

## **Women's Bible Study Spring 2011**

A Spiritual Legacy – Passing On What You Know

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***Preach the Word: 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:1-8***

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Our friend Mee Yan had a kidney transplant on March 23. Without this transplant she would likely not have been able to live much longer even with dialysis several times a week.

The experience has been physically devastating, but Mee Yan has survived the initial stages by recounting her blessings. One of these was the kindness of the hospital personnel, especially a nurse who took great care to make her comfortable during the difficult nights following surgery. Mee Yan writes, “Kindness is still a critical thing to keep our humanity going – all the kind medical personnel and the one nurse who took care of me three nights in a row have made the intense painful experience bearable. And the generosity and courageous love of Alix (her donor) to me is literally life changing – I am so humbled by what she has done for me.”

All around us are hurting people. Women and men are hurting from tangled lives and broken marriages. Others are suffering in their body or mind from illnesses that will not get better, only worse. What do we have to offer people?

Paul says that we have everything to offer them. He himself is at the end of his life. What does he have to offer young Timothy, who will have to carry on alone? He can offer Jesus Christ. It's time for the handoff in the great race of faith. Like every good relay team Paul and Timothy been running side by side for a short period of time while both of them have their hands on the baton. But now the time has come for Paul to let go, and for Timothy to sprint forward.

Please turn with me to 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy chapter 4 beginning with verse 1.

Here's what Paul says to Timothy:

### **I. Be prepared (v. 1-2)**

**“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:1-2)**

This opening sentence is very serious. Paul calls God and Christ to witness, using a legal phrase that means “to testify under oath in a court of law”, what he is going to say to Timothy. In light of the fact that God will judge both the living and the dead, we are held responsible for our actions here on earth. And knowing that Christ will come again and establish his kingdom, we need to be ready to explain what we did with the time that was given to us.

This charge is so solemn because Paul knows that he will soon face God. These are Paul's last recorded words. Some commentators believe that they were written weeks, perhaps even days before Paul's execution. He doesn't view death as a dreaded prospect; in fact, it's welcome. But after death Paul knows that God will call him to account, as he will every one of us.

Paul's job in this life has been to make disciples. When he is gone, the work at Ephesus will carry on, as long as Timothy understands that a pastor's work is the work of the gospel. It is to preach the Word.

So that is the first part of "Be prepared." We, not just Timothy, need to be able:

### **A. To preach**

What does it mean to preach? It means that we "give a reason for the hope that is within us." (1 Peter 3:14) Why is preaching so important? Because people come to Christ through exposure to the spoken or written gospel. While the Christian life can serve as a way to draw attention to one's faith in Christ, we cannot expect others to make that connection unless we spell it out. They might think we're nice. They might notice there is something different about us. But unless we verbally credit Christ with the change in our life they will never know about the transforming power of the gospel. Unless we give the glory to Christ, no one will miraculously come to faith simply by observing us. So we all need to preach.

Mind you, Paul was giving this charge to Timothy. And Timothy was pastoring the church at Ephesus. As a pastor, Timothy needs to preach. But we're not off the hook. We, too, should always be ready to explain why we follow Christ. So all of us need to be prepared to preach, in the sense of explaining the gospel.

But then we also need to be prepared

### **B. To guide**

Look at verse 2. The passage says "**be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.**" (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:2)

We are to guide others through multiple means – through correction, rebuke and encouragement. Sometimes this verse is translated "to exhort", which means to urge, advise, admonish or caution earnestly. It carries the implication that these are not just nice words, as in "you're doing a great job" but rather carry a slight flick of the whip. John used to watch the girls' soccer games at Schaeffer and in his very large voice would boom out, "Come on Schaeffer, you can do better!" I have to say that this particular exhortation got a mixed reception. Perhaps some of them were inspired, but it seemed more likely to discourage them. After all, who TRIES to lose when you're playing a game?

But Christian exhortation isn't like that. It's not telling someone they ought to do better if they just pull their socks up and try harder. It is telling someone that they WILL do better because Christ is in them, strengthening them. Exhortation points us to Christ for our strength instead of belittling us for not being able to manage on our own.

So that's why Paul says not just to exhort, but instead correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. That means for every dose of correction or rebuke we get

three doses of kindness in the form of encouragement, patience and instruction. No faithful believer would ever want to break the spirit of the person they are exhorting. That's why we need to be prepared to guide, not just to admonish, rebuke, or correct. We need to guide those we shepherd to the truth – the truth that they don't have to live life on their own power but in the power of Christ.

He also tells Timothy to “be prepared, in season and out of season.” This doesn't mean that we inflict the gospel continually on those around us whether they want to hear it or not. No, this advice applies to the speaker more than it does to the listener. It means that, whether it's inconvenient or not, comfortable or not, we must be ready and willing to speak about the good news of Christ.

I recall a taxi trip to London Heathrow at 5:30 am when John had been throwing up all night from food poisoning that he had picked up in Singapore. He could hardly have felt worse. But the taxi driver started asking him questions about Christianity and John roused himself out of his deep desire to nod off (or vomit) and patiently answered this man's questions for almost an hour. Sometimes we fail to engage when the opportunity presents itself because we're in a hurry, or we have another commitment. Paul says be ready, whether or not it's convenient. Those opportunities come from the Lord, so be prepared.

Next Paul tells us to

## **II. Be grounded (v. 3-4)**

**“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:3-4)**

“Being grounded” is an expression that means we have a connection to a firm foundation. In electrical wiring, a ground wire is a safety measure to keep from electrocuting someone if there's a surge in the current. For Christians, to be grounded is also a safety measure. It means that we are standing on a firm foundation of doctrine and faith. Jesus describes this in the Sermon on the Mount when he says **“Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24-25)**

So we need to be grounded

### **A. In doctrine**

Paul has spoken a lot about “sound doctrine” in his letters of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy. Think of the verses we've studied in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy:

**“What you have heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching...” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:13)**

**“...a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth...” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15)**

## “...continue in what you have learned...” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:14)

Sound doctrine is what guides us in difficult times. It is a clear and accurate understanding of the sovereignty of God, the reliability of his Word, and Jesus’ faithfulness.

We need to be grounded in our faith, for otherwise we can’t tell when the gospel is being twisted or misrepresented. You see, it’s human nature to always want something new or different. But the truth doesn’t change. We can change the way we present it. And we should try to present the truth winsomely to our hearers. But we cannot alter the basic message or we’re in danger of telling people what they *want* to hear, instead of what they *need* to hear. These people were looking for teachers who would only tell them what they desired to hear. It was all backwards...first they decided what they wanted to hear and then they looked for teachers who would legitimize it by teaching it. But if we’re grounded in doctrine we will recognize falsehood when we hear it.

We also need to be grounded

### **B. In discipline**

Practicing sound doctrine requires discipline. It means that we have to accept the truth, and be disciplined enough to apply it.

Discipline is not a popular lifestyle choice today. Recently, an elderly city attorney in my sister in law’s court was retiring, and invited her, along with the other court employees, to attend his retirement lunch. They knew this fellow as a good attorney, very fair, very likable – a nice, elderly gentleman. But what they didn’t know until they heard the speeches at the retirement lunch was that their colleague, Kenneth Hughey, had a remarkable life. He was a highly decorated fighter pilot who was shot down during the Vietnam war. He was kept for almost 6 years as a prisoner of war in the Hanoi Hilton – the notorious p.o.w. camp run by the Viet Cong. Many Americans were imprisoned there, and they communicated by an ingenious system of taps on the wall. These men, in the midst of dreadful punishment, survived through discipline. They had four rules. The first was that every morning, each American would face east and say aloud the Pledge of Allegiance. The second rule was that they were never to bow to their captors. Consequently the men were punished continually for not bowing. Third, they were never to reveal any information. This, too, resulted in more punishment. Finally, each night, they recited the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm. And these four rules, along with the surreptitious taps on the walls that were their only communication, helped them stay alive. Discipline sustained them.

Someone meeting Paul at the end of his life might not have realized that he was a hero, the greatest missionary of all time, a man who had survived astounding adventures for the sake of carrying the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul had the discipline of spirit to accept his situation. Nero would soon decree his execution. But despite his utterly despair-producing circumstances, Paul had the discipline to remain grounded in Christ. He knew that even in his prison cell, he was in God’s hands, not Nero’s.

We are not in such dramatic circumstances as Paul. Yet remaining grounded in doctrine and discipline keeps us believing faithfully regardless of loss, of suffering and sorrow. And when we do that it allows God to bless us with an even greater measure of faith. Instead of looking around for an easier gospel, or one where we can remake God in our own image, we need to be grounded in doctrine and discipline.

Next, Paul tells us to

### **III. Be consistent (v. 5)**

**“But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:5)**

We need to be consistent

#### **A. In temperament**

Paul telling Timothy to “keep his head in all situations” is surely one of the greatest pieces of advice ever given to a pastor. But it’s pretty good advice for all of us. No one can get close to us if we’re chronically angry, because it’s really hard to be honest with someone who flies off the handle all the time. And it’s also difficult to be friends with someone who is negative – who always sees the worst. Who wants to talk to that person? In every group, though, there is an even-tempered person who is unflappable, has a sense of humor and is easy to talk to. That’s the person that everyone gravitates towards, because you can trust them. They won’t panic in a crisis. They won’t fall apart in bad circumstances. They’ll laugh instead of crying because some situations are as funny as they are awful. A pastor with this temperament is miles ahead of someone who is touchy, easily hurt, or easily swayed. Paul wanted Timothy to be that steady person whom everyone would trust.

We think we cannot change our basic temperament, and it’s true that some of us worry more, some are more impatient, and some are more easygoing. But all of us can work on sin in our lives, like underlying anger or disdain for others. Those traits, left unchecked, lead to sin. The Holy Spirit can help us get a grip on our temperament so we become more even keeled.

So Paul tells Timothy to be consistent in temperament, and consistent:

#### **B. In work**

The ministry contains hardship. That’s a given. And, if well done, it’s very hard work. But remember that Paul has modeled this before Timothy for years. All he’s asking Timothy to do is to be consistently faithful in discharging the duties of ministry.

This means that Timothy will have to put others in front of himself and his own needs. Ministry mean that you have the wonderful privilege of being with people at the best and worst moments of their lives – in births and weddings and baptisms, and in suffering, in hospitals, at gravesides. Timothy needs to be consistent in his work so that his congregation will learn to trust him and therefore to trust the Christ whom Timothy serves. The minister’s life has to point to Christ consistently, or he will undercut the gospel.

But don’t feel you’re off the hook just because you’re not a pastor. Oh no. This advice stands equally well for every believer, to be consistent in temperament, and consistent in our work. Otherwise, our lives reflect badly on Jesus, and by our sins we might push people away from belief rather than draw them toward it.

Next Paul tells Timothy to

### **IV. Be faithful (v. 6-8)**

**“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.**

**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:6-8)**

In faith, Paul is moving

#### **A. To completion**

Verse 6 comes from the language of sacrifice. The Romans typically poured a cup of wine on the ground at the end of a meal to thank the gods for their provision of food and life. Even though Paul is not dying, he clearly sees the time has come for him to lay his life down in a sacrifice to God. Like Jesus, it’s not being taken from him. Paul gladly lays it down.

But the phrase “the time has come for my departure” contains a world of word pictures. The actual word he uses means “loosing”. The first meaning depicts an animal being unyoked from the plow or shafts of a cart. Imagine the relief that the ox feels when it can step away from the burden it pulls all day long. Imagine the relief for Paul that death would bring, when he could lay down the burden of the churches forever. The second meaning is to loosen bonds or fetters. Through death, Paul would exchange the chains of prison for the glories of heaven. The third meaning is of a soldier loosening the ropes of his tent in order to take it down. Now for anyone who camps you’ll know that when you take down the tent, it’s time to move, and new adventures are always in store. Finally, the word can also mean to untie a boat from its moorings. [William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*.] As Stott says, “Already the anchor is weighed, the ropes are slipped, and the boat is about to set sail for another shore.” Think of Reepicheep in the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* laying down his sword, and sailing his boat alone with tremendous anticipation to the utter East. Every single one of these pictures show that Paul is ready for death, in the sense of rest from his toil, release from his bondage, readiness for adventure. The light of the glory that awaits him cancels out all the concerns which once gripped him in this life. And death is all those good things for the believer, especially for one who is suffering. In this Holy Week we can remember that Christ has vanquished death itself, so dying now is a transformation to real life rather than the end.

Those ideas of rest from toil and freedom from bondage carry over into verse 7 – **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race...”**

Our daughter Hannah went from high school running to college level racing. In high school, she won almost all her races. And a large part of the charm of running was winning.

But now she’s in college. Now she’s not even running in the fastest heats. Her job now is to run her personal best. To finish well, not necessarily to win. You see, it’s not about the individual any more...it’s about the big picture. The TEAM picture. This is a much more accurate view of the sort of race Paul is talking about in v. 7. You see, *finishing well* is far more important than winning.

Paul might have been able to look back on his life and say, “I won the race.” He was the most successful missionary ever. He brought the gospel to lands where it had never been heard. He trained young men like Titus and Timothy. His letters form the basis of Christian thought for the

next 2,000 years. I guess we might think that Paul had won his race. But he doesn't presume to say that, and here's why.

To Paul, finishing well was more important than winning. Winning implies glory for the individual. But Paul never wanted the spotlight on himself – he only wanted the spotlight to rest upon Jesus. Fifteen years earlier in Ephesus, Paul said these words to the Ephesian elders:

**“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” (Acts 20:24)**

All along that was Paul's aim. Not to *win* the race, but to *finish* the race. Now, years later, Paul uses almost the same verbs, but in the past tense. **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”** The Lord had permitted Paul to have his great wish, of finishing well.

Paul is faithful not only to completion, but

### **B. To God**

**“I have kept the faith.”** You see, Paul hasn't just trudged wearily to the end of his life, complaining all the while about the prisons, the beatings, the starvation and the suffering. No, he's instead written over and over again about how joy-filled the life lived towards God is. He is able to write in Romans 5: **“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 5:3-5).**

If we spend our lives trying to do what others expect of us, we'll likely be resentful, angry and unfulfilled. If we spend our lives trying to please ourselves, we'll likely be dissatisfied, because there is never enough novelty to keep us interested. But when we understand that Jesus Christ is the only person to whom we are responsible for our actions, it's very liberating. Now we only have to worry about pleasing ONE person. Sure, Paul's looking forward to the crown of righteousness, but only because it means he'll be in God's presence. He's looking forward to it because it means that he'll see Jesus face to face. And that is more important to him than any old crown. So to Paul and to everyone who loves God, there is no terror but only joy at seeing Christ after death.

This is all very well for Paul, but how many guys have there been like him in the history of the world? It can be daunting to try to model our lives on someone who was extraordinary. But Paul would be the first to say that that whatever he accomplished, he did solely in the power of Christ. So we need to ask ourselves,

### **V. How Can I Finish Well?**

Leaving a spiritual legacy means finishing well. We already know from this passage that in order to finish well we need to be prepared, be grounded, be consistent and be faithful. We see how Paul did it. And we can also see that he has prepared Timothy to take the baton and go on after Paul dies. Instead of being daunted by Paul's example, let's be inspired. And let's take away three simple attitudes that will help us finish well.

The first is to

*Look at Christ, not at ourselves.*

Paul says that his own life has already been poured out like a drink offering. To Paul, life is not something to be hoarded. Nor is it a springboard to meeting his own goals. Rather, it's an offering to the Lord who made him. Remember that he is writing from prison. And this time it's not the comfortable house arrest that he once experienced in Rome. This time Paul is old, possibly ill, cold and badly fed. He is lonely. He has given his life to God. But instead of saying, "God, you owe me a decent retirement after everything I've done for you," Paul says, "I'm happy to have poured out my life as an offering to you. And I'm happy to go now. My work here is done." By looking at Christ, not at ourselves, we understand what our purpose is. Whatever our hands find to do right now, we offer it back to Christ.

The second is to

*Serve God where I am now*

Serving God where we are now means that we are not waiting for a more convenient stage of life. Life's happening right now. So we don't have to wait until we're more holy, or more knowledgeable about the Bible, or better tempered. It means that we get up tomorrow and offer our day to God, whatever we are doing. Part of our desire for the Women's Bible study is that we equip you to serve within the church as well as in the home and workplace. That might mean that we are home with children and our job is to raise them in a godly way. It might mean that we're salt and light in our secular workplace. It might mean that we are ushering or working in the nursery or helping at the Emmaus dinner. If we think of our life as service to God all sorts of opportunities open up. The ability to finish well comes from walking with God every single day. That's what it means to serve God where I am now.

Finally,

**Give Thanks**

I worshiped in a church in LA where the pastor related a story about Ash Wednesday. His church draws many street people, and they often enter the service to ask for money. After the service the pastor spotted a homeless man waiting at the back. "Oh no," he mentally rolled his eyes, "Here comes another plea for funds." The pastor watched as the man looked furtively this way and that, and then made his way to the almsbox set into the wall of the church – a place where people could give an offering. This had been battered and broken into on occasion by people seeking money. But this man slunk up to the almsbox, drew a battered dollar out of his filthy coat, and slipped it into the slot. Then he made the sign of the cross and left.

What does it cost a homeless person to give up a dollar bill? More than most of us will ever know. But like the widow's mite it must have touched the heart of God. We are never too poor to be thankful.

My sister Gail recently gave me a book called *1,000 Gifts* by Ann Voskamp. The subtitle says "A dare to live fully right where you are." It's by a woman who embarked on the project of teaching herself to rejoice. She did this by writing down 1,000 things she was thankful for. I have mixed feelings about the book itself. But it is a fantastic idea, and right away I wanted to do it. My Type A personality suggested that I should just sit down, write a thousand entries, and have done with it. But the more reflective part of me knew that I'd get more out of this exercise if I spun it out over several weeks and months.

Part of the premise of her book is that we don't learn to enjoy God unless we first learn to rejoice in what he's given. That means right here and now, not always longing for what's in the future, or what we had in the past. As she began to look for God in each of her busy days her eyes were opened to the glories of creation – the beauty of that particular stage of her children – the greatness of God's provision for her family of eight. So I began my list. And as it grows day by day my eyes too are being opened.

How can I finish well? I can look at Christ, not at myself. I can serve where I am right now. And I can be thankful, because every day I discover something to be thankful for.

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