

## IT'S NOT HOW YOU START, IT'S HOW YOU FINISH

Have you ever thought about how you will finish out your life here on earth? How does your life look to those who you have influence over? Are you standing in the trenches with your brothers and sisters? Are you feeling like you have failed God and others and there is no more use for you. Are you in so deep with your sin that you feel that God doesn't love you anymore, or maybe ever?

Welcome to week 4 of All Things New and as we continue our journey through the 21 DOP and Fasting I want to challenge you today. As we fast and give ourselves to God more we begin to see the things in our lives that don't matter as much, the things that we put over Loving God and Others. But the real question is this, do you consider the way you started out your life as a believer to be the way that you finish your walk in Christ?

As we dive into scripture today, 2 Timothy 4, I want us to consider 3 different men as case studies for how to live and how not to live. As we study this passage of Scripture I want you to ask yourself the question, "Who do I identify with?" Who in this scripture do I see in the mirror in the mornings when I am getting dressed?

2 TIMOTHY 4:9-18 (NIV) 9 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. 14 Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. 15 You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. 16 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

There are 3 men who we see in this portion of the scriptures who Paul is telling Timothy about. As I asked you earlier, did you identify with any of these men?

1. A fellow worker who falls out of fellowship (2 Timothy 4:9-10)

2. A deserting partner restored as a friend (2 Timothy 4:11-13)

3. A faithful Savior strengthening His followers (2 Timothy 4:17-18)

What I would like to do for the remainder of our time together. I want to share with you 3 principles we can live by. And maybe you have recognized yourself as one of men and you see yourself as a failure or a mistake. You are not, and you are not alone in this walk with Jesus.

**Principle 1. Warning, Don't fall in love with the world ( Like Demas)**

How many of us have found ourselves in a position where we have walked away from God and walked into the world. That we have chosen the ways of the world instead of God. It's not that we don't know better, it's not that we are ignorant to the fact of what we are doing. We choose to do this out of our evil desires of your heart. By our very nature we are selfish, and our hearts seek after what it wants and what it considers best for us, not for God or others. **1 John 2:15-17 says 15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.**

But as we also know from the book of Jeremiah as well that the heart is deceitful above all things. And as we shall shortly, what we should do when we walk away and turn our back on God. We as believers have a choice to make. We can either strive for eternal riches or be in Christ. Or we can strive for things of this world. And For Demas he chose the world. You see he bailed out on Paul when he was imprisoned and just left him. Left the ministry and walked into the world. As we saw in the scriptures earlier

9 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Let me ask you a question. What are you in love with on this earth that you put on the throne of your heart? What is in your life that isn't of God but of man's creation. **Matthew 6:21** tells us that **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** If the treasures that you are seeking and loving aren't of God they are of the world. And sometimes we let circumstances and our feelings and emotions dictate our relationship with God. I want to list some reasons why some walk away from God.

1. I Don't Like His Rules
2. I Want to Live My Own Life
3. Christians Are Hypocrites
4. Someone in the Church Hurt Me

Maybe you are struggling with some of these this morning. Maybe your reason for walking away from God isn't on the list. But I want to give you this warning. If you think that you are going to live a better life outside of God and his grace and mercy you will not. Choosing to leave God and choose the world only brings heartache and pain. You will never be satisfied with what the world will offer you. His rules or the laws that some of us struggle with feel restricted by how God wants us to live but they are not meant to be restrictive but to keep you safe. Jesus came and fulfilled all the laws because we can't. We will fall short of those things. But Jesus came and lived like us so we can have it as an example.

Or maybe the lifestyle you want to have is more important than the relationship with christ. You can't have two loves in your heart at the same time. You have to make a choice. Do I want to live in a way that makes me comfortable or live in a way that proclaims Christ as king of my life? But if you have walked away you can come back to the arms of Jesus and that leads us to our second principal.

## Principal 2 Restoration is Possible

For a lot of people they had been knocked down, and there seemed to be no way of getting back up. And the same is true for us in life when we have been stricken by life itself. Whether it's a loss of a job, marriage falling apart, kids wandering in the world. Or just our personal struggle with sin or other issues it's easy to let this knock you down and keep you down. But what we should never forget is that God is walking through the waters of life. Whether they are good or bad situations, he is there.

And when we are struggling with these things not only will he be with us, but he will also make sure that it will not sweep you away. He will not let it consume you, or fall to it. You have the God of all creation on your side. He loves you too much to just leave you. Because he will never forsake his children. In the scripture above we see that it mentions Mark, and Paul says this **11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.**

You see In Acts 13-15 we see Mark was with Paul and Barnabas at one point doing ministry together. And it seems that he left them and the ministry. Now it is suggested that he left out of discouragement of the unfruitfulness of the ministry that he was a part of with Paul and Barnabas. When he left there was a strong disagreement between Paul and Barnabas about whether to take him on another mission trip, Barnabas was willing to forgive him and Paul wasn't willing to take someone who would just walk out and quit. So Paul and Barnabas go their separate ways to do ministry and Barnabas takes Mark with him. Despite him walking away from the ministry Barnabas apparently forgave him. We see this happen in the book of Acts. But fast forward to our scripture today and we see that Paul is calling on Mark to come and join him. What happened that made Paul change his mind. For Mark to walk away and come back to this ministry life he had to look for restoration. So it is to believe that Mark matured and grew in his relationship with Jesus. Because Paul called on him to join him his relationship was restored and so was his relationship with God.

But here is the thing we have to cling to. We have to believe that he will take care of us and restore us despite how our situations may seem. Despite how bad things are going in our lives, he is with us. Even if we walk away from God, and his calling in our lives we must seek Restoration and repentance. And even if you have walked away from God, he still loves you, he still cares for you. **Romans 8:38-39 New International Version**  
**38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Nothing, and I mean nothing, can separate us from the love of God. That means your sins, your mistakes, failures, bad life choices, decisions based on the evil desires of our hearts. No matter what, he still loves you. So when you fall down in life. You have a reason to get back up, because he is there for you and that he loves you and wants to restore you. Don't let the enemy tell you otherwise. Remember Satan's job is to convince you that God doesn't love you after mistakes, sins, failures in your life. That is how he keeps us at arms distance from the father of heaven. He wants to restore you. But knowing God's word and his promises can keep you in check and remind you and for you to remind Satan what kind of God that we serve. Remember Jesus needed the fathers words to combat satan so do we. So don't be afraid to let God in and do work in your life.

Another reason to seek restoration and repentance is because we are a shining example of God's love for us when we get up from our situations. Especially with the power of the Holy Spirit we are able to show others the power of God and how he can do the same for you as well. When we overcome our situations with God at our side others will see this and it will open a door for you to share the gospel and who God is in your life and how he helped you up when you fell down.

So how do we do this? We see here in the Book of Joel how we should do this.

Joel 2:13

New International Version

13 Rend your heart

and not your garments.

Return to the Lord your God,

for he is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and abounding in love,  
and he relents from sending calamity.

First thing is to repent. If you have ever repented of something it's not just asking God for forgiveness. But it is also turning away from what it is that you gave into instead of God in the first place.

But how do you do this, as we see in Joel to tear or rend our hearts, pray to God to show you what it is that you need to repent of. Maybe it isn't so clear to you, but God can show you. Usually walking away from God is a slow process, like a turtle turning around. One thing can lead to another and another and before you know it you are completely turned from him. But the beauty of the God that we serve is that he wants us to come back home. Just like in the story of the prodigal son he wants us to return to him and he will be there with open arms. There is nothing that you have done, no distance too far that you can't come back to him,

Return to the Lord your God,  
for he is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and abounding in love,  
and he relents from sending calamity

He wants you, he loves you, why? Because first he is gracious and compassionate. He knows that we are human, he knows that outside of Him we are weak and will fall prey to the desires of the world. His grace

knows no bounds and he will continually love you and give you grace and compassion when we fall short. Even if we run away. Secondly he is slow to anger and his love is endless. For example I know that for some of us as parents we have a short fuse with our kids. Or you have that certain family member that just gets to you every time.

Well God isn't like that, he doesn't get angry at us when we drop the ball and mess up. Instead he is slow to get angry and constantly showers us with love. Even though we may be living in a place where we don't deserve it. And because of his grace, compassion, slow to anger and his abounding love.

He don't strike us down. He doesn't send hellfire and brimstone upon us when we mess up. Now yes, there are consequences to our actions and our sin. But that is based on our decisions not His desire to smite us. So if you have turned from God this morning I ask that you turn back to God, repent and seek restoration because he loves you. And when you are restored and walking with Christ and seek repentance that leads us to the third principal.

**Principal 3. If you are faithful and walking with the Lord, keep the faith,**

1 Timothy 6:11-16, 11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you 14 to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

If you are here this morning, in the midst of the 21 DOP and fasting and you are keeping the course, congratulations. Listen, being a follower of Christ is hard. The path is narrow for those who seek God, because we have so much to combat to do so. But here we see what Paul is calling us to do for us who are trying to keep the faith. First he is calling us to flee from the things of the world, they will never satisfy, they will never bring Joy and peace to you, instead fight the good fight of faith, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Because fighting the fight of faith means you are literally soldiering against the world. You are combating against everything that it stands for and instead fighting for what is right and just.

If you are fighting for and pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness, guess who has you back. GOD does. He will stand and defend those who defend him on this earth. He loves those who are close to him. **James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.**

To fight the good fight requires us to do a couple of things. First we must submit to God, and his authority. Just as we have talked about the whole past year. God loves you and he sent Jesus from heaven to die so you would have the opportunity to have eternal life. Isn't that enough of a reason to submit to the authority of God. then when we submit ourselves to God resisting the devil is possible. We can't do it with our own strength and abilities. Only with God can we do it. Being submissive isn't a sign of weakness. Instead it's a sign of respect and willingness to allow God to be the king of your life. To sit on the throne of your heart. To give him full access to our lives to do the work necessary to make us into the image of Christ that he needs us to be so that we can soldier on in life as a cross carrying believer of christ. "The theme here is one of humility. One cannot submit to God without humility. Obedience requires us to humble ourselves to surrender to the authority of another, and we are told that God resists pride—the opposite of humility—and the arrogance that fosters that pride."



Francis Chan puts it this way **“He wants all or nothing. The thought of a person calling himself a ‘Christian’ without being a devoted follower of Christ is absurd.”** To fight the good fight we must be all in. All or nothing. We have to put skin in the game. We have to be willing to submit and let God lead us.