

## CHAPTER ONE

# WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE GIVING IN

### 2 TIMOTHY 1:1-2

*“I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race.  
I have kept the faith.”*

*—Paul, in 2 Timothy 4:7*

**Q**uestion: If the Christian life is a race, have you ever felt like quitting?

Every time I read 2 Timothy 4:7, I think of Big Jake. Jake was a teammate on my high school track team. I ran long distance; Jake threw shot put. We called him Big Jake because he was, quite simply, massive. He'd been shaving since second grade (or so it seemed), and he had muscles in places where I didn't even have places.

However, Jake was not exactly the brightest candle on the cake. Case in point: Once our team was given an extra entry in the mile race, and Big Jake volunteered to run. We could not contain our surprise. He had never run *one* lap around the track, let alone the four laps that make a mile. But it was his senior year, and Jake wanted to go out in a blaze of glory. Coach gave him the spot.

The day came, the mile runners lined up, the gun fired, and to our astonishment, Big Jake took off like a deer . . . or more like a buffalo. He *sprinted* out around the first curve, opening a large lead. Like a locomotive with a full head of steam, he was chugging down the track. A blaze of glory indeed.

But something began to happen during the second lap. Big Jake started to slow. His stride was losing its strength, the pack of runners began to pass him, and it quickly became apparent: Big Jake had burned all his fuel in that spectacular launch. He was running on fumes. Soon he was in dead last.

He was in a world of pain. Every muscle in Big Jake's body (and there were a lot of them) was screaming for him to quit, and halfway around the

**It's not how you start the race that matters. It's how you finish.**

last lap, he did just that. With a mighty sigh, he just stopped running. He bent over and grabbed his knees, fighting for air, and after a few moments to regain his balance, he walked slowly off the track. The blaze of glory had flickered out.

Big Jake never finished the race, and that day I marked down what you might call the Big Jake Principle: *It's not how you start the race that matters. It's how you finish.*

If the Christian life is a race, have you ever felt like quitting?

## **A Difficult Life**

After all, the Christian life is hard.

On my desk, I have a large red pushbutton with the word “easy” on it. Maybe you’ve seen the office supply store commercials that featured this button. Anytime you have a problem, the commercials told us, just push the “easy button” and all will be solved. Out of copy paper? Press the “easy button,” and paper appears. Coworker playing obnoxious rap music? Press the “easy button,” and he’s listening to country-western.

Unfortunately, some Christians think this ought to be included in the gift of salvation. Wouldn’t it be great if we were handed an “easy button” on our way out of the baptistery? One push and God would make all of our problems disappear. Hard time paying the bills? Press the “easy button,” and your bank account is full. Difficult boss? Press the “easy button,” and he’s nicer than Mr. Rogers. Isn’t that the way the Christian life is supposed to work?

A young man came into my office once, sat down, and began the conversation with these words: “I had no idea. For some reason, I really thought that when I became a Christian my troubles would go away. I didn’t know that being a Christian was so hard.”

My hunch is that you already know the Christian life is hard. You know because you’ve read your Bible. In John 16:33, Jesus says, “In this world, you will have trouble.” In Acts 14:22, Paul says, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

But it’s not just Scripture’s clear warnings that taught you to expect difficulty. Your own experience has taught you. You know the Christian life is hard because you’ve *lived* it:

- You’ve struggled to get free of a sinful habit that wouldn’t let you go.
- You’ve ached through a painful church conflict that tore your congregation in half.
- You’ve lost a friend because she didn’t understand why you took your new faith so seriously.
- You’ve prayed fervently for God to heal your father, but no miracle came, and he passed away.

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I *When You Feel Like Giving In*

You know there is no “easy button.” Anyone who has followed Jesus for more than five minutes has experienced moments of defeat, fatigue, rejection, pain, and I’m wondering if you’ve ever been tempted to just stop. When you first became a Christian, still flush with gospel excitement, maybe you had visions of your new life as a constant blaze of glory. But you’re a few laps into the race now, and perhaps the flame is flickering low. You’re tempted to walk off the track and never come back.

If the Christian life is a race, have you ever felt like quitting?

## A Dear Son

Timothy did.

Who is this Timothy to whom the letter of 2 Timothy is addressed (1:1)? In a sentence, he was the apostle Paul’s last earthly hope.

Second Timothy was written around A.D. 67, and some 15 years before, on a trip through the small town of Lystra, Paul met a young man whose spiritual maturity caught his attention. Timothy, perhaps 18 years of age or so, was “spoken well of by all the brothers,” and seeing his kingdom potential, Paul invited Timothy to travel with him on the rest of his missionary journey (Acts 16:2-3).

The invitation proved to be life-changing for both men. Timothy had been raised under the godly influence of his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, but his father was not a believer and apparently not much on the scene. In Paul, Timothy found a spiritual father—someone who taught, encouraged, challenged, and cared deeply about him. For over a decade and a half, Timothy looked to Paul as a mentor and model, wisdom figure and hero.

In Paul, Timothy found a spiritual father who cared deeply about him.

In Timothy, Paul found the son he never had. In 1:2, when Paul calls Timothy “my dear son,” the word *dear* is actually *agapeto*, or “beloved.” You can hear the deep affection. While Paul taught Timothy as a rabbi would a disciple, Timothy was more than just another student. What began as a teacher/pupil relationship grew into a deep friendship. In 2 Timothy 1:4, Paul says, “I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.” In his New Testament letters, Paul mentions Timothy 18 times by name, and in Philippians 2:20, he even says, “I have no one else like him.”

Indeed, Paul entrusted to Timothy his most significant kingdom assignment—leading the church in Ephesus. Outside of Rome, Ephesus was the most strategic city in the Empire. Capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor, it stood at a major trade crossroads, at the midpoint of both the north-south and east-west travel across the Empire.

Large, diverse, and affluent, Ephesus was where Paul spent his longest recorded ministry. For three years, the apostle worked “night and day” to

start and establish a healthy church in this premiere city, and when he left, he did not think he would ever return (Acts 20:25,31).

But now, years later, came disturbing news. To paraphrase the old song, Ephesus “starts with E and that rhymes with T and that stands for trouble.” Along with the problems of materialism (1 Tim 6:5-10) and divisive attitudes (1 Tim 2:8), false teaching was threatening the church. These teachers, like wolves in sheepskin, were infiltrating the flock and leading many astray (1 Tim 1:19-20; 4:1-3; 2 Tim 2:17-18; 3:1-9; 4:3-4).

## A Difficult Assignment

Paul and Timothy returned to Ephesus to straighten out this mess, but after hearing of a pressing need in Macedonia, Paul decided to move on, leaving Timothy behind to set matters right (1 Tim 1:3). Now Timothy was alone with a big job on his hands. Forming a new church is hard work, but *reforming* an established church is even harder. Giving correction is always harder than giving direction.

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direction.

To make matters worse, Timothy feels like he’s stepping up to the plate with three strikes already against him. First, he’s **young**. He was likely in his early 30s, and apparently the folks in the Ephesian church saw him as just another green Bible college kid, still wet behind the ears. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul hints that some are looking down on his youth. I once heard an older preacher jokingly say that to succeed in ministry you only needed two things: gray hair and hemorrhoids. He said the gray hair would make you look distinguished, and the hemorrhoids would make you look concerned! Timothy was ministering without the gray hair, and this young man got no respect. *Strike one.*

He was also **sickly**. If you’ve ever been on a trip in the developing world, what do they always tell you? “Don’t drink the water.” Apparently no one mentioned this to Timothy, so in 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul tells him, “Stop drinking only water,” citing his “frequent stomach illnesses.” Can you imagine: poor Timothy is preaching a sermon when he suddenly experiences an *Imodium A-D™* moment. How embarrassing to have to make a quick exit! His weak constitution probably presented many challenges to fulfilling his ministry. *Strike two.*

To top it off, Timothy was something of an **introvert**. He was more inclined to stand on the sidelines than to get out on the field. That’s why, in just four short chapters, Paul uses 35 imperatives in 2 Timothy. He sounds like a coach giving a pep talk! Listen to these “motivational moments” in Paul’s letters to Timothy: “Don’t neglect your gift . . . fight the good fight . . . fan into flame the gift of God which is in you . . . for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power” (1 Tim 4:14; 6:12;

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I *When You Feel Like Giving In*

2 Tim 1:6,7). One scholar, John Stott, calls him “timid Timothy,” and if that’s true, then the thought of confronting misguided leaders would’ve made this soft-spoken young man inwardly cringe.<sup>1</sup>

In just four short chapters, Paul uses 35 imperatives, like a coach giving a pep talk.

*That’s strike three, and Timothy wants outta there.* He’s ready to be done with this ministry, throw in the towel, walk off the track, and never come back. If the Christian life is a race, he feels like quitting.

## A Determined Leader

So the apostle Paul picks up his pen.

Ephesus was too strategic, the false teaching too dangerous, Timothy’s mission too important to let this situation go unaddressed.

By the way, here’s an important note: Paul is especially urgent because he is writing this letter from prison. You might be thinking, “Yeah, so? Paul was, like, always in prison.” Of course, you’re right. Paul was what we would call a “repeat offender.” Because of his bold preaching, Paul had compiled quite an arrest record, often spending time in the local lockup. As my friend Chris DeWelt says, “Paul was really into stocks and bonds.”

But this time is different: Paul knows this is his last imprisonment. In just a few short months—or weeks—he will face execution. In 2 Timothy 4:6, Paul writes, “I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.” As one scholar puts it, 2 Timothy is written “in the shadow of the scaffold.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul knows his death is imminent, and tragically, it appears that all his church planting in the province of Asia Minor has been for naught. At this time Nero was emperor, and Christians were his favorite scapegoat. Persecution loomed on the horizon, and to understate the case, it was an inconvenient time to follow Jesus. There was no “easy button,” and consequently, 2 Timothy 1:15 describes an overwhelming exodus from these churches. “You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.” Remember the parable of the sower in Mark 4? Like the seed in the rocky soil, these Asian believers had shallow roots. As Jesus had predicted, “When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away” (Mark 4:17).

They weren’t the last to ever fall away.

In his book *Finishing Strong*, Steve Farrar tells the story of John Bisagno, the long-time pastor of First Baptist Church in Houston:

When John was just about to finish college, he was having dinner over at his fiancée’s house one night. After supper, he was talking with his future father-in-law, Dr. Paul Beck, out on the porch. Dr. Beck had been in ministry for years, and that was inevitably the subject toward which the conversation turned.

“John, as you get ready to enter the ministry, I want to give you some advice,” Dr. Beck told the younger man. “Stay true to Jesus! Make sure that you keep your heart close to Jesus every day. It’s a long way from here to where you’re going to go, and Satan’s in no hurry to get you.”

The older man continued, “It has been my observation that just one out of ten who start out in full-time service for the Lord at twenty-one are still on track by the age of sixty-five. They’re shot down morally, they’re shot down with discouragement, they’re shot down with liberal theology, they get obsessed with making money . . . but for one reason or another nine out of ten fall out.”

The twenty-year-old Bisagno was shocked.

“I just can’t believe that!” he said. “That’s impossible! That just can’t be true.”

Bisagno told how he went home, took one of those blank pages in the back of his Scofield Reference Bible and wrote down the names of twenty-four young men who were his peers and contemporaries. These were young men in their twenties who were sold out for Jesus Christ. They were trained for ministry and burning in their desire to be used by the Lord. These were the committed young preachers who would make an impact for the Lord in their generation.

Bisagno relates the following with a sigh: “I am now fifty-three years old. From time to time as the years have gone by, I’ve had to turn back to that page in my Bible and cross out a name. I wrote down those twenty-four names when I was just twenty years of age. Thirty-three years later, there are only *three names* remaining of the original twenty-four.”<sup>3</sup>

I don’t know how many names the apostle Paul had written in the back of his Bible, but he had just crossed out Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Tim 1:15). Now there was only one name left: Timothy. All the other leaders on whom Paul was depending had abandoned the cause. As one commentator writes, “To every eye but that of faith it must have appeared just then as if the gospel were on the eve of extinction. . . . Christianity . . . trembled, *humanly speaking*, on the verge of annihilation.”<sup>4</sup>

Timothy seemed like Paul’s last earthly hope. He was depending on this young man, into whom he had poured his love and learning and life, to carry on his ministry. The torch of the gospel must be passed unquenched from one generation to the next, and Paul was determined that Timothy not fumble it. Timothy must grasp it firmly and hold it high. Paul needed Timothy to be the “one out of ten” to finish well.

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**The torch of the gospel must be passed unquenched from one generation to the next.**

I *When You Feel Like Giving In*

## A Divine Encouragement

So Paul picks up his pen and writes 2 Timothy, the last known letter from the apostle's hand. In this letter, he issues to Timothy essentially one charge: DON'T QUIT! Be faithful. Persevere. Endure. Don't give up. Don't give in. Keep running. Finish strong, Timothy! Stay on the track.

Paul is forging in Timothy what I call *finish-line faith*.

This letter is a powerful tool for shaping that kind of resilient faith. A priceless gift, these words from the aging apostle are better than any "easy button." Rather than simply removing hardship, these pages provide the wisdom needed to overcome hardship. These words shoot adrenaline through Timothy's weary soul.

In fact, as we begin our study of 2 Timothy, can I tell you the end of the story? The church historian Eusebius tells us that Timothy faithfully led the church in Ephesus for the next 30 years. In A.D. 97, after protesting the pagan festivities surrounding the worship of Artemis, he was finally stoned to death.

In other words, Timothy finished strong. This letter had done its work.

As you study 2 Timothy, I think you'll find new hope surging through your soul as well. When you feel like quitting the Christian life, this letter will send spiritual strength coursing through your veins.

It will equip you with finish-line faith.

How?

In the course of the four chapters of 2 Timothy, Paul will give instructions on how to go on when you feel like giving in—things like: remembering your heritage, meditating on the gospel, nourishing yourself on Scripture, and cultivating real community. You'll find his words to be straightforward, practical, and Spirit-inspired. They are exactly the divine encouragement a discouraged disciple needs.

In the next chapter, we'll begin our paragraph-by-paragraph study of 2 Timothy. Let me encourage you to read each biblical paragraph before you read the corresponding chapter in this book. God's Word is so powerful! In fact, as we close this chapter, read again Paul's first words to young Timothy. In 1:2, he writes, "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

I know of a lady who decided to pray for a different friend each day for a year. Each morning she would write out her prayer on a postcard and send it, allowing that day's friend to "eavesdrop" at her prayer closet as she prayed for him or her. What an encouragement to listen in as one of God's saints intercedes on your behalf!

That's exactly what Paul is doing here for Timothy. Before the apostle moves into the body of his letter, he pauses to let Timothy overhear his

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prayers on Timothy’s behalf. What does Paul pray for this disheartened young man? He asks for God to bestow three of his richest blessings: grace, mercy, and peace.

Don’t miss the powerful message here. What is grace? It is God giving His attention to the undeserving. What is mercy? It is God giving His aid to the unable. What is peace? It is God giving His spiritual health to the unwell. That’s a mighty prayer:


- Grace: God’s worth to the worthless
- Mercy: God’s help to the helpless
- Peace: God’s rest to the restless<sup>5</sup>

As Timothy is allowed to eavesdrop at Paul’s prayer closet, hearing him ask God to give these blessings, I’m sure Timothy draws great strength.

Here’s the good news: these blessings are available to you too. God still gives His grace, mercy, and peace to those who ask, and it is still God our Father who enables His children to endure whatever hardships come their way.

**Here’s the good news:  
these blessings are  
available to you too.**

What a simple but essential truth with which to begin this book: *God* gives us the strength to finish. While each study chapter will suggest a way to “go on when you feel like giving in,” these suggestions are simply means of accessing the Father’s resources. It is God—and God alone—who will bring us safely home. As the missionary Hudson Taylor once said, “It is not by trying to be faithful, but in looking to the Faithful One, that we win the victory.” Or as the prophet Isaiah put it, “Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not grow weary . . .” (40:31, NASB).

With God’s help, you can be the “one out of ten.” Keep reading, and let Him forge in you a finish-line faith. Remember the Big Jake Principle: *it’s not how you start the race that matters. It’s how you finish.* 

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973) 30.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 380.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Farrar, *Finishing Strong* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995) 16.

<sup>4</sup> Handley Moule, *The Second Epistle to Timothy* (Religious Tract Society, 1905) 16, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from John Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 26.

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## Going On When We Feel Like Giving In

1. Describe something in your life which you didn't finish, but now wish you had—piano lessons, college, etc.
2. Answer the question: if the Christian life is a race, have you ever felt like quitting? If so, when and why? What were the circumstances? What helped you most in getting through the difficult time?
3. Did you expect the Christian life to be hard or easy? Explain. Do you know somehow who has walked off the track as a believer? If so, why did they?
4. Timothy was young, physically sick, temperamentally shy, and had been given a difficult assignment. Are there ways in which you can identify with Timothy? How so?
5. What are the consequences of quitting? What are the rewards of finishing well?
6. Paul asked God to give Timothy three spiritual blessings. Which do you think you need the most? Take time to ask God for this blessing.
  - Grace: God's worth to the worthless
  - Mercy: God's help to the helpless
  - Peace: God's rest to the restless

**Memory Verse**  
2Tim 1:1-2

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>to Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*

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*When You Feel Like Giving In* 1