

Main Idea: Based on Paul's example in 2 Timothy 4:16-22, you're ready to leave this world when these things are true.

- I. You're ready to leave when the gospel shapes your view of past disappointments (16).
 - A. People let Paul down.
 - B. Paul responded graciously to people.
- II. You're ready to leave when the gospel shapes your view of past accomplishments (17).
 - A. The Lord stood with me.
 - B. The Lord strengthened me.
 - C. The Lord delivered me
- III. You're ready to leave when the gospel shapes your view of the future (18).
 - A. The Lord will rescue me.
 - B. The Lord will bring me safely home.
 - C. The Lord will receive glory.
- IV. You're ready to leave when the things that matter most to the Lord matter most to you (19-22).
 - A. Paul valued people (19-21).
 - B. Paul gave people what matters most in the light of eternity (22).
 1. He wanted Timothy to experience the Lord's presence.
 2. He wanted all of us to experience the Lord's grace.

Make It Personal: Am I ready to leave this world?

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 4:16-22

Many years ago, while on vacation with my family, we spent a couple of days in Kent, Ohio, the home of Kent State University. It was there that many years ago, on May 4, 1970, 4 students were killed and 9 wounded by State Guardsmen during an anti-war protest on the campus. I wanted to see the spot where it happened. I wondered how the event would be preserved. After all, the tragedy was the result of rebellion. How would such an event be remembered?

We drove all over the campus the first evening, and saw nothing. The next morning, I jogged through the campus. I asked one person where the students had been killed. She didn't know. The second I found pointed me in the right direction. I came to a small hill, to a small wooded area.

Here's what I saw: four large, unmarked granite memorial stones. The atmosphere was very solemn. Next to the granite disks was a 22' plaza. In front of the plaza was a bench. I looked carefully for an inscription, a message somewhere. What I eventually found struck me by its brevity. Etched in the plaza's stone threshold were three words.

Inquire, Learn, Reflect.

When something significant happens, it's vital that we inquire, learn, and reflect. But most of us spend very little time in reflection. We run. We coast. We play. We build. We stay busy. But we tend *not* to reflect.

I don't agree with a lot of what his conclusions, but I still remember a survey he cited thirty plus years ago. Sociologist Tony Campollo referred to a survey of fifty people over the age of 95. They were asked the question, "If you had it to do all over again, what would you do differently?" There were three dominant answers: "Reflect more. Risk more. Do more things that would live on after we were dead."

This morning, we return for the last time to a letter we've been studying, written by a man who knew how to reflect on the meaning of life. When the apostle Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he knew that his death by execution was imminent.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

For over thirty years, Paul had served God and his fellow man by proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. He had traveled literally thousands of miles throughout the known world of his day. He influenced hundreds, even thousands of people. He had personally led who knows how many people to faith in Jesus Christ, and he had disciplined them, and helped establish strong churches for them.

But now his race is nearly over. He told Timothy in 4:6-8, "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.⁸ 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."

In essence, Paul could say that he was *ready to leave*. And that's worth some serious reflection on our part.

How can a person truly say they are ready to leave this world? That's something I want to be able to say, and for you to be able to say, when the Lord says it's time. Paul, by example, shows us what it takes. Based on Paul's transparency in 2 Timothy 4:16-22, you're ready to leave this world when four things are true.

I. You're ready to leave when the gospel shapes your view of past disappointments (16).

Verse 16, "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.

You say, "I don't see any mention of the gospel there." No, but the gospel underlies *everything* Paul says in this letter. When you read 2 Timothy, it's as if you're reading marching orders from General Paul to his lieutenant, Timothy. Paul hits four gospel centered assignments:

Ch 1 Protect the Gospel. (1:13)

Ch 2 Preserve the Gospel--How? Be a leader. And train leaders. (2:1-2)

Ch 3 Persevere in the Gospel. (3:14)

Ch 4 Preach the Gospel. (4:2)

So the gospel was everything to Paul. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, Jesus, who came to earth, fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures by living a perfect life, then laying down His life to make a ransom payment for sinners. Jesus died in the place of sinners, taking their punishment, and then rose from the dead. Now God gives eternal life to all who will repent of their sins and put their trust in Christ Jesus.

This is the gospel. This is the message that Paul believed, and proclaimed, and mobilized others to proclaim, and was eventually arrested for, and sentenced to die for.

At my first defense. Defense for what? For the gospel. The Romans arrested him, and put him on trial for the gospel. And what happened?

AV, "At my first defense no man stood with me..." No one came to my support.

Did you sense the pain of loneliness in those words? Do you feel the personal rejection Paul felt? Perhaps you can relate.

When did this happen to Paul? He says at his "first defense." When was that?

Remember, Paul was imprisoned twice in Rome for the sake of the gospel. The first time is described in the end of Acts. During his first Roman imprisonment, Paul was under house arrest, and had limited freedom. He wrote the prison epistles like Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Then around seven years later, Paul was arrested again. This time he was chained in a Roman dungeon.

Some suggest that Paul's "first defense" refers to that first imprisonment. I don't think so, since Timothy already knew all about that.

We need to know something about the legal procedures in the Roman empire. Before the actual trial, there were preliminary hearings. At such hearings, it was common to hear the testimony of advocates for the accused person.

Now watch this. Paul had been arrested. His preliminary hearing date was set. The opportunity was given for friends to come and testify in his defense.

And who came? *Not one person.* Verse 16 "At my first defense, no man stood with me, but all forsook me." Simply put...

A. People let Paul down. You say, "Why didn't anyone come to help Paul? After all he'd done for so many!"

I'm not sure. Perhaps it was fear. After all, it can be dangerous to associate yourself with a criminal facing potential execution.

We can relate to this. We're all influenced too often by what people may think, instead of what would please God.

And it certainly was dangerous to be a Christian in AD 67. Remember Emperor Nero burnt down half the city of Rome just three years earlier, and blamed the Christians. He made Christians scapegoats, and even tortured them.

Whatever the reason, no one showed up in Paul's behalf. Just think of that. Many people today say Paul is their favorite Bible character. God used him to help many, many people in his day, and since. But when *he* needed help, when he needed a witness to stand by him in the Roman court, not one could be found.

Again, we can relate. We've had people let us down before. That's inevitable in a world where sinners do life with other sinners, even redeemed sinners. But notice how Paul treated this past rejection.

"May it not be held against them." In the AV, "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." Amazing.

B. Paul responded graciously to people. He, of course, learned that from someone he treated wrongly, Stephen, whose murder he contributed to, and who said as he was dying in Acts 7:60, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

And certainly Stephen learned it from Christ Himself, who cried out from the cross in Luke 23:34, "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing."

You're ready to leave when the gospel shapes your view of past disappointments. Past disappointments like a criminal charge you didn't deserve, and an unjust court system, and people, including your brothers and sisters in Christ, that let you down. That happens to all of us, but those who are ready to leave this world are those who respond graciously even to those who've hurt them.

I know I'm talking to some here today who have been wounded deeply in the past. Perhaps a parent let you down when you needed him or her the most. Perhaps a spouse inflicted pain upon you. But to make it worse, right now you are in bondage to your own anger and hatred.

What must you do? What Paul did. Turn the matter over to God. Pray as he did, "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."

You say, "I can't do that! It's too hard."

How did Paul do it? What was the source of his strength? The gospel. The fact that God's Son loved him though he had done terrible things, and died for him, enabled him to do the same with others.

You're ready to leave, first of all, when the gospel shapes your view of past disappointments. Secondly...

II. You're ready to leave when the gospel shapes your view of past accomplishments (17).

Past pain can trip us up, but so can past accomplishments. Ever been around a self-absorbed older person, who just wants to talk over and over about what *they* have done in life? It's not a pleasant experience.

That's why Paul is so refreshing. He *has* past accomplishments. But he refuses to put the focus on himself for those, but puts it where it belongs.

Verse 17, "But *the Lord* stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth."

Notice how verse 17 begins, "But the Lord."

There's a strong contrast here. In the AV, "notwithstanding." Yes, people had let Paul down. People hurt Paul. So how did he deal with this past pain?

But the Lord. Paul puts a strong emphasis on "the Lord" in these final verses.

V 14 "the Lord reward him"

V 17 "the Lord stood with me"

V 18 "the Lord shall deliver me"

V 22 "The Lord be with your spirit."

And then notice the first person pronouns.

V 16 "At MY defense...with ME"

V 17 "The Lord stood with ME...strengthened ME...ME...I..."

V 18 "The Lord will rescue ME..."

Let this sink in. The God of the universe, the Lord of all creation, the Almighty King delights in being personally involved in the lives of His people. The God who is **THERE** is the God who is **HERE**.

Not there's a reality that will change the way we look at our past! *But the Lord.*

Then specifically, Paul identifies three things the Lord did for him, in contrast to people who let him down.

A. The Lord stood with me. "The Lord stood at my side," says Paul in verse 17.

My life verse is Psalm 16:8, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." I love the word picture there. Where is the Lord? I choose to set him *before* me, moment by moment, and therefore He is at *my right hand*.

This is the essence of the Christian life. It certainly was for Paul. He freely admitted that he was totally **DEPENDENT** on the presence and strength of the Lord. Not partially. Not sometimes. But totally and always.

Jesus meant what He said in John 15:5, "Without Me you can do **NOTHING**."

You might want to write this down. Howard Hendricks put it this way, "When I try, I fail. When I trust, He succeeds."

Think about that. Friends, *the Christian life is not difficult, but impossible*. It's not natural, but supernatural. We can't overcome the disappointments of life, or the successes for that matter, on our own strength. We need to know that the Lord is standing with us, and He is if His grace, we have put our trust in what He did on the cross.

B. The Lord strengthened me. In Philippians 4:13 Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." In our text Paul says, "And gave me strength."

So the Lord is not a disinterested bystander. Yes, He is stood at my side. But not passively. *He gave me strength*, says Paul.

To what end? Strength for comfort? For an easy life? That's not what he says. Rather, He "gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it."

Strength for the ministry He gave me. That's what the Lord gave.

Remember what the Lord told Paul when He saved him? Listen to Acts 26:16-18, "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

For thirty years that's what Paul has done. He's personally taken the message of Jesus to Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire, and he's mobilized others to do the same.

And the Lord gave me the strength to do it.

There's no boasting in Paul. No, "Look what I accomplished in life!" It's all about the Lord.

C. The Lord delivered me. The end of verse 17, "And I was delivered from the lion's mouth."

Paul uses a passive, *was delivered*. Who did the act of delivering? Again, the Lord did.

It doesn't seem like Paul is referring to execution here. Roman citizens, like Paul, were not executed by the lions, but by beheading. More likely, he's referring to Satan (whom Peter calls a roaring lion in 1 Peter 5:8). The symbolism also refers to people who want to kill you, as in Psalm 22:21, "Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen."

Here's the point. You're ready to leave this world when the gospel shapes your view, one, of past disappointments, but also of past accomplishments. You acknowledge the Lord. You talk about the Lord. You give the credit to the Lord. You make it clear to everyone that if they see good accomplishments in your life, it's because of Him.

"I love thee O Lord, my strength," says the psalmist in Psalm 18:2. "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

III. You're ready to leave when the gospel shapes your view of the future (18).

Verse 18, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

The Lord's presence affects not only our view of the past, but equally what we think of the future. Paul affirms he knew three future realities. They are bedrock assurances, without question, absolute realities.

A. The Lord will rescue me. "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack." He doesn't say that the Lord will rescue him from the sword, and not even from hardship, which has been commonplace throughout his life in Christ. But the Lord will rescue me from *every evil attack* ("from every evil *work*," says the AV).

Again, Paul knows he's going to die. He's not talking about the rescue of his physical body. That's not our greatest foe anyway, for every person will eventually face physical death ("It's appointed unto man once to die," affirms Hebrews 9:27).

But then what? For the majority of the world, there's physical death followed by eternal spiritual death. The separation of the creature from the loving presence of the Creator.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, affirms Paul in Romans 8:39. Are there wicked foes that desire to do so? Yes. Satan and his spiritual hosts. But they will not succeed. The Lord will rescue me, says the person who belongs to Christ.

B. The Lord will bring me safely home. “Will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom,” says our text. “Will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom,” says the AV.

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8).”

This is our longing, for a better country (Hebrews 11:16), to be safely home with our Lord. And our longing is a certain reality, for the Lord will bring us there.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3).”

C. The Lord will receive glory. Look at what Paul says at the end of verse 18, “To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

You can take that in a couple of ways, and both are true. First, it’s Paul’s desire, and every true believer’s, that the One who will rescue us and bring us safely home will receive glory. He deserves that, and we desire for Him to receive that, in our lives now, and in other people’s lives.

But this is also an affirmation, a statement of ultimate reality. To Him *BE* the glory for ever and ever. The AV captures this sense, “To whom be glory for ever and ever.” This *will* happen. God will receive glory, in the saving of people, and even in the condemning of people who refuse to humbly accept His offer of pardon, and in every other even that happens in His universe.

It’s all about His glory, and a person isn’t ready to leave this world until he or she acknowledges that. But the person who does, is ready.

Lord, have Your way with me. Do with me, do with those I care about most in my life, do with my country, do with this world, whatever will most bring glory to You.

Is that our prayer? Jesus taught us to pray, “Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done.”

“Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim You, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord (Psalm 89:15).”

“But may all who seek You, rejoice and be glad in You; may those who love Your salvation always say, ‘Let God be exalted’ (Psalm 70:4).”

We tend to look at the closing comments section of New Testament letters, like verses 19-21, as sort of wrap-up filler. They are certainly not. These too are God-inspired words for our edification. This particular closing gives us a fourth benchmark.

IV. You’re ready to leave when the things that matter most to the Lord matter most to you (19-21).

Verses 19-21, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰ Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. ²¹ Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.”

Pretty personal words, in fact, quite intimate. And what do they reveal to us? Something very basic, and very essential.

A. Paul valued people (19-21). Sure, he'd been burnt by people, burnt badly, and could have thrown in the towel and retreated into a fortress of isolation, never to be let down by people again. But he didn't.

Paul lists the names of nearly twenty people in the closing chapter of this letter. You'll find some 100 people mentioned in association with Paul in the NT. Right here we see nine people—Prisca (or Priscilla), Aquila, Onesiphorus's household, Erastus, Trophimus, Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia.

You're ready to leave this world when the things that matter most to the Lord matter most to you. What matters most? The Lord and His glory. What matters next? Those created in the image of the Lord. People.

Paul valued people. And for a couple of different reasons. You'll notice that with people in mind, Paul makes two types of requests in this section.

First, he makes a request for himself. Verse 21, "Do your best [Timothy] to get here before winter." Paul's either being redundant, and of course, that's not the case, or this must be a tremendous need in his mind, for he already asked Timothy to come to Rome in 4:9.

Come before winter! Why before winter? One, cold weather was coming and Paul needed the cloak he left at Troas (13). Two, because he knew if Timothy didn't come before winter the sailing conditions on the Adriatic Sea would prevent him from traveling until the following spring. And that would be too late.

Paul wanted Timothy to come asap. But why?

Certainly there's a personal side to this. Back in 1:4 Paul said, "Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy." Timothy's presence would give Paul joy. He loved this man. They'd served Christ together for fifteen years, and had such a bond.

But Paul's motivation to see Timothy again isn't sentiment. It's the gospel. What matters most to Paul is seeing Christ's work go forward after he leaves this world. And for that to happen, workers are needed. Paul knows Timothy is struggling. That's why he wrote this letter, at least in part. To see Timothy again would mean that Timothy is back in the game, fully engaged, and ready to carry on the work once he's gone.

Paul also made some requests for the benefit of others. *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.* Paul wants to encourage these dear people, and so he sends them a greeting.

He also gives information to Timothy about some other people. He gives Timothy the address of Erastus (he stayed in Corinth), and a health update on Trophimus ("I left him sick in Miletus").

And he also passes along some greetings to Timothy from other people. From Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the other brothers in the church in the city of Rome.

Years ago I heard Chuck Swindoll mention a book by John Powell who says there are five levels of communication. Tragically, many people never get past the first level.

5. Cliche'--How's it going? How are you? {not that I care, but I'm asking}
4. Report facts--Were'd you go on vacation? What do you do at work?
3. Ideas and judgments--What do you think about discipling children?
2. Feelings--How did you feel when your son went through his divorce?
1. Peak, intimate communication—Where there's humble openness/transparency

Most of us, men in particular, live at the cliché level, or perhaps the reporting of facts level. Our relationships tend to be shallow and hollow, in part, because our communication tends to be surfacy and trivial.

But Paul by example reminds us of this. As people in whom Christ dwells, we have the capacity for something very unique in this world. Meaningful, God-exalting, gospel-advancing, relationships. Where there's joy, and sometimes heartache due to our sin, followed by more joy as we humbly acknowledge our sin and forgive one another.

You say, "I want that. What does it take?"

I want that too, so let's all learn from Paul. It takes first of all the determination to *value people*, and specifically, to value relationships with people, which means we invest time and energy and resources into the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So we're talking about, not a focus on getting, but giving, for the getting comes from the giving. And notice what Paul gave. We see it in the final verse of the letter.

Verse 22, "The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you."

Again, that's not filler. That's Paul giving to people. What did he give?

B. Paul gave people what matters most in the light of eternity (22).

First, "the Lord be with your spirit." "Thy spirit" says the AV, because its second person singular. This is something Paul wants for Timothy.

1. *He wanted Timothy to experience the Lord's presence.* In his *spirit*. That's what timid Timothy needed most.

Just think. What in the world could Paul give Timothy that could help him? He had no money. He had no phone. All he could do was write. What could he possibly give to Timothy?

He could give this. He could give Timothy some words that could transform his heart.

The Lord be with your spirit. Your spirit, Timothy. I know you're struggling in your spirit, but the Lord hasn't given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind (1:7). *The Lord be with your spirit, Timothy.* He is, and I'm praying you will experience the reality of it.

But there's another gift from Paul, and this is to us.

2. *He wanted all of us to experience the Lord's grace.*

Verse 22 again, "Grace be with you." This time the "you" is plural. Paul intended for the Christians in Ephesus where Timothy ministered to read and benefit from this letter. And all other Christians too, including us.

What's available to us? Grace, God's unmerited favor and provision.

These are the last recorded words of the apostle Paul. What fitting words! "Grace be with you."

We could not be saved apart from grace (Eph 2:8). We could never live the Christian life apart from grace (2 Pt 3:18). We could never serve God apart from grace (Eph 3:7).

But we have what we need. We have grace. Abundant grace. Amazing grace. Grace that can restore broken relationships. Grace that can give us peace of mind in difficult times. Grace that can restore us to minister, and keep us going. Grace through Jesus Christ.

Inquire. Learn. Reflect.

I want all of us to stop right now and do just that. Reflect.

"Only one life, twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." This is the question we each must consider. *Am I ready to leave this world?*

You're ready to leave when the gospel shapes your view of past disappointments, when the gospel shapes your view of past accomplishments, when the gospel shapes your view of the future, and when the things that matter most to the Lord matter most to you, His glory and people.