

## THE OR SERIES 7: ONE WAY OR MORE TO PRACTICE FAITH?

*Yet then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:1, NIV)*

WHEN IT COMES TO GOLF (and likely some other endeavors—but really, who would know?), there are one-way teachers and your-way teachers. What we mean by that is that while one professional will give you the goods based on her single proven method, another will look at your natural swing tendencies and help you develop new strengths based on what you already possess.

The latter method appeals to me. Several years ago, master teacher Jim Hardy made public his two strains of teaching. He trained his cadre of coaches to identify whether their students were one-plane swingers of the club or two-plane swingers. From there, those coaches would offer methodologies to fit the player. His logic made sense to me. After all, whenever I looked up and down the range, I saw variety at work.

But what about when it comes to our faith? After all, there is one God, and it would make sense in his grand mastery that there is one best way for us to practice the matters of faith.

Some would have us believe this to be true, for instance, when it comes to our quiet time. They read in Psalm 5 that David came to the Lord in the morning, so surely the early hours are the most productive spiritually. This suggestion, when adamantly given, can form a sort of new legalism: Things must be done *this way* or God will not be pleased. And then we read that Jesus prayed late into the night...

Any time we get to thinking we can tighten the bonds around spiritual practices and get everyone doing the same thing, we miss two important matters. First (and definitely foremost) is the freedom we have in Christ. Second, is the recognition of the difference in callings and giftings God has given us and circumstances into which he has placed us.

We can learn much regarding proper balance here from Paul's words to Timothy, his protégé in ministry. In his first letter, Paul disdained those who were ordering a particular diet as the proper way to practice one's faith. Yet in his second letter, he urged Timothy toward the discipline of soldiers and athletes because following Christ is serious business.

"Be strong in Christ's grace" were Paul's summary words. That is, you have been given freedom; now exercise discipline in living it out.

**Opening questions** Have you stuck with one style of play your whole life, or do you like trying different approaches to the game? • Would you describe yourself as a disciplined person? If so, in what ways?

**READING** John 21:20-22; Romans 14:5-8; 2 Timothy 2:1-7

**The difference in our lives (John 21)**  
How does Jesus' exchange with Peter inform our understanding of how God orders our lives differently from one person to another? How might your personal circumstances influence your prayer or study practices?

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**Range of expression (Romans 14)**  
What two practical matters did Paul tackle here? What modern questions might bring two believers into a conflict of conscience? How can they honor each other all the same (see verses 16-18)?

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**Reflecting on grace and strength (2 Timothy 2)**  
When you take up Paul's charge in verse 7, what reflections do you have about the context of our study today?

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Written by Jeff Hopper ©2017 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: <https://youtu.be/DRYSNtIC324>