



WEEK TWO – FAITHFULNESS WHEN THINGS GET TOUGH

Read 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Paul, probably more than anyone else, exemplified this. Speaking of those who say they have a faith but as soon as things get difficult give up, Paul's testimony is this:

2 Corinthians 11:23-28

"...I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,

I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.

I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."

In studying this book, it is important to understand why Paul is encouraging Timothy to always be faithful and what we can learn from this for our own lives.

Read verses 3-7

- How do we know when faith is genuine?
- Could this be said of us?

In verse 6, Paul encourages Timothy to: *"fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."*

What that gift was is not stated but it must have been clear to those who knew him.

- What gift has God given you?
- How do you try and develop that gift?

In verse 7, Paul says: *"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."* In the NKJ version it describes self-discipline as

having a *sound mind*. Evidently, the Greek meaning of this word is *safe-thinking* denoting: good judgement, disciplined thought patterns and the ability to understand and make right decisions. It includes the qualities of self-control and self-discipline.

- How might we learn to develop these things in our lives?

Clearly, we cannot be good disciples if we are timid or fearful of what people think about us and our beliefs. Timothy was fortunate that he had been brought up with good examples in his mother and grandmother who had nurtured his sincere faith.

- Do we consider how we influence other people in their thinking about Jesus and the Christian faith?
- What have you found to be the best way for you to share your experiences?

Read verses 8-14

At the time of this epistle, Christians were almost certain to be persecuted. However, Paul didn't want Timothy to be discouraged by this but encouraged him to be bold because the Spirit of God gives us power, love and self-discipline.

I'm not sure you would get a positive response if this were preached on Sunday morning. However, we do know that in areas of the world where there is persecution, peoples' faith is incredibly strong, and they are willing to give their lives for their love of Jesus.

We will never know, unless put in this position, how we might respond. Many people would associate more with timid Timothy than outspoken Paul.

- Does verse 9 bolster your faith? It clearly states that we have been given grace to enable us to live a holy life. Not a sudden decision of God's, because it was foreordained - given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.
- What do you understand the words 'a holy life' to mean?

In Leviticus 11 and 19, we find a lengthy list of instructions for the Children of Israel to follow in order to be holy. What God was doing here was setting them apart from the tribes around them.

I think this is an important lesson for us. Not that we follow the dietary laws or laws of sacrifice but that we live according to New Testament teaching. You will find that the teaching in the Acts and Epistles encourages us to place a high priority on spiritual values.

Read Galatians 5

We may not have the overt persecution of some countries but living out the Christian life is not always easy. People are often keen to trip us up or make a joke out of what we believe. Christians in this country do not receive the protection they once did.

If we make it our purpose to be faithful, even during the tough times, God promises the help of the Holy Spirit to be able to stand firm in our faith. Paul declares: “.. *for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day (that is the glorious return of Jesus).*”

Verses 13 and 14 encourage Timothy to follow the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus, to guard the good deposit that has been entrusted with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

In saying that we need to guard what God has given to us Paul is aware that we have to have a firm stance so that we can withstand any problems that come our way. There is nothing passive about Christianity. We must be like the soldier ready for the fight, or the athlete prepared to run his race. In all things, we must be faithful.



Prayer

Father, in all things help us to be faithful. May we take courage from those we read about in your word and may we constantly be filled with your Holy Spirit.

Amen