

vista

June 7, 2026



Avoid Wrecking Your Faith

by Mark Haines

Gordon Lightfoot's song "The Wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*" (1976, Moose Music, Ltd.) immortalized that ship and the men who lost their lives when it sank. When the SS *Edmund Fitzgerald* was launched in 1958, it was the largest freighter on the Great Lakes. The *Fitzgerald* sank into Lake Superior on November 10, 1975. All twenty-nine crew members died.

On November 8, a storm was gathering force in the plains and advanced north toward the Great Lakes. It appeared to be a typical fall storm. On November 9, 1975, the *Fitzgerald* left Superior, Wisconsin, carrying more than 20,000 tons of iron ore bound for Detroit, Michigan. Shortly after leaving, the crew made contact with

another ship, the *Arthur M. Anderson*, headed on a similar route for Gary, Indiana. On November 10 around 2:00 a.m., the captains of the *Anderson* and *Fitzgerald* discussed the threatening storm and decided to change their routes toward the coast of Canada. They expected the northern route to protect them from the storm's waves.

On the afternoon of November 10, the wind shifted direction and began blowing very hard. The *Fitzgerald* and *Anderson* were no longer protected by land. Strong winds producing waves twelve to sixteen feet high were reported by the *Anderson*. About the same time the *Fitzgerald* contacted the *Anderson* and reported some damage to the deck and that the ship was listing (leaning to one side) slightly.

At seven o'clock that evening, the *Anderson* made radio contact with the *Fitzgerald* and had it on their radar. About ten minutes later, crew of the *Fitzgerald* said, "We are holding our own." Only moments later, the *Fitzgerald* disappeared from the *Anderson's* radar screen. The sinking of the *Fitzgerald* was awfully fast. It is likely the crew had no idea of the danger they were in. After the ship sank, one severely damaged lifeboat was found and only part of the second. The condition of these lifeboats indicated that the crew members made no attempt to leave the ship. No distress signals were ever made, either. Why did this great ship sink so fast?

We need regular doses of solid Bible study and careful application of God's truth to our ideas, experiences, and behaviors.

The US Coast Guard Marine Board of Investigation Report suggested that the *Fitzgerald* was taking on water because of earlier damage from the storm and that around 7:15 p.m., it nosedived into a large wave and sank straight to the bottom of Lake Superior. Several factors contributed to the sinking. First, the *Fitzgerald*

carried extremely heavy cargo, making her sit lower in the water. This position increased the frequency and quantity of water that could flood the deck during a rough storm. Second, several of the hatch covers over the cargo hold were not sealed properly and were therefore not watertight. The repairs were scheduled for the end of the shipping season. During the storm, the ship was almost certainly taking water into the cargo hold through the hatches. As water leaked into the cargo hold, the *Fitzgerald* grew heavier and began to sit even lower in the water, allowing more water to wash into the ship.

In the end, the bow plunged down under a wall of water, and the vessel was unable to recover. Within a matter of seconds, the cargo rushed forward, the bow plowed toward the bottom of the lake, and the ship's structure disintegrated. This sequence of events led to a rapid sinking, with no time to make a distress call or attempt life-saving operations.

Your Faith Can Be Shipwrecked

No matter how great a ship may seem to be, it can sink just like the *Edmund Fitzgerald*. No matter how strong your faith may appear and no matter how firm your commitment feels, your faith can be shipwrecked. Paul warned Timothy about



Hymenaeus and Alexander, who were among those who had “suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith” by ignoring the doctrines of the faith and the vital importance of a clear conscience (1 Tim. 1:18–20). Later he warned Timothy that “the Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). And in Galatians he declared that any person trying to earn salvation through observing ritualistic laws had “fallen away from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

Paul also wrote that God can keep us “without blemish and free from accusation—if [we] continue in [our] faith” (Col. 1:22–23). The author of the book of Hebrews said, “We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end” (Heb. 3:14). Jesus also taught that our ultimate salvation is conditional. He said we must “stand firm to the end” in order to be saved (Matt. 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; Rev. 2:26).

How can you keep your faith afloat? How can we avoid shipwrecking our faith?

Pay Attention to the Details

A few leaky hatches did not seem like a big problem. A typical November storm did not appear to be a killer. Sixteen-foot waves were not unusual, but together these details destroyed the *Edmund Fitzgerald*. Hebrews 2:1 says, “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” The figure is that of a ship drifting off course and into danger.

We must pay attention to the Bible and the doctrines of the church. New ideas and thoughts can distract us. Sensational reports can take our minds off the truth. The typical worries and cares of life may lull us into complacency. The result could be disastrous. We need regular doses of solid Bible study and careful application of God's truth to our ideas, experiences, and behaviors.

We must pay attention to our attitudes toward the Bible as well. We must be careful to make sure we do not develop "a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). As we read and study, if we make excuses for not obeying what it says, we are in danger of sinking. If we try to reinterpret what the Bible says to match our behaviors, we are in trouble. We dare not tolerate deliberate disobedience in our lives. If we do, we should expect "judgment and . . . raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (Heb. 10:27).

So we need "to show . . . diligence to the very end, so that what [we] hope for may be fully realized" (Heb. 6:11). We need to "make every effort to confirm [our] calling and election" by growing spiritually so that we "will never stumble" (2 Peter 1:10).

Strengthen Your Support Structures

Standing firm to the end in the Christian faith is not a solo operation. We have each other for strength and help in the storms of life. We need to "encourage one another daily" (Heb. 3:13). We must find ways to nudge one another on toward love and good deeds (10:24–25). We must meet together for worship, prayer, and Bible study.

We should pray for each other and help the hurting ones so that they can keep moving (Heb. 12:13). We need to seek true holiness in every thought, word, and deed (12:14). We need to help each other trust in God's grace and to be gracious to others as well (12:15). We need to teach and to hold each other accountable for sexual purity as well as godly priorities (12:16). In order to support each other, we will have to keep loving each other and spending time with each other (13:1–3). Church leaders—pastors, teachers, and board members—need to set a good example for others to follow (13:7).

While it is possible to turn away from God and to shipwreck your faith, you don't need to live in fear. God is faithful, and he will complete what he has begun in you (Phil. 1:6) as long as you continue to trust him (Col. 1:23). So follow Paul's example: "Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called" us in Christ (Phil. 3:14). ●

How can you keep your faith afloat?
How can we avoid shipwrecking our faith?



Continue learning about and praising the Lord at home with your family. Here's an idea how to do that.

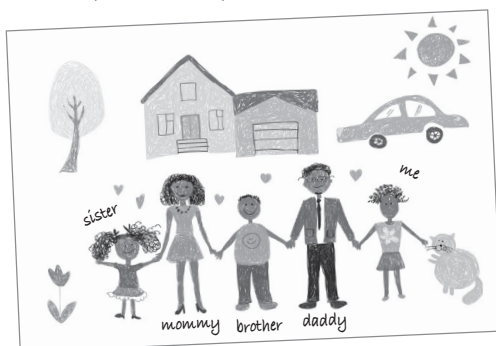
FAMILY TITLES

Paul used a family term to describe his relationship with Timothy, calling him his true son in the faith.

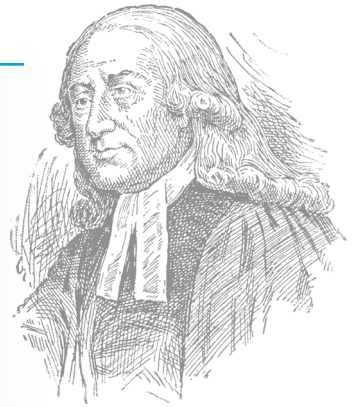
Sit around a table and list all your family's "designations" and who has those titles: son, daughter, mom, dad, wife, husband, aunt, uncle, grandma, grandpa. Then talk about the roles each person plays: clown, bookworm, counselor, leader, and so forth.

What parallels do these designations and roles play in the church family? What should the church do when there's a "black sheep" in the family? What did Jesus mean when he asked, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (Matt. 12:48).

Close the time with prayer, thanking God for bringing you together as a family. ●



WORDS from Wesley



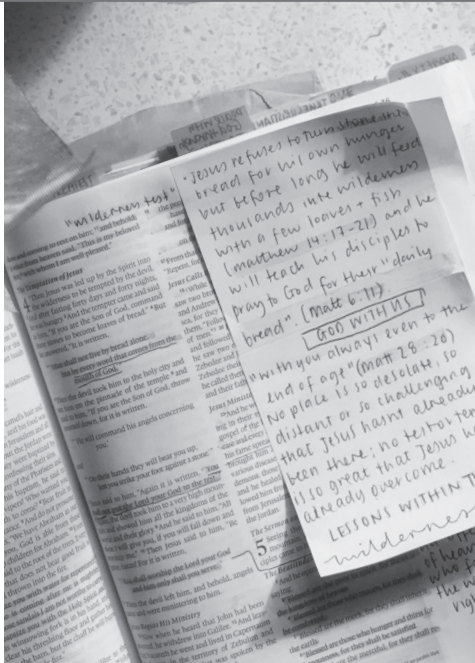
1 Timothy 1:1

Paul, an apostle—Familiarity is to be set aside where the things of God are concerned: according to the commandment of God—The authoritative appointment of God the Father, our Saviour—So styled in many other places likewise, as being the grand orderer of the whole scheme of our salvation, and Christ our hope—That is, the author, object, and ground of all our hope.

Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, by John Wesley, M.A. Fourth American Edition. New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, 1818.



THROUGH THE BIBLE IN A YEAR



Monday

June 8 1 Kings 1–2

Tuesday

June 9 1 Kings 3–5

Wednesday

June 10 1 Kings 6–7

Thursday

June 11 1 Kings 8–9

Friday

June 12 1 Kings 10–12

Saturday

June 13 1 Kings 13–15

Sunday

June 14 1 Kings 16–18



SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



Faith at Work in Christ's Family

GOD'S ABUNDANT PROVISION OF GRACE

1 Timothy 1:1-17

God's grace is the basis for our relationship with him.

INTO THE SUBJECT

The apostle Paul, a veteran of Christian ministry, mentored Timothy, a young man, in doctrine and the disciplines of ministry. What Paul told Timothy will help you, too, to become a stronger, more effective servant of Christ.

INTO THE WORD

1. Why had Paul become an apostle? Why do you agree or disagree that every person in vocational ministry should feel called to the ministry of an apostle, a messenger of the gospel?
2. How does verse 2 emphasize the close relationship that united Paul and Timothy?
3. How has a devout Christian mentored you? How have you mentored someone in the faith?
4. Why does every believer need "grace, mercy and peace" (v. 2)?
5. Why did Paul urge Timothy to stay at Ephesus (vv. 3-4)?
6. Have you known a situation in which a controversy troubled a congregation and disrupted the Lord's work? If so, what was it? How was it resolved?
7. Read Galatians 3:19-24. Why did God give the law to the people of Israel?
8. What exemplary attitudes did Paul show in 1 Timothy 1:12-17?

INTO THE WORLD

Every believer has been appointed to be an ambassador of Christ charged with the responsibility of spreading the good news that all can be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Do the work of an ambassador this week with a sense of a divine call.

COSTLY GRACE

The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 1:14)

In one of the most famous stories in literature, from Victor Hugo's classic novel *Les Miserables*, Jean Valjean is caught stealing the bishop's silverware. When the police drag him back to the scene of the crime, the bishop not only insists that Valjean keep the silver, but also hands him two silver candlesticks, saying, "You forgot to take these." That gracious act transforms Valjean. He gratefully sells the silverware to begin a new and productive life, but he keeps the candlesticks, which will forever represent grace to him. As the reformed thief breathed his last at the end of the book, Hugo wrote, "The light from the two candlesticks fell upon his face."

That's a powerful story, but I know a better one, and so does every born-again child of God. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith," the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians (Eph. 2:8). When he later wrote to Timothy, who was pastoring that same Ephesian church, he shifted to a first-person pronoun (1 Tim. 1:14). This was Paul's testimony too.

Certainly, the lost silver cost the bishop a great deal, but think what Christ's sacrifice cost him. No wonder the German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned us not to settle for what he called "cheap grace" by being unwilling to pay the cost of discipleship. Paul didn't, Bonhoeffer didn't, and neither must we.

—Bob Black

1 Timothy 1:1–17

Surround yourself with reminders of the difference God's grace has made.

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