

Lesson 15: Live to Finish Well!

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Have you ever walked through a cemetery and read the gravestones?

Some are extravagant.

Some are simple.

A name.

Two dates.

A dash in between.

*That **dash** represents a whole life.*

Every joy. Every sorrow. Every decision. Every relationship. Every moment lived.

And one day, every one of us will have a dash.

The question is not whether that day is coming.

The question is what that **dash** will represent.

Because at the end of life, what matters most is not how you started.

It is how you finished.

When we come to 2 Timothy 4, we are standing on significant ground.

These are the final recorded words of the apostle Paul.

He is writing from a Roman prison.

The trial is over.

The sentence is coming.

The end is near.

And Paul knows it.

This is a man staring death in the face and telling us what matters most at the end of life.

And what is remarkable is this.

There is no panic in his voice only peace.

Why?

Because Paul knows something every believer must understand.

Main Idea: Your Day is Coming! Be Prepared!

If your life ended soon, would you be ready?

Would you be able to say what Paul is about to say?

Could you face that moment with confidence instead of fear?

Would your life point to a finish line well run?

Because one day, every one of us will come to that moment.

In these three verses, Paul pulls back the curtain and shows us what it looks like to finish well.

He shows us how to live now in light of that day.

And it begins with this.

1. You Are One Day Closer To Your Day (v. 6)

Each day. Each hour. Each moment brings you closer to the day that you will meet face to face the One who created you.

Paul was facing the end of his life on earth.

Death was looming and he was preparing not only his own heart for this reality but preparing Timothy as well.

Look at what he says in verse 6...

2 Timothy 4:6 ESV

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

This is an intriguing way to articulate his impending death.

“For I am already (key word) being poured out as a drink offering...”

What does Paul mean by this phrase?

In the Old Testament, a drink offering was wine poured out over a burning sacrifice, a final act of worship that completed the offering and symbolized total devotion to God.

It was not kept back or measured out cautiously, it was poured out completely as an act of devotion.

That is the image Paul draws on in 2 Timothy 4:6 when he says, *“I am already being poured out as a drink offering.”*

He sees his life like that offering on the altar, spent, surrendered, and fully given to the Lord.

Paul's point is clear - a faithful life is not one preserved for self, but one willingly poured out in worshipful service to Christ.

Can you sense the import of how Paul is feeling at this point in his journey.

When I read these words, I get the sense of a football player whose *“left everything on the field.”*

Paul gave it his all. He held nothing back and He did it as an offering, as a gift to the Lord.

The time of his departure is here. He is not talking about getting on a train and leaving town.

He is talking about his life and impending death. It is at hand and Paul is at peace.

There was a time in Paul's ministry when he was torn about whether he should go to be with the Lord or stay and be a blessing to those God has entrusted to his care.

Philippians 1:21–24 ESV

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

But that time has passed.

His time has come and he is ready to go.

History tells us that not long after writing these words, Paul's life came to a violent end. Under the reign of Nero, Christians were being hunted, and Paul, a Roman citizen, was sentenced to execution. Unlike Peter, who was crucified, Paul was led outside the city of Rome and beheaded along the Ostian Way. No crowds. Just a worn-out apostle, likely chained, surrounded by soldiers, giving the last drop of his life for Christ.

And yet, when Paul writes, he does not sound defeated. He says, *“I am already being poured out as a drink offering.”* In the Old Testament, a drink offering was poured out completely on the altar, nothing held back. That is how Paul saw his death.

Not as a tragedy, but as worship. Not as loss, but as sacrifice.

Church, Paul did not waste his life, and he did not waste his death.

The sword of Rome may have taken his head, but it could not take his reward.

He died the way he lived, poured out for Christ to the very last drop.

Listen, Paul's death forces a question on us.

If your life were poured out today, what would it be poured out for?

Paul did not accidentally live a poured-out life. He chose it.

Every sermon he preached, every scar he bore, every prison cell he inhabited, every hardship he endured, he was saying yes to Christ.

And when the end came, there was nothing left to give because he had already given everything.

And here is the application for you!

Do not wait until the end of your life to be poured out.

You decide now what your life will be poured out for.

Will it be comfort?

Will it be success?

Will it be applause?

Or will it be Christ?

Because here is the truth, church.

Everyone's life gets poured out on something.

The only question is whether it will be poured out on something eternal.

So do not wait until your final breath to give Jesus your life.

Pour it out now.

Pour it out daily.

Pour it out willingly.

And when your time comes, like Paul, you will not regret a single drop.

Your Day is Coming, Be Prepared

You are one day closer to **your** day

2. Keep Fighting Until That Day (v. 7)

2 Timothy 4:7 ESV

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

There are a lot of adjectives that come to mind when I think of the Apostle Paul

Bold

Determined

Zealous

Passionate

and even humble.

There is one more that comes to mind as well.

Determined!

Paul didn't give up. He kept at the fight that God had entrusted to him.

I mean listen to his very own words that describe his determined mindset!

Philippians 3:12–14 ESV

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Isn't the terminology that Paul uses interesting?

He considers the Christian life and ministry to be a **fight**. A good fight, but a **fight**, nonetheless.

*ἀγών - Strife, contention, contest for victory or mastery such as was used in the Greek games of running, boxing, wrestling, and so forth. Paul applies the word to the evangelical contest against the enemies of man's salvation. A race, a place to run. A struggle, contest, contention. In the NT, it is presented as the life task of the Christian. - **The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament 73. ἀγών agón***

Listen to some other verses that Paul makes similar allusion.

1 Timothy 6:12 ESV

*Fight the good **fight** of the **faith**. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

Philippians 1:29–30 ESV

*For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also **suffer** for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same **conflict** that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

Colossians 2:1 ESV

*For I want you to know how great a **struggle** I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,*

1 Thessalonians 2:2 ESV

*But though we had already **suffered** and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much **conflict**.*

And probably the best catalogue of Paul's suffering which is found in

2 Corinthians 11:22–28 ESV

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Paul was a **determined** fighter, but his **fight** was now coming to an end.

Paul's race was not a sprint, but a marathon - and his race was almost complete.

The Greek word used here mean **“foot race.”**

I have never run a marathon. The most I've done is a 10k a few times.

And I will tell you, running is enjoyable, but it is also laborious.

And when running the race, there is something wonderful and motivating about seeing and crossing the finish line. (My Arndt Grandkids met me and ran with me over the finish line)

And during the fight and while running the race, Paul never lost **“the faith.”**

Paul was so convinced about **“the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”** (Jude 3) that he never quit believing nor following the Lord.

Don't get me wrong, it wasn't all sunshine and rainbows for Paul.

Sometimes he admits to the emotional weight he carried.

Look at what he said to the church at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 1:8–9 ESV

*For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the **affliction** we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly **burdened** beyond our strength that we **despaired** of life itself.⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*

But he didn't give up! He persevered! Why?

In that same letter he wrote these words...

2 Corinthians 4:7–12 ESV

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.⁸ We are **afflicted** in every way, but not **crushed**; **perplexed**, but not driven to despair;⁹ **persecuted**, but not forsaken; **struck down**, but not destroyed;¹⁰ always carrying in the **body the death** of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our bodies.¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

This passage described Paul's **why**.

Paul fought for you!

He wanted the world to know Jesus.

And with his last breath and with his last pen stroke he would fight to the end.

"The Christian life is not a sprint but a marathon."

— John R.W. Stott

The Message of 2 Timothy (BST Series, IVP, 1973), p. 114

Paul most definitely had a **why**.

Christian...

What is your why?

What do you fight for?

What are you staying in the race for?

What matters to you most?

For Paul it was the **FAITH**. He fought the good fight for the faith.

He wanted all people everywhere to know the love of Jesus.

What is your **why**?

Does it have the same nobility of Paul's **why**?

Does your why have eternal realities?

Like Paul, make sure your Why matches up with the Will of God.

Your Day is Coming, Be Prepared

You are one day closer to your day

Keep fighting until that day!

And here is the hope you grasp on to...

3. Your Day Leads to Much Better Days (v. 8)

As Christians, we talk about Heaven quite a bit. And we should.

The talk of the promise of Heaven gives us the hope to persevere the now.

Paul does the same thing.

Paul KNOWS what is in store for Him because of the promises of God.

Look at verse 8...

2 Timothy 4:8 ESV

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

The bottom line is for Paul there was an award for him. This is such an amazing concept.

Our God who **saves** us by His grace, **Empowers** us by His Spirit, and promises us eternal life in His Word – This God does all the work, and yet we receive an award?

It makes no sense. God's amazing grace makes no sense to our sin scarred, finite, minds. This is why it is AMAZING GRACE!

Understand what Paul is saying in this verse.

Henceforth - in other words there is something awaiting me. Something very special.

The Crown of Righteousness - The crown of righteousness is not a medal Paul earned, it is a promise he is about to receive.

From the moment we are saved, we are clothed in Christ's righteousness.

Then all through life, we struggle and stumble as the Spirit keeps shaping us into what we already are in Him.

But one day, the struggle will end. No more sin. No more weakness.

No more inner war. On that day, righteousness will not just be declared over us, it will be perfected within us.

That is the crown. The moment we are finally made like Christ.

And here is what is so powerful. Paul says this crown is for all who have loved His appearing.

In other words, this reward is not for super Christians.

It is for believers who live looking forward. People who long for Jesus.

People who ache for the day sin is gone and Christ is seen.

If you love His appearing, you are not afraid of that day.

You are waiting for it. And when that day comes, the righteous Judge will not condemn you.

He will crown you.

Paul says this crown will be awarded *“on that Day”* by *“the righteous Judge.”*

Every phrase matters.

First, the Judge is righteous. This is a holy courtroom scene.

The One who judges the world will evaluate every life with perfect justice.

Genesis 18:25 asks, *“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”*

The answer is always yes.

Second, this happens *“on that Day.”*

Paul uses that phrase to point to the return of Christ and the believer’s final vindication (2 Tim. 1:12, 18).

This is the moment when faith becomes sight and every promise is fulfilled.

Third, Paul expands the promise. *“Not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*

That phrase reveals the heart of a believer.

A genuine Christian lives with a forward gaze.

Titus 2:13 describes believers as those who are...

Titus 2:13 ESV

waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

The movement of the text is clear.

A righteous Judge.

A certain Day.

A promised crown.

Given to those who love His appearing.

Think of a soldier who has been deployed for years. The battle has been long. The days are exhausting. The nights feel endless. What carries him forward is the return. He counts the days. He looks at photos of home. He imagines the moment he walks through the airport and sees the people he loves.

A soldier who treasures home looks forward to that moment.

That is the picture Paul is painting.

Loving Christ's appearing is the longing of someone whose true home is ahead.

This text brings a personal question into the room.

Do you love His appearing?

This is a heart-level issue. What you **love** directs how you **live**.

A believer who loves Christ's appearing lives with eternity in view.

There is a growing seriousness about sin and a growing investment in what lasts.

Hardship is endured with steadiness because the finish line is clear.

When the return of Christ feels distant, the heart slowly settles into this world.

Priorities adjust. Urgency fades. Eternal things move to the margins.

So let this passage recalibrate your heart.

Lift your eyes again.

Stir your longing again.

Ask the Lord to deepen your love for the day you will see Him.

And here is the encouragement in the text.

This crown is promised to all who love His appearing.

Faithful believers who keep looking up. Saints who keep longing for Christ.

Ordinary Christians who keep walking toward that Day.

So, live with that Day in view.

Love His appearing.

And when you stand before the righteous Judge, you will stand with joy.

As these final words fall from Paul's pen, you can almost feel the weight of eternity in them.

Every sentence he writes pulls our eyes upward.

Every phrase lifts our perspective higher.

And now we stand where every believer eventually stands.

Looking toward that Day.

“Set your minds on things above, not on the things of the earth” (Col 3:2).

Let's think about what this means for us.

Conclusion

Your day is coming.

That is where this text leaves us.

You are one day closer to seeing Christ.

One day closer to standing before the righteous Judge.

So, keep fighting until that day.

Stay faithful.

Finish your race.

Keep your faith.

And remember this.

Your day leads to much better days.

For the believer, the end is seeing Jesus.

So live ready.
Love His appearing.
And finish well.

“I am still in the land of the dying; I shall be in the land of the living soon.”

— *John Newton, last recorded words (1807)*