

Realign Your Life

1 of 7 in *Realign Your Life: Practices that Transform You*

January 3, 2020

2 Timothy 2:1-13

Well, here we are in Cornerstone's first worship service of 2021. Happy New Year everyone.

Even as this New Year has emerged from the old, we're all kind of expecting that 2020 will continue to cast its shadow into 2021, for a while anyway.

Because last year was disruptive, to say the least.

But as he so often does, God can take life's disruptions, and turn them into discoveries. That's Cornerstone's Ministry Theme for 2021—*From Disruption to Discovery: Finding Your Bearings in Jesus' Story*.

Times of disruption, confusion and stress disorient us, but when we fix our eyes on Jesus, he enables us to find our bearings in his story. After all, it's the story of Jesus that shapes your story and mine—the story of his birth, life, death and resurrection, as well as his promise to return one day and set the whole world right once and for all.

As we continue into 2021, how will God help you find your bearings in Jesus' story?

One way that God has turned disruption into discovery for Cornerstone involves our Production Team. A year ago, we didn't have one. But when the pandemic forced us to bring our worship services online, a Production Team began to emerge, and it now features two great new staff members—Peter and Josh— plus a group of wonderful volunteers.

Because of them, our reach as a church has expanded significantly, and we're that much better positioned for kingdom impact in years to come. If you're watching live, go ahead and type "Thank God for the PT!" into the chat.

Speaking of expanded reach, another way God has turned disruption into discovery at Cornerstone involves our local outreach ministries, which *mushroomed* throughout 2020 as we sought to serve the greater community in these times of crisis.

Bethany has coordinated so many of those local outreach efforts for us, and has now joined our staff team. Let's encourage her too. If you're watching live, type "Thank God for Bethany!" into the chat.

So there you have just two examples of what could be many more when it comes to how God is able to lead us from disruption to discovery.

But such discoveries don't make the disruption of 2020 any less real or any less painful. These times of crisis have had a disorienting effect on pretty much all of us. Therefore, as we stand at the beginning of 2021, many of us are seeking to realign our disoriented lives.

Now the desire to realign your life at the beginning of a new year is pretty typical. But this year that desire is running deeper for many, and it's showing itself in ways that are not so typical.

I read some articles about how COVID is influencing the kind of resolutions people are making this New Year. Insurance giant Allianz conducted a [national study](#) showing that financial resolutions are deemed less important this year than last, in spite of all the financial insecurity so many have experienced in 2020.

Also surprising is the fact that people aren't showing much resolve to [renew their social connections](#) in 2021, in spite of so much social isolation in 2020. Maybe that's because for now the pandemic is still very much with us.

Health and wellness resolutions, while popular every New Year, are far more popular this year than ever, beating every other category.

For some people, that means making a resolution to [get better sleep](#) each night. Many have been afflicted with sleep problems throughout the pandemic. Some refer to it as *coronasomnia*, and it's had a significant impact on people's physical and mental well-being.

This year, sweaty legions of freshly motivated fitness seekers will *not* be crowding gyms in January, but that doesn't mean they haven't made resolutions to get more exercise *at home*. Peloton—the exercise bike company— was projecting to finish 2020 with its first-ever billion-dollar quarter.

Eating healthier and managing stress also feature among this year's top resolutions, according to the study.

Whether or not you're making any health and wellness resolutions this year, or even any resolutions at all, I wonder how many of you are feeling the need to realign your life—to put first things first again—especially when it comes to following and serving Jesus, and finding your bearings in his story.

If you need to realign your life in Jesus, type "That's me!" into the chat.

Today, we're beginning a new sermon series designed to help you do just that, by God's grace. The series is called *Realign Your Life: Practices that Transform You*.

Later in this message, I'll unpack what the series is all about, and give you a preview of what's coming over the next six weeks. But first, I'd like to set us up for that by sharing a teaching from a New Testament passage— 2 Timothy chapter 2, verses 1-13.

Here's the setting. The Apostle Paul is in a Roman prison. He's been imprisoned for preaching the gospel before, but this time, his trial isn't going well, and he senses that he's not going to survive. So with his time drawing near, Paul, from his cell, writes a letter to his protégé, a young pastor named Timothy, and in that letter Paul says these words:

Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor. Think about what I am saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things.

Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach. And because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the word of God cannot be chained. So I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen.

This is a trustworthy saying:

If we die with him,
we will also live with him.
If we endure hardship,
we will reign with him.
If we deny him,
he will deny us.
If we are unfaithful,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot deny who he is.

We live in difficult times, and this passage tells us that there are **two aspects of following Jesus faithfully in difficult times**. They are two sides of the same coin. There's God's part in it. And then there's our part in it. First, let's look at:

1. God's part.

In verse one, Paul writes:

Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. ¹

Paul is telling Timothy, and us, that the grace God gives us in Jesus —the same grace that saves and forgives us— is also the same grace that strengthens us to follow and serve Jesus faithfully at all times— especially in difficult times.

In fact, the main reason why Timothy needs to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” is because Paul is encouraging him to:

Endure suffering along with [him]... ²

Things weren’t easy for Paul. In verse 9 he writes:

I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. ³

But Paul knew that things weren’t easy for Timothy either. Times were tough for the young pastor, and were probably about to get tougher.

Not only was Timothy facing many difficult challenges in the church he was pastoring in Ephesus. Now, he was also facing the possibility of losing Paul, his mentor and father in the faith.

On top of that, in this letter Paul asks Timothy to pay him a visit in prison, which would have been a precarious thing for the young pastor to do. Some co-workers had already deserted Paul because they were afraid of the stigma of being associated with an accused criminal.

Aware that his request for a visit could be a costly one for his protégé, Paul reminds Timothy that God’s grace is the Christian’s source of strength and power to follow Jesus faithfully— even when it’s costly to do so.

You see, it’s incredibly important to realize that **faithfulness to Jesus comes with a cost.**

If our story is shaped by Jesus’ story, it’s important to remember that there is a cross at the heart of that story. It’s not supposed to be easy to follow Jesus, and if any preacher tells you otherwise, you can be pretty sure they are proclaiming a false gospel.

¹ 2 Timothy 2:1 (NLT)

² 2 Timothy 2:3a (NLT)

³ 2 Timothy 2:9b (NLT)

We follow the Jesus who says:

If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it. ⁴

Faithfulness to Jesus comes with a cost. It means being committed to something bigger than yourself, and being willing to endure sacrifice for the sake of a greater goal.

But the good news is that in Jesus, God promises to provide us with sufficient grace and strength to remain faithful through it all. As Paul puts it in our text, “be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus.”

So Jesus himself is the source of all the grace and endurance you’ll ever need. God can always be depended upon to do his part in helping us to follow Jesus faithfully in difficult times like the ones we find ourselves in.

But you and I have a part to play as well. Let’s talk about that.

2. Our part.

In verses 3-7 of our passage, Paul uses three analogies to express the kind of personal commitment and responsibility that you and I are called to demonstrate as followers of Jesus. The three analogies are that a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Paul says to Timothy:

Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers don’t get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor. Think about what I am saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things.

Each of these analogies is a picture of what we’re called to when it comes to following Jesus. A way of summing it up is to say that you and I are called to **single-minded devotion and discipline**.

When Paul speaks of the soldier, he specifically has in mind the Roman soldier. Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, wrote the following words about the renowned discipline of Roman soldiers:

Each soldier every day throws all his energy into his drill, as though he were in action. Hence that perfect ease with which they sustain the shock of battle: no

⁴ Matthew 10:38-39 (NLT)

confusion breaks their customary formation, no panic paralyzes, no fatigue exhausts them... The perfect discipline makes the army an ornament of peace-time and in war welds the whole into a single body; so compact are their ranks, so alert their movements, so quick their ears for orders, their eyes for signals, their hands to act upon them. None are slower than they in succumbing to suffering.⁵

Such ideas would have been in Paul's mind when he chose the image of a soldier to describe those who follow and serve Jesus Christ. Paul points out that:

Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them.⁶

In a world where there are distractions all around us, Paul is saying that our focus on our commanding officer—Jesus—must be our top priority. What are his purposes, his will for us? That's what matters. Our eyes must remain focused on Christ, our ears attentive to his every word of command, and our ambitions set on pleasing him alone. And this requires the discipline of a soldier.

Or, that of an athlete. Paul says in verse 5:

And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules.⁷

Here, Paul has in mind the Olympics of his day, the Isthmian Games. Athletes were required to go through an intensive 10-month training period in order to compete in the games, and then, in order to win, they had to observe a strict set of rules.

Single-minded devotion and discipline is what would carry these athletes through the difficulties of training and competition. The same is true of us as we follow Jesus.

Then, there's the farmer. Paul tells Timothy that:

A hardworking farmer should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor.⁸

A farmer wakes up early, and labours diligently to sow crops in season. Then, he waits, relying on nature to do what only it can. Without nature doing its thing, there would be no harvest to enjoy. But without the farmer diligently and sacrificially doing his thing, there would also be no harvest.

Similarly for the Christian, God has a part that only he can do—only he can give us the grace and strength we need to follow Jesus faithfully in difficult times. But you and I must embrace our part as well—that of single-minded devotion and discipline in Christ.

⁵ As quoted by Philip H. Towner in *1-2 Timothy and Titus* (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series), p. 172.

⁶ 2 Timothy 2:4 (NLT)

⁷ 2 Timothy 2:5 (NLT)

⁸ 2 Timothy 2:6 (NLT)

You and I are called to be like a soldier, an athlete or a farmer— those who are committed to something bigger than ourselves and who are willing to make sacrifices in order to accomplish a greater goal.

New Testament scholar Philip Towner says that such devotion and discipline allow us “to give ourselves to other people when we are tired, to pray when we do not feel like it, and continue in hope” in difficult times.⁹

Having said all these things, Paul then urges Timothy:

Think about what I’m saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things.¹⁰

Paul is asking Timothy to pause and reflect on what he’s been saying. And we would do well to pause and reflect as well.

Because on the one hand, the strength to follow Jesus faithfully comes from Christ himself, but the images Paul has used—the soldier, the athlete, the farmer—call us to single-minded devotion and discipline on our part.

So in line with Paul’s invitation to think about what he’s saying, we’re actually going to pause and allow you 30 seconds to prayerfully reflect on this question.

How is God speaking to you through this passage?

[Go to series title slide for 30 seconds and play reflective instrumental music if possible]

So, how is God speaking to you through this passage? Go ahead let us know in the chat.

At the end of today’s message, we’ll celebrate the Lord’s Supper, and that’s when I’ll touch on the remaining verses in our 2 Timothy passage.

But what I’d like to do at this time is tell you more about our current sermon series. It’s designed to bring together both of the aspects we talked about in today’s teaching—God’s part and our part.

Again, the series is called *Realign Your Life: Practices that Transform You*.

In the weeks to come, we’re going to explore six biblical practices that can help you to realign your life by God’s grace in the midst of these difficult and disorienting times.

The six biblical practices we’ll be looking at specifically are *prayer, fasting, scripture, service, hospitality* and *giving*.

⁹ Towner, 173.

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:7 (NLT)

You see, the thing about biblical practices—which are often called *spiritual disciplines*— is that they are things *you* can do in a disciplined way that will open your life to the flow of God’s renewing presence and strength, even and especially in difficult times.

In his classic book *Celebration of Discipline* Richard Foster expresses it this way:

The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.¹¹

And if this year is about finding our bearings in Jesus’ story, we see in scripture that Jesus engaged in such practices himself. Jesus prayed. Jesus fasted. Jesus meditated on scripture. These were channels of God’s sustaining grace in his own life and ministry, which was often difficult.

If Jesus needed to practice the spiritual disciplines, then maybe, just maybe, you and I need to as well.

What I’m especially excited about is that this series is going to culminate in an opportunity for you to make a special Lent commitment to practice one or more of the biblical disciplines that we’ll be covering in the weeks to come.

Lent is the 40-day period leading up to Easter. This year, we’ll be making our Lent commitments on Sunday, Feb. 14 and Lent itself begins on Wed. Feb. 17.

So, that’s what you can expect in this *Realign Your Life* series. Are you excited about what’s to come? If so, type “I’m excited!” into the chat.

Communion

Now, let’s prepare our hearts to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. I hope you have your communion elements ready, so you can participate with us today in this act of worship.

I’d like to go back to the latter verses of today’s passage, where Paul reminds Timothy:

Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach...

This is a trustworthy saying:

If we die with him,
we will also live with him.
If we endure hardship,

¹¹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 7.

we will reign with him.
If we deny him,
he will deny us.
If we are unfaithful,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot deny who he is.¹²

Paul's words to Timothy—this young pastor facing difficult times— are also for us today as we face difficult times.

Paul points us to Jesus, who himself endured infinite suffering of the cross for you and me, and then rose triumphant over death.

To concentrate on Jesus and his resurrection is to strengthen our hope for our own future resurrection and eternal life, when we will reign with Jesus in the new heavens and new earth.

At the same time, resurrection hope also keeps us from being overwhelmed by our present struggles. It therefore becomes our power to endure the difficulties, costs, and sacrifices of faithfully following Jesus right here, right now.

Jesus suffered, died, and was raised to life, and our story is to be shaped by his story.

These truths that helped Paul and Timothy to follow Jesus faithfully in difficult times will help you and me to do the same today.

In a recent article, Canadian pastor and podcaster Carey Neiuwhof warned that we should [lower our expectations for 2021, starting now](#). Now, before you call me Captain Bring-Down for mentioning that, the point is that the year ahead remains uncertain, and it may well bring more hardships.

Therefore, to stake our hopes on circumstances unfolding this year in the particular way that we're hoping for this year would be unwise, and could lead to great disappointment.

Instead, what we're going to do is fix our eyes on Jesus, and pursue practices that allow his grace to flow in our lives, and in doing so, we'll find all the hope and grace and strength we need to endure any hardship, as we follow Christ faithfully and fruitfully through it all.

Always remember Jesus Christ, Paul tells Timothy. That's exactly what we're going to do now...

Communion

¹² 2 Timothy 2:8, 11-13 (NLT)