

Main Idea: In 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Paul by example shows us how to finish well in life. Finishing well involves thinking rightly about three things.

- I. Finishing well involves the runner (6).
 - A. He must be ready to die.
 - B. He must be realistic about death.
 1. Death is not a cessation.
 2. Death is a change of residence.
- II. Finishing well involves the race (7).
 - A. The goal is to say, "I have fought."
 - B. The goal is to say, "I have finished."
 - C. The goal is to say, "I have kept."
 1. This is all by grace.
 2. This is all to the glory of Christ.
- III. Finishing well involves the reward (8).
 - A. What is it?
 - B. Who gives it?
 - C. Who receives it?

Make It Personal: There are three kinds of people.

1. Some are not even in the race.
2. Some are running with a wrong view of the race.
3. Some are marathon Christians.

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 4:6-8

The Bible uses several images to portray the Christian life.

One, there's an image from **battle**. The Christian life is a battle, and we are soldiers of Christ. Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand..."

Two, there's an image from **botany**. Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches. John 15:5, "I am the vine, and you are the branches. He that abides in Me..." Psalm 1 "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel...he shall be like a tree planted by the river." Galatians 5:22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love..."

Three, there's an image from **biology**. The Church is a Body. Ephesians 4:15-16, "But speaking the truth in love may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies..." 1 Peter 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word that you...grow thereby."

So as Christians we are like soldiers in a battle, branches in a vine, and members in a body. But there's another very important image, one of my favorites. The Christian life is like a **race**.

1 Corinthians 9:24 "Know ye not that they who run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain the prize."

Philippians 3:14 "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ."

Hebrews 12:1-2 "Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight...and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus..."

So if you are in Christ this morning, you're in a race. That may not be news to you. But the question for every follower of Jesus is this. What *kind* of race are you running?

***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.

I'm convinced right here is where a fundamental breakdown occurs far too often. And it's this breakdown that explains why there are so many weak and discouraged Christians. They have a distorted view of the race.

How do you envision the Christian life? What kind of race is it?

For some it's like a morning one mile jog. When I was in school, I was a runner—5, 8, 10 miles a day, 500 miles one summer. But that's past tense. Now I jog. And I do it when I feel like it, and I don't when I don't.

That's a pretty common approach to the Christian life. It's not so much a race, as a leisurely jog in the park. You fit it in if you have time, and it makes you feel good if you do. But if the schedule is too hectic, or you just don't feel up to it, it's no big deal to skip a day here and there, or a week or two, or a month, or longer. You'll get back to it some time.

Others view the Christian life as a 100 meter dash. It's an intense, give it all you've got affair...*for awhile*. So you get saved, and never miss a service, and serve in every church ministry you can find...*until you burn out*, or until something on the sidelines grabs your attention, and you stop running.

Brothers and sisters, if we view the Christian life like a mile jog or a 100 meter dash, we will soon become very disillusioned with our Christian experience. But the problem is simply we're not thinking biblically about the Christian life. And if we're not thinking biblically about this race, we won't *finish well in it*.

And that is the goal, to *finish well*.

I want to finish well. I want you to finish well. That's why I am so encouraged by today's text. In 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Paul by example shows us how to finish well in life. He did, and by God's grace, we can. And here's how.

Finishing well involves thinking correctly about three things: the runner (6), the race (7), and the reward (8).

I. Finishing well involves the runner (6).

Verse 6, "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near." In the AV, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand."

These are some of the most familiar and well-known words of the apostle Paul. He of course penned them within weeks, if not days, of his execution. His recipient was Timothy, his long time friend and fellow worker in the gospel ministry. When Paul wrote this letter, he was essentially passing the baton to his assistant. Timothy was relatively young, and had a somewhat cautious temperament. As we saw last time, Paul wanted to embed in Timothy's mind one last, vital charge...

4:1 "I charge you...preach the Word."

Why was Paul so insistent, so firm, that Timothy *preach the Word* and *discharge all the duties of his ministry*? Here's the answer. Verse 6, "For..."

Paul's race was just about over. Was he dismayed? Was he dispondent? No. As a runner who has fixed his eyes on the finish line, two qualities emerge. Notice them, for they ought to be true of us too.

A. He must be ready to die. Verse 6 "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering." The AV, "For I am now ready to be offered." The "I" is emphatic. Paul bares his soul to Timothy. "I" am ready Timothy! I am ready to be offered.¹

¹ The NASB puts it this way, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering."

Most of us likely miss the thrust of Paul's words because of a cultural gap. Paul of course was a Jew, and he's using a figure of speech here that he knew firsthand from all those sacrifices his family brought to the temple in Jerusalem, as instructed in the Old Testament.

Paul viewed his life as a drink offering. According to the Mosaic Law, as stated in Numbers 28:4-8 (and in 15:1-10), when a Jew offered a lamb or bull as a burnt offering, he was also to offer a *drink offering*. The drink offering was a special concoction of the fruit of the vine.

We need to know three things about this drink offering: One, It was an offering. You gave it, it wasn't taken from you, but willingly offered. Two, It was the offered as the final act of the sacrificial ceremony. And three, do you know how it was offered? Numbers 28:7 says it was..."poured unto the LORD."

And that's the way Paul viewed his life. He saw himself as a drink offering. There in that horrible, foul-smelling Roman dungeon, he was gradually being poured out as a sacrifice to God.

That's quite a perspective, isn't it? William Barclay observed this about Paul, "He did not think of himself as going to be executed; he thought of himself as going to offer his life to God. Ever since his conversion, he had offered everything to God--his money, his scholarship, his time, the vigor of his body, the acuteness of his mind, the devotion of his heart. Only life itself was left to offer, and gladly he was going to lay it down."

Is that how we view our lives, brothers and sisters?

Paul was *ready to die*. How could he be? Let's probe this further, for this was no whimsical statement. He actually said he was ready to die seven years earlier when he wrote a letter to the Philippians.

Philippians 1:21 "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Philippians 1:23 "For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better."

So was Paul an escapist? Was it because he was couldn't cope with life that he wanted to get out of it? No. Paul loved life and lived life to the fullest. He was one of the most content men who ever lived. He wasn't running from problems when he said he was ready to die.

So how and why then could he say he was ready to die? Here's the key. He knew his death would come according to God's schedule, and not one day before or after.

Paul cherished the doctrine of God's sovereignty. He believed that God was in total control of everything that happens in His universe. Do you believe that? Do you believe that God is absolutely in control of your life, and even of the timing of your death?

Psalms 39:4, "Show me, LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is."

Paul believed in the sovereignty of God in the timing of his death. Listen to his testimony...

4:16-17 "At my first defense...I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

4:18 "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever."

Paul was *ready*. People who love and live for Jesus Christ have a supernatural fortitude that enables them to look death in the face and say, "I am ready to die."

I have heard it many times. I think of Carrie Williams, John Roschi, and other members of this church who said to me, "I am ready to go..."

But there's a second quality to this runner. First, he must be ready to die.

B. He must be realistic about death. Paul says at the end of verse 6, "and the time has come for my departure."

Paul was not a "pie in the sky" sort of Christian. True, he was heavenly minded, set his affections on things above (Col 3:1), and knew his citizenship was in heaven (Phil 3:20). But he also faced life's obstacles head on. He was realistic.

In fact, he had an objective, realistic view of death, in contrast to many today for whom the subject of death is taboo. We don't like to talk about death. We ignore it and take a very unrealistic attitude towards it.

Staggering numbers of people don't have a will. We should. I would also recommend we take necessary steps to prepare for our funeral arrangements while we are living. It makes it so much easier on our surviving family members, plus it gives us another opportunity to exalt our Savior, through our own memorial service.

Look at Paul's realistic view of death. What did Paul call death in verse 6? "The time has come for "my departure." Please notice.

1. *Death is not a cessation.* Death is a departure. In other words...

2. *Death is a change of residence.* The word "departure" was a traveler's term in Paul's day. It was used of a soldier striking or loosing a tent. It was also used of boats. The last thing a sailor must do before heading out to sea is to untie the boat from its moorings.

The cords that held Paul to this life were about to be cut. The time of his departure was at hand. And he talked about it freely, *realistically*.

We're not going to live in this life forever. Or to use our image, we're not going to run this race forever. Just for a window of time. Then we'll depart.

So who sets the agenda for your life? In Paul's case, God did. I mean God *really* did. Paul knew he was living on borrowed time. Do you? He knew time was not his to waste, for he was a steward. Jesus Christ was his Master. He knew that everything he had had come *from* God—his time, his health, his skills, everything—and to be used *for* God. He truly believed that the One who died for him on the cross set the agenda for his life.

So for us. As a steward of Jesus Christ, I have one basic task, and so do you. To please my Master for as long as He chooses to give me life.

Beloved, one day the time of our departure will come, either by death or rapture. We will change residences. The runner who finishes well is the runner who is ready to die and is realistic about death.

So finishing well involves thinking rightly, first of all, about the runner.

II. Finishing well involves the race (7).

In verse 7, Paul describes the race itself. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Please notice three claims Paul made. He's not boasting. But as he shares with Timothy, he's very personal. For over thirty years, since that day Christ entered his life on the road to Damascus, Paul has run the race. He now describes how he ran his race with three perfect tense verbs.

Let's learn from Paul. This should be our threefold goal for the race.

A. The goal is to say, "I have fought." "I have fought the [AV says 'a'] good fight." The verb "fought" means to contend for a prize, to struggle; lit. "I've struggled a

good struggle." In fact, the Greek word for fight is *agona* from which we get our word "agony."

Listen carefully to the testimony of a runner who had run his race, finished his race, and finished well. Was the race easy? No. It involved agony, for the course is hazardous and the hardships many.

Why keep running then? Because the goal is to come to the end and say, "I have fought, and didn't stop fighting."

By the way, some want to offer a package of Christianity without the fight. Sort of a Christianity-lite. But the Bible endorses no such thing.

Paul said he "fought." It's a perfect tense verb (all three are in verse 7), and a perfect tense verb means it's not a one time shot. It's something that started in the past and continues to the present.

Theodore Roosevelt commended this trait in a speech he gave in Paris in 1910.

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."²

But it's not enough merely to *fight*. The goal is to fight *the good fight*. Some people are fighters, and that may be good or not good. But Paul said he fought *the good fight*.

What's that? It's the same thing Paul told Timothy to do back in 1 Timothy 1:18, where he told him how to do it. "Timothy, my son, I am giving you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight." (see also 1 Timothy 6:12 and 2 Timothy 2:3)

So fighting the good fight means you follow the Lord's instructions. You don't fight merely for what you want, but what He wants, for His name to be hallowed, His kingdom to come, and His will to be done.

That's the goal in this race, to say, first of all, "I have fought."

B. The goal is to say, "I have finished." "I have finished my course," says the AV. "I have finished the race," says the NIV.

Now that's quite a claim. In a day when many Christian workers start in a flash, and many fizzle out, it's rare to hear the words, "I have finished my course."

Four of the most discouraging words I hear as a pastor are, "Well, I used to..." "Well I used to attend church every service, but I guess it's been awhile." Or, "Well, I used to teach a class, but I guess I'm not really building into anybody's life now." Or, "Well, I used to talk to lost people about Jesus all the time, but..."

Frankly, we're all prone to get sidetracked, to get off course, for we're sinners and that's what sin does. Which is why we need times like this, to take inventory, to remember the objective of the race, that the goal is to say, "I have finished."

² <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/trsorbonnespeech.html>

I read about a very famous man who was approached with the proposition that his biography should be written while he was still alive. He absolutely refused to give his permission, and gave this reason, "I have seen so many men fall out on the last lap."

C. The goal is to say, "I have kept." Verse 7, "I have kept the faith."

This past Thursday Judge David Bunning ordered Kim Davis, County Clerk of Rowan County, KY to go to jail for refusing to obey an order of his court requiring Mrs. Davis to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Al Mohler's blog title sums it up, "*In this World You Will Have Trouble*" — *Welcome to Rowan County*.³

Romans 14:23 says that "everything that does not come from faith is sin." Kim Davis said that her Christian convictions would not allow her to issue a license for a marriage she did not believe was legitimate. She refused to act in violation of her faith, and therefore, kept her faith.

But Paul is even more specific. He doesn't say he has kept *his* faith (meaning he's been consistent with what he believes), but rather, kept *the* faith.

What is "the faith"? Take a look at what Paul said earlier in 2 Timothy 1:14, "Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you." Or as the AV puts it, "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Spirit." (see also 1 Tm 6:20)

What's "that good thing"? It's synonymous with "the faith," or as Jude puts it, "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). "The faith" is that sacred deposit which God entrusted to the apostles including Paul, and to Timothy, and to us. This sacred trust is the content of the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news concerning the saving work Jesus Christ accomplished for sinners on the cross.

Paul could say, "I have kept it! I didn't get sidetracked from this message! I didn't water it down to make it more palatable. I kept the faith."

Please look at verse 7 again. When it came to the Christian life, Paul says he fought, finished, and kept. That's the objective for this race, as any runner knows, to finish well.⁴

Some of you will remember the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. You may not remember his name, but the unforgettable story of Great Britain's Derek Redmon, who tore his hamstring during his race, and who obviously didn't win a medal, but who was determined to finish the race. And his father came on the track, and together they kept moving until he crossed the finish line.

It's a wonderful reality. I'm not responsible for winning the race of the Christian life. Christ already won in my place. But I am responsible for finishing the race, for being faithful to the end. And...

1. *This is all by grace.*
2. *This is all to the glory of Christ.*

How's your race going? You say, "I'm struggling. This is a hard race." But the Lord has given us something to help us, to motivate us. Paul talks openly about this thirdly. First, the runner, second the race, and thirdly...

III. Finishing well involves the reward (8).

Verse 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."

³ <http://www.albertmohler.com/2015/09/03/in-this-world-you-will-have-trouble-welcome-to-rowan-county/>

⁴ Paul lived with this goal every since Christ saved him, as he had told the leaders in Ephesus, where Timothy was presently serving. Acts 20:24 "...so I might finish my course..."

Some people love running, but for most, it's the prospect of a reward that motivates the runner. And Paul says there *is* a reward coming, and answers three questions for us about it.

A. What is it? Verse 8, “the crown of righteousness.”

When a competitor won a race in the Greek games, he didn't get a gold medal. His reward was a garland made out of green leaves. Intrinsicly the prize had no value. What made the garland so valuable was what it represented. If you received a garland, it meant you finished well and indeed were the best!

The reward made the race worthwhile for Paul. He knew the King of kings was going to honor him for his faithful service. He would receive “the crown of righteousness,” meaning either the crown which is a reward for righteousness in his life (Rev 22:12), or the crown which is righteousness itself. MacArthur leans toward the latter, “It is the crown of eternal righteousness—the very righteousness of the Redeemer granted in full perfection to the glorified believer.”⁵

B. Who gives it? Verse 8 says, “Which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day.”

Think about where Paul was when he wrote that. In some stinking dungeon cell, on death row. And why? Because Emperor Nero declared him guilty, unfit to live, and condemned him to die a disgraceful criminal's death.

But what did Paul know? That before his severed head hit the ground, he would be in the presence of the righteous Judge, King Jesus Himself, who would set the record straight and award him with the declaration he longed to hear, “Welcome home, my good and faithful servant! You are righteous in Me!”

Do you ever get weary for doing what's right, and feel like it goes unnoticed, or even attacked? Don't lose heart. Some day we'll all stand before the One who alone possesses the authority to distribute the crown of righteousness.

C. Who receives it? Paul, for sure. “To me,” he says. But not just Paul. “And not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Who will receive the crown of righteousness? Those who preached eloquent sermons? Not necessarily. Those who did the most in the church? Again, not necessarily. Who will?

Those who have *longed for his appearing* will. The AV says *that love his appearing*.

What does that mean? To love His appearing means you long for His return. This word is a perfect tense participle as well. That means we're talking about something that is to be the characteristic of our lives.

What is a Christian? It's a person who believes in Jesus, and therefore loves Jesus, and therefore is longing for Jesus to appear again on earth.

And why long for His appearing? First, for Jesus' sake, for when He appears He will receive what He deserves and did not receive when He came the first time. Honor, and adoration, and obedience, and worship. And second, because that's what *we* long to give Him, our honor, and adoration, and obedience, and worship, forever and ever.

Is it apparent to the people who know you that you are longing for Christ to return? Can your kids tell that you can't wait for the Lord to return, and not just for your sake, but His?

⁵ John MacArthur, p. 200.

How many times in the past week did you consciously long for the appearing of Jesus? Most of us need help here, because we don't long for something we're not thinking about.

You say, "Well, Jesus' appearing? That's something old people think about, like Paul. I have too much on my plate right now to think about that."

Let me share with you something a 24-year-old wrote.⁶

*When this passing world is done,
When has sunk yon glaring sun,
When we stand with Christ in glory,
Looking o'er life's finished story,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When I hear the wicked call,
On the rocks and hills to fall,
When I see them start and shrink
On the fiery deluge brink,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When I stand before the throne,
Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see Thee as Thou art,
Love Thee with unsinning heart,
Then Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When the praise of Heav'n I hear,
Loud as thunders to the ear,
Loud as many waters' noise,
Sweet as harp's melodious voice,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Savior's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love, how much I owe.*

Robert Murray McCheyne wrote those words that he called "I Am Debtor" in 1837 when he was 24-years-old. He died five years later, and over 6,000 people attended his funeral.

When is it time to start thinking about and longing for the appearing of Jesus? Right now, and every day until we see Him.

⁶ This poem by Robert Murray McCheyne, titled "I Am Debtor," appeared in the Scottish Christian Herald, May 20, 1837.

This kind of longing justn't just happen, and the following excerpts from McCheyne's diary, which he wrote when he was just a student, teach us much about how to cultivate a heart that is longing for Christ's appearing.⁷

"**June 22.** Bought [Jonathan] Edwards' works. Truly there was nothing in me that should have induced Him to choose me. I was but as the other brands upon whom the fire is already kindled, which shall burn for evermore!"

"**August 15.** Awfully important question, Am I redeeming the time ?"

"**February 23.** Sabbath. Rose early to seek God, and found Him whom my soul loveth. Who would not rise early to meet such company ?"

We need Christians who will determine to run the Chr Life like that. Will you?

The runner, the race, and the reward. Now let's make it personal.

Make It Personal: When it comes to the Christian race, there are three kinds of people.

1. Some are not even in the race. They are not true Christians. Oh, they may appear to be running, but they're not genuine participants in this race called the Christian life.

They're not genuine, because they've never, shall I say, "registered" for the race. They're like the frauds who jump into the marathon race towards the end because they want the glory of the crowd's applause, but they've refused to enter the race as required.

They obviously won't finish well, for they didn't start well. Indeed, they didn't start at all, not according to the rules of the race.

Perhaps I'm talking to you. You can't run the race because you're not even in it. What's needed? You need to acknowledge your unworthiness and inability to run the race God has called you to run. And then you need to put your total trust in the One He sent to run the race in your place. Jesus His Son ran a perfect race, as your substitute. And then He took your penalty for failing to run the race by dying on the cross and taking the wrath of God you deserve. Then, as a victor, He conquered death, returned to heaven for a season, and now promises to save any who will call on Him.

Repent and believe in Him, and God will save you, and place you in the race Paul's been telling us about today.

2. Some are running with a wrong view of the race. This may be you. Oh, you're in the race, for you have placed your faith in Christ and are indeed God's child. But you're not thinking rightly about the race. Not like McCheyne, not like Paul. To use Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 9:26, you're "running aimlessly."

What needs to change? Robert McCheyne developed a Bible reading plan that took the reader through the New Testament and Psalms twice a year and the rest of the Bible once a year. Start there. Saturate your mind with God's Word, and He will change your affections.

Thankfully, by God's grace in Christ...

3. Some are marathon Christians. They know that they do not add anything to the finished work of their Savior, but they rightly see the Christian life, not as a morning job, but a marathon. And by God's grace, they're in the race for the long haul, running faithfully, longing for the prize of seeing the smile of their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ <http://www.mcheyne.info/life.php>