

## Press On In Your Faith // 2 Timothy 2:1-13

Amen and good morning! My name is Jesse Slinkman and I serve here as our College & Residency Pastor. Which means I train our college students to be mature Christians and I train aspiring pastors for the work of ministry. If you're at all thinking about going into ministry, connect with me and I'd love to talk about it!

It's so good to worship with you and it's a blessing for me to preach this morning as Pastor Rob begins his time away for the remainder of July. So let's continue in worship by turning in our Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 2. If you need a copy of God's Word just get the attention of an usher.

2 Timothy is the book that we studied last semester in our college ministry. (By the way if you are 18-25 years old and don't know about or don't come to our college ministry, you should - for discipleship and fellowship). I'd love to see you there.

This spring we taught through every verse of 2 Timothy and we discovered that Paul's overall message in this text and the book as a whole is to press on. To press on in the faith. Keep going on the path that God has laid out for you. Don't give up.

What you need to know is that Paul is in prison and the end of his life. He has every human reason to give up and to give in. But he didn't. He fought the good fight. Even when it was hard, he pressed on in his faith until the end!

And in these verses he encourages Timothy how to do the same! Timothy is a young pastor who needs encouragement to press on. To keep going. Timothy was likely a timid, shy, quiet person. Maybe because of his age or his personality. Either way, he needed a reminder of how to press on in the faith. How to not give up.

Maybe you've felt like giving up. Maybe you feel that way now - in a place of weakness. "I'm struggling. I'm hurt. I feel broken. God can't use me". Or maybe you're in a place of apathy. Spiritually lethargic. "I don't care anymore. I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to press on." No matter what heart condition you came here with today - listen to what God has to tell you:

*2 Timothy 2:1-7 [1] You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, [2] and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. [3] Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [4] No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. [5] An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. [6] It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. [7] Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.*

You can feel in this text, it's like Paul is pushing you forward. Like he's pulling you up and pushing you to press on. Even when it's hard. Even when you suffer. Even when you feel weak. When you feel like you can't take another step. Paul wanted Timothy to press on and God wants you to press on. So he tells you to:

- **Be strengthened in Jesus (v1)**

It's the first thing Paul says in this new section of the letter. The introduction, the greeting, and the warm up is done. This is Paul getting into it now, telling Timothy and you how to press on. *[1] You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ..... be strengthened*

It's interesting that Paul doesn't say "be strong" or "strengthen yourself". He says *be strengthened*. Meaning that strength is something that Timothy receives. Not striving or working to be stronger, but strength is something that is given to us.

That's not how we normally think about it. We think "I can do this on my own. I can do the work. I can grind it out." But that's not the Christian life. God doesn't leave you to do it on your own strength. He gives you strength by his grace.

We usually define grace as "unmerited favor". A more simple and clear definition is: God's undeserved love. It's a kindness and favor that you don't have to work for. You just have it if you are a believer in Jesus. He loves you and he cares for you without you having to do anything. *be strengthened* by what you can't earn.

You can't earn his love. You can't work for his compassion. You already have access to it. It's like if all you had to do was go to the gym parking lot and just by being there you automatically got stronger. When you go to Christ, you are automatically strengthened just by being with him. By abiding in relationship with him. Abiding in Jesus is how to *be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus*

So go to him. Abide in him. Do you go to Christ for strength? Or do you go to other sources? In order to press on, you have to go to Christ. You have to receive his grace. His strength is waiting right there for you, if you would only go to him. Go to his word. Go to him in prayer. It's the most important way, to press on in your faith.

Look at verse 2 with me. *[2] and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also*. This is describing a pattern. A pattern that Paul intended - for Christians both receive and teach doctrine to other people in their lives. What he wants us to do is:

- **Live out discipleship (v2)**

4 groups of people are talked about in this one verse. What Paul taught to Timothy, Timothy was supposed to teach to faithful men, and they should be able to teach it to others. And the pattern continues and continues. That's how the Gospel spreads

And at some point, through faithful discipleship - that message came to you. It's the same message that we teach at our church and all of our ministries. The message from Jesus. Spreading to all the world. Entrusted to others and expanding.

Does anyone recognize this game? Mexican train. I grew up playing it with my family. And what is cool about it, is that you're not just making one row of dominoes. As a group, you have multiple lines of dominoes that come out from the center. They are spreading and expanding and going out. And that's what Paul is describing in these verses. The best discipleship is not just one by one like addition. The best discipleship is multiplication. In a group context - expanding.

That's why we do our discipleship in groups at our church. Because the biblical model is to teach groups to maximize our efforts for the increase of the Gospel. So that more and more and more people grow in their walk with Christ.

And I pray that you are a part of it. If you're not already, get in a men's group, or women's ministry, or college, or students or freedom groups. Because it's in those environments that the Word of God is applied to our lives as a community. And by not participating in that discipleship, you forsake all the growth God has for you.

You're not supposed to do discipleship alone. In fact, you can't do it alone. There is no such thing as a Christian who doesn't grow with others. No such thing as just me and Jesus and my Bible. *[2] and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also*

Be willing to be taught in a group. It's in these groups that you receive the truth of God and apply it to your life. It will help you press on in your faith - when you are consistently in discipleship. Make that time an absolute priority, because it's essential to your spiritual life and to help you press on. Live out discipleship.

Look at v 3 *[3] Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [4] No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. [5] An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. [6] It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. [7] Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.* We can sum up verse 3-7 with this phrase

- **Stay focused (v3-7)**

That's the heart of what we just read. A key to pressing on is to stay focused. It's like my dad would tell me in sports, keep your eye on the ball.

And in verse 3 Paul sets up for us a list of illustrations, all with the same point. Stay focused. *[3] Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.* We are going to come back to the suffering part later in the message, so we aren't going to focus on that now. For now, just let that word soldier set in.

I mean, that's quite a statement and a picture for us. A soldier fights. He doesn't have the luxury of getting distracted or side tracked. Pauls shows us in verse 4 *[4] No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.* This is what it looks like to stay focused as we press on:

- **Live for the leader (v4)**

*[4] No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.* In Paul's day the Roman army was mixed in with the civilians. They would be out walking around doing the bidding of the emperor. And they could not afford to get distracted. They had a mission. They had orders.

So do you. You have orders from the king of kings. To serve him. To live for him. To follow his command. — Live for the leader. His way is your way. His path is the one you take. You aim to please him, the one who enlisted you.

Then we get a new illustration. *[5] An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.* According to the rules? What does that mean? It means this:

- **Do what he says (v5)**

Now I love summer because it brings 2 things that I love - swimming & baseball. And know I'm probably making enemies when I say GO Cubs. But every year, MLB seems to change the rules. How big the bases are. How many times can you throw a pick off. The new ABS system. The pitch clock. The runners lane. Every year, more changes. And the players have to know these changes. If they don't stay focused and follow the rules, they aren't going to win. *An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules*

So it seems to me that Paul is saying that part of pressing on is to do what God says. Just like an athlete follows the official rules, Christians have to do what God says. Live how he wants you to. Obey him in everything. That type of obedience is what it takes to press on in your faith in Christ. Stay focused.

Next is our 3rd illustration: *[6] It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.* Here's the intent of this illustration:

- **Work hard for him (v6)**

Whatever you do, do it with all your heart. Don't be lazy and cut corners, especially when it comes to the things of God. Farmers are the best example of hard work. Up early, devoted to their job, and the day isn't done until the work is done. He is focused. He is pressing on and working hard. That's what is being said to you.

Work hard and press on. Last verse in this point:

*[7] Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.*

- **Learn his truth (v7)**

Paul ends this section by telling us to think upon the truths of Scripture - specifically what he just laid out for us about the soldier and the athlete and the farmer. About staying focused as a part of how we press on.

*[7] Think over what I say.* Not just Paul's words, but what Paul is telling you is to think and learn God's words. God's truth. The things that God says. You have to think about the Scriptures. You have to ponder it. You have to learn God's truth.

When was the last time you learned something about God's truth? When was the last time you sat down with your Bible and studied it, instead of just reading? When was the last time you read a book about God or discipleship? When was the last time you listened to a theological podcast? These things help you learn. And Paul promises that when you think, the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Even if you feel like you don't understand it, keep reading, keep studying, and keep learning. He will *give you understanding*. That's a promise for you.

4 ways that help you stay focused as Paul laid out in these illustrations. The soldier, the athlete, the farmer - they all have to press on. Look at v8:

*2 Timothy 2:8-13 [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. But the word of God is not bound!* It's not hard to interpret the meaning:

- **Remember The Gospel Of Jesus (v8-9)**

Remember Jesus Christ. The one who died and lives now. The offspring of David, the fulfillment of all God's promises, the Messiah, the Son of God. God in the flesh. Paul continually comes back to what Jesus has done and who Jesus is. It's the center of all reality.

And I'd like us to actually do what Paul says here, and remember Christ right now.

The Romans and Jews had already beaten him. They had already whipped him. They had already spat on him. He carried his own cross (the instrument of his death) up that hill. The soldiers laid him on that cross, nailed his flesh to that cross, and then stuck that cross upright in the ground with Jesus on it until he died hours later. Do you remember it?

And he suffered all of that for you. He paid the punishment for all of your sin. You should have been beaten. You should have been whipped. You should have been spat on and killed. But Jesus took all the pain that you deserved upon himself.

If you are going to press on in your faith, you have to remember the one who died for you. You have to keep coming back to the Gospel truth. It has to saturate your whole life. Like a dry rag that gets dropped in the water. Like that rag absorbs all of that water, your soul has to absorb and soak up the Gospel. So that you are saturated with the truth of Jesus. It's the energy you need to press on.

Are you filling yourself with it? Are you drinking in the life-giving water of the Gospel? Or are you still a dry rag? Are you still parched for the true thirst quenching eternal living water of the good news of Jesus? Refresh your soul with the Gospel. Remember what Jesus has done for you. *Risen from the dead* for you.

It's the reason Paul is suffering *9] for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!* Do you feel Paul's commitment? Look at his resolution in verse 10.

*[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. [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.*

The point here is to...

- **Endure suffering (v3, v10-13)**

Hard times are going to come. Difficulty and suffering are unavoidable, especially for a Christian. Look at what Paul is going through. He mentioned it in verse 3. Even in verse 9 he said he was suffering, but enduring it. In verse 10 he says that he would endure everything for the elect, for God's people. And then he quotes an early church creed to reinforce his point about pressing on. Look at v11...

I'll explain as we go along

*If we have died with him* (if we are united to Christ), *we will also live* (forever) *with him*; [12] *if we endure* (if we press on through hardship), *we will also reign with him* (in the New Heavens and New Earth); *if we deny him* (If we turn our backs on him completely), *he also will deny us*;

What's the point? The point is that we must endure and press on through suffering - as opposed to denying the Lord and giving up. If you deny him, he will deny you. If we choose to turn our back on him completely, he will turn his face away from us. But those who endure, who trust God through suffering, we get the privilege to reign with Christ forever. Because we pressed on through the sufferings of life.

Suffering is going to look very different for any given Christian. Sometimes it's physical suffering. Sometimes it's emotional. Sometimes it's relational. But suffering always makes you more holy and like his son. It's a way that God builds your Christian character and helps you to press on. Does suffering make you give up or give in? Don't let it. Resolve to endure. And the reason that you can is...

- **Because God is faithful**

*[13] if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.*

Meaning that even in your doubts, even in the weakness of your faith, God is faithful to help you endure. That's the difference between denying and faithless. Denying is turning away from Christ, faithless is being spiritually weak. But even in your weakness, he shows his faithfulness. Faithfulness is this:

God has an unending commitment (not obligation) to care for you. He never leaves you. He never abandons you. Because you are his. *for he cannot deny himself.* Because you are in Christ himself, God will never leave you. That is the hope that helps us endure. To know that whatever hardship may come, God is there. He's on the throne. He's in control. He's always with us. Faithful to you as you press on.

5 ways that you ought to press on in your faith. Maybe you feel like giving up and giving in. Maybe you feel like this is all too much. God's Word tells you to press on. To keep fighting. Keep walking. Keep enduring. Be strengthened in Jesus and press on for his kingdom and his cause. Let's pray.

Lord, would you help us? Help us to run the race. Help us fight the good fight of faith. Strengthen us by your grace to live out discipleship - to stay focused, to remember the Gospel of Jesus, and to endure to the end. May we live for your glory in all of it. You alone deserve it. So we turn our eyes now to worship you and glorify your name as we press on for your cause and for your kingdom. Let's stand and let's worship together.