

Learning to Finish Well

Series: Fan the Flame (2 Timothy)

Brad Bailey – January 14, 2024

PRAY

Intro

“It’s not how you start...it’s how you finish.”

It’s a **truth that many have said and heard.**

We might think of **the fable about the tortoise and the hare** and we would say the moral of that story is that it’s not how you start... it’s how you finish.

It can describe the **hard fate of some sports teams** ... during the season that **become the favorites to win it all**...and then... they are out.

And it speaks far more deeply about life.

We’ve all heard of those who seem to have been headed off so well... crash along the way.

I begin to realize that **in our teens and twenties**... there is so much ahead... a natural anticipation...and by our **40s and 50s**... **we may find we are navigating more challenges in finishing well**... and in **later years**... we begin to consider what it means to finish well even more.

I want to finish well... not just in a role...but in life.

That is what the Apostle Paul speaks into...

In the Biblical Book we call 2 Timothy...

The Apostle Paul is one who God **called out in a dramatic way.**

He was born within the Roman empire...and as a Roman citizen was able to **travel across the known world** and **spread the news.**

He initially went to the **city of Ephesus**. When Asia Minor was incorporated into the Roman Empire (133 BCE), Ephesus was designated as the capital of the new province Asia. He **stayed for at least two years**... and then began his extended years moving from city to city.

And in Ephesus ...he entrusted those who received Christ...to **a young man named Timothy**. Timothy would prove not only **faithful serving in Ephesus**...but also in helping Paul throughout the years wherever he went. Paul calls Timothy **his spiritual son**... **his fellow worker**. In fact, Timothy is listed as a coauthor on six of Paul's letters (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.)

Timothy was like a son.

Now Paul has been **arrested in Rome once more.**

He saw it coming....and **this time it is different.**

The Emperor is now Nero... infamous for his **brutal rule.**

And there was a prison... converted cistern... for those that would be executed.

> **Paul knows** these are **likely his last days,**

What we are reading are **the last words** of the man who helped change the world.

What we are reading are the last words **a man is writing to his dear spiritual son**...**about finishing well.** It had been about 11 years since they last saw each other.

And what we are reading are **words meant to be heard by us**. While this letter addresses Timothy... like Paul's other letters... **Paul clearly intended it to be shared with the whole community**... and even ends with the second-person plural "you all": "**Grace be with you all**" (1Tim 6:21; 2Tim 4:7; Titus 3:15). These words were read aloud with sacred respect to all the people. [1]

As we heard over the past couple weeks...he began by expressing how much he values Timothy... and **affirming him**.

And gives him the initial charge to **fan the flame**... God has not given a spirit of fear... but courage.

And then.... **Don't be ashamed**...don't let yourself think that the hardships are something to be ashamed of.

And now we are going to hear what Paul says in **Chapter 2:1-13**... primarily verses 1-7.
... and see what God has to say to us.

2 Timothy 2:1-7

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² **And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.** ³ **Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.** ⁴ **No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.** ⁵ **Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.** ⁶ **The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.** ⁷ **Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.**

Begins...

2 Timothy 2:1

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

The first encouragement he gives for how to endure...

1. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus

Find your strength in the grace of Christ

Be rooted in grace

This is the first thing that Paul now says... and it may sound **a little hard to grasp** what he means.
[2]

What is he saying?

He knows **Timothy is facing plenty of challenging circumstances**...and people...and he is saying....you don't have to find your security and strength in proving anything. God has already accepted you through the grace of Christ.

And it captures the whole of what Paul's life was about

He had **spent his life striving to prove his merits**... then came divine grace...and now that grace became a strength... and a message.

This is what Paul expounds upon in [3]...

Philippians 3:3-4a, 5-10a (NLT)

We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, ⁴ though I could have confidence in my own effort....⁵ I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. ⁶ I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

⁷ I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸ Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ⁹ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ.

¹⁰ I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead.

Paul says... **I know what it's like to try and prove yourself** ... I had the whole **resume that everyone wanted**... but I never could have confidence of being in right relationship with God. But now I know that God has fulfilled that need in Christ.

Paul knows that when we wake up each day...and try to prove our own merit... we will be depending on something that we can never fulfill.

We will live **between denial** and **despair**.

> Paul often warned against going back to religious performance.

Paul says...to Timothy... to us...

find your strength in what God has done...not in what you have done.

It's **God's provision**...but **your choice as to what you rely on**.

But if you choose to find your confidence in the grace of Christ... you will have **a source of strength that no person and no circumstance can take away**.

For Paul....this the **grace** of God **wasn't a bumper sticker**...or an **proposition**...it was an actual relationship with the one who loved him. ...

He says...he wants to "become one with him"... to become like him.

Paul realizes that **Christ had a strength** that was **rooted in a relationship** to something that **transcended this world**. It was a strength that can endure hard circumstances around us.

It is the strength that comes from living life out to **an audience of one**.

It is what allowed Christ to express in the end of his life..."Father I have completed everything you gave me to do.: (John 17)

**So ...1. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus
Be rooted in grace**

He continues....

2 Timothy 2:2

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

**The second point towards finishing life well...is to
2. Invest in others**

Paul is telling us **something that is so true...** and yet so easily missed.

At the **end of our earthly lives...** it won't be our possessions that matter... it will be the **difference we made in other people's lives.**

In particular... .. "entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."

Paul realizes that there is no investing like the investment we make into others... particularly investing the truth about eternal life.

He didn't seem to worry about having big rallies... he met lives... understood that lives are naturally networks... with families and friends.

That is exactly what Jesus had begun. He spoke to crowds...but his focus was on just 12 lives for his entire three years of ministry. Twelve rather ordinary lives.

He says Timothy... you have received the investment I have made in you...now do the same.

And he wants Timothy to **recognize the potential for that to carry on successively.** Notice he says... invest and entrust those **who can go on and teach others.**

Paul understood the exponential power of one...because **they will influence others who will influence others.**

This is the principle that God has built in to his physical universe and we see it everywhere... God created trees with fruit and seeds according to their kind. We can sit in a forest of massive oak trees...and not only ponder how many acorns are in that forest...but how many acorns are within a single acorn.... IF it is broken open and will share it's contents.

It's the **unseen power of multiplication... exponential multiplication...** when everyone invests in someone who then invests.

If one person helped just one other person begin a relationship with Jesus... and then spent a year helping them develop so that they could help someone they new begin a relationship with Jesus. After one year, there are only 2 disciples. At the end of the second year, only 4. However, after just 33 years, more than 8.5 billion people could have a relationship with Jesus. [4]

We can each have exponential influence by helping others begin a relationship with Jesus.

Maybe we **hear the word “teach”**...and don't identify with being teachers.
Paul isn't talking about some type of academic formal teaching.
He is talking about **passing in what we have learning**...in any way we might share it.
> **If you know John 3:16**...you know **enough to change the world**.

Some may think...well... I don't feel I have a right to impose what I believe on others. Paul isn't talking about imposing anything...but rather **sharing what we have learned**.

Maybe we think...no one wants to hear the truth? The truth is that many **don't want to be spoken down to**... but they are **open to hearing what you have personally learned**.
Many **may initially show resistance**...but know that there is something more... and be **more open than they may show**.

Some may think...I **don't have a lot of potential relationships**.
Avg person influences **10,000 people** throughout their lifetime
Embrace your influence...

- **Serve Kids church**... you could invest weekly into an emerging life.
- **Invite someone to Alpha**.

So Paul says... finishing well involves investing ourselves in others.

And finally...he continues...

2 Timothy 2:3-7

Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. ⁵ Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. ⁷ Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

“Join with me in suffering”... how's that for an invitation.
Can sound crazy...if we get a letter from someone in the worst of prisons...we'd expect it to read “Get me outta here”...not “join me in suffering.”

It's important to be clear...that Paul didn't like suffering in itself.
When he faced various authorities along the way... he drew upon his legal rights... his influence... and the prayers of friends...to be released.
So what he is calling Timothy to join him in...is **not wanting** to suffer...**but of accepting what is required to fulfill what matters most**.

This **becomes clear** as Paul brings in **three illustrations**: The good soldier, the dedicated athlete, hardworking farmer.

Each of these reflects how if we want to finish well... to fulfill what matters most... we will embrace what is required.

The third point is this:

3. Embrace what is required for fulfilling what matters most

You can spend your life trying to be free of any demands... free of difficulties....but those who want to fulfill what matters most will embrace what is involved. They have a **MINSET towards life**.

Paul gives us **three examples**. (*If you had lived in this day, you would have been connected in some way to one of these professions.*)

Soldier – motivated by pleasing officer

a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

A soldier has **embraced** that they are **serving a cause that requires dedication**... they **surrender some of the freedom and comforts of civilian life**... that is what allows them to fulfill what matters most.

In the same way... we should embrace that we are now part of an eternal kingdom... for which we will serve.

Athlete – motivated to stay qualified

⁵ *Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.*

Athlete...wants to finish... and that means not being disqualified for having not followed the the proper rules.

The rules define what winning requires.

It's easy There are a variety of athletes who achieved success...but then it was found that they had not followed the rules... cheaters... who were disqualified.

A wise athlete will know that it is worth embracing the rules so that what they achieve is legitimate.

Rules – integrity...you are actually achieving what you appear to achieve.

So easy to try and cut the corner...

Sexual integrity... financial integrity...and the places we go to relax become the places we will cross when we face harder times.

Farmer – motivated by the potential of the crop / harvest

⁶ *The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.*

Some of you have come from farming country... maybe farming homes. You know something about how hard it is.

The point that Paul is making is that the farmer embraces months of work... because they value the crop.

God is calling us to work the field of our own lives.

Paul is telling Timothy... and us... Embrace what is required for fulfilling what matters most.

Paul has reached the end... and he is not bound by regret.

Why?

Because I know that I've pleased my commander.

Because I know that I have not been disqualified for lacking integrity.

Because I have shared in the rewards of the harvest.

This is that point which Paul wishes for Timothy...and for each of us...that point in which we realize...this is worth giving our whole lives to forever.

Paul brings this home with the following...in verses 8 to 9 [5]

2 Timothy 2:8-9

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.

I am now chained like a criminal...but God's word is not chained.

With these words Paul is **bringing home the unstoppable power of what God has done.** You may **chain the messenger**, you may even kill the messenger, but you **can't stop this gospel message.**

Paul was killed within weeks... silenced... by the empire to end all empires. And here we are 2,000 year later... gathering around the Gospel he shared.

If you want to finish well...hold on to what will last.

I want to close with a story that may be familiar to some...it's actually a true story drawn from naval magazine...While on maneuvers, a battleship lookout noted a light in the dark, foggy night. After noting the light's coordinates, the captain recognized his ship was on a collision course with that other vessel. "Signal the ship: We are on a collision course, advise you change course 20 degrees." The return signal came, "Advisable for you to change course 20 degrees." The captain said, "Send, I'm a captain, change course 20 degrees." "I'm a seaman second class," came the reply. "You had better change course 20 degrees." By this time the captain was furious. He yelled, "Send, I'm a battleship. Change course 20 degrees." The reply..."I'm a lighthouse." God's authority is never changing, it's always constant. Whenever a change of course is required we better be prepared to make the correction from our end. [6]

There is something unstoppable... It would be like saying please go outside and stop the rain. It cannot be bound.

PRAY

Resources: I drew the introduction and a couple other illustrations from Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub's message entitled "An Enduring Ministry."

Notes:

1. In the pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus, Timothy and Titus were the primary recipients and the believers with them were the secondary recipients. Given that few people were able to read and there were a limited number of manuscripts available to them, these letters were performed before the believers to elicit a particular response from them. All three letters end with the second-person plural “you all”: “Grace be with you all” ([1Tim 6:21](#); [2Tim 4:7](#); [Titus 3:15](#)). This pattern suggests that these letters were read aloud—more specifically, performed—before the gathering of believers just as Scripture is read aloud in many services today. Second, significant portions of the letters do not make sense if they were simply Paul writing to Timothy and Titus, his beloved and well-known co-laborers. Referencing again the verse we cited above ([1Tim 2:7](#)).

2. It has been noted that this is an interesting charge because it is a command... to receive something... an Imperative with a passive nature.

3. Paul also describes the type of inner confidence and strength that comes from the security of faith in what Christ has done, in Romans 8:3-3, 15-17, 38-39 (NLT)
God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. ⁴ He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

...¹⁵ ... you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children.^[h] Now we call him, “Abba, Father.”^[i] ¹⁶ For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

...³⁸ And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[j] neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4. Drawn from: <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/share-the-gospel/evangelism-principles/one-person-change-the-world.html>

5. Paul continues with verses 11-13, not covered here in this sermon, drawing upon what must have been a part of a liturgy at the times... something akin to a hymn that may have been sung. Today it is not uncommon for people hear or read that what the Bible testifies to about Jesus...wasn’t rooted in historic time...but developed far later. That isn’t true on so many level... but I want to note that we should be particularly struck whenever the NT writings... such as Pauls... refer to a hymn or creed of the time.

An event has to have been experienced widely to find a communal expression... and then be given form... and then become widely familiar...and then shared across spaces... so that Paul could refer to it when writing to a wider audience. In other words... it would have to be rooted in a shared reality...and then develop over an extended time. So if you hear that this testimony is really just something that some later group made up... that we really can’t deem historically true... among so many other reasons to question that... remember what the use of these familiar hymns tell us.

6.The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People, Stephen R. Covey, 1989, pgs. 32-33+