

LESSON 13

How to Finish Faithfully

2 Timothy 4:6–8; Revelation 2:10

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing, 2 Timothy 4:6–8.

Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life, Revelation 2:10.

Class Overview: Every Christian begins the race of faith with enthusiasm, but not everyone finishes well. In 2 Timothy 4:6–8 and Revelation 2:10, the apostle Paul and the Lord Jesus both call believers to endurance—to remain faithful to the end, no matter the cost. Finishing faithfully is not about perfection or recognition; it's about steady devotion and trust in the grace of God. Paul viewed his life as an offering poured out for the glory of Christ, confident that the same Lord who called him would also reward him. The faithful Christian runs with purpose, keeps their eyes fixed on eternity, and relies on God's strength rather than their own. This final lesson in the *Tools for Ministry* series reminds us that faithfulness is the goal of every servant—to complete the race, keep the faith, and receive the crown of life from the righteous Judge who never forgets His own.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Explain Paul's reflection on his ministry and what it reveals about living with an eternal perspective (2 Timothy 4:6–7).
2. Describe how faithful endurance is essential to finishing well, even when the path is marked by hardship and loss.

3. Understand the meaning of the “crown of righteousness” and “crown of life” as eternal rewards for those who remain faithful (2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 2:10).
4. Learn to value spiritual integrity and steadfast obedience over outward success or acclaim.
5. Identify daily disciplines and attitudes that cultivate endurance, gratitude, and unwavering faith.
6. Reflect on how God’s mercy carries His servants through every trial and gives strength to finish the race with joy.

Introduction:

DURING THE LATE 1980s, I WAS A LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER for my junior high and high school track team. My running “career” actually started in 6th grade in 1986. Our community hosted a festival called “Brickfest.” Our town was known as the brick capital of the world because Malvern produced more bricks from its three brick plants than any other place on the planet. Our county is famous for a special clay that, after firing in the kiln, results in bricks with a beautiful, natural white color. So, our community leaders felt that this was something we all needed to celebrate with a festival. Each year, there was a 5K race on Saturday morning. The night before, they held a one mile “kids’ run” at one of the local brick plants for children from 7th grade and below. That year, I won the race! And it wasn’t even close. From there, I began running almost every day. I couldn’t wait until next year to run in the 5K with all the adults.

Finally, the following year arrived. On race day, I started strong. The first few miles felt easy, the crowd cheered me on, and I felt good. But somewhere past the second mile, my legs started to ache, my lungs burned, and my confidence began to fade. I thought about quitting more than once. Then, near the end, as we came back into downtown, I saw the finish line in the distance. Something inside me shifted. I found just enough strength to push through. I finished second in my age group that year. I still have the trophy out in my barn. (It’s made of brick, so it hasn’t fallen apart after all these years.) Crossing that line didn’t make me a great runner, but it taught me a valuable lesson: the joy isn’t in how fast you start, it’s in how faithfully you finish.

That's exactly the message Paul gives in 2 Timothy 4. By the time he wrote those words, Paul was nearing the end of his life. He was in prison in Rome, awaiting execution. Many of his friends had deserted him. The churches he'd planted were facing challenges. His body was worn down by years of travel, persecution, and hardship. But listen to his tone, it isn't one of despair or defeat. It's one of peace and fulfillment.

He writes, *for I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* (2 Timothy 4:6–7). Those words represent the heart of a servant who has given everything to Christ and who is ready to meet Him without regret. Paul didn't just live faithfully; he *finished* faithfully. He could look back and say, "I've fought, I've finished, I've kept."

That's what we all want, to come to the end of our lives and ministries and be able to say the same. Not that we were perfect, but that we were faithful. Not that we avoided hardship, but that we trusted God through it. Not that we accomplished everything, but that we gave ourselves fully to the One who called us.

In Revelation 2:10, Jesus told the church in Smyrna, *be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.* That's the goal; it's not just to start strong but to remain faithful all the way to the end.

As we conclude this quarter's study, we'll consider what it means to finish well: to keep the proper perspective, persevere through challenges, and focus on the eternal reward. Because ultimately, the race isn't about who finishes first; it's about who remains faithful.

Finishing Faithfully Requires Perspective

In 2 Timothy 4:6–7, Paul writes, *for I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* These are the words of a man who saw his life through the lens of eternity. Paul's circumstances were grim, chained in a Roman prison, awaiting execution, yet he spoke with peace and confidence. The key to his endurance was perspective. He viewed his life not as something to cling to, but as something to pour out for God's glory.

1. Faithful Servants See Life as an Offering, not a Possession

When Paul says, *I am being poured out as a drink offering*, he uses a vivid image from Old Testament worship. A drink offering was wine poured out before the Lord at the base of the altar, completely given, with nothing held back. It was an act of total devotion. Paul viewed his ministry that way, not as something to protect or preserve, but as something to give. Every sermon preached, every mile traveled, every scar earned was part of his offering to God. He didn't see his life as his own; it belonged entirely to the One who saved him.

Perspective changes everything. When we see life as an offering instead of a possession, service becomes joy, not duty. Suffering becomes meaningful, not wasted. And finishing well becomes less about preserving comfort and more about pouring out love. In ancient Greece, runners in the Olympic Games didn't compete for money or fame; they ran for the honor of their city and the approval of their king. At the finish line stood a judge holding a crown of olive leaves, waiting to reward the faithful runner who finished the race. The goal wasn't simply to start strong or to outpace others, it was to finish with integrity, representing one's city well. Paul understood that image. He ran not for personal glory, but to honor his King.

2. Faithful Servants Accept the Reality of Departure

Paul says, *the time for my departure is close*. The word "departure" (*analsis*) means "to loosen" or "to untie." It was used to describe a ship being untied from its moorings and setting sail for home. For Paul, death wasn't an end; it was a release. He was about to leave the prison of mortality and sail toward the presence of Christ. That's the perspective of faith: to view death not as defeat, but as departure, not as loss, but as gain. When we live with eternity in view, we no longer fear the end. We see it as the moment when faith becomes sight.

3. Faithful Servants Keep Their Eyes on the Eternal Goal

Paul's perspective shaped his purpose. He could say, *I have fought the good fight*. The "good fight" wasn't a battle against people but against sin, discouragement, and the forces of darkness. He had fought to remain faithful to the gospel in a hostile world. Faithfulness requires focus. If we

lose sight of eternity, the struggles of ministry will feel overwhelming. But when we remember that every sermon, every act of service, every unseen labor has eternal weight, we gain strength to keep going.

Practically, this means:

- View every act of service as part of your offering to God.
- Remember that faithfulness matters more than recognition.
- Keep your eyes fixed on eternity: the finish line where your King waits.

Paul could face death without regret because he had already given his life away. That's the perspective that allows us to finish faithfully. When life is seen as an offering, the end is not loss, it's fulfillment.

Finishing Faithfully Requires Perseverance

Paul declares, *I have finished the race*. It's a simple phrase, but it carries enormous weight. Finishing well requires endurance. Anyone can start a race, but far fewer cross the finish line. Paul's words remind us that the Christian life, and ministry especially, is not a sprint but a marathon. It's a long obedience in the same direction, requiring courage, discipline, and faith when the road grows difficult.

1. Perseverance Means Staying the Course When It Would Be Easier to Quit

Suffering, beatings, imprisonment, betrayal, and hardship marked Paul's journey. Yet he could still say, *I have finished the race*. Why? Because his commitment to Christ outweighed his desire for comfort. Every servant of God will face seasons when quitting seems easier than continuing. The temptation to walk away, to withdraw, or to stop caring can be powerful. But perseverance says, *I will keep going, not because it's easy, but because God is worthy*.

During the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, Tanzanian runner John Stephen Akhwari entered the marathon with high hopes. But early in the race, he fell, dislocating his knee and injuring his shoulder. Most assumed he would quit. Hours after the winner crossed the finish line, Akhwari limped into the stadium, bloodied and exhausted. When asked

why he hadn't stopped, he said, *My country didn't send me 5,000 miles to start the race; they sent me to finish it.* That's the spirit God calls us to. The goal is not speed but faithfulness. God didn't call us to start the race; He called us to finish it.

2. Hope, Not Pride fuels Perseverance

Paul's strength didn't come from personal pride or stubborn willpower. It came from confidence in God's promises. He knew that the same Lord who called him would carry him to the end.

Hebrews 12:1–2 gives the same picture: *let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.* The secret to endurance is focus, not on the pain of the present but on the purpose of the race. When you keep your eyes on Jesus, the finish line becomes worth every step.

3. Perseverance Requires Faithful Consistency, Not Flashy Moments

Finishing faithfully doesn't mean doing something spectacular at the end; it means living consistently along the way. Paul didn't end well because of one heroic moment; he finished well because of thousands of small, unseen acts of obedience. In ministry, it's often the daily faithfulness, the quiet prayers, the late-night visits, the steady teaching, the unseen service, that God uses most powerfully.

Practically, this means:

- **Stay focused** when ministry feels monotonous. God values faithfulness over excitement.
- **Keep showing up.** Perseverance is built on consistency, not convenience.
- **Trust the process.** Growth and fruit come in God's timing, not ours.

Paul's words echo through the centuries: *I have finished the race.* He didn't finish because he was strong; he finished because he refused to stop. Perseverance isn't about perfection; it's about endurance rooted in faith.

Finishing Faithfully Receives a Promise

Paul concludes his reflection on life and ministry with these triumphant words: *there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing*, 2 Timothy 4:8. And to the church in Smyrna, Jesus says in Revelation 2:10, *be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life*. These verses remind us that faithfulness is not forgotten. The race may be long, the battle may be hard, but there is a reward waiting for every servant who endures, not the applause of men, but the approval of God.

1. The Crown Is a Symbol of Victory and Vindication

In Paul's day, victors in athletic contests were awarded a wreath, a crown made of olive or laurel leaves. It wasn't made of gold or jewels, but it symbolized honor, recognition, and achievement. Paul uses that image to describe the reward God will give to those who remain faithful. This "crown of righteousness" isn't something we earn through our own goodness; it's the reward of grace given to those who have trusted and obeyed Christ. It represents final vindication, the moment when God declares, *You have run well. You are mine*.

When a soldier completes his final deployment and returns home, there's often a ceremony: flags, medals, words of honor. But what matters most to that soldier isn't the medal; it's hearing the commanding officer say, *Well done. You served with honor*. That's the moment of validation. That's the image Paul paints here, standing before the Lord, hearing the righteous Judge say, *Well done, good and faithful servant*.

2. The Crown Is Given by the Righteous Judge

Notice who gives the crown: *the Lord, the righteous Judge*. Earthly judges had condemned Paul unjustly, but the true Judge would set things right. The same hands that once bore nails will one day place the crown of life on the heads of those who endured. That's what makes the promise so personal, it's not about getting a trophy; it's about receiving it from the Savior Himself. To see His face, to hear His voice, to know it was all worth it, that's the reward.

3. The Crown Is Promised to All Who Love His Appearing

Paul makes it clear that this promise isn't just for apostles or preachers, it's for *all those who have loved His appearing*. Faithful endurance is within reach for every believer. If you love Jesus, if you long for His return, if you keep walking by faith even when life is hard, this promise is for you. We find similar assurance in Revelation 2:10: *be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life*. The finish line of faith is not death; it's life eternal. For the faithful, death is not defeat; it's the doorway to reward.

Practically, this means:

- Keep eternity in view: every act of faithfulness brings you one step closer to seeing Christ.
- Remember that God keeps perfect records: no tear, sacrifice, or act of service goes unnoticed.
- Encourage one another with the promise of the crown: remind weary believers that glory awaits.

When Paul spoke of his coming crown, he wasn't boasting; he was testifying. The God who called him had kept him. The faith he had fought for would soon be fulfilled. And the same promise stands for us: *If we remain faithful to the end, we will see His face, we will hear His "Well done," and we will wear the crown of life*.

Practical Application: How to Finish Faithfully

Finishing faithfully isn't something that happens by accident. It's the result of daily choices, humble dependence on God, and a heart that longs more for eternity than for earthly applause. Paul didn't finish strong because his path was easy. He finished because he lived with purpose, perseverance, and perspective.

Here are several practical ways to cultivate that same faithfulness:

1. Live Each Day with Eternity in Mind

Paul viewed his life through the lens of eternity. He saw death not as an ending, but as a departure: a transition to what truly matters. The finish line shaped every step of his journey. Ask yourself daily: *What will matter 100 years from now?* When eternity becomes your

focus, priorities shift. Bitterness fades, fear lessens, and faithfulness becomes your goal.

2. Keep Your Heart Anchored in Grace, Not Performance

Paul could say, *I have kept the faith*, not because he was flawless, but because he trusted in God's mercy. Finishing well doesn't mean never falling; it means never letting failure have the last word. Keep coming back to grace. Let it fuel your service, heal your wounds, and keep your heart humble.

3. Stay Consistent in the Small Things

Faithfulness isn't built in grand moments; it's built in quiet consistency. Keep teaching, serving, praying, and showing up even when no one notices. Paul didn't measure his ministry by public success but by private devotion. Finish your assignments with the same diligence you started them.

4. Pass the Baton to Others

In the same letter, Paul told Timothy, *what you have heard from me... commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also* (2 Timothy 2:2). Finishing well means investing in others who will continue the race after you. Mentoring, training, and encouraging the next generation is part of how we "finish" faithfully.

5. Guard Your Integrity Until the End

Faithfulness is not just about staying active; it's about staying true. Many begin well but falter morally or spiritually along the way. Protect your heart. Keep short accounts with God. Stay transparent, humble, and accountable. The most incredible legacy you can leave is not your accomplishments but your character.

6. Anticipate the Joy of Hearing, "Well Done"

The promise of the "crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:8) is meant to motivate us. Picture that moment: standing before the Lord, seeing His face, hearing Him say, *you were faithful*. That vision has carried countless servants through hardship. Let it carry you.

Challenge

This week, take time to reflect on your spiritual race. Where are you strong? Where are you weary? Where do you need to realign your focus?

Write a few short sentences describing the kind of Christian, servant, and finisher you want to be. Pray over it daily. Then live this week in light of that goal, because every small act of faith today prepares you for a faithful finish tomorrow.

Conclusion

Finishing faithfully is not about perfection; it's about endurance. It's about walking with Christ long enough, and closely enough, that His strength carries you when your own runs out. Paul's final words in 2 Timothy 4 are not the sigh of a tired man: they're the song of a fulfilled servant. After decades of hardship, persecution, and sacrifice, he could say with confidence, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*. That's the goal for every one of us. To reach the end of our days not bitter or burned out, but grateful, able to say, "I've poured out my life for Christ, and it was worth it."

There will be times along the way when faith feels heavy and ministry feels lonely. There will be losses, disappointments, and seasons when your efforts seem unseen. But as Paul reminds us, "*The Lord, the righteous Judge,*" sees it all, and He has reserved a crown for every faithful servant. One day, every tear, every prayer, every act of obedience will be remembered and rewarded. The finish line is closer than we think. And when we cross it, we will not regret the miles we've run for the glory of God.

When I think back to the struggles I've faced in ministry: the failures, the betrayals, the weary seasons where I wasn't sure I could keep going, I'm reminded of one truth: God has never failed me. The same grace that called me has carried me. The same mercy that sustained me in 1998 still sustains me today. Through every new challenge, God has provided and gotten me through. That knowledge has helped me persevere.

And now, as I look ahead, I want to finish the way Paul did, faithful, thankful, and full of hope. Because the race is not about outpacing others; it's about keeping your eyes on Jesus until you see Him face to face. So, here's the challenge: run your race well. Don't stop short. Don't let bitterness, fear, or fatigue steal your faith. Keep your eyes fixed on the eternal crown, the joy of hearing your Savior say, *well done, good and*

faithful servant. Finish faithfully: not for applause, but for the glory of the One who ran before you, endured the cross, and now waits at the finish line with open arms.

For Discussion

1. When you think about your life and ministry, what does “finishing faithfully” look like to you? Who in your life has modeled that kind of endurance and integrity?

2. Paul viewed his life as a “drink offering,” poured out for God. How does this image challenge our tendency to cling to comfort, recognition, or control? What would it look like to live with that same perspective of total surrender?

3. Why do you think so many people begin well but fail to finish well? What daily habits or spiritual disciplines help you stay consistent when ministry or faith feels hard?

4. Paul and John both spoke of a “crown of righteousness” and a “crown of life.” How does this promise of eternal reward strengthen you to stay faithful now?

5. What does finishing faithfully look like in your current season of life? What steps can you take this week to ensure your focus stays on faithfulness rather than success or recognition?

6. Reflect on Matthew's story about God's sustaining grace through hardship and ministry trials. How have you seen God's faithfulness carry you through difficult seasons? How can that memory fuel your perseverance as you continue your race?
