



## What Really Matters?

2 Timothy 4:1-8

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I'd like to read this passage, and then I have a few comments to make as a ministry update. Then I'd like to spend the remainder of the moments we have in this passage. Second Timothy 4:1-8. Paul says this to Timothy:

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. <sup>5</sup> As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

*<sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up 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 loved his appearing.*

Pray with me.

Father, thank You for these words. Thank You for this blessed message in which we see how, at the end of Paul's life, he boils down what really matters in life and ministry for this young man. These are beautiful words for us with an exhortation and a teaching for us today.

I pray that You, through Your Spirit and Your Word, Lord Jesus, will make alive truths that have been communicated to us time and time again. And yet, may they be revived and refreshed for us so that we may be strengthened and encouraged, and in some cases even confronted, rebuked and corrected. So we ask that Your Word and Spirit will work in a mighty way. We know the flesh profits nothing. It's Your Word and Spirit that bring life, and we pray that will take place, to Your glory Lord Jesus. Amen.

Well, as David said, I have been a part of New Covenant Bible Church from the very beginning, and you'll have been a part of our ministry from the very beginning. Thank you so much for your ministry in our lives as a family. Thank you for praying for us. Those prayers act as a wonderful accountability. What a great privilege!

Sometimes you might wonder, "What does a missionary think when they're sent out? Does the church really care for them? Do they connect with them?" A day like today is emotionally charged. I'm not sure what you're going to get up here. There could be tears and laughter. It could run from A to Z. People here have come to me and said they're praying for us. Thank you. You give. Thank you. You encourage us. Thank you. So for all you've done—and we ask that you continue to do—we appreciate it greatly.

Allow me to give you an update on where we are and what's going on in our lives. Many have asked us, "Where do you guys live?" I usually say, "Around." Well, as you know, we are empty-nesters. No, that's not true. We have no nest. Those of you who know about our journey know we sold our St. Charles home in 2015. We have an address in south Florida, but we're not there much. We stay with some really good friends in Sunrise, Florida, for a couple weeks here and there throughout the year, and they receive our mail for us.

This is a ministry that Lynn has joined me in. It's a life-changer, folks. After almost ten years of doing this, to have her travel with me for long periods of times, multiple times a year, is extremely encouraging. She's a blessing to the pastors—and actually, she's a pretty good staff member too. So we're very thankful that we have the privilege to do this together.

It's great to have Douglas with us. You know, he's a big guy, a mature guy. And our daughter Whitney is in Honolulu, Hawaii, doing some training on line and working at Starbucks and she's also really involved in a local church there.

As I look at this year's schedule, I look forward to being with you again in April and September again this year, and we'll be around the world other times of the year. But we look forward to being part of this church in those times.

So that's a little update on our lives. For almost nine years now I've been full time with Leadership Resources International (LRI). God has literally used this ministry in spite of me to touch thousands of pastors. It's a wonderfully overwhelming ministry that New Covenant Bible Church is directly involved with in the Ukraine. I was just there for two weeks of December. There are three trainings taking place now in the Ukraine, with about 20 pastors in each venue. Then those pastors are training other pastors. It has become a national movement now. The largest evangelical seminary in the Ukraine has partnered with us for which we are very thankful.

Pastor David, they're excited about you coming in May, so I hope that still can happen. They're looking forward to hearing your preaching and teaching and to being in sweet fellowship with you. Thank you for sending David to partner with us. You have to know that I'm thankful for the fellowship we have together. He is a great encouragement to me when he's there. And the pastors there send their greetings to you at the church here and thank you for the long-term relationship we've had.

I think it's important that I share with you a little bit of why we do this. What is it about this ministry of training pastors that's so compelling, not only in my life, but in the lives of those who are receiving this training? I think it's built on a core conviction about the Word of God. That's nothing new for you, but I want you to understand that this is a novel concept in many churches around the world where they do not have a conviction about the Word of God. They have more of a casual relationship with the Word. I call it a "hovering above" the Word of God. Many pastors think, "Yes, the text is okay, but this is what I want to say."

Let's read a "conviction passage" from Isaiah 55:10-11, as a little backdrop to what we do and to what Paul is saying to Timothy in our main passage. ***"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth..."*** We understand that, don't we? It comes down, it waters the earth—and does it have any effect? *"...Making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater."* Yes! God is saying the rain and the snow have an effect.

I was in South Africa a few months ago when they were going through a drought. Everybody in every church we went to were praying for rain. We were sitting in one church, and as the pastor was preaching, all of a sudden the clouds opened and the rain came! Everybody was jumping up, rejoicing, clapping, praying. Then after two or three days, we saw that that which was dry and desolate was now perky and turning green. Wow! It's kind of an axiomatic thing, right? It's designed that way, and it's going to happen.

*"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth,"* God says. *"It shall not return to me empty. But it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I have sent it,"* or ordained it. It will accomplish the very purpose for which God sent it. These are not some "ideas" God gave us. These are the words of life. What did Jesus say in Matthew 4:4? *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."* This is sustainable. This has impact and intent. It will accomplish that for which God sent it.

That's a conviction I have. I know this holy pulpit for many years has had this same conviction and I pray will continue to have it. I pray that we who sit and listen week after week

will have it as well; that we will demand it, that we will hunger for it and devour it, and that we will take it from here. As God's Word has worked in our lives, we will take it with us.

But sadly, that is not the case around the world. Many pastors, elders and churches have moved away from preaching the Word of God. They understand that there's a role they have as a pastor, or function they have as a church—and it doesn't seem to be happening—therefore they think they have to come up with some clever idea, something new. They say, "The Word is not as relevant, so we have to come up with something that meets our culture."

Is that what Isaiah is saying? No. He says the Word of God will accomplish that for which He sent it. But they have substituted various programs or therapeutic ministries. This is where God has called us to become involved, because sometimes the people are uneducated. They've never been taught differently, so they're just doing what everyone else is doing. They see something being done in another church and decide to try it themselves.

Is that what Paul is saying to Timothy: "*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus*"? Well, my friends, I'm very concerned that pastors don't know how to effectively fulfill their role in ministry. I'm concerned that churches don't know what the focal point of their body should be. How are we doing with leading churches into true Christ-centered worship? How are we doing in the Great Commission—sending out and going out locally and around the world? How are we doing with equipping the saints who are amongst us to do the work of the ministry?

So is there a need? Is there a purpose? I have nothing clever for you today. Why do I keep using the word "clever"? Because it happens to be a very popular word, and one pastor just recently said that's what he's looking for every week. I asked him, "What's your goal on Monday? What are you trying to come up with for Sunday?" He said, "I'm trying to come up with something clever." I want you to know—this guy is not from Africa. He's an American. Every week he feels the pressure to be clever. Being the good questioner he was, he asked me, "What's your goal every Monday for Sunday?" I said, "I'm struggling to be clear with what the text is saying." He just looked at me.

My friends, when we think about what really matters in ministry, it's a real challenge in our lives. It reaches to the core of a pastor's being. It challenges his identity, his financial security, and even the will of God in his life. It becomes a challenge.

What is my purpose, my goal, for being involved in Christian ministry? Is it the pursuit of excellence and success? Or is it more about drawing near to Him, being faithful to Him? This note that Paul writes to Timothy—his final note—also confronts me time and time again.

Having just read these eight verses, we come with this conclusion that Paul is making about what really matters in life and ministry.

I was blessed to work with a man in Kenya named Eric—a very dynamic and articulate Kenyan leader who was making a significant impact in south Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania. Yet his ministry was more focused on meeting the needs of people. Eric got involved in our training and after the first year he came to me and said, “Doug. I’m going to give other people the opportunity to do those other things in ministry, because this is what I want to do with the rest of my life: I want to study the Word of God. I want to proclaim the Word of God and I want to teach others how to do it.” My heart was just jumping. I was so encouraged. Here was a man who wants to do this for the rest of his life.

So Lynn and I had a meeting with him. Then we went home and happened to be in Pennsylvania when I got a letter from one of his colleagues, Michael, who started telling us that Eric wasn’t feeling well. At the end of Michael’s note was the fact that Eric had died. Wow. I was standing in an outdoor mall and right there I started weeping. Eric—the man who had said, “I want to do this the rest of my life”—we had no idea that the rest of his life was going to be five weeks. He had no idea either.

So when we stop and think about what really matters, you can’t put that into questions like, “What should I be doing? What could I be doing? I’m going to put it off until later.” You don’t know. Do you think those people who got off that plane the other day in Ft. Lauderdale were saying, “You know, I’m going to focus on what really matters later”? Lynn and I just flew out of that airport on Tuesday. We’re flying back into that airport this coming Tuesday. We don’t know.

The very calling of my life was rooted in the death of my brother in a car accident. God used that to sober me to the reality of the brevity of life. And when Eric passed away a year ago, it was another shocking experience to me as well.

So Paul was coming to the end of his life and wrote, “Timothy, I want you to get this. This is what really matters.” You know, most of us write out a “last will and testament.” Paul is actually doing that here, but this is more about life and ministry rather than the possessions of life. I wonder how many of us would struggle writing our last will and testament when it comes to the idea of what’s important in life and gospel ministry.

Let me ask you a couple questions starting with the easier one first. What would you say in your last will and testament that you are going to leave to people? Then I think the more difficult question is who would you send it to? Who would listen to you? Who cares with whom you have lived life with in gospel ministry?

Paul lived closely with Timothy in such a way that he calls him his son. He knew him from the early days of his life. He knew his family and background. As he writes to him, he knows him intimately, communicating with him directly and clearly. There's no guessing in what he says to Timothy. He focuses on proclamation, communicating to him what is really important in life and ministry.

At the top of the column in my Bible, and probably yours, it says, "Preach the Word." Well said. What's this text about? "Preach the Word." As we look at these eight verses, I want us to understand something. Yes, it's "preach the Word," but more specifically, it's "preach the Word in the presence of God, fulfill your ministry and finish well." It's not just about preaching, but preaching in such a way that your ministry is fulfilled—so you can say, as Paul said, "I've finished well."

Do you see that a relay race is taking place here? Can you see that Paul has been running and is now getting to the end of his course, and he's reaching forward to hand the baton to Timothy? Timothy is reaching back to grab the baton, so he can continue the race and run his course; so he can say, as his mentor and as the Lord Jesus said, "It is finished."

If you spend some time in 2 Timothy you'd see that Jesus finished well after enduring suffering. Paul finished well after enduring suffering. Paul is exhorting Timothy to endure suffering and finish well. So, Doug, David, congregation—endure suffering and finish well. What a way to start the year. Happy New Year!

I love messages like this in my life, because there's a calibration factor that we'll see as we work through this text. This is a profound book of the Bible, and it's very helpful to local church pastors, those who have a passion to be ministers of the Word of God.

Let's examine this idea of preaching the Word. Paul gives Timothy three compelling reasons why he ought to preach the Word, why it's important and why it really matters to preach the Word.

### **Preach the Word in the Presence of God**

The first compelling reason is in verse one, where it says preaching is done in the presence of God and in the presence of Christ Jesus. Let's stop and think about that. Paul says, "*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing...preach the word.*" In other words "Listen, Timothy, preaching is about understanding that you're doing it in the audience of One. The eternal God is Whom you're preaching in front of." We think it's on this level. We're concerned about what people will think when we're preaching.

I think any honest pastor has to work through the faces in the congregation. I literally pray through some of your faces. I know some of you. I'm glad I don't know everyone, because that means God continues to bring new people here. Some of us are very encouraging, but some of us come each week with a critique sheet: "How did the pastor do? Was it a nine, a ten, a six?"

The reality, day in and day out, in what Paul is saying is very liberating for a pastor. We need to be concerned about what God thinks. Who is this? He is the One Who judges the living and the dead. I might feel judged on the human level, but He is the Judge. So my accountability and responsibility is to stand before Him Who is the faithful and righteous Judge.

"And by His appearing and His Kingdom." You know, whenever you look at a text, it's helpful to look at where the passage starts, and then look at the end. Look at the end of verse eight, where you'll see this idea of His appearing again. "*Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge*"—there it is again— "*will award to me on that Day*"—when is that Day?—"and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."

So here in verse eight we have the fact that He's the judge and He's appearing. What is Paul trying to communicate? There's the original appearing, the inauguration of the Kingdom—as he says here—and then there's the second appearing which is the consummation of His Kingdom at the end of the ages. He's saying, "You preach the Word between the first and the second comings. That's not what you do just this year. It's not the church's goal to work through expository preaching for this year only. No, young man, you do this from now until He comes again."

This is what we are to understand about the proclamation of the Word of God to the church. Jesus is the One to Whom we are preaching. He is the Judge. We know that, because 1 Corinthians 3:12 talks about the fact that we as believers will be judged as to whether our deeds are gold, silver and precious stones or wood, hay and stubble. We understand that's part of what it means to be a Christian. But this Day is drawing near. Whether it's five weeks, five years or 50 years—or longer—the clock is ticking. It's ticking in all our lives. There's an urgency, a clarity and relevance about this.

So we are to preach the Word. We understand that it nourishes our souls. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Paul says in verse two, as we preach this in the presence of God, we preach in the understanding of Who He is and the relevance of that.

What does Paul mean by preach the Word? Why preach the Word? Look with me at 2 Timothy 3:16. You know this verse, but we need to see why the Word of God is helpful, relevant

and worthy to be preached. It's because all Scripture is breathed out by God. It is the very words of God and it's profitable for teaching. So you should expect that the Word of God is going to teach.

So those of you whom God has gifted to teach—you should be teaching. And what is the content of your teaching? The Word of God. *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof.”* There's a counseling element here where we need to be life on life, seeing the Word of God reprove. I hope you came today expecting the Word of God to have an effect in your life because it would contain teaching and instruction, reproof and correction. And where you need training in righteousness, it will come through the Word.

What else can have that impact in people's lives? The Word of God and the Spirit of God work uniquely to put His very finger on those areas in our lives where we need it. I can't think of any talk I could design that could do that. Maybe I could manipulate you, but I could not have genuine impact that brings honest transformation other than by the Spirit of God and the Word of God at work in your life. So preach the Word—it's very important.

You know, when we think about a church, we take for granted that all churches are preaching the Word. They're not. I've been really bothered by this. We have traveled around the world, and recently Lynn and I have been doing some traveling in the U.S. as well. We're finding it disturbing that congregations are not happy with their pastors and pastors are not happy with their congregations. There's something out there now called an “empty pulpit syndrome.” There are pastors who have one foot out, with their people pushing to get the other out. It's disturbing to us.

So I started doing some research on what is going on. I began to ask people a simple question: “What's the number one reason people go to church on Sunday? What's going on out there in evangelical churches? The number one reason people choose the church they go to is because they feel cared for. They feel like the church body cares for them; the pastor cares. Well, that is one of the things the church will do, but should that be the number one reason we attend a church?

The second reason people go to the church they go to has to do with their theological or doctrinal beliefs. If you were a Baptist your whole life, you go to a Baptist church. If you're a Reformed Christian individual, you go to a Reformed Christian church. You go to a Presbyterian church because you've always been Presbyterian. And so forth.

Number three concerns me: People go to the church they go to because they feel the pastor is approachable. Or they feel like the pastor connects with them. Now I want you to understand the context in which many of these questions were asked: megachurches, satellite

churches, live-stream churches. Do you understand what I'm saying? These people are saying they feel connected to the guy on the screen. They feel connected to the guy who's bigger than life. He's 20 feet tall. Well, the screen is that large, right? He's charismatic. He connects with everybody. But they're in different satellite churches all over.

So where does the Word of God come in on the list? It's coming in about sixth. The way they termed it was "Quality of sermons." My friends, we're doing this in the presence of the Father and of the Lord Jesus. Preach the Word. That thing we're pursuing will only come from the Word of God. Paul is telling Timothy, "This is what really matters. Continue to preach the Word of God."

### **Preach the Word with Patience & Humility**

Paul says this in verses two to four:

*Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

When we handle the Word of God, we must be patient. We must understand that we do it with humility, letting God do His work in people's lives, because there is a day coming when people will no longer listen to sound teaching. They'll no longer endure it. They will come to a point where they say, "We want something different." I love the little phrase he uses: "*having itching ears.*" And because of this, "*they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.*"

A friend of mine said it's like a spiritual salad bar. People already know what they want. They choose what they want out of the selection of teachings and teachers and churches. They'll find someone who will oblige their tastes—as they go through this spiritual salad bar—someone to whom they're willing to listen.

The itching of the ear also conveys the idea that thoughts only lightly touch their ears. The truth does not penetrate deep into the inner life of the individual. Hebrews 4:12 tells us the Word of God is like a sword that cuts deeply into the hearts of men and women, separating the bone from the marrow. They don't want that! The day is coming when they won't endure that anymore. They'll find teachers who will accommodate them instead.

Our cities are full of people looking for their own sinful behavior to be embraced by the church—and there are churches willing to accommodate them and their sinful behavior. There

are churches that are willing to compromise what the Word actually says. Paul tells Timothy that the day is coming, but also tells him, “Endure. Keep at it.”

I love the idea of a pastor patiently enduring. One of the things we’ve had the privilege of doing is working with groups of pastors throughout a four-year commitment. On day one they’re in a different place. But patiently we keep taking them back to the Word, and the Word of God changes their lives and ministries. Yes, we are to rebuke, reprove and exhort, but we are to do so with patience.

Several years ago I was in the country of Ghana and we had the opportunity to hold a workshop with several pastors. The first day we met they were gathered around a television, writing feverishly as a pastor from Nigeria was speaking. His name is Pastor Chris and he is well-known all over Africa. He had previously been in South Africa where he invited all the single women to attend a meeting and receive pre-blessed rings.

But there was a fee to attend. Seven thousand women showed up. Seven thousand women. We did the math on it. I forget the South African rand calculation, but it was thousands and thousands of dollars that he collected by handing out these rings to these ladies, rings he had prayed over and kissed. That’s Pastor Chris.

These pastors were busy writing. They were excited to receive all this material. They did not have television out where they were, but they had heard about Pastor Chris. They said, “We will have months of preaching from this sermon.”

God in His sovereignty allowed us to make a five-year commitment to that group. But that’s where we started with them. We worked through several books of the Bible, twice a year, a week at a time. It’s amazing what God has done in these men’s lives. They recently invited us back, and Lynn and I will be going there in February to re-engage with them and have another opportunity to see where they are and encourage them, even as they will encourage us.

We are to patiently endure. But in the midst of these times, Paul says people will turn away from the truth. Then look at what he says in verse five. Not only does Paul give Timothy a heads up on what will take place, but he also gives him instruction on how he should respond. He says, “*As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*”

Wow. He gives him a four-point response. As you are faithfully preaching the Word with humility and patience, do this as well:

Be sober-minded. Walk with your head up. Look around. Make keen observations of what’s going on. Be sober-minded—be aware. Be observing and diagnosing so that when you’re proclaiming the Word of God, the Word will find its way into people’s lives.

Endure affliction. Endure suffering. Why? Because people are not going to want to hear the Word when their ears are being tickled. They want something different —something clever. This reminds me of Pastor John in Kenya who was a *rhema* preacher. You know what a *rhema* preacher is, right? *Rhema* is a word from God, so he would pray that God would give him a word. He'd walk into the pulpit and would give that word to the people. He would give it with enthusiasm and a lot of hallelujahs, and there would be singing and dancing. But afterward, if you asked the people what the sermon was about, no one would know—but they felt good about it.

Pastor John came to our training when Jeff Brewer was there. During our training John repented and said, “What have I been doing for all these years? I’ve been struggling every week to come up with a word, and many weeks it all sounds alike.” He repented, went back and started proclaiming the Word of God. Do you think his people liked it? No! They didn’t like it. They said, “Where’s our *rhema* pastor? We want the *rhema* guy back.”

Do you know what they did? They started attacking him. They started saying false things about him. They left the church. He came back to our training and was a little discouraged, but he said, “I will never change and go back to that way of teaching.” I’m looking forward to seeing John next month. I hope he’s still proclaiming the Word. I hope he hasn’t yielded to the pressure and to the suffering he’s going through. We must endure the hardship and affliction and be willing to suffer for doing what’s right.

Paul also says this: “Do the work of an evangelist.” Do we think about evangelism much? I mean, are we leaving every Sunday excited about who we’re going to share the gospel with this week? Or maybe it’s not even the gospel. Matthias Media, an organization we work with, has a thing called “Moving to the Right.”

They said, “Stop and think about having redemptive conversations with every person with whom you’re engaged.” What do I mean by that? You might say, “I’m concerned about you as a person. Where are you spiritually?” And asking how could God by His grace use me to bring that person one step closer to the cross? So it’s not like they have to pray the sinner’s prayer and then you’re done with them. No. May God use us in a patient way to communicate the Word of God to bring them one step closer to the cross. And once someone comes to the cross, when do they stop growing? Never. Until they reach maturity in Christ, which means when they’re with Him.

So how are we having these conversations based on the Word of God with people who are Christians, moving them to the right, moving them to maturity? I want you to speak that way into my life. So it’s not all “one shot.” Maybe some of us think evangelism is just share the

gospel, and if they don't come to Christ, we're done. That was the one bullet in my gun. No. Stop and think about it. This pulpit right here preaches the Word. It's done it for the 22 years I've been in this building. All you have to do is let the Word of God have this effect in your life: that it confronts you, it corrects you, it reproves you, it trains you in righteousness. In other words, all you have to do is let the Word do its work in your life.

And then when someone asks you, "What did you do over the weekend?" you can say, "I went to church where the Word was preached, and it was really helpful." They'll say, "Oh?" The conversation might not go any further, but share what's going on in your life. They are more than willing to share about their weekend experience. Be engaged with people in real dialogue—with your part of the dialogue based on what God is doing in your life through His Word and through His Spirit. Don't make it a mountain you can't climb. These are not Kilimanjaro moments. These are just the way we live life. So when he says to Timothy, "Do the work of an evangelist," he's actually saying to him, "Continue to present the gospel in your life, in your conversations—in the midst of ignorance and in the midst of opposition."

Can we do that? Can we go from here without making it so difficult, but simply sharing the goodness of the Word at work in our lives? You know how you'll come across to people? With authenticity. They won't feel like you're scripted; like somebody gave you four points to lay on them. They'll say, "I think this person is genuine. There's authenticity in what he's doing. I think he cares about my soul."

Fulfill your ministry. What's your gifting? Timothy, you're a preacher. Preach. Don't get weary in doing well. Fulfill it. Fulfill actually means filled to the top and overflowing. Fulfill it. Finish well. One of the things that's very dangerous and that I think Paul is describing here is the idea of spiritual drift in our lives. He's saying, "There are going to be churches that are going to drift away." Three times in his letter to Timothy Paul speaks of individuals who are hurting the church or who are attacking Paul or Timothy—and we see that he calls them out. I think that's a good thing. These people are demonstrating spiritual drift. But it's not always easy to identify spiritual drift. It can be a very slow movement over time.

It reminds me of when I was on a little boat, about 16 feet long, on the Nile River in Uganda. The captain of our little boat wanted us to get close to a bull elephant that was on the bank of the Nile River. There was a pod of hippos over there and some crocodiles over there. And he said, "I can just take this boat in there, very carefully, and get you really close so you can get a great picture of the bull elephant."

Sounded like a good idea to me! So he turned the motor off and kind of drifted into the pod. Bill Mills, who is 72 years old, was with me. He wanted to become 73. I'm the missionary

to Africa—this is nothing to me, right? Do you know what animal kills more people in Africa than any other? The hippo. So you knew that, right? Nothing new here.

As we got really close, and the hippos were starting to react to us being there. I was actually concerned, because this elephant's head looked as big as that back wall. And Bill's not saying anything. Then all of a sudden Bill turned around and looked at me. I said, "Yeah, that's close enough, isn't it?" What happened then is the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey would have said.

The captain pulled on the rope to start the motor, but nothing happened. He pulled and pulled and pulled. Now, the funny thing was, as he was pulling and we were growing more and more concerned, we looked up and realized, "Whoa. We had drifted quite a bit as he was trying to start that motor. We've gotten very close to those animals." Finally the boat started, and we're obviously here today to tell you the story.

This river excursion started as quite a nice adventure. We were just drifting. —It was like, "This is beautiful. This is different. We've never done this before. Look how close we are to this danger. This is fun." So we're just drifting and drifting. And then when we thought we had drifted just far enough, we thought all we had to do was stop and we would leave the danger zone.

Husband, what's your relationship like with your wife? Is there some drift going on? Wife? Church member with your church? It's just a little drift. It's not what it used to be, but we all go through that. There's a drift there and you can't always stop it when you want to stop. And Paul says, "Beware of the spiritual drift. Observe it, be aware of it, and be involved in these things to protect you from it: be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist and fulfill your ministry." Spiritual drift is very dangerous.

Paul says it another way in the book of Philippians: "Press on." Even when there is spiritual drift, Pastor David, press on. Church members, press on. Even when there's drift going on, don't leave. Patiently endure. Hold fast to the Word, Pastor, congregation. Continue in this work.

### **Preach the Word So You Will Finish Well**

Lastly, Paul says the third compelling reason to preach the Word is this that we might be able to finish well. He says, "I'm being poured out as a drink offering." Here he's using the language of one being sacrificed, flowing out of Numbers. It's the idea of spending and being spent that he describes in 2 Corinthians 12:15. He's come to the end of his life. His time to depart has come. He knows it's over for him. He understands where he is and what's going to

happen. He's come to the end and he communicates how he looks at the end of his life. He looks at it from the past: "*I have fought the good fight.*" He says, "Listen, I've been in battles."

If you follow the life of Paul, did he ever have any battles? Read the list there in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, where he spent time in the sea, in the dark and was beaten—none of us would go through that. He has fought the fight. He's been faithful. He also says, "*I have finished the race.*" He understands that he is coming to the end and has crossed the finish line.

Then lastly, he understands that in the future he will receive "*the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me...*" And not only to him. He's always thinking of others: "*...but also to all who have loved his appearing.*"

"Preach the Word, that you might be able to finish well. Timothy, Jesus finished well. I've finished well, by the grace of God. You can finish well." And we all can finish well, as we faithfully proclaim the Word of God.

Maybe as you sit there you're thinking, "Who is capable of doing this? Who is adequate for this?" Well, I don't think any of us are—except for the grace of God. Paul gives nine references just in this book to how God's strength makes us sufficient for this calling. God gave us a spirit of power. We share in the suffering for the gospel by the power of God. God is able to guard until that day. By the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. And on and on and on. He is there.

Look what he says even at the end. When he comes to the end of the book, in chapter four, verses 17 and 18, Paul says this: "God stood by me." Secondly he says, "God strengthened me." Thirdly he says, "God rescued me." What? "God rescued me, yes, because God brought safely into the Kingdom." Rescue meant something different to Paul than it means to most of us. Rescue meant, "He took me from where I was all the way into the Kingdom." That's what it means to be finally rescued. Do you believe Jesus will deliver you safely into His Kingdom?

Let me conclude as Paul concludes. Was his last will and testament just for Timothy? No. It was for us and all who teach the Word and all who have a desire to feed on the Word of God. It was an on-going legacy until Jesus, the righteous Judge, appears on the Day of Judgment. My friends, Paul's charge to Timothy is his charge to us. I know it's a charge to me. What an epitaph!

My mentor in ministry, about 30 years ago, said this to me: "Not many men finish well, Doug. Not many men finish well." I didn't really know what that meant 30 years ago like I do today. By the grace of God may we finish well by not allowing spiritual drift in our lives, by being occupied with the Word of God, proclaiming the Word of God and by enduring suffering and dry

points in our lives. See, those words that pastor gave me 30 years ago are constantly on my heart and mind. I'm reminded of them often.

At Lynn's request I have taken a crack at writing my own funeral service. She said, "You've done a lot of funerals over the years, Doug. What would you like at yours?" I said, "There are three things I really want to focus on: the importance of loving God and His Word, loving others and being a hard worker." That's it. Love God and His Word. Love people. Sounds like nothing new, right? And be a hard worker.

Just yesterday I read a brief story of Jim Elliot in a devotional that reminded me of his statement: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Preach the Word. Never give up on gospel ministry. Suffer for the gospel. Guard the gospel. Train others in the gospel. Continue in gospel work. Preach the Word. Amen? Amen.

In the presence of God, preach the Word. Fulfill your ministry. Finish well. That's what really matters. And as you think of calibrating your life and ministry this year, in some way may this Word have this effect in your life: that it's taught you, that it's reproved you, corrected you or trained you in righteousness, by His grace.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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