

Paul and Timothy: Passing the Torch

You Call THAT Suffering?

Rough Transcript

Special Guest Speaker Ronn Read with introduction by Patrick Morley

Patrick Morley:

Well, this morning, we have a special guest speaker. I am extremely proud and honored to be able to introduce the National Field Staff Chaplain for Man in the Mirror. His name is Ronn Read. And Ronn was a pastor for 35 years in four different churches in Illinois and Washington and one other place I can't think of right now. He joined the team at Man in the Mirror new 10 years ago. He was in the first recruiting class for the Area Director initiative. So some of you know, we have Man in the Mirror, the organization, we have staff area directors in over 30 states around the country and we help churches, disciple men more effectively. And we have three of our board members, well, one recently retired, but Scott McCurdy over here, a retired board member, and then Lawrence Smith here, existing board member, and Fred Mateer over here, an existing board member.

And so this Bible Study has been sort of the Petri dish for all of these things. And so it's really wonderful to be able to sort of bring in a person who now is helping all of those men in the field with their chaplaincy issues, if you will. Ronn was married for 48 years to Janie and she passed away a few months ago. They have five children and 19 grandchildren. Ronn is a graduate of Liberty University, played basketball at John Brown University, Kansas State and Liberty University also coached at Liberty University where he graduated. And then has a doctorate degree from Luther Rice Seminary.

And so I wonder if you would join me in giving one of our own, really one of your own, the Chaplain for the Man in the Mirror Field Staff, our own Ronn Read. I wonder if you'll join me in giving him a very warm rousing Man in the Mirror welcome. Ronn Read.

Ronn Read:

Thank you, Pat. Thank you. Thank you guys. And as I'm standing here, you probably realize it was not basketball that I played. It was baseball. Little short for that sport. It is an honor to be here and thank you guys. This is not my first time of being at the Bible Study. Every time we do an MPD training or our, what used to be called bootcamp training, I have been here before for those. So it's good to see some of you again, and some new faces as well.

So you look at the title this morning, it is, So **You Call That Suffering**. There were three old guys sitting on a park bench. Pat said, I'm a pastor for 35 years. So I have to tell a pastor joke, three old guys sitting there. And the first guy said, "You know, the miracle of modern medicine, my hand was cut off, but look at this." And he was able to pull off his prosthetic hand and he put it back on. And he goes, "You know, modern medicine. I was in a sword fight and lost my hand." The second guy, he said, "Well, I was in a sword fight and lost my leg." And he pulls his leg off and puts, "Modern medicine. I'm able to do this." And the third guy said, "Well, I've never done this before, but I was in a sword fight and they cut off my head." And so he pulled his head off and he fell over dead immediately. And the other guy said, "I guess he wins." But not really, not at that point. We do talk about our suffering and we look at our suffering.

So a Facebook friend of mine started posting just a few weeks ago, pictures of his dad and his dad was a pastor where I was pastor in Quincy, Illinois, 40 plus years ago. He was the old guy. Looking back, he probably was in his fifties, but he was the old guy stuck in his ways. He was going to do things his way. And I was this young guy. I was 24 years old when I took on my first senior pastor, just fresh out of seminary. So I was the guy ready to innovate, the guy ready to change. And as Bruce has been putting these pictures and stories on Facebook of his dad, it would've been his dad's birthday. So he was kind of remembering and reminiscing.

I'm looking at that and reading these pictures going, doggone, I didn't know this guy. I wish I would've known him. I wish that I could have sat down with him because I'm sure he could have imparted some wisdom to me. And I probably could have imparted some challenge to him as well, but we never talked. In the 10 years that I was in Quincy and both of us pastoring there, we honestly never talked. I'm now a good friend with his son, but oh how I wish that I would've learned from him because he went through a lot of church problems. I was going through a lot of church problems. It could have been a great combination of a Paul/Timothy that we missed that opportunity.

So this morning I'm hoping that I can give a little bit of a challenge in regards to our text today on enduring hardship, on looking at how can we teach somebody else. So the Big Idea today is: **We need to be trained to be prepared for hardships that are sure to come.** We need to be trained, to be prepared for the hardships that are sure to come. Paul says in our text, "Endure hardship with us." He goes on to talk about, what is going to be a part of that. But he's saying, "Endure hardship." One of our core values is resilience. And that's what this endurance truly is.

So I want you to think for a moment, think about the hardships that you have either been through, or maybe are going through right now. I heard some pastor say one time, "You're either just coming out of a difficulty, you're in a difficulty, or you're about to go into a difficulty," because that's life. Life has hardships. And we're going to use a lot of synonyms today, hardships, pain, trials, difficulties, but we need to be trained to be prepared for those hardships.

So as you think about your hardships, it's very easy for us to focus on our own. I could take a look at the difficulties that I've been through in my life. And I could, it'd be very easy to focus on some of the residual effects of those. I grew up without a dad. My dad died when I was five months old. And so I grew up without a dad. And that's obviously a difficulty that I could easily focus on, on the emotional scars and wounds that that caused. My goal was to play professional baseball. And in my sophomore year of college, I blew my knee in a very freak accident on our ball field. And there went my dream, not just my dream, but literally my little G God. And God in his severe mercy moved that little G out because that's when I found the real God, the big G God was through that experience, but I could focus on the emotional pain of that.

Then once my wife and I were married, we lost our first baby. And I could focus on the spiritual pain that I went through at that point. I was a brand new Christian and it's like, God, where are you? As we talk about the five types of men, that hurting men is usually asking, where are you, God? I could look at the problems in various churches that I've faced over the 40 or 35 years of pastoring. Brett describes in the no man left behind, the elder is that mid-level management person that walks into a church boardroom and loses his brain. And sometimes they lose their soul and their heart. There's just pain that a lot of pastors go through in that situation. I could focus on the spiritual struggles of that. And then just recently the death of my wife of 48 years, and nothing compares, maybe the story of the guy losing his head. You feel like you've lost your head. And there's just the pain that you go through with that.

Patrick had an illustration a couple weeks back at our... I missed that part, didn't I? We look at Pat's teaching in the season of suffering and the playbook that sometimes we suffer for doing wrong. We obviously look at that and we go, well, yeah, I did a bad thing, a stupid thing, an illogical thing. And I'm suffering for that. Sometimes we suffer for doing right. We take our stand and we know that by taking

that stand, somebody's going to not like the stand we're taking and we're going to suffer for that. And sometimes, quite often, for no apparent reason at all.

But a few weeks back at reunion, he put up on the screen, something that if you sat in an emergency room, you've seen this. I was just recently in the emergency room. Am I skipping ahead? Yeah, here we go. You see the different types of pain. And what we learn from that is pain is relative. Our pain is something that, as we look at our pain, we're feeling that pain, but somebody else may say, you call that pain? You call that suffering? You call that a trial?

I've got a grandson that he fell out of a bunk bed, fell onto a big log and cracked his skull, literally fractured his skull. It went right through his ear, transverse converse. And so he suffered an immense amount of pain with that. And then recently he broke a finger. I won't point what finger he broke in his hand, but he broke the finger. It was literally turned 90 degrees. And when he went into the emergency room, they said, "What kind of pain are you having?" He pointed at the mile, the one to three. He actually said a two. And in comparison to what he experienced with his head, yeah, because pain is relative.

I actually Googled the problems that today's generation is facing. As I was preparing for this, I thought, well, as we're going to be talking about mentoring in our suffering, what are the problems that today's generation would say, these are the biggest. And they listed the top five problems. I'm going to give you three of them. Number one was student debt. That was the biggest issue that today's generation is facing, coupled with the difficulty of, and this was number two, finding a job or a career that will help pay those student debts. And so number three, financial difficulties that are as a result of those lack of good paying jobs. And number four was their relationship issues. Meaning many had no positive examples to learn from, or even a bad example in their lives. They just are feeling the relationship issues.

Again, pain is relative. None of us are facing what the country of Ukraine is facing right now. But my pain is my pain. Your pain is your pain. So no matter what's happening over there, we feel the pain that we're going through. And in our mind, this is bad. God, where are you?

HARDSHIPS ARE RELATIVE

So circle one, I've kind of jumped ahead here. So if we go back to the first circle that you can fill in, in your outline, hardships are relative. The problem in our text today... By the way, hardships in our text is translated, discomfort. Discomfort, I'm not feeling good. Whether it's a discomfort of physical issue or I don't like the situation that I'm in, it's translated trouble. It's translated suffering in some particular verses, and it's even translated tribulation. I don't know about you, but I see a pretty wide gap there from discomfort, I don't feel good, to tribulation. To actually being wiped out in my spiritual, emotional, mental, and maybe even physical walk is a pretty wide relative term there.

Hardships are relative. The problem is we look at our texts today and it's a proven fact that print shrinks the older you get. It's not that it's my eyes, it's that this Bible is just getting smaller and smaller, but it does say this, "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs. He wants to please his commanding officer." Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown, unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmers should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I'm saying for the Lord will give you insight into all of this.

So the problem in our text is laid out that hardships are going to be faced, and they're not even delved into by Paul. He just lists these three occupations or three positions and just says, yeah, this is going to happen, that pain, difficulties, hardships, suffering, tribulation happen in our lives. The soldier certainly, he faces, in Paul's day it would've been swords and spears, but the soldier today faces battles, bombs, and bullets. I'd call that suffering. I'd call that hardship to know what soldiers face. The athlete faces

pain, pushing his body to the absolute limit. Now, I don't know if getting paid \$30 million to have that pain is really worth it, but that's the pain of that athlete.

As a matter of fact, some of you may have seen the video of LeBron James having to be carried off the court because he had cramps in his calves. That's suffering, man. For all the money that he makes to be able to do that, he suffers. And then the farmer faces storms, drought, the various elements, bugs, you name it, the farmer faces that. And it's all relative. I'm sure that each one of them saw their pain as being the worst pain and could have easily looked at the others suffering, you call that suffering? And we do the same.

Going back to the problems of today, student debt, you say that's an issue. We stormed the beaches of Normandy. We fought in the jungles of Vietnam. We fought in the mountains of Afghanistan. We're soldiers, that's pain, that's hardship. Financial hardship, hey, we put in hours and hours and hours of practice, as well as time in the gym, pushing our bodies past the point of pain to gain that championship. We were athletes. Relationship issues, we hardly even saw our families. We were up before dawn and got home before or after dark as we spent hours and hours in the fields dealing with rocks, rains, drought, bugs, you name it. We were farmers.

Yet Paul, who could have easily berated Timothy, could have easily said, Timothy, all you're doing is pastoring a church. And yeah, you're having a difficult time with them. You call that hardship. Look at what I went through. I think the text is up on the screen. With far greater laborers, far more imprisonments, countless beatings, often near death. Five times at the hands of the Jews, the 40 latches, less one. Three times beaten with rods, once stoned, and not the good kind of stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I drifted sea, frequent journeys, danger from rivers danger from robbers. What he did write to the Corinthians, he could have written that to Timothy, saying, big boy, this is pain. What you're going through is not. But he didn't do that. He did not do that. He simply said, "Timothy, endure hardship." He gave him that challenge. And again, the word endure has several meanings. We're going to get into that in just a moment.

But my favorite book of all time is a book called Endurance. Anybody in here read the book Endurance? Yeah, it's a story of Ernest Shackleton. His goal, his vision, because the South Pole had already been discovered, he wanted to cross the continent of Antarctica. So he was going to bring his ship into the Weddell Sea, and then his explorers were going to get off, cross the continent, go past the South Pole, and then be picked up on the other side. Well, the problem was winter set in early, and the ship got crushed by the ice. As it got encased by it, pretty soon, it literally crushed it and sank. They just found it, after a hundred plus years, they just found it under 10,000 feet of water, still intact.

But that story, I would give you a challenge, guys, read the book Endurance. You'll never complain about being cold or hungry again because they, for over two years survived on just whatever they could kill and eat. And also, they didn't have the modern Gore-Tex material. Everything that they were wearing was rotting. And just story after story in this book of survival, literally of endurance. But the ship was named Endurance. That's why the title of the book, but it was based off of the family motto of Ernest Shackleton, Fortitudine Vincimus, which means by endurance, we conquer. And so that became their battle cry. And that's what Paul is challenging that to Timothy. By endurance, we are victorious. By endurance, we win the war, we win the championship, we harvest the crops. So again, Paul gave this challenge, endure hardship.

WE NEED SOMEONE TO WALK THROUGH HARDSHIPS WITH US

So point number two is this. We need someone to walk through the hardships with us. In the New International Version, it says, "Endure hardships with us." Then there are two others, the English Standard says, "Share in the suffering." And then another version of the NIV. "Join with me." Join with me, doesn't that sound like an invitation that you want to just jump into? Hey, come on, join with me in

the suffering. Well, the reality is, it's not an invitation. It's a reality that we're going to be in the suffering. We need somebody to walk through that suffering with us.

So as you look at the text, we see that the soldier was trained. The soldier goes through... How many of you served in the military? How many of you would say bootcamp was the best experience of your life? I've never seen hands go down so fast. Yeah. And yet that bootcamp was what trained you for what you were going to be facing. And they knew it. You hated it. They probably hated it too, as they yelled at you. Some of them probably enjoyed it, but they knew you're facing the potential of death. We want to help you avoid that. So there was training.

A soldier always knows the potential of death. His endurance though is driven by dedication. And that's what, again, the text points out that the soldier doesn't get entangled, doesn't get distracted by the affairs of this world. Our victory of soldiers will come only as we stay focused on our calling, only as we stay focused on our training and why we're here. Our victory quite often depends on the training from a commanding officer. Now, as we're talking about mentoring relationships, that's not exactly a relationship that's warm and fuzzy. The commanding officer, he's the guy who's going to tell you, this is what you have to do, and you're going to do it and makes you do it that way.

So my first day at Liberty University, I'd been attending Kansas State University, I had just become a Christian probably about three months before my first day walking onto the campus. I'd been married for about a week at this point. And so we pulled up into the parking lot. I had baseball practice in the back gym of, basically it was the Academy there. There was no college campus at this point. So we were having baseball practice. So I'm wearing sweats, I'm ready to go to baseball practice. And I slid over or out and my wife slid over to drive, my brand new bride. And I reached down in the window and gave her a kiss. And then when I stood up, there was an RA right in my face. I mean, he was right there and he said, "I want your name." And I said, "Why, don't you like your own?" And I walked away. I mean, I was a smart alec and that didn't get driven out of me by becoming a Christian.

So he's barking at me like a little Chihuahua as I'm walking into baseball practice, just following me, "You're out of..." He starts naming PDA, which I didn't even know what PDA was at that point, but it's public display of affection. I was out of uniform. I didn't have a tie on, my hair was too long. I still had my Fu Manchu mustache from my days. And so everything that I was, was against every rule at Liberty, and he's telling me this. And I finally turned around, I said, "Well, your rules are stupid." And that was the magic word. Now I got to meet the Dean of Student Affairs. And so Coach Worthington tells me, "Just go take care of this and then get back as soon as you can." So I met the Dean and he's telling me these things, and I said the same word to him, "The rules are stupid."

And so I met the next Dean up and the next Dean up until finally I find myself in Jerry Falwell's office, who I didn't even know who Jerry Falwell was. I went there to play baseball. And he said, "Son, were you in the military?" I said, "No, sir. I was not." And he said, "Well, in the military, they have stupid rules, a lot of stupid rules." He goes, "You want to know why? They're building champions." And he said, "If they're going to obey a stupid rule, then that rule may save their lives on the battlefield." And he said, "So, son, you're going to wear a tie." I said, "I don't own a tie." And he pulled out his wallet and he gave me five bucks and he goes, "Go buy a tie." I did. I bought a tie and I wore that tie for the next five years. I hung it on my rear view mirror as I left campus and put it on.

But his point was great. You're going to have to obey the stupid rules. You're going to have to obey the commanding officer because that's going to save your life or give you hope in life someday. Sometimes the thing God calls us to do may seem stupid on the surface. It may seem like, what are you asking me to do this for, God? Why are you calling me to this place? Why are you challenging me to talk to that guy? And it may seem stupid, but he's training us to endure the hardships we're going to face on the battlefield. When I can say no to the things or yes to the things that I might want to say no, or yes to, I can say no to the things that are thrown at me in an attempt to destroy me. I can stand to that battle.

The soldier is trained. The athlete is coached. And there's, again, a little bit more of a relationship here. There's coming that mindset, that, again, the athlete always knows the potential of injury. And so the coaching is to help not only prevent the injury, but help us to win the championship. His endurance is driven by discipline. He's going to repeat that same process over and over. I took batting practice every day, as long as I possibly could, because again, just that muscle memory, swinging that bat and having your swing down. There was discipline involved, but don't get sidelined is the challenge in the text. Don't get sidelined by taking shortcuts.

I ran cross-country in high school, hit a season where I was not able to play football and so I ran cross-country. And our coach had this old Jeep Willys panel wagon, and he would put the whole team, there were only like seven or eight of us, we'd pile in the back of that, and he'd take us out a few miles and drop us off. And the goal was, and the necessity was, make it back to campus before the buses left, or you're going to continue to run and run all the way home. And so he would take us out and drop us off. And every single time somebody on the team would say, "Hey, I know a shortcut," and we'd find this shortcut to get back. It might involve running through a field with bulls, or it might involve crossing a few barbwire fences, but we'd take that shortcut. And it was great until we hit our first meet. And we were not prepared for that meet because we had been taking all these shortcuts along the way. No more shortcuts after that.

So Paul challenges Timothy, don't get disqualified by breaking the rules. Our victory depends on running with diligence the race that is set before us, and we need a coach. Paul often uses that analogy of a race as an analogy of the Christian faith, the Christian walk. The discipline of training, diligence. The need of staying on the course. And it's our course. He says, "Run with patience to the race that is set before you." You're not going to run somebody else's race. You're running your race. And then the power of his strength in our weakness. The third one mentioned is the farmer. I grew up on a farm in Kansas. And so like most farmers, a farmer doesn't... Most men don't just say, hey, I'm going to go into farming. This sounds like a good profession. Are there any farmers in here? Anybody? You don't farm in Orlando? Yeah. Most farmers are farmers because their dads were farmers. Yeah. I mean, they were mentored.

So now we've developed a third level of relationship, the commanding officer, the coach, and now we're going a little bit deeper with the mentor, with the man who knows why he's doing what he's doing, what he's experienced, and what he can impart as far as wisdom. He always knows the potential of crop loss. The commanding officer knows the potential of death through the soldier. The coach knows the potential of injury. The farmer knows the potential of crop loss, that all the work that he's done could be washed away with a flood, wiped away with a tornado, storms, market changes. You name it, the farmer faces that. But his endurance is driven by diligence. He's going to stay with it. He's not going to get discouraged by things that are out of his control.

Growing up on the farm, because my dad had died, my grandpa raised me. So I grew up under his tutelage and he had a unique way of teaching and it was giving a freedom to fail. He would let me go out and plow as probably a 11, 12 year old on the big tractor. And then after I had messed up, he'd say, "Now you want to learn how to do it right?" And he would mentor me. He would teach me. But I only heard my grandpa cuss twice in my growing up years and one of them was when I'd gone out to do some chores. And I came back in, I said, "There's a dead cow out there." And he shook his head and said a cuss word.

We had to dig a big trench and drive the cows in there, shoot them, burn them, bury them because it was cholera. And that was going to wipe out, not only our herd, but other herds around. So, that was the requirement was that you'd kill off your herd. But through that, he went to pigs and that saved the farm. I often wish that it would've just gone ahead and died with the pigs. But he learned the diligence that you find another way. You don't just give up and say, well, that's it, we're done. We're over. There was diligence in staying by this stuff. And sometimes we need that.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO TEACH AND MENTOR OUR SONS IN THE FAITH?

So that leads to circle number three, the so what? What do we need, what do we need to teach and mentor our sons in the faith? What do we need to grab onto in the midst of our hardship, that we're going to be able to teach others? So the application comes from second Corinthians chapter one, where Paul wrote, "Blessed is the God of all comfort, who comforts us in any of our struggles so that..." And that's a critical transition word. He comforts us. He gives us what we need so that we're able to comfort any others that are going through struggles. You get that? He doesn't just comfort us so that we feel comfortable or no longer suffering, or the hardship is over. He gives us this so that we can give it to someone else.

Joseph is a great example, by the way, the rest of the text goes on to say, "But this happened so that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God." All of this, that Paul talks about, all this struggle, all the suffering, all the hardship, he said, the number one lesson he got from that, Timothy, is that this helped me so that I no longer rely on myself, but on God. If there's one lesson that we are supposed to learn from the struggles, hardships, difficulties, tribulation, or even discomfort that we go through, it's so that we won't rely on ourselves and so that we can teach somebody else what we've learned. All of these, what we looked at, the soldier, dedication, the athlete, discipline, the farmer, devotion, all of them are important, but they all require dependence, dependence on the strength of the Lord.

Joseph named his second son Ephraim. Ephraim was given to him after he had been delivered from his suffering of 13 years. Joseph said that he named him this in Genesis 41:52, because God had made him fruitful in the land of his suffering. Ephraim means twice blessed. So he was blessed not only by coming out of the suffering, he was blessed in the suffering. He knew that God had a purpose in the suffering. We know, and even quote the verse, "You intended it for evil. God meant it for good." God had a purpose in his suffering.

So get this. When God brings us, not if, when God brings us into a time of suffering, it can be a fruitful time. It's rare for us to see the fruit during the suffering period, but know that the roots are going deep into the spiritual soil of our soul because of our pressing into God during the time of suffering. This is producing a work of character in our lives that cannot be seen often until it finishes the process. That was the case for Joseph. He didn't see it in the middle of it probably, but he saw at the end, there was purpose in this. There was character building.

So it was not until several years after a time of suffering in my life that I began to see the fruit of the trials that the Lord allowed me to experience. As a matter of fact, 10 years ago, when I interviewed for the Man in the Mirror Area Director position, Pat was one of my interviewers. And he said, "I just have one question. Have you been broken?" And I think I broke down in tears at that point. He goes, "Okay, you answered that question. What happened?" But yeah, when we have experienced that, we've been broken, now we begin to see God had a plan. God had a purpose. He was not ignoring me or leaving me during that time. He was carrying me and giving me strength, allowing me to experience this, because this is what was going to bring me character and the ability to teach others that same thing. So he has delivered us. This is in 2 Corinthians 1, Paul said, "He has delivered us," in verse 10. Then he goes on to say, "He will deliver us."

The story of David and Goliath. When David went to the top of that mountain and Saul tried to give him his armor, he said, "What makes you think you can do this?" And David begins to tell about his battle with the lion and his battle with the bear. He was basing his future expectations, battling the giant off his past experiences. "God's been with me before. God will be with me now." And when we have that understanding, we know he will deliver us. Or we can look at Mary in her Magnificat, in Matthew, where she meets up with Elizabeth. I think it's nine times she says, "He will. He will. He will. He will." And then she says, "Because he has, he has, he has." You want to know how many times... I said, she said nine

times, "He will." Want to take a wild guess how many times she says, "He has"? Nine times. She based her future expectations off of past experiences.

So when you're going through that suffering, that struggle, that difficulty, to know, I can face this. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me because I've seen where he strengthened me here, here, here, and here. He brings us through so we don't rely on ourselves, but on him. And then Paul says to the Corinthians in verse 10, again, "He will continue to deliver us his promises." The hope that he gives that is the anchor to the soul. The recombobulation.

I went through TSA last night. When you go through TSA, you take your shoes off, your belt off, everything out of your pockets. I almost always travel with these pants that have these zippers, so I always get the pat down because of those. You go through all that. Well, if you ever fly out of Milwaukee County Airport, Mitchell Field, at the end of feeling that discombobulation, they've got a big sign that says "Recombobulation Area." So if you're ever feeling discombobulated, go to Milwaukee and go through TSA, there's the recombobulation... I didn't even know that was a word, but you sit there and you put everything back on. Well, that's the he will continue. When we feel discombobulated, we need to know he will continue to restore and deliver.

I'll close with this. There's so much at stake here in our broken world. And I think we'd all agree, we live in a broken world. And as a result, a lot of broken people, broken hearts, broken souls, young men who are just feeling the impact and the overwhelming consequences of brokenness. But as you draw your own conclusion about our current state of affairs, I wonder and challenge, are you willing for God to speak to you in regards to your hardship, what you're going through right now? Are you willing for God to lead you in the endeavor of figuring out what it is that has broken you or that you've been through that hardship that he's now saying, I have a plan.

Don't forget, never forget, there's a reason why you grew up the way you did, the place you did, the trials you faced, the hardships, the battles you fought as a soldier. There's a reason you grew up the way you did. And someone today needs to hear and relate to your story, your experiences, so they might not give up and be distracted in their own warfare. Don't forget that there's a reason why you have experienced what you've experienced in life, the races that you've run. And again, because someone is experiencing those same difficulties in their race today, and they feel like pulling up and giving up in that race, they need to know to not give up and to not break the rules and take any easy shortcuts out.

Don't forget there's a reason why you've traveled the roads that you've traveled and plowed the fields that you've plowed. And maybe someone is going down that same road today and needs to stick with it, not giving up. Don't forget, as older men in this room, don't forget, someone is looking for someone just like you. They don't know it right now, but they're looking for someone just like you to walk through the struggles that they're facing. Maybe as a soldier, fighting a war. Maybe as an athlete, just pushing their body to the limits. Maybe as a farmer, feeling like another storm is on the way. They're feeling that they need somebody to walk through this battle with them. Will you be willing to find that Timothy and will you be willing to be their Paul? Let us pray.

Lord, I thank you for your sovereignty, that nothing comes at us that hasn't gone through your hands first. I thank you for your unfailing love and for your amazing grace. I thank you for your power and strength that in our weakness, you are made strong. And I thank you, Lord, for your wisdom, that you do know what is for our good as well as for your glory. May we not only rest in your grace and your sovereignty, may we be willing to use and to be used with what you have taught us, that we might teach others so that we might not rely on ourselves, but on you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.