

2 Timothy 4:1-8 - Don't Quit: How to Stay Faithful When the Christian Life Gets Hard

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 February 2026

Preacher: Simon Lawrenson

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. It's good to see you. If you've got a Bible, turn with me to 2 Timothy chapter 4. So we are in our penultimate week. Is that the right word? Good. I should have learned now not to try and do difficult words at the beginning of a sermon. The penultimate session in 2 Timothy. And just in case you are wondering or you've got a question, you may not, but that's fine. The week after next, we will be in Titus because it goes 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, then Philemon. So, and if you are asking about Hebrews, pass. So, like, I'm not qualified to teach on Hebrews. So anyway, enough of that. 2 Timothy, I'm not qualified to teach on 2 Timothy either. But so we'll see how this goes. So Paul writes to Timothy and he says this, verse 1 chapter 4.

He says, Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word. We ask that you would teach us this morning. Lord, despite the truth that I am not able to teach this, Lord. And so we ask that you would help us, Lord. And we are not able to receive it without your help. And so, Lord, we ask again, would you do the work that only you can do, Lord? Would you unblock our ears, Lord? Would you have our hearts be like well ploughed fields, Lord, ready to receive your word? Lord, that it would bring forth fruit? Lord, that's what we desire. Lord, we desire to be more like you. Lord, and Lord, we love studying your word, Lord, but we love you more. Lord, and so we pray, Lord, would your word draw us to you?

Lord, would it make us more like you? Lord, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. All right. So last week and actually the week before, we were looking from kind of chapter two.

[3 : 19] And we said that last week's chapter three was a, it wasn't a new conversation. It kind of flowed on from chapter two, where Paul had been talking to Timothy about fleeing youthful passions. This is chapter two, verse 22. It's not going to be on the screen, but you know, you know where to find it.

He said to flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. And he warned him in verse 23 to avoid foolish controversies, to lead with gentleness, and to trust that God grants repentance through the truth. And so then in chapter three, he kind of continues that with the question, oh yeah, but that's not going to be easy. Right? We know that, right? Like walking with the Lord is difficult. And so that's what he highlights in chapter three, that the environment and the culture and the society that Timothy is living in and he is ministering in is not going to be easy. And pursuing righteousness is still the right thing to do.

And so then in chapter four, under that backdrop, it's almost like he's needed to then begin with a charge. Look what he says in verse one. He says, I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom. And then he gives the charge, preach the word, right? So Paul lays down this absolute truth that this life, this world, living the Christian life in the society that we're living in is not going to be easy. And so therefore, you need a command, you need a charge. Do this, Paul is saying to Timothy. And he does actually something remarkable. We shouldn't gloss over this. What he's kind of doing is drawing back the curtain on what Timothy can see and to show him what he can't see. In essence, to say, Timothy, your audience isn't who you think it is. This is in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus. And so he's not only giving Timothy a set of instructions, he's giving him a new perspective on living. It's not just do this.

He's saying, look, you do need to do this, but you need to do this in light of the fact that God is present and Christ Jesus is present. And so he reminds us again that our lives aren't in a vacuum, that every word, every choice, every decision, every battle, God sees it all. Every single one.

And so he says that there is a reality that you potentially don't see or don't recognize every single day. And that reality is that God is present. God sees and Christ Jesus sees. And he knows.

[6 : 24] The one who conquered death, the one who stands victorious, the one who prays for us, even when we stumble. The Savior who has gone before us and walks with us. He sees and he knows. And then Paul draws the curtain back even further, reminds us that our lives are lived not just in view of God in Christ Jesus, but they are also lived in Christ Jesus, but they are also lived in view of eternity.

That every trial, every act of faithfulness, every moment of patience and every part of your endurance is not only shaping today, but is being recorded in a story that will one day be opened by a judge.

And that's sobering, isn't it? And what we've talked about in previous sermons is that this idea of this judge, and it comes full round circle from Paul, this idea of the judge and that we don't really fear, we don't really fear being judged, we fear the judge. And where the difficulty is, where we place too much emphasis on what other people think of us or what organizations think of us or whatever, we've just misplaced the judge. It's the wrong judge. And so here, Paul reminds us, look, that everything that you are doing is in the presence of God, is in the presence of Christ Jesus, and is writing a story for eternity. That we don't ultimately answer to whatever is trending on TikTok. We don't answer to our critics.

We don't answer to the crowds. And we don't even answer to our own fears. We answer to God. And we live every single day before the face of God. And that's sobering, isn't it?

And I wonder if we had that kind of mentality every single day, how our lives would be different. And I think like that this is exactly where that kind of perspective becomes powerful for life change.

[8 : 36] Not because we fear necessarily, because Paul has already said we haven't been given a spirit of fear. So not out of fear, but with a recognition that actually our lives are accounting for something.

And this is what Paul is trying to say to Timothy. That based on your identity, who you are before God, because of God, you have a calling. God has called you to do something. And Paul is going to say to Timothy, Timothy, God has called you to preach the word. But that has to come out of a correct identity.

You can't just do that out of fear. And so he's saying, look, having this perspective becomes powerful. When you see your life in this light, you don't live for applause. You don't live for random or, excuse me, temporary recognition or random recognition. You don't live for, you don't live merely to avoid failure and to escape punishment. You live to honor the one who knows you, who loves you and has promised that all that you do in faithfulness matters forever. And I wonder whether we believe that.

I wonder whether we believe that this morning, that everything that we do really does matter. And so Paul pulls this curtain back, not to intimidate Timothy, but to empower Timothy.

And to remind him, look, there are going to be days, maybe even hours where life is challenging. But you need to know that God is present. Christ Jesus is present and your faithfulness matters for eternity. And so we get to decide who we are living for. That is the key. And so this charge then is to do what? What is this charge to do? So this is the exhortation, the command from Paul.

[10 : 28] And he's saying, look, this is a weighty command. This is not me just saying this writing because I've got another chapter to write and I really don't know how to open that chapter. So let's just go with a command. We know that's not how the Bible was written. He's saying, look, you need to do this. And this is being commanded now in the presence of God in Christ Jesus. And what you do, how you respond is going to change your eternity. And so this charge then is then in verse two that we know probably very well, where he says, preach the word. And so Paul gives us both the method and the subject. He is to preach, which means to announce or to declare. It doesn't necessarily in this context. And that word actually doesn't mean in and of itself to exposit the word, to preach a sermon. It doesn't necessarily mean that. It means more often used to announce, to make a declaration.

And there are lots and lots of different words that Paul could have used in here that he could have used for preach. But he uses a word that paints the picture of a herald. And we are fortunate enough, blessed enough to have a kind of a culture and a society that really still understands the idea of a herald. In the old days, and this is old, old, you know, the way that news was spread would be that a town crier or someone would come in and shout the news. Oh, yay, oh, yay. I think they

started with or something. I'm not too sure I wasn't around then. But like I've heard, I've heard it said. And then they would give the news and then I'll go on to the next town and then, oh, yay, oh, yay, give the news.

And they've got the next before newspapers and those kind of things. And that's how we get, you know, the daily herald is from that. It's an announcement. It's news. And in many, many cultures, you have the same thing. Where even in parts of the world, whole families, their job in life, you get born into that family, then that was what you did. You went from one town to another and you just declared the news. This is what's going on. If you heard what's going on in Southampton, and they would say, this is what's happened. There's been a crash on the M27 or the M27 is going to be closed for three days. And, you know, that was the weekend and you're getting the news on Tuesday and you're like, well, thanks very much. But that's the idea. Heralds weren't philosophers. They weren't teachers. They didn't stick around and give a lesson on the news. They announced, they just declared what they knew to be true, which means the essence of Christian preaching is not to tell people how they should live, but what has been done. It's declaring news. That's preaching. Not what they must do to save themselves, but what has already been done to save them. You remember in Acts when Stephen was martyred. And, you know, the question could be, well, who does this?

[13:49] Who does this preaching? Well, obviously in this context is Timothy. But in Acts chapter 8, when Stephen was martyred, Christians basically left Jerusalem. You know, there was persecution that came and they were scattered.

And in Acts chapter 8, verse 4, it says that those who were scattered went about doing what? Preaching. Now, you know, from Acts chapter 2 and other verses, Acts chapter 9 and so on and so forth, we do understand that they did more than that.

They did meet in each other's homes. They did break bread together. They did fellowship together. But it's striking to me is that as the church scattered, the church went about preaching the word. That's what they did. And so that's not Timothy or just the ordained ones. This is all of Christians who were scattered, which means that we all have the same call and responsibility to clear the good news.

And we all need to take this message to Timothy to heart. Yes, life is going to be difficult. Yes, life is going to be challenging. Yes, you're going to find resistance like we saw last week.

[15:04] But that is not a reason to draw back. That is not a reason to stop. It's not a reason to grow timid at all.

It's actually a reason to preach. And so we are to preach and we are to preach the word. That's the subject. We are to preach the word, not ourselves.

I don't know how much of an avid YouTube watcher you are. I have grown in watching YouTube over the years and much more than kind of normal, like telly.

And sometimes I find myself stumbling onto different preachers. And sometimes, more often than not, I come away a little bit sad that they haven't preached the word.

They've preached themselves or they've preached something else. And I'm like, I'd just like to get into the word. So Paul's instruction here to Timothy is to preach.

[16:08] And the subject is to preach the word. And if we think about it, look, you know, many people approach life carrying around some kind of fear, don't they?

Like if you've spent any time with any length of time with anyone, really digging under the surface of why we do things the way we do things, oftentimes there is some kind of fear that is being carried around.

A fear of rejection. Or a fear of failure. Or a fear of not measuring up. I think they call that imposter syndrome, don't they?

I had to look that one up. Like that's a real thing. Now it's a syndrome. It's fear. Fear of what people think of them.

But Paul is pointing out that if you know your identity in Christ, if you're secure in that and you're unashamed in that, then fear loses its grip. And all of a sudden, your worth is not tied to someone's applause or to outcomes.

[17:21] Your worth is tied to the truth that you are already loved, you are already accepted, you are already declared righteous because of Christ. And that frees you then to preach a message that isn't about protecting yourself or inflating your own status.

You can preach the word without needing to sugarcoat, without having to shrink back. And this is powerfully liberating.

It's a position that is freeing to be in. Because to actually believe, and this is like something that is good just to, I don't know, just to, I want to say think about, but it doesn't do it justice, you know? Meditate just seems too deep. But think deeply about. Yeah. If we were to actually believe and behave as though our confidence isn't in our ability to persuade, perform or succeed.

But it's in who you are before God because of God. That frees us tremendously. So Paul says, look, if you have that, if you believe and behave as though your confidence is in Christ, and you're not worried about, you know, stringing along whatever Greek grammar, verb, tense that is and just to impress people.

[18 : 48] Or you're not doing it, you're not preaching yourself to protect your own kind of position. Paul says, look, that's really, that's super liberating. You are able to preach the word.

And then he says, not only that, preach the word, be ready. Be ready in season and out of season. We are essentially to preach when we feel inclined to preach and find it convenient to preach.

And we are to preach when we are discouraged. And we are to preach when the thought of it fills us with dread. And we are to preach when we feel like there is a fear of rejection or a fear of failure or a fear of not measuring up or a fear of what people might think.

That's what being ready in season means. Timothy is to preach. Timothy is to preach whether or not people feel inclined to hear what is preached.

Timothy is to preach and whether people are prepared to listen. He's still called to preach. And then Paul reminds Timothy and then Paul reminds Timothy that his preaching of the word should involve three vital elements.

[20 : 24] And these three vital elements we struggle with. The first one is reprove. The second is rebuke. And the last one is to exhort.

The idea of reproving is simply to straighten up. It's to make sure people are walking in the right direction. Reprove. Rebuke is to tell people off.

And that's a hard one because none of us like being told off and really none of us like telling other people off.

But Paul says, look, one of the vital elements of preaching is make sure people are walking the right direction. And when they're not walking the right direction, tell them off for not walking in the right direction. And then I want you to exhort them to keep going in the right direction.

Sometimes our own sensibilities. They're having a great time back there, by the way. I know what you're thinking.

[21 : 24] Like, whatever they're doing, I want some of that. It's personally uncomfortable to correct others.

And it's personally uncomfortable to be corrected by others. And somehow we have this little bit of a softness. And, you know, some of my friends up north would say that you have a southern softness about you, right?

Like that, you know, we don't want to offend anyone. And absolutely we don't want to be offended. But I think we choose what we're offended at by and large. And we don't want people to kind of go, well, you know, we don't want to make drama out of it.

So what do we do? We just keep quiet. I'm not going to tell anyone off. I'm not going to, you know, rebuke. That kind of gives some weightiness to it, isn't it? That's way worse than telling someone off.

Rebuke. But look, Paul is saying, look, we have to have hearts that are okay about being reproved, rebuked, and exhorted.

[22 : 38] And we have to have people who are skilled at reproving, rebuking, and exhorting. And we have to decide what we get offended at.

We're too easily offended. We get offended at all kinds of nonsense where no offense was even intended. Like, if you intend to offend, kind of bring it.

Like, let's do that. But like, for the most part, like we're in church, we don't mean to offend people. It happens, but it shouldn't happen. So Paul is saying, look, reprove, rebuke, exhort.

Point them in the right direction. Tell them if they're not walking in the right direction, then exhort them to keep going in the right direction. And so Paul takes the trouble to remind Timothy that it is too easy to leave those elements out.

That's why they're there. He doesn't remind him because he already knows. He's reminding him because the danger is we forget those three things. And so he says then, and he adds on the end, which is the bit that we all probably struggle with most, with all complete patience and teaching. [23 : 46] That's what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, and he's supposed to do it patiently. How long should we be patient for?

It's a great question, isn't it? Because like the moment we stop being patient, we probably haven't been patient enough. That doesn't mean that we're quiet. That doesn't mean that we are timid and pull back.

It just means we're patient. We're patient with each other. And so, and we teach each other. We don't just go, well, there's the end goal. I expect you to figure that out yourself.

And look, we need patience. Why do we need patience with each other? Because we all sin, don't we? And so we're not all going to get it right all of the time. Some of us might get it right some of the time.

But for the most part, it doesn't work like that, does it? It doesn't work like we're all heading the right direction. And there doesn't need to be a command given to reprove, rebuke, and exhort.

[24 : 52] The command is there. Why? Because we need it. And so, he says, look, do it with patience. Keep doing it just as God is patient with us and keep teaching how to do that.

And so, this is the kind of, what is Timothy to do? Well, he is to declare the news of Jesus, the good news of Jesus. And then when? Well, basically all the time ensuring that he is patient in doing so.

So, just a small task there for Timothy. And then in verse 3, he starts with for. And he starts with for, because again, he's going to remind Timothy to expect resistance, but without losing resolve.

He says, for, the time is coming. And you might want to just, I would never tell you actually to ever cross a word out of your Bibles, but you might want to go in your margins, the time is already here. Right? Because Paul is writing to Timothy 2,000 years ago, the time's coming. I want to go. No, the time is already here. When people will not endure sound teaching.

[26 : 08] Paul himself knows that this divine mandate doesn't come with any promise of success. No promise of success. whatever success might look like.

He says, look, you're going to, you need to know something. There will, there will not, there will not be a positive reaction from everyone. And Timothy must be prepared for rejection.

He says that the time is coming when people, and you might even hear Paul's heart where he says, your people.

This is in the context of Timothy in Ephesus. This isn't Timothy's worldwide prophetic ministry beaming to tens of thousands, millions of people on YouTube.

He's talking of, in a local context. And he's saying, Timothy, your people are not going to endure sound teaching.

[27 : 20] And you must be, you must be ready for, for them to reject not just what you say, but you yourself because you say it. And he says that, that, that, um, the people he, he is loving, the people he is faithfully or at least trying faithfully to teach will have itching ears.

Now, I, I don't really relate to itching ears, like physically, like what is an itching ear? Um, but I do, I can tell you that, uh, we, we used to have a dog and, uh, so some of you will know, um, our dog had very long ears.

And one of the things that he loved is when you just scratched him behind the ear and he would, he would just literally, his whole muscles in his body would just stop working and he would fall to the ground and he'd be like, you know, he was like Scooby-Doo, like just his, his tongue would come out and, uh, you start drooling and all you're doing is this on his ears and he would absolutely love it to the point where when you stopped, he would give you that look as to mean like, what are you, what are you doing?

What, what do you mean? And he would push his head towards your hand as if, keep going, keep going. That's the only thing I can relate to those two words, itching ears.

Whenever I read that, I think of my old dog and I think how much he loved being, having his ears itched and, um, he, the reason that he wanted it was because he loved the feeling.

[29 : 04] There wasn't anything like medicinal there. There was nothing that helped him there.

What he loved was the feeling. Paul goes, there's going to be people like that when it comes to the word of God.

they're going to go from preacher to preacher. They're going to taste test the faith buffet. Getting their own passions satisfied.

That's what Paul is saying. And I think like, we see it probably more in our day than ever before, don't we? And look, I don't think this is, this, what I'm about to say is necessarily wrong.

But like, um, you know, we have our devices and we have, we have our devices full of podcasts and sermons and we go from this podcast to that podcast and I'm not saying anything that is, is necessarily wrong.

But Paul's, Paul's point is, is, is not that we have people teaching us, it's that we flick from one to another so that they justify in their preaching our kind of lifestyle.

[30 : 15] If I can avoid some of the hard questions, I'm going to go to that podcast. If I can avoid, like, being confronted or rebuked or exhorted, I'm going to go to this other podcast.

And again, look, I think we should be listening to podcasts. Like, I want to say that nice and clearly, we should be listening to good, sound Bible teaching on a daily basis. But don't switch your podcast just because it gets, they get too close for comfort.

Right? You, you can see, and you can see this in the, in the plethora of content that is available these days. People want new, people want exciting, people want instant, but the gospel calls us to endurance.

Paul isn't saying that you can't, excuse me, Paul is saying that you can't, you can't control their ears, Timothy.

You can't control that. But what you can control is your obedience to keep going. People are always going to do that. People are always going to, you know, jump from one place to another, one podcast to another podcast or whatever it may be.

[31 : 35] You can't really control that. What Timothy is saying, Paul is saying, Timothy is, don't give up because of that. People don't want to wrestle with hard truths.

They want spiritual, instant gratification, a five minute sermon that makes them feel good. A TikTok Bible quote that validates their opinions.

A weekly spiritual smoothie. I was thinking that when I made my smoothie this morning. Just like easily digestible.

Probably some good in it. But probably quite a lot of sugar too. Do you get me? That's my kind of smoothie. And so, this is what Paul is warning us about.

a kind of fast food church. And he says, look, these people, they're going to have itching ears.

[32 : 45] And it says in verse 4, he talks to them about listening to the truth and wandering off into myths. And the punchline there is absolutely brutal, but it's freeing.

You can't build lasting life on myths. That's what Paul is saying. You can't. You can't satisfy your soul with bite-sized, people-pleasing, convenient spirituality.

It just doesn't work. The gospel calls us to endure. The gospel calls us to wrestle. The gospel calls us to stick with the truth even when it's uncomfortable, even when we don't like it.

And look, the kicker is if you're ashamed of Christ, you're, or excuse me, if you're unashamed of Christ, you're free to preach the truth even when people wander off. You're free to preach the truth even when they go for the fast food option, even when they are heaping up for themselves different kinds of things.

Why? Because your security, Timothy, isn't in their approval, it's in his. And that's what he's saying is the big picture. And look, can I also say that there is a relational cost of this.

[33 : 53] And this isn't lost on Paul. Paul isn't kind of saying, you know, well, just dig deep, be the bigger man. You know, go for all of those kind of masculine kind of words that we associate with just dig deep.

You know, go to the forge. We'll be doing that on Saturday morning. He's not saying that without any mention of cost.

And if you really want to, if you really, if you really want to, I don't know, if you really want to feel the cost of this, come next week because Paul is going to talk to us about all of the friends that he once had that no longer has.

There's a cost to what Paul is saying and this isn't lost on Paul. He just hasn't got to it yet. We'll get to that in verse 9. So he hasn't got there yet. So he's saying this.

He's telling Timothy, look, that he needs to be secure in Christ because if you're secure in anything else, you're going to, you're not going to enjoy, you're going to give up, you're not going to make it.

[35 : 08] And the collateral damage is going to be high. And so if you're uncertain of who you are before God because of God, Paul is saying, you're going to quit.

So how do you keep going? And that's the big question. And so he says, look, in verse 5, he says, keep your head when others lose theirs. He says, but as for you, verse 5, as for you, so other people are going to be cashing in.

Absolutely. Timothy, Timothy, there's going to be bigger churches than yours. Timothy, there's going to be better ministries than yours. Timothy, there's going to be better preachers than you. And so, but as for you, you don't need to worry about all of that.

You don't need to worry about them. You don't need to worry about what they're doing. As for you, always be sober-minded, which literally means keep your head. And there's a certain amount of irony there because Paul is sitting in a prison waiting to lose his, literally.

And so he writes to Timothy and says, I want you to keep yours. Keep your head, keep your faith, keep your course. Endure suffering, he says, verse 5.

[36 : 18] Do the work of an evangelist fulfill your ministry. In other words, just keep going. Don't let the chaos around you rewrite who you are. And then in verse 6, he seems to grab hold of that thought about enduring suffering and he then is going to spend the rest of the chapter actually about suffering.

He says, yeah, let me tell you about suffering. And he's going to say that to measure success by finishing, not winning. And if you are a kind of person who likes to win, this is a real struggle for you. I get it. Like, if you're the terrible person to play a board game against or cards against, you like winning. Like Laurie, Laurie likes winning.

I just let her now. It makes her feel good. She's not here, so I can say that. And if any of you grasp me up, I know. It'll be one of you. If you don't see me next week, then...

This is difficult because Paul is removing some of the kind of the worldly markers that we place down in terms of success.

[37 : 29] He's removing them. And he's almost saying, look, I want you to run towards the finish line, but I'm not going to tell you where that finish line is. And I want you to run the race, but I'm not going to tell you who you're racing against or where they are in the race.

And you might think, what kind of race is that? Well, it's the race that Paul lays down for Timothy, and it's the race that Paul lays down for us. He says in verse 5, for I am... So look, in verse 5, excuse me, that was verse 6.

In verse 6, he says, for I am, and in verse 5, he says, as for you. And so now it's as for me, right? So as for you, verse 5, as for me, verse 6, I am already being poured out as a drink offering.

He wrote to the church of Philippi there in Philippians 2, verse 17, saying, even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering. Here he's saying, well, that's already started. Paul is, towards the end of his life.

No doubt he is wondering every time he hears the keys, the key change rattle, is it time? And so when he wrote to the church of Philippi, he said, it's on its way.

[38 : 48] And now he's saying, it's already started. Timothy, you have to fulfill your ministry. Me, I'm already being poured out as a drink offering. And that drink offering really refers to something in the Old Testament, the Old Testament law.

And I love that he uses that as an analogy rather than something else. It was an offering of wine that was accompanied next to the animal sacrifice.

And so Paul's offering of himself and giving of his own life, he is saying, I'm not the main thing. My life is just going to go alongside the sacrifice of Christ.

My offering is nothing compared to that offering. And so he says that I'm already being poured out as a drink offering in the time of my departure has come. I love that word departure because it means more than just leaving.

It's a sailing term actually to, that means to raise the anchor. He's saying, look, the time to raise the anchor has come. The time for being set free from the constraints of the harbor have come.

[40 : 03] You know, my dad worked in the naval dockyard in Portsmouth for many years. And during that time, I remember even vividly as a youngster, him talking about all these massive ships that he would be working on.

And they were huge. But he always made the comment that they were never good in dry dock. Ships aren't built for dry dock, are they? And it's only ways when you raise the anchor and let them

sail out of harbor that you find out what they're really created for.

And so Paul is saying, look, I feel like the time of my set and sail has come. I'm going to meet my destiny. My time here is nearly done. And Paul is probably so worn out.

he's probably so beaten up by this life. I'm so tired. You know, you could run a whole kind of history of his life, what he's endured, what he's gone through.

And he's not saying, it's time for me to stop. He's not saying, it's time for me to find a harbor to cozy up into. He's actually saying, look, it's time to raise the anchor and actually to do what I've been created to do.

[41 : 18] And so he's writing to family and he's saying, I'm ready. And like, I think about what Paul has kind of gone through, you know, and sometimes I think, and I know that you'll agree, that sometimes life is just hard.

And Paul writes to the church at Corinth in chapter one and he says that, he says, I don't want you to be unaware, brethren. Like, I don't want you to be, I want you to know. I want you to know something.

I want you to know of the affliction we experience in Asia. He says, we are so utterly burdened beyond our own strength, we despaired of life itself.

I'm like, how do you get to a point? And then how do you get through that point of despairing of life itself? Well, Paul was looking forward to a point, wasn't he?

where the anchor of his life, the things that were holding him down, probably like the whole physicality, the body that he had to, you know, carry around day and night, he'd be finally liberated from.

[42 : 29] And he didn't see the end of his life as being, or a retirement. You know, we were talking about retirement, a couple of us yesterday, the day before, and it's like, you know, what does it even look like these days?

But for Paul, there didn't seem to be a retirement. There seemed to be, I'm going a thousand miles an hour, and then I'm going to die. And I'm going to go and be with him in glory.

And this is what he's referring to. And so then in verse seven, he gets to a point where he says, he's almost reminiscing. He says, I have fought the good fight.

Looking back on his life. And it's a challenge, isn't it? Can we say that of our own lives? That we have fought the good fight. In his first letter to Timothy, he said, he said to fight the good fight of the faith.

And here he says, I've done that. And he says, it's a good fight. That word good is beautiful. And that's what that word means. It's a beautiful fight. And we need to think about that because a lot of us fight stupid things, don't we?

[43 : 34] Like, I'm not the only one, surely. Like, there's chosen battles that are just stupid battles. And, like, I fought some of those and I'm probably, I'll fight them again someday, I'm sure.

But we need to pack our, we need to pick our battles wisely. And so, Paul has said, look, I've done some fighting and I fought the good fight.

They're the ones that we need to fight, the good fight. He says, I finished the race. The word race in classical Greek is used of the stars and planets that have been lined up and how God has set them on a course.

The course of the planets is the race. By the time the second century came around, the church was using that word as a course of your life, the direction of your life, the path of your life.

David says, remember in Psalm 139 that John brought to us a couple of weeks back, there in verse 16, the psalmist says, you saw me before I was born.

[44 : 41] Every day of my life was recorded in your book and every moment was laid out before a single day had even passed. That's a course. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus and he told them that we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared before and we should walk in them.

That's a course. And Paul is saying, I have finished that course. And I love that because actually the word finished means he did have something to do.

God had given him something to do. He was up to something. God gave him a purpose, a course and he finished it. In Acts chapter 20, we read about how he was saying, you know, none of these things move me.

All of these struggles. He was being warned about going to Jerusalem and being arrested. He says, none of these things move me, nor do I count myself dear to myself or my life dear to myself that I may finish my race with joy.

And I think for me that's like a whole another problem right there to finish my race with joy. sometimes it's easier to finish the race and just grumble a little bit about it.

[45 : 58] But Paul says, look, I want to finish my race with joy. That's what he wanted to do. And years and years later, he's saying, I finished the race. And interesting that he says, I have fought and I have finished.

again, no mention of victory, at least by our standards. He didn't say that he won every round and he never got knocked down. He didn't say that he came home in first place.

He says, I fought and I finished. He fought the beautiful fight and finished the race. He finished, he says, I have preached my last sermon.

I have written my last letter. I have traveled my last mile. I have kept, and that word is guarded, the faith.

And look, Paul's just for a moment let that sink in. This is, this is, this is not just a man finishing well. This is a man who time after time faced the full fire of opposition and refused to bend.

[47 : 11] you read his missionary journeys in Acts and here is a man who absolutely was confident in where he stood before God.

He stood among the hostile philosophers you remember in Mars Hill and they rejected him. That would have been enough for a man like Paul with his credentials and his learning and his understanding to have absolutely crippled him if he drew his approval from men.

And the way he was able to keep going was that he drew his approval from Christ. He faced the Jewish Sanhedrin multiple times.

Most powerful council of religious leaders at that time. Potentially used to be one of them. they wanted nothing more than to see him silenced.

And he fought that fight. He confronted the Gnostics. He confronted the Judaizers who were twisting the truth and confusing the churches.

[48 : 21] He fought that fight. He didn't even flinch. He may have flinched a bit but he didn't even flinch when the Romans came calling the most powerful empire on the earth threatening his life.

When people were saying if you go to Jerusalem you're going to die. And Paul goes oh okay. Why? Because fear was in front of a different judge.

And letter after letter journey after journey imprisonment after imprisonment Paul guarded the gospel not for fame not for comfort not for applause but for the truth of Christ for the people who would hear it and for the generations like us yet to come.

And every beat of his heart it seems like every scar every sleepless night every shipwreck that he went through it was for one purpose and it was for this purpose to finish well. To fight the good fight to keep the faith entrusted to him.

And the beauty of it is that he didn't do it in his own strength but in the grace of God. This is the standard. It's not really to intimidate us although it probably does.

[49 : 36] It's to inspire us. Faithfulness is not about ease it's about unwavering devotion. It's about as we've talked about before taking my flag putting it down with Christ and say wherever you're going I'm going to.

That's faith. Even when the world resists it even when the stakes are high. And it costs everything. And again we'll talk about that next week what it costs Paul.

This is the unashamed life. It's not a perfect life. It's not a victorious life by worldly standards.

He's not getting a medal but he is going to get a crown. And so in verse 8 he moves from thinking about what the end result is in verse 8 and he exhorts Timothy to let the future pull us forward.

He says 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.

[50 : 48] And look just imagine what his appearing brings when Christ returns. This crown is not a reward for Paul's ego. This is not a reward for even the letters that Paul wrote.

This is not a reward for the applause that Paul has received. This is a gift of grace. And notice who it's for.

It's not only for Paul. It's for all who have loved his appearing. And that's identity again. The Christian life is not driven by fear of failing. It is drawn forward by hope.

We keep going. Why? Because Jesus is coming back. And so this text, these eight verses are a charge to us.

But they should not shame us. They should steady us. They should motivate us to keep going. We don't need to be louder or more impressive. We don't even need to feel like we're winning.

[51 : 58] We need to stay rooted. And that's winning. The definition of winning needs to change. And look, we don't really also need to think that we need to do more, like we need to do more.

That's not the point. The point is faithfulness, not busyness. The question isn't how do I impress people or succeed?

The question is how do I stay rooted? How do I stay unashamed and obedient right where God has placed me? And it is easy to feel the strain, isn't it?

It is easy to feel discouraged and to want to give up. But Paul's encouragement to us is to keep going, to preach the word.

Preach the word in your life, through your words, through your actions, through your love, but speak the truth. Not to be liked, but because it matters eternally. Expect resistance.

[53 : 05] Expect to be disappointed. Expect to be discouraged. But don't let the noise rewrite who you are. Remember who you are in front of God, because of God.

Have your identity rooted there. And finally, let the hope of Jesus' return pull us forward every single day, that every act of faithfulness every small obedience is not wasted.

It matters forever. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word. Lord, we want to be a people who love your appearing. Lord, and it's not lost on us that Paul started with talking about drawing back the curtain and seeing the presence of God in Christ, and then finishes this portion with again reminding us of the present reality or the future reality of us being with him forever.

Lord, and we pray, Lord, that we would have eyes to see the things that the world do not see. Lord, and help us to be motivated, not out of fear, but out of this reality that you see all and are in all and are drawing everything together to that one day when you'll come back.

Lord, help that to motivate us to stay faithful, to stay with you. Lord, to not give up. Lord, to be patient.

[54 : 36] Lord, to help each other. Lord, to do that work of rebuking and reproving and exhorting. Lord, that when you appear there may be the appearing of so many of us there with you.

Not because we've had really anything to do with it, but you've given us a job to do. Lord, and we've been faithful to that. Help us to be faithful, we pray. Lord, help us to discover where you're calling us into.

Lord, and help us to keep moving into that. Lord, to help us to be obedient in what you are calling us to be obedient into.

Lord, we pray, Lord, lift our spirits. We ask, Lord, we thank you, Lord, that even though Paul went through all of this suffering and all of these trials, you are the one who went first.

And Lord, we can rest in you and we can be free in you because of what you've done for us on the cross and what you have done in that empty tomb. And so, Lord, we ask that we would now come before you, Lord, and say thank you that we can follow you, that we can have your Holy Spirit who empowers us to walk with you and to finish well.

[55 : 53] Lord, and if there's any of us that are just feeling like we're on the brink, like we're ready just to kind of throw in the towel, whether it be with you or with church or other people, Lord, we pray, Lord, that you would give us endurance today, Lord, to keep going, Lord, to come back to you, Lord, and to know that you see all things, Lord, that you have set us on a course, Lord, we want to be faithful to that course, so help us, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen, Amen.