



## Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

February 25, 2021

**DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT  
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**By Rev. Maria Szabo Berces**



Source: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

I believe it is part of our human nature that we need cheering time to time. It is true if we think about sport teams, where cheer-leaders play an important role during games in encouraging their team to press on and to win. But it is similarly valid in our everyday tasks and challenges. When we have someone, who believes in our abilities, or expresses support in our labor, it can be invigorating and strengthening.

The message to Timothy from Paul quoted below reminded me one of my favorite passages from the Bible. It was told several hundred years before: **“Be strong and courageous ... The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”** (Deuteronomy 31:7-8)

These words were Moses’ words to Joshua, who had to take on the leadership of the whole Israel in the difficult task of settling in the promised land. Joshua had to be really strong and wise as he faced the responsibilities of dividing the land among the tribes; settling all the arguments and concerns; not to mention the battles before moving in. In my view, he needed the assurance that the Almighty is with him in these duties.

Isn’t it true with all of us, whatever difficult or ordinary tasks we have ahead of us? When we have the positive attitude that we can do it; or receive the feedback that what we do is appreciated, it can make a whole lot of difference in succeeding in our labor.

In the meditation below we are reminded that we are supervised and supported by a loving God, who doesn’t want us to fail as we journey in life. The Almighty wants us vitality, and a loving relationship with our Creator, and with each other. However, when we fall short, when we have little faith, we are still approached with pardon and a second chance.

We can belong to a God who is ready to stand by us, to cheer us on, and to give us the Spirit of Truth, by whom we are able to grow in the good fruits of this supportive affiliation. As we are strengthened by grace, the people around us will start noticing what Paul explained like this: **“... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”** (Galatians 5:22)

Abiding in Jesus, we may receive the above encouragement, and the joy that comes with it. As He said: **“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”** (John 15:11)

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



## Strengthened by Grace

*You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*

2 Timothy 2:1

### READ 2 TIMOTHY 2:1-4

During the American Civil War, the penalty for desertion was execution. But the Union armies rarely executed deserters because their commander-in-chief, Abraham Lincoln, pardoned nearly all of them. This infuriated Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War, who believed that Lincoln's leniency only enticed would-be deserters. But Lincoln empathized with soldiers who had lost their nerve and who had given in to their fear in the heat of battle. And his empathy endeared him to his soldiers. They loved their "Father Abraham," and their affection led the soldiers to want to serve Lincoln all the more.

When Paul calls Timothy to join him in "suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3), he calls him to a tough job description. A soldier is to be completely dedicated, hard-working, and selfless. He's to serve his commanding officer, Jesus, wholeheartedly. But in reality, we sometimes fail to be His good soldiers. We don't always serve Him faithfully. And so Paul's opening phrase is important: "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (v. 1). Our Savior is full of grace. He empathizes with our weaknesses and forgives our failures (Hebrews 4:15). And just as the Union soldiers were encouraged by Lincoln's compassion, so believers are strengthened by the grace of Jesus. We want to serve Him all the more because we know He loves us.  
– By **Con Campbell**

### REFLECT & PRAY

**Dear God, please strengthen me in the grace of Christ that I may serve Him faithfully. Amen.**

How can the grace of Christ become a source of strength for you to serve Him? What does it mean for you to suffer for Jesus?

### SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

The imagery of a soldier is used in ancient Greek ethical teaching (for example, Plato and Epictetus) for the same reasons that Paul uses it in 2 Timothy 2: a soldier is dedicated and is willing to suffer in order to achieve a set goal. Paul also uses this imagery in 1 Corinthians 9:7 and uses military metaphors in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, Ephesians 6:10-17, and 1 Timothy 1:18. But such military metaphors and images aren't meant to be taken literally—though they sadly have been in times past through crusades and holy wars. Such misuse of Paul's language isn't to be blamed on him. To be "a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3) means that Timothy is to embody the same attitudes toward the service of Jesus that a soldier does toward his commanding officer—and Jesus' command is that we love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). – By **Con Campbell**

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