

Be Strong in Grace

Let us go before our Lord with the sermon, 2 Timothy 2, 1-7. Turn to your Bibles to 2 Timothy 2, verses 1-7. Let us listen attentively to the word of God.

2 Timothy 2, You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life that it may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also, if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.

Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. Let us pray. This is indeed our prayer, God, that we would consider what has been said by the Apostle Paul to his apprentice, who is now a full pastor, Timothy.

Lord, that we see much that is also applicable to us, and that we pray that you would give us understanding in all things that we need as believers. Amen. So once again, Paul urges Timothy to carry on his work as a Christian and a pastor.

He is not to be distracted nor turn away one side or the other from the path set before him. Rather, young Timothy should gird himself up for the important work that God has called him to draw from the fountains of grace more strength that he would have the might needed for the task at hand. That's what the first verse is basically about.

Be strong in the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is what it means to be strong in grace. And Paul offers some details here that I will flesh out for us, and so let's see what it means to be strong in the grace of our Lord, our God, and Savior, and how that is for us today.

And not in a possible task, but rather a word of encouragement, not just for him, but for each of us this morning.

Be Strong in Grace

The first point, be strong in grace, verse 1. Now, it's a specific call, to be sure, to Timothy, but it's based upon a general call for all of us. I think we can all agree when he urges and encourages Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, that that's also applicable for all believers.

It's not like the rest of us are, okay, you guys can be weak, you can just be spiritually couched potatoes, and you're fine. It's just only the pastors. They're special.

They're the holy ones. And you're going to see in Sunday School class that you had that kind of growth, unfortunately, where the pastors were considered somehow special Christians,

and you had the growth of the super holy, because they're living away from the world and really focusing upon God. And that's not the case here at all.

Now, it is true that it's given to Timothy, who he describes as what? My son. Now, we know that he's not biologically his son, but rather he is emphasizing here, reminding us again, the close mentor-apprentice relationship that they have. It's important that such things were used for thousands of years, because it makes sense.

That the man who knows what's going on at the job or in politics, in this case, the church, would pass on that knowledge to the next generation, because they're not going to live forever. So, it only makes sense that Paul and others, as we know, again, the New Testament is mostly written of Paul, we think of mostly Paul, but there are many other apostles and many other pastors beyond the apostleship, right? Missionaries and the like, they too did the same thing, I am sure. It's a helpful tool.

It's a very useful tool to have a mentor and apprenticeship relationship in the church of our Lord and Savior. Wherever leadership is needed, in fact, the old guard, people must raise up the new guard. And this tool, one of many, to be sure, that even Jesus did.

We don't think of it that way, I suppose, but He was mentoring. He was training. He was with them, in this case, day by day.

I can't imagine that that was the case with Paul. He seemed a very busy man, to be sure. He was in Ephesus for about two years, and he leaves and goes somewhere else.

He established the Church of Corinth, you know, across the Aegean Sea. He's a pretty busy man. He's not going to spend three years with Timothy, I'm sure, but we don't know that for a fact.

The point being, it's a very helpful tool. I encourage it for the church today. And I think it's something more significant than just a summer internship.

That's what we typically have. That's bare minimal. I'm glad we do that.

These are usually men coming out of seminary, their last year of seminary, and they find a local church. And they're there, and the pastor mentors them for the summer, teaches them the ropes, as it were. Hopefully, he's not treating him as a gopher.

When I was an engineer, we talked about being a gopher. Go for this, go for that. You weren't really doing engineer work, right? No, that's not what Paul does.

That's not what we should do. We ought to use this to help the Church of Jesus Christ. And this is clearly, as well, an application of the Fifth Commandment, is it not? What do I mean by that? Paul, not biologically related to Timothy, beyond being both Jews, is speaking to him in a relationship as a father to a son, metaphorically, but real in the sense it fits under the Fifth Commandment.

The Fifth Commandment covers all relationships, all positions of authority and following at jobs, clubs, society, business, anything. So, we read of the Old Testament of the prophets called fathers there, and first and second kings of queens called mothers. And that language is helpful to remind those involved in these relationships as this mentor-apprenticeship relationship, not to be impersonal in the matter, not just another number, but that we have proper duties and responsibilities, not only outwardly, but within our emotions and our hearts.

We ought to love and have consideration for those over us. Now, I don't mean love in an emotional sense, but I mean love in the sense of caring and wanting to be a good worker, for example, on the job, and certainly in the church, for here, for the pastor, to the young man becoming a new pastor, that he showed him a care that a father showed towards a son, some consideration and some help and the like. It helps us to become more personable to think in terms of the Fifth Commandment when it comes to our responsibilities one to another.

That's one of the advantages, and that's how God designed it, just like family. I mean, that's the picture, of course, in 1 Timothy 5. We went over that. I finished 1 Timothy a few weeks ago, when he describes every one of us in the church of God as brothers and sisters, as mothers and fathers.

That's the Fifth Commandment language. This call to be strong, the Lord our God, and the grace that he has given us in Christ Jesus is indeed for all of us, as I pointed out. And this grace is founded not in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

That's the language. Be strong. He's telling him, Timothy, you ought to stand firm and do your duty in the grace.

What about this grace that is in Christ Jesus, not in us? We are not perfect. We are not somehow holy and special. And so therefore God feels compelled to be gracious towards us, but rather it is the mercy, the long-suffering, the covenant of grace bestowed upon us through Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

It is grace in him. That's the significance here. It is not native to us.

We don't have the strength and power. It comes from the mercy of our Lord. Now, grace is not a substance that is poured into us.

That's something along the lines of the Roman Catholics and others who treat the sacraments that way and the priesthood and the like, but rather grace is unmerited favor that is only found in God in Christ Jesus. Unmerited favor. You can't work to please God out of hell, out of judgment, but rather it pleases God to save whom he will and gives mercy upon them in salvation through our Lord and Savior.

God in Christ is the fount of every spiritual blessing. We see that in Ephesians 1 and following. Therefore, all calls to Christian growth arise from this promise of grace, not what is native in you, but what is given to you by Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, as

we know from the rest of the Bible, that we are bestowed upon us the Spirit of God and he grants us various ascended gifts.

And we all have at least one common gift. That's the gift of grace, of unmerited favor, of kindness towards us, although we were unkind towards him and wicked sinners who deserved hell. The imperative, another way of looking at this description of what's going on here, you therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

You have lots of imperatives in the New Testament, that is commands, whether by the form of the verb or by the intent of the sentence, it doesn't matter. We know what a command is. This is something you ought to do.

The imperatives are based upon the indicative or what we have in Christ Jesus, what is true, which is the grace of our Lord and Savior. Because we are saved, therefore, we can fulfill and grow as Christians these imperatives or commands of the Christian life. Which is to say, another way, that we're not saved by our obedience even after we're saved.

We don't persevere in the sense of we can now really justify ourselves. All the more, it's a good thing Christ saved me because I'm really obedient now that I'm saved. That's not what that means.

It means, rather, we are always dependent upon him and we must always go to Jesus for our growth as believers. And this call to Timothy here, I also want to point out, is a call to Timothy. Believers, yes, are saved and saved by grace, but they themselves have a duty.

They must repent and believe. Even though repentance and belief, they are also a gift of grace. But the Spirit of God doesn't exercise it for us.

We are not robots. We are called, therefore, as Timothy is, to do our duty, to repent and to believe, and to work and to obey, to do our callings and vocations in life. And thus, the grace of our Lord and Savior is not excuse to do nothing.

It never is. We will fall short, to be sure, but grace is still with us and still overcomes our limitations by His mercy. Duty is ours.

The results are God's. That's the Christian walk. Personal responsibility is what we have in our Christian walk, as Timothy does here, and the rest of us as well, as we see in these verses.

Yes, the regeneration that is in being born again, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not involved any more than a baby is involved in being conceived and born. They have no choice in the matter.

But as the baby comes out and the baby is into this world and the baby is growing and living, he's doing all kinds of things. And so it is with the Christian life. In our sanctification, we are active.

In our regeneration, we are passive. We are alive and kicking, as we like to say. And that's important.

We decide. We don't decide. We believe.

We don't believe. We repent. We don't repent as believers, as Christians, because, of course, we still fall short.

We're not perfect. Timothy will fall short. Paul has fallen short.

We've all sinned. But our difference between ourselves and our neighbor is that we put our hope and faith in our grace of our Lord and Savior. Now, all the do this commands for believers, in other words, is not evidence of work salvation, but evidence that Christians are not passive.

That's different. We're not to wait for some impulse from the Holy Spirit to get up and do our duty, to be strong, and to carry on in our work, as we will see in the next few verses here. So we know this is our call, and it's rooted in the grace of our Lord and Savior.

Now, what does it mean to be strong in grace? Before he gets to the specifics there, he's going to talk about other things as well. But I want to give you a highlight of being strong in the grace of our Lord and Savior. And the clue is from the rest of the verses.

I mean, you could read that and say, that sounds great, Pastor. What exactly is that looking like? What does that mean in my life? And the clue you have here is in verses 2, 3, and 4, and in 5, where he says, endure hardships, avoid distractions, please our Lord and Savior, run hard the race, work hard on a farm. That's what he's talking about.

All these different ways of describing the Christian walk and what we are called as believers. We have the Spirit of God with us. This is true.

And he guides us and gives us grace and strength. And this is a blessing. But nevertheless, we are still active by the power that God has worked within us, and so that we can do these things.

We can be strong, that is, equipped for the hardship in the midst of our duty. We can be strong, that is, to use our gifts to follow the Lord and to be helpful in God's kingdom, as Timothy was in his particular office as a pastor. But before Paul gets into that, he has one more thing to give to Timothy.

Not just be strong, but, and the things that you have, verse 2, heard from me, that's the second point, among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men.

Be Committed to Pass on Truth

We have two duties here. Be strong and commit.

Hand over. What things? The things that you've heard from me, Paul tells us there in verse 2. Paul's teaching, right? And of course, it isn't just Paul's teaching as though he made his stuff up, but rather the Holy Spirit working through him. And the revelation given to him and the apostles in general as well.

They all have this task, that Christ has sent them out to establish the churches of the New Testament era, to unpack the teachings of Jesus, both the doctrine and the practice. And we know this by these very letters themselves, where Paul shows by his examples what he's doing in raising up the next generation and committing to him that which was committed to him from Paul to Timothy and from Timothy to others, because Paul got it from Christ. That is the wholeness and the truth of the gospel and the word of God.

And it's among many witnesses. You see that there in verse 2. All the things that you've heard from me, the implication being he taught and explained these things, among many nations, witnesses, a public teaching, in other words. It's not a private religion.

Christianity was never a private religion. The Gnostics had variations of that. They believed as being special.

They had special Gnostic or knowledge of God somehow. They claimed to be followers of Christianity and they were nothing of the kind. But rather, Christianity has always been public.

We don't hide things. We don't hide the truth. We don't have secret meetings to really show the truth to the pastorship.

And the rest of the session goes back and there's a room back here and we teach one another and have these ritualistic practices or something weird like that. People do these things. Religions have done these things.

Again, highlighting somehow the officers of the church are somehow unique and special and better than you. Nothing of the kind. The pastor, of course, because the message is public and witnesses have seen and heard these things, the message in the officer as well.

Their teaching should be public. Their office is public. Their qualifications are public.

1 Timothy 3 gives us a list of qualifications, doesn't it, to Timothy. These are the kind of pastors or bishops or ministers you ought to have in the church of Jesus Christ. Everyone knows these qualifications.

It's not a secret. And therefore, it makes them accountable to the people. They know what to look for.

They ought to anyway. And their teaching is, of course, to be examined as we saw in Acts 17, that those Bereans were more noble than others because they went to the word of God to examine if what Paul said to them was true. It wasn't just, well, Paul said it.

I believe it. Amen, brother. Oh, no.

That's a public teaching. It requires public examination. And they did.

They did their duty. They said, is it really here? Can I find these verses? Can I find these amazing things here in the Bible that Paul claims are there? And sure enough, they could. And that same standard is with us today.

Because there are churches, you may not always be aware of this if you've been in reformed churches for a very long time. There are churches in which somehow the minister and the officers around there, they keep things close to the vest. You don't really know what's going on.

If you say the wrong thing, you find out, oops, I said the wrong thing, and you get in trouble with them. I've run across that. I've seen it done because they want to hide things.

It's not public anymore. That's not good. This too requires the grace and strength of a Lord and Savior.

Yes, it's two things here, I believe. He says, be strong, verse one, and to commit to others, to give them these things, that is to carry on the tradition of teaching and the doctrines of Christianity to the new generation. But it also requires strength, power from on high for Timothy to stand firm and bold and to instruct the next generation.

It assumes, Timothy, all of us are equipped by grace as well and that we can do such things. Paul isn't just saying, you can't do this, Timothy, I'm just teasing you. No, he's saying you have the grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior upon you, and therefore you can be strong.

You can gird yourself up and do the right thing as a minister and teach the next generation and commit these things to him, to these officers. The text is immediately, of course, about the next generation of leadership, that they be mentored by Timothy is the implication, just as Timothy was mentored by Paul in the truth of Christianity, given and committed. That word committed, you may recall this.

We have it again, deposit. Paul uses this word or a variation of this word three or four times in his letters. We ran across this earlier in chapter two and also elsewhere in chapter one of Paul, 1 Timothy 1 and 2 Timothy, excuse me, Paul's letters talking about committing or giving a deposit.

In other words, a safekeeping is the idea here. It's to highlight the seriousness and the weightiness of the cause of Christ Jesus, like a precious inheritance carried on from one generation to another. That's the idea here, that we must as churches, as leaders of the church, and you ought to expect that from the leaders in your churches, to carry on these truths, not only to the congregation and preaching and teaching as I am doing this morning, but here in particular, that they ought to raise up the next generation to mentor them, to instruct them in the truths of the word, that they be men who will boldly stand firm and preach it to the next generation as well.

For the church has been given this high calling to maintain the truth of the gospel, not just as individual Christians, because this assumes a church that's organized, doesn't it? There is a strand of Christianity historically called the Anabaptists, or variations of Anabaptists they were called. Ana means again, they believe in being baptized again and again. That's in the American way of thinking Christian churches, unfortunately, and that is to really downplay the church as an organization.

We don't really need church officers. We're all believers. I have the Bible.

I think you're a pretty good speaker. You can just talk to one another, and you can just go out there and do whatever you feel like. Clearly, we see here, Paul is talking to another officer, Timothy, a pastor, and saying, you need to pass this on to others, what, as a pastor.

These letters, again, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, are letters to other pastors, not to you as such, although there's, I hope you already see, so much application still for you. A lot of overlap in that sense, but there's no overlap in the sense of a public office. You don't have a public office.

You don't have public responsibilities the way a pastor does, the way a ruling elder does, the way a deacon does, any more than as an American citizen that you have a public office as a sheriff, as a judge, as a president. You don't have that at all. You understand the difference.

It's the same in the church. The church is an organism. That's true.

We're organic. We have relationships between churches. You don't have to go through the pastor to have a relationship and friendship with other Christians.

I hope not, but it's also an organized religion. There are officers. There's church discipline, 1 Corinthians 5, right, where Paul tells them, you should cast these people out of the church.

This is wicked, wicked stuff. So the idea here of safekeeping from generation to generation, passing on the truth, this too, of course, takes what? The strength of the grace of God in Christ to teach the right thing in the face of lies that are everywhere. Back then and even today, it seems even worse in some regards to rise up and to preach when peer pressure says, shut up and sit down.

Those are the kind of men that you need to carry on, to commit to. Are you supposed to commit and give this beautiful inheritance to some sloppy person who just never pays attention to anything and drops diamonds and wakes up late in the morning and doesn't take care of their life? No. The implication being, you got to find men who are worthy of the deposit, that is men empowered by the Spirit, who are mature enough to stand firm, to preach the gospel, and to carry on that tradition to others.

That would be the implication here, clearly. So it's not just to any Tom, Dick, and Harry out there that you give this deposit to. That's why there's that list in 1 Timothy 3 of what it means to be a minister.

Now, parishioners, you too have a responsibility in your own way. What I perhaps could come up with a better way of describing it, I call it an adjacent responsibility to support good pastors and churches that carry on the deposit of faith, that carry on the safekeeping, and that you can be involved in that way in your own manner, and therefore to stand upon the firm truth of God's word, that you are not embarrassed, that you expect your leadership to not be embarrassed, and that they would do the right thing and commit the truth to others. Put that kind of pressure upon them, right? We call it peer pressure in the best sense of the word.

You also have a general responsibility as well to know the Bible, to teach therefore those under your responsibility like a family. I'm the pastor, I teach, but my office is public office. I'm not your father.

Our church, or any good church, their leadership shouldn't go into your life and try to run it like a father runs their household. The father does that. And therefore the father has this different, what we call sphere of responsibility, and that includes with the wife, the mother, teaching and instructing and disciplining their children, that they would learn the truth of God's word.

Like the Bereans, they read it. You're all supposed to be Bereans in your own way. It's often, of course, informal.

It may not be as in-depth, to be sure, because, I mean, frankly, the pastor's job is, he spends all day reading the Bible, studying, researching, praying, so that he can be helpful for the people of God. You have a job. There's nothing wrong with that, and it's a good thing to have.

God has designed it that way. So as you are able, you can carry on in your own way the godly tradition of the deposit of truth to your children and your grandchildren and to one another. Now Paul moves on to the why and how to be strong in the grace of God, and the next several verses. So he has two ideas here. Be strong and commit to others the truth of the deposit of the word of God.

Be Engaged in Warfare

And the reason why you ought to be strong, Paul, is because you're engaged in warfare, verses 3 through 7. You're engaged in warfare.

You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in what? Warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life. You're busy being shot at.

Why are you worried about these other things? That's the picture he's painting here for Timothy. And so this idea of being engaged in warfare, or more precisely, being engaged in his ministry as a pastor, is interwoven with points and illustrations here from enduring and working hard as the idea in general to three metaphors that he unpacks. Warfare, athletics, and farming.

Right? Warfare, athletics, and farming. Natural events that require natural actions and characteristics and practices that everyone else would do. In other words, the church isn't exempt from hard work.

It's not like you become a Christian, oh great, it's easy now. No problem. Or, as some Christians do, unfortunately, they just come up with the craziest things.

Well, the Spirit of God told me to do this most nonsensical way of studying the Bible, of learning these things. I'm not going to read. I'm just going to sit there and pray and try to recall from my mind the things, and if I don't recall anything, I guess I'm not going to learn anything.

Weird things like this. I grew up in these circles, and God says, no, you're supposed to use what? Over and over again, you see Paul using everyday illustrations, which means what? Everyday common sense things that you're supposed to do in any other endeavor in life. As a business leader, as a politician, as a neighbor of HOA, right? Homeowners Association, dealing with matters.

You use common sense. You balance your budget. You get up early in the morning so that you can get your work done on time so you can make it to the HOA meeting, and all these things.

And Paul's like, you're supposed to do that for your Christian life as well. As a soldier, you got to work hard. You got to endure.

As a farmer, you got to work hard if you want to get any fruit of your labor. Over and over again, and here he just hits them with three of them in a row. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom.

You're going to do sports. You better do it right. You better use some common sense ways.

It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of strength, and here the strength to endure hardships. And he explains this in three ways, two ways here in verse three.

He therefore must endure hardship like a soldier under fire, like a soldier under fire, surrounded by heretics and liars standing for the truth like Paul did on Mars Hill and Acts, or better yet like Paul did with the Jews who tried to kill him a number of times and he had to flee the city like Damascus. You must endure hardship, and those are two ways I think you can picture in his metaphor here of hardship, being under fire, but also not being under fire. For being in warfare as a soldier has two things, fighting and not fighting.

And when you're not fighting, you're hopefully sleeping in a foxhole as fast as you can, as quick as you can, but you're also marching and walking around everywhere with 60 pounds in your backpack. So yes, you're not being shot at. You're not under fire, but it's still what? A lot of work that you have to endure as a soldier.

They would march, I know during the Civil War, probably because it was pretty common even up to the Civil War for thousands of years, you can march up to about a day, several

miles with full backpack. That would be hard work, but they did it. They weren't being shot at yet, and then you get shot at.

No thank you. I had enough of that in basic training in the Air Force, carrying it in the mind of what it means, not just for Timothy, but for all of us to endure what it means to be a Christian, to endure the hatred of the world, the hardship, the sins within that we struggle with, and the sins and temptations without as believers. And we have to get our mind wrapped around this, that the Christian walk is not a cakewalk.

Now he needs strength to endure hardship as a soldier, but also strength to avoid distractions. No one engaged in warfare, verse 4, entangles himself with the affairs of this life. You're kind of busy being shot at, carrying your equipment so you can hide somewhere else and attack the enemy later on.

You don't get distracted from the things that shouldn't be distracting you from your job. And of course, passers here, because that's Timothy, the immediate object of these verses, specializes in the Bible. And so he has the law he preaches and learns about for conviction and the gospel for the relief of a guilty conscience.

Now, pastors may have additional knowledge from prior training and experience in life. The number of pastors today, more and more coming into the ministry late in life. And so for myself, I had an engineering background, so I like the sciences and I still keep up with some of that stuff.

And I may have that knowledge for you, but that's not really my focus. I'm not going to get distracted and start talking about this stuff in the pulpit or in my writings and my books on the ministry or something like that. No, I'm going to go back to the Bible.

I'm a specialist in the Bible and how to apply it in the Christian life. So whatever background we may have in the ministry, that's to the extent to which we can be an expert at something. That's true as itself.

But a minister as such is not an expert because he's a minister in all kinds of other topics. They have to come by their own experience, training, and the like. Now, in teaching the law of God as pastors, and we're not to engage in warfare, entangles himself with the affairs of this life.

He's not saying, okay, you're so holy like the monks and you're not going to be engaged with the affairs of this life. You're not going to hang out with the rest of us. You're going to go out in the desert and just pray and read the Bible all day, which is what they did.

They've been doing that and they still have that going on. That's not the picture he has here. I think what he means here is, look, you still have to apply the word of God.

Paul does here in Timothy and to family life, for example. Isn't a family life a family affair? When he says the affairs of this life, well, that would include the family, wouldn't it? If you misconstrue what he's saying here in verse 4, because he's just using a metaphor. Of course

not, because in 1 Timothy 5, he talks about the family, doesn't he? He tells them about how to handle your own widows.

That's applying the law of God to the things of today. Therefore, and pastors in teaching the law of God, for guidance in the Christian walk, they have to be doubly careful not to bind consciences on matters that are not clear-cut or that are matters of Christian liberty. I used the illustration last week when I pointed out there are a lot of social or political policies that people can debate upon.

What's the best way to accomplish A, B, and C? The pastor's specialty would mostly be about the A, B, and C. Murder, preserve the family, protect life, and things like that. All the different ways in which you can accomplish that, there can be debates about that to some degree. On the flip side, not to hold back the law of God in matters that are clear, because you're afraid that people may not like to hear that.

But in all things to please Christ, verse 4, the latter half, verse B, that He may please Him who enlisted Him as a soldier. Of course, that would be Jesus Christ, enlisted as a soldier. We want to please Him and not the world around Him.

So the flip side, when He says not to engage in the things of this world that He may please Him, the implication being, Timothy, don't try to be a man-pleaser, rather please Jesus. That's what He means by the affairs of this world. Don't be a man-pleaser, please Jesus.

And He also needs, and we also need as well, strength to compete, verse 5. And also, if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. And the first thing that came to my mind was 1 Corinthians 9. I preached the 1 Corinthians 9.24. Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. Paul loves that metaphor of competition, of races.

And that's what we have as Christians as well. We have to compete in the Christian life. But in the best sense of the word, we're all running the race together, this marathon to heaven.

We're not competing against one another. We're competing against what? The world, the flesh, and the devil. We want to beat them to the punch, to the finish line, that they not drag us down as lions drag down a gazelle.

And then he also has the imagery of working hard, so he needs strength. Be strong in the grace that God has given you, that you may endure, that you may compete, that you may work hard as a believer, here of course as a pastor. This urging of Paul is not about abstractions or feelings, but about concrete responsibilities and vocations in life.

And whatever you're called as a mother, as a father, and the like, as Christians in a world of unbelievers, as spouses and cultures attacking marriage, as citizens tempted to water down the truth, you are called to be strong in our grace of our Lord and Savior. To work hard as a hard-working farmer must first partake of the crops. He can't partake of them if he isn't working hard.

He just sits back and waits for the impulse of the Holy Spirit, waits for the church to tell him what to do, instead of taking the common sense to get up early, stay up late, work hard, get the right tools at the right time, the right amount of water, whatever it takes to get the job done. And we are called the same thing, and we need that strength. We need that mercy.

We need that might from our Lord and Savior. And so we need the strength to work hard, to compete, and to endure in all things of the Christian walk. The call to be strong in the grace of Christ Jesus requires our trust, of course, in Jesus and His Word.

That should go without saying. It requires our humility to admit our sins. In other words, that we would turn around in courage to do our duty before our Lord and Savior, and that takes strength.

Whether a church officer or a parishioner, brothers and sisters, no matter what you are facing here or in the near future, may the words of Paul be words of encouragement and direction for you. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Let us pray. We ask that Your great Spirit would be upon us, Lord, that we would be strengthened and empowered by You, God Almighty, to do our calling as believers to carry on in the Christian walk, we pray, in spite of our sins and all things to trust and rely upon You and not upon ourselves. We ask these things by the blood of the everlasting covenant in Christ Jesus.

Amen.