

RAY C. STEDMAN

# Adventuring Through the Bible

A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible

*New Enhanced Edition*



## *Adventuring Through the Bible*

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Timelines for each chapter developed by Dr. Dick Sterkenburg

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### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Stedman, Ray C.

Adventuring through the Bible : a comprehensive guide to the entire Bible / Ray C. Stedman. -- 2nd ed.  
p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-57293-571-6

1. Bible--Introductions. I. Title.

BS475.3.S74 2012

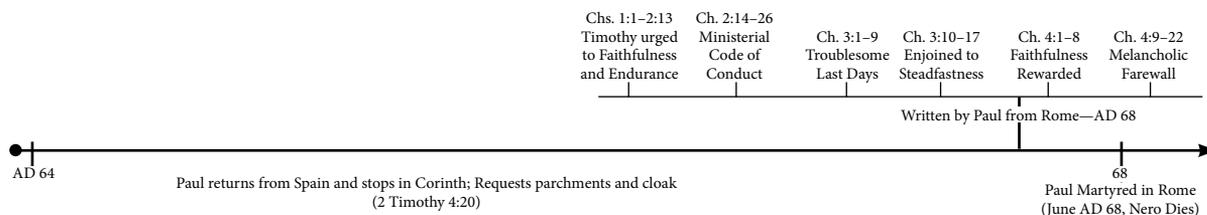
220.6'1--dc23

2012032119

*Printed in the United States of America*

First printing in 2012



*Sturdy Christians in a Collapsing World*

In AD 68, an old man sits in a filthy, rock-walled, circular cell in a Roman prison. This man, who once traveled the world telling thousands of people how to know the Creator of the universe, is now confined in a dingy space about twenty feet in diameter. From that prison cell, he writes a letter to a young man in distant Ephesus, far across the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. The subject of his letter: How to remain strong in the midst of a collapsing civilization.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy, his son in the faith, he writes to a young man who is troubled by a weak constitution (a weak stomach, to be exact), a fearful spirit, and a timid outlook on life. It should be noted that Timothy has much to be fearful about! Roman society in the first century was in rapid decline. The world was in political crisis and social chaos, and Timothy was surrounded by intense persecution.

Meanwhile, Paul is in prison for his faith, facing a death sentence. He knows that he will soon be with the Lord, and he wants to pass the torch to this young man. He does so in this letter, which, in fact, is the last letter we have from Paul's

pen. This is his farewell message, his legacy, his last will and testament.

### The Substance and Outline of 2 Timothy

In developing the theme of his second letter to Timothy—how to remain strong in the midst of a collapsing civilization—Paul focuses on four challenges he wants to communicate to his young son in the faith.

1. *Guard the truth.*
2. *Be strong in the Lord.*
3. *Avoid the traps and pitfalls of life.*
4. *Preach the Word.*

These timeless challenges apply equally to our lives today. If I were to write to a young person today, I am sure I could never find

### CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This chapter examines Paul's second letter to Timothy, which was written in times of political and social upheaval. It is the last letter we have from the apostle Paul, written from a prison cell shortly before his death, at a time that is deeply personal and heartbreaking to read. Paul's final words to Timothy are words we all need in these troubled times: flee temptation, avoid foolish arguments, stand firm, endure hardship, and preach the Word.

any better words to write than the words of 2 Timothy.

## Guard the Truth

Paul begins by reminding Timothy that God has given him a deposit of truth, which is his responsibility to guard:

*Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us (1:14).*

Paul then suggests certain ways to carry out this commission. Timothy lived in a pagan, secularized society, and Paul impressed upon him his responsibility to strengthen the defenses of the Ephesian church, which was imperiled by the pressures, temptations, and persecutions of the evil society around it.

While this letter is addressed to Timothy, a young pastor, Paul's challenge should be taken to heart by all Christians. Like Timothy, we have received this same deposit of truth, this same revelation of the Scripture concerning the nature of reality. From our study of God's Word, we know what the world is like, what God is like, what people are like, and what we need to do in order to be saved from our sin condition.

From Timothy's day until now, people have wondered: What makes the world operate the way it does? Why does the world constantly seem to come apart at the seams due to war, civil unrest, injustice, and economic trouble? Why does evil prosper? Why are righteousness and truth always under attack?

The answers to these questions are found in the deposit of truth that has been given to

us through Jesus Christ, and we must guard that truth. Paul suggests three specific ways to do this:

- Guard the truth by exercising the spiritual gift God has given you.
- Guard the truth by suffering patiently.
- Guard the truth by following the pattern of sound teaching (that is, study and teach the Word of God).

Paul addresses the first of these ways to guard the truth in chapter 1:

*I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline [or a sound mind] (1:6–7).*

Over the years, people in my congregation have come to me during various world crises and asked: What is going to happen in the world? What do these attacks on Israel mean? What does this Middle East war mean? What does it mean that communism has collapsed and the Berlin Wall has fallen? What is going on in Russia? What is going to happen to America after this election?

Though I've studied Bible prophecy, I have no crystal ball (nor would I want one!). I don't think it's either useful or wise to try to match this or that headline with specific verses in Scripture. We definitely see that the pattern of history and current events matches the pattern of prophecy, but I don't know how this or that specific event fits into God's eternal plan.

As someone has wisely said, we don't know what the future holds, but we know

# THE BOOK OF 2 TIMOTHY

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## THE CHRISTIAN'S STRENGTH IN A COLLAPSING WORLD (2 TIMOTHY 3-4)

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who holds the future. Even more importantly, we know that God has not given us a spirit of timidity and fear. If we are anxious and troubled about what is going on in our world, that anxiety does not come from God.

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of power who prepares us for action. He is the Spirit of love who enables us to respond to people in a way that produces healing and grace. He is the Spirit of a sound mind, enabling us to be purposeful in all that we do. The way to discover this Spirit is to exercise the spiritual gifts that God has given us.

If you are a Christian, the indwelling Holy Spirit has given you a special ability. If you are not putting that spiritual gift to work, then you are wasting your life. In the judgment of God—the only judgment that counts—all that you accomplish outside of His will and strength will be counted as wood, hay, and stubble—fit only to be burned.

What work has God given you to do? What spiritual gifts has He given you? Have you discovered your gifts? Do you know what to look for? Do you know how to find them? When you have discovered your gifts and you begin to use them for God's purposes, the advancement of His kingdom, you'll find that God does not give us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind. That

is Paul's first word to Timothy about how to guard the truth.

You might ask, "How does that work? How can using my spiritual gifts help to guard the truth?" It's simple: When you exercise your spiritual gifts, you literally unleash the truth and set it free to work in the world. The truth is not some fragile, brittle thing; God's truth is powerful, vigorous, active, and transformative. The most effective way to guard God's truth is to unleash it in the world!

Charles Spurgeon was exactly right when he said, "Truth is like a lion. Whoever heard of defending a lion? Turn it loose and it will defend itself." That is what we need to do with this truth. We do not need to apologize for God's truth or fend off attacks on God's truth. We merely need to set the truth free in the world, act on it, live it, use our spiritual gifts, and let His truth take care of itself!

The second way Paul says that we should guard the truth is by suffering patiently. He reminds Timothy that every Christian, without exception, is called to suffer for the gospel's sake.

*Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God (1:8).*

## HOW DO WE GUARD THE TRUTH OF GOD?

- Guard the truth by exercising the spiritual gift God has given you.
- Guard the truth by suffering patiently.
- Guard the truth by following the pattern of sound teaching.

Later in this same letter, Paul makes a related statement:

*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (3:12).*

Many believers around the world suffer persecution and

## EVERY BELIEVER IS EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY



It is significant that in each place where the gifts of the Spirit are described in Scripture, the emphasis is placed upon the fact that each Christian has at least one. A gift may be lying dormant within you, embryonic and unused. You may not know what it is, but it is there. The Holy Spirit makes no exceptions to this basic equipping of each believer. No Christian can say, "I can't serve God; I don't have any capacity or ability to serve Him." We have all, as authentic followers of Christ, been gifted with a "grace" of the Spirit.

It is vitally essential that you discover the gift, or gifts, that you possess. The value of your life as a Christian will be determined by the degree to which you use the gift God has given you.

**Ray C. Stedman**

*Body Life*

(Discovery House Publishers, 1995)

peril as a normal condition of being a Christian. More Christians were tortured and put to death for Christ's sake in the twentieth century than in any other time in history, and the twenty-first century is shaping up to be even worse, with ever-increasing hostility toward those who follow Christ.

The suffering we face, however, is not always physical; it can also be mental, emotional, and spiritual. This is the suffering we endure when our faith is ridiculed, when we are excluded because of our moral and spiritual stand, when we are treated with open contempt or disdain, when our values and beliefs are mocked. These are all forms of suffering for the gospel, and we are to accept this suffering with patience, says Paul. When we do so, we unleash the truth of God in the world, and without even defending ourselves, we guard the truth of God.

One of the reasons the gospel is not widely accepted in many places today is because Christians have been impatient in suffering. Instead of patiently withstanding the abuse of the world, they become offended

and outraged by persecution, or give in and gone along with the crowd to escape having to suffer for the Lord's sake. We cannot challenge the sin and corruption of the world without provoking the world's anger.

Obviously, we shouldn't go out of our way to offend people, but God's truth alone will bring offense and backlash. The Scriptures make it clear that God is able to use our patient suffering for His truth as a tool for expanding His influence in the world. Our patient suffering is a powerful way of guarding the truth of God.

The third way in which Paul says we guard the truth is contained in his admonition to Timothy: "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching" (1:13). In other words: Listen to God's Word, trust it, and live it out on a daily basis.

I love that phrase, "the pattern of sound teaching." So many Christians and churches are departing from the pattern of sound teaching. They believe that some secular writer, out of the blindness and darkness of his or her own heart, has more insight into

the problems of life than the Scriptures. If we live as Paul tells Timothy he should live—guarding the truth that God has entrusted to us by exercising our gifts, suffering patiently, and trusting the Scriptures—then God will keep us secure in the faith, even amid this crumbling, collapsing world.

### **Be Strong in the Lord**

Paul's second exhortation is: "Be strong in the Lord." Paul knew that Timothy had the capacity for strength—and you and I do as well. This is not a strength that we manufacture within ourselves but a strength that comes from trusting in the infinite power of Jesus Christ. There is a saying, "When I try, I fail. When I trust, *He* succeeds." God's strength, remember, is perfected in our weakness (see 2 Cor. 12:9–10). That is the central truth about how the Christian life is to be lived.

Paul uses a number of word pictures to describe what it means to be strong in the Lord. First, we are to be strong as a soldier is strong and utterly dedicated to the task. Second, we are to be strong as an athlete is strong; disciplined and abiding by the rules of the Christian life so that we can compete to the utmost. Third, we are to be strong as a farmer is strong; diligent in our work, not slowing down or slacking off, because we know that if we work hard by planting and cultivating, then we will gather a great harvest. Dedication, discipline, and diligence—these are the keys to strength as described by Paul in this visual job description of the Christian.

Paul closes this second challenge with a reminder regarding the strength of the Lord. We are not merely to be strong, but to be strong in *the Lord*. He writes:

*Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel (2:8).*

Paul wants Timothy to remember two things about the Lord Jesus: (1) He is the risen Christ, the Messiah, and He is unlimited by the constraints of space and time; (2) He is the human Christ, the Son of David, the one who has been where we are and felt what we feel—our pressures, our fears, our temptations, and our pain. He is the Son of God and the Son of Man, and He is the source of our strength in a collapsing world.

### **Avoid the Traps and Pitfalls of Life**

Paul's next challenge is found in 2:14–3:17. Here, he tells us to avoid three traps that lie in wait for us along the Christian life:

*Trap 1: Battles over Words.* Have you ever noticed the way Christians often get into arguments over some little word in Scripture? Or about a particular mode of baptism? Or about the exact timing of the Millennium? I've seen it happen many times—Christians dividing into camps, choosing weapons, and battling it out with each other.

Paul says we must avoid this kind of conflict over words. These are pointless controversies, dividing Christian from Christian, and they spread like gangrene. I'm not saying that such doctrines as baptism and the Millennium are unimportant. These are clearly areas of important biblical and scholarly inquiry, and Christians may engage in a robust discussion of such issues. But Christians should never separate or attack each other because of such issues.

*Trap 2: Dangerous Passions and Temptations.* Here is a word of counsel to a young man who must have felt the urgings of a normal sex drive while living in a sex-saturated society much like our own:

*In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work (2:20–21).*

Paul uses a beautiful word picture here, depicting the whole world as a great house. In the house there are instruments, or vessels, representing people. God uses these different instruments for either noble purposes or ignoble purposes. In other words, some people are like beautiful vases and crystal goblets. Others are like brick doorstops and brass spittoons. One way or another, God will use us for His purposes. It's completely up to us what kind of vessel we choose to be. God uses committed Christians to tell the world about His love, to draw others to faith in Him, to actively care for the hurting and the needy.

But God also uses ungodly people. In his book *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness*, Jerry Cook tells a story that illustrates this truth.

Some years ago, a young man and a young woman were living together, unmarried, in an apartment in downtown Portland. The young man was a drug pusher, and he and his girlfriend enjoyed a hedonistic lifestyle focused on abusing drugs together. The young man reached a point where he realized he was unhappy with his life. So he told his girlfriend, "I'd like to be free of this dope addiction."

His girlfriend replied, "I know how you can do that. If you were to trust in Jesus as your Savior, He would deliver you." "What does that mean?" he asked.

"I'm not going to tell you," she said. "If I do, you'll become a Christian, and you'll take off and I won't see you anymore." Though she was living a rebellious lifestyle, this young lady had been raised in a Christian home and she knew the gospel story—but she refused to share the gospel with her live-in boyfriend.

The young man kept prodding her. Finally, in frustration, she said, "All right, I'll tell you." She recited John 3:16, the salvation verse she had memorized as a child, and she told her boyfriend how he could be saved. The young man went into the next room, prayed to receive Christ—then walked away from his lifestyle of drugs, sex, and sin.

The young woman remained in her sinful lifestyle—and Jerry Cook concludes, as far as he knows, "she is not a Christian to this day. This girl wasn't saved, didn't want to be saved, and didn't want him to be saved. Yet she was able to tell the way of salvation." (Jerry Cook with Stanley C. Baldwin, *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness: Being Christian in a Non-Christian World* [Ventura, Ca.: Regal Books, 1979, 2009], 74).

The young lady was an ignoble and unwilling vessel, used by God to transform her boyfriend's life. She didn't want God to use her. She wanted nothing to do with God. But God used her nonetheless—and as a result, her boyfriend became a committed believer,

### THREE TRAPS & PITFALLS OF LIFE

Battles over Words  
Dangerous Passions and Temptations  
A Rebellious Attitude

a noble vessel, surrendered and willing to be used by God.

Our goal as Christians is to become the most noble, most beautiful vessels for service to Him. In order to be used for a noble purpose rather than ignoble, says Paul, we must separate ourselves from the things that would destroy our lives:

*Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2:22).*

One of the great destructive forces of our time is sexual immorality. Deadly sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS, are only the most visible harm this behavior causes. Sexual promiscuity destroys families, wounds the emotions and the psyches of men, women, and adolescents, and tears apart the fabric of our civilization. Most people in our society seem blind to this fact. But Christians have been instructed and warned: Flee evil desires, pursue purity before God. Then He will be able to use you for noble purposes, not ignoble.

*Trap 3: A Rebellious Attitude.* Paul describes the trap of a rebellious attitude in vivid terms:

*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but*

*denying its power. Have nothing to do with them (3:1–5).*

First, understand that the phrase “last days” refers to the final end time of the church on earth. It includes the entire period of time between the first and second comings of Christ. From the very day that our Lord rose from the dead, we have been in the last days. During these last days in which we now live, says Paul, there will be recurrent cycles of distress.

We are experiencing such times right now when people long for peace but are anxious about the future. Demonic forces are at work in the world, stirring up divisions, wars, racial strife, inter generational tension, and unprecedented conflict between the sexes. Today we see these rampant characteristics that Paul describes: self-centeredness, greed, arrogance and pride, abusiveness, disobedience, and disrespect. These are characteristics of rebellion—an attitude of lawlessness. Even professing Christians often assume such attitudes and behavior. Paul says, “Avoid such people. Do not join in their lawlessness.”

Paul then shows Timothy the twofold way out of all these snares: (1) patience in suffering, and (2) persistence in truth (see 3:10ff.). Paul says, in effect, “Remember the way I behaved. You’ve seen how I have endured all the trials that came my way. Remember that if you’re patient in suffering and you continue holding to the truth of God’s Word, you will find your way safely through all the perils and the pitfalls of this collapsing world.”

In chapter 4, Paul gives Timothy a final challenge:

*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction (4:1–2).*

In other words, do not merely believe the Word; share it with others. Declare the great truth that God has given you. Notice there are three dimensions to declaring God’s truth: correct, rebuke, and encourage all who will listen to the truth, in order to counteract the corrupting influence of this dying age. Paul underscores the urgency of his counsel to Timothy, adding, “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine” (4:3).

### **Paul’s Parting Words**

Paul closes this letter on a poignant yet triumphant note:

*I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (4:6–8).*

This victorious statement is all the more astounding when you remember the setting in which it was written. Paul had been imprisoned in a small stone-walled cell, cramped and cold, writing in semidarkness by the light of a sputtering oil lamp. He knew



Nero

Wikipedia Commons

his fate was sealed. He had already appeared once before Nero—that monster in human form—and he was to appear before this Roman emperor again. Paul fully expected to be taken outside the city wall and, with a flash of the sword, be beheaded.

But notice where Paul’s gaze was fixed—not upon the moment of his death, but *beyond* death, to the crown of righteousness that awaited him. Death is but an incident to one who truly believes. Beyond death, victory beckons.

Yet, mingled with this passionate shout of triumph, we hear a chord of strong human emotion—especially the emotion of loneliness:

*Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments (4:11–13).*

Although Paul could look beyond his present circumstance to the glory that awaited him, he was human, and he experienced human emotion and suffering. This is normal. This is acceptable to God, because He knows what we are made of. He knows that it's difficult for a human being to remain hopeful during times of loneliness, isolation, and suffering. We can admit these feelings to God, knowing that He fully accepts us. There is nothing sinful about normal human emotion in times of trial.

Still, Paul's only concern at that moment was that he be able to proclaim God's message with boldness:

*At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen (4:16–18).*

Just as an aside, I have often thought about Paul's appearance before Nero. At that time, the name of Nero was honored and praised throughout the known world. He was the all-powerful emperor of the mighty Roman Empire. Who was Paul of Tarsus, but an itinerant preacher with a strange faith in a crucified Jew? Yet two thousand years later, the tables are turned. Today, people name their sons Paul—and their dogs Nero.

Paul closes his letter to Timothy with a few personal words to his friends—some with familiar names like Priscilla and Aquila, along with some lesser known names.

I would love to have gotten a letter like that from Paul. Wouldn't you? Yet, in a real sense, this is a letter straight from the heart of Paul to your heart and mine. And it's a letter straight from the heart of God. He wants us to know that, no matter how frightening and perilous this world becomes, God is faithful. He has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind.

## **2 TIMOTHY**

### **STURDY CHRISTIANS IN A COLLAPSING WORLD**

1. Read 2 Timothy 1:3–7. What do these verses say to you about the importance of raising children in a Christian home?
2. Read 2 Timothy 1:13–14. What is “the good deposit that was entrusted to you”? Why does Timothy need to guard it? How do we go about guarding that “good deposit”?
3. Read 2 Timothy 2. Here Paul lists some of the tough demands of the Christian life. Where does the strength come from to endure hardship like a good soldier, or to flee the evil desires of youth? What is the ultimate end of those who step up and meet those tough demands?
4. Read 2 Timothy 3:1–9. Here Paul describes the evil that will infect the world in the last days. Do these evil traits describe a time that is yet to come—or the times in which we live today? Explain your answer.
5. Read 2 Timothy 3:10–17. Paul says, “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Have you found that to be true? Explain your answer. The last four verses of that passage speak of the power and purpose of Scripture. Do you agree or disagree with Paul’s view of Scripture? Explain your answer. How do these verses affect the way you look at God’s Word?

***Personal Application:***

6. Read 2 Timothy 4:1–5. How do these verses challenge you personally concerning your own Christian service?

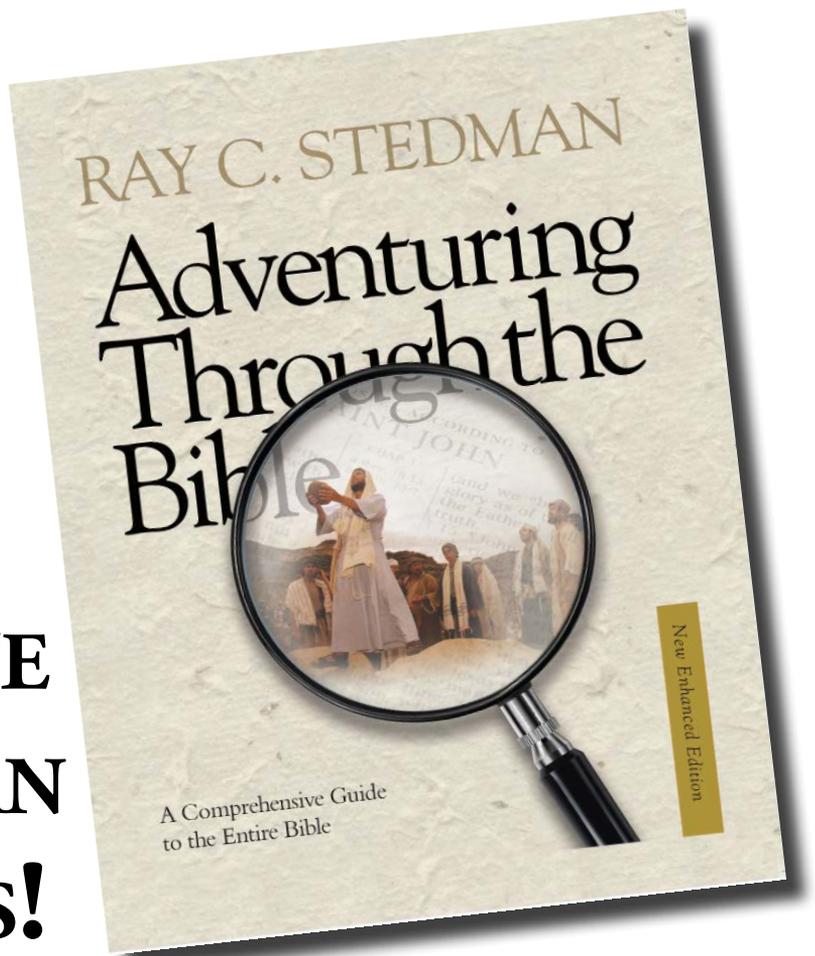
7. Read 2 Timothy 1:15–18 and 4:6–22. How do these verses affect your view of the apostle Paul? Do they help to make him more real, more human, and more vulnerable in your mind? Do you feel a greater kinship with Paul as a fellow sufferer?

Do you have Christian friends with whom you can be open, honest, and vulnerable as Paul was with Timothy in these verses? If not, why not? Have you considered joining a small group Bible study in your church so that you can build close friendships and *koinonia* (fellowship) community with other Christians? What steps can you take this week to become more involved in the “body life” of your church?

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PLEASE NOTE: For an in-depth exploration of the epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, read *The Fight of Faith: Studies in the Pastoral Letters of Paul* by Ray C. Stedman (Discovery House Publishers, 2009).

# THE COMPLETE BOOK CAN BE YOURS!



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