

Spiritual Strength

3 Ways to Stay Strong in Suffering for the Gospel

2 Timothy 2:8-13

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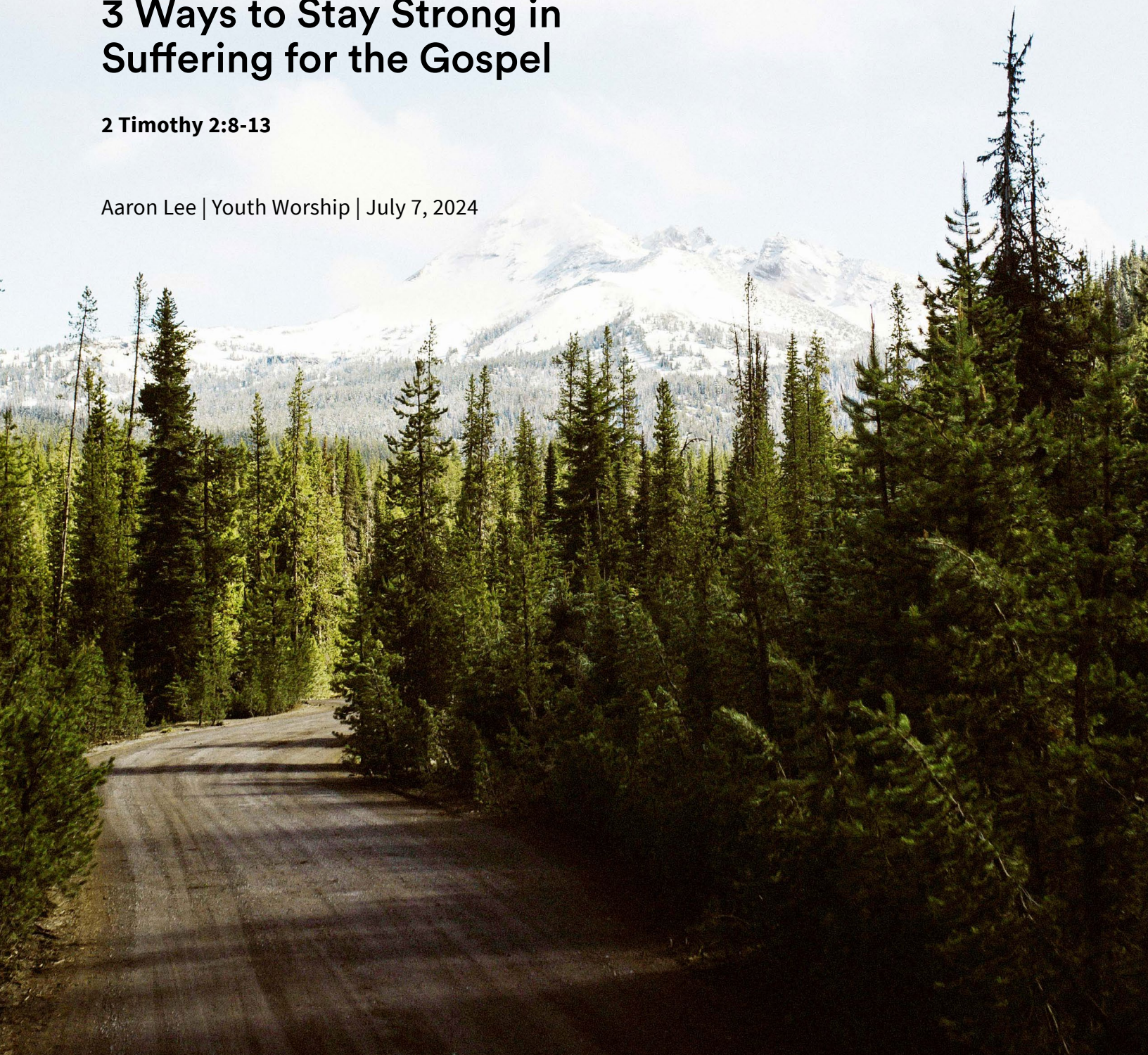


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Introduction

How can I stay strong as a Christian? While the summer season is good for a break, we can't neglect our spiritual lives.

I like to run as my exercise, and if I don't keep up, I actually start to feel weaker. I can feel it in my breathing. My lungs start feeling tighter. My heart starts working harder, feeling heavy. When I'm running, it feels like suffering. But the suffering is actually how I get stronger. This is true of our spiritual lives. We should be growing more mature, and getting stronger. And when God brings suffering, it serves our spiritual growth.

Context

This is Paul's last letter, and he's telling the young Timothy to stay strong in the Lord. 2 Timothy 2:1 sets the stage, and it's what I'm going to call our key context verse:

*You then, my child, **be strengthened** by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,
(2 Timothy 2:1)*

In context, Paul is actually speaking to Timothy about suffering. How can I stay strong as a Christian, especially in times of suffering? I have never been persecuted like Paul – but we all experience different types and levels of suffering – and God does promise us that persecution will come. We must be prepared.

Sermon Preview

Our sermon today will share three ways to stay strong in suffering for the Gospel. Let's get started.



1. Remember Jesus Christ

The first way to stay strong in suffering is to remember Jesus Christ. Specifically, we are to remember that he is risen from the dead and the offspring of David:

8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. (2 Timothy 2:8-9)

When we remember that Jesus is risen from the dead, we remember that Jesus has the ultimate victory over death, Satan, sin. This is incredibly important to suffering Christians. Just as Jesus rose from the grave, so too will believers.

Paul not only defines Jesus as risen from the dead, but as the offspring of David. If you'll recall, David is known as the King of Israel. Jesus, being the son of David, is the King not just over Israel, but over all. He is the Messiah, God's Anointed, God's chosen one, who brings Good News to the entire world. Paul is suffering on behalf of this Gospel – he is literally bound with chains as a criminal. He's saying that it's worth it. He's saying that the Gospel is worthy to suffer for. In Paul's mind, the Gospel is everything. It is all-consuming. It is life-giving. It really puts everything into perspective for him. To a legalistic Pharisee like Paul, nothing was more important than the Word of God. To listen and obey it. To follow it to a tee. The laws were the supreme and final rules of the land. The Pharisees thought they had a hold of it. They thought they understood it. They thought they could see straight through it. But if Jesus really is the Word of God made flesh – this changes everything. Jesus resurrected, and he reigns. Religious leaders and teachers must submit to how Jesus reads and sees Scripture. Christ and his cross are now fundamental to our faith, foundational forever as our ultimate reality.

Ultimate Reality

So, will you remember Christ's resurrection and reign as ultimate reality? Remembering ultimate reality helps us combat the lies of the world. We think that suffering, sickness, and death are a threat to us. The ultimate reality is that we will live forever and life with the Lord will be so much better. We think that God does not do anything and the world just runs its course. The ultimate reality is that Jesus is ruling and reigning, holding everything together.



My kids have been asking me recently about whether things are “in this world” or not. They’ll ask things like “Are there monsters in this world” or “Are there ghosts in this world?” I think what they’re trying to do is to make sense of the world, what they hear about and what they see, and to know what is real. My kids are just kids, but I do want them to know about ultimate reality. So while monsters aren’t real – there is evil in this world. And while ghosts aren’t real – we do believe in angels and demons. What I try to do is to point them to Jesus. One time my kids asked me if there were bad guys in this world, and I noticed that they were a bit scared of what my answer might be. I said yes, there are bad guys in this world – but we don’t have to be afraid, because we know Jesus who is the King over all of the bad guys. Even when we’re scared of evil or suffering, don’t forget about Jesus. His resurrection and reign is our ultimate reality.

Stay strong in suffering by remembering Jesus Christ as risen from the dead and the offspring of David – our ultimate reality.

2. Endure in Ministry

The second way to stay strong in suffering is to endure in ministry:

*But the word of God is not bound! 10 **Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect**, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. (2 Timothy 2:9-10)*

Despite his suffering, despite his chains, despite being put in prison – the Word of God and the Gospel prevail! The Word of God and the Gospel go forth! The Good News cannot be stopped. Paul endures everything, including his suffering, for the sake of the elect – for those who are called, for those who are Christians. It is his privilege and his passion to be involved in ministry and missions. I don’t think it’s an accident that Paul calls Christians as God’s elect. He’s confident that those who are chosen by God will come to salvation. God’s purposes will not fail. His plans will not be thwarted.

Notice that Paul does not use God’s sovereignty over salvation as an excuse to avoid evangelism. When Paul says that “the word of God is not bound,” he does not mean that God’s word can magically make its way into the hearts and minds of the lost. On the contrary, he is motivated to endure everything. He wants to be the means, the conduit, the passageway for the word of God to be proclaimed. He’s moved to go out and do God’s work. He’s set to suffer more for the mission. And when we do God’s work, when we are on

God's mission, we cannot lose. Victory is guaranteed, the outcome is secure: Salvation and eternal glory. John Piper paraphrases this sentence from Paul as saying: "Endure everything, Timothy, and you will be the instrument of their salvation." Piper also says that "The word of God runs triumphantly because Paul suffered to bring it and because Paul's suffering confirms the truth and worth of the gospel and advances it."

Another word for endure is persevere. We endure everything. We persevere through the pain. Enduring in ministry is how we bring people to our forever home to heaven. These are eternal glories that we endure and persevere for in the faith.

Eternal Glories

So, will you endure in ministry for eternal glories? Eternal glories include our home in Heaven. Look towards Heaven as we do God's work in this world. When you see your unsaved family and friends, let your heart long to bring them into Heaven, and be encouraged to evangelize. The world tells us to live for the here and now. Scripture tells us to set our eyes to the sky. To look towards the future. The things we do on this earth will not last. Even the most exciting and compelling legacies will not last forever. Whether achievements and accomplishments in academia, banners and trophies and statues in sports, awards in the arts and entertainment, or prizes in medicine and sciences – they will all fade away. Eternal glories, glories that will last forever, are the deeds done in the name and for the fame of Jesus. This does not mean you have to be a pastor or a preacher. But it does mean that you play your part, and embrace your role, in making disciples and joining the work of the church. With your family at home, with your friends and neighbors, as well as the weak and helpless in this world. And you can have boldness to share – knowing that you cannot fail.

Missionaries are motivated by eternal glories. George Whitefield's biography by Arnold Dallimore is a classic in the Christian book world. George Whitefield was a powerful preacher and a key figure in the First Great Awakening. He is quoted to have said: "The more I am opposed, the more joy I feel." (Kidd). From England, he would travel 12 times by boat to the early American colonies – an incredibly dangerous way to travel, risking his life and thinking it might be his last every time he went on board. In America, he was met with opposition – with people breaking into his home to beat him up. And when he would go back to London, he would experience the loss of friends and financial support due to this time away. But what motivated



Whitefield, at the end of the day, was the mission of converting souls to Christ and being born again, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the means of preaching.

As an Asian American, I can't forget about the influential work of Hudson Taylor and Lottie Moon – missionaries who went to China. Hudson Taylor knew the importance of identifying with the local culture, and Lottie Moon was a trailblazer for women in missions. They endured their own sufferings for sure, but persevered in bringing the glorious gospel to the Chinese people. Stay strong in suffering by enduring in ministry for eternal glories – being bold in sharing the Gospel story, knowing that you cannot fail in bringing God's people home to heaven.

3. Trust God's Faithfulness

The third way to stay strong in suffering is to trust God's faithfulness:

*11 The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 13 if we are faithless, **he remains faithful**—for he cannot deny himself. (2 Timothy 2:11-13)*

Whenever Paul says that a saying is trustworthy, we're being clued into the fact that this is a common saying, like a creed or confession. It's an accepted summary or standard of Scriptural truth. Let's quickly unpack this trustworthy statement one phrase at a time. We're going to see two encouraging statements, and then two warning statements. These pairs of statements are meant to motivate our endurance.

The first two phrases are encouragement. Dying and living with Christ talks about our salvation and our unity with Christ. Enduring and reigning with him speaks to persevering and receiving our reward with him in Heaven. These are good things that push us to stay strong in suffering for the Gospel.

The next pair of phrases are warnings. Denying Christ is akin to not persevering, not enduring, not remaining in him. Those who deny, turn away, and reject Christ will be judged. This next one is interesting. It says if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself. What this does not mean is that God will save people who don't have faith or who are not believers. Paul has already taught us about false teachers and those who have fallen away as never truly having saving faith. It does not mean that you can just willingly sin and presume on God to save you. Paul says that these type of people were never saved to begin with. What it does mean is that if

we are faithless to God, God will remain faithful to himself – meaning he will uphold who he is and what he has said. if we prove our faith to be fake and if we prove that what we said about our faith is false and disingenuous – God remains faithful, he will prove that he is true and he is true to what he says and is genuine. God is not a liar. Some translations say “he cannot deny who he is” and “he cannot disown himself” and “he cannot be false to himself.” Faithless men cannot ruin the mission. He will stay true to his mission, and save those who are truly his children. His name, his glory, his reputation, is not tarnished by how men respond to him. He is the hero. So this final saying of he remains faithful puts everything in its rightful perspective. Mankind is not the main character – God is. He will be faithful to what he has said about himself. He will be faithful to his word.

Unchanging Word

So, will you trust God’s faithfulness and his unchanging word? This is what it means to be faithful – to do what you say you’re going to do. When we say we believe the Bible, we are saying we trust in God to stay true to his word.

The world is changing, with new presidents and new technologies. Our church is changing. A new youth pastor, our children’s director retiring, church planting, and a senior pastor succession plan. People change. I’ve seen this in me and my wife as we just celebrated our 11th wedding anniversary. Our kids are changing. Something that was hard for me to grasp growing up was that our parents change. Your family, your brothers and sisters, change. Your friends change. We change as people. But God does not change. His word remains the same.

No matter what happens in our changing world, in our changing church, and in our changing personal lives – we can trust God’s unchanging word. God will remain faithful to himself and he will ensure that the elect endure. Stay strong in suffering by trusting God’s faithfulness and his unchanging word.

Big Idea

Spiritually strong Christians remember Jesus Christ, endure in ministry, and trust God's faithfulness.

Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning again for our conclusion. I asked you: How can I stay strong as a Christian? Spiritually strong Christians remember Jesus Christ, endure in ministry, and trust God's faithfulness. I don't want to leave you with the wrong impression. When we talk about our spiritual strength — the focus, the attention, and the glory should not be on ourselves, but on God. Let's look a little bit more closely at our key context verse again:

*You then, my child, be strengthened **by the grace** that is in Christ Jesus, (2 Timothy 2:1)*

We are not strengthened by our own strength – of working harder or being more disciplined or by our own willpower – but by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. This reminds us that it is not our own effort or work that gives us spiritual strength. Yes, we play our part, but it is God who gets us through. It's God who causes growth. And look at 1 Peter 5:10, showing us that grace that saves is the same grace that strengthens and sustains.

*10 And after you have suffered a little while, **the God of all grace**, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, **strengthen**, and establish you. (1 Peter 5:10)*

It's all encapsulated in this verse. The God of all grace is the God who called you — the God that chose you to save you. The God of all grace is the God who knows you will suffer for a little while, but you will endure and persevere. And the God of all grace is the God who will strengthen you and establish you as we run the race to our Heavenly home.

The Gospel

Our God is a God of grace. This is the entire point of the Gospel. We deserve to be punished for our sins. We cannot save ourselves. But God is a God of grace. Admit you are a sinner. Believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified for your sins. And confess him as your treasure – the resurrected King and Lord over your life. God breathes life into our dead and dry bones. When we are weak, he is strong. And as we follow him on this earth, he ensures that we will follow him all the way into Heaven. This Gospel offer of grace is free to anyone who believes. Come and trust in Jesus.

My brothers and sisters, aren't we so grateful to God? Every time I run, I'm reminded of what a grace it is to breathe and to be alive. And not just physically, but spiritually. To have spiritual lungs and to have to have spiritual life, to have a heart that beats for God, so that we can run the race of faith. As we make our way to the final day and the finish line, I pray that you will give God glory as he grows and strengthens you by his grace.



Strength

Strength inside my heart
Strength inside my lungs
In persecution, suffering
The race of faith we run

Remember Jesus Christ
As risen from the dead
The son of David, King of Kings
The word of God made flesh

Endure in ministry
Eternal glories come
We witness and we work until
We reach our heavenly home

We trust God's faithfulness
His glory will be full
The Lord is sure to save, for every
Word of God proves true

And on that final day
We'll cross the finish line
It was not I - but grace in Christ
That strengthened all this time

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