

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH

Kansas City, Missouri

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Standing Strong in the Kingdom

Marching Orders for the Soldier of Christ

2 Timothy 2:1 (NIV)

“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

Based on the sermon by Pastor Maurice Gadson

Prepared for Dr. Stan Archie, Senior Pastor & Co-Founder

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DAY 1 — NOT A BED OF ROSES: WHERE TRUE STRENGTH BEGINS

Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 3:4–5 (NIV)

Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.

Devotional Thought

No one who tells you the truth will promise that kingdom living is a smooth, flower-lined path. We have all heard the well-meaning counsel — just let go and let God, and everything will somehow work itself out; hang in there, and it will all be all right. But sometimes everything is not all right. Sometimes the honest testimony of a disciple is that the pressure increased rather than eased. This is not because God delights in our suffering. It is because we have been planted in a broken world where human strength simply cannot repair the damage that sin has already done.

Have you ever tried to get yourself together? Most of us have tried more times than we can count — the positive thinking, the fresh resolutions, the private strategies for climbing out of the hole — only to discover that we have merely dug the hole deeper. Paul, writing from a Roman prison cell under a death sentence, does not hand Timothy a self-help slogan. He hands him a source: “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Notice that he does not say be strong in your talent, your willpower, or your cleverness. He points past the self to the only well that is deep enough.

“My own well is not that deep. The grace that is in Christ Jesus is the only well that never runs dry.”

And our own well is not that deep. Left to draw on ourselves, we run dry quickly, and we come up empty precisely when the pressure is greatest. The world offers a hundred substitute wells — the affirmation of a crowd, the counsel of the culture, the promises of social media — but none of them can reach the water we actually need. The grace that is in Christ Jesus is greater than the grace of any platform or following. It is the one supply that does not rise and fall with our performance.

What makes this grace sufficient is that it is not a substance God ships to us from a distance; it is God Himself, given to us. In Christ we receive His presence — “I will never leave you nor forsake you” — His power, His Spirit, His Word, and everything else the journey requires. To be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus is to stop straining to manufacture strength and to start drawing daily from the One who has promised to walk with us. That is where standing strong begins: not with a firmer grip on ourselves, but with a deeper dependence on Him.

Personal Reflection

1. When pressure rises in my life, where do I instinctively reach first — my own strategies and willpower, or the grace of Christ? What does my honest first move reveal about where I believe strength comes from?
2. What is the “hole” I keep trying to climb out of in my own strength, and how has relying on myself actually made it deeper?
3. What would it look like this week to draw on Christ’s strength before I try to fix a situation myself — practically, in one specific circumstance I am facing right now?
4. What part of my life am I still trying to manage in my own power that God is asking me to surrender to His grace today?

DAY 2 — SEEK FIRST: LIVING ON PURPOSE UNDER THE KING

Scripture Reading

Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Devotional Thought

God supplies His strength when we align our hearts, our choices, and our steps with His will. That means access to His power is never separated from surrender to His purpose. Some of us want God's stuff without wanting God — we pray for a breakthrough while remaining unwilling to lay down the very thing that keeps us bound; we ask Him to strengthen us for our own agenda rather than asking for grace to obey Him. But God will not lend His power to our private projects. He empowers us to accomplish His kingdom purpose, and that requires that we seek Him first.

To seek first the kingdom is to prioritize the relationship — to give God the throne rather than merely a seat, because He does not share the throne with anyone. It is also to make worship the central theme of life, and not only the worship we offer on Sunday inside four walls. Real worship shows up on Monday. It is respecting God through our obedience as a husband or wife, a parent, an employee, a neighbor — acknowledging Him in all our ways. Worship is a commitment made in advance, in which we surrender our plans to His will before the crisis comes, rather than scrambling to call on Him only after the emergency arrives.

“Some want God’s stuff, but they don’t want God. You cannot have access to His power without aligning yourself to His will.”

We already know how to do this; we simply do it for lesser kings. When we took our jobs, we prioritized the relationship, submitted to the company's policies, and surrendered forty, sixty, sometimes eighty hours a week to fulfill someone else's purpose. In return the company equipped us with whatever we needed to carry out its mission. How much more will the King of glory supply everything we need when we give Him the devotion we so readily give an employer? The tragedy is that many will surrender their whole week to a paycheck and withhold their obedience from the One who gives them breath.

When Jesus stood before the governor He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” His reign is not bound by borders; it is heavenly, spiritual, and without limit, and it becomes visible on earth in the lives of people who let Him rule. That is why He added, “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” Kingdom people listen to the King. In most kingdoms an ordinary citizen never has the ear of the ruler, but our King desires a personal relationship with every citizen. His kingdom becomes real and practical the moment His people begin to reflect His values instead of being shaped by the pressures and persuasions of this world.

Personal Reflection

1. *Am I seeking God first, or am I seeking His blessings while keeping Him at arm's length? Where in my prayer life do I ask for His help without submitting to His will?*
2. *What “lesser king” — a job, an image, an ambition — currently receives the kind of daily devotion and surrender that rightly belongs to God?*
3. *What would it mean for my worship to move outside the four walls this week and show up specifically in how I obey God in one relationship or responsibility?*
4. *What plan or decision is God asking me to surrender to Him in advance — before a crisis forces the question?*

DAY 3 — POUR IT FORWARD: ENTRUSTED TO MULTIPLY

Scripture Reading

2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV)

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

Devotional Thought

You are part of God's kingdom purpose to create community. God does not pour into us so that we can become spiritual hoarders, stockpiling truth for our own comfort. He fills us so that we can pour into someone else. Everything Paul deposited into Timothy he expected Timothy to deposit into reliable people, who would in turn be qualified to teach others — four generations of disciples named in a single verse. The kingdom advances not by addition but by multiplication.

Someone will object, "But I'm not a teacher." Yet if you are saved, you already are one. If you know how you came to Christ — if you can tell the story of how you got saved — then you are already equipped to pour that same truth into another person. God is into multiplication. From the beginning He told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, and He was speaking of more than children; He was speaking of reproducing His life in others, so that the next generation would not merely resemble us but would resemble Him.

"God is not pouring into you so you can become a spiritual hoarder. He fills you so you can pour into somebody else."

This is why the repeated call for teachers is not a scheduling problem but a kingdom mandate. When we capture our children early and ground them on a biblical foundation, we send them into the world with something solid to stand on. And this discipleship must guard its content carefully. Paul says to entrust "the things you have heard me say" — the redemption of Christ, Jesus as Savior and Lord, the inheritance of all who enter the kingdom. He does not say pour your opinions, your political persuasion, or your personal preferences into people. Paul's whole message could be summarized in one word: Jesus. The community God is building is built on His Word, not on our commentary.

So the question for every believer is simple and searching: if someone is pouring into your life, into whose life are you pouring? Discipleship is not the specialty of a few; it is the ordinary calling of every citizen of the kingdom. The grace you have received was never meant to terminate on you. It was meant to flow through you.

Personal Reflection

1. *Who has God placed in my life to pour into — and am I actually doing it, or am I holding what I have received for myself?*
2. *When I examine what I "pour" into others, is it the Word of God and the person of Jesus, or is it mostly my own opinions and preferences?*
3. *What would it look like this week to intentionally invest the truth of my own salvation story into one specific person?*
4. *Is there a place — a class, a child, a younger believer — where God is asking me to step forward and teach, and what is holding me back from saying yes?*

DAY 4 — STRENGTH MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS

Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 12:9–10 (NIV)

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ... For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Devotional Thought

We are quick to complain when turbulence enters our lives. Why do I have to go through this? Where is God now? Why me? But the honest kingdom answer is, why not you? If Jesus Himself was persecuted, His followers should not be surprised to share in hardship. Paul urges Timothy to “endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus” — reminding him that he is not suffering alone, and that soldiers who enlist have already accepted, up front, that obstacles and even danger come with the calling.

Paul knew this from the inside. He carried what he called a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan sent to torment him, and three times he pleaded with the Lord to remove it. Notice that he did not politely ask; he pleaded. And the answer he received was not the removal he requested but the revelation he needed: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” The thorn was allowed to remain so that Paul would stay dependent, so that his surpassing revelations would never curdle into conceit.

“When you get your own strength out of the way, that becomes the opportunity for God to do what only He can do.”

Here is the turn that changes everything. Paul does not merely tolerate his weakness; he says he will boast in it and even delight in it, so that Christ’s power may rest on him. When we finally get our own abilities out of the way, we make room for God to do what only God can do. Weakness, in the economy of the kingdom, is not the obstacle to God’s power — it is the opportunity for it. “When I am weak,” Paul concludes, “then I am strong.”

We must be careful to see what actually changed for Paul. The thorn did not leave. The pain did not stop. What changed was his attitude, once he was certain that his Savior was walking with him and would never leave him. This is why a believer can hurt on one hand and rejoice on the other — not because the trouble has disappeared, but because God is present in the very details of the trouble. He knows our ups and our downs and every challenge we face. So we do not buckle under pressure or act as though God has vanished when difficulty comes. We stand, resting on the promise: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Personal Reflection

1. How do I typically respond when hardship enters my life — with the assumption that God has abandoned me, or with confidence that He is present in the details?
2. What is the “thorn” I have pleaded with God to remove, and what might He be teaching me by allowing it to remain?
3. What would it look like for my attitude to change — not my circumstances — this week, as I trust that Christ is walking with me through the difficulty?
4. In what specific area do I need to get my own strength out of the way so that God’s power can rest on me instead?

DAY 5 — AN AUDIENCE OF ONE: PLEASING THE COMMANDING OFFICER

Scripture Reading

2 Timothy 2:3–4 (NIV)

Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

Devotional Thought

A soldier understands rank and order, and above everything else he knows who his superior officer is. That single awareness governs his conduct. Paul says no one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs — the outside concerns that have nothing to do with the mission — because his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. For the disciple, the Commanding Officer is Jesus, and every kingdom citizen knows who our Commander is. Standing strong means keeping our eyes fixed on His approval rather than getting tangled in a hundred lesser loyalties.

This is precisely where so many of us lose our footing. We are desperate for a standing ovation from people, posting our thoughts and decisions for the world to weigh in, hungry for the reassurance of a crowd. But if there is anyone whose approval we should crave, it is God's. So here is a challenge worth carrying into the week: before you post it for the world to like, post it before the throne — measure it against the Scripture — and see whether God likes it first. If God approves, you already have the only vote that counts.

“Before you post it for the world to like, post it before the throne — and see if God likes it first.”

Consider Solomon, who had wealth, wisdom, and every pleasure a person could imagine — enough to bankroll any habit he pleased. Others looked at him and said, “Now that man is living.” Yet when Solomon had tasted it all, his conclusion was that whatever we have and whatever we do, if it is not rooted in God and does not carry His approval, it is empty. “Fear God and keep his commandments,” he said, “for this is the duty of all mankind” — because everyone will one day stand before God and give an account, and He will examine our kingdom résumé. Living under God's rule means prioritizing His will above popular opinion, above cultural trends, and above the influence of every powerful voice in the world. It is better to have everyone displeased with us and God pleased than to win the applause of the crowd and forfeit His approval. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. God is the majority. He can speak a word and it is done, and no amount of influence, following, or cultural pressure can overrule Him. When He becomes our audience of one, we are finally free from the tyranny of everyone else's opinion.

Personal Reflection

1. Whose approval am I actually living for right now — God's, or the applause of people? What evidence in my daily choices reveals the true answer?
2. What “civilian affairs” — distractions, controversies, entanglements — have pulled my attention away from pleasing my Commanding Officer?
3. What would it look like this week to run a decision, a word, or a post through the filter of Scripture before I seek anyone else's approval?
4. Where is God asking me to accept the disapproval of people in order to keep His approval — and am I willing to do it?

DAY 6 — REMEMBER AND GIVE THANKS: THE TESTIMONY THAT KEEPS YOU STANDING

Scripture Reading

1 Samuel 17:36–37 (NIV)

“Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.” ... “The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Devotional Thought

Never forget the lessons and experiences of your past. We are not called to live in the past, but we are commanded to remember it — because the memory of what God has already done becomes the fuel for present courage. When David faced Goliath, the entire army of Israel had lost its nerve, because they had forgotten to count on God. But a shepherd boy stepped forward carrying a memory: he recalled the day a lion seized a lamb and God gave him the strength to overcome it, and the day a bear came and God delivered him again.

Because David remembered, he could look at the giant and say, “The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.” The same God who worked it out yesterday can be trusted to work it out today. Many of us have our own lions and bears in the rearview mirror — the health crisis God carried us through, the financial valley He brought us out of, the family situation He turned around. Remember what God has done, and you will find the strength you need for the giant standing in front of you.

“The day you stop thanking God for what He’s already done is the first day you begin to drift from Him.”

The opposite is just as true, and just as sobering. Israel watched God split the sea, rain bread from heaven, and draw water from a rock — they saw it with their own eyes and experienced it with their own lives. Yet as soon as those miracles became familiar, the wonder wore off and they slid back into the sin cycle. Familiarity with blessing is a spiritual danger. If we are not counting our blessings and reflecting on where God brought us from, we can walk around inside an atmosphere of blessing and never even realize we are standing in it.

This is why thanksgiving is not a formality but a fortress. The very first sign that we are drifting from God is that we stop thanking Him for what He has already done. Paul, writing from prison, tells us to rejoice, and again to rejoice, and to make our requests known to God with thanksgiving — because gratitude has power to change our present circumstance. Start thanking God for everything He has done, and you will run out of complaints before you run out of reasons. Keep thanking Him, and you will keep standing.

Personal Reflection

1. What are the “lions and bears” in my past — the specific deliverances God has already worked — and how easily can I call them to mind right now?
2. Where have I grown so familiar with God’s blessing that I have stopped noticing it, and how has that dulled my gratitude?
3. What would it look like this week to deliberately rehearse my testimony and thank God for a specific deliverance before I ask Him for anything new?
4. What present worry is God asking me to hand over to Him with thanksgiving, trusting the God of my past with my future?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we come to You at the end of this week confessing what we so easily forget: that we can do nothing without You. The path of kingdom living has not been a bed of roses, and we have stopped pretending it should be. We have tried to get ourselves together in our own strength and found that our well is not deep enough. So we return to the only source that never runs dry — the grace that is in Christ Jesus — and we ask You to be our strength.

Teach us, Lord, to seek You first. Forgive us for the times we have wanted Your blessings without wanting You, for the days we surrendered our best hours to lesser kings and withheld our obedience from You. Take the throne of our lives; move our worship out beyond the four walls and into our homes, our work, and our relationships, so that Your kingdom becomes visible on earth through people who have decided to listen to the King.

Make us faithful to pour into others what You have poured into us. Keep us from becoming spiritual hoarders, and make us reliable people who entrust Your truth — and not merely our opinions — to the next generation. Where You are calling us to teach, to disciple, and to build community, give us the courage to say yes, so that those who come after us will look not simply like us but like You.

When hardship comes, and we know that it will, remind us that Your grace is sufficient and that Your power is made perfect in our weakness. We confess how quickly we complain and how tempted we are to believe You have disappeared in our difficulty. Change our attitude even when You do not change our circumstance, and let Christ's power rest on us precisely where we are weak. Help us to endure hardship like good soldiers who have never forgotten who our Commanding Officer is.

Free us, Father, from our hunger for the applause of people. Let Your approval be the only standing ovation we chase. Before we seek the likes of the crowd, teach us to seek Your face; before we post it to the world, let us weigh it against Your Word. And keep the memory of Your faithfulness fresh in us — every lion, every bear, every sea You have parted — so that we face tomorrow's giants with yesterday's testimony on our lips and thanksgiving in our mouths.

So we take up our marching orders. We choose to stand strong in Your kingdom — to draw on Your strength, to seek You first, to multiply Your truth, to boast in our weakness, to please our Commanding Officer, and to remember all that You have done. Here we are, Lord. Send us. We surrender ourselves to You. In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.