

How to Hang In (2 Timothy 2:8-13)

Big Idea: Suffer because you're taking the same path as Jesus, because his mission is unstoppable, and because your future depends on your endurance.

Last week I talked about a very unsexy topic: suffering. I mentioned things like persecution, hardship, self-discipline, and hard work. Not exactly a light summer sermon topic!

But it's important. Here's the basic message we got from 2 Timothy 2:3-7:

- Every follower of Jesus is called to share in suffering.
- At the very least, this will involve shifting our loyalties like a soldier, disciplining ourselves like an athlete, and working hard like a farmer.
- All of us should spend some time thinking about what this could look like in our lives, knowing that God will help us pinpoint areas that need to change.

If you're a follower of Jesus, you're called to share in suffering. One day that suffering will be over, but that day hasn't come yet. We'd better learn how to share in suffering, because it's part of the normal Christian life until Jesus comes back.

That sounds pretty demanding. I think it's fair to ask where we'll get the resources to live that way. In the passage we just read, Paul gives us the answer. He gives us his secret to how we were able to live this way, even if it meant prison and death.

If the normal Christian life is sharing in suffering, where will we get what we need to endure? Why endure? In this passage, Paul gives us reasons and arguments for why

we should embrace suffering rather than running away from it, and why we should press on with confidence and courage even when we're suffering.

Paul gives us three reasons to endure in this passage:

Reason One: We're Taking the Same Path As Jesus

Read verses 8 and 9: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal."

Let's see if I can unpack Paul's logic. I watched a movie called [Elephant Queen](#) last week. The film is about Athena, the herd's matriarch, who tries to protect her herd when forced to leave their waterhole. She has to lead the tribe 200 miles to the next waterhole. How does she find the next waterhole? She remembers the way that was passed down to her that she learned from earlier generations. It helps that they create paths as they migrate that they can follow whenever they need to migrate.

Think about that image: following a path that others have walked before you. You're not blazing a trail. You are walking a well-worn path, and you know that path ends in a very good place.

I think that's what Paul means when he says in verse 8, "Remember Jesus Christ." Think about what Jesus did for us. Even Jesus had to walk the path of suffering and death before he was exalted. Even Jesus suffered. When we suffer, we're taking the exact same path that Jesus did before us. We're walking on a well-worn path. Nobody will suffer more than Jesus did. It's just not going to happen.

What path did Jesus take? He took the path directly to the cross. Jesus, the promised Messiah, the offspring of David, came with the purpose of suffering and dying for us. He bears the sins of anyone who trusts in him for salvation and life. And that path of suffering led to his torture and crucifixion, but it didn't end there. The path continued with his resurrection and exaltation. Any time we share in suffering with Jesus, we take the same path and we're promised the same life on the other side of death.

I love how Paul Miller puts it in [J-Curve](#):

We embrace the whole pattern of Jesus's life as the story of our own life ... You are entering the sufferings of Christ; the pattern of his life is now the pattern of your life. Now you are beginning to love and get to know Jesus in new and deeper ways. This is your glory!"

Paul followed the path that Jesus blazed, and it led him to a prison in Rome, and eventually to death. He was bound in chains as a criminal. Instead of worrying about it, Paul was fine with it, because he knew where that path ultimately leads. It's actually the path to life.

So every time you share in suffering as you follow Jesus, remember that you're taking the same path that Jesus did. You're in very good company. And it's a path that leads to the best kind of life possible. Remember Jesus. Take the same path that he took.

Why endure? The first reason to endure is that we're taking the same path as Jesus. Here's the second motive.

Reason Two: His Mission is Unstoppable

Do you remember this year's SuperBowl? It seems like it was about twenty years ago. The 49ers came out and by the third quarter it looked like they were going to win the game. The Kansas City Chiefs were down 20-10 with only 8 minutes remaining. But you know what Kansas city did. They came back with 21 unanswered points to steal the victory. They looked unstoppable. The Chiefs had three double-digit comebacks in a four-week span, and stand alone in NFL history. They set records.

Whose team would you want to be on in with only 9 minutes left in the game? The 49ers, who looked like they had the game locked up? Or the Chiefs who ultimately won? Stupid question, right? You would rather be down mid-game if you knew that you were going to win in the end.

Okay. Another question. Who would you rather be: Paul, locked in prison and about to die, or Caesar on his throne? When Paul wrote this letter, nobody would have envied Paul's position. He was "bound with chains as a criminal." The word criminal is a rare term, used for insurrectionists, and murderers, not just garden-variety criminals. Paul's situation is dire. He is innocent and a Roman citizen, and yet he's chained. Chains were an affront to a Roman citizen, and yet he's in chains. Nobody would envy him.

But Paul says, "But the word of God is not bound! 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" (2:9-10). They can lock Paul up, but they can't lock the Word of God up. It's unstoppable. And Paul knows that the gospel will keep spreading no matter what happens to him.

Not only that, but he's willing to endure any suffering for the sake of the gospel advancing. He can endure imprisonment, beatings, persecution, and illness knowing

that he's playing a role in spreading the good news about Jesus, and that word will continue to spread no matter what happens to him. The fact that they can't stop the Word gives us courage, because the worst they can do is to stop us. They can put me in prison, but they can't imprison God's Word.

One of the greatest examples of this is the church in China. Christianity came to China took root after Robert Morrison, a missionary with the London Missionary Society, arrived in 1807 and translated the first Chinese Bible in 1819. In the 200 years since then, Christianity in China has gone through trial after trial, including the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and persecution by the Chinese Communist Party (1948-present). And it's grown, according to some estimates, to over a hundred million believers.

See how that works? If you're a Christian in China you don't need to fear the Communist Party because you know the gospel's unstoppable. It's the same for us. The worst they can do is kill us. But they can't kill or imprison God's Word. The gospel "cannot be defeated but only advanced by the suffering of his servants" (John Piper). We can't lose in the long term. The only way to lose is if we don't endure.

Why endure? Because we're taking the same path as Jesus, and because our cause is unstoppable. But there's one more motive for why we should endure.

Motive Three: Your Future Depends on Your Endurance

Verses 11 to 13 gives us what looks like an early hymn with four lines. The first two lines are about those who remain faithful:

*If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;*

The next two lines are about those who don't remain faithful, with an added statement at the end:

*if we deny him, he also will deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.*

A lot rides on which lines apply to us. If we are faithful in suffering, if we endure, we will live with him. Not only that, we will reign with him. Imagine that. Could there be any better news? We will be co-regents with Christ. If we endure to the end, we will one day have unbelievable honor and responsibility as we co-reign with Christ.

But what if we don't endure? Verse 12 repeats what Jesus said in Matthew 10:33: if we deny him, he will deny us. I think verse 13 is actually a warning: God gives grace to us if we waiver, but not to the point of apostasy. If we are faithless, God will remain faithful to himself. He can't be messed with. He will defend his honor. Don't mess with God. This is not a game. Don't presume on his kindness.

A lot rides on our faithfulness.

Last week Paul called us to share in suffering. This week he gives us three reasons why. **Suffer because you're taking the same path as Jesus, because his mission is unstoppable, and because your future depends on your endurance.**

It's what kept Paul going in prison. It's what will keep us going, even when things get hard.

What do you want to do with your life? What's your main goal? Are you looking for prosperity and security? It's how most of us live. It's okay, but it's not what you were made for.

What about doing something else with your life? What about spending your life living faithfully for Jesus, telling others the good news, even if it costs you everything? There's no way for you to lose. You'll be taking the same path as Jesus. Your mission is unstoppable. And your future depends on it. If you're faithful, you will reign with Jesus himself.

Lord, thank you for summoning us for a mission that matters. Enable us to answer the call and spend our lives on something that will matter for eternity.

I think of the prayer of the famous old preacher George Whitfield: "Lord, when You see me in danger of nestling down, put a thorn in my nest." Lord, use this passage as a thorn in our nest so that we don't settle down. Help us to spend our lives faithfully serving you. And by your grace may we endure and one day reign with Jesus our Savior. We pray in his name. Amen.