

THE CHURCH AWAKENING AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL STUDY THREE

Distinctives of a Contagious Church

2 Timothy 2:1–10

What causes the community to take notice of a church? It isn't the building. It's the people. Not the number of people but their passion, their Spirit-directed energy.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT draws us to one church over others? What stirs our excitement to drive miles to attend services, make friends there, and invest hours of our time? Why does *this* church attract us so much that we plan our family's schedule around the church's calendar and invite others to come with us?

One reason may be the sound, biblical preaching and teaching. But, as we discovered in our first *Searching the Scriptures* study, a healthy church must also have fellowship, worship, and prayer (Acts 2:42). And yet, of all the churches that offer these functions, what makes one church stand out? What gives a church that *contagious* quality that draws us in?

In his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul shed light on the distinctives that make churches contagious. Let's explore these distinctives so we can model them in our lives and then in our churches.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

You may love your church and feel at home there. Or you may be discouraged, wondering whether it's time to look for another church. Invite the Lord to minister to you where you are. In quiet prayer, express to the Lord your hopes for your church experience and ask Him to open your eyes to His truth in His Word.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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2 Timothy 2:1–10



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul wrote 2 Timothy while imprisoned in a cold, damp dungeon cell in Rome. His life nearing its end, Paul used this final letter to hand off the ministry to Timothy and, through the centuries, to us.

Having planted numerous churches, the aging missionary knew that the best materials to use in building a church were certain qualities in the lives of the people. After all, a church is not a building but a people. In his blueprint for Timothy, Paul included specs for four deeper life distinctives.



Observation: Commands, Insights, and Guidelines

In the observation phase, we look closely at the words Paul selected and how he structured his ideas. In 2 Timothy 2:1–10, Paul's commands act like pegs on which he hangs his instructions. Read the passage below and highlight the commands.

Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor. Think about what I am saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things.

Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach. And because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the word of God cannot be chained. So I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen. (2 Timothy 2:1–10)

In the space below, write down the commands along with key words associated with each command.



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2 Timothy 2:1–10

What metaphors did Paul use to illustrate his command in 2 Timothy 2:3?

What other observations can you make? How did Paul use his imprisonment and personal example to emphasize the urgency of his message to Timothy?

Paul was cold. He was lonely. He was coming to the end of his life, and it was time for him to pass along his insights for ministry. It's as if Paul was handing Timothy a baton in a relay, saying, "Run with it! Run now!" Having served so faithfully and so long, Paul was handing the ministry to Timothy and telling Timothy, in turn, to hand it to others.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Four Characteristics of Contagious Churches

In the interpretation section, we'll carve out of Paul's commands the four distinctives of contagious churches. The first distinctive emerges from the imperative, "be strong" (2 Timothy 2:1).



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2 Timothy 2:1–10

Be Strong—2 Timothy 2:1

Paul didn't command Timothy to be strong in his own strength but through what divine empowerment, according to 2 Timothy 2:1? How would you explain this concept?

Grace must flow through every aspect of church life. What makes churches that *preach* a gospel of grace, *promote* a lifestyle of grace, and *practice* grace in relationships so attractive?

Conversely, what makes churches that preach a gospel of works, promote rules and regulations, and practice judgmentalism so toxic to our souls?



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What principle was Paul passing along to us about this essential distinctive?

A church of grace is alive, anticipating, willing to risk, and free of judgmentalism. Churches of grace are attractive places. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Teach—2 Timothy 2:2

Paul's second command was to teach others. What must we teach, according to [2 Timothy 2:2](#)? Whom must we teach? What concept was Paul explaining as an educational model for churches to follow?

What principle about contagious churches does this distinctive highlight?

A church is not a gathering of people who sit and listen to one person preach. We must use what we hear to build into the life of someone else. Otherwise, we're a stagnant lake with little life. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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2 Timothy 2:1–10

Endure—2 Timothy 2:3–7

From his dark dungeon cell, Paul’s enduring faith shone like a beacon, encouraging Timothy to fearlessly carry on, to fight the good fight, and to finish the course just like Paul (2 Timothy 4:5–7). How does each of the three metaphors in *2 Timothy 2:3–7* illustrate aspects of endurance through suffering? Use the following chart to organize your interpretation.

| Metaphor | Actions | Obstacles | Reward |
|----------|---------|-----------|--------|
| Soldier | | | |
| Athlete | | | |
| Farmer | | | |

Paul said, “Endure suffering *along with me*” (2:3, emphasis added). What is the attraction of a church in which the members of the body endure suffering together?

Drawing from his metaphors, summarize Paul’s principle about endurance as a church distinctive?



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When tested, the church body pulls closer together. That's the secret of a contagious church.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Remember—2 Timothy 2:8–10

What central truth in *2 Timothy 2:8* beats strong in the heart of a contagious church?

Paul built his life on his calling to preach the gospel and was willing to suffer if it meant that others might be saved. How does Paul's example shape the core mission of a contagious church, according to *2 Timothy 2:9–10*?

In a final principle, put together all four distinctives in a summary statement. Complete this sentence, "The members of a contagious church . . ."



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Correlation: Paul's Favorite Metaphors

Paul's favorite metaphors to illustrate the Christian life were *soldier*, *athlete*, and *farmer*. Correlate Paul's use of these images in our passage with the following passages. What other principles did Paul teach using these metaphors?

Soldier: Ephesians 6:10–12

Athlete: 1 Corinthians 9:25–27

Farmer: 1 Corinthians 3:5–9



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2 Timothy 2:1–10

What is it that draws us to one church over another? We find in the church's leaders and the members qualities we admire—the courage of a soldier, focus of an athlete, diligence of a farmer. Key distinctives stand out. People minister in the power of God's grace, mentor their weaker brothers and sisters, suffer hardships together, and pursue the primary goal of proclaiming Christ as Savior. That's a contagious church!

Application: Making It Practical

Try on for size the four distinctives of a contagious church and see how you might live them out.

Have you been struggling in your strength and finding little success? Ask God for His grace to do what you can't on your own. How can you be strong in the grace of God in a particular area of work or ministry?

The essence of mentoring is loving people. It's building them up, helping them with their questions, listening to their concerns, praying with them, and passing on biblical knowledge. Whom can you come alongside as a spiritual friend? What steps can you take to develop a mentoring relationship with someone?



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Do you know someone who is going through a hard time? How can you be like Paul and suffer hardship together with this person or family?

The heart and soul of a contagious church is sharing the good news of Jesus. Who needs to hear the forgiveness and new life the Savior offers through His death and resurrection?

Imagine everyone in your church clothed in these distinctives—living by grace, being mentored and mentoring, enduring hardships together, and sharing the gospel. What an attractive place that would be!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, change begins with me. Help me to depend on Your grace today in all my doings. Build into my life Your truths so that I might use them to build into others' lives. Make me a person people come to when they need a helping hand, and give me the joy of sharing the hope of the gospel with someone else today. In Jesus' name, amen.

