

# The Last Letter of Paul

by Carter Conlon

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*Carter Conlon's sermon emphasizes the importance of passing on faith and enduring hardships as exemplified in Paul's last letter to Timothy.*

**Duration:** 57:53

**Scripture:** 2 Timothy 1:13-16, 2 Timothy 2:1-5, 2 Timothy 2:15

**Topics:** "Letter"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of passing on the testimony of Christ to future generations. The charge given by Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1 is highlighted as a commission to preach the word of God. The speaker encourages Timothy to be strong in the grace of Christ and to commit what he has learned to faithful men who can teach others. The sermon emphasizes the need to endure hardships and strive lawfully in order to be a true testimony for God.

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## Transcript

This message is one of the Times Square Church Pulpit Series. It was recorded in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in Manhattan, New York City. Other tapes are available by writing World Challenge, P.O. Box 260, Lindell, Texas 75771, or calling 903-963-8626.

You are welcome to make additional cassettes of this message for free distribution to friends. However, for all other forms of reproduction or electronic transmission, existing copyright laws apply. Turn with me, please, in your Bibles to the book of 2 Timothy in the New Testament, chapter 2. 2 Timothy, chapter 2. I'm going to preach tonight a message called The Last Letter of Paul.

The Last Letter of Paul. Let's pray together tonight. Father, I thank you for the abiding anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you, Lord, that you are building something into this church. Lord, I know it in my heart. Guide us now.

Beloved God, guide us. I ask you for an empowerment, a quickening on my mind and body that, Lord, I may disappear, that you may appear, that your word might be spoken through me. I ask you, Holy Spirit, that even the animations of my voice might come from your heart.

Help me to disappear. Let no name ever be named but the name of Jesus Christ in this house. Father, I pray, God, that you would encourage an advance in truth, in the knowledge and embracing of truth, this church.

Father, I give you the glory, and I ask you, Jesus, to be absolutely glorified. Vanquish darkness tonight. Let the kingdom of God come, and I ask it in Jesus' name.

The last letter of Paul, 2 Timothy chapter 2, beginning at verse 1. Paul says, Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and the things that thou hast heard among many witnesses. The same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Verse 4, No man that warreth entangled himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him, has chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.

And Paul says something very seemingly strange. He says, Consider what I say. And the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

Lastly, in verse 8, he says, Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel. Now, Paul's last letter was, in a sense, a commission to a young believer. Even a slightly fearful one.

Paul had met Timothy under earlier circumstances. We don't know what those circumstances were. But Paul saw something in this young man.

And these are the last words that Paul is penning. As far as he's concerned, he's about to die. And Paul is actually correct in that.

It was not very long after that he was imprisoned and lost his life. And now he's commissioning a fearful young man that he met along the way, that he saw something in. And he's writing a letter to this young man.

Now, the Holy Spirit has obviously burdened him to do this, and God's Spirit is pouring through him. But 2 Timothy, if you and I had time tonight to really tear this apart, this is almost a summation of Paul's life and his theology. In these four chapters of 2 Timothy, the life and theology of Paul is almost wrapped into what I call Paul's last will and testament.

I don't think he had a lot of material goods. As a matter of fact, I'm fairly sure of that. But he's leaving to Timothy what he does have.

He has learned something about God, and he's penning it in this letter. And he's leaving behind that legacy as it is of what God has written in his heart. Paul is writing it on paper and giving it to Timothy.

Beloved, I tell you with all my heart that the ultimate cry of the true Christian is the cry of Paul that says, that I may know him, that I may be conformed, that I may walk through his sufferings with him, that I may be conformed to the image of his resurrection, that I may be able to say to the next generation, safely follow me as I have followed Christ. That's the life. That's the desire of every Christian.

It should be in this place. If there is another generation after ours, God should be able to write his testimony in us and through us to this next generation, so that they have as it is a living testimony of who Christ is and what he can do. Paul was about to depart, and he's giving a charge in chapter 4, verse 1. We're going to sporadically look at different parts of this entire book.

But in chapter 4, verse 1, Paul says, I charge thee, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick, that means the living and the dead, at his appearing in his kingdom. Remember, this is to Timothy. He says, Preach the word, the instant in season and out of season.

Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. So this entire, really, this letter is a charge to Timothy. It's a commission to Timothy.

Timothy, I'm passing on the life of Christ that I have learned to you, and now you're going to be the next torchbearer as it is for the kingdom of God. I remember Jack West, when the last time he preached here, he was an evangelist for those who don't know it. He was 80 years of age, and he used to preach regularly here.

Wonderful passion for the lost. A man of incredible integrity. And I remember the last time he preached here.

I knew it in my heart. I leaned over to Pastor Neal. I said, I don't believe we'll ever see Brother West again after tonight.

Something the Holy Spirit just spoke, said, he's going home to glory. And he did. We never saw him again.

And I remember he stood in this pulpit, and on that last message, he said, there was a poem, he said, that's in my heart, and it was called In Flanders Fields. It was a soldier's poem. And he quoted that poem, and there was a line in it that just jumped out at me.

And he said, to you, from failing hands, we throw the torch. If you break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep. Though poppies grow or blow, whatever it is, in Flanders fields.

It's amazing. And as he spoke those words, I felt the torch just being thrown towards Pastor Neal and I, Pastor Patrick, the younger ministers on the platform. It's as if an old warrior of the cross was leaving, and he had written something of God into my heart.

And there was almost a trembling, because when you see these warriors of the cross pass on, you begin to realize that we are the next generation for that short period of time. And I felt a torch literally flung towards us as he shared this. The Holy Spirit was telling me, you're not going to see this man again.

I hope you've learned something from what I've written in and through his life. Paul says in chapter 4, verses 6 and 7, I'm now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. Paul says, I've fought a good fight, and I've finished the course, and I've kept the faith.

And now Paul is saying, I'm leaving now, Timothy, and I'm charging you to preach the gospel, as you've seen it in me. You've known my life, you've understood my ministry. And right back in the beginning, as Paul writes to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 1 and verse 4, he says to Timothy, I'm greatly desiring to see thee being mindful of thy tears, that I might be filled with joy.

His tears. Paul remembered the tears of this young man. I don't know the circumstances.

I remember when I was a new Christian, I used to weep at the drop of a hat. Somebody get up and tell some hokey old story they've told a hundred times. I'd cry like a baby.

I used to cry with Brother West when he told about Uncle Tommy's conversion. You remember Uncle Tommy? I heard it 28 times here in this pulpit. I cried along with him every time.

There's something so precious in a soul that loves God, in a person that has a passion for the work of God. And Paul looks at this fearful young man and his memory of Timothy is not so much that he's a powerhouse, but he has a tender heart. And Paul says, oh, I long to see you again, Timothy, because I remember your tender heart.

I remember perhaps when I used to preach and I would talk about what God will do for those who turn to him. And I would see the tears in your eyes. Or perhaps it was a moment when Timothy finally realized his own need of God.

Timothy, of course, was raised by a godly mother who was in turn raised by another godly mother. There's no evidence that Timothy had a godly father. For all the single mothers take hope in that who are here tonight.

Paul says, I remember the faith that was in your grandmother and also in your mother. And I'm persuaded it is in you also. And Paul says, I remember your tears.

Maybe it was the day of his own personal salvation. Maybe it was the day of his dedication. Maybe Timothy finally, in all of his fearfulness, got up and said, I'm going all the way with God.

And perhaps Paul was the one who had preached a message and seen him. I've seen many at this altar here in Times Square Church over the last 10 years. And I've seen many with tears.

And it always means something when somebody has, especially if it's an altar call to give yourself to the purposes of God. And you see those tears coming so freely to the eyes. He says, I call to remembrance in chapter 1, verse 5, the unfeigned faith that is in you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice.

And I'm persuaded that is in thee also. The unfeigned means, he said, you have an unpretended faith. You had tears.

You want to be given to God and God gave you an unpretended faith. Timothy, yes, you're fearful. He said, but God's not given us a spirit of fear, but power, love and a sound mind.

He said, but you have an unpretended faith. And that's always the evidence of sincerity. If you are sincere about following Christ, God himself will plant in your heart an unpretended faith.

You don't have to put on an act. It is real. It's in you.

You do trust God. There's an evidence. There's a constant growth because that faith is a reality.

Then in verse 6 in chapter 1, he says, wherefore, I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. Paul says to Timothy, when I set you apart for the ministry, God used my life to touch yours. And through me, a knowledge of his grace was given to you.

That's the only desire of my heart as a pastor here at Times Square Church. And I know I speak for Pastor Neil, Pastor Patrick, for Pastor Dave, for Teresa and others who step in this pulpit. There's only a desire in our hearts that through us, a knowledge of God's grace will be given to you.

And Paul says, Timothy, it was me that God used. It was my hands that God used to be laid upon you as it is. And when I touched you or God touched your life through my hands or my preaching, there was an impartation as it is into your heart of an understanding of God's grace.

And he says, I ask you, Timothy, to stir up this gift. Actually, the word gift in the Greek really is the word for grace. He says, stir up this grace.

Fan it back into flames again. It's by the goodness of God that we live, Timothy. It's not by natural power or ability.

We live and move and have our being in him. It's all about him. And God used me to touch your life and to tell you that this fearfulness, you don't have to live under this fearfulness anymore.

You have the power of God within you now. You have the spirit of God upon you. The greatest thing that God could ever do through my life as a pastor in this pulpit is somehow by faith impart that into your heart, that you can lay hold of this and say what God has done for our pastors, God can do for me.

God has taken them as fearful people and God has taken them in their weaknesses and with their confusions and failings. And God has put his power upon them and made them into what they could never hope to be in their own strength. God has taken them and brought them into places where his life and testimony is glorified through them.

Wherefore, if God do that for them, God can do that for me. That's the hope of preaching the gospel. It's not that we make a name for ourselves or have some kind of a reputation.

The hope of preaching the gospel is that you would lay hold of the faith that has put us where God has us today. By his grace. Hallelujah.

And Paul says, God used me. And it were my hands, Timothy, that God used to touch you and my voice that God used to speak into you. So stir up the grace.

This understanding that I have attempted to put into your life. Therefore, he says in 2 Timothy 2 now in verse 6, the things that we opened with, he said, the husbandman that labors must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel. Now Paul says, Timothy, there are some things that you must first experience before you can preach them. You've got to go through them first before you can be a witness for Jesus Christ.

Or you will have no power in your preaching. There'll be no evidence of God's life. You'll be all theology with no power.

You'll have a knowledge of God, but no power. You won't understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God. You will have no evidence in your life.

It will be all empty, hollow theology. And it can't touch anybody. It can't do anything for anybody.

There's no power behind it. There's no evidence in the vessel. And the Holy Spirit cannot back a vessel that's not living in reality.

He says, but Timothy in verse 8, remember that the gospel is about humanity. You see, he says, remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David. Now it's very important he puts that in there.

Because Jesus was the son of God, but he was also a fully human as well as fully God. He was of the seed of God, but he was of the seed of David. He was also a man.

And he says, now I want you to remember that Jesus Christ, being fully human, was raised from the dead by the power of God. Timothy, you have to know this, because this is the very seedbed, as it is, of your faith. You have to understand that the gospel is about a dead man living.

That's what the gospel is about. That's your salvation and that's your hope. It's about one dead man living, but the scripture says he is the first fruits among.

He's the first born among many brethren. As he lived from the dead, so you and I will too. If we will trust in him, if we will allow his promises to come into our heart, if we will allow his life to be our life, we too will be raised from the dead.

We too will not have to live under the confines of culture, class, education, things that have been imposed on us, words of death that have been spoken into us. Physical, mental limitations are gone. We're raised from the dead.

We're born again by the Spirit of God. He says, Timothy, remember this. Remember this, because you see, this is your hope.

Paul knew it. Paul was a lunatic before he came to Christ. He was.

He was. He would be branded in the papers today in the New York Times if they would write about Paul in our generation. They'd say, mass murderer on the loose, because that's what he was.

Hauling people off into prison who believed in Christ, causing them to blaspheme. The scripture says, the name of God. In other words, torturing them until, I suppose, some gave in to the torture.

He says, I did these things ignorantly and unbelief, and God forgave me. He was out of his mind, literally, to do the things that he did. But he even thought he was doing them in the name of God.

Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1 and verse 8, he says, Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner. But be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our own works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. Now, Paul says, Timothy, don't shy away from those things that you cannot possibly hope to endure or accomplish in the flesh.

Do not be ashamed, Timothy. In other words, the word ashamed really means to be triumphed over. Timothy, don't be triumphed over.

When you have to go through the things that God will have to take you through to make you into a man of God. But walk in to the same difficulties that you've seen me have to go through. You've seen, Timothy,

that God has kept me.

God has always had a purpose for my life. You know I walked through storm. You walked me, walked through betrayal.

You've seen me wounded beyond belief. You've understood that I was pressed even beyond measure so that I even despaired of life in Asia. Timothy, you're familiar with the testimony.

But all through these things, God kept me. And he had a purpose for everything he brought me through. He has shown you, Timothy, through my life, that he's able to keep to the very end those who put their trust in him.

He's brought me through flood and fire and water and betrayal and pain and difficulty and confusion and wounding and isolation and despair. I've come through all these trials, and I'm more than a conqueror in Jesus Christ. That's why Paul can say, I believe that there's no power in heaven or on earth, no angels, powers, principalities.

Nothing can separate me from the love of God. Paul says, I'm not aware of any more that could happen to me. In all these things, I've known and understood that I'm more than a conqueror through Christ who strengthens me.

I've learned to have everything. I've learned to have nothing. I'm poor, yet I seem to possess all things.

I've become made all things to all men. God has enabled me to go into every environment, every group of people, whether rich or poor, Pharisees or those who are ignorant of God. And he's been my supply.

Everything I've ever needed, he's given me. I've had a word in season. I've been able to speak to the wise, to the ignorant, to kings and rulers, to the poorest of the land, to prisoners and prison guards.

I've been everywhere that you can go in the leading of God, and God has never failed me. Hallelujah. He says, Timothy, don't shy away.

Don't try to run from the afflictions of the gospel. There are hard times that have to come to everyone who's ever going to preach the gospel. Be a testimony for Christ.

Don't run through these things, but find the power of God in the midst of them. You see, that would be your testimony. He said, don't be ashamed of the testimony.

Verse 9, he said, He says, Timothy, it's not according to our abilities, but a predetermined plan that God had for us. He's called us according to his own purpose. He had a purpose for your life, Timothy.

He called you, and when he called you, he wants to do something through your life, and he's going to have to take you places where you can't go. He's going to have to make you into things you can't be. He's going to lead you into the land of impossible, where the only possibility of it becoming possible is with the presence of God in your life.

He's going to work in you a testimony of his faithfulness. How many preachers today try to preach about victory through the storm, and they never go through a storm? They do everything in their power to avoid the storm. Church gets a little hot, so they pack up their little briefcase of 35 messages and head on to the next church.

Never walk through the storm. Never trust God in the midst of the difficulty. All their lives is flee, flee, flee, flee from the power of God, and then go to churches and stand with powerless theology.

Never willing to walk through the difficulties of life. Never willing to ride the storm. Never willing to stand in the ferocity of the opposition that comes to every true preacher of the gospel, every witness of Christ.

Paul says to Timothy, everyone who lives godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Everyone. He's called us with a holy calling and not according to our own purpose, not according to our plans, not according to our will, but according to his purpose and grace.

You see, God has a purpose, but he's got grace that goes with it. He's got this strength that only he can give. And this grace was given us in Christ Jesus, he says to Timothy, before the world began.

You see, that's how much... see, Paul's saying to Timothy, this is how much God is in control. He gave it to you before you were born. He supplied before the world began.

You see, the devil's not in control, the storm is not in control, circumstances are not in control. You see, God has destined to have a testimony through you. Now, in 2 Timothy chapter 2 again, Paul says to Timothy, remember, he said there are the husbandmen that labors must be first partaker of their fruits.

Timothy, if you are going to preach the gospel, there are some things you have to go through first. Otherwise, it's just all theology and there's no reality to it. You have to go through it.

If you want to be used of God, beloved, tonight, Education Annex, here, every place where people are listening to my voice, if you want to be a testimony for God, there are some things you have to go through. You have to be the first partaker of these things. You have to first go through the trial and first be a partaker of the fruit of God's keeping power in the trial to give your witness some power behind it.

You have to go through it. In 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 1, he says, Thou therefore, and here's the first thing, my son, he says, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. He says, you must first be a partaker of strength and grace.

Otherwise, you'll have just a theology but no experience, no life, no power. Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 3 to 5, let me read it to you. Paul says, I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

He's speaking now to the Corinthian church. My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. It's almost a paradox.

Paul says, I was with you and I was weak and I was trembling. And Paul's saying to the Corinthians, to look at me, without Christ you saw weakness. You look at the human vessel, and the human vessel was frail.

And you looked at it, but yet there was this incredible strength. He said, when you also looked, you saw something else. But Paul said, it's not me.

It's Christ in me that you saw. You saw this incredible keeping power of God. You saw that my preaching was not even good.

Paul said, I didn't come to you with fanciful theology. I didn't come to you with words that just dazzle. All these brilliant little corners on God, but they have no power in them.

Paul says, no, I came to you with simple speech. But you saw in me the power of God. There was a demonstration in my life of the power of God.

Hallelujah. Oh God, give us simple preachers again in our generation. Give us simple men and women who know God, who have the power of God in them, who've walked through the trials.

They've walked through the valley of the shadow of death. They speak plainly so that people can understand them. You saw this incredible keeping power of God.

And Paul says to the Corinthians, so that your faith should not rest in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. You should not have faith in my fanciful speech, but you should have faith in what God is able to do in a surrendered vessel. Because you see, that's God's power and plan for your life.

In 2 Timothy again, chapter 1 and verse 12, Paul says, for the which cause I suffer these things. I also suffer these things. Nevertheless, I'm not ashamed.

In other words, I'm not triumphed over. For I know whom I've believed, and I'm persuaded that He's able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day. I know whom I've believed.

Can you say that tonight? I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He can keep that. I've given Him my life. I've given Him my testimony.

I've given Him my past, present, future, my wife, my children, my grandchildren, my all in all. And He's going to keep it in His hand, and nobody can take it out of God's hand. I'm convinced.

I'm convinced deep down in my heart that nobody can take this testimony from me. Hallelujah. This is Paul's testimony.

He said, Timothy, firstly, you must be strong in grace. You must be strong in God's goodness. It must not be your effort, your amount of Bible reading, your amount of study, your amount of gritting your teeth and with dogged determination saying, I'm able to live this Christian walk.

He says, no, you must be strong in grace. You must be strong. Paul says, when I am weak, then I am strong.

I glory in my infirmities. Paul says that the power of God, the power of Christ may rest upon me. Hallelujah.

To the natural mind, this is stupidity. What do you talk about a man who says, I glory in my weakness? No, Paul says, I do, because the weaker I am, the more I have to lean on God. The more he comes through, the more his strength is manifested.

Secondly, he says, you must be first partaker of something else. He says, the things that you've heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. The first thing or the second thing you must have is a teachable spirit, Timothy.

A teachable spirit. In chapter 1, verses 13 to 16, he says to Timothy, hold fast the form of sound words which you've heard of me, and of faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was

committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

Thou knowest that all they which are in Asia have turned away from me. Verse 16, he says, the Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain. Hold fast, he said Timothy, because everybody in Asia has turned away from me.

They're ashamed of my chain. It's really significant. You see, Paul's saying, they're ashamed of the trials.

They're ashamed of the rejection. They're ashamed of the imprisonments. They're ashamed of the struggles that I have to go through, that God has destined my life to have to go through, that he might be glorified in me.

And they're all in Asia, he said, they're turned away from me because they say, well, this is not the gospel that we want. This is not the God that we... We want a God who just prospers us. We want a God who makes us healthy and happy all the time.

We want to go to a place where we can just clap our hands and live in milk-fed Christianity the rest of our lives. We don't want anything. Whatever Paul has, we don't want it.

They didn't turn away from God. They turned away from Paul. And they probably started another church.

It was probably a prosperity church. They were ashamed of my chain, he said. They're ashamed of the hard things that I had to go through.

I was telling them this is God. I was telling them there's a purpose in this. But they said, no.

No, no, no. There's no purpose in having a thorn in your flesh. No purpose in being whipped and beaten and rejected.

There's no purpose in having to go to jail and be in chains and be on a slave ship and be bitten by a snake, by a fire. And all of these things that Paul was saying. Yes, there's something of God in this.

He's leading me, you see, to an understanding of something. Poor imbeciles from Asia didn't know this man's being used of God to write the Bible. You see, but this is revelation they didn't want.

So many today want truth. Oh, make me a teacher. But they don't have a teachable spirit.

It can't be taught. But everybody wants to teach. And so we get all of these spiritual pygmies running around with their big Bibles and glossy brochures and programs on television.

They know nothing about God. Nothing about the power of God. There's no revelation of Jesus Christ.

But everybody's a teacher now. Ashamed. Trying to make out Paul to be a prosperity preacher.

Imbeciles. Spiritual imbeciles. Using the words of Paul to say we should be rich.

Imbeciles. Discounting his entire life and ministry. And everything that God did.

And then taking and twisting his words, as Peter says, to their own destruction. They're ashamed of my chain. They're ashamed of what I have to go through.

Timothy. He says, study. Chapter 2, verse 15.

Study to show thyself a proof to God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Study, Timothy, and you will not be triumphed over, but have a teachable spirit. And when he says rightly dividing, Paul's saying, Timothy, let the word of God speak to you what it really says.

Don't try to modify it to suit your own desires and needs. Let it speak to you what it says. Just read it.

It's not difficult. You know, this Bible is actually very plain. If you really want to understand it, it's very plain.

If your life is an open book. Now, if I come to this book and I've got this image of myself and my direction and my future, then I'm not going to understand it. I'm going to study it, but I'm not going to understand it.

And where it speaks something that seems to be contradictory to my viewpoint of what my Christian walk should be, then I'll just gloss it over. I'll be ashamed of the chain as it is and push it away. But Paul says, Timothy, if you'll study and if you'll rightly divide it, you will not be triumphed over because of a wrong interpretation of truth.

You'll stand in the last day. Again, he says to Timothy, chapter 2, verse 3, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. You see, Paul's entire revelation of God's keeping power had come through affliction.

And he says, Timothy, you're going to have to go through hardness, but endure it as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Timothy, it's here that I found the power of God. It was a theology, but it has become a reality.

I know, he said, whom I have believed in. It's not like I've studied it and I have this knowledge. He said, Timothy, I know whom I have believed.

He said, endure hardness. Don't try to escape it, endure it. Walk through it, find the lesson in it.

And even if you don't understand the lesson, trust God for the power to get through it. And when you get to the other side, you're going to have a message. You're going to be able to speak to people and say, hey, I've been through.

And God, that's the deepest theology you'll ever find. I said to the music ministry this week, I said, you want to know the difference between an old preacher and a young preacher? I said, an old preacher has more anointing when he clears his throat into the microphone than a young preacher has in the first 15 minutes of his message. When he gets up and says, would you turn in your Bible? And immediately there's a sense of God because this man has walked through the storm.

When I first got here, I used to tell Pastor Neil, I used to almost tremble when I'd have to get up and preach in this pulpit 10 years ago. I still do. Pastor Dave would get up in the morning and he's like a chainsaw.

You'd see this huge oak just tumble down and people would be weeping. I felt like a woodpecker getting up. You know, the scripture says they feel by their much speaking.

If I just can speak long enough and get enough revelation, then something has got to happen. But you see, the longer you walk and the more you get a history and the more you know that God will bring you through, you don't need a lot of words. You just get up and say, God will be faithful.

And there's something, you see, the Holy Ghost can go behind that. It's not something you can explain until you experience it, I guess. I don't know how to say that.

God will bring you through. God will bring you through. Endure hardness.

2 Timothy 2 verse 4, the fourth thing he says, There's no man that wags entangle himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier. Timothy, you must be the first to be free from the captivations of this world. Can you imagine? And then Paul uses the illustration of a soldier, that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier.

Can you imagine now a soldier being called to liberate a people from a system in which he himself is heavily invested? Can you imagine it? Sending a soldier in and say, liberate the people, and most of your life is intertwined with what they're intertwined with. How do you set people free from corrupt thinking if you're corrupt yourself? How do you preach with any authority to turn away from evil company when you yourself are a companion of evil people or you are associating with evil practice? How do you speak with any authority? Timothy, you must be free from the captivations of this world. You must be first partaker of these fruits.

You must leave them aside and begin to understand as you seek God first and his kingdom, all the things that you need, God will add to you. You don't have to go searching after anything. You'll find everything you need from God himself.

You must clearly know and be dedicated to seeing people free from the devices of your enemy. Timothy, he's chosen you. Paul says in 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 10, here's the end result, as I see it, of people who are never free.

You know, when you see long-standing ministry sometimes fall, oh, it's been falling for a long time, and quite often there's a reason for it. He says in 2 Timothy 4 and 10, he says, For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world. Now, I don't know who this man Demas really is, but I do know he walked a long time, more than likely with Paul.

And right down to the point where he's writing his last letter, Demas apparently seems to be there, but finally Demas says, ah, Paul, I just don't get it. I don't get it. I don't want it.

If you're saying this is what I'm going to follow, if you're saying this is the call of God in my life, he says, forget it. I need a holiday. I don't want to live like this anymore.

I'm not interested in war. And so he walks away just thinking he's rejected Paul and Paul's theology. But you see, God writes with his pen about this man.

He said, he's forsaken me, having loved this present world. He loves the things of this life. He's more concerned about ease than he is about the cross.

He's more concerned about reputation than preaching the gospel, and all these other things that go along with this. He says, Demas has forsaken me, because the love of the world is still in his heart. In 2 Timothy chapter 2, again, in verse 19, he says, Nevertheless, the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal.

The Lord knows them that are his, and let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity. In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth, and some to honor

and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared for every good work.

He says, Timothy, be purged. Be first purged from those associations in your life that dishonor God. You have to be the first partaker of these things.

You have to put these things away. All the associations that dishonor God that are in your life, from relationships to practices to things you read to things you speak to things you look at. You have to put them away if you're going to be a testimony for Jesus Christ.

Whatever you look at, that's what you're going to become. And lastly, in 2 Timothy chapter 2, in verse 5, he says, And if a man also strived for mastery, he is not crowned, except he strived lawfully. He says, Timothy, you must be the first to obey God.

If you would lead yourself and others into victory. Remember the apostle Paul says, I keep under my flesh and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. Timothy, you must be the first to obey God.

You don't win the race unless you do it God's way. You don't get the crown unless you run according to the rules. You cannot do it in the physical world.

Try it. Remember there was a racer one time that was in a marathon a few years ago, ducked into the bushes somewhere along the line and probably jumped on a motorcycle and jumped back into the race about a mile from the finish. And was crowned.

Remember that? He was crowned and walked around with the victor's crown until somebody on a video camera had caught the whole episode. And you remember the shame when the crown was taken off and given to the person who apparently, seemingly was second, but in reality was first. Can you imagine when we get before the throne of God one day and the same scenario, the heaven's video has recorded everything.

And people are going in, you know, the victor's crown, but they've not run it lawfully. They've not done it God's way. And Paul says, Timothy, you've got to be the first to obey God.

If you're going to be a leader, if you're going to run the race and cross the line and come into victory, not just yourself, but your home, your family, your marriage, your community, everywhere God sends you to be a witness, you've got to run it according to the Word of God. And you have to be the first. You can't tell other people to obey when you're not walking in obedience.

There'll be no authority behind your words, there's no power, there's no conviction. The Holy Ghost will never bear witness to a man or woman who is not living in truth and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. You've got to obey what is written in the Word of God, what God reveals to you, what the Holy Spirit speaks to you.

You've got to walk in obedience if you would lead others into victory in this race. He said, you've got to be the first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

Timothy, you've got to be the first. You've got to be the first who's strong in grace. You can't tell other people to be strong in grace if you're not strong in grace.

I've got to make you weak, Timothy. I've got to take you through trials and difficulties, and I've got to show you where the true power of the Christian life is, so that you can be a witness for me among others who are themselves in a storm and trial. I've got to take you through this.

You've got to be the first who's strong in grace. Timothy, you've got to be the first who can be taught before you can teach. You have to have an open heart.

I've got to be able to speak to you. I've got to be able to guide you. I've got to be able to write into your life the truth of the gospel before you can teach it to other people.

Timothy, you've got to endure hardness. I've got to take you through some hard places in your life. Hard times are going to come to everybody.

There's no way of getting around it. You're going to die eventually. Well, not most everybody.

I guess everybody here is going to die. You're going to die. Some are going to get sick.

Some are sick now. You're going to go through hard times. Difficulty is going to come your way.

Disappointment is a part of life. There's going to be hard times. You're simply not going to get away from it.

But God says, I want to lead you. I'm going to have to lead you through. And I'm going to be your comfort.

And I'm going to be your strength. And I'm going to write something in you that people are going to look and say. Like Paul said to the Corinthians.

The people looked and said, he's so weak, but he's so strong. We don't get it. It's not of the world.

There's nothing in the world that can produce such strength in such a weak man. And God says, I'm going to have to take you through, Timothy, some hard times. And I'm going to be your strength in the midst of those times.

You've got to be the first to be disentangled from the world. You've got to be the first to walk away from what's wrong. To know who the enemy is.

How do you fight if you don't even know who the enemy is? How do you deliver people if you don't know what's captivating them? And then he said, you've got to be the first, Timothy, to obey when God speaks to you. Timothy, Paul says, I have obeyed God. And so few people understood it.

We understand it today because we have the Bible. But so few people of Paul's generation understood where God was leading him. He was appointed to suffer.

You remember when Ananias was sent to lay hands on him after his conversion? And he said, I will show this man the great things. Jesus said, he must suffer for my name's sake. He was appointed to suffer so he could experience the strength of God.

So that at the end, still standing, saying, I've finished my course. I've run the race. I've kept the faith.

He could write and say, it's been all Jesus. It was Jesus in the beginning. It was Jesus here.

It was Jesus there. It was Jesus here. He has kept me.

He's strengthened me. And I know whom I have believed. And he could write to us today a revelation that if we read it as it's written, will keep us through every storm that will ever come our way.

But verse 8 is my favorite of the whole chapter. He says, Timothy, you may have little or no strength. Because remember, Timothy was a fearful young man.

Paul had to tell him to take a little wine. Let's not get into the fermented or unfermented thing. It doesn't really matter to me.

But he said, Timothy, take a little wine for your often, your illnesses. Your stomach is always turned around. He said, take this.

It'll settle your stomach. I prefer to believe it was unfermented. And he says, Timothy, you may have little or no strength.

But remember, the gospel of Jesus Christ is about a dead man living. He said, remember, Timothy, it's about God raising the dead. This is the gospel.

And he says, this is the gospel that will keep you. This is the gospel I've preached. This is the gospel that I've lived.

He said, there was a place in my ministry where I reckoned myself dead. He said, but I trusted in God who raises the dead. And he kept me.

And he will keep me. He said, Timothy, you're weak. I know you're weak.

I know you're young. I know you're frail. But the gospel that I preach is about Jesus Christ being raised by the power of God from the dead.

This is the gospel. And tonight I just wanted to tell you this has been my hope all my life as a Christian. It's been my hope, and God has never failed me.

If I had the time to tell you that the number of times I've gone to God and said, I'm a dead man, God. I'm dead. I'm dead.

I don't know how to do this. I don't know how to change this. I can't.

I'm dead. And the Lord is so delighted when we finally give that testimony. The Lord says, this is wonderful because, you see, I specialize in raising the dead.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. I know tonight.

I know there's people who are weak. But the Lord says, I've allowed that so that you would turn to me to be made strong in grace. There's some who are not teachable.

That's sad. Very, very sad. I knew a man in ministry once who used to buy himself expensive suits, but his wife and daughter had no clothes, no food.

What a disgrace that man was to the name of Christ. I remember his teenage daughter weeping in my office, telling me they had no food at home. He said, but my father comes home with five, six, seven hundred dollar suits on a regular basis.

My mom and I have nothing to eat. I remember thinking, what an unteachable, disgraceful man to the name of Jesus Christ. There's some who are going through hard times, but you have so little power to endure it.

But God says, I've allowed it. I have allowed it. If you will understand what it's all about.

There's others that are entangled, and you need to be disentangled from the world. You don't have a testimony because you're so interwoven with the things of this world. And then lastly, there are people here tonight who are just not running the race lawfully.

You know it. I know it. God knows it.

You are not running it lawfully, and God says, no crown until you do it my way. No crown. No testimony.

No victory. No celebration at the end of the race. Unless you do it my way.

And he says, I will give you the strength because I am the one who takes the dead and gives them life. Tonight, Education Annex Balcony Main Sanctuary, if the Holy Spirit is speaking to you, you know what you have to do. You know.

Don't wait for another point. Don't wait for another argument. You know what you have to do.

The Holy Spirit has already been speaking to you. You knew before you came in here tonight. You know what you have to do.

If you're unsaved, you have to give your life to Christ or you'll never see heaven. You have to receive him as Savior or you will never make it to the other side. If you're a Christian and looking for the testimony of God, you have to be the first partaker of these things that God has spoken about tonight or you will never be a living testimony for him.

You'll never know victory in your Christian life. You'll never know the keeping power of God. And I'm telling you tonight, if the Holy Spirit is speaking to you and you need to get right with God, some area of your life, you need strength to the most difficult trial perhaps you've ever known.

I'm going to ask you to come and meet me at this altar. Let's stand. Balcony, Education Annex Main Sanctuary.

Would you just slip out wherever you are? Come meet me at this altar tonight and we're going to pray together. And let's believe God for a miracle of deliverance and strength. Let's believe God to raise you from the dead in that area of your life.

Slip out wherever you are. Balcony, Annex. You can make your way here.

We'll wait for you tonight. Come and meet me here and we're going to pray tonight. We're going to believe for a miracle because he raises the dead.

That's the gospel. The gospel is so simple. The Christian life is so simple.

People try to make it so complicated. It's such a wonderful life to be alive in God. To know that your sins are forgiven.

To know that the power of the Holy Spirit, God, is now in your life. And he's guiding you and leading you and establishing a testimony for his glory all the days of your life. There's no greater life to be lived on this side of eternity and for all eternity with God.

No limitations by education. Nobody barred because they've committed too horrible a sin. The ground is level at Calvary.

And whosoever will, Jesus said, can come. Can be forgiven. Can have a new life in Christ.

I know there's got to be people here tonight. In the education annex of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus sees your hands too as well. But I want to give an invitation tonight for anybody here tonight that says, Pastor, I'm not a Christian.

I'm not saved. But tonight, I want to give my life to Jesus Christ. For the first time, I've understood the gospel.

I've understood something about God I've never known before. And tonight, I want to give my life to Christ. Now, he died on a hill for you publicly.

And I'm going to ask you to do this publicly for him. We don't bow our heads and close our eyes at Times Square Church. We're not ashamed of Jesus Christ.

He died on a hill high. And everybody saw it. It's a historical fact.

And tonight, if you want to come to him, I'm asking you to do it openly. I'm asking you to do it honestly. I'm asking you to make an honest admission in front of 1,800 or so people in this sanctuary that you need Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

If that's you tonight, I'm going to lead you in a prayer. But before I do, would you join me and raise your hand? Would you do it? All over the sanctuary, you're coming to Christ for the first time. You want to be saved.

Raise your hand. Raise it high. Raise it high.

I'm coming to Jesus. I want to be a Christian. I want to live my life for God.

God bless you. All over the sanctuary. Hallelujah.

The beginning of a new life. Imagine walking out of here tonight. You came in and maybe you don't even know why, but you're going to walk out tonight forgiven.

The Holy Spirit now in your life. God leading you. What an incredible decision you're making tonight.

Let's pray. And those who raised their hands, would you pray with me tonight? The education annex, I may not see your hand, but God sees it tonight. And let's pray together for those who are coming through to Christ.

Pray with me. Lord Jesus. I am a sinner.

Jesus, thank you. That you love me enough. That you became a man.

And died on a cross. Pay the price. For all the wrong things.  
That I have done. I'm sorry for my sin. It's my sin.  
That put you on that cross. And I'm sorry. I don't want to live.  
In rebellion to you. Anymore. I ask you to forgive me.  
And tonight I open my heart. And I invite you into my life. To be my Savior.  
And my Lord. I believe. Jesus.  
You are the Son of God. I believe. You died for me.  
To pay the price. For all the wrong things. That I have committed.  
Against God. And against man. I believe.  
That on the third day. By the power of God. You were raised from the dead.  
As living proof. That my trust in you. Tonight.  
Is not in vain. I believe. That as Christ was raised from the dead.  
So tonight. Almighty God. You are raising me from the dead.  
From the death of sin. You are giving me a new life. The life of Jesus Christ.  
Oh God. On my testimony. And the belief in my heart.  
And according to your word. At this moment. I believe.  
I am saved. I am saved. I am.  
Saved. Hallelujah. Saved.  
Saved. Saved. Saved.  
Thanks be to God. I'm saved. I'm not going to hell when I die.  
I'm going to heaven. I'm going to heaven. You can believe that tonight.  
I'm going to heaven to live with God. Hallelujah. Now for the rest that are here.  
Let's pray a simple prayer together. Lord Jesus Christ. Guide me.  
Teach me. Help me. To be a living testimony.  
To my family. To my marriage partner. To my children.  
To my neighbors. The people in my workplace. God.  
Establish your testimony. In the things I've heard tonight. Give me understanding.

Lead me. Guide me. Be the source of my strength.

Be the source of my life. Jesus I thank you. You're going to be my companion.

My comfort. My guide. My deliverer.

My healer. My refuge. My joy.

My strength. You're going to be everything I need. Oh God I will give you glory.

I will open my mouth. And I will sing your praises. I will be a testimony.

By your grace in me. I will be a testimony to you. Oh God.

Thank you Jesus. Thank you mighty God. Thank you mighty God.

This is the conclusion of the message.

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