

Series: Last Words for the Next Generation
Sharing in the Sufferings of Christ
2 Timothy 1:8–12

What would you say to those closest to you if you knew the time of your departure was near?

What would your last words be?

Remember that 2 Timothy is Paul's final letter. He wrote it knowing the end was near, and he wrote it to a next-generation leader in the church of Jesus Christ.

Last words often carry unusual weight because they are reduced to what matters most. Paul's words carry even greater weight for three reasons.

First, because these words were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; they are life-giving words that still minister grace to those who want to follow Jesus faithfully.

Second, because of who he was—an apostle of Jesus Christ and a spiritual father to Timothy.

Third, because Paul lived them. He was not writing from a place of ease or luxury. He was writing from a prison cell. And he did not write to gain pity, but to strengthen Timothy to endure.

The title and subject matter of this message is not what some church-growth experts would recommend. Many would say that if you want to grow a church, your sermons should appeal primarily to the felt needs of people. In practice, that often means catering to the consumer—giving people what they already want to hear so they will keep coming back.

But the call of Christ is not mainly about growing the size of the Sunday morning gathering. It is about making disciples who spread

His fame. And that will not happen unless we are willing to share in His sufferings.

This is one reason expository preaching through books of the Bible is so essential. It guards us from preaching and listening only to what we want to hear, and it forces us to receive the whole counsel of God—including the hard but life-giving call to share in the sufferings of Christ.

Paul writes: *“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God...”* 2 Timothy 1:8

Here is the clear call: Do not be ashamed. Share in suffering for the gospel.

This is a word the next generation desperately needs. Research and observation both confirm that many young adults today are living through a prolonged adolescence. Developmental psychologists have described a new life stage between adolescence and full adulthood that often stretches into the mid and late-twenties. The traditional markers of adulthood—independent living, stable work, marriage, and parenthood—are routinely delayed.

Pew Research Center has documented that a high percentage of 18 to 29 year-olds live with their parents, reaching levels not seen since the Great Depression.¹

In the United States, young men are actually more likely than young women to live with their parents. Living at home is only one marker, and in some cases it can be wise and protective. The deeper concern is the larger pattern of delayed responsibility and reduced resilience that often accompanies extended dependence.

¹Pew Research Center, September 2020, available at [pewresearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org)).

In many cases this is not merely economic; it is also the fruit of a culture and, at times, a parenting style that has removed too many obstacles and smoothed too many paths. Studies on “helicopter” and “snowplow” parenting consistently link over-protection with lower resilience, higher anxiety, and reduced ability to tolerate difficulty.

Would you believe that a 2026 Zety survey found that 20% of Gen Z workers reported a parent had attended a job interview with them?

When young people are rarely allowed to struggle, fail, or persist through difficulty, they reach adulthood without the resilience that previous generations often developed earlier. The result is frequently a sense of entitlement and a low tolerance for hardship.

Something similar has happened in parts of the church. In the name of reaching the next generation, we have sometimes lowered the bar. We have offered entertainment, amusement, and a version of Jesus we hope will not scare them away. We have catered to consumers rather than making devoted disciples.

The result is a generation often unprepared for hardship and unfamiliar with a gospel worth suffering for. Many quietly absorb the assumption that if God loves them, He will not let them hurt. When real cost comes—a broken relationship, academic pressure, workplace tension, social rejection, or unanswered prayer—that fragile faith is tested, and too often it collapses.

Main Idea: Christians will not advance the gospel by a comfort-driven faith, but by resting in the finished work of Christ, embracing a calling that includes hardship, and living in the assurance of His guarding presence and power.

As we unfold the text this morning, we will consider three gospel truths Paul gives Timothy to strengthen his resolve and resilience.

1. The Accomplishment of Christ

To begin with we see that the call to suffer rests on **the finished accomplishment of Christ**.

After exhorting Timothy to share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, Paul continues: *“who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”* 2 Timothy 1:9-10

Notice the order. Before Paul talks about suffering, he talks about what God has already done. We were saved and called not because of our works/performance, but because of God’s own purpose and grace—grace given in Christ before time began and now revealed through the appearing of our Savior. Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.

This is the foundation. We do not suffer to earn God’s favor. We suffer because we have already received it. The One who calls us to share in suffering is the same One who has already conquered the grave. Because Christ has abolished death and brought immortality to light, no suffering in this life, whether for the gospel or the ordinary hardships of living in a fallen world, has the final word.

What difference does this make on a hard Monday, in a hospital waiting room, or when a long-held dream dies? It means we do not have to prove ourselves or demand that life be fair. The decisive victory has already been won. The worst thing that can happen to us has already been defeated. That truth does not remove the pain, but it changes the horizon under which we endure it.

Bring your present suffering under the light of what Christ has already accomplished. Let the finished work of Christ steady you.

2. The Appointment That Includes Suffering

Secondly, the call to follow Christ is an **appointment that includes suffering**—and in that suffering we share in the sufferings of Christ Himself.

Paul continues: *“for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do.”*

Paul’s appointment as a preacher, apostle, and teacher was not a path to comfort. It was a path that included chains, rejection, and hardship. Suffering was not a sign that something had gone wrong. It was part of the calling itself.

Notice something deeper here. The One who appointed Paul is the same One who suffered for Paul. The risen Christ who gave Paul this assignment is the Christ who first laid down His life.

When Paul suffers for the gospel, he is not merely enduring hardship for a cause; he is participating in the sufferings of the very One who appointed him. Scripture holds these realities together: we suffer for the gospel, and in doing so we share in the sufferings of Christ. (Philippians 3:10; Romans 8:17; 1 Peter 4:13).

Incredibly, Paul goes even further. In Colossians 1:24 he writes:

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”

What is Paul saying here? Is he finding pleasure in the pain itself? And is something missing in the cross—was Christ’s atoning work incomplete?

No. Suffering is hard. Paul is not rejoicing in suffering as an end in itself. He rejoices because his hardships are serving a purpose beyond himself: the good of the church and the advance of the gospel.

Moreover, the call to fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions does not mean the atonement was incomplete. His sacrifice was perfect and fully sufficient.

John Piper helps us see what Paul means: what is lacking is not the *worth* of Christ's afflictions, but their *presentation* to the world. Christ is no longer on earth in bodily form. So God calls His people to make the sufferings of Christ visible and real to others through their own costly obedience. In our sufferings for the sake of the gospel, people are meant to see something of the love and sacrifice of Christ Himself.

So, when we share in that cost, we are not adding to the atonement—we are displaying His love and His worth.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is not made to look glorious when we follow Him mainly because He will bless us with health and wealth. He is made to look glorious when believers find Him so worthy and so satisfying that they are willing to suffer for Him (Piper).

This is a word many in the next generation have rarely heard. Following Christ is not mainly about self-fulfillment. It is about faithfulness to a divine appointment that may cost us.

The gospel is not advanced by those who demand ease, but by those who are willing to endure hardship for the sake of the Name.

None of us share Paul's apostolic authority, yet every believer has been sent into the world as Christ was sent. That calling includes costly faithfulness in ordinary places—marriage, parenting, work, friendships, integrity at school or on the job. God uses those very hardships both to conform us to the image of Christ and to demonstrate His love.

Where is Christ calling you to remain faithful even when it costs comfort, reputation, or ease? The hardship is not evidence that God has abandoned you. It may be evidence that you are walking the path He has assigned and sharing in the sufferings of the One who first suffered for you.

3. The Assurance of Christ's Guarding Presence and Power

The final truth that rises from this passage is this: We can share in suffering because of **the assurance of Christ's guarding presence and power**.

Paul gives us the deepest ground of his confidence: *"But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me."*

Kent Hughes captures the force of this well. Though Paul is in a dark cell awaiting execution, though he seems a forgotten cast-away to the world, he still declares, "I am not ashamed." Why? "For I know *whom* I have believed."

Paul certainly knew **what** he believed—he authored much of the New Testament. But the stress falls on **whom** he has believed and continues to believe in. There is no wavering. His confidence rests in a Person, not merely a system of doctrine.

You cannot truly know *whom* you believe without knowing *what* He has revealed. But it is possible to know a great deal of *what* and still not know *whom*.

Paul's assurance is personal and relational.

There is a rich double reality here. God has entrusted the gospel to Paul. Paul has entrusted his life and ministry to God. And Christ Himself stands as the Guardian of both. He will not lose what is His.

Notice the beautiful tension that follows. In verse 12 Paul rests in God's ability to guard the deposit. A few verses later he tells Timothy, "By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (v. 14). The same deposit is in view, namely the gospel itself, the pattern of sound words Timothy had received from Paul.

God is the ultimate Guardian of the gospel, yet Timothy is still responsible to guard it. This is the same pattern we saw with the command to “fan into flame the gift of God.” God gives the gift; we stir it up. God entrusts the deposit; we guard it—and we do both by the power of the Holy Spirit.

How do we guard it day by day? By staying in the Scriptures so the truth remains clear. By praying so our dependence remains fresh. And by remaining in honest relationships where we are known, encouraged, and corrected.

Isolation is one of the enemy’s most effective strategies against endurance.

This deposit also gives us a heavenly perspective. The gospel opens our eyes to life and immortality. It frees us from living only for ourselves and for temporary comforts. We maintain that perspective by continually returning to the gospel, by keeping “that Day” in view, and by staying close to the means of grace that reorient our hearts to eternal realities.

Living with that Day in view—the day we will stand before Jesus—changes how we spend money, time, and emotional energy now.

This assurance produces courage—not only for suffering that comes from gospel witness, but for every form of hardship we may face. We can endure because the One we **know** is able to keep us, and because He is working even our sufferings for the greater purpose of making us like Jesus.

This also changes the way we pray. Instead of only crying, “Lord, change my hard circumstance,” we begin to pray, “Lord, use this hard circumstance. Keep me. Shape me. Teach me to trust You through it.”

Conclusion

In the film *Saving Private Ryan*, a group of soldiers are sent on a dangerous mission to find and bring home one young private whose

three brothers have already been killed in the war. Many of the men die in the effort. At the end, Captain Miller, who was mortally wounded, looks at the younger man and speaks his last words: “Earn this.

Decades later, an elderly Ryan stands at Miller’s grave with his family and says, “I tried to live my life the best I could. I hope that, at least in your eyes, I’ve earned what all of you have done for me.”

Of course, we cannot earn the salvation Christ purchased for us. The text is clear: God saved us not because of our works, but because of His own purpose and grace. Yet when we truly grasp the magnitude of Christ’s sacrifice, something in us rises up and says, “I don’t want to waste this.”

John Piper once testified of two elderly missionary women from his church, Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards. Both were in their eighties. One had been single all her life and served as a nurse; the other was a medical doctor. They had poured out their lives making Christ known among the poor and sick in some of the hardest places. While serving in Cameroon, the brakes on their vehicle failed, they went over a cliff, and both died instantly.

Piper asked the crowd, “Is this a tragedy?” The answer came back strongly: “No. That was not a tragedy. That was a life poured out for Christ, followed by heaven.”

Then he said, “I’ll tell you what a tragedy is.” And he proceeded to read from a *Reader’s Digest* article about a couple who took early retirement, moved to Florida, and spent their remaining years cruising on their boat, playing softball, and collecting sea shells on a beach. He said, “Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment saying, ‘Look, Lord, my sea shell collection.’ That’s a tragedy. Don’t waste your life.”

Parents and grandparents, are we preparing the next generation for a life of costly discipleship, or are we still clearing every obstacle and offering them a Jesus who exists mainly to make life comfortable?

Young adults, the call is not to try harder in your own strength, but to **know** the One who is able to keep you and to live as those who have already been given everything in Christ.

The call still stands: Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord. Share in suffering for the gospel—and in doing so, share in the sufferings of Christ—not in your own strength, but by the power of God. And the same resources that sustain us in gospel hardship also sustain us in every other form of suffering.

You have the finished work of Christ. You have a calling that is big enough to include hardship. And you have the strong assurance that Christ Himself is able to guard what has been entrusted, both the gospel He has placed in our care and the lives we have placed in His hands, until that great day.

So, do not shrink back. Do not waste the grace you have received. Run to it, rest in it, and live in such a way that the worth of Christ is made to look great, even when it costs you.