

A Robust Faith (2 Timothy 2:1-7)

Toughen up! We might hear these words of not-so-gentle challenge from a coach, a business colleague, or even a parent. The problem with such a command is that it comes with no resource for complicity. It simply expects us to muster up the strength to perform whatever task lies before us in our strength. How different is Paul's exhortation to Timothy. "Be strong," Paul writes, and adds, "in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." The grace of God through His eternal Son enables us to toughen up in the midst of impossible circumstances. Paul's words ring down through the centuries to God's people today. We need to be strong, depending on the grace that flows from Jesus Christ. By His grace we can develop a robust faith. The strength of our faith should reflect the strength of our Savior. This kind of robust faith will display the characteristics of multiplication, discipline, and reflection.

A robust faith is characterized by multiplication (2:1-2).

Paul had poured his life into Timothy. He now expected Timothy to follow his example by passing the truth of God on to others. Timothy's commitment to Jesus Christ would display itself in a lasting heritage, a heritage of spiritual stamina and strength.

Be strong—maintain a vibrant commitment to Jesus Christ (2:1).

Paul addressed Timothy as his "child," his spiritual son in the faith (compare 2 Timothy 1:2). He exhorted Timothy to be strong, a verb that implies an ongoing condition. Timothy, like us, would need to bolster his spiritual strength day by day and hour by hour. But Timothy didn't need to rely on his own resolve—in fact, he would have been ill advised to do so. Instead, Timothy could concentrate on the grace that comes from a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul encouraged Timothy to remain strong "in," that is "by means of" the grace of Jesus Christ. The Lord graciously extends His power to His people in their time of need. We can be strong in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Pass it on—be strategic about transmitting God's truth to others (2:2).

Those who maintain spiritual strength through the grace of Jesus Christ have a responsibility to help others on their spiritual journey. Paul had provided this invaluable service to Timothy. Timothy had "heard" the truths of the gospel from Paul in the presence of "many witnesses." In other words, the message Paul proclaimed wasn't unique to him. Many others were declaring the same truths about Jesus Christ. Since Timothy had received Paul's teachings

over the years it was incumbent on Timothy to pass these teachings along. He was to multiply his ministry in the lives of others. Specifically, Paul expected Timothy to focus his attention on “faithful” individuals, those who were “competent” to pass these truths forward to others. He was to “entrust” the truth to others, a term that’s related to the idea of the “deposit” Paul had placed in Timothy’s hands (verse 14). He would entrust these truths by “teaching” the next generation of Christian leaders. We see in this verse four generations of Christians, a truly remarkable heritage—Paul, Timothy, faithful individuals, and still others. A robust faith is characterized by multiplication.

**A robust faith is
characterized by discipline (2:3-6).**

Using three illustrations—a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer (compare 1 Corinthians 9:7, 24)—Paul underscores the importance of discipline in the Christian life. A robust faith, sustained by the grace of God, involves personal spiritual discipline.

Like a soldier, endure suffering in order to please your commanding officer (2:3-4).

The life of a soldier, particularly the Roman soldier with whom Paul was familiar during his imprisonment in Rome, is one of endurance. Paul instructed Timothy to “endure hardship,” literally to “suffer bad things” (compare 2 Timothy 1:8) like a “good soldier.” Soldiers don’t have luxurious living conditions. Instead, they live outside or in rustic barracks. They march in hot or rainy weather. They face the real possibility of severe injury or death in battle. They experience loneliness and boredom. Such is the life of a soldier. Why should the spiritual soldier, the follower of Jesus Christ, expect better? We should endure hardship for the sake of our Savior. Paul states that soldiers endure hardships and avoid entanglements with the affairs of life in order to please their commanding officer, literally, the one having enlisted them. We’ve been enlisted by Jesus Christ. Our lives should be free from the entanglements of the world, the busyness, the distractions, and the sins that keep us from full devotion to our Savior. This requires constant spiritual discipline.

Like an athlete, compete according to the rules in order to win the prize (2:5).

Paul’s second illustration of discipline is that of an athlete. Here he emphasizes the importance of competing according to the rules. An athlete in ancient times would compete for the glory of a laurel wreath crown (in contrast to a king’s crown, a different word in Greek). The glory of that reward compelled ancient athletes to follow the rules of their sport. In today’s competitive world of sports too many athletes break the rules in order to achieve a higher level of performance. Those who are caught lose their rewards and are even banned from their sports.

Paul reminds Timothy to abide by the rules like an honest athlete. God's Word is our rulebook. One day we will stand before the Lord in anticipation of His eternal reward, including the crowns we may earn for faithful service. We must live disciplined spiritual lives, disciplined by the truths of God's Word.

Like a farmer, work hard in order to enjoy the first of the harvest (2:6).

Finally Paul illustrates a disciplined Christian life by pointing to the hard working farmer. Here the emphasis lies on the farmer's work ethic. The farmer labors intensely in order to produce a crop. Long days and physical exhaustion are the norm. But when harvest time arrives, the hard working farmer is the first to enjoy the fruit of these labors. Likewise, the Christian servant must labor intensely for the Lord. We must be diligent and disciplined in our work, knowing that one day we too will receive our reward from the Lord. A robust faith is characterized by discipline.

**A robust faith is
characterized by reflection (2:7).**

Finally, a robust faith is characterized by reflection. While we must multiply our lives by pouring into others and while we must discipline our lives in order to achieve our God-directed goals, we must also take time to rest and reflect on the work of God in our lives.

Take time to reflect on God's Word (2:7a).

Paul encouraged Timothy to take time to reflect on his words, to think deeply about what he wrote. We often neglect the very important discipline of rest and reflection. However, through reflective meditation on the truths of God's Word we discover the voice of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We need to set aside time to reflect on God and His Word.

Trust the Lord to give you spiritual insight (2:7b).

Paul assured Timothy that the Lord Jesus Christ would give him understanding "in all things." In other words, we can trust God to guide our lives as we reflect on Him. We'll gain spiritual insight into God's Word and direction for living out His truth in our day to day lives. By God's grace we can develop a robust faith. The strength of our faith should reflect the strength of our Savior.