



2 Timothy 4

*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: **2** preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. **3** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, **4** and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. **5** As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. **6** For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. **7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. **8** 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.*

***9** Do your best to come to me soon. **10** For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. **11** Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. **12** Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. **13** When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. **14** Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. **15** Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. **16** At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! **17** But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. **18** The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

19 Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. 20 Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. 21 Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers. 22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Paul is going to die. When he wrote this letter to Timothy, he was sitting in a Roman prison awaiting his final trial. He had already what was probably a preliminary trial. *At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.* We are not sure how he knew but he knew that death was very near for him. Verse six lays it out clearly. *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.* How did he know? Did God tell him that this next trial would result in execution? Was it just a strong feeling that he had?

I knew of one elderly father who was lying in a hospital bed and very close to death. His wife and most of his kids were gathered around him but his one son was still on his way to the hospital. Finally the son arrived, talked with his father for a few minutes and then his dad quietly breathed his last.

Sometimes people just know when they are going to die and maybe that was the case with Paul. We don't know how he knew, but somehow he did know that he was going to die soon. Not only did he say that he was going to die, but he was also in a hurry. Twice he told Timothy to come to him soon and to make sure that he arrived before winter. And Paul was right. He was executed less than a year after he sent this letter to Timothy. This last chapter of 2 Timothy has become the Last Will and Testament from the apostle Paul. These are his final written words preserved for us. Therefore, this chapter can teach us how to die well. And if we can die well, then in most cases it means you have also lived well.

1. Finish strong

The first principle for dying well is to finish strong. Here at the end of his life Paul made three statements that are well known to most Christians. *7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* Paul seems to love battle and athletic analogies. He uses this imagery because it resounds with most people. After all, who doesn't like to watch a good race of some kind.

One of my favorite races is this [scene from Chariots of Fire](#). I think it is especially relevant to the race of the Christian life because Eric Liddell falls down in the race and gets back up. In the movie, he not only gets back up and finishes the race but he also won the race. But Paul's analogy does not say "I have won the race" but rather "I have finished the race." Finishing the race is not about winning the race but rather it is about getting back up when you fall down. Aren't you glad that the Lord does not expect perfection out of us? Aren't you glad that there is a little thing called confession and repentance that restores our relationship with the Lord? I would not want to be a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness who is constantly worrying about being accepted by God. Our acceptance is based on the blood of Jesus not on my hard work.

Have you fallen this week? Has your behavior fallen short of the some Biblical standard? I know that mine has. We need to get up and keep running the race. That is as simple as approaching the throne of grace with confidence in order to receive mercy and grace in our time of need. It is

easy as confessing your sin and receiving full forgiveness. This is finishing the race. This is what it means to finish strong. When you fall—not if—get up and keep running.

The Bible is full of characters who finished strong. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and fell down in their turn but all finished the race. King David fell hard—even toward the end of his life as an old man—but he still finished strong. Elijah had a period of doubt and depression but finished literally in a cloud of fire. We never really see much failure in Daniel’s long life and he finished in full faith and strength.

Unfortunately, Scripture also describes plenty of people who start well but do not finish strong. Eli the priest raised Samuel but his other sons were horribly wicked. The end of Eli’s life is a sad mixture of personal and national failure. Despite having a father like King David as well as the largest dose of Godly wisdom ever given, Solomon passionately pursued the pleasures of the world and finished as a spiritual weakling. Earlier in his reign, King Hezekiah was praised for his amazing faith and leadership genius but his final years saw him stumble in pride and never recover. Therefore if you are running the race well now, statistically not everyone will finish strong. If we could take this slice of your life you are living right now, it might look like a sure winner. There seems to be a lot of strength and the trend is on an upward trajectory. To everyone who sees you, you seem to be a sure bet to finish strong. But not all of you will. On the other hand, if the slice of your life right now is one of weakness it doesn’t have to end that way.

If you notice, there is a lot of “I” language in this passage. *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* If you didn’t know Paul very well you would conclude that he was fighting and winning in his own strength. But nothing could be further from the truth. Paul knows that the battle belongs to the Lord but he still needs to fight. Please do not be confused by the “I” language. Paul is picking up his proverbial sword and the Lord is fighting the battle for him.

2.Pass the baton

The second way to ensure that you die well is to pass on the baton of faith to others. As he often does at the end of a letter, Paul addresses several people by name—seventeen in all in this chapter. Two of the people were a negative influence on Paul. Demas, who was once a full partner in the gospel, deserted him. That must have been very painful for him. Alexander did more than just abandon Paul in his time of need. He actively tried to do Paul great harm.

Demas and Alexander were not nice people. But that’s only two out of seventeen people. Paul named fifteen other people by name who were a positive influence on him and others. So the first way to pass the baton to others is to surround yourself with other people. Ministry is people. Ministry cannot happen in the absence of people. You can’t call yourself a leader if no one is following you. You don’t have the gift of helps unless you are actively helping others and you can’t do ministry unless you are hanging around people.

Obviously, some of these people will bring you down at times. There will be conflicts and problems. That’s just part of ministry and part of life. People are messy, including you. Becoming engaged with people is a risky endeavor but I love the ratio of good to harmful people. Paul had a 7-1 ratio of good to bad people. This is no kind of guarantee that you will always have

a positive ratio nor even that we should have a positive ratio. But in general, working with other people is a joy. Soldiers can become friends with each other during boot camp but the battlefield is where inseparable bonds are forged. You come to learn that the guy fighting in the trenches beside you has got your back. In the same way, ministry is often trench work and a battlefield and most other believers will have your back when the time comes.

Let's look at a few of these positive situations. Verse eleven is very important. *Get Mark and*



bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Do you remember Mark? In the book of Acts he went by the name of John, which is why we usually refer to him as John Mark. Like Timothy, Mark was a young man who fully wet behind the ears when Paul and Barnabus took him along on their first missionary journey. John only managed to make it through two cities. Acts 13:13 records, *Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem.*

If you recall, before they started their second missionary journey, Barnabus wanted to bring Mark along again and Paul objected so strongly that Paul and Barnabus went their separate ways. Barnabus did take Mark and Paul took Silas with him. So who was right in that decision—Paul or Barnabus? We'll really not know till we get to Heaven but I would say both were right in different ways. Mark truly abandoned them and did not seem fit for the mission field, so Paul was right to leave him behind. But Barnabus was also right in that he saw some raw talent in the young man and took him under his wings. Scripture record absolutely nothing about the missionary journey of Barnabus and Mark. We have no idea what happened to Barnabus after this but almost twenty years later Mark shows up in Paul's final letter in his Last Will and Testament. The young and the useless Mark was now "useful" to Paul. Mark had matured in a huge way and Paul and Mark had long ago mended their ways. Mark still may not have been the caliber of a Timothy but God smoothed his rough edges and made him into a great helper to Paul. More than that, it was right around this time that Mark wrote the very first gospel which bears his name.

Luke is another important person in this passage. Luke's name does not appear once in the book of Acts but we know that he was with Paul on some of his journeys. Each time the journey is told from the perspective of the second person plural—"we"—Luke is almost certainly the one writing the story. Luke was with Paul at the start of his second missionary journey which is when he first met Timothy and decided to take him along. I had forgotten that Luke was with Paul in the incredible two week storm in Acts 27 which led to the shipwreck on the island of Malta in Acts 28. And then at the end of his final letter we learn that only Luke was with Paul. Incredibly, we have two of the four gospel writers mentioned merely in passing in this chapter. It wasn't too long after Paul's death that Luke composed his version of the gospel of Jesus. We know that

Scripture	Date	Event
Acts 14	47-48	Paul preached the gospel in the town where Timothy lived; Timothy, his mother and grandmother were converted.
Acts 16	Luke	Paul met Timothy on 2 nd missionary journey, invites him to come with him.
Acts 28	Luke	Paul in prison in Rome; wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon
Acts 29	63	Paul not in prison
	64	Paul not in prison
	Luke	Paul in prison in Rome and expects to die soon

Luke was a physician. We know that he was an excellent historian having written both Luke and the book of Acts. Now here we learn that as much as anything else, Luke was a good friend. *Luke alone is with me*. Five small words which were earth shaking to Paul. At the bitter end, facing certain death, Paul was able to count on his good friend Luke. Do you have a friend like Luke? Are you a friend like Luke?

And of course we have to mention Timothy. His name does not

officially appear in this last chapter but that's because the entire letter was written to him. Remember that out of thirteen letters that Paul wrote and appear in the NT, eleven of them either were written to Timothy or with Timothy. One of the two that have nothing to do with Timothy, that is Galatians, was written before Paul even met Timothy. More than Barnabus, more than Silas, more than anyone else in all the world, Timothy was the closest to Paul. Paul referred to him as his son in the faith and he was receiving the baton from Paul. Paul surely handed smaller batons to others whom he trusted, but Timothy got *the* baton.

We have a front row seat to the passing of the baton in verse one. *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: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.* The word for "charge" here was a way for Paul to officially pass on his ministry to his disciple and friend. The old word for this is bequeath. Paul had no earthly riches to pass on but he did have a gospel ministry to leave with Timothy. Who is your Timothy?

Part of passing the baton includes several commands. Verse two has the first four. *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

- Don't hoard the good news (Preach)—Most of you will never preach an actual sermon but this word really means to proclaim the good news. In other words, if you have good news, don't keep it to yourself.
- Call sin, sin (Rebuke)—The word occurs twenty-nine times in the NT, but Paul only used it one time—right here. It is a strong word used when Jesus rebuked demons.¹ This was the strongest possible word that Paul could have used to mean rebuke. And sometimes we need to rebuke others like this and sometimes we need to be rebuked like this. Rebuke goes hand in hand with the next two commands.

- Say hard things nicely (Reprove and exhort) But all of this rebuking and correcting is to be done with great patience. This perfectly matches what Paul said in chapter two—to correct others with gentleness. How you communicate important truths with people is just as important as what you say.

Verse five has the rest of the commands.

- Think clearly (be sober-minded) Paul warned that *the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.* They were not sufficiently sober-minded. They did not think clearly and so have the same challenge before us in our day.
- Redeem the pain (endure suffering) God always intends pain for a good purpose. Don't waste your pain.
- Be a good news guy/gal (do the work of an evangelist) Recently Abbie Larrington took one of the pew Bibles (because I frequently mention to take one if you know of someone who needs it) and gave it to her next door neighbor. This young boy is completely unchurched and has never owned a Bible. Karen was given her first Bible by a friend at about the same age as Abbie and it was very meaningful for her. This is a simple way to be a good news guy or gal.
- Don't quit (fulfill your ministry) Like we said before, when you fall, get back up and finish the race.

3. Rest in the Lord

When you think of what it means to die well, you usually think of, well...dying. But planning to die well always includes living well. Paul can die well because he has finished strong and has passed on the baton of ministry to multiple people. In addition, Paul lists at least four benefits of death.

A crown of righteousness—*Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day.* Do you believe that death brings rewards for the believer? Our rewards will not be based on how we die but on how we live.

Death as a departure—*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.* I love how he describes dying as a departure, as if he is going on a journey. And he is! Also, the word for departure means to be loosed, to be set free.

I received an update from Traci Stalsberg on Aaron's dad. She wrote, "Glen is ready to go – and he expressed on several occasions his desire to quickly go home to the Lord. He's suffering a lot and is unable to keep much of anything down – including liquids. Surprisingly, Madeline said during lunch preparations yesterday that none of us should cling to Glen, but 'release him.'" Death is a releasing, a loosing, a letting go.

Death as a form of rescue— *So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.* Just like Jesus, despite being stoned, beaten and shipwrecked multiple times, Paul could not be killed before his appointed time. Paul was confident of this. He had been rescued countless times and even near the end of his life Paul said that the Lord will—future tense—rescue him from every evil deed. But do you see, what he means is that death itself is a rescue from every evil deed. How can anyone be rescued from evil? God can protect us from evil and if he so chooses, keep evil at bay, but a full rescue from death requires us to leave this life. To be, as it were, “rescued” from life so that we can be brought safely into God’s heavenly kingdom.

Death as gain—*for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.* Of course we also have Paul’s quotable line from Philippians chapter one. Living is Jesus but dying is better because we get more Jesus. We see through a glass darkly but then we shall see face to face.

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¹ Mark 3:12; 8:33; 9:25; Luke 9:55; 19:39–40