

Entrusted with the Gospel:  
Studies in 2 Timothy, #6

## "Standing Firm in the Faith"

2 Tim. 3:10-17

--CEFC 12/10/17; 7/14/91

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Over the years, I have very much enjoyed attending  
what are now the bi-annual General Conferences  
of the Evangelical Free Church of America.

You get to see scope of our denomination,  
all the various ways the Free Church is involved around the world,  
you hear some excellent speakers,  
and you get to know some very interesting people.

But at the same time, there is also a low point for me in these conferences.  
It comes in the report of  
the Committee on Ministerial Standing--  
the group that administers ministerial licenses and ordinations.

At every conference that committee must report the names of those  
whose ministerial credentials have been taken away from them  
during the last year.

Every year there are a few who fall away due to moral failure,  
disqualifying them from positions of leadership.

I remember one case where a pastor I had greatly respected  
and who had actually served as the chairman of that same committee  
and was included in that list one year  
after divorcing his wife  
to marry the church secretary.

I once heard the President of the Free Church  
describe this disciplining duty as the most difficult thing he ever had to do.

In each case, a person with great promise had entered into Christian ministry  
convinced of the call of God  
and eager to serve to God's greater glory,  
but somewhere along the line, they stumbled and fell,  
and most never return to their former level of service;  
some fall away from the faith altogether.

What a tragedy that is.

But it's not just ministers who wander from the Lord, of course.

Some are people of some prominence—

I think of singer Bob Dylan

who went through a very serious "Christian phase" in his career,  
but then it all seemed to fade away.

Of I think of Bart Ehrman, religion professor at the University of North Carolina,

and now best-selling author,  
who came to faith in Youth for Christ,  
attended Moody Bible Institute and then Wheaton College,  
but then claimed to have lost his faith studying in seminary,  
and now spends most of his time writing books denigrating the Christian faith.

This sort of thing happens to ordinary Christians, too.  
Perhaps you have known some yourself.  
I'm sure you have.

I think of one of Susan's dear friends--  
they were roommates in college,  
and she was a bridesmaid at our wedding.  
She was a strong believer--committed to the Lord,  
active in Christian ministries,  
but along the way, something happened.  
She left her husband, gave up on the church,  
and last we heard, she was living with another man  
and was into psychotherapy and new age ideology.  
I've known others just like her.

How does it happen?  
Why does it happen?

There are various paths to this kind of spiritual destruction, I'm sure.  
Generally it is a slow and gradual decline,  
similar, I'm sure, to what happens to many marriages—  
without attention to the demands of maintaining a growing relationship,  
the relationship withers and the couple just drifts apart.

It's like an unattended garden—the weeds will eventually win out.

You could also liken such a process to getting drunk, I suppose.  
Each small step away from faithfulness to the Lord  
makes it easier to take the next one,  
until people finds themselves doing things  
they would never have imagined doing before.

Their judgment becomes blurred,  
the conscience becomes dulled,  
and their heart becomes corrupt--intoxicated,  
losing control of their behavior.

At some point along the way a person comes  
to that moment of existential doubt  
leading to a fateful decision--  
and they ask, Why should I believe all that Christian stuff anyway?  
Why should I behave according to some moral standard  
that just doesn't suit my own desires?  
Why?

And with no adequate answer to that question,  
 the door is left wide open--  
 and away they go--to follow the follies of their own hearts.

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The Apostle Paul knew some people who had taken that course--  
 he mentions two of them by name in his second letter to Timothy.  
 Hymenaeus and Philetus--  
 who, he says in 2:18 "**have wandered away from the truth.**"  
 They were among those he describes in our passage this morning  
 as "**evil men and impostors**"  
 who "**will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived**" (3:13).

Paul knew the dangers of the days he was living in--  
 he talks about that in the beginning of chap. 3 of this letter--  
 religious people, having a form of godliness, will fall away.  
 And like Hymenaeus and Philetus, they will oppose the truth  
 and draw others after them.

Paul, knowing that he will not be long on this earth,  
 is concerned that this not happen to his young protégé and dear friend Timothy.

He is fearful that Timothy might fade away,  
fizzle out  
 and wander from the truth.

So he encourages him--  
 3:14--"**But as for you, [Timothy,]  
 continue in what you have learned  
 and have become convinced of, ...**"—  
 "Hold on to what you have firmly come to believe (ἐπιστώθης)."

"I know of your sincere faith" (1:5)—  
 "You have been taught the truth of the gospel," Timothy,  
 "you have embraced that truth as your own.  
 You have come to put your trust in that truth—the personal truth of Jesus Christ--  
 now hold onto it--don't let it, or him, go!

And in our passage,  
 Paul offers two reasons why Timothy should hold firm to the faith,  
two grounds for confidence in the truth that he has embraced--

Consider--

- I. First, the character of those who taught you
- II. And second, the nature of the Word you were taught.

Everyone one of us needs to hear these words of encouragement,  
 lest our names also  
 become listed among the tragic casualties of Christian discipleship.

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3:14-- "But as for you, [Timothy,]  
 continue in what you have learned  
 and have become convinced of,  
because you know those from whom you learned it,"

In referring to Timothy's teachers, Paul uses the plural here,  
 surely to include Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice,  
 mentioned at the beginning of the letter (1:5),  
 who had taught him spiritual truths from his infancy.

Timothy knew their sincere love;  
 he had seen first hand the quality of their character--  
 he knew they would never deceive him.

But in referring to those who had taught Timothy,  
 Paul is thinking particularly of himself.

In contrast to the self-seeking, pleasure-loving religious charlatans  
 that had appeared in Ephesus,  
 who were engaged in false teaching,  
 that was spreading like gangrene,  
 which Paul had described in the passage we looked at last week,

Paul says in v.10--

"You, however, know all about me, Timothy--  
 I'm no stranger to you, I have nothing to hide from you--"

"You know all about my teaching," he says.

"I taught you the gospel of Christ--  
 Jesus Christ, God come in the flesh,  
 who was crucified for our sin

who was raised from the grave to give us new life--  
 Jesus Christ destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light--  
 and he is coming again so that we might live with him forever.

You received this pattern of sound teaching  
 that came with faith and love in Christ Jesus."

"You know how I taught this message with integrity--

I never preached for profit, as so many others did--

I had nothing to gain by it.

"You know that I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing" (Acts 20:33),

"and how I worked hard with my own hands

so that I would not be a burden to anyone" (1 Thess. 3:8).

"You know how I taught this message with consistency--

whether to slave or free, rich or poor, Jew or Greek--

it was the same gospel.

I showed no favoritism--

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks

that they must turn to God in repentance  
and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21).

"I have not sought the praise of men but the approval of God  
who has called me to be a herald of this gospel message."

You know all about the content of my teaching, Timothy.

As Paul declared to the Elders of Ephesus,

**"You know that I have not hesitated to preach  
anything that would be helpful to you  
but have taught you publicly and from house to house. . . .  
I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God"** (Acts 20:20,27).

And you know all about the character of my life, Timothy.

"**my way of life**"—you have seen the way I have conducted myself day by day.

"**my purpose**"—you know that my aim has been  
to serve the Lord and not to seek glory for myself.

"**my faith**"--as I have trusted in the Lord, who has always been faithful to me.

You know all about "**my patience, my love, my endurance**"--

all these I lay before you, Timothy, for your examination.

But then notice what else Paul uses to commend his ministry.

Had he lived in America in our day

he might have spoken of his many conference appearances  
or his church planting successes;

He might have listed his theological degrees

or the popularity of his many books,

He might have boasted of how many friends he had on Facebook,

followers on Twitter.

Or he might have testified to his powerful spiritual experiences--

the miraculous healings he had performed,

the signs and wonders, his heavenly visions.

Maybe he would have even mentioned his appearances on

Oprah Winfrey, the Today Show and Fox News.

That's what we would have done.

But look what Paul points to --

You know all about "my persecutions and my sufferings."

You know what kind of things happened to me in Antioch--

where I was mocked and expelled from the city in shame.

in Iconium--where I was threatened with stoning--

and in Lystra--where they did stone me

and left me for dead in the street.

Timothy, you know all about the hardships I endured for the cause of Christ.

Why bring this up?

1. First, because this demonstrates the depth of his convictions--

His preaching was no idle talk—  
 a willingness to suffer was certainly a sign of his sincerity,  
 and Paul had demonstrated  
 that he was willing to give his life for this gospel message.

And through history, this willingness to suffer for the gospel has always had an impact--  
 you can read stories of the many who came to faith  
 after seeing the Christian martyrs die in the Roman arena.<sup>1</sup>  
 Instead of destroying the church,  
 such persecution only caused it to spread all the more.  
 Perhaps we'll find God's using this method once again  
 to build his church here in our country.

2. But this mention of suffering and persecution  
 also demonstrated the centrality of the cross of Christ--  
 not just in Paul's theology, but also in his life.

At the heart of the gospel is a Roman cross--  
 a symbol of painful shame.  
 And Jesus said we must take up that cross and follow him.

Jesus knew that faithfulness to him and to his message  
 will inevitably lead to conflict with the world and its system of values.  
 Somewhere there will be friction--we will rub people the wrong way.

That's why Paul says in v. 12 that  
 "**everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus  
 will be persecuted.**"

In Paul's eyes such persecution was a badge of honor,  
 a sign of faithfulness to the gospel of Christ,  
commending his message to Timothy.

Hold on to what you have learned and become convinced of, he says,  
 because of the character of those who taught you.

Don't you think of me as a credible witness to the truth of the gospel? he asks.

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I tell you, I find great challenge in those words--  
 As a pastor, I'm not like a TV preacher who appears a half hour a week  
 or a traveling conference speaker who flies into town  
 and is gone in three days.

I live among you--  
 you can observe my life--  
 you can know all about me.

It is a challenge for me to live in such a way

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<sup>1</sup>e.g., cf. Fox's Book, p. 8

that my life commends the message I preach.  
I want to live a life that gives credibility to the gospel.

For isn't this the way many people think?—  
they look at the hypocrisy of some Christians  
and then don't bother to consider the Christian message.  
I want there to be something good, something attractive, about my life  
that commends the gospel to others.

Didn't Jesus say,  
**"let your light shine before others,  
that they may see your good deeds  
and glorify your Father in heaven"** (Mt. 5:16; cf. 1 Pet. 2:12).

But it's not just me, because I am a pastor--  
in fact, every believer must face up to this challenge.  
If you intend to be more than just a casual Christian,  
if you intend to be an real disciple of Jesus  
and stand for him in the world,  
then you, too, must deal with issue.

What does your neighbor see in you?  
What about your colleague at work?  
What about your children? or your classmates? or your friends?

Will your life commend what you say to them about Christ?  
Will it testify to the truth  
such that it will make it easier for them to believe the gospel  
and, as believers, harder for them to fall away from the faith?

It's a challenge to us all.

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Considering the character of your teachers can be a great support.  
I think of someone like John Stott, a name many of you might know—  
he was a wonderful Bible teacher,  
but in the little I got to know of his life,  
he was also a humble, gracious, and godly man.  
His life encouraged me to hold on to the truth that he taught.

The character of those from whom you learned the truth of the gospel  
can be a great support  
when you experience times of doubt,  
but I'm afraid it's not enough.

As a young Christian, if I had relied on that alone,  
I doubt if I would be here today.

It happened that two of the men who were very instrumental  
in leading me to Christ in high school  
each had a moral crash within two years of my conversion--

one misappropriated ministry funds,  
 the other had sexual relations with a high school student,  
 resulting in her getting pregnant.

Later on, the pastor of the church that Susan and I were members of in Cambridge—  
 who was one of the finest preachers I have ever heard,  
 abandoned his role as a pastor  
 when he left his wife and children for another man.

We live in a fallen world, and even Christian leaders will fall.

I've had to have more than just the character of those who taught me  
 to see me through my Christian life.  
 And that's why Paul points to a second ground of confidence--  
 one that is even more important than the first.

Look again at v.14--"**Continue in what you have learned  
 and have become convinced of,  
 because you know those from whom you learned it,  
 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures,**"

Hold on to what you have learned--  
 it's reliable because the holy Scriptures are reliable./

To help you understand how the Bible is reliable I've brought a map—  
 To many of you younger folks,  
 you may have never seen one of these—  
 In this age of GPS on our phones,  
 I don't know if they even make them anymore.

This map is just a visual aid—  
 I wanted to show you another map that I used to use quite often  
 before the age of GPS—but I have since thrown it away!

It looked like this--  
 [Project Rand McNally map—keep it up

And it was a very reliable map--  
 How did I know it was reliable?

1. First, I considered it reliable because of who produced it—  
 It was a Rand-McNally map.

Rand-McNally is a company that has been printing maps since 1872.  
 Rand McNally published its first road atlas,  
 the *New Automobile Road Map of New York City & Vicinity*,  
 in 1904.

They hire their own cartographers  
 and have been in the forefront of mapping for over a century.



When we say that the Bible is an inspired book,  
we mean that God has worked by his Holy Spirit  
through the instrumentality of the whole personality  
and literary talents of its human authors,  
to produce the very words that God wished to be written  
to reveal himself to humanity.

That's what we mean when we say that  
"All Scripture--in all its parts--is God-breathed."

God is its source, Paul says,  
and so it is reliable;  
it is worthy of our trust,  
because God is worthy of our trust.

This was certainly the attitude Jesus had toward the Scriptures--  
they were his authority;  
in his mind, what the Scriptures said settled any argument,  
and they guided his own life.

You see it in his words,  
Jesus affirmed that what the Scriptures said, God said.  
According to Jesus, the Scriptures are the word of God.

This understanding is also the consistent testimony of the church through the ages—  
from the early church,  
through the Reformation, including the Roman Catholic Church,  
up until the time of the Enlightenment,  
when some churches, becoming prey to the Age of Reason,  
began to abandon what had always been taught about the Bible.

But those churches that are faithful to that pattern sound teaching,  
that good deposit that Paul handed down to Timothy,  
have always held to the truth that  
"All Scripture is God-breathed."

The Bible is reliable because of its source--  
it comes from God himself.

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But the Bible is also reliable and worthy of our trust  
because of its effect—  
like a good map, it gets us where we want to go.

v.15--the Scriptures "are able to make you wise for salvation  
through faith in Christ Jesus."

The Bible leads us to Christ.  
To use Luther's illustration,  
the Bible is like a crib that holds a precious baby--  
so we come to the Scriptures to see Christ,  
for in him we have life.

And this is the testimony of history--  
it is the Bible and its message that have led men to the gates of heaven.

Augustine in the 4th century was converted when he was led to read  
from Paul's letter to the Romans--

**"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ  
and do not fulfill the lusts of the sinful nature."**

The Reformation of the 16th century was a great spiritual awakening  
that more than anything was a re-awakening to the truth of God's word.  
Martin Luther came to a saving faith,  
again, by reading from Paul's letter to the Romans,  
the words, **"The righteous shall live by faith."**

John Wesley in the 18th century felt his heart strangely warmed  
when he heard the message of the Scripture.

And so it is today--  
Do you want to find Christ?  
Do you want to find his salvation?  
Then go to the Scriptures--I tell you, it works.

That's why, when I am sharing the gospel with an unbeliever,  
what I most encourage them to do, is to read the Bible.  
I encourage you to do that—  
with a friend, a neighbor, or a fellow student—  
simply ask them if they would like to read through one of the Gospels with you—  
that they might see for themselves what this book is about.

There is power in these words—  
it is reliable in its ability to make us wise for salvation—  
to bring people to a knowledge of Jesus Christ.

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But the Bible is reliable for something else—  
not just for coming to faith,  
but also to growing in faith.

v.16--it **"is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting  
and training in righteousness,  
so that the man or woman of God may be thoroughly equipped  
for every good work."**

The Bible is reliable in leading us to the truth in what we ought to believe--  
in right doctrine--teaching us what is true,  
rebuking us when we are in error.

And the Bible is reliable in leading us to the truth in how we ought to live--  
in right conduct--correcting those who act wrongly,

training us in righteousness

The Bible is profitable to us in all matters of faith and practice.  
so that we might be able to meet all demands placed upon us,  
and be equipped for every good work.

This is what the Bible does--  
this is why the Bible must be central in our lives  
and in our church.

I make no apology for our use of the Bible in our worship—  
where we read from the Bible,  
and pray from the Bible  
and sing songs grounded in the message of the Bible,  
and where we systematically expound the Bible week after week,  
Nor do I apologize for our Sunday School classes, where we teach the Bible,  
or for our Community Groups  
where we seek to apply the message of the Bible to our lives.

I firmly believe that the Bible "**is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting  
and training in righteousness,  
so that the man or woman of God may be thoroughly equipped  
for every good work.**"

Listen to the words of the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck:  
"Scripture was written by the Holy Spirit that it might serve him  
in guiding the church, in the perfection of the saints,  
in building up the body of Christ.

In it God daily comes to his people.  
In it he speaks to his people, not from afar but from nearby.  
In it he reveals himself, from day to day,  
to believers in the fullness of his truth and grace.

Through it he works his miracles of compassion and faithfulness.  
Scripture is the ongoing rapport between heaven and earth,  
between Christ and his church,  
between God and his children.

It does not just tie us to the past;  
it binds us to the living Lord in the heavens.  
It is the living voice of God,  
the letter of the omnipotent God to his creature.  
God once created the world by the word,  
and by that word he also upholds it [Heb. 1:2, 3];  
but he also re-creates it by the word and prepares it to be his dwelling.  
Divine inspiration, accordingly, is a permanent attribute of Holy Scripture.  
It was not only "God-breathed" at the time it was written;  
it is "God breathing."<sup>2</sup>

John Stott captures the truth so well—

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<sup>2</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, pp. 384f.

"The Bible, then, has an essential place in the life of a Christian.

For the revelation of God leads to worship,  
the warning of God to repentance,  
the promises of God to faith,  
the commands of God to obedience  
and the truth of God to witness.

It is no exaggeration to say that without Scripture  
a Christian life is impossible."

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Hold firm to what you have learned and have become convinced of--  
because they come from this divine book--the holy Scriptures--  
which can lead you to salvation  
and equip you to do all that God calls you to do.

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Paul loved Timothy--he loved him like a father,  
and in this fatherly letter, he encourages Timothy to hold on to what is true.  
He wants, more than anything else,  
to see him remain, to abide, to endure,  
in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When that time of temptation and doubt came,  
he wanted Timothy to know how to overcome it.

Have you ever had a time of temptation and doubt about your faith?  
A time when you asked yourself whether it was really true--  
all this stuff you had been taught about God and Christ and the Holy Spirit?

Have you wondered whether it really mattered,  
whether you spent your time and energy in Christian pursuits,  
whether it was worth it seeking to live a godly life?

I can remember a time of doubt in my life--  
It was my first term studying theology in Oxford.

It was a new start for me--  
I was thousands of miles from anyone who knew me.

I could do or be or believe anything I wanted to  
without pressure from my friends.

I was studying the Bible in an academic setting for the first time,  
exposed to all the latest critical theories  
theories which undermined the Bible's divine source and authority,  
taught by brilliant professors with the highest credentials.

For a short while there,  
everything seemed up for grabs.  
Which way would I go?

Certainly I had to apply my mind to the questions I was confronted with.

But just as much, I had to apply my heart to these words of Paul--  
"Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of."

Would I continue to believe it, even if no one around me did?

It was a heart-searching time--

and I considered the credibility of those who had taught me,  
my pastor and my Christian friends back in the church in Florida—  
or even people I got to know in England like John Stott.

I thought of the quality of their lives--  
their character--

their love, and faith,

their way of life and even their sufferings—

and I tell you I found great encouragement in that reflection--

I believed that what they taught me was true.

More than that, I had to decide what I thought about the Bible--

did I really believe it was God's Book?

I must say that I drew great assurance as I considered

how effective that Book was in changing lives

and leading men and women

into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The churches that taught the Bible were alive

in a way that the others were not.

God was at work there in a powerful way.

That Book had a power in my own life--

as I could see myself in its pages, as in a mirror--

as it reflected my own struggles with sin

and gave me power to carry on in the fight.

It had brought me to a knowledge of the love of God.

I learned a great deal during my time in Oxford;

many of my beliefs were refined, it's true,

but I thank God today that none of my core convictions changed one bit.

The Lord saw me through.

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What about you?

--will you hold on to what you've become convince of?

Perhaps you're not sure if you've ever become convinced at all.

I will say, that I am utterly convinced

that this gospel message of Jesus Christ is true--

or I wouldn't be standing here today.

I don't feel quite the same boldness that Paul had

to commend myself to you as your teacher.  
Though I do thank God for the path he has led me down,  
the quality of life that the gospel has nurtured in me.  
I shudder to think what my life, my marriage, or my children, would look like now  
if the Lord had not saved me by his grace.

And I can confidently point you to others in our midst--  
men and women who have walked with the Lord for many years.  
I urge you to consider the character of their lives  
and let them testify to you of the truth of this message.

But more than that I urge you to listen to the Word of God itself--  
this God-breathed book.

It is true.  
Let it make you wise for salvation as it leads you to put your faith in Jesus Christ.  
Let it mold your life,  
teaching you, rebuking you, correcting you  
and training you in righteousness.

Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of--  
Don't become a casualty,  
a castaway from the faith.  
Don't let go of the gospel of grace.

For as Jesus said,  
only those who endure to the end will be saved (Mt. 24:13).

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Prayer:

Closing Hymn: *Go Tell It On the Mountain*

Benediction:

"Therefore, dear friends, ... be on your guard  
so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men  
and fall from your secure position.  
But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Entrusted with the Gospel:  
Studies in 2 Timothy, #6  
Dec. 10, 2017

## **"Standing Firm in the Faith"** 2 Tim. 3:10-17

We all know of people who once seemed to embrace the gospel, but who later fell away from the faith. And we all have our moments of doubt. The Apostle Paul had seen it all, and he wants to encourage his young protégé Timothy, lest he become a casualty in the spiritual battle. In our passage this morning, Paul points to two encouragements as he urges Timothy to "continue in what he had learned and had become convinced of."

### **I. Appreciate the Character of Those Who Taught You**

**The character of one's life  
can commend the truth of the gospel.**

### **II. Recognize the Nature of the Word You Were Taught**

**The Scriptures are reliable—**

#### **A. Because of their source**

*"All Scripture is God-breathed"*

#### **B. Because of their effect**

*"They are able to make you wise for salvation"  
and "fully equipped for every good work"*

**Discussion Questions:**

**"Standing Firm in the Faith"**

2 Tim. 3:10-17

- What examples do you know of people who once seemed to have embraced the gospel but who later fell away? How did it make you feel when you discovered this change?
- Who are some people whose quality of life made it easier to believe the gospel or who make it harder to give it up? What was it about their life that impressed you? Examine yourself—what about your life commends the gospel to others?
- What most commends the truth of the Bible to you? Why should you believe it speaks truth? How has the Bible been proven to be true in your experience?
- How has the Bible equipped you for "every good work"?
- How do you deal with times of doubt, and you feel tempted to abandon the faith? What most helps you to hold on?