



# Finish Line Faith

**2 TIMOTHY**

**MATT PROCTOR**

*Everyday Exposition Series*

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*This book is dedicated to the memories of my father-in-law Don Bunton and my grandfather I.O. Weede, who both passed away during its writing. Both were farmers, family men, and faithful elders who loved the Lord and encouraged me. Both finished well.*

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# Series Introduction

## *The Everyday Exposition Series*

Welcome! You hold in your hand a volume from the Everyday Exposition Series. This is not an accident. Since before the beginning of time, God has known this moment would come—a divine appointment, not with the author of this book, but with God. Each volume in this series walks through a Bible book (or books), and since the Lord speaks through Scripture, you should expect to hear his voice in the pages ahead. What else should you expect as you seek to understand God’s Word better?

You can expect this book to be *faithful* to the text of the Bible. This volume is not a Bible commentary, at least not in the traditional sense. It won’t explain every verse or get exegetically technical. (You won’t need to know Hebrew or Greek.) Each author, however, is a past or present Bible college professor who “correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). These scholars believe “all Scripture is God-breathed,” and our aim in the series is to carefully communicate the background and big ideas of God’s Word (2 Tim. 3:16). The goal is to help you clearly hear his voice.

You should also expect this book to be *accessible* to you as a reader. First, it’s a readable size. If each book of the Bible were a piece of geography to be explored, your author is more like a tour guide pointing out the highlights than an archaeologist digging up every square inch of ground. Larger books can give you a worm’s-eye analysis of Scripture, but this smaller volume gives you the bird’s-eye view. Second, it’s written in understandable prose. While a technical Bible commentary might use specialized vocabulary that goes over people’s heads, we’ve used bottom-shelf, everyday language. Preacher Charles Spurgeon

once quipped that Jesus said “feed my sheep,” not “feed my giraffes.” So this college-level teaching is written in a church-friendly style.

Finally, you should expect this book to be *applicable* to you as a believer. “All Scripture is . . . useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Or as someone put it, Scripture “tells us what’s right, what’s not right, how to get right, and how to stay right.” The Bible was written to transform lives, so each chapter of the books in this series includes discussion questions with practical suggestions to help you apply God’s truth. Our goal is not just to help you be a better Bible student, but a better Christ-follower as well.

The Everyday Exposition Series is a ministry of Ozark Christian College, a fully accredited Bible college and seminary, training men and women for Christian service. Since 1942, our motto has been “teaching the Word of Christ in the Spirit of Christ,” and whether you’re studying on your own or with a small group, we offer this resource with a prayer: *May “the word of Christ dwell in you richly”* (Col. 3:16, ESV).

Matt Proctor  
President, Ozark Christian College

# 1

## 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: A few days before a meet, our team received an extra entry in the mile race, and Big Jake volunteered to run. We could not contain our surprise. Jake 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.

The day came, the mile runners lined up, the gun fired, and to our astonishment, Big Jake took off like a deer . . . or perhaps 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 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 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. Halfway around the last lap, he just stopped running. With a mighty sigh, he bent over and grabbed his knees, fighting for air, and after taking 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 I call the Big Jake Principle: *It's not how you start the race that matters. It's how you finish.*

## **A Difficult Life**

If the Christian life is a race, have you ever felt like quitting? After all, the Christian life is hard.

On my desk, I have a large red button with the word “easy” on it. Maybe you remember the Staples commercials that featured this button. Anytime you have a problem, just push the “easy button,” and all will be solved. Unfortunately, some Christians mistakenly think an easy button is included in the gift of salvation. One push, and God makes all our problems disappear. Hard time paying the bills? Press the easy button, and they'll be taken care of. Difficult boss? Press the easy button, and he's suddenly nicer than Mr. Rogers. Shouldn't we get an easy button as soon as we come out of the baptism?

I teach at a Bible college, and one day a young man came into my office, sat down, and began a conversation with these words: “I had no idea. For some reason, I really thought when I became a Christian, my troubles would go away. I didn't know being a Christian would be so hard.”

My guess 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 alert you to this reality. Your own experience has likely taught you the Christian life is hard:

- You’ve struggled to get free of a sinful habit that won’t let you go.
- You’ve ached through a painful conflict that tore your church in half.
- You’ve lost a friend because they didn’t understand your new faith.
- You’ve prayed fervently for God to heal a parent, but no miracle came.

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—have you ever been tempted to just stop? When you first became a Christian, still flush with gospel excitement, you envisioned your new life as a constant blaze of glory. But you’re a few laps into the race now, the flame is flickering low, and you’re ready to walk off the track.

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

## **A Dear Son**

Timothy did.

Timothy was the apostle Paul’s last earthly hope.

Paul penned the letter we read in 2 Timothy around AD 67. Some fifteen years before writing it, on a trip through the small town of Lystra, Paul met a young man whose spiritual maturity caught his attention. Timothy, perhaps age eighteen at the time, 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 really in the picture. In Paul, Timothy found a spiritual father, and for over a decade and a half, Timothy looked to Paul as a mentor, model, wisdom figure, and hero.

In Timothy, Paul found the son he never had. In 2 Timothy 1:2, when Paul calls Timothy “my dear son,” the word “dear” is actually the Greek word *agapētō*, 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 writes, “I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.” Throughout his New Testament letters, Paul mentions Timothy eighteen 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. As the 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 routes 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 didn’t think he would ever return (Acts 20:25, 31).

But now, years later, came disturbing news. The congregation in Ephesus was in 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.

To make matters worse, my guess is that Timothy felt like he was stepping up to the plate with three strikes already against him. First, he was young. He was in his early thirties, and the folks in the Ephesian church saw him as just another Bible college kid, still wet behind the ears. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul hints that some are looking down on his youth. *Strike one.*

Second, he was sickly. If you've ever been on a trip in the developing world, what do you always hear? "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 "stomach and . . . frequent illnesses." Can you imagine: poor Timothy is preaching a sermon when he suddenly experiences an Imodium A-D moment! His weak constitution 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. In just four short chapters, Paul uses thirty-five imperatives in 2 Timothy. In his two letters, Paul tells Timothy: "Do not neglect your gift . . . fight the good fight . . . fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you." Paul sounds like a coach giving a pep talk to a reluctant player. One scholar called this soft-spoken young man "timid Timothy."<sup>1</sup> The thought of confronting misguided leaders would have made him cringe.

*That's strike three, and Timothy wants outta there.* He's ready to be done with this ministry, 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.

It's important to add that Paul is especially urgent because he is writing this letter from prison. You might be thinking, *Paul was, like, always in prison.* Yes! 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.

But this time was different: Paul knew this was his last imprisonment. In just a few short months—or weeks—he would face execution. In 2 Timothy 4:6, Paul writes, “I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.”

It appears that all of Paul's church planting in Asia Minor had been for naught. Nero was emperor at the time, and Christians were his favorite scapegoat. Persecution loomed on the horizon. There was no “easy button,” and consequently, 2 Timothy 1:15 describes an overwhelming exodus from the churches that Paul planted. Paul writes: “You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.”

And they weren't the last to fall away.

The book *Finishing Strong* 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 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.

“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 [age] 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. 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. 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>2</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 (1:15). Now there was only one name left: Timothy. All the other leaders Paul was depending on had abandoned the cause.

Now, here he was, depending on this sickly, introverted young man—the apprentice he had poured his love and life into. The torch of the gospel must be passed unquenched from one generation to the next, and Paul was determined that Timothy not fumble it. He needed Timothy to be the "one out of ten" to finish well.

## 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 to Timothy, Paul issues 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. This priceless gift from the aging apostle is better than any easy

button. Rather than simply removing hardship, these ancient pages provide the wisdom needed to overcome hardship. The words shoot adrenaline through Timothy's weary soul.

**These ancient pages provide the wisdom needed to overcome hardship.**

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 thirty

years. In AD 97, after protesting the pagan festivities surrounding the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis, he was stoned to death.

In other words, Timothy finished strong. Paul's letter had done its work.

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

It will equip you with finish-line faith.

How?

In the course of the four chapters of 2 Timothy, Paul gives 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. I encourage you to review each paragraph in the Scriptures 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 2 Timothy 1:2, he writes, "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

I know of a woman 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" on

her prayer closet as she prayed for them. 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 prayers on Timothy's behalf. What does Paul pray for this disheartened young man? He asks God to bestow three of his richest blessings: grace, mercy, and peace.

Don't miss the powerful message here. 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>3</sup>

As Timothy eavesdropped on Paul's prayer closet, hearing him ask God for these blessings, the young man drew 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 our way.

What a simple but essential truth for us as we begin this book: *God* gives us the strength to finish the race. While each 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. The missionary Hudson Taylor said, "It is not by trying to be faithful, but in looking to the Faithful One, that we win the victory."<sup>4</sup>

**God gives us  
the strength to  
finish the race.**

The prophet Isaiah put it this way, "Those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired" (Isaiah 40:31, NASB).

With God's help, you can be the "one out of ten" who finishes well. 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.*



## Discussion Questions

1. What is something in your life you didn't finish but now wish you had?
2. Think back to when you first trusted Christ. Did you expect the Christian life to be hard or easy? How would you describe it now?
3. If the Christian life is a race, have you ever felt like quitting? What or who helped you navigate that struggle?
4. What are the consequences of quitting? What are the rewards of finishing well?
5. Which of the three spiritual blessings—grace, mercy, and peace—do you think you need the most?

**TAKE ACTION** Take time to ask God for the spiritual blessing you most desire.

Purchase  
*Finish Line Faith*  
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*Or from your favorite book vendor.*

# Notes

## 1 | When You Feel Like Giving In

1. John Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), 30.
2. Steve Farrar, *Finishing Strong* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995), 16.
3. Adapted from Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy*, 26.
4. Quoted in “The China Missions Quote Project,” *Vision for China*, accessed March 25, 2024, [visionforchina.org/the-china-missions-quote-project](http://visionforchina.org/the-china-missions-quote-project).

## 2 | Remember Your Heritage

1. You may remember that David Livingstone was the nineteenth-century Scottish missionary, doctor, and explorer who helped open central Africa to missions.
2. J. K. Jones, *Reading with God in Mind* (Joplin, MO: Heartspring, 2003), 60–61.
3. Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat* (Dallas, TX: W Publishing, 1989), 26.

## 3 | Rely on the Spirit

1. The *l* and *i* reference is from John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 107.
2. Cited in Jack Cottrell, *The Holy Spirit: A Biblical Study* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2006), 8.
3. Leslie Flynn, *19 Gifts of the Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1994), 16.

## About the Author

Matt Proctor has served as president of Ozark Christian College in Joplin, Missouri, since 2006. He is the author of two books, former president of the North American Christian Convention, and a past contributing editor of *Christian Standard* magazine. When he's not traveling to preach, Matt teaches children's church, tolerates the family livestock (donkey, chickens, sheep), and cheers for the St. Louis Cardinals with his wife, Katie, their six children, and their growing tribe of grandchildren.