

LESSON 5

Love That Strengthens

You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer. Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

— 2 Timothy 2:1-7

A congregation loves by strengthening the brother who is ready to quit, and the strength it gives him was first given to it in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Introduction

WHERE DOES LOVE GET WHAT IT NEEDS? As we've learned over the first four lessons, it is grace, already handed over. Now, a harder question. What does love do when the body is strained, when people are hard to love, or when the people who should be doing the loving have quit? It begins with a young preacher who is close to giving up.

Timothy is in Ephesus. Paul is in a Roman prison for the last time, and he knows it: *the time for my departure is close*, 2 Timothy 4:6. The men who should have stood with him have scattered. *All those in the province of Asia have deserted me*, 1:15. Demas has gone, 4:10. Paul remembers Timothy's tears, 1:4, and reminds him that God did not give him *a spirit of fear*, 1:7. Timothy was afraid, and Paul knew it.

A body is strained. Its leaders have left. The one man still standing is young, timid, and outnumbered. What does love do?

Paul's answer runs through four parts: the paragraph the *therefore* of 2:1 stands on, where Onesiphorus went looking for the deserted apostle (1:15-18); the command itself, *be strengthened* (2:1); the deposit that has to keep moving (2:2); and three working pictures of a strengthened man (2:3-7). Then the lesson turns to Christ, who strengthened a man on the very night that man failed him.

2 Timothy 1:15-18 – One Man Who Came Looking

You know that all those in the province of Asia have deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he diligently searched for me and found me. May the Lord grant that he obtain mercy from him on that day. You know very well how much he ministered at Ephesus.

Chapter 2 begins with *therefore*, and a *therefore* always stands on something. This is what it stands on: everybody left, and Onesiphorus came looking.

Notice what Onesiphorus did. He *often refreshed* Paul. He *was not ashamed* of the chains. When he reached Rome, he *diligently searched* for the prisoner *and found* him. Rome was enormous, a chained man was hard to locate, and being seen with him was not safe. Onesiphorus went looking anyway.

Keep that in mind as you read the rest of this lesson. Paul has already told Timothy not to be ashamed of the Lord's testimony or of Paul, and he says he himself is not ashamed (1:8, 1:12). He then names a man who was *not ashamed of his chains*. Onesiphorus is the living example of what Timothy is asked to become. Paul does not lecture him on courage. He shows him a man who had it.

That is the first thing love does when a body is strained. It refuses the exit everyone else took, goes and finds the brother who has been left, and is not embarrassed to be seen with him.

Everybody Left, One Man Came

2 Timothy 1:15-18 · The paragraph the *therefore* of 2:1 stands on

NOT ASHAMED, THREE TIMES 1:8 don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me 1:12 But I am not ashamed 1:16 he was not ashamed of my chains	THE DESERTION All those in the province of Asia have deserted me, 1:15 Phygelus and Hermogenes, named Demas, later, since he loved this present world, 4:10 At my first defense, no one stood by me, 4:16	ONE MAN CAME Onesiphorus, 1:16-17 OFTEN he often refreshed me UNASHAMED was not ashamed of my chains SEARCHED he diligently searched for me and found me
---	---	--

Chapter 2 begins with *therefore*, and a *therefore* always stands on something. This is what it stands on: everybody left, and one man came.

Love refuses the exit everyone else took, and it goes looking.

2 Timothy 2:1 – Strength That Is Handed to You

You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

“You.” Everyone in Asia has scattered, and then *there is you*. Paul turns to Timothy and calls him *my son*, a father's word, so the tenderness comes first, and the command comes inside it.

The command reads differently in Greek than it does in English. *Be strong* is passive: keep on being strengthened.²³ The verb is built on *dynamis*, the power word found in 2 Corinthians 12:9: *my power is perfected in weakness*, and it works the same way. The strength is given *to* Timothy. His part is to stay where it is handed out.

Where is that? *In the grace that is in Christ Jesus*. Grace does two things at once. It forgives, and it empowers. The grace that puts us right with God is the grace that puts strength in him for God's work, and if we keep our heart turned toward the Lord, we stand in both.

Paul will use this same wording at the end of the letter: *At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me*, 4:16-17. *Strengthened* is the verb of 2:1 with the Lord as subject.²⁴ What Paul commands in chapter 2, he confesses in chapter 4, from the same prison and under the same desertion. He had said it years earlier: *I give thanks to Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me*, 1 Timothy 1:12.

Our previous lesson ended on a Lord who *is able to make him stand*, Romans 14:4. Here is where the standing comes from.

Keep On Being Strengthened

2 Timothy 2:1 • Four beats in one verse, and the command is passive

YOU, THEREFORE <i>Everyone in Asia scattered, and then you.</i> The pronoun is emphatic. Paul is looking at one man.	MY SON <i>A father's word before a command.</i> The tenderness comes first. The command sits inside it.	BE STRONG endynamou Present passive: keep on being strengthened. The strength is done to him.	IN THE GRACE <i>Grace forgives, and grace empowers.</i> Stay where the strength is handed out.
--	---	--	--

ONE VERB • ENDYNAMOO Seven times in the New Testament. Two are commands; three are Paul saying the Lord did it. 2 Timothy 2:1 <i>be strong in the grace</i> Commanded. 2 Timothy 4:17 <i>the Lord stood with me and strengthened me</i> Confessed, from the same prison. 1 Timothy 1:12 • Philippians 4:13 • Ephesians 6:10 <i>who has strengthened me • him who strengthens me • be strengthened by the Lord</i>		
--	--	--

What Paul commands in chapter 2, he confesses in chapter 4.

2 Timothy 2:2 – A Deposit That Has to Move

What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

The word for *commit* is a banking word: hand something valuable to another party for safekeeping.²⁵ Its noun is the *deposit* Paul has already mentioned twice: the *good deposit* Timothy must guard 1:14, and the *deposit* the Lord will guard until that day 1:12. Timothy was handed a treasure, and now Paul tells him what a treasure is for: it moves.

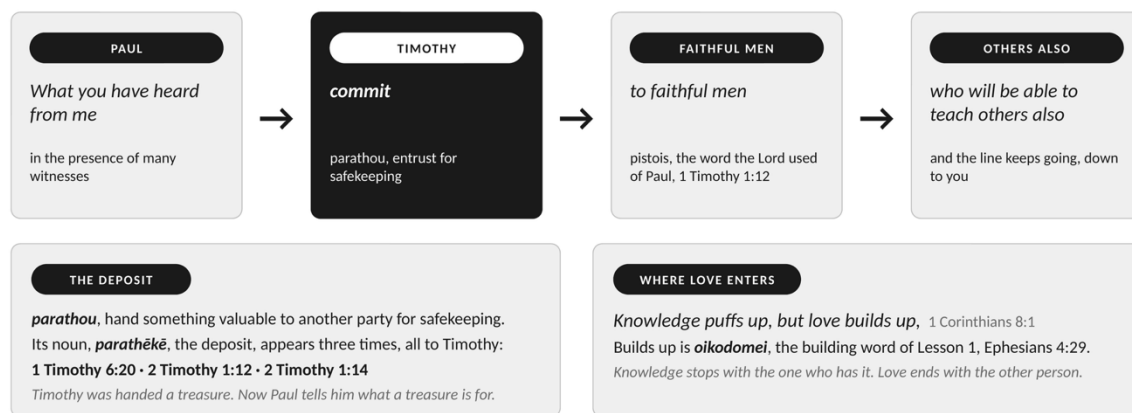
Count the hands in the verse. Paul taught Timothy. Timothy is to entrust it to faithful men. Those men are to teach others. Four generations stand in one sentence, and every Christian reading this page is somewhere down that line, because someone taught you. The deposit is meant to leave your hands the way it arrived.

Who gets it? *Faithful men, pistois*, the same word the Lord used of Paul when He strengthened him: *he considered me faithful*, 1 Timothy 1:12. Paul passes over the gifted and the impressive and asks for the reliable, people who can be trusted with the things of God and will not let them stop with themselves.

Here is where love enters. Paul says it like this elsewhere: *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*, 1 Corinthians 8:1. Knowledge that stays put swells the man who holds it. Love spends the same knowledge on somebody else.²⁶ That is why Paul will not let the deposit sit with Timothy. Teaching is how love handles what it was given, and Timothy had been given a great deal.

Four Hands, One Deposit

2 Timothy 2:2 · Four generations in a single sentence



A deposit is meant to move.

2 Timothy 2:3-7 – Soldier, Athlete, Farmer

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

The verb is *synkakopathēson*, and it occurs exactly twice in the New Testament, both times in this letter (1:8 and 2:3).²⁷ Paul asks Timothy to suffer *with*: with the gospel, with Paul, alongside the brothers. Hardship is coming either way; love decides whether a man carries it alone.

Then three pictures. The soldier does not get *entangled in the concerns of civilian life*; his aim is to *please the commanding officer*. The athlete is *not crowned unless he competes according to the rules*. The farmer works hard and is *the first to get a share of the crops*. Each picture has a cost on the front end and a fruit on the back, and in each one the cost is paid for someone else's sake. The soldier pleases his commander. The athlete meets the judge's rules. The farmer's crop feeds more than the farmer. None of these men is strong for himself alone.

And then Paul stops explaining. *Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything*, 2:7. He leaves the pictures open and trusts the Lord to finish them in Timothy's mind. That is verse 1

again. The strength is given, and the understanding is given with it. Timothy's part is to think hard and stay close.

Looking to Christ

Paul learned this somewhere. On the night before the cross, with desertion hours away, Jesus turned to one man: *Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers*, Luke 22:31-32.

Set that beside 2 Timothy 2:1-2 and the sequence is the same. First the strength is supplied from outside: *I have prayed for you*. Then it is handed on: *strengthen your brothers*. Be strengthened, then strengthen. Christ gave Peter that assignment before Peter fell, while the turning back was still ahead of him.

Peter did fall, three times over, and then *the Lord turned and looked at Peter*, Luke 22:61. No word passed between them, but the Lord had not stopped looking for him. Onesiphorus searched through Rome for a chained apostle; the Lord looked across a courtyard at Peter at the worst moment of his life. And Peter went out and wept.

What Christ did for Peter that night is what Paul says the Lord did for him. *Everyone deserted me. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me*, 2 Timothy 4:16-17. Everyone deserted. The Lord stood. That is the grace Timothy was told to be strong in. Before Paul ever wrote *strengthen* to Timothy, Christ had said it to Peter, prayed it for him, and then stood with Paul in a Roman court when no one else would. The command in 2:1 asks the church to stand where strength is handed out, then turn around and hand it to the next man.

Be Strengthened, Then Strengthen

Luke 22:31-32 beside 2 Timothy 2:1-2 · The same two steps, in the same order

	CHRIST TO PETER Luke 22:31-32	PAUL TO TIMOTHY 2 Timothy 2:1-2
SUPPLIED <i>The strength comes from outside first.</i>	<i>I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.</i> 22:32	<i>be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.</i> 2:1
HANDED ON <i>Then it moves to the next man.</i>	<i>And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.</i> 22:32	<i>commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.</i> 2:2

Everyone deserted me. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, 2 Timothy 4:16-17

Everyone deserts. The Lord stands.

3. *Be strong* in 2:1 is a passive command: keep on being strengthened. What is the difference between trying to be strong and putting yourself where strength is handed out? What does the second one look like in an ordinary week?
4. Paul says grace both forgives and empowers. Why does a person who is unsure of the first have trouble with the second?
5. Compare 2:1 with 4:17. What does it tell you about Paul that the strength he commands is the strength he received in the same prison?
6. Trace the four generations in 2:2. Who taught you the faith? Who are you teaching? If the answer to the second question is no one, what is the deposit doing?
7. What kind of person is *faithful* in the sense of 2:2? Why does Paul choose that word rather than gifted or educated?
8. *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*, 1 Corinthians 8:1. Give a concrete example of the same piece of Bible knowledge doing each of those two things.

9. Look at the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer in 2:3-6. What does each one give up, and for whose sake? Which picture describes the kind of strength you most need right now?

10. In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus tells Peter to strengthen his brothers before Peter has fallen. What does that order tell you about how Christ views a believer's failure? How should it change the way you treat a brother who has failed?

Looking Ahead

Lesson 6 – Restoring the Fallen, Galatians 6:1-5

This lesson strengthened a man who was close to quitting. Next week, we turn our focus to the brother or sister who has already gone down. *Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted,* Galatians 6:1.

The strength Timothy received was never meant to make him hard. It was meant to make him useful to the one who fell, and Galatians 6 says how, with a word about gentleness and a warning about the restorer's own footing. Read Galatians 5:16 through 6:5 before class, and watch who Paul means by *you who are spiritual*, because the answer is in the verses just before it.

²³ *Endynamou* is a present passive imperative of *endynamoō*, "to strengthen, make strong," BDAG, s.v. ἐνδυναμώω. The passive is not merely permissive; Timothy is the object of the strengthening, and the present tense makes it continuous.

²⁴ *Endynamoō* occurs seven times in the New Testament: Acts 9:22; Romans 4:20; Ephesians 6:10; Philippians 4:13; 1 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 2:1; 2 Timothy 4:17. Five of the seven concern Paul or Timothy, and the two imperatives (Ephesians 6:10; 2 Timothy 2:1) stand beside three confessions that the Lord did the strengthening (Philippians 4:13; 1 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:17). Ephesians 6:10, *be strengthened by the Lord*, sits inside the quarter's anchor letter.

²⁵ *Paratithēmi*, "to entrust for safekeeping," BDAG, s.v. παρατίθημι. The cognate noun *parathēkē*, "deposit," appears only three times in the New Testament, all in the letters to Timothy: 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:12; 1:14. The verb is also the one Jesus used from the cross, *Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit*, Luke 23:46, and the one Luke uses of Paul and Barnabas committing new elders to the Lord, Acts 14:23.

²⁶ *Oikodomeō* at 1 Corinthians 8:1 is the verb behind the noun *oikodomē* in Ephesians 4:29 and 4:16, the building thread that opened this quarter in Lesson 1.

²⁷ *Synkakopatheō*, "to suffer hardship together with," BDAG, s.v. συγκακοπαθέω. Its only two New Testament occurrences are 2 Timothy 1:8 and 2:3. The simple verb *kakopatheō* appears at 2:9 and 4:5 in this same letter. The strengthening verb of Luke 22:32, *stērizō*, will return at 2 Thessalonians 2:17 in Lesson 11.