's not the effort that's wrong, it's what you spend the effort on* – will it last?

OK, if you're not into the military or athletics, I've got one more chance to connect with you and that's farming. There's no such thing as a lazy, successful farmer. They have seasonal rhythms times when there's less work than others, but it's typically just hard work. As John Stott said, "Successful farming depends as much on sweat as skill."

And the Apostle Paul thought this was also a fitting model for the Christian life and ministry. He frequently commends doing hard things. He even says he worked harder than other apostles (1 Cor 15:10, 2 Cor 11:23) though not for His own glory, but for the sake of Christ. And, he commends the hard work of others around him. Here are four examples just from one letter he wrote – at the end of Romans he includes all these little personal shout-outs, so he says things like:

**Romans 16:6** Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.

**Romans 16:12** Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have worked hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, who has worked very hard in the Lord.

And there are more examples in his other letters. It was a common thing for Paul to commend and encourage hard work because He understood, *life is hard*.

And yet, here's the critical thing about the hard work of a farmer – *it also requires patience*. You can't force the crops or the herd to grow. Botanical and biological growth just take time, and so does spiritual growth. Listen to the way one commentator put it more than 100 years ago:

Often the [farmer] must be content, first, to work, and, then, to wait. More than any other workman, he has to learn that there are no such things as quick results. The Christian too must learn to work and to wait. Often he must sow the good seed of the word into the hearts and minds of his hearers and see no immediate result. A teacher has often to teach, and see no difference in those he teaches. A parent has often to seek to train and guide, and see no difference in the child. It is only when the years go by that the result is seen; for it often happens that when that same young person has grown [into an adult], he or she is faced with some

overmastering temptation or some terrible decision or some intolerable effort, and back into [their] mind comes some word of God or some flash of remembered teaching; and the teaching, the guidance, the discipline bears fruit, and brings honour where without it there would have been dishonour, salvation where without it there would have been ruin. The farmer has learned to wait with patience, and so must the Christian teacher and the Christian parent.<sup>1</sup>

Church, farming the soil and the flocks is hard work, and so is the Christian life and ministry. Things take time. Results don't come over night. Remember that when you want to see change in yourself, and the people you love.

OK, so we have these three examples, the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer and they're each put forward as a model for Christians to consider as examples for how we approach life. We've seen that there are particular things we can learn from each – the separation of the soldier, the compliance of the athlete, and the patience of the farmer. Now let me point out two things they all have in common.

A. They all have bad days.

First, they all have bad days. They each have days when they don't feel like training or working, but it still has to be done. Christian, there will be days when the right thing to do is a very hard thing to do. There are days when the wrong thing is very easy and very, very attractive. We all have weak moments and tough seasons. We all experience the temptation to relax our standards or pause our habits. Don't think you're doing it wrong just because your walk with God isn't full of joy on any particular day. Today just might be a day when you need to grind it out because you remember the reward. Which is the other thing they all have in common.

B. They all know there's a reward ahead.

The soldier, the athlete, and the farmer all know, hard work pays off. If not with results, then at least with the benefit of the training and the work you put in along the way – you're a better person for what you've been through and done and likely, others were blessed as you did what you did. Christian, life is oriented toward an outcome; can you embrace restrictions today for the sake of an eternal reward? Can you work hard and endure because of what you're convinced lies ahead?

And maybe you say yes, but sometimes I have bad days.

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, 162-163.

Well, I want to move on talk about the sources of strength and encouragement that help us do all this hard work in just a minute, but first I need to say more thing, and that's to point out what's happening here to the men and the young men among us.

Brothers, I need you to notice – here in Scripture we find a call to a strenuous life, a noble life. A masculine life. At times the church and religion can take on a softer, feminine style and feel. There is a soft side to Jesus, and we should thank our sisters for helping us to see it and sense it. But there is also a manly side to it and it's on full display here.

I want to make sure you see that the Christian Bible is telling you to *be strong*. It's telling you to *do hard things*. There's something in your chest that *likes* that, that *wants* that. It's because *this is what God has made you to do*. This is what God has called you to be. To sweat and struggle and serve *like* a soldier, an athlete, a farmer. And don't miss this – *this is written to a pastor* – he's saying this is what leadership should look like. This is the model. It's not an option or an alternative. It's the standard. It's what is supposed to be.

The church, the family, the community, and the workplace need men to show up, step up, to lead and to lean in. Even when it's hard. Even when you're opposed. Even when it feels like battle or opposition or the growth and progress seem slow in coming. *Scripture is so clear* – it says that there is a spiritual enemy of your soul – that he walks around like a roaring lion seeking who he may devour. There are forces at work in this world, and even a tendency inside your own chest at times, to sit back, pull back, or drift away – resist that. The world needs you, the church needs you, other men need you, your family needs you.

And here is how you're going to survive. We said that life is hard, but if you suffer *with* others and *for* others, God's grace will get you through.

## 2. Suffer with others

Look with me at verse 3. I use the New King James Translation of the Bible because it's what I grew up with, but this is one area where I think other translations have it better because they say something like [Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus](#). And if you have a NKJV you'll see there's a footnote at the bottom of your page saying something similar.

The original Greek word here is *synkakatheo* which, aside from being fun to say, starts with the prefix *syn* like synthesize or synergy – it means bringing two things together, so a more literal translation is [join me in suffering](#), or as others translations have it [share in suffering](#). Paul says, I'm suffering too. It's hard for all of us. *So, let's encourage each other as we go*. You're not alone Timothy. And just because it's hard, that doesn't mean it's wrong.

Church, one of the things I love about this place is walking around and seeing you ministering to one another – watching dads huddle in the back hall on Wednesday night – waiting to pick up their kids and they're *ministering* to each other. They might not think of it that way, or call it that, but that's what it is. They're encouraging each other by listening

to each other, helping each other, and caring about what each other is going through. And the women do the same thing. And the teens do the same thing. I overheard one teen this week asking another to pray about a certain situation and then the other person did, right then, right there.

Church, you are doing life together. You're caring for and about each other. You're suffering together. And you're doing it well. Just because life is hard, doesn't mean you're doing it wrong.

Of course, it's not just that we suffer with each other, but we also find fellowship with Jesus in our suffering. Notice that Paul tells Timothy (vs 1) **You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**

The call to Christ is not a call to set your jaw, grit your teeth and grind it out. Back in Paul's day you had the Gnostics, a group of people who thought you made your life better by discovering secret knowledge. There was something you needed to learn and know. And there were the Stoics who said you made your life better through self-mastery, self-generated, self-control. Both approaches still exist today. And both approaches are wrong.

Our lives are transformed when the grace of Jesus Christ comes rushing in. We are saved by grace:

**Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast.

And, we are sustained by grace – God told Paul

**2 Corinthians 12:9** ... “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Yes, life is hard, but grace gets you going and keeps you going as you find fellowship in suffering with Jesus and His people. So, here's a question to ask yourself: how can I plug into God's grace as my source of sustaining power today?

Because, point number three, we are called to suffer not just with others, but for others as well.

### 3. Suffer for others

Jesus suffered for us. That's what we commemorated and celebrated for the past two Sundays – that Jesus Christ came to earth to save sinners. We all know we have done wrong things in our lives. God should punish us for that. But if we are willing, Jesus will take that punishment for us and give us His righteousness. That's what happened on the cross – He

suffered in our place, and then, He rose from the dead offering a new life to all who trust in Him.

Paul received that new life – he was utterly transformed, and so he thought little of suffering for and with Jesus while spreading the gospel, mentoring Timothy and starting new churches. And now he’s calling Timothy to suffer for others himself. Notice, verse four’s exhortation to [share things you received from me with faithful men who will be able to teach others also](#).

Life is hard, there will be suffering, but we do it with others including Jesus, and we do for others. Every Christian has a ministry. You’re serving Jesus somewhere. It might be leading a small group, or teaching in Children’s Ministry, or making dinner each night for people who don’t say thank you. But someone is on the other side of you – on the receiving end of your ministry at home, at work, or in the church.

You’re suffering for them, *just like Jesus* and others suffer for you. Life is hard for all of us. You’re not the only one. And just because it’s hard, doesn’t mean you’re doing it wrong. You’re pushing through, grounded in grace, drawing strength from the Holy Spirit, *so that you can fulfill the ministry and role God has entrusted to you* and other people benefit from that. The day is coming when you will stand before God and hear the words, [well done good and faithful servant](#).

So don’t go down cowering when life gets hard. Don’t give up or give in. Don’t moan too much about the culture – it was against Timothy too. Receive the grace of Jesus, receive the encouragement of the saints you’re suffering with and pour into others! Pass on the faith!

One last thing: [Consider what I’m saying, may the Lord give you understanding](#).

Sometimes you need to think on things, chew on them, pray about them – it’s often easier to get an answer from Google than it is from God, but is that the right answer? You may say I’ve tried to read my Bible and I don’t understand it. Or, I hear what it’s saying but I don’t know exactly what to do. OK, have you asked for help – first from the Lord and then from others.

If God is getting your attention, give Him time to speak and guide you. Pray, chew on things, go for a walk, take a shower, talk with a friend. Do whatever you need to do – but seek [understanding](#) from the Lord, He’s trying to lead you through an otherwise difficult life by encouraging you to suffer with and for others, anchored in grace and strengthened by Christ. But you may have to spend some time considering these things, the answers might not always be immediate and obvious.

We’re going to celebrate the suffering of Jesus this morning by receiving communion. It’s a good time to remember all that God has done for you and recommit yourself to following and serving Him, *even when it’s hard*. It’s a good time to ask Him to make you [strong in His grace](#) so that you can walk the path He’s laying before you and walk it well – for His glory

and the good of theirs. It's a good time to consider what Scripture is saying and receive understanding from the Lord.

Let's pray.



## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### 2 Timothy 2:1-7

#### Life is Hard, Relationships Are the Answer

**Summary:** Life is going to be hard, but if you suffer with others and for others, God's grace will get you through.

- What's your power source – who or what keeps you going through thick and thin?
- Review the following verses. How does Paul point back to our strength in Christ?
  - o 2 Timothy 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14
- Where are endurance and strength needed in your life right now?
- Review 1 Cor 16:13 in several translations (hint: you can use blb.org or Bible Gateway to see many translations at once). What do you notice about Paul's charge and men?<sup>2</sup> Is your reaction to this positive, negative, or cautious? Why?
- "I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no 'spiritual gains without pains'. I should as soon expect a farmer to prosper in business who contented himself with sowing his fields and never looking at them till harvest, as expect a believer to attain much holiness who was not diligent about his Bible-reading, his prayers, and the use of his Sundays. Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them."<sup>3</sup>
  - o Why is hardship and suffering so often the path to growth?
  - o What has been hard for you in your spiritual journey?
  - o What has helped you grow?

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<sup>2</sup> In Greek Paul commands the Christians to *Andrizomai*. The root of the word is *aner*, or man. So, today we would say, It'll make a man out of you.

<sup>3</sup> JC Ryle, *Holiness*.