

# A True Missionary Church: 4. Suffers for the Truth

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 June 2007

Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, now you can turn to Paul's second letter to Timothy, and it would be good if you would. If you've got one of our visitor's Bibles, let me just see. It's page 995, the beginning of 2 Timothy.

We've been looking at some of the themes recently that run particularly through these pastoral epistles, as they're called, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. And we've been doing so because these letters, along with particularly 2 Peter, have very particular and practical relevance for shaping our understanding of what it means to be a true missionary church in the post-apostolic era.

The time after, the foundations of the church have been laid on the apostles or the prophets of the New Testament. And when the baton has been passed on to the succeeding generations to continue the true witness to Jesus Christ right down the ages until the Lord Jesus himself comes again.

Now, Paul is very concerned that the churches would know and understand what it means to be the church, to be, as he calls it in 1 Timothy 2.15, the household of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

And so these letters expound and instruct in very practical ways what are to be the priorities of a church that will be true to its apostolic foundation, a pillar and buttress of the apostolic gospel.

[ 1 : 41 ] And it's all concerned with that, with being a pillar of the truth of God. So, first of all, we saw that the true missionary church will therefore live the truth.

It will adorn the gospel, as that phrase in Titus puts it. It'll adorn it in its life. It'll be a model of health in a world of decay, bringing meaning in a world of confusion, bringing mercy to a world of despair. It's life and the lives of all who are in a true apostolic church will shine, just as Jesus said. So, people will see these lives and will give glory to God in heaven.

It lives the truth. But to do that, it must, of course, guard the truth in the face of the relentless drift to falsehood and error that is in the world.

And also, alas, always rearing its head within the worldly church. And it guards the truth and the faith as it propagates it, passing it on in evangelism, drawing others into the church to believe the gospel, and training, building others up and sending them out with the gospel.

[ 2 : 50 ] And, of course, that only happens, as we saw in our third study, when the church proclaims the truth, in the face of many and great pressures to downgrade the ministry of the word.

It relentlessly does the work of the true evangelical. In other words, it doesn't just believe the Bible, but it puts the Bible to work, everywhere, all the time, always, throughout its life, in every place. But, you see, the reality is that that kind of church, a truly mission-focused church, will be very counter-cultural, won't it?

Very different from the world, and very different also, alas, from the worldly church. Because the worldly church is never focused on these priorities. It's always focused on preserving its traditions, its comfort, that we're cozying up to society.

So as not to stick out like a sore thumb, not to attract ridicule and opposition to itself. But, you see, a true missionary church will always stick out like a sore thumb.

[ 4 : 00 ] A missionary church will never be popular with the world, just because the true Jesus Christ was never popular. And his true gospel has never been and never will be popular in the world.

And that's why Paul is also very, very concerned to lay out before us the abiding reality that a true missionary church will always, always have to endure hardship, suffering, for the truth of its message and its mission.

Now, I'm sure you couldn't possibly miss that emphasis as we read through the whole of 2 Timothy. Interesting, isn't it, to hear a whole letter read? Duncan Porter was just saying to me a little while ago, there's such power in reading through a whole letter and encourage me to do so.

So you're glad I decided not to do it with Ecclesiastes, but I thought 2 Timothy we could manage. But I'm sure you couldn't miss that great theme all the way through it.

Supremely, the theme of this little letter is the need for endurance, for suffering for the sake of the gospel. It's a letter written to Timothy as a Christian leader, but clearly it is written to be read and to be heard and digested by everybody in the church.

[ 5 : 14 ] Everybody in the church at Ephesus, but everybody also in true church's sins. That's why he, in the last verse of the letter, says, Grace be with you all. It's in the plural.

It's clear to be read to everybody. And it's shot through, isn't it, with stories of hardship and of struggle, with talk of suffering and of persecution.

Repeatedly, Paul's message is the same, isn't it? Chapter 1, verse 8, Share in suffering for the gospel. Chapter 2, verse 3, Share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4, verse 5, Endure suffering as you do the work of a true evangelical. It's absolutely obvious that suffering and the call for endurance is the dominant theme of this whole letter.

A true missionary church must endure suffering for the truth. Now, we can only dip into the letter this evening, but sometimes just having an overview of a letter like this can be very helpful to give us a sense of the big message.

[ 6 : 23 ] So I just want to look at this theme of suffering that runs all the way through it by asking three questions about this gospel suffering and seeing the answers that Paul gives us to these questions.

The questions why and what and how. First then, why does being a true missionary church entail necessarily suffering and hardship?

Well, the answer to that is really quite simple. It's because the true gospel is a message that shames the world by its very nature. It speaks of a crucified Savior, a weak and suffering Savior and Lord.

And it calls people to take up their cross and follow in his path. And that path was and always will be a path of shame and of weakness and of scorn in the eyes of the world.

You share in suffering, says chapter 1, verse 8, for the gospel. And it's the gospel of the true Jesus Christ that engenders suffering because it's despised, it's scorned, it's hated by the world.

[ 7 : 29 ] It always will be. By its very nature, it's the true gospel that speaks of the cross of Christ. And it calls others to carry the cross in this life now as a way of suffering.

Because it means standing with Jesus and his cross against the wisdom of this world. And the world's values are absolutely opposite to that.

This world values the things that are strong, the things that are popular, the things that appear glorious and powerful now. But by contrast, the gospel of the cross appears weak.

It appears foolish. And therefore it's unpopular, it's inglorious, it doesn't seem to have any power now. And that's why the world scorns the gospel.

And that's why, alas, there are always those in the professing church who are ashamed of the true gospel, who want to look for something much more impressive to the world now, much more acceptable and less offensive to the world now.

[ 8 : 38 ] They're ashamed of the disgrace of the gospel of the cross. A gospel that speaks about blood to be shed, about wrath revealed from heaven against sin.

And they're ashamed of the way of the cross. As chapter 2, verse 19 says, the way that calls all who call on the name of the Lord to depart from iniquity.

And that's why Paul says in chapter 1, verse 15, that all in Asia had deserted Paul then. It's astonishing, isn't it? We find it so hard to believe. And yet, of course, today, there are also many, many who would call themselves Christian but have utterly deserted Paul and his gospel.

And yet, in doing so, they've also deserted the only true gospel and the only true Jesus. That's why in chapter 2, verse 8, as we read, Paul says, remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel for which I'm suffering.

You see, the real gospel is the gospel of a crucified Savior, a Savior that the world put to death. And that's why the true gospel servant will also always find that in this world, on this side of their resurrection, they will inevitably share in the sufferings of Christ.

[10:08] There's no other way to avoid the sufferings of Christ other than to abandon the true gospel of Christ. There's only two ways. Either keeping the true faith, and that means suffering for the gospel with Paul and with Jesus, or abandoning the true faith, shunning the true gospel because of its shame, because it's too much of you to bear, too much for you to bear in this world. That's why Paul's first command to Timothy in chapter 1, verse 8 is what it is. Do not be ashamed. Don't let the shame of the cross cause you to abandon Jesus Christ. No, join in suffering for the gospel, for the true message of salvation. See, there's no middle way. There just isn't one. There's no halfway house of a kind of gentle, acceptable evangelicalism, says Paul.

The kind of thing that tries to have the best of both worlds. It tries to say, well, we can still be biblical, but somehow we can avoid the shame and the stigma of suffering from the world and the worldly church.

No. It's share in suffering, stand with Paul and with Christ, or it's shun suffering and betray Christ and his apostles.

[11:31] Either it's the spirit of power and love and self-control, as Paul puts it in verse 7, enabling us to trust the Lord and to be true to Christ despite the shame, or it's a spirit of cowardice, of fear, that deserts and abandons the Lord who saved us.

It's either or, one or the other. Can't be a middle way. And that's the reality of life, isn't it? We all know that. It might begin with creeping cowardice as we face mockery, as we face snide comments, and so on.

But it leads to a growing resistance as we find it harder and harder to put up with those kind of things. And eventually, well, it's like chapter 1, verse 15, Philegius and Hermogenes, and all the rest of them in Asia who turn away from the truth, shamed, ashamed to be associated with Paul.

And it's so easy, isn't it? It's so easy for us to be ashamed of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. What a striking contrast, isn't there, between verse 15 and verse 16 of chapter 1.

The household of Onesiphorus, who were not ashamed of Paul's disgrace, not ashamed of his chains. What an accolade to have verses 17 and 18 recorded about him and his household forever.

[13:01] And of course, the day of the Lord will declare him, and all like him since, who have not been ashamed of the gospel, the day will declare for him the crown of glory. He fought the fight.

He kept the faith. He was not ashamed of the gospel. And so must you be like that, says Paul to Timothy. And so must all in the churches, if we're to be true missionary churches.

But Paul says, it's going to be hard. It'll be very, very hard, because in the last days, there will be troubled times. You see, just like the writer of Ecclesiastes, Paul is a supreme realist.

And so he writes to warn his people, and to prepare the church to stand firm, and not to be ashamed, not to abandon and depart from the true gospel of Christ.

And so he says, clearly, Christian leaders must be realists. They must be ready to endure. Endure suffering, he says to Timothy. Fulfill your ministry against all opposition.

[14:08] But also, all Christian believers, every one of us, must have similar endurance. Because, as we read in chapter 3, verse 12, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Well, are you prepared for that? Are we? We must be, says Paul, because it's a hallmark of genuine gospel faith. It's a hallmark of genuine gospel mission.

You can't be missionary people in a missionary church if we're not prepared to endure suffering. Because we follow a crucified Savior, and we preach the message of the cross.

That's why a true missionary church will always be a church that has to endure hardship. But second, what?

What does this hardship entail? Well, this letter is simply full of many different ways that true Christians and missionary churches may be called to endure hardship.

[15:12] It's not just persecution from outside, not by any means. There are many, many other things, particularly just things related to Christian service that make for hardship and often for frank suffering.

Sometimes it's just the natural consequences of very positive blessings of ministry and mission that bring deprivations along with the blessings. And any keen-serving Christian believer who puts the gospel first in their life will inevitably encounter some of these things.

And anyone in particular thinking about full-time Christian mission of some kind certainly must be prepared and be realistic about these things. But let me just run you through some of the most obvious things in this letter.

First, chapter 1, verse 4. There are separations from friends and loved ones. Paul says he was painfully separated from Timothy and from other believers and supporters.

And that's just one obvious side effect, isn't it, of full-time mission. It may be on the other side of the world as it is for some of our missionaries in this congregation and that can be very hard, can't it?

[16:20] But it might just be the very real separations that come in any, particularly, full-time ministry. Certainly, if you're in ministry, you don't see other Christian friends and families at weekends.

Other colleagues are separated from you simply because they're doing the same thing that you're doing in other places. That's just how it must be. You're closest friends and soulmates in ministry. You hardly see. It's just one of the facts of life if you're in full-time ministry, certainly. But many others bear a very similar cost and I know many of you do. You're committed to the mission of the church.

So you order your life to make weekends your priority so that you're here, so that you're able to offer hospitality to people, to minister to the saints, to ensure that you are serving in the church, not just spectating.

Many of you could spend lots of weekends on trips away at your country cottage or away on a trip on a cheap airline somewhere, but you don't because the gospel mission has priority in your life.

[17:25] and no doubt you see less of your friends and family at weekends, perhaps because you're wanting to be part of a true missionary church. Part of that, of course, is that when your children grow up, they may very well grow up and want to serve Christ in full-time mission in some other country because they've seen the zeal for evangelism and mission in your home life.

They've seen in their parents what's most important and they too have picked it up. And then there's that cost to be born too, the cost of joy but also of pain. That's just one kind of hardship, isn't it, if you're engaged in true Christian mission?

Secondly, very different and terribly painful, there's the desertion that we sometimes experience by friends and loved ones. Chapter 1, verse 15, Paul was deserted by everyone, including these close associates he'd been in ministry with, Philegius and Hermogenes.

Chapter 4, verse 10, there was Demas who deserted him in love with the world. Perhaps Crescens too, we don't know if that was a good or a bad departure. But it can be deeply hurtful, can't it, when people that you've served with drift off or even storm off because the challenge of being part of a disturbing and a demanding gospel mission is too much for some people who, like Demas, love the world.

It's very hard when you hear about that happening. It's terrible, isn't it, when we hear that at the prayer meeting when missionaries or folks in churches have lost key people. And Paul says it always will happen where there's a true missionary church.

[19:06] Very painful, but be prepared, endure it. Third, in chapter 1, verse 11 and 12, he speaks of just the inevitable suffering that goes with being a teacher of the true faith.

I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, a teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. It just goes with the territory of any kind of Christian leadership because the very essence of true spiritual leadership is heralding the way of the cross.

And you can't lead others genuinely in a way that you've not known yourself. It's one reason why James tells us in his letter, not many should seek to become teachers.

And anyone who does desire such a thing needs to be very real and realistic about it. Somebody once put it very memorably, the message of Christ crucified can be proclaimed effectively only by crucified men.

Part of the reason for that is the next thing. It's highlighted in the pictures of chapter 2, verses 3 to 7, and it's just the sheer hard slog of real gospel mission. Ministry and mission is tough.

[20:20] Doing real missions, says Paul, is like being on the front line in an army. There's no place for deserters. That's the spirit of cowardice. You don't run away from the front. No.

In real mission you aren't distracted by trivialities, by things that are fine for peacetime, but no use at all when there's a war on. And spiritual warfare is tough.

You're doing battle with powers in the heavenly realms. You're praying against blindness caused by the evil one. You're involved in the mess of real life and the mess of real people's lives.

There's no cheating. There's no easy way. Like an athlete, Paul says, you've got to run the race according to the rules. You can't cut corners. You can't make the gospel more palatable or soften it up or make it easier.

It's very hard in Christian mission, isn't it, to call people to real repentance, to call people to lay behind a life of ungodliness and depart from that.

[ 21 : 26 ] It's very hard when you have to say those things and people refuse and walk away. But real mission is hard graft, says Paul.

It's like the farmer's work, the hard-working farmer. To an onlooker, to a townie, you go past looking at a field, it looks as if nothing's been achieved very often, doesn't it?

It's a long and wearisome task for a farmer, planting, weeding, watering, and feeding. And for much of the year it looks like nothing's happening.

Only at the harvest will the fruit be seen. And that's hard, isn't it? It's hard in Christian mission because it's true.

Only at the harvest will the fruit really be seen of our labors. I certainly find that hard. That's why I love nothing more than doing a practical job like painting a room or making something with your hands.

[ 22 : 22 ] You do it and you see it finished and you see what you've achieved. But friends, in Christian mission we never see that or only get a glimpse of it. Isn't that right? We don't see the harvest of our mission.

It's by faith. We don't see certainly the fullness of it until the day of the harvest, the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. But a real missionary church endures that slog, that graft.

And then fifth is the suffering of the world's slander and scorn. Chapter 2, verse 9. Paul suffers, he says, bound in chains like a criminal.

The lowest of the low in his society's eyes. Despised, rejected. And that's very much the story, isn't it? For the true missionary church in many parts of the world today.

Not yet so here. But it may not be long in coming. And often it's not actually the pain of the physical suffering that's the worst, even though that is very real.

[ 23 : 26 ] It can be the mental and the psychological abasement that cuts so deeply. Paul felt it and treated like a criminal. Word only used elsewhere in the scriptures of the two criminals crucified on either side of Jesus.

Some of you know that book by the Chinese brother, Brother Yun. Speaking of his suffering and mistreatment for the gospel.

Let me read you something from that. Speaking of the pain of seeing his family suffer because of the stigma and the shame of being attached to him. The guard tore the children out of his arms and said, Yun, if you really love me your children wouldn't be here in prison.

I asked my son repeatedly, How's your school? But Isaac looked down at the ground and refused to answer. Finally, he wiped tears from his eyes and said, Daddy, I want to go to the school but you aren't at home with us.

The teacher doesn't like me. She told the other children, Isaac and his family stupidly believe in Jesus. My classmates mock me and say, Your father is a dirty criminal who deserves to be in prison.

[ 24 : 37 ] He goes on to say, I've suffered many torments and torments in my life. I've had electric battens placed inside my mouth. I've been kicked and beaten until I long to die.

I've fasted 74 days without food or water. But I tell you from my heart that the most difficult thing I've ever experienced was seeing the condition of my family when they came to visit me in those days. Nothing I've experienced caused me such pain as those visits treated like a criminal. Well, as Dick Lucas says, we might not be sent to prison but we may very well be sent to Coventry, mightn't we? For the sake of the gospel. And that's hard, isn't it? Because slander does sting us. And it's one of the things that so easily can silence us.

The shame of being called an evangelical Christian. The shame of being called a fundamentalist.

The disgrace of being associated with the evangelical faith has led, alas, many that I have known in ministry to distance themselves over time from the true gospel of Christ.

[ 25 : 54 ] Embarrassed by those that are seen by the church establishment as troublemakers, people who rock the boat. and they no longer want to be seen or associated with those people because they don't want to be tarred with the shame.

It's the same thing at school, isn't it? Or in college when your friends sneer because you go to church or because you go to SU camp or whatever it is.

And you're tempted to be ashamed. You're tempted to be silent, to desert the gospel. But no, says Paul, don't be ashamed.

Remember, he says, the word of God is not bound and we endure everything for the sake of the elect, for those whom God is calling to His eternal glory in Christ.

There's purpose in it. So endure. Then, chapter 2, verse 15, there's just the relentless discipline that's needed if you're going to teach God's Word properly.

[ 26 : 58 ] The work, the real sweat of being an approved workman, a laborer who's unashamed, who rightly handles the Word of Truth. Well, there's a huge temptation to compromise there.

I can certainly tell you that. Just because of the sheer mental and physical hardship, the hard labor of digging into the Word of God to yield its treasures. I remember my father often quoting to me something one of his teachers said to him when he was training.

The scriptures, he said, will not yield their treasures to chance inquiry. And that's true. It's so true.

And it's easy, you know, very, very easy to put a good talk together, a popular talk.

It's easy and it's often wonderfully well received to use a text as a springboard on which you jump off. You pad it around with a string of anecdotes, perhaps heart-rending and emotional stories.

You have people eating out of your hand. And it's very tempting because people love that kind of thing. But to rightly handle the Word of Truth, to actually get across what God is saying, not just what you want to say, well, that's hard labor.

[ 28 : 08 ] It's hard labor for me. It's hard labor for every one of you who's involved in teaching in this church, in Sunday school, in Bible class, in house groups, in Release the Word, in Christianity Explored, your Bible study, wherever it is.

It's hard work. You know that. You know it only too well. And it should be and it must be. And that's just part of the hardship that we endure if we're to do real mission and ministry, not something superficial, not something shallow, not a cheap imitation.

Then there's the suffering and often real persecution of other church leaders. Chapter 2, verse 17 and 18, the Hymenaeus and Philetus's of this world.

Or the Janus and Jambres's of verse 8 of chapter 3, who oppose and who criticize those who are faithful to God's Word. And Paul says they have great influence.

Their teaching spreads like gangrene. Well, of course it does because it plays to the crowd. It's so much more acceptable. It's so much more attractive. And these people will badmouth and belittle the work and the reputation of those who seek to be faithful to the apostolic truth of the Gospel and the demands that it makes.

[ 29 : 29 ] And it's hard to be made to feel that you're an outsider, that you're the cranky one, that you are the unenlightened one because you stand with Paul and because you won't join the other party.

Someone in our fellowship was made to feel very much like that just recently at the end of that kind of stinging remark. They were made to feel they didn't really belong in the evangelical mainstream because they stand with Paul on some of the things that are essential and absolute to the heart of the Gospel.

But they're made to feel, well, you're beyond the pale. Well, that's hard. But expect it, says Paul.

Endure it. Endure hardship. Then there's the physical persecution that Paul does speak of in chapter 3, verses 10 to 12.

He speaks of his pattern of maltreatment, my persecutions and sufferings, he says, that happened to me at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. And that has been, you know, the reality for most believers in most places at most times in history.

You see, we in this country have lived through a period, an aberration. It's not been the norm. It's not the norm today. It won't be so here forever. I know that's hard for some of us to believe.

[ 30 : 49 ] Especially some of the older ones who have always known this to be a so-called Christian country. But verse 12 is God's truth. Look at it. All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

And all of us, as faithful believers, must face up to the reality of that truth. It may be just slander today. But one day it may be shackles too.

Then, there's the pain and the hardship of witnessing the turning away of people even within the church. Chapter 4, verse 3 and following.

There will always be those, he says, who will not endure the truth of God. And when things that are said come too close for comfort in their life, they'll refuse any longer to hear it.

They'll shut their ears off. They'll turn aside and wander away to find somebody who will say something much less challenging and much more congenial. Teachers to suit their own passions.

[ 31 : 53 ] And you'll see that if you're involved in youth work for Christ. You'll see that as there are folk who rebel against the authority of God's Word upon their life.

And they say, no, I want to go my way. They turn aside. You'll see it in your Christianity Explore group that you're leading. You'll see it with the friends that you're sharing the Gospel with and you're seeking to bring to faith.

There'll be some of them that they reach a point that their rich young ruler reached. And they love the things of this world more than they can love the Lord Jesus Christ. You'll see it in all mission work.

You'll even see it, says Paul, in a mature, apostolic, Christian congregation. And Paul's answer is in verse 5.

You keep your head when that happens. You're sober-minded. Endure suffering. Keep on doing the work of an evangelist, of a true evangelical, teaching the full counsel of God.

[ 32 : 55 ] You fulfill your ministry. You endure. You keep on being a true missionary church. even when, and this is the last thing, there are people who are persistent thorns in the flesh of your ministry.

Chapter 4, verses 14 and 15. The Alexander, the coppersmiths of the 21st century. He did it to Paul and therefore he'll oppose Timothy.

And he'll always oppose those who are faithful to the same message of the apostolic gospel.

Alexander, you see, is like Melchizedek. Melchizedek was a priest forever. Well, Alexander is a pain and a persecutor forever.

And his spirit is alive and well in the churches today. He'll say that, well, he's got issues with a particular person, with his style, with their manner, whatever it might be. But that's not the truth.

Paul says in verse 15, the truth underlying that is this. He strongly opposed our message. Now, as every true missionary church will have to endure those, often within as well as without, who in a whole host of ways, perhaps very subtle at first, perhaps apparently innocuous, but at heart oppose the message of the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

[ 34 : 16 ] But Paul says, expect it and endure it. That's the calling of a true missionary church. By the way, also he says, leave it to the Lord to repay those kind of people.

It's not your business to repay them yourself. No, you share in suffering for the truth of the gospel. You endure everything for the sake of God's elect. You endure suffering, fulfill your ministry.

Well, it's pretty relentless, isn't it? And there are many more things we could write from this letter.

We might feel utterly depressed. We might feel overwhelmed by all of this. But that's not Paul's intention.

Let me encourage you. He wants to encourage us. He doesn't want to drive us to despair. This is what we're to endure. He says, this is why we're to endure, but he also tells us how.

How can we endure the true hardship and be a true missionary church, suffering for the truth, for the sake of God's elect? We'll turn back to chapter 1, verse 8.

[ 35 : 23 ] Because Paul says, you're not abandoned, you're not on your own in all of this. He tells us that we endure by the power of God, first of all. Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

Striking, isn't it, that in this letter there's no mention of the power of God in terms of miracles and healing and so on. In fact, it's quite the reverse, isn't it? He leaves Trophimus behind because he's sick. So obviously, miraculous healing wasn't at the heart of Paul's ministry, although it was a part of it at times.

No, he says, God's power is in us that we might endure suffering for the gospel. Do we doubt God's power is able to help us endure?

Well, look at verse 9. God's power, he says, has saved us. God's power, he says, has called us to a holy calling of glory that was purposed before the ages.

verse 10, he says, God's power has abolished death and brought immortality to light through the gospel. And look what he says in verse 12.

[ 36 : 32 ] He, God, is powerful, says Paul, to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. You see, he calls us to endure, he calls us to guard the gospel through suffering, but he is the one who's doing it all by his power.

We endure by the power of God at work in us. And he says to us, we know that we have God's power at work in us to enable us to endure because, he says in verse 14, we have his spirit in us. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, you guard the good deposit entrusted to you. We endure by the power of God. We endure by the spirit of God.

And more than that, he says, you have the grace of God at work through us. Remember, this letter begins and ends with the grace of God.

That's not just a formula, it's real. That's why he says in chapter 2, verse 1, you then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. That's how, as he goes on to say in verse 3, that's how you share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

[ 37 : 45 ] You see, we're not on our own. He's within us. He's with us even to the end of the age and his grace is sufficient for us, for every one of us.

And he will empower us to fight the good fight, to finish the race, to keep the faith. As we come to him daily for strength, we endure by the grace of God.

Well, how do we do that? Well, finally, he tells us we have the word of God, don't we? We have the word of God that points us and turns us again and again to his grace, to make us wise for salvation in Jesus Christ, to equip us for every good work, including the endurance of hardship and suffering.

Listen to chapter 3, verse 12. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted while evil people and imposters go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you've learned and affirmly believe, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you've been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[ 39 : 05 ] all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work, including the vital work of enduring to the very end through every suffering and hardship.

A true missionary church endures suffering for the truth. We endure everything, says Paul, for the sake of the elect. But we do it by God's power, His Spirit within us, for His grace which is abundant to us and through the Scriptures which again and again and again turn us to that grace and equip us daily for our task.

So let's encourage one another in the reality that we face and let's rejoice together in the sufferings that we share in and the hardship that we endure because it tells us that we are genuine missionary Christians and a genuine missionary church.

and may God grant that we will be indeed fruitful this year and next year and every year until the Lord comes that we also with Paul might say, I fought the good fight, I've finished the race, I've kept the faith and henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.

Well, let's pray. Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord nor of me his prisoner but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God who saved us and called us to a holy calling not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace.

[ 41 : 12 ] Heavenly Father, we thank you for the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross which have achieved for us an eternal weight of glory.

Help us when it's so easy for us to be shown to be cowards. Help us, Lord, daily to turn to you that we might endure by your power, by your spirit, by your grace and through your word.

Help us to be always true missionaries and a true missionary church rejoicing in the true gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ until he comes.

For we ask it in his name. Amen.