

Rewards in Suffering

It seems we're constantly bombarded with discouragement today. Like many, maybe you're dealing with feelings of anger, sadness, fear, frustration, or depression. How do we stay positive and focused on our goals as servants of Christ during all this trouble? Can anything good come from such uncertain times?

The apostle Paul offers some timely encouragement in today's [Jesus Through the Scriptures](#) reading from 2 Timothy 2. As he writes his final letter to one of his closest companions from a prison cell, Paul could have painted a bleak and depressing picture. But instead, he calls on Timothy to share in his suffering (2 Tim. 1:8, 2:3), to find strength in Christ (2 Tim. 2:1), and to keep spreading the good news to faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2)!

So what good can come from all this suffering? Paul shares three everyday examples of workers who receive great rewards: soldiers, athletes, and farmers (2 Tim. 2:3-6).

Soldiers Have Focus

"Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him" (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

Life — especially in difficult times — is full of distractions. But just like a soldier on the battlefield, we need to have our priorities straight. We're all adjusting to changes like working from home, helping our kids learn online, thinking about how we shop, eat, or how far apart we stand in the grocery store —not to mention all the changes in our Bible study and worship. But don't forget that God hasn't changed! We're still on the front-lines, fighting a spiritual battle for people's souls! If we shift our eyes away from what the Lord expects of us, to those trivial cares and concerns of life, Satan has successfully stolen our focus (Luke 10:40-42).

And what's our reward as a focused soldier of Christ? Paul says that Christ — the one who enlisted us — is pleased with us! So, where are your priorities today? Are you focused on the Lord's daily marching orders, or are you distracted by all the disruptions in your daily routine?

Athletes Have Discipline

"An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules" (2 Tim. 2:5).

Moving on from soldiers to athletes, Paul hones in on the discipline required of the Lord's people. Though all our sports are currently canceled, remember that every sporting event has its rules and regulations. A basketball player has to dribble the ball while moving down the court. A football team can only have eleven players on the field at a given time. And a soccer player isn't allowed to pick up the ball and start running down the field with it. And as followers of Christ, we need the self-discipline to obey God's rules too! There aren't any shortcuts on our marathon race toward the finish line. We either follow God's direction, keeping ourselves under control, or we'll be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:27).

And what's our reward as disciplined athletes? Paul says we'll receive the crown at the end of our race! So, are you willing to follow Christ's rules? Will you receive that great reward after a life of faithful obedience, or will you face the eternal penalty for choosing your own path?

Farmers Have Patience

"It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops" (2 Tim. 2:6).

Wrapping up his practical examples of dedication through difficulty, he points us to the hard-working farmer. While I'm not an expert in farming, one thing I learned in elementary school is that growth takes time. Planting a seed in the dirt doesn't produce a mature plant overnight. So a farmer puts in the effort in preparing the soil, planting the seed, watering it regularly, protecting it from pests and disease, and eventually, it grows and produces. Slowing down and waiting on the Lord may be one of the greatest lessons we have to learn during our current times of uncertainty. When will this be over? How many people will be lost to disease? Will this impact me or someone I love? One thing we can be sure of — God is able, in time, to make these events work together for our good if we love Him (Rom. 8:28).

And what's our reward as a patient, hard-working farmer? Paul says we'll enjoy the first share of the harvest! So, are you patiently waiting on the Lord today? Are you doing your part and staying optimistic that God cares about you, or will you throw up your hands in despair and give up?

May God help us today to stay focused on what matters, to compete with discipline and endurance, and to patiently wait for that great eternal reward someday. And despite all our struggles, let daily echo Paul's words at the end of this letter: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).*