

SHARING IN SUFFERING: PART 1

2 Timothy 2.1-7

Paul wrote 2 Timothy in harsh conditions. Timothy was ministering in the overtly pagan context of Ephesus. The church also faced internal problems in the form of false teachers. In this context, Paul calls for the mission of God to go forth through Timothy and the believers in Ephesus.

Our mission involves life on life intentional reproduction.

Paul envisions the faithful transmission of the message (2 Timothy 2.2). As evangelicals, we associate this idea with “Apostolicity”, or the “Apostolic Succession”. This is less about church offices and more about the faithful passing along of the Gospel message.

This lays out the principle of ministry multiplication. There is an expectation that a Christian encourages other people to follow Jesus.

Paul => Timothy => Faithful People => Others

We should always be on the look-out for people who are Faithful, Available, and Teachable.

It is generally wise to have at least one close relationship with someone further along than you and someone you are bringing along.

Executing our mission requires hard work.

Paul strings together three metaphors, the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer (2 Timothy 2.3-6). What do they have in common?

- i. A desired outcome or mission – to defeat the enemy, to win the competition, to reap a harvest. The Christian life has a mission of making disciples.
- ii. The need for preparation. Soldiers and athletes train rigorously, and a farmer plants seeds well before a harvest. In other domains, we are quite willing to prepare. We invest in continuing education, seminars, conferences, and books to become better in our professions. What would it look like for me to plan to make disciples?
- iii. The necessity of discipline, self-denial, and hard work. In all instances, the mission requires effort.

There are other implications for each metaphor.

Soldier - If a soldier becomes “entangled in civilian pursuits”, he takes his eyes off the mission (2 Timothy 2.4). How much time should a Christian be spending posting on social media? Where is there wasted energy?

Athlete - In order to win a race, you must “compete according to the rules”. We ought not look for short cuts. This reminds us of the template for the mission (2 Timothy 2.2). Are we a “Word-centered, others-focused” church?

Farmer - The farmer’s reward is connected to his work. As a farmer shares in the benefits of his crop, so also does a disciple maker share in the joys of discipling. We can also think in terms of delayed blessing. The time between sowing seeds and reaping a harvest requires patience.

The command to be “strengthened by grace” explains how a Christ-follower is sustained in the hard mission (2 Timothy 2.1). Grace is God’s unmerited favor. The command is to be strong in that which we could not do for ourselves.

Key Ideas: Disciple making is worth the cost

Application Questions:

Why do some people shy away from doing hard things? Why should people attempt costly endeavors?

What does this passage tell us about the demands placed upon a Christian?

Where does the strength come from to do this hard mission (2 Timothy 2.1)? Discuss specifically the idea of being “strong in grace”.

Can you think of other reasons why Paul would compare disciple making to the work of a soldier, athlete, or farmer?