

## Leadership Principles & the Pastoral Epistles – 2015 WEEK 2: BE STRENGTHENED BY GRACE

### Introduction to 2 Tim. 2

The Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) are a rich vein for leaders—a whole section of the New Testament that is written to Christian leaders and focused on key issues pertaining to church leadership. I have been reading and re-reading them for the last several years—and I continue to be enlightened and challenged by them all out of proportion to their length.

The heart of this class will focus on one particularly rich chapter in the Pastoral Epistles—2 Timothy 2. Here is the very heart of Paul's last letter to Timothy, in which he urgently reminds Timothy of six elements that must characterize his leadership. Although they were addressed to a specific leader in a specific context, they have universal relevance. And while they do not describe everything a leader needs to know and do and be, they do describe the "big picture." If you and I focus on these six elements, and if we make progress in them, we *will* become transformational leaders!

Briefly overview the six elements.

### Interpretive comments on 2 Tim. 2:1

Read 2:1. Notice that Paul is *not* commanding Timothy to be strong in himself (stoicism; machismo), but to "be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus." "Grace" is synonymous to "the gospel" (cf. Acts 20:24); it refers to all that God has provided for us through Jesus. God's grace is not only available for our *salvation* and *sanctification*; it is also available for our *ministry* (see 1 Cor. 15:10 for another example of this usage).

The command "be strong" (*endunamou*) is *passive voice* ("be strengthened by" vs. "strengthen yourself"), *present tense* ("be continually strengthened" vs. once or occasionally), and *imperative mood* (something we must *choose* to receive).

### Why is this first?

Though this element receives the *briefest* coverage, it is *first* because it is *foundational*:

All of the other elements of transformational leadership require the strengthening power of God's grace (e.g., developing workers; embracing hardship; dealing with opponents). Authentic ministry is not difficult; it is impossible! The heart of spiritual leadership is serving love—and we cannot consistently give ourselves away in love to others unless we consistently receive God's love (Jn. 13:3,4; 1 Jn. 4:16-19). Therefore, we need to be continually fortified by God's grace.

Leading our flocks into God's grace is a primary responsibility (Acts 20:24; WEEK 5)—and we cannot do this unless we are being renewed by God's grace ourselves (Acts 20:32). Leaders must be continually "renewed" by the gospel in order to help their people get/stay "renewed."

In a sense, then, this foundational element of Christian leadership makes leadership not only doable, but also *enjoyable*! We need to lead our flocks into the pasture of God's grace, and one key way we do this is by modeling being strengthened regularly by God's grace.

### Why do we tend to drift away from this priority?

If being strengthened by God's grace is both foundational and enjoyable, why do we tend to drift away from it unless we intentionally prioritize it? The answer is not that we simply forget, or even that we don't know how. It is that our sinful nature (and Satan) knows that this is the power of God and is committed to lure us away from this focus.

*Because our sinful nature is insidiously self-justifying.* Before we meet Christ, we tend to live this way more overtly—we try to “be somebody” on the basis of what we accomplish (EXAMPLES). But after we commit ourselves to serve Christ, our sinful nature will “morph” into being “spiritual”—as long as we still base our value/identity on what we do for God, rather than what He is and does for us (MORE EXAMPLES LATER). We may start out ministering out of gratitude for God’s grace, but we tend to drift toward making a name for ourselves in the name of Christ.

This is precisely what Jesus warned the 70 against in Lk. 10:17-20. Jesus affirmed that the 70’s ministry results were real and very significant, and He shared their joy. But something about their response concerned Him (Was it that they said: “The demons are subject to *us* in Your name?”)—so that he warned them not to continually rejoice in this (“rejoice” is in the present tense). Only our identity as God’s children (“your names are recorded in the book of heaven”) is to be the foundational and continual source of our rejoicing. When we make the mistake the 70 were making, this leads us to take our identity and value from how people respond to our attempts to influence them. This results in managing/using people out of emptiness instead of loving/serving them out of fullness.

“If our heart is remembering the gospel, is rejoicing in our . . . adoption, then our ministry is (a) Christian sacrifice of thanksgiving. The result will be that our ministry is done in love, humility, patience, and tenderness. But if our heart is forgetting (the gospel), then our ministry can be . . . a way to convince ourselves and others that we are ‘something.’ We may be successful in some ways, but there will be the tell-tale signs of impatience, irritability, pride, hurt feelings, jealousy, boasting . . . We must beware of identifying with our ministry and making it a functional salvation and an extension of ourselves. Until we see this, we may be in the short-term successful, but also driven, scared, and either too timid or too brash—until we see what we are doing . . . Is our prayer life dead? Do we struggle with feeling slighted? Are our feelings always being hurt? Is there a lot of anxiety and joylessness in our work? Do we find ourselves being highly critical of other churches and co-workers? Is there a lot of self-pity? If these things are true, then our ministry may be skillful and successful, but it is hollow, and probably we are headed for (burnout), or doomed to produce crowds and funds with superficial long-term effects.”<sup>1</sup>

*Because our sinful nature tells us that we already “get” grace.* Are you coasting on your past understanding of grace? Are you focusing instead on “more advanced” issues (theologically; methodologically)? “Grace” is more than justification; the “gospel” is more than an evangelistic invitation!

Read Col. 1:6 (NIV). “The gospel is infinitely deep. We do not simply learn it when we are converted and then move on from there . . . It only does its renewing work in us as we understand it ‘in all its truth.’ . . . Many people can live around the truth of the gospel and not really ‘get it.’ . . . Only as the gospel is applied more and more deeply and radically—only as we think about all its truth does it bear fruit and grow. So the key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal is the continual rediscovery of the gospel . . . This is true for either an individual or a church.”<sup>2</sup>

Explain LAYERED PYRAMID vs. HUB & SPOKES DIAGRAM. God’s grace is not a doctrine that we learn or teach, and then leave behind as we learn or teach other aspects of biblical doctrine or ethics or ministry (LAYERED PYRAMID). Rather, grace is the dynamic center to which we consciously relate all other aspects of doctrine and

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<sup>1</sup> *Redeemer Church Planting Manual*, pp. 62,63. For more on this, see Bill Lawrence’s description of “deficit thinking” in *Effective Pastoring* (Word Publishing, 1999), pp. 3-20.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller, “The Gospel: The Key to Everything,” cited in Paul Thompson, “The Glory of the Gospel”

ethics and ministry (HUB & SPOKES). This is what Mike Bullmore means when he describes the “functional centrality of the gospel.”<sup>3</sup>

Are you growing in grace (2 Pet. 3:18)? Ask yourself these questions:

*“Has my understanding and appreciation of God’s grace increased over the past year?”*

During this time, what new insights into grace have you gained? What aspect of God’s grace that you already understood gave you delight? Can you relate to Paul (a 20/30-year-old Christian worker) breaking out in praise about God’s grace in his letters (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:17; Rom. 11:33-36)? Or is your honest response: “What’s the big deal?”

*“How have I personally experienced the truth of Rom. 5:20b this past year?”* Without indulging in morbid introspection, are you getting greater insight into your depravity? Can you relate to this statement: “I am far more sinful than I ever believed—but God’s grace is far more extensive than I ever imagined.” If you draw a blank concerning this question about your depravity, is it possible that you are self-deceived and/or self-righteousness?

*“Am I thriving off of loving other people (without being recognized and regardless of their response) more this year?”* Laying hold of God’s undeserved grace produces motivation to give His love away to others who don’t deserve it (Matt. 10:8b)—and giving His love away to others increases the capacity of your heart to receive more of God’s love (Jn. 13:17). Is your willingness to love others increasingly conditional and calculated (perhaps in the name of being “strategic”)?

### **How can we be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ?**

Paul doesn’t explain how to do this because Timothy already knows how and merely needs to be reminded. (Paul’s synonym for this is “setting your mind on the things of the Spirit/above.” Jude’s is “keep yourselves in the love of God.”) We cannot reduce this to a formula—we are persons, and we have to work this out personally with God. But here is a framework for developing your own personal “grace-strengthening” plan. The first two are the most difficult—but also the most important.

*Regularly and proactively meditate on different aspects of God’s grace, thanking God and asking Him to grant you greater understanding and appreciation of what He has given you.*

The “therefore” (*oun*) in 2:1 may simply signify the contrast that is to exist between Timothy and those who fell away in Ephesus (1:15; see the “but you’ [*su de*] in 3:10,14; 4:5). But more likely, it hearkens back to the many provisions of God’s grace that Paul has just reminded Timothy of in chapter 1:

His past spiritual influences (1:2,5)

His spiritual gift (1:6) and ministry calling (1:9)

The power of the Holy Spirit (1:7)

His eternal destiny (1:10)

God’s promise of protection (1:12)

His present spiritual friends (1:16-18)

How often do you reflect on and affirm this? Is there a connection between your answer and your “strength” for ministry?

Notice how Paul prays for this for the Ephesians in Eph. 1:15-21 (after reminding them of God’s grace in 1:3-14) and in 3:14-19 (note the connection between this and spiritual maturity in 3:19 “that”).

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.xenos.org/teachings/?teaching=1771>

This is what Paul calls “rejoicing in the Lord” (Phil. 4:4). This is what he models for the Ephesians in Eph. 1:3-14 (“to the praise of the glory of His grace”). This *proactive* prayerful reflection on God’s grace is critically important! For example, pray the elements of grace in Jn. 13:3 or Eph. 1:3-14 or Romans 8 back to God, personally thanking Him for how these aspects of his grace apply to you. Pray through the “before” and “after” description of Eph. 2:1-10, personally reflecting on how lost you were before Christ saved you, and on how good it is to be “found.” Milton Vincent’s *The Gospel Primer* is an excellent tool to help you do this.

The goal is to do this *even when nothing is wrong* emotionally or circumstantially. This cultivates a heart that increasingly embraces God’s love as the true treasure of our lives. This “proactive” work is one of the key signs of Newton’s “C” Christian (see “Glory of the Gospel” article by John Newton, your assignment for Week 3). We may not be here yet, but we need to inch toward it!

*When your emotional life is chronically absent of peace and hope and joy, aggressively “preach the gospel to yourself.”* As Christian workers, we will all experience anxiety, fear, discouragement, anger, etc. These negative emotions are part of being in a fallen world and spiritual battle, and we cannot simply switch these off and switch on peace, hope and joy. But we should resist letting these negative emotions become the main emotional “background music” of our lives. Such chronic negativity (especially if it hardens into cynicism) will greatly hinder our effectiveness as Christian leaders. Instead, we need to aggressively “talk to ourselves” instead of “letting ourselves talk to us.” We should do this by faith, trusting that in God’s timing, He will encourage our hearts by restoring our peace and hope and joy (Rom. 15:13).

See how the psalmist does this in Ps. 42.

How does Paul stay “spiritually buoyant” – not losing heart (2 Cor. 4:1,8,9,16) and instead being of good courage (5:6,8) – in spite of his terrible circumstances? He chooses to focus (4:18 – *skopeo*) on what God has revealed about His provisions through Christ. This is what Paul calls on us to do in Rom. 8:28-39 (see Packer’s quote below; PERSONAL EXAMPLE).

“(Paul) wants us to possess our possessions . . . the peace, hope and joy in God’s love which are the Christian’s birthright. Paul knows that ‘emotional thinking’ under life’s pressures (i.e., believing what our negative thoughts and emotions are telling us) forfeits these possessions: hence his demand for a reaction, not to *those things*, but to *these things*’ set out in Rom. 8:1-30. Think of what you know of God through the gospel, says Paul, and apply it. Think against your feelings; argue yourself out of the gloom they have spread; unmask the unbelief they have nourished; take yourself in hand, talk to yourself, make yourself look up from your problems to the God of the gospel; let *evangelical* thinking correct *emotional* thinking.”<sup>4</sup>

See how Luther preaches the gospel to himself and argues with the Law: “O law! You would climb up into the kingdom of my conscience, and there reign and condemn me for sin, and would take from me the joy of my heart which I have by faith in Christ, and drive me to desperation, that I might be without hope. You have over-stepped your bounds. Know your place! You are a guide for my behavior, but you are not Savior and Lord of my heart. For . . . through the Gospel am called to receive righteousness and eternal life . . . So trouble me not! For I will not allow you, so intolerable a tyrant and tormentor, to reign in my heart and conscience — for they are the seat and temple of Christ the Son of God, who is the king of righteousness and peace, and my most sweet savior and mediator. He shall

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<sup>4</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 236.

keep my conscience joyful and quiet in the sound and pure doctrine of the Gospel through the knowledge of this passive and heavenly righteousness.”<sup>5</sup>

During an average week, how much of this kind of preaching and argument do you engage in with yourself?

*Keep an eye out for legalistic thinking that is related to doing Christian ministry.* It is probably not possible to be a committed Christian worker without at least occasionally slipping into a legalistic mind-set. But we should ask God to sensitize us to the typical ways we do this, and we should try to “nip them in the bud” with thinking that is consistent with ministry under God’s grace. For example:

Do you tend to take your sense of worth and value from ministry results, how people respond to your influence, etc.? Do you tend to view teachings as auditions for people’s approval? Affirm that your approval comes from God alone, and that His approval is a status earned wholly by Christ’s perfect work and bestowed permanently upon you!

Do you tend to not only do your part in ministry, but also usurp God’s part in ministry? Do you tend to feel that people’s conviction, conversion, motivation, etc. are substantially up to you to generate? Can you relate to Jesus when He speaks of being in His yoke, in which He supplies most of the power (Matt. 11:28-30)? Can you relate to Jesus when He says that He does nothing from Himself, but sees what the Father is doing and does it with Him (Jn. 5:19)? Affirm that God will play His big role as you simply play your small-but-significant role!

Do you tend to view other Christian workers as anchors (holding the ministry back) or as rivals with whom you compete? Do you tend to spend a lot of mental time comparing yourself to certain other workers? Do you tend to feel like if you don’t do the work, it won’t get done by others? Affirm that you are a member of a team, with complementary strengths, and cultivate enjoying ministry as a teammate!

*Read and reflect on quality Christian articles or books on grace, and listen to quality teachings on grace (Heb. 13:9).* We all have “free time”—and we need to capture a significant part of this time to nourish our souls in God’s grace in this way. Do you do this—or is most of your free time spent on entertainment, hobbies, home care, more career work than necessary, etc.?

This is why we’re having you keep a journal on Paul Thompson’s “The Glory of the Gospel” as your homework. This is why we have a “Living Grace” book table at Main Campus (and similar at 4<sup>th</sup> St.).

*Converse with other leaders and workers about what you are personally learning about grace (Col. 3:16).* We all need “gospel colleagues.” This is a main way in which we “stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:25). This is why we advocate “Challenge Groups” and other similar structures for home group leaders and workers. In this setting, we can read and discuss a quality grace-centered book and share what we’re learning about God’s grace, our selfishness, loving others, etc. Do you prioritize this kind of quality, grace-focused fellowship with other workers?

*Listen to and/or sing songs that expound and celebrate the content of God’s grace (Col. 3:16).* This is why Paul reminds the Colossians to “Let the word of Christ (i.e., the message of grace) richly dwell within you . . . with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Music is a very powerful medium for truth because it affects not only our heads but also our hearts. Are you collecting such songs in your own personal “arsenal?” If so, do you regularly use them?

iPods are great to listen to quality teachings and music while doing other tasks.

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, “Preface” to his commentary on Galatians

NOTE the tendency to see this as a luxury you can't afford (because you're so busy in ministry) vs. a stewardship responsibility that enables you to give out of fullness rather than manage out of emptiness. Paradoxically, we must work hard to stay strengthened by God's grace (Heb. 4:11)!

NOTE the tendency to underestimate this "private" activity as less important than "public" ministry (EXAMPLES), instead of realizing that this is where much spiritual power and motivation and insight are gained or forfeited. Jesus reminded Martha that her service needed to be undergirded by, like Mary, sitting at his feet, listening to his Word (Lk. 10:38-42). If we don't "sit" like Mary, we will become frenzied and resentful like Martha! If we serve like Martha long enough, we'll want to quit—but this is not the answer.

NOTE: We need a slow IV drip vs. a massive one-time injection of grace. We would rather be like steroid-injected athletes, full of our own power doing spiritual exploits. But Paul rejoiced in his weakness because this helped him depend habitually on God's sustaining grace—and gave him true power for ministry (2 Cor. 12:9). Your homework assignment is designed to start the slow IV drip!