

2 Timothy 4:5-8 | “Finishing Well”  
*Preached on March 26, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown*

You can turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 4, and we will be in verses 5-8 today. *[pause]*

**Have you given any thought to finishing well in your life?**

For some of you, you are very young, so you may not have thought about that question at all.

**You are just thinking about the next day, week, year, or the next 5-10 years.** *[pause]*

For others of you, you are nearing the end of your life, and maybe you have thought about how you will spend the rest of your years here on earth. *[pause]*

**Yet no matter what age you are, you should be giving thought to how you will live and finish your life.** *[pause]*

But here’s the question: what do you believe it means to live and finish your life well?

**For some of you, finishing well means riding out your remaining years in comfort and ease...**

...Taking it easy, enjoying your retirement, and spending time with your family. *[pause]*

**For others, you think living and finishing well means buying as much stuff as you can before you die, or experiencing the most experiences you can before you leave this world.**

Essentially, you think you need to have the most fun and enjoy the most amount of things before you pass on. *[pause]*

**But are those Biblical ways to live our lives and finish well?**

Interestingly, Paul in our passage this morning shows us how to live and finish well as a Christian.

**So no matter if you are 6 and you most likely have many years ahead of you, or if you are 96, and you may only have a few years left...**

...This passage is for each of us because it has to do with how we both live and finish the Christian life. *[pause]*

**So let’s READ the passage.** *[READ VERSES 5-8]*

Paul is nearing the end of his life, as he is on death row.

**He is trying to prepare Timothy for a life of ministry ahead, and sort of “pass the baton” onto him, so that he can keep going.**

And in so doing, he shows us how to finish well in the Christian life.

*First, he shows us that...*

### **I. Finishing well takes a clear head and clear focus. (5)**

After speaking of how people will have itching ears and how they will turn away from the truth and wander off into myths...

...Paul now goes on to say, “As for you,” and gives Timothy some commands to live by and finish out his ministry. *[pause]*

So once again in this letter, Paul makes a contrast that ought to be seen in our lives compared with others.

As the world worsens, we are not to blend in and go with the flow, but we go against the flow and live differently. *[pause]*

So while others may be turning aside, *as for us*, we don’t let that discourage us, but we continue being devoted to Christ.

While others may be turning aside, *as for us*, we keep being faithful to the end.

But to do this we need a clear head and clear focus. *[pauseeee]*

Look at what he says in verse 5, “As for you, always be sober-minded.”

Literally, he is calling Timothy to be sober, but of course, by the context we see that he means more than a literal intoxication.

What he’s talking about is that he wants Timothy to be sober-minded, clear-headed, and self-controlled. *[pause]*

Like a sober person is compared to a drunk person, so that’s what we are called to be in the Christian life.

We should think clearly and control ourselves. *[pause]*

But why is this so important to a life of faith well-lived?

Because if you aren’t thinking clearly, this can lead you to wander off the path like those with itching ears.

You could get caught up in the false teachings of the day, and in the deceptive methods of others.

But if you are thinking clearly, you are able to discern between truth and error. *[pause]*

This is why our minds always have to be engaged and clear, for there is falsehood swirling around us all the time.

You let your mind get foggy, and you can end up in a bad place in no time. *[pauseeee]*

Another reason for a sober-mind is because our tasks are so important that we need a clear-head. *[pause]*

*In the Christian life, we are dealing with eternal realities.*

A pastor isn't dealing with superficial matters, a pastor deals with eternal matters.

*A pastor isn't shepherding animals, a pastor shepherds souls. [pause]*

Would you want a drunk pilot flying your plane?

*Would you want an intoxicated person managing a nuclear power plant?*

So how could Timothy not always be sober-minded in his ministry? *[pauseeee]*

*But really, each of us has ministry tasks that we are called to, and these things matter greatly...*

Encouragement of other people truly affects them deeply.

*But how can you encourage someone rightly if you aren't thinking clearly? [pause]*

Pointing people to the truth matters for eternity.

*Yet how can you point someone to the truth, if you aren't thinking soberly about the truth? [pauseeee]*

In order to minister well, we must always be sober-minded!

*But are you sober-minded? [pauseeee]*

You can't minister well with a mind fogged up with lies or distractions.

*That's why we need clear heads so that we are able to think rightly and act rightly in accordance with the situation before us. [pauseeeee]*

So we are called to have a clear mind, but also clear focus.

*Timothy is called to endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill his ministry.*

What do each of those take? Focus. *[pause]*

*Think through each of those commands...*

When you are suffering, how do you endure it?

*Don't you need the right focus? [pause]*

If you are only focused on the suffering, this can create bitterness in you.

If you are only focused on getting out of it, this can lead you to be unfaithful to God.

If you are focused on the discouragement and despair you feel, it will drive you down deep into a nasty hole of hopelessness.

But if you are focused on Christ, on always doing what's right no matter what, and on what the Lord might do through your suffering....

...You are able to endure suffering. *[pause]*

So when you face suffering for Christ, and you start to despair, think about where your focus is.

Most often, once you evaluate your focus, you'll find that it's in the wrong spot. *[pauseeee]*

Next, doing the work of an evangelist takes focus.

Think of it this way: the tasks that you don't focus on are the tasks that unusually remain undone. *[pause]*

For Timothy, it could be easy to lose focus on sharing the good news with others.

He could get caught up in many good things, but he could not lose sight of the need to share the Gospel with others. *[pause]*

In ministry, it's easy to allow other things to block your view of people's need for the Gospel.

Many people share their needs, and you want to help them, but do we remember that their greatest need is Christ? *[pauseeee]*

We must keep in mind the work of evangelism as we go about our days.

Yes, people have physical needs.

Yes, people have financial and other practical needs.

But we must always remember that people need the Gospel! *[pause]*

Many of us are ready and on task to jump in and serve someone in need, which is great, but have we lost sight of the task of evangelism? *[pauseeee]*

It also takes clear focus to fulfill our ministry.

Paul is calling Timothy to fully accomplish the ministry that God has for him.

He must complete it, not give up.

He's basically saying: "Finish the job." *[pauseeee]*

It's a lot easier to begin something than it is to finish something.

This is why many people start their new year's resolutions, but how many were completed?

How many goals of yours have stopped short of being accomplished in your life?

Men, compare your list of started projects around the home with your list of completed projects.  
[pause]

But what makes the difference so that more things are in the completed column? Focus.

Timothy must be focused on actually fulfilling his ministry, not just starting it.

He must carry it out to completion, and we are called to do that, too. [pauseeee]

What are your God-given tasks?

What is your ministry and service that God has called you to that you need to fulfill? [pause]

Maybe God has gifted you with the gift of encouragement.

Maybe you even started encouraging people for a little bit, but then it sort of got tossed to the side.

Fulfill your ministry! [pause]

Maybe you are gifted with the gift of serving others behind-the-scenes.

You did some service years ago, but then you got focused on other things, and you just didn't continue it.

Fulfill your ministry! [pause]

Remember that God has gifted you with a ministry to serve others, and carry it out.

Don't let other things take your focus away from what God has called you to. [pauseeee]

Live and finish well by having a clear head and clear focus.

Your tasks are set before you, but will you let a foggy mind and a focus on other things cause you to not do them well? [pauseeee]

*As Paul continues, he shows us something else about finishing well...*

## **II. Finishing well takes effort and endurance. (6-7)**

After calling Timothy to finish well in his life, Paul goes on to talk about how he has finished well in his life. [pause]

Remember, Paul is about to be killed for the Gospel.

So here's Paul at the end of his life, taking Timothy aside and encouraging him on by explaining how he has finished well. *[pauseeee]*

There's something about hearing about someone who has finished well that helps us to finish well. *[pause]*

For me, hearing about the example of someone like John MacArthur instills in me a desire to be a faithful pastor.

MacArthur has pastored for over 50 years, faithfully preaching the Word, and not having any moral scandals.

He has lived well and seems to be finishing well, and his example motivates me to finish well, too.

That's what Paul does for Timothy by pointing to his own life. *[pauseee]*

If you are an older Christian here this morning, do you ever take a young person aside and encourage them on in faithfulness?

You have lived through so many things that could have caused you to give up, yet you were faithful.

Can't you help younger people to endure? *[pause]*

Ministry doesn't stop at 65 or 67 like retirement from a job.

Ministry is to be lifelong!

You have such an important role to play, especially mentoring and encouraging younger people!

We need your wisdom and experience! *[pause]*

That's what Paul was doing for Timothy - he was encouraging him on in endurance, and what an impact that I'm sure that made on Timothy! *[pauseeeee]*

So Paul talks of his life, and he first says, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering."

Now we don't typically use this kind of language, do we?

This is actually Old Testament sacrificial language. *[pause]*

A drink offering would be poured out before the Lord as a sacrifice, and that's what Paul is talking about as it comes to his own life. *[pause]*

What he's saying is that here he is on death row, about to be martyred for the faith, and in doing so, he's being poured out as a drink offering.

His life blood will be poured out as a sacrifice to God, for he was dying for the cause of Christ.  
*[pause]*

Just consider Paul's mindset...

He didn't see the ending of his life as defeat and shame, but as a final act of worship!

Even in his death, he could glorify God! *[pause]*

Many of us don't view death this way.

We often see death as loss, as defeat, as the worst thing.

But what if we remembered that even in our death, we could glorify God?

Up until your final breath, you can live a life of sacrifice to the Lord. *[pause]*

You can be poured out as a drink offering even with cancer, even with liver failure, even with some sickness.

You can be poured out as a drink offering by testifying of the goodness and grace of Christ until your last dying breath.

You can be poured out as a drink offering by using your last days encouraging others to continue on. *[pause]*

Will people be able to say of your life: "He poured out his life for Christ," or, "She poured out her life for Christ.?" *[pauseeee]*

One reason Paul could do this was because he didn't see his death as the end, but as simply a "departure".

He says, "the time of my departure has come." *[pause]*

The word used here of departure relates to the loosening of a ship from its moorings to go somewhere else.

That's what death is for a Christian! A departure!

Our death isn't the end, but it's simply setting sail for another land!

We are simply going from one place to another. *[pauseeee]*

What if more Christians laid on their deathbed with this confidence?

The confidence that they are simply standing on a ship about to depart for another land.

Yes, they will be leaving friends and family by departing and that's sad, but they are going to be with Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Finishing well takes effort and endurance, and in that it takes sacrifice.

All of our lives are to be given in sacrifice to God,<sup>1</sup> and even the ending of our lives here on earth are to be a drink offering poured out to God.

From beginning to end, we finish well by living lives of sacrifice to Him. *[pause]*

We can do this because we know that we belong to Him, and He is worth everything, for He is our hope in life and death. *[pauseeee]*

After speaking of his impending departure, he gives three different statements concerning the life that he lived.

He says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Each of those images show us that finishing well takes effort and endurance. *[pauseeee]*

This reminds us that the Christian life is not easy.

The Christian life is characterized as a battle and a marathon, both of which involve effort and endurance. *[pause]*

The word used there when it says, “I have fought,” is agonizomai, which reflects our word, agonize.

The Christian life takes agonizing effort in a struggle.

It takes endurance to finish a race, but will you cross the finish line? *[pause]*

Along the way, there will be temptations to give up.

The world, the flesh, and the devil will try their hardest to make you throw in the towel.

But will you fight the fight and finish the race? *[pauseeee]*

Any faithful older believer can tell you that it has taken effort and endurance to be faithful over the years.

They will tell you that it has taken effort and endurance to keep trusting God when the days were dark, and the nights long.

They will tell you that it has taken effort and endurance when they sat beside the bed of their loved one who departed to be with Christ.

And they will tell you that it took effort and endurance when they were at the end of their rope, yet even at the end of the rope, they found Jesus there. *[pause]*

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<sup>1</sup> See Romans 12:1.



So yes, the Christian life is a battle, and it's a race.

Yet we are to keep the faith through it all with the effort and endurance that only God can supply.

For it may be our sweat that falls to the ground, but that sweat was only possible because God has worked in us to strain and endure.

So we run with our legs, but our shirt has written on it, "Powered by grace." *[pauseeee]*

*Finishing well takes effort and endurance, but thirdly...*

### **III. Finishing well takes keeping your eyes on the prize. (8)**

Whenever we do something hard, it's helpful to keep our eyes on the prize, so to say. *[pause]*

**As an Olympian trains and competes, their eye is on that gold medal.**

As you work on a home project, your mind goes to the finished product and how it will be worth it all.

**As you go through a hard class, your eye is on the completion of the class and the degree that comes along with all the classes being done.**

So also, in the Christian life, our eyes must be on the prize.

We are more motivated and empowered to endure something hard when our eyes are on the end goal. *[pauseeeee]*

Now that Paul has told us of how he has finished the race, he says, "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness." *[pause]*

**So it is because he has finished the race that he is able to receive the crown of righteousness.**

And by saying this, he's showing us that it's worth it, for there's a crown awaiting those who finish. *[pauseeee]*

**He tells us that this crown is *laid up* for him.**

It's reserved and stored away, so it's not like he may not get it, but rather, it's laid up for him. *[pause]*

**And this crown is called a "crown of righteousness".**

This may be a literal crown or may mean that the reward is righteousness itself.

**Either way, it's connected with righteousness, and we only receive it because of the grace of God giving it to us on the basis of Christ's righteousness imputed to our account. *[pauseeee]***

Think about Paul's situation.

He was about to be killed, and so he would be deemed guilty by the world, but he knew that their reckoning was false.

What mattered was that someday the righteous Judge would give him the crown of righteousness.

So though others in this life condemn you, if you place your faith in Christ, you will be vindicated someday, and a crown of righteousness given to you.

It is the righteous Judge who will give us this crown, and what good news that is!

The righteous Judge knows how to award, for He won't get it wrong. *[pause]*

Olympic judges can be mistaken in their judgments or corrupt in their judgments, but the Lord, the righteous judge will always get it right. *[pauseeee]*

You see, Paul didn't have fear of meeting the Lord as righteous Judge because he stood declared righteous by the blood of Christ.

But those who have never trusted in Jesus Christ should have fear of meeting the righteous Judge.

For He will always do what's right, no matter what. *[pauseeee]*

So who is it exactly who receives this crown of righteousness?

He says that he's not the only one to receive this crown, but "also all who have loved his appearing." *[pause]*

So as we see with Paul, it is those who finish the race that receive the crown, but those that finish the race are those who love Christ's appearing.

That means that this crown isn't given to some elite group within Christendom, but it's given to all who love Christ!

They long to see Christ, they long for Him to return, and to make all things right. *[pauseeee]*

Genuine believers love and hope in Jesus Christ alone, so it is genuine believers who love Christ and His appearing and who persevere and receive the crown. *[pauseeee]*

Do you love Christ?

Do you eagerly wait for Him?<sup>2</sup>

You can't be in love with this world *and* love His appearing.

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<sup>2</sup> See Hebrews 9:28.

But your eyes must be fixed on Christ, on His glorious return, and on the crown that He will graciously give to you.

That's how we can finish the race - our eyes must be fixed on those glorious realities.

Like a marathon runner knows that all of the hardships will be worth it in the end, so we run with endurance the race set before us.<sup>3</sup> *[pause]*

Fear will rise up and try to scare us off course.

The cares of this world will try to turn us aside.

Sin and temptation will try to beset and hinder our pace.

And discouragement will try to dishearten our running.

But we press on towards the mark with our eyes on the prize.

We love and look to our precious Savior's return, and we rest assured that He will give us the crown of righteousness that we can receive only because of His shed blood. *[pauseeee]*

Yes, it will take blood, sweat, and tears to run the race of faith with endurance.

But the sweat is grace-empowered, and the blood and tears are not in vain, but are known and will be recognized by God.

So...

**Finish the race of faith well!**

No matter if you only have 9 months to live or 90 years - finish well! *[pauseeeee]*

I don't remember who said these words, or the exact words given, but I have never forgotten this idea that I heard one time...

One person said this of pastoring: "A part of pastoring is helping people to die well." *[pause]*

That's what I want to help you do, and that's what I want for my own life.

I don't want you to waste your life, or to throw in the towel before the finish line.

I want you to live well, and if Christ doesn't come back before you die, I want you to die well. *[pauseeee]*

There may be some of you who I will officiate your funeral.

Will we be able to say, "He or she ran and finished well."?

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<sup>3</sup> A reference to Hebrews 12:1.

How will you be remembered? *[pause]*

There may be some of you who I will stand by your bedside during your final days here on earth.

Will *you* be able to say like Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”? *[pause]*

As Paul lived his final days on earth, he wasn’t doubtful or unsure of what was to come, but he had confidence in God, who graciously gives life and blessing.

He recognized that this was the end of the line for him, but he wasn’t bitter or fearful, for knew that he was simply “departing” to be with Christ.

And he wasn’t regretful by an unfaithful life, but he was content with a life well run for the glory of God.

Will that be your experience when the time of your departure comes? *[pauseeee]*

William Borden was a missionary in the early 1900’s, and he came from a wealthy family.

He decided to give his life for the mission field and wrote in the back of his Bible two words: No reserves.

“Turning down high paying job offers after graduation from Yale University, he entered two more words in his Bible: No Retreats.

[After] seminary, Borden sailed for China to work with Muslims, stopping first at Egypt for some preparation.

While there he was stricken with cerebral meningitis and died within a month. *[pause]*

‘A waste’, you say! Not in God’s plan.

In his Bible underneath the words ‘No Reserves’ and ‘No Retreats’, he had written the words ‘No Regrets’.”<sup>4</sup> *[pause]*

May we all be poured out for God with no reserves, fulfill our ministry with no retreats, and finish well with no regrets.

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<sup>4</sup> Original Source: *Our Daily Bread*, December 31, 1988. Found at: <https://bible.org/illustration/no-reserves%E2%80%94no-retreats%E2%80%94no-regrets>.