

**Leadership Principles & the Pastoral Epistles – 2015**  
**WEEK 4: EMBRACE HARDSHIP**

**Interpretive comments on 2 Tim. 2:3-13**

Transformational leaders understand that they must embrace the hardships involved in being a servant-leader (2 Tim. 1:8; 2:3-13; 4:5).

Paul devotes more space to this third element of transformational leadership than to any of the others. Perhaps this is because Timothy was (and we are) most resistant to this element!

“Although souls are won only by the sovereign power of God through the Holy Spirit, yet . . . souls are ‘hardly’ won—not by the slick, automatic application of a formula, but by tears and sweat and pain, in prayer, in sacrificial personal friendship, and in other ways.”<sup>1</sup>

Notice that this is an *active* engagement (see also 1 Pet. 4:1,2).

“There is much suffering that we can avoid if we wish; but if we are to be of use to the Lord, it is a fundamental necessity that we make deliberate choice of the path of suffering for His sake. Unless we acquire a disposition to suffer for Him, the work we do will be of a very superficial quality.”<sup>2</sup>

**What kinds of hardships must we embrace?**

In 2:4-6 Paul uses three illustrations to describe three specific kinds of hardships which we must embrace:

**SOLDIER (2:4)** – the hardship of staying focused on the work and staying unentangled by the affairs of everyday life.

- Be conscientious in your home and work responsibilities (cf. Col. 3,4; Eph. 5,6; 1 Pet. 2,3), of course—but do so as representatives of Jesus, as part of your ministry, not as separate parts of your life with their own separate goals and affections.
- Keep a close eye on your affections. What gives you joy? What do you look forward to? What makes you most angry and downcast if you do not get it?
- Soldierly hardships also include the sufferings of the battle itself, including demonic (Eph. 6:10-13; 1 Pet. 5:8-10) and human persecution (see 2 Tim. 1:8; 3:11,12). You must expect to be attacked by Satan, and you must actively and firmly resist him.

**ATHLETE (2:5)** - the hardship of competing according to the rules. The athlete's rules included two aspects:

- The rules of the contest

---

<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, Lecture on 2 Timothy 2.

<sup>2</sup> Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Worker* (Fort Washington: Christian Literature Crusade, 1971), p. 91.

- The rules of training

FARMER (2:6) - the hardship of working hard and consistently without immediate results.

Notice in each illustration the connection between the willingness to embrace this hardship and the positive outcome. *While our hard work and suffering cannot by themselves guarantee the advance of God's kingdom, our unwillingness to suffer can prevent its advancement.* This is why Watchman Nee says: "In some places there is no ingathering of the harvest for the simple reason that there are too many Christians who dislike work."<sup>3</sup>

### Repenting from self-indulgence

"Perhaps you are the one who must admit that you give your people little to model themselves after.

It is therefore not surprising that they lack the zeal and effectiveness of the Thessalonian church's evangelism . . . The (leader) functioning as a servant and brother knows that *work* is the operative word for his calling: (he) is a *working* model for his people. Like Epaphroditus he may be called to labor in self-giving right to the door of death (Phil. 2:28-30), to study diligently as a scribe in the kingdom (Matt. 13:52; 2 Tim. 2:15), and to agonize in prayer for men (Col. 2:1-3; 4:12-13).

On a daily basis, this means that self-indulgence must be put to death . . . It takes the form of physical laziness and sluggishness of spirit, which readily fosters fear. Personal timidity and physical exhaustion often seem to issue from the poisoned conscience of the slothful leader. It works like this: the (leader) neglects his calling in the community, grows weary of study, and finds his preaching and teaching a burden. He also thinks he needs more sleep. And his fear of people grows. Other sins soon spin out of his disobedient life. Legalistic penance, wheel-spinning, the aggressive pushing of secondary causes in the church, the neglect of matters of first importance - he indulges it all.

To be rid of this burden of self-indulgence, go to Christ, the perfect Advocate with the Father (1 Jn. 2:1,2). By faith hand the sins over to him. Be specific as you confess your transgressions, and then trust his forgiveness. He promises it (1 Jn. 1:8-10) . . . At the same time, ask the Lord to search out your heart for related sins, such as daydreaming and fantasizing. What you may learn is that the pride that keeps you daydreaming is the fundamental cause of your laziness. You may have been too proud to let the Lord search you and root out your pet sins, whatever they were. Take them seriously. Don't be afraid to grieve over them (James 4:6-10).

But be comforted. The Holy Spirit will help you (Ps. 139:23,24). Christ will write the Father's laws and love on your heart (Ezek. 36:24, 25; 1 Thess. 3:5). And remember, repentance is

---

<sup>3</sup> Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Worker*, p. 15.

normal for the believer, his way of responding to Christ and drawing near to the Father (Lk. 15:20-24).”<sup>4</sup>

Consider 2:3-6 with *this* attitude—and the Lord will show you what to work on (2:7).

**What will motivate us to embrace these hardships?**

By connecting the challenging commands of 2:3-6 with the wonderful promises of 2:8-13, Paul is showing Timothy how to “be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1) so that he can embrace these hardships!

*First, there is the example of Jesus (2:8).* At the heart of Paul’s gospel is the promised Messiah (“descendant of David”) comes into his glorious rule *through* suffering and death.

Jesus embraced this hardship for the sake of *our* salvation! Meditating on the amazing Love that would willingly choose this path for people as sinful as us will motivate us to willingly follow in his footsteps (Heb. 12:1-3).

|                     | <b>JESUS</b> | <b>PAUL</b> |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|
| <b>RENUNCIATION</b> | Phil. 2:6,7  | Phil. 3:7,8 |
| <b>HUMILIATION</b>  | Phil. 2:8    | Phil. 3:10  |
| <b>EXALTATION</b>   | Phil. 2:9-11 | Phil. 3:11  |

*Second, there is the example of Paul (2:9,10).* Through our suffering, God spreads his salvation to others (Jn. 12:24-26).

- See Paul’s broader description of this path (2 Cor. 4:7-12)
- Think of the people who have helped you come to Christ and/or grow in him. Think of the people whose spiritual life you most admire. You will *always* find that they have suffered deeply, and that they attribute their spiritual fruitfulness to God and the sufferings through which he has taken them (Jn. 15:2; 2 Cor. 1:8,9; Rom. 5:3-5; Jas. 1:2-5). Ask them if it has been worth it, and listen carefully to their answers.

*Third, there are the promises of God’s eternal kingdom (2:11-13).* God will more than make it up to us!

---

<sup>4</sup> C. John Miller, *Powerful Evangelism for the Powerless* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1997), pp. 86,87.

- How much do you focus on this? This was tremendously motivating and strengthening to Paul (Rom. 8:18 and 2 Cor. 4:16-18), and it can be for us, too!

If you want to follow Paul's direction to embrace hardship, you will need to serve with others who also want to do this.

Embracing hardship is intimately connected to experiencing real joy:

Ajith Ferrnando says: "Just as faith is indispensable if we are to maintain joy in daily life, so is surrender. If we cling to anything in life, even a good thing, that thing will surely take away our joy . . . Each of these texts implies that Christians constantly give up things that they like to keep in order to experience the freedom God intends them to have. The most important thing that we surrender is our own self—our desire to control our lives. Of course, we don't surrender and go into a vacuum. We surrender something in order to cling to God only. Surrender is the means to enjoying more fully the most beautiful thing in our lives—our joyous love relationship with God . . . Often the things we have to surrender are not easy to give up—things like our health, our convenience, our comfort, or our reputation . . . For a biblical Christian, rather than being something to dread, surrender can become the gateway to an exciting adventure. We know that God will bring something good out of every situation. Even as we go through pain, this truth sustains us and we wonder, 'How will God do it this time?' We anticipate his deliverance with holy longing. And when we see what he has done, our joy is complete!"<sup>5</sup>

A former student of this class emailed the following comment: "Week 4 of your leadership class is entitled "Embrace Hardship." I read that title over and over in class and realized I had no category for that perspective (and was kind of horrified). I have had the perspective of enduring suffering (after wrestling with God much on even this), but never embracing it. I had dismissed anything that active as asceticism. So I decided to look through all of the scriptures and pray for wisdom. To me, embracing is an active position but enduring is fairly passive. After reading through the passages on suffering, I agree that embracing is a better descriptor of the stance we are called to. I also think that this is where the joy comes in. Unless we are more active than passive in suffering, we miss out on experiencing the joy God has for us. Good things need to be fought for. As I was processing all this, I began to see that adopting a perspective of embracing suffering radically changed my views on my daily interactions with people. There is much suffering that I can sidestep (especially relational) without my conscience hurting (maybe I have issues here). However, when I adopt the perspective of embracing suffering, I begin to see things differently. Conflicts can be positive opportunities to enter into difficult situations to bless people rather than unnecessary difficulties to avoid."

---

<sup>5</sup> Ajith Ferrnando, *The Call to Joy & Pain*, pp. 43-46.