THE CORNERSTONE
OF OUR FAITH

A Good Soldier of Jesus
Edward Robinson

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how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called *The Foundation*. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God’s Word.

The second part of each lesson is called *The Cornerstone*. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section “preach.” God’s Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called *The Inscription*. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God’s Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking *Discussion Questions* that help you explore God’s Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.
The Apostle Paul had been instrumental in spreading the gospel of Jesus throughout the Gentile world of his day. Not only did he preach and teach, he trained younger men to carry on his work. Among his many apprentices were Timothy and Titus. Paul thought of Timothy as his spiritual son and appreciated Titus’s good work on the island of Crete.

As one who had received his orders directly from headquarters on the road to Damascus, Paul wanted to faithfully execute his duties to the head of the church – Jesus Christ. He understood that his mission was much broader than just his lifetime. Silas, John Mark, Timothy, and Titus were just a few of the many men who had been through Paul’s “basic training.”

These good soldiers would risk their own lives in service to the kingdom. Some would die in spiritual battles, others in dark prisons. They all knew that the mission must move forward and more soldiers must be trained. The commander’s victory must be secured. Paul’s instructions to Timothy and Titus ring true for a new generation of faithful soldiers.
First Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are often referred to as “Pastoral Epistles.” Paul Anton, a German scholar, first coined the phrase “Pastoral Epistles.” Timothy and Titus were not “pastors” in the modern sense of the word; more accurately, they were evangelists and located ministers. Timothy ministered in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). Titus preached in Crete (Titus 1:5). Paul wanted Timothy to be a “good minister” (1 Timothy 4:6) and a hard-working “evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). The apostle praised Titus as “my partner and co-worker” for the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:23).

Paul most likely composed 1 Timothy and Titus around A.D. 63-65. Many Bible scholars believe that 2 Timothy was Paul’s last epistle before his execution by the Roman Emperor, Nero, in A.D. 68.

The apostle Paul met Timothy on his second missionary journey in Lystra (Acts 16:1). Luke wrote, “The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him” (Acts 16:2). His grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, were devout Christians (2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy’s name in Greek meant one who honors God or one honored by God. His name was a testament to his mother’s religious devotion. Because his father was Greek, Paul had Timothy circumcised so that he
would be an effective minister among the Jews (Acts 16:3).

Elders at Lystra and Iconium ordained young Timothy into the preaching ministry. Paul wrote, “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you” (1 Timothy 4:14). Timothy accompanied Paul on several preaching tours, and the apostle recognized the young man when writing his letters. When addressing Christians in Rome, Paul called Timothy “my co-worker” (Romans 16:21). Knowing that his young protégé was visiting a volatile congregation in Corinth, Paul wrote, “When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am” (1 Corinthians 16:10). When precarious circumstances forced Paul to depart from Thessalonica, the apostle sent Timothy there, calling the young preacher “our brother and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ” (1 Thessalonians 3:2).

Paul had many ministerial companions and preaching assistants, but Timothy stood out. When writing to Christians at Philippi, he wrote of Timothy: “I have no one else like him, who will show a genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 2:20-21). In other words, Timothy was a young man whose life shined brightly.

Even though Timothy was highly regarded and uniquely gifted, he had some personal challenges. Paul implicitly mentioned three personal struggles Timothy faced as a young man and young minister. First, Timothy struggled with his health. “Stop drinking only water;” urged Paul, “and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses” (1 Timothy 5:23). Some scholars have suggested that contaminated drinking water pervaded the Greco-Roman world. It made good sense, then, for Paul to advise Timothy to drink wine to improve his health. In the biblical world, wine was often used for medical purposes (Luke 10:34) as
well as festive occasions (Ecclesiastes 10:19).

Second, Timothy seemingly struggled with fear. Therefore, Paul reminded him: “For the spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). Paul did not want Timothy to be fearful of the challenging people and circumstances in Ephesus. The great apostle understood that an unhealthy fear can prevent one from serving God and pleasing God (Galatians 1:10). Paul chose to fear God more than man. He wanted Timothy to do the same.

Third, as a young man, Timothy wrestled with the issues of shyness and shamefulness. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul instructed him: “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” Because he was a young preacher, Timothy might have been reluctant and reticent to stand boldly on some matters of faith (see Timothy 1:8). Paul reminded his young brother that “I am not ashamed” (2 Timothy 1:12, NKJV), and he highlighted Onesiphorus who was “not ashamed of my chains” (2 Timothy 1:16).

One way a young person can overcome shyness in the Lord’s service is by realizing that God gives wisdom to both the old and young alike (James 1:5). Indeed, when one is empowered by the Spirit of God and governed by the wisdom of God, one can overcome insurmountable odds. The psalmist perhaps had this thought in mind when he declared, “I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts” (Psalm 119:99-100).

Notwithstanding Timothy’s personal challenges, the young preacher possessed a characteristic all Christians should have: a tender heart. Paul wrote, “Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I
may be filled with joy” (2 Timothy 1:4). When and why did Timothy shed tears? We are not sure, but we know that after Paul gave his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders, Luke recorded, “They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him” (Acts 20:37). Timothy was most likely among the weepers. In this regard, Timothy was like his soft-hearted mentor, Paul, who confessed, “I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents” (Acts 20:19). He later warned the bishops at Ephesus: “So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31). The references to “tears” attest that Paul and Timothy were sincere and sentimental servants of the Lord and that they genuinely cared about God’s people. Indeed, all Christians should possess a caring and loving heart. “Rejoice with those who rejoice,” wrote Paul, “mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15).

Additionally, Timothy likely shed tears because of difficulties he faced while preaching in Ephesus and leading the church there. Idolatry and immorality were widespread in Ephesus. More importantly, Paul said that he “fought [with] wild beasts in Ephesus” (1 Corinthians 15:32), which probably refers to his encounter with two-legged beasts rather than four-legged animals. Standing before the Ephesian elders, Paul forewarned, “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock” (Acts 20:29). “Wolves” meant false teachers, for Jesus declared, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Matthew 7:15). Timothy faced such two-legged animals in Ephesus, and Paul instructed him to “stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer” (1 Timothy 1:3). In other words, Paul did not want his young understudy to run away from the problems in Ephesus. He did not want him to quit or to
abandon his post. Instead, the apostle commanded, “...stay there in Ephesus.”

Ours is a world of quitters. Some young people quit school. Many adults quit their marriages and families. Others quit jobs. Some ministers quit the ministry. Many Christians quit God and the church (see Hebrews 10:25).

The apostle Paul knew that becoming a Christian was easier than remaining a Christian. That is why he encouraged new converts in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to “remain true to the faith” (Acts 14:22). Paul understood that getting into the ministry was much easier than staying in the ministry. John Mark disappointed Paul when he quit the first missionary tour (Acts 13:13; 15:36-41). Therefore, Paul did not want Timothy to be a quitter. The old adage is true: “Quitters never win, and winners never quit.”

All Christians have an “Ephesus.” Your job might be your Ephesus. If criticism from co-workers makes you weary, that is your Ephesus. If racism makes you uneasy and sexism makes you uncomfortable, that is your Ephesus. The message is: “Stay in Ephesus.”

Your marriage and family might be your Ephesus. Rebellious children can create deep sorrow in your heart and home (Proverbs 10:1). A fussing and cussing wife can make you feel like you are in Ephesus. Solomon experienced such a woman; hence, he declared, “Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife” (Proverbs 21:9). A lazy and irresponsible husband can make your marriage feel like an Ephesus. The message is: “Stay in Ephesus.”

Your neighborhood might be your Ephesus. The prevalence of prostitution, drug addicts, and gangsters can make a community feel like an Ephesus. Sometimes, a divided, im-
moral, and worldly congregation can make you feel like you are in Ephesus. But God wants you to stay there and make a difference.

The point is this: We do not win when we abandon or quit difficult situations. The solution is not always to quit your job, abandon your children, terminate your marriage, or walk away from the church. “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18). In other words, do your best to hang in there. Don’t quit! Stay in Ephesus.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What did Timothy’s name mean in Greek?
2. When did Paul meet Timothy?
3. How did Timothy and Paul reveal the tenderness in their hearts?
4. What challenges did Timothy face as a young man?
5. What challenges do our young people face in today’s world?
6. Who were Timothy’s mother and grandmother?
7. Why did Paul regard Timothy so highly?
8. What was Paul referring to when he mentioned, “I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus”?
9. What is your Ephesus today?
10. When was the last time you encouraged a young man or young lady?