

How to Endure Suffering

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No one enjoys suffering, but suffering is a necessary, normal part of the Christian life. In fact, the Scripture says we can expect hardships and suffering to increase (2 Tim. 2:3; 3:1–4, 13), so we must be prepared.

We learn from the book of 2 Timothy that we may experience suffering as a result of our testimony, our godly living, or our stand for truth (2 Tim. 1:8; 2:8–9, 17–18; 3:6–8, 12). We may also experience suffering when we are rejected or left alone (2 Tim. 1:15; 4:9–11; 4:16), or as a natural consequence to our fleshly, worldly desires (2 Tim. 2:22).

Suffering will indeed come, but God can give us grace and power to overcome every trial and to fulfill our purpose and mission in His kingdom. In his second epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul shares some important truths about how we can endure suffering.

Ten Principles for Enduring Suffering

1. Don't forget why you are suffering.

Remember your purpose and Whom you serve! The Apostle Paul said he was willing to suffer for the proclamation of the Gospel, for the sake of the elect, and for the glory of God. Our suffering, big or little, can be used to bring about the same purposes.

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead . . . as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal” (2 Tim. 2:8-9).

“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 Tim. 2:10).

“To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (2 Tim. 4:18b).

2. Remember that you are a prisoner of Christ, not of your circumstances or other people.

“Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner” (2 Tim. 1:8).

3. Keep going back to the things you know to be true from God’s Word.

Don’t doubt in the dark what you have seen in the light. Remember what you received as a result of your salvation in Christ (2 Tim. 1:5). Remember your calling and the grace of God (2 Tim. 1:1, 9-12).

“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13).

4. Keep doing whatever God has called you to do.

“Persevere, stay the course, and be faithful, regardless of any opposition or hardship” (2 Tim. 4:1–5).

“The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching . . . As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:3a, 5).

5. Trust God to deal with those who oppose the truth.

Don’t take matters into your own hands or become bitter and argumentative.

“Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:23–26).

6. Remember times in the past when the Lord delivered or rescued you.

“Be quick to praise Him and testify to others” (2 Tim. 3:11; 4:16–17).

“The Lord stood by me and strengthened me . . . So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth.” (2 Tim. 4:17)

7. Rely on the resources God has given you:

- The grace of God (2 Tim. 1:2, 9; 2:1; 4:22).
- The gift of God—your God-given ability to serve Him (2 Tim. 1:6–7).
- The power of God (rather than your own strength) (2 Tim. 1:8; Phil. 2:13; Eph. 6:10).

- The indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 1:14).
- The Word of God, which will keep you grounded and give you perspective (2 Tim. 2:7, 9; 3:12–17; 4:1–2).

8. Remember that you are not alone in your suffering.

You already have:

- The presence of Christ (Matt. 28:20)
- The prayers of other believers (2 Tim. 1:3)
- The “fellowship of suffering”—other believers who are facing hardships for the sake of Christ (2 Tim. 1:8; Heb. 13:3; Col. 1:24).

Cultivate these to help you endure:

- Godly helpers – Find and cultivate a group of like-minded believers whose faithfulness and prayers can inspire and strengthen you (2 Tim. 1:2, 4–5; 4:9–13, 19–21).
- Godly heroes – Read the biographies of missionaries and other faithful believers so God can cultivate faith and wisdom in your heart (Heb. 13:7).
- “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness . . . continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it” (2 Tim. 3:10, 14).
- Godly heritage – As you learn about those who’ve gone before, you will be able to instill faith and courage in the next generation. Pass the baton to others.
- “And what you have heard from me . . . entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

9. No matter how difficult things are today, you can face the future with hope. Trust the truth of Scripture.

The Truth is:

- All wrongs will one day be righted (2 Tim. 3:8-9; 4:14).
- The Lord will deliver you from all evil—in His time and way (2 Tim. 4:17-18). In the meantime, counsel your heart according to the truth and promises of God (Psalm 27).
- “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18a).
- All your suffering, efforts, labors, and faithfulness will be rewarded in “that Day” when believers stand before the Lord (2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 2:12; 4:8; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; James 1:12).
- “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. 4:8).

- You will give an account, so guard the “deposit” entrusted to you (2 Tim. 1:12, 14; 1 Tim. 6:20).

10. In all your suffering, remember Jesus Christ.

Remember:

- His life and His suffering and sacrifice for you (2 Tim. 2:3)
- His triumph over Satan, sin, and death (2 Tim. 2:8)
- His power, promises, and presence (Matt. 28:18-20)
- What He is doing for you in heaven (John 14:2–3; Rom. 8:34)

"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:3–4).

Expect suffering—it is inevitable—but don't forget the powerful resource that you have in Christ. Entrust your life to His ever-present care and control. He loves you, and He will help you endure.