TELLING THE GOOD NEWS · STUDY NOTES

Study 10: When it is hard

For personal study or groups

Your name

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How to use these notes. Watch each part's video on biblehelp.net, or read the text below. Look up each passage in your own Bible and write the answer on the lines. The verses are printed at the back if you need them. At the end there are questions to think about on your own or to discuss in a group.

PART 1

Fear and shame

When we are afraid (2 Timothy 1:6–14; Acts 4:13–20)

Most Christians find it hard to speak about Christ. We worry about what people will think, we have been laughed at, or we have prayed for years and nothing seems to have changed. The Bible does not treat us as failures for this. It writes to us.

1. Fan into flame (2 Timothy 1:6–7). Paul is in prison in Rome, near the end of his life, writing to Timothy, who seems to have been a timid man. A gift from God is like a fire burning low: it needs blowing on. Every Christian has been given something, so think about what yours is, and use it. "God has not given us a spirit of fear." That cowering fear does not come from Him. Being bold does not mean feeling no fear. It means going on in spite of it. He has given "power", the Spirit's power; "love", which pushes out fear; and "self-control", a sound and steady mind.

1 **Read 2 Timothy 1:6–7**

What does Paul tell Timothy to do? What has God given us instead of fear?

See also: 1 Corinthians 2:3; 16:10.

2. Do not be ashamed (2 Timothy 1:8). Fear says, "They might hurt me." Shame says, "They might laugh at me." For many of us today, shame is the bigger one. Paul calls himself the Lord's prisoner, not Nero's. And he invites Timothy to share in suffering for the gospel, "by the power of God". We are not asked to bear it in our own strength.

2 **Read 2 Timothy 1:8**

What are we not to be ashamed of? How are we to bear suffering?

3. Look again at the gospel (2 Timothy 1:9–11). The cure for shame is not to try to be braver, but to see how glorious the message is. He has saved us, not because of our works, but by His grace, given before time began. And Christ "has abolished death". Its power is broken, and it cannot have the last word. People are dying, and we know the way to life.

3 **Read 2 Timothy 1:9–11**

How has God saved us? What has Christ done to death?

4. "I know whom I have believed" (2 Timothy 1:12–14). By any human reckoning Paul had failed. And yet he is not ashamed, for his confidence is not in his record but in a Person. He has put his life into Christ's hands, and it is safe until the last day. Then he turns it round: Timothy must guard the treasure of the gospel, which we did not make up and may not change. We guard it by holding on to it and passing it on, with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

4 **Read 2 Timothy 1:12–14**

Why was Paul not ashamed? What is Timothy to guard, and how?

5. They had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13–14). A few weeks earlier, Peter had denied that he knew Jesus. Now he and John stand before the council that condemned Him. The council saw their boldness, realised that they were ordinary men, and "took note that these men had been with Jesus". That is the secret. And the man who had been healed stood there with them. A changed life is very hard to answer.

5 **Read Acts 4:13–14**

What did the council notice about Peter and John? Why could they say nothing?

6. Not in this name (Acts 4:15–18). In private the council admits, "we cannot deny it", but it makes no difference to them. No evidence will persuade a heart that has decided not to believe, so we must not think we have failed when someone refuses to listen. They wanted the message kept quiet. The world often does not mind what we believe, so long as we keep it to ourselves.

6 **Read Acts 4:15–18**

What did the council admit? What did they command?

7. "We cannot stop speaking" (Acts 4:19–20). Peter and John answer politely and clearly. We respect those in authority, but when we are commanded to disobey God, we obey God. "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." The best cure for silence is not more guilt. It is a fresh sight of Christ.

7 **Read Acts 4:19–20**

How did Peter and John answer? Why could they not stop speaking?

See also: Acts 4:29.

When you are afraid

Remember that this fear is not from God. Look again at the gospel. Remember whom you have believed. Be with Jesus, in His Word and in prayer. And ask for boldness. If you have stayed silent when you should have spoken, remember that Peter was restored. Confess it, and try again.

PART 2

Sowing and waiting

When nothing seems to happen (1 Corinthians 3:5–9; Mark 4:1–20; Galatians 6:9)

You have prayed for someone for twenty years. A friend changed the subject. Someone seemed keen, and then disappeared. Have we failed? The Bible tells us to expect exactly this.

1. God made it grow (1 Corinthians 3:5–7). The Corinthians were treating their preachers like stars. Paul asks, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul?" They are servants. Paul planted and Apollos watered, "but God made it grow". You can plant a seed, but you cannot make it live. In the same way, new life in a human heart comes from God alone. So the results are not our responsibility. We are responsible for the sowing. That takes away our pride when things go well, and our despair when they do not.

8 **Read 1 Corinthians 3:5–7**

What are Paul and Apollos? Who gives the growth?

2. Rewarded for labour (1 Corinthians 3:8–9). The one who plants and the one who waters share one purpose. Many people may play a part in one person's coming to Christ, and you may never know your part until the last day. "Each will be rewarded according to his own labor", not according to his results. God asks for faithfulness.

9 **Read 1 Corinthians 3:8–9**

What will each be rewarded for? What does Paul call believers?

3. The farmer and the four soils (Mark 4:1–9). The crowds were large, but so was the opposition. Jesus answers with a story. The seed and the farmer are the same each time. The difference is in the ground: the path, the rocky ground, the thorns and the good soil, which yields an astonishing harvest.

10 **Read Mark 4:1–9**

What happens to the seed on each kind of ground?

4. A hard saying (Mark 4:10–13). These are difficult verses. Jesus quotes Isaiah, who was told that his preaching would meet with hard hearts. Those Jesus speaks of had already turned against Him, and the point is not that anyone who is truly seeking is shut out. The disciples did not understand either, but they came and asked Him. If the Son of God had hearers who did not believe, we should not be astonished if it happens to us.

11 **Read Mark 4:10–13**

What did the disciples do when they did not understand?

See also: Isaiah 6:9–10.

5. The farmer sows the word (Mark 4:14–20). Our job is to sow the word, widely. Some hearts are hard, and the enemy takes the word away, which is why we pray. Some receive it with joy, but have no root, and fall away when trouble comes. Jesus tells us this in advance, so a sad falling away is no surprise to Him, and true faith perseveres. Some let the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word: a warning for us too. And some bear fruit, thirtyfold, sixtyfold or a hundredfold. Only God can make the soil good, and so we sow and pray.

12 **Read Mark 4:14–20**

What happens in each kind of hearer? What encouragement is there in the good soil?

See also: Luke 8:15; Ezekiel 36:26.

6. Do not grow weary (Galatians 6:9). Paul includes himself: "Let us not grow weary." Weariness comes after years of praying with no answer, and it is the common trouble of all Christian service. "In due time we will reap a harvest" is a promise, and the only condition is

that we do not give up. You may not live to see the answer. Keep praying, keep loving, and keep sowing.

13 **Read Galatians 6:9**

What does Paul promise, and on what condition?

Sowing and waiting
We sow, and God gives the growth. Expect mixed responses. True faith perseveres. God rewards faithfulness, not results. And do not give up.

PART 3

Joy in heaven

The end of it all (Luke 15:1–10; Psalm 126)

The Bible does not want us to finish with hard things. It wants us to finish with joy.

1. "This man welcomes sinners" (Luke 15:1–3). Tax collectors and sinners were gathering to listen to Jesus, and the religious leaders were appalled that He ate with them. They meant it as an insult, but it is the gospel in a sentence: "This man welcomes sinners."

14 **Read Luke 15:1–3**

Who was coming to Jesus? Why did the Pharisees grumble?

2. The lost sheep (Luke 15:4–7). The shepherd goes after the one that is lost, and he does not give up until he finds it. He carries it home on his shoulders, joyfully. The sheep does nothing: it is carried. "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents." One person turns to Christ, perhaps unnoticed on earth, and heaven rejoices. When someone with a difficult past comes into your church, are you with the Pharisees, or with heaven?

15 **Read Luke 15:4–7**

What does the shepherd do? What happens in heaven when a sinner repents?

See also: Isaiah 53:6; Luke 19:10.

3. The lost coin (Luke 15:8–10). A coin does not even know that it is lost. The woman lights a lamp, sweeps and searches carefully until she finds it. Evangelism can be like that: slow and unglamorous. And "there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents". We are being shown the heart of God, who takes pleasure in saving sinners. If you help even one person to find Christ, you have been part of something that made heaven rejoice.

16 **Read Luke 15:8–10**

What does the woman do to find the coin? What does this show about God?

Once lost

Every Christian was once that lost sheep, and there was joy in heaven when you turned to Christ. If you have never turned to Him, the Shepherd has been looking for you. Turn to Him and trust Him. He welcomes sinners.

4. Great things (Psalm 126:1–3). This song of ascents remembers the day the Lord restored His people, so wonderful that it felt like a dream. Their mouths were filled with laughter, and the nations said, "The LORD has done great things for them." When God saves His people, the news spreads.

17 **Read Psalm 126:1–3**

How did God's people feel? What did the nations say?

5. Sowing in tears (Psalm 126:4–6). They pray again: "Restore our captives, O LORD, like streams in the Negev", a sudden flood in a dry land. "Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy." A farmer in a hard year might have to sow the last of his grain. Evangelism can be costly and full of tears. But the one who goes out weeping "will surely return with shouts of joy, carrying sheaves of grain". And One has gone before us: the Lord Jesus wept, died and was buried like a kernel of wheat, and He bears much fruit.

18 **Read Psalm 126:4–6**

What do they pray for? What is promised to those who sow in tears?

See also: Luke 19:41; John 12:24.

6. The whole course. The message: Christ crucified and risen. The motive: God's glory, love for Christ and for our neighbour, and the coming judgement. The power: salvation belongs to the Lord, and the power is the Spirit's. The way: live it, answer gently, and tell what God has done, together as a church. And the end of it all is joy.

THINK IT THROUGH

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What are you most afraid of when you think about speaking of Christ? Where have you kept quiet about Him? What gift could you fan into flame this week?

2. Who have you been waiting for? Have you been measuring your work by results? What kind of soil are you?

3. Who will you pray for every day? Who will you speak to this week? What would it mean to sow in tears?

HIDE IT IN YOUR HEART

Memory verse for study 10

Learn this verse by heart this week. Cut out the card and keep it where you will see it.

TELLING THE GOOD NEWS · STUDY 10 · MEMORY VERSE

“Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Galatians 6:9

Berean Standard Bible · biblehelp.net

“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11, BSB)

AT THE BACK

The Bible passages (BSB)

1 **2 Timothy 1:6–7** *6For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.*

2 **2 Timothy 1:8** *So do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me, His prisoner. Instead, join me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.*

3 **2 Timothy 1:9–11** *9He has saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but by His own purpose and by the grace He granted us in Christ Jesus before time began. 10And now He has revealed this grace through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the gospel, 11to which I was appointed as a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher.*

4 **2 Timothy 1:12–14** *12For this reason, even though I suffer as I do, I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day. 13Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching you have heard from me, with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14Guard the treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.*

5 **Acts 4:13–14** *13When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they marveled and took note that these men had been with Jesus. 14And seeing the man who had been healed standing there with them, they had nothing to say in response.*

6 **Acts 4:15–18** *15So they ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. 16"What shall we do with these men?" they asked. "It is clear to everyone living in Jerusalem that a remarkable miracle has occurred through them, and we cannot deny it. 17But to keep this message from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them not to speak to anyone in this name." 18Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.*

7 **Acts 4:19–20** *19But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than God. 20For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."*

8 **1 Corinthians 3:5–7** *5What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, as the Lord has assigned to each his role. 6I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.*

9 **1 Corinthians 3:8–9** *8He who plants and he who waters are one in purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.*

10 **Mark 4:1–9** *1Once again Jesus began to teach beside the sea, and such a large crowd gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people crowded along the shore. 2And He taught them many things in parables, and in His teaching He said, 3"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4And as he was sowing, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5Some fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. 6But when the sun rose, the seedlings were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the seedlings, and they yielded no crop. 8Still other seed fell on good soil, where it sprouted, grew up, and produced a crop—one bearing thirtyfold, another sixtyfold, and another a hundredfold." 9Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

11 **Mark 4:10–13** *10As soon as Jesus was alone with the Twelve and those around Him, they asked Him about the parable. 11He replied, "The mystery of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to those on the outside everything is expressed in parables, 12so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.'" 13Then Jesus said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand any of the parables?*

12 **Mark 4:14–20** *14The farmer sows the word. 15Some are like the seeds along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. 16Some are like the seeds sown on rocky ground. They hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17But they themselves have no root, and they remain for only a season. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 18Others are like the seeds sown among the thorns. They hear the word, 19but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20Still others are like the seeds sown on good soil. They hear the word, receive it, and produce a crop—thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold."*

13 **Galatians 6:9** *Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

14 **Luke 15:1–3** *1Now all the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around to listen to Jesus. 2So the Pharisees and scribes began to grumble: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3Then Jesus told them this parable:*

15 **Luke 15:4–7** *4"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the pasture and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, 6comes home, and calls together his friends and neighbors to tell them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep!' 7I tell you that in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous ones who do not need to repent.*

16 **Luke 15:8–10** *8Or what woman who has ten silver coins and loses one of them does not light a lamp, sweep her house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9And when she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors to say, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost coin.' 10In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents."*

17 **Psalm 126:1–3** *1A song of ascents. When the LORD restored the captives of Zion, we were like dreamers. 2Then our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with shouts of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." 3The LORD has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.*

18 **Psalm 126:4–6** *4Restore our captives, O LORD, like streams in the Negev. 5Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy. 6He who goes out weeping, bearing a trail of seed, will surely return with shouts of joy, carrying sheaves of grain.*

Scripture: Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain. Quotations keep its American spelling. Like many English Bibles, it often says 'man', 'he' or 'brothers' where it means people in general, men and women alike.

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Study 10: When it is hard

> **Memory verse:** “Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9). Say it together at the end, and ask who can say it without looking.

Aims

- See from 2 Timothy 1 and Acts 4 that fear and shame are real, and that the answer is a fresh sight of Christ and the power of the Spirit.
- See from 1 Corinthians 3, Mark 4 and Galatians 6 that we sow and God gives the growth, and that God rewards faithfulness, not results.
- See from Luke 15 and Psalm 126 that the end of it all is joy, and finish the course with God's glory in view.

Suggested timing (about 100 minutes)

- **5 min** Welcome and short prayer.
- **30 min** Part 1 video (15 min); 2 Timothy 1:6–7, 8, 9–11, 12–14; Acts 4:13–14, 15–18, 19–20.
- **30 min** Part 2 video (16 min); 1 Corinthians 3:5–7, 8–9; Mark 4:1–9, 10–13, 14–20; Galatians 6:9.
- **30 min** Part 3 video (14 min); Luke 15:1–3, 4–7, 8–10; Psalm 126:1–3, 4–6.
- **5 min** Reflection questions. Close in prayer.

For most groups, take one part each week.

Tips

- Many in the group may carry guilt about times they stayed silent. Be gentle. The study points to Peter, who was restored.
- Some have prayed for a husband, wife or child for many years. Be tender, and do not promise that every prayer will be answered in this life. The promise of Galatians 6:9 is a harvest "in due time".
- Mark 4:10–13 is a hard passage. Keep to its main purpose, as the study does, and do not let the group turn it into a debate. Those who come to Jesus with their questions are given the answer.
- If someone fears that they are the rocky ground, point them to Christ, and to the good soil: those who hear, receive and go on.
- On Acts 4:19, the study says briefly that we respect authority and obey God first. Keep to that.
- Part 3 includes a gospel invitation. If anyone in the group is not yet a believer, offer to talk with them afterwards.
- This is the last study. Give time at the end to look back over the course, and to pray by name for people the group would like to reach.

Answers to watch for

- **2 Timothy 1:6–7:** fan into flame the gift of God; power, love and self-control.
- **2 Timothy 1:8:** the testimony of our Lord, and Paul His prisoner; by the power of God.
- **2 Timothy 1:9–11:** by His own purpose and grace, not by our works; He has abolished death.
- **2 Timothy 1:12–14:** he knows whom he has believed; the treasure of the gospel, with the help of the Holy Spirit.
- **Acts 4:13–14:** their boldness, and that they had been with Jesus; the healed man was standing with them.

- **Acts 4:15–18:** a miracle had happened and they could not deny it; not to speak or teach in Jesus' name.
- **Acts 4:19–20:** to listen to God rather than to them; they had seen and heard it.
- **1 Corinthians 3:5–7:** servants; God.
- **1 Corinthians 3:8–9:** their own labour; God's fellow workers.
- **Mark 4:1–9:** eaten by birds, scorched, choked, and a crop on good soil.
- **Mark 4:10–13:** they came to Jesus and asked Him.
- **Mark 4:14–20:** Satan takes the word; no root; choked by worries and wealth; a crop.
- **Galatians 6:9:** a harvest in due time, if we do not give up.
- **Luke 15:1–3:** tax collectors and sinners; He welcomed sinners and ate with them.
- **Luke 15:4–7:** goes after the lost sheep until he finds it; joy in heaven.
- **Luke 15:8–10:** lights a lamp, sweeps and searches; God's joy over one sinner who repents.
- **Psalm 126:1–3:** like dreamers, filled with laughter; "The LORD has done great things for them".
- **Psalm 126:4–6:** for God to restore them like streams in the Negev; they will reap with shouts of joy.