

Sustaining Graces III **II Timothy 2:1-13**

Sustaining Graces: these are the gifts God sends our way to get us through the difficult times we experience in life. As Paul writes what we believe to be his final letter, he wants to make his friend and fellow servant, Timothy, aware of how these special gifts can sustain him. Paul knew Timothy would need to know this—just as we do.

In our text for this morning, Paul is saying to Timothy that though God is available to help us, He also expects us to do our part to prepare for the difficult moments that come our way. Which is to say that we have certain responsibilities as Christians. Handling our responsibilities in a mature manner opens up our lives to all the graces that God provides.

As you know, it's a tough job market right now. I heard about a young man who desperately needed work. He got an interview, and did his best to make a good impression.

The human resources director asked him, "Young man, are you a responsible person?" "Oh, yes," he said. "On my last job, whenever anything went wrong, they always said that I was the one responsible."

Well, sometimes things may go wrong in our lives because we're just not being very responsible. Now, if this irresponsibility carries over into our walk with the Lord, this could actually get in the way of the graces God provides to sustain us. God still provides, but we may not be ready to receive. Hold that thought as we turn to our text for today, **II Timothy 2:1-13:**

¹You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ²And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. ³Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. ⁵Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. ⁷Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

⁸Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. ¹⁰Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

¹¹Here is a trustworthy saying:
If we died with him,
we will also live with him;
¹²if we endure,
we will also reign with him.
If we disown him,
he will also disown us;
¹³if we are faithless,
he will remain faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.

As we've noted before, Paul saw great potential in Timothy. He was counting on him to be a leader in the early church. He was young, though, inexperienced, and evidently, rather timid. So Paul was trying to grow him up so Timothy could serve as a responsible and effective leader for the church in Ephesus.

Now, keep in mind that Ephesus had "tough crowd" written all over it. Many people there had been downright hostile toward the Gospel...and toward Paul himself as he planted a church there.

So Paul continues to point his young friend toward the things which could sustain and nurture him for the tough challenges that lay ahead. Let's take a look at these.

1. Paul encourages Timothy, first of all, to be **FAITHFUL IN WITNESS**. Look at vv. 1-2 of II Tim. 2: "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

"Then" is a "hinge" word in Paul's writings. When Paul says, "You, then," He is referring back to something he's already talked about in this letter. "You then, my son, be strong...and entrust the things you have heard me say to reliable men." What's he referring back to?

Remember Phygelus and Hermogenes from last week? These were the two that Paul reported had deserted him. They are the “You, then” reference. They provide the contrast. ‘Don’t be like them’, Paul is warning Timothy. ‘And don’t entrust the Gospel of Christ to anyone like them.’

They are unfaithful and unreliable. They are deserters. They cannot be counted on to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ to others.

I can’t help but wonder what Paul would say about us in this regard? Are we being faithful witnesses to the Gospel?

What would happen in our community if this group gathered here this morning—if we went out from this sanctuary focused on being faithful witnesses for Christ? What if we consistently spoke a good word for the Lord, or for His church? What if we simply seized the opportunities we have to invite others to come?

Evangelism is not so much memorizing lines to be repeated as it is sharing our own personal experience of being in relationship with Christ. It’s not telling what happened to us in a revival meeting when we were twelve, but what does our relationship with Jesus Christ—and His Church--mean to us now?

It’s not always easy to put this into words. Nobody said it would be easy. Paul says, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” He acknowledges up front that power is needed to pass the Gospel along to others; and it won’t happen unless we depend on the grace of God in Christ. We need help—God’s help—to do this.

Evidently Paul and Timothy were rather weak from a physical standpoint--the Bible seems to indicate this about both of them--but they were made spiritually strong by the grace of God. Strong to do what? STRONG...to communicate the Gospel.

The message of salvation was passed from Jesus to Paul, and from Paul to Timothy. Now Timothy is given the responsibility to pass it on to others, who in turn are to share it with still more who have yet to hear the Gospel and respond to it.

And so it has continued for 2,000 years; but all the while, as has often been pointed out, the Christian message has been just one

generation away from extinction. Only as one person teaches another who teaches still another does the Christian community continue. It's an awesome responsibility. Are we being faithful witnesses? Being faithful in our witness can be one of God's sustaining graces for our lives.

2. Now, here's another one: **DISCIPLINED IN LIFE.** We need to add to our faithful witness a disciplined lifestyle.

I heard a fellow discussing the struggle he was having with his diet. "As I was driving down the road," he said, "I remembered there was a doughnut shop just ahead. They make really great doughnuts! Man, would a cup of coffee and a doughnut hit the spot," he thought.

Then he remembered his diet. So he said a prayer: "God, if you want me to stop for a doughnut, then let there be a parking space right by the front door." And sure enough, on his seventh trip around the block...

Now, I can relate to that little story—and on several levels. Perhaps you can too. But could it be that this lack of discipline also exists in our Christian lives? Probably so.

Do you think spiritual disciplines are any easier than physical ones? Not likely...they're probably harder.

Paul said elsewhere, "I buffet my body"—some of us get the pronunciation wrong (buffet)—we may find ourselves in a buffet line of some kind today. But when Paul says "I buffet my body," he means that he is disciplining his body to bring it into line with the Lord's will.

In vv. 3-6, Paul uses three different pictures to help us see the disciplined life. There is the picture of 1) a soldier, 2) an athlete, and 3) a farmer. All three occupations require discipline.

A soldier is responsible for obeying orders. He often must endure much hardship in the process of getting the job done. In many circumstances, he will be required to do, not what he wants to do, but what he must do.

A soldier is disciplined. He does his duty. Friends, there are duties in the Christian life as well. They're not always easy. They require discipline.

The next picture is that of an athlete. I played some high school football. I wasn't very good. You've heard of half-backs and full-backs. I was a drawback.

Actually, I played guard—right guard on offense and left guard on defense. All I've got to show for it is a letter jacket that I hope is still at my parent's house somewhere, a scar on the back of my leg left from a deep cleat mark, and memories of hot, sweaty practices that seemed to me to be something akin to torture.

By the way, I ran into my old high school football coach a few years back. I learned that he was now a Baptist preacher. Now, I struggled to make that fit with the image I had always had of him. I also found myself hoping that his deacons give him fits!

Not really. The fact of the matter is, though, if you are going to play the game of football, you must practice. You have to train hard. And listen, if you're going to live the Christian life and be an effective member of God's team in this world, there is a discipline of learning, growing, and training that must be followed.

Then, the third picture is that of a farmer. Lazy farmers don't make it. It requires hard work and perseverance to be a farmer. You must stay with the job in good times and bad.

Some seasons you work hard and end up with nothing to show for it. But as you responsibly do your job, you eventually make a crop. In our Christian lives, years of faithful service are sometimes required before we begin to see the fruit of our labors.

So, here are the three pictures the apostle paints for us: the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer. All three require a disciplined life. Paul is simply reminding us that the Christian life also requires discipline.

3. Now, Paul mentions one other responsibility here that can become a sustaining grace in our lives. He tells Timothy and us that we need to be **GROUNDING IN CHRIST**.

Verse 8 begins, "Remember Jesus Christ." How simple and straight forward: "Remember Jesus Christ." Paul was in prison, a condemned man. He knew he wouldn't be writing many more letters.

Paul didn't waste his time, then, saying, "Hey...how y'all?" He wrote about the things that matter most. "Remember Jesus Christ," he said, "raised from the dead, descended from David."

There's a whole lot packed into those two brief phrases. The words "raised from the dead" are a reminder of Jesus' divinity.

There were lots of gods and goddesses known to the people of Ephesus. They had a temple in town dedicated to the worship of the Greek goddess Dianah. It was considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world. None of their gods, however, had any answer for death.

But Jesus Christ does. He is "raised from the dead," and He says to everyone who places their faith in Him, "Because I live, you will also live" (John 14:19). "Jesus Christ, raised from the dead!"

"Descended from David," on the other hand, is a reference to Jesus' humanity. He took on human flesh and endured the same kinds of problems and challenges we must face.

He's been one of us. Because of this, Jesus knows us well. He understands us completely. Paul wanted Timothy, along with all those to whom he ministered, to be well-grounded in Christ.

"Remember Jesus Christ," he says. Remember who He is. Remember what He has done for you. Remember to make Christ Lord of your life, and He will sustain you through the hard times. He can do this only because of who He is: Son of God and Son of Man--He is the Word of God for our lives.

Paul tells us in verse 9 that he is having a hard time writing this letter because of his chains. But then he goes on to say that no chains can bind the word of God—which is true, whether we're talking about God's written word, the Bible, or His Living Word, His Son, Jesus Christ.

In *Arabian Nights*, Sinbad the Sailor warns his shipmates about a great magnetic rock in the Indian Ocean. He tells them the

magnetism of the rock is so powerful it will pull all of the nails and bolts out of passing ships, causing them to sink.

There are so many harmful influences in our world that people, including many Christians, are being drawn to—pulled like metal to a magnet; and lives, and families, and even churches are falling apart and sinking as a result.

It happens when we fail to make Jesus Christ Lord of our lives, or we do not keep Him in that rightful place. It happens when our foundation weakens, when other things begin to take priority, and we're no longer well-grounded in the Lord.

Listen, friends: each new day brings with it the responsibility to decide how we will live it: 1) will it be our way or Christ's way?; 2) will we try to get by in our own strength or rely instead on His?; 3) will we live our lives for others or only for ourselves?

Bottom line: who or what will be our rock, who will serve as our foundation this day? Will it be Christ Jesus, or will it be instead something or somebody else?

On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand. Remember to keep Christ first.

Staying grounded in Christ is vital. So I want to encourage us to begin each new day with a prayer that goes something like this:

“Lord, I give my life to you today. I'll need your help to live it to its best and fullest. There will be some things that come my way this day that I won't know how to handle.

There will be people who are difficult to deal with. There will be temptations which must be overcome. There will be opportunities to serve You and others that I shouldn't miss. So, you take control. Be Lord of my life today. Guide me by Your Spirit. Strengthen me by Your grace. Thank you, Lord. Amen.”

God is always ready to see us through the tough times; but we have to be responsible enough in our Christian walk to be ready to receive the gifts of God's grace: 1) Be faithful in witness. 2) Disciplined in lifestyle. 3) Grounded in Christ. And when the time comes, your foundation will be solid—like a rock! “On Christ, the solid rock I stand!”