

Entrust and endure

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[0 : 0 0] And let me just again greet you. If you don't know me, if you're new to this church this morning, my name is Pastor Brian. And we're in the middle of a series of 2 Timothy this morning, and in God's providence, I think some of the things we'll talk about will tie in quite closely with what Reverend George has just shared with us as well.

Can I ask that you keep your Bibles open in front of you, that's the most important thing. And also in your bulletin, there's a sermon outline that will help you to follow along. So that's what you need, a Bible and a sermon outline.

But of course what we need most of all is God's help, so let's pray. Heavenly Father, we just ask again that you will be at work by your Holy Spirit as your word is explained and proclaimed.

I just pray, Lord, that you would indeed help us to feel the challenge of your words this morning. But indeed, you will also help us to feel the hope that we have in the Lord Jesus.

All this we pray in the name of Christ. Amen. Now I used to live in London for a number of years, and I was privileged to live just 10 minutes away from the Tower of London.

[1 : 1 1] It's actually a castle just next to the River Thames, and was used as a prison in the 16th and 17th centuries. It's quite a fun place to spend an afternoon as a tourist.

And within the Tower of London is a block known as Jewel House, and that's where the British crown jewels are kept. The crown jewels are a collection of royal ceremonial objects, which include things like crowns and ropes and the biggest clear-cut diamond in the world.

They're not insured against loss and are unlikely ever to be sold, so apparently they are officially priceless. So you can imagine that they are very heavily guarded.

They are protected by bomb-proof glass. The door to the room which they are housed in is a meter thick. In addition, there are over 100 CCTV cameras watching visitors as they enter into this room.

And they are guarded by guards called the yeomen waders, and they serve for life. The state, obviously, is very serious about guarding this treasure.

[2 : 2 8] Well, last week, Paul has been exhorting Timothy also to guard a treasure. Except this time, the treasure isn't just any jewel, but the gospel itself.

It's the priceless message that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sin has been won, and God's new kingdom is being established.

And Paul says, I'm handing this down to you, Timothy, so guard the good deposit. And the reason that Timothy needs to guard this well is quite simple.

Satan wants to rob the church of this good treasure. For if Satan succeeds, he will bring down the church.

You can have the most amazing building facilities, and even the most interesting activities. But if there is no gospel, there is no church. And throughout the New Testament, as well as church history, Satan has a simple two-fold strategy to try to achieve his purposes.

- [3 : 43] The first is through persecution. During New Testament times, it was both the Jewish leaders, as well as the Roman authorities, who led the first wave of persecution.
- The emperor Nero was living when 2 Timothy was written, and he ordered the Christians then to be tortured, blaming them for a horrific fire in Rome.
- About 250 years later, another Roman emperor, Diocletian, systematically stripped the Christians of their legal rights and ordered them to worship the Roman gods.
- In the 7th and 8th centuries, the rise of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula meant persecution of a more subtle form. Not necessarily direct oppression, although that could still happen, but treatment of Christians as second-class citizens.
- So, for example, the Christian communities there were often heavily taxed into poverty, which would then be an incentive to convert. The French Revolution of the 18th century resulted in the deportation of clergy and the closing of churches.
- [5 : 03] In that big Notre Dame cathedral, many of you will be familiar with it, they covered up the Christian symbols and put an altar in there to the goddess of reason or liberty.
- But the 20th century has often been seen as the century of the persecuted church. The historians agree that more Christians have been killed in the 20th century than in all the previous centuries combined.
- That includes the Soviet Union, communist China, Pol Pot's killing fields in Cambodia, and totalitarian and totalitarian North Korea. But what is Satan's purpose in persecution?
- Now, it's interesting to hear the words of Nick Ripken, who was a missionary to East Africa and who's written this very sobering book called *The Insanity of God*.
- If you ever want to read an account of the persecuted church, now that's one to read. And he says this, it's on your outline. Believers living in the midst of persecution suggest strongly that the goal of Satan is not to beat, torture, or kill believers.
- [6 : 22] The goal of Satan and his persecutors, suffering believers remind us, is to silence believers, to make believers lose or give up their voice, and to diminish witness.
- The most successful persecution happens when an immediate family member, a boss, a spouse, or the culture in general, pressures the convert into remaining quiet, keeping faith private.
- Satan wants people, in other words, not so much to be killed, but to abandon the gospel. The second strategy of Satan is through false teaching.
- If you can't silence Christians, then get them speaking the wrong thing. Again, if you were to look through the first few centuries of the early church, you will find all sorts of heresies floating about with all sorts of fancy names.
- Gnosticism, Arianism, Doceticism, Apollinarianism, and so on. And all of them twist an aspect of Christian teaching in one way or another, often by downplaying Christ's divinity or humanity.
- [7 : 42] And when we explore false teaching throughout church history, we discover there's nothing new under the sun. A lot of contemporary false teaching is simply a variation of these heresies.
- We won't have time today to explore them. That's not our purpose this morning. But feel free to look them up later if you have time. And false teaching is cruel because as Eugene Peterson, the pastor and translator of the message, once said, it's also on your outline, a lie about God is a lie about life.
- Telling a person a lie about God distorts reality, perverts life, and damages all the processes of living.

So heresy actually keeps you enslaved rather than liberates you. And once again, Satan wants people to abandon the true gospel because then they will lose access to true life.

Those were exactly the two things that Paul and Timothy had to contend with. In chapter 2, verse 9, we can see that Paul is suffering persecution from the state to the point where he is being chained like a criminal.

[9 : 08] But there is also false teaching floating around. Chapter 2, verses 17 to 18 tells us about the presence of teachers who have wandered away from the truth. And we'll examine that more in the coming weeks.

And so both the Christian and the teaching of the gospel are threatened. And so the question is, if this is Satan's strategy, what is Paul's strategy to safeguard the gospel's future?

What must we do to faithfully guard the good deposit? And Paul will give a threefold answer in today's passage. And trust, endure, and remember.

And so make sure your Bibles are open in front of you to 2 Timothy and let's learn from the strategy of Paul. Firstly, and trust. Verse 2, and the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses and trust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

Now, what would you do when you're faced with persecution or false teaching? When that kind of pressure is on, it's tempting to keep a low profile and gather in your holy huddle and keep the gospel to yourself.

[10 : 37] That's guarding the gospel, right? When you're losing people to the other false teachers, it's tempting to draw your remaining members together, make sure that they never engage with anyone else, and take a defensive posture.

That's protecting the gospel, right? But Paul says, no, Timothy, you need to be proactive. You need to think strategically.

You need to go on a recruitment drive. The way to guard this gospel is not by holding onto it with tight fists, but to hand it out with open hands.

But who is Timothy to hand it to? He's not to entrust the good deposit simply to anybody. Rather, in verse 2, he lists out two main criteria.

They must first of all be reliable people, or faithful, as another translation puts it, and second of all, they must be qualified to teach others.

[11 : 48] Let me put it another way. Timothy must entrust the teaching of the gospel to people with two Cs. They must have gospel convictions, and they must have competence to be able to teach the gospel to others.

Now, why must they have both? Well, if they have competence, but not convictions, then it's easy for them to compromise and drift.

When faced with other teaching that twists or contradicts the gospel, they will shrink back and not be willing to stand up for God's truth. They must remain faithful to the pattern of sound teaching, and be motivated by a desire to steward what has been put in their trust, rather than by greed or fame or something else.

After all, Vigilus and Hermogenous, we met them last week in chapter 1, verse 15, could very well have had competence, but without convictions, they deserted Paul and abandoned the gospel.

They were not reliable or faithful. But what if they have convictions, but not competence? You see, to be qualified here means to be up to the task.

[13 : 21] You need to be up to the task of articulating the gospel freshly to a new generation, to be up to the task of defending the gospel against new errors, to be up to the task of applying the gospel to a set of new questions and circumstances.

You need to be able to teach. If you're not up to the task, then there's a danger that the authentic gospel will not be handed down because the message is all muddled.

Then you won't be able to guard the good deposit. And so Paul says, entrusted to the right people.

just as this gospel was entrusted to me by Jesus, and just as I have entrusted it to you, Timothy, well, entrusted to people of gospel convictions and competence.

And notice verse 2 again, that these people are then also to entrust others with it. and so there's four generations in one verse.

[14 : 39] There's Jesus to Paul, Paul to Timothy, Timothy to faithful people, and those faithful people to other faithful people.

And that way, the gospel will be safeguarded. Now you might protest. Is that too high a bar?

Surely if anyone wants to be a preacher, or a scripture union worker, or a Bible college lecturer, or even a small group leader, or Sunday school teacher, well, we should encourage them.

We just heard how few people there are out there serving the Lord full time. Surely the only criteria should be willingness and sincerity? But perhaps an illustration here would help.

Let me tell you about the Parthenon. The Parthenon was a Greek temple that is widely regarded as one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world.

[15 : 45] But by 1885, this building was in an advanced state of decay and in need of restoration. And so the people used iron clamps and rods to try to hold together the slabs of marble as they set out to do the restoration work.

What they didn't realize, however, was that iron expands and contracts with changes in temperature. And they also failed to rust proof the iron.

And so as the iron began to corrode and expand, it actually began to crack the marble stones it was meant to preserve.

So instead of saving the building, it actually caused it to decay more and meant that future generations had to work even harder to restore the building.

Well, the same thing happens when we entrust the teaching of the gospel word to people who neither have the competence nor the convictions. Now, if they do have convictions and competence and character, which is one more C that 1 Timothy 3 adds, then by all means possible, please encourage them.

[17 : 04] God's people needs them. But if they are clearly lacking in these Cs, well, we shouldn't. Or we're just going to cause more cracks and decay and give ourselves more heart ache in the future.

And so a church should seek to deliberately identify and encourage those who might be the ones who can teach the gospel to others.

It's very easy for a congregation to put other things on the agenda because they can seem more urgent. Keep that youth program running, make sure that there are enough musicians this Sunday.

And it's very easy for a pastor to let urgent things dictate his agenda. There's always another hospital visit to make or another sermon to preach.

Now those are all obviously good and necessary things to do. But Paul is thinking not just short-term but long-term. We must seek to entrust this gospel to others.

[18 : 18] And so a pastor as he strives to teach the Bible faithfully, as he seeks to ensure that there's disciple-making and caring going on, must also be looking to identify those whom he can pass the gospel on to.

And the congregation's job is to encourage such people when they are identified and to confirm their gifts and character. If someone is doing a great job in leading the Bible study or teaching the Bible to kids, tell them.

Encourage them. And tell the pastor. If he's living a godly life, well, encourage him. And if the pastor and the congregation both do this, well, God will certainly ensure that such faithful and qualified leaders will emerge.

He will not allow his church to go without. And so that is one of the things that I'm trying to do, although I admit sometimes it's a bit of a struggle to keep it on the agenda.

That's why you are beginning to see more young men lead the prayer meeting. And indeed, one of them will preach in this 2 Timothy series later on. That's why behind the scenes, I try to meet with a small number of people to disciple and equip them.

[19 : 46] That's why next month, I'm going to KL for a couple of days to help out with a small conference called Entrust, which is designed to help people considering full-time ministry think it true.

It's the first time this conference is being run, and I can't think of any other Christian conference in Malaysia that does the same thing. And this conference exists because we want to take seriously 2 Timothy 2 verse 2 for the Malaysian church and encourage the right people to offer themselves for such service to God's people here in Malaysia.

But that's not the only thing we need to do to guard the good deposit. And so Paul says secondly, endio. Endio.

Verse 1, You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And then down to verse 3, join with me in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

You see, we really have only two choices, to join with Paul or to abandon him. And following Paul looks like the harder option.

[21 : 06] And so Paul wants to encourage us to join with him. And he encourages us here with words that were similar to last week in chapter 1. Draw on divine power, Timothy.

Look back at that grace in Christ Jesus and remember how that showed God's power and be strengthened for the work. But don't just look back, Timothy.

Look forward as well. To strengthen Timothy's resolve to join with him in suffering and to end your, Paul now draws on three pictures, three different occupations, the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer.

And all of these pictures are related. All of them have an ultimate goal or prize in view. All of them advocate a single mindedness necessary to endure.

And that's why Paul brings them to our attention. So let's look first of all at the soldier, verse 4. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

[22 : 22] You see, there's a war on. Satan is hell-bent on robbing the church of the gospel. And so a soldier needs to stay alert.

If the enemy is active, it would be strange for the soldier to just sit around watching Netflix or playing fantasy football, wouldn't it? He needs to be single-minded in focus.

He can't get entangled in civilian affairs. Now, certainly he might have longings for an easy life, and one day that will come. The war will be over.

But for now, he only has one aim, and one aim only, to please his commanding officer. That's his goal, to suffer for the sake of the gospel.

And that's our goal as well, especially for those in leadership and full-time ministry. And that's our privilege. Jesus Christ has enlisted us for such service.

[23 : 36] And he says, we can live our lives in such a manner that we can please him, the one who made all things.

isn't that an incredible thought? You can please God. And so live your lives in such a manner that the gospel is clearly number one.

Whenever we're guarding the good deposit, one of the potential dangers is distraction. There are many good and worthy causes in this world.

Climate change, cultural renewal, combating poverty, and so on. And let me just state clearly in case I misunderstood, that those are all things Christians should care about because they love their neighbour and because God has asked us to look after his creation.

salvation. But the danger for every generation is to let those causes overwhelm and push aside the gospel rather than let those concerns come about organically because we live for Jesus as Lord.

[24 : 52] Often what happens, according to church history, is that a church gets more passionate about a particular cause rather than Jesus himself.

They get distracted. And then the gospel begins not so much to be disbelief, but to be sidelined. And what usually happens is that the generation after them keeps hearing about helping the poor or whatever worthy cause is being championed at that moment, and very little about who Jesus is and what he has done.

And they begin to think, oh, combating the poor or whatever it is, sorry, combating poverty or whatever it is, is the core of Christianity.

They begin to lose their grasp of what the gospel is. And by the third generation, the gospel has gone completely missing because it wasn't passed down. No.

We must guard the good deposit by making sure we are single-minded in focus on the gospel and then let all our good works flow out of that.

[26 : 05] Next, the athlete, verse 5. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.

again, there is a prize in view, the victor's crown. And to ensure you get the prize, you have to play according to the rules.

Now, to understand what Paul is getting at, it helps to know that during those times, those who took part in the Isthmian Games, which is like their Olympics, had to swear on oath that they had undertaken strict training for 10 months prior to the Games.

Otherwise, they were disqualified. And so only those who had put in the hard work of daily training could take part and thus be qualified to gain the prize.

No shortcuts allowed. And so there is a single-mindedness in approach. And we just mentioned the dangers of distraction, but another danger, of course, is discomfort.

[27 : 23] None of us like discomfort, but any attempt to avoid suffering and thus endearing, Paul says, is like a breach of the rules.

Suffering is part of following Jesus. That's the rule. But if you compete according to the rules, there is a reward.

The victor's crown lies in wait. So end the year. As is often said, no pain, no gain.

So be single-minded in our approach. Finally, there's the farmer, verse 6. The hard-working farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

I've never been a farmer, but as far as I can see, farming looks quite exhausting. From early on in the morning till late in the night, you have to ensure that the soil is right, the seeds are planted, you have to work out the weather patterns, and so on.

[28 : 32] It's not glamorous. But as the farmer works hard, well, there too will be a price, a share of the crops.

that's the goal. But he will need to work hard. He's to be single-minded in his effort. As we labour on for the gospel, we might not see immediate reward.

And one more potential danger is that of discouragement. As we share and teach and disciple, as we identify and entrust the gospel to others, the growth can be very slow.

But on the other hand, if there is no labour and suffering for the gospel, the growth will be zero. So we must work hard.

We must endure. And it's understandable, therefore, that Timothy and ourselves will be reluctant to serve Jesus wholeheartedly when it involves such suffering.

[29 : 45] And that's why verse 7, Paul says, reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. We need to constantly keep in mind our future prize.

As one commentator nicely puts it, we need to keep in mind that beyond warfare is victory, beyond athletic effort, a price, beyond agricultural labour, a crop.

And dear, all is not in vain. Now, wait a minute, you might say, haven't you been telling us over the past two weeks that 2 Timothy is first of all to be applied to those in full-time ministry?

so maybe none of this is relevant to us. Now, you're right. The initial application of these verses is primarily to people like me.

Paul is writing to Timothy. I need to be single-minded. I need to endure. And so the application for the congregation, first of all, is to pray for people like me.

[30 : 58] And I appreciate that much more than you could ever imagine. But remember as well that all believers are expected to join in suffering for the gospel.

So yes, I am indeed to model for you this kind of single-mindedness and endurance. Well, that's my challenge. But all believers are also then to be of the same mind and join in as we face different kinds of suffering.

So, endure. all is not in vain. And we can be certain of that when we do one more thing.

Here's the third part of Paul's strategy. Remember. In verses 8 to 13, Paul calls on us to do two things. He wants us to remember the pattern and power of the gospel in verses 8 to 10, and the promises and character of God in verses 11 to 13.

So, remember the pattern and power of the gospel, verse 8. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.

[32 : 19] This is my gospel. So, Paul is saying, remember who you serve, David's son. Someone from the royal line.

And not just any royal line, but a special royal line. For back in the Old Testament, God had promised David that from his line would come a king who would reign forever.

And Jesus comes from that line. And remember what David's son has accomplished. He is risen from the dead. He's not just an eternal king, but a resurrected king.

Well, this is the gospel that's been entrusted to us, the one we're guarding. It's a gospel that declares the power of this king as he conquers death and reigns forever.

It's a gospel, verse 9, that cannot be chained even if its messengers are chained. Let me illustrate this.

[33 : 26] There was once an old female doctor in Beijing known as Auntie Mabel. She was from a wealthy family, she had a large house, she was unmarried, she looked after a sick brother, and she was Christian.

All that changed as a result of the Cultural Revolution more than half a century ago. She was stripped of her post as a doctor, she was cast out of her house to live in a shed, and since she was a Christian, she was constantly under suspicion.

She was even beaten up and made to parade in the streets while wearing a play card, a signboard, with her crimes written on them. She was accused of distributing Bibles, and in those days, the only Bible allowed was Mao's little red book.

As a result, she was tempted to commit suicide, but did not follow through. She said later, somehow God gave me the strength to endure, I never knew how.

Later on, after Chairman Mao died, and the Cultural Revolution quietened down, she once more began to receive a stream of visitors. Many of them were high-ranking members of the Communist Party.

[34 : 46] And to her astonishment, they asked her for Bibles. She asked them, why did you come to a house of a 70-year-old to ask for Bibles?

They replied, during the Cultural Revolution, you had to show a sign displaying your crimes. One of them was that you distributed Bibles.

So now we know where to find them. You see, humans may be chained, but God's word cannot be chained. As Auntie Mabel endured, she was laying the foundations for her future ministry, which would be to supply Bibles to members of the Communist Party.

She could never have imagined that. The gospel is too powerful to be restrained. The Cultural Revolution came and went, but the word of the Lord endears forever.

But Paul also says, remember the pattern of the gospel. For Jesus to rise again and be shown to be king, he has to die first.

[36 : 04] He has to suffer first. The eternal and resurrected king is first of all the suffering and dying king. It's suffering first, then glory later.

It's man of sorrows before man of splendor. And that is why Paul is suffering. That is why Timothy should expect suffering, and that is why we should expect suffering.

As a preacher friend of mine puts it nicely, the experience of the messenger should mirror the content of the message. And when we are willing to suffer, we catch people's attention.

If we abandon the gospel at the first sight of trouble, well, it can't be worth very much, can it? That's what people will conclude. But, if like Paul in verse 10, we are willing to endure everything, well, we may in turn help others to attain that eternal glory that can only be found when someone puts his trust in Jesus.

And that's what Auntie Mabel did. She said, every single day was hard. I can't say that I saw Jesus or even felt close to him most of the time.

[37 : 33] But as she endured the situation, she became a source of transformation to others as she put the word of God in their hands. And as we remember the power and pattern of the gospel, we similarly trust in the promises and character of God.

In verses 11 to 13, Paul quotes a trustworthy saying. And notice how they all look forward to the future. We will, we will, he will.

And Paul says let that future shape your present. Verse 11, if we died with him, we will also live with him.

Because we will enjoy abundant life in the age to come, well, we can die to self today. Or look at verse 12, if we endure, we will also reign with him.

As we suffer along with Paul and remain steadfast in the face of persecution and false teaching, we will enjoy his glorious kingdom in the age to come.

[38 : 52] Endurance will lead to enjoyment. That is God's promise. But don't forget the other side of the coin.

Verses 12 and 13. If we disown him, he will also disown us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

You see, if we don't stick with Jesus, he won't stick with us, for he has to remain true to his character.

Now verse 13, I think, is meant to be taken in parallel with verse 12. It's actually meant to be taken as a warning, not as a comfort.

If we are faithless, God must remain faithful to his character as one who is just. Because he cannot disown himself, therefore he has to disown us, if we are faithless.

[39 : 59] next week there will be words of comfort. Paul will remind us that God knows and keeps those who belong to him. But here in verse 13, he wants us not to forget.

If we say that God is faithful, we cannot pick and choose which promise he is faithful to. If we endure, we will reign with him.

God will keep his promise. But if we disown him, he will also disown us. God will also keep that promise.

And so here is Paul's strategy. And trust, and deal, and remember. When faced with the difficulties that come with serving Christ, keep on doing this.

Look to the future. Identify the right people to pass on the gospel to. And stay single-minded in running the race.

[41 : 11] There was a pastor who lived in the Soviet Union. And he had to watch with his very own eyes as the KGB beat his own son in front of him because he wouldn't reveal the location of an underground printing press.

And the pastor couldn't take it. He said to the KGB, enough, spare my son, I will tell you everything. But the son screamed, don't tell them anything father, I can see Jesus coming and he's beautiful.

This pastor said years later, I just cannot describe to you the emotions that went through me as my son died. It was a tragedy. And yet I was thankful, even envious, that my son is now in the bosom of Jesus.

If we died with him, we will also live with him. And my friends, this is where we are going.

God did not spare his own son. And he raised him from the dead. There was suffering, then glory.

[42 : 34] So be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Let's pray. heavenly father, we are mindful here that people have come this morning in differing circumstances, some in joyful circumstances, some in circumstances that are difficult.

So I pray, Lord, whatever people are going through this morning, will you help them to continue running the race, help them not to give up living for Jesus, help them to end your and we pray especially that you would raise up faithful men and women who are qualified to teach others, who will be faithful to you, so that they can themselves be models of this kind of suffering.

And father, please help us to keep our eyes on the prize, for we know that if we died with Jesus, we will also live with him.

For his name's sake we pray. Amen.