

“Persevering to the End”
II Timothy 4:5–10
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For this study we’ll be looking at II Timothy and this is the last letter we have that the Apostle Paul wrote. II Timothy 4:5–10 says *[5] As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

[6] For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. [7] I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

[8] 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.

[9] Do your best to come to me soon. [10] For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. This is the Word of our Lord.

In this study, we will be talking about persevering, being faithful, to the end of life. Paul teaches a lot on the concept of perseverance. He exhorts people often in his letters by telling them not to lose heart or don’t grow weary. It is a theme of his and really a theme of the Bible. We will be looking at Paul giving his own example of perseverance in this study and not so much his teaching on perseverance. So I’d like to start by giving a little bit of context to this text to set the stage of what we’ll be looking at.

Being that this is Paul’s last letter, he seems to know that his death is eminent. We don’t know if the Spirit had revealed to him about his death or if the verdict from Nero had already come down that he would be beheaded, but it seems he knows it’s only a matter of days, weeks or maybe months that he won’t be getting out of prison this time. He is in a dungeon and alone because some have gone off to other missionary journeys as well as some deserting him. He is writing to Timothy who seems to have been his most loyal, faithful disciple and Paul seems to have much affection for him. Timothy was a younger man, probably still single and he seemed to struggle with timidity. So, Paul is writing to exhort and encourage him but there is also a sense that Paul realizes he is one of the last few Apostles, is about to die and is passing the Gospel baton so to speak off to the next generation. That baton through the Word is still being passed to us, the next generation and will continue until Christ returns.

What can we learn from this faithful man of God about what it means to persevere all the way to the end? There are at least three things here. One is to always be faithful, two always be fighting hard and three always be finishing well. There some reading this that are much younger and you may be thinking ‘a study on persevering to the end? I’m just beginning.’ So I want to share this story with you that I heard from a faithful source about two years ago and I believe this took place in Sri Lanka.

There was a church service being held that had a little Sunday school class and they were talking about some theme, perhaps something along the lines of perseverance. The Sunday school teacher asked the little children a question that is a lot more pertinent in that area of the world than here in America and that was, ‘how many of you are willing to die for Christ if it came to that in your life?’ Most or all the children raised their hands and shortly after the Sunday school let out, they went to the church service and a terrorist had planted a bomb and many of those children were killed.

Why do I share that story? It is to remind us what most of us know that we often forget which is that we don't know when the end is going to come. The end might be 70 years away and that seems like a long time or it could be 70 minutes away so this persevering to the end does have implications for all of our lives right now because we never know when the end is going to come. So, it means we have to be faithful all the time.

The first point is to be faithful. Here Paul is writing a very personal letter in one sense to Timothy but Paul knew he was also writing a letter that would be for all the church so this really applies to all of us who read it and know Christ. Timothy was an official ordained minister of the church so he tells Timothy do your work, fulfill your ministry and be an evangelist and in a very real way this applies to all Christians, because all Christians are supposed to be ministers of the Gospel and evangelists, but I don't mean full time, 40 hours a week and you get paid for it. In a smaller role all Christians are supposed to minister to others – perhaps family, friends and neighbors.

This is really the story of Briarwood Presbyterian Church and by God's grace historically that is one of the things that has made this church great. As Frank and Barbara Barker led people to Christ, after that would be some type of training/mentoring to those they led to Christ to go lead others to Christ and it worked. As the Barkers had a Bible study in their home and led others to Christ, others would end up having Bible studies in their home and things multiplied, not perfectly, but faithfully. So all of us need to be faithful to whatever ministry the Lord has called us to no matter how small it may be.

I have three sub points under this idea of being faithful. The first is to be sober-minded. Don't let anything distract you from your devotion to Christ. The idea of intoxication really means to be controlled by something else, some other substance. We tend to think of being intoxicated with wine or alcohol and obviously that is wrong for the Bible says not to do this, but Paul doesn't have this in mind here. He uses this metaphor of being sober-minded as not to be controlled by anything. Don't be controlled by wine, lust, greed, self-centeredness, worry, fear, insecurity or anything else. We should only be controlled by Christ and filled, not with wine, but the Spirit, controlled by Him, passioned by Him and loyal to Him.

What is it that you are most tempted to be controlled by other than Christ? What is it that pulls at the affections of my heart? We don't all have the same temptations of the heart in the same way, but we should be wise enough to know what tends to pull our hearts away from Christ and tends to control us or distract us from the faithfulness of being faithful to Christ. Some sins look worse than others. For instance, public drunkenness is a pretty bad sin to struggle with because everyone is going to know about it and you might end up in the paper with a bad looking picture and your hair all messed up. Some sins are worse than others. Some sins are easier to hide than others but they might actually be worse, even though externally at the horizontal level they don't look near as bad.

From my experience, growing up and ministering in churches like this, we tend to struggle with more of the hidden sins and not as much as public sins. So I am encouraging all of you, myself included, that we need to think more of our sins at the vertical level than we do at the horizontal level because that's where it really matters. Is there anything that no one else knows, but the I know and the Lord knows that is really controlling me to some degree and I need to be sober-minded, getting my mind back on Christ, being centered on Him, not controlled by anything else that would distract me.

The second thing to really be faithful, to be tough, Paul says to endure hardship. I knew a missionary years ago in eastern Germany right after the wall fell and it was not a glamorous

place to live at all. He had a couple of young daughters who would often complain about things and he said 'here is what I would say to my daughters, life is hard and then you die.' I'm not sure that's the best way on how to encourage people but there is an element of truth to it. Life is going to be hard and then it will end, for most of us, with something else that is really hard. Basically, this man was trying to say to his daughters not to be shocked by hardship.

That is one of the mysterious hardships that comes to us Americans, is that we have been so richly blessed and we should be grateful. Don't feel guilty for being blessed. We are pilgrims in this world and this world is not our home, but it often feels like our home because God has been so kind and gracious to us. Enjoy the blessings but don't get addicted to the blessings. When the blessings get removed and you bump up against some hardship, we should not be shocked or surprised but ready to endure it. Endure hardship.

Imagine this; there was this high school running back who was amazingly super fast and could outrun anyone, seemingly. He also had a great offensive line who blocked well for him so he is setting all these state records and getting all these scholarship offers, but he realizes that college football is different than high school football and he has come through high school football pretty much unscathed. As he goes on these college recruitment tours he lets the coaches know he is interested in playing on their college team but then says to them 'I have one rule and that is I want you to guarantee me that I will never get hit. I don't like getting hit. I like making touchdowns, etc.' It will not work out for that guy because that just won't happen. He would not make it as a college football player.

My point is that when we as Christians want God to suddenly make our life easy, protecting you from all hardship that is a silly request, because the greatest Man who ever lived, the Lord Jesus Christ, suffered so horribly. The greatest follower of Christ that ever lived, the Apostle Paul, suffered a ton. We shouldn't be shocked. We need to be prepared. We need to be tough. We should be willing to persevere. There is a quote I love by a Baptist church planter in the Middle East, named Matt Stiles who said 'in most of the world when people think about sharing their faith, doing the work of an evangelist, what they fear is a raised fist for they might get some real violence but sadly back here in the west, we fear the raised eyebrow' – social ostracism. Someone may look at us funny or laugh at us or mock us. We need to be able to endure/persevere.

My third sub point is to be faithful means to be an evangelist. I know that all people don't have the gifting of an evangelist and that's not what I mean here. I just mean we need to be faithful to talk to people. If we were honest, myself included, most of us would say we are not as faithful in this area as we ought to be. I was meeting with a group of Samford students a couple of years ago and most of them were very new Christians. The good thing was they knew lots of non-Christians and they really did care about them. They had been brought out of the darkness and wanted to see their friends change but there was also this kind of intimidation factor. 'I don't want to be the weird guy talking about Jesus all the time.'

One night I was talking with them about being more faithful and they were also kind of fearful. I said 'Let's just pray that God would make it easy for us.' God may say 'no' but 'let's just pray that these guys you want to share the Gospel with, would initiate by asking you questions' because it does seem easier when others start the Jesus conversation with you, right? You might think that's the chicken's way out and maybe so but God tells us to ask whatever we want. I'm not guaranteeing that God will answer that prayer but we prayed it and within that week several of those guys had people approaching them wanting to ask them about Christ. Pray the Lord will take any fears you have away and that He will give you courage to be faithful but

there is nothing wrong to ask Him to make it a little easier on you. Perhaps you are new at it and you still need the training wheels. Speak about the name of Christ.

There is so much about technology today that is negative, that hurts us, holds us back and is a huge distraction, but there are a lot of benefits that come with all kinds of modern technology. You can share your faith over FaceBook and all the social media. Find some creative way to try and talk with others and influence them about Christ. Do your part, even if it's just in your family circle and a little wider than that. Be faithful.

Secondly, fight hard. II Timothy 4:6–7a says [6] *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.* [7] *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race.* It's a fight to be faithful in the Christian life. You have to persevere. You have to work at it. Salvation is free but sanctification costs you. Justification is all a work of God, totally passive for we just receive the gift. Sanctification, to grow to be faithful, is the work of God, but we have to work in conjunction with Him, in partnership with Him. It's not easy.

We have at least three enemies – the world, the flesh and the devil. This culture is sinful and pushes us in the wrong direction. Then I have indwelling sin, even the most sanctified person on the planet has this living inside of them. Often times we like what the world culture is doing and want to do them. The Bible tells us there really is this dark spiritual force that we are wrestling against and that's attacking us. In the Christian life, to be faithful, it's a fight.

In our text for this study, Paul kind of started this passage, exhorting Timothy and now he begins to, in part, share his own testimony. He basically shares with Timothy some of where he has been and done and gives this idea of a drink offering. In the Old Testament and even in some religions there were certain types of sacrifices that after the lamb or bull or goat was burned, a drink was taken, perhaps a glass of wine and then it was poured out on the fire. With a drink offering there is no ashes left so what is Paul saying here? He knows he is about to die and he is literally going to pour out his blood for Christ and this is in a sense his ancient way of saying 'leave it all out on the field – play to the whistle – go all out – live with no regrets.'

I know a group of guys who had this little phrase they would say. This may sound weird but hang with me. They would say 'If I was a dish rag full of water you could wring it out and out would come water' so if my life had so much potential to give glory to life, God I want You to wring out my life and get all the potential for Your glory out of my life. Spare not for price nor pain. Do whatever it takes to get glory out of my life, even if it's hard for me. Can we honestly pray that? We should pray that way.

Another thought, is I heard this from John Piper probably a decade ago at a conference. He said it is easier to be a pilgrim when you are in your 20s than when you are in your 40s. It's easier to be a pilgrim in your 40s than in your 60s, is it not? It's kind of like it's easier to go camping when you're a teenager than it is when you're 80. As you get older your body aches more and you have your creature comforts, but as we grow in Christ we ought to say I'm still a pilgrim here. I'm not going to get attached to the world. I'm ready and willing to suffer, to fight hard, to be faithful all the way to the end.

Part of what is beautiful here about Paul is that he doesn't seem to be mourning his death at all. He doesn't seem to be sad. He seems to have this anticipation. It seems like he has this attitude that he has been working his tail off for the Lord here on earth and he is kind of excited about going to heaven. He is looking forward to going to heaven knowing it's going to be great. Is that how you look at it, moving on to the next life? I recently heard a testimony of an older gentleman, an elder in this church, and it was very encouraging. There was no sense of fear or sadness but a sense of joy and faithfulness to the end, a confidence of wanting to see his Savior

face to face. Hearing that faithfulness from an older saint gives me courage and motivation to persevere to the end because it's worth it and that is what Paul is doing here.

Paul is not boasting or bragging on himself. It's like he is saying this in the Greek, where the good fight comes first. 'The good fight Timothy, I have fought it.' It's like he is saying 'I know what you're going through, been there, done that and you're right it's super hard to be faithful but it's also super worth it.' That is also what he is saying to us where others have been ahead of us, yes it's hard but yes it's worth it so don't grow weary in doing good because we will reap a harvest one day.

This is an important side note. Wouldn't it be great to have a personal mentor in your life like the Apostle Paul? We all need mentors. Even if you're old and mature it's still good to have someone a half a step ahead in faith that when you hit a road block in your life you can at least go and ask this person questions. That's what's nice about a church like Briarwood because there are plenty of people who can mentor you in the faith. Perhaps you think you are advanced and maybe you should be mentoring someone for that's one of the ways for you to be faithful in your ministry. Ask a younger person, would you like a mentor, can I pour into you and invest in you? We need that.

John Calvin said 'The perseverance of the saint it is a corporate venture.' We don't do it on our own. That's Calvin's way of saying that there is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian. We need each other and Paul even alludes to this. In II Timothy 4:9 Paul says, *[9] Do your best to come to me soon.* Paul the super Christian, seems to have no fear, gets beat half to death, gets thrown out of the city and still gets up to go back in the city to keep preaching, still wants to see Timothy. We all need friends to do this thing together. Lock arms with other believers and persevere for that's one of the ways to fight well.

The third point is to finish well. II Timothy 4:7-8 says *[7] I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8] 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.*

As you think of this think of an ultra-marathon which I'm sure they didn't have back in Paul's day but I think ultra-marathons are insane. These are people who run like 30 miles, 50 miles and even 100 miles. I have a friend who does this. The point is when you run 100 miles you don't run the whole thing without stopping. You have to stop for bathroom breaks, perhaps to change your shoes, to nap or whatever but the point is you keep going for within 30 to 40 hours you will finish 100 miles. Your feet may start bleeding but you keep going. Your ankles may start hurting or your legs may cramp but you keep going, you persevere and that's a good picture of the Christian life. It's not as much about the speed or intensity but it's the faithfulness of continuing to put one foot in front of the other. It's amazing what the Lord can do with a life like that.

Paul is at the end of his life and says 'It's been really hard but it's all been worth it.' I read that Napoleon, from a secular standpoint one of the greatest men to ever live, a great general, got to the end of his life and just talked about becoming worm food. That's all he had to look forward to. Gandhi, supposedly a great spiritual leader, an influential philosopher, got to the end of his life and talked about being confused and needing light. Here Paul is at the end of his life and he is ready to go, even to the point of the word he uses for his death is departure in II Timothy 4:6, which is like untying a boat as if to go on a trip, untying the stakes for your tent as you pack it up for your next journey. Paul is ready to go. Is that how you are going to face death?

What does it mean when Paul says ‘I’ve kept the faith’ in II Timothy 4:7? It has at least a two-fold meaning. The first is, stick to the simple, true, basic doctrine of the Gospel which is what you believe, teach and pass on to others. The Gospel is Christ dying for sinners. Don’t buy into whatever the latest cultural fad is – not just because it’s wrong but another reason is because it will probably change to something else really soon after and then you will have to change to. Just stick to the ancient Text, the ancient Truth – the true Gospel from the Word of God.

The second meaning is live the Gospel. Live faithfully. One of the phrases I have never forgotten from Reverend Frank Barker is ‘the Christian life is about the direction of your life and is not about the perfection of your life.’ I need to be moving forward to Jesus and I may sometimes look like a drunken driver, not literally, but weaving on the road, but at least I’m still heading toward Jesus for I’m not going to be perfect. I want to be faithful, genuine and sincere. Persevering in and believing in right doing – orthodoxy – orthopraxy.

Paul is talking about a crown in this text. He uses an illustration that comes from the Greco-Roman world. It could have come from two places. One, if a conquering general came home, they would often get a wreath, placed on the head like a crown, because they had won the battle – they conquered. Also, a similar thing would happen in the Olympic type games if you won. Paul is not saying only he will get a crown but every true Christian who loves His appearing is going to get a crown.

Paul is probably referring to glorification here. In justification we first trust in Christ and instantaneously we’re made fully, legally righteous in the cosmic courtroom of the universe, only by the grace of God and the blood of Jesus with His life, death and resurrection as our substitute. However long you live, from the day you trusted in Christ to the day you see Him face to face is that sanctification process that is hard, work and messy that we have to persevere in. But when you get to see Jesus face to face there is this next experience of this instantaneous transformation which is glorification. You are becoming like Jesus in the sense that you will not sin anymore and it will be impossible for you to sin.

We ought to look forward to heaven for a lot of reasons. The main reason ought to be to see Jesus face to face and to worship Him and love Him. I will tell you for me what is a close second and that is I’m sick of struggling with my own sin. I’m weary of that battle and I’m trying to be faithful but I’m ready for the battle to be over, won and done. I didn’t win but He won it for me. I can’t use that as an excuse to just lay down and give up now, for I have to keep fighting even when I feel like I’m losing sometimes, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. There is hope. We’re going to get there and the battle is going to be over. That is glorious, wonderful news. It ought to encourage us and put strength in our soul to persevere to the end no matter how hard it is.

Here is an application. II Timothy 4:10 says *[10] For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.* There are unfortunately, lots of people who confess Christ that for a while look like genuine Christians but they don’t persevere to the end. The Bible is very clear that you cannot lose your salvation. You may be up and down but you will never fully fall away. So the question isn’t did you lose your salvation but did you ever really have it? There are such things as a nominal Christian – a Christian in name only, someone that professes to be a Christian and falls away.

I John 2 :19 says *[19] They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.* Here John is talking about people leaving the church because they never really

of us. He isn't saying they left the Presbyterian church to join the Baptist church. John is saying they left the true church to go to the no-church because they abandoned the faith. This even happened to one of the men who had been a missionary with the Apostle Paul.

If that isn't significant enough, there was a really great disciple maker named Jesus Christ who had 12 men He put most of His time and energy into and one of them didn't make it (Judas Iscariot). If it can happen in a circle that close to the Lord Jesus Himself, it can certainly happen to those around us. I'm not saying this to give out some fear and trembling that we can't have any hope or trust. No, this is all about Hope, but it's about a sober, realistic Hope that I have to be persevering. How do I know I'm a real Christian? Persevere to the end, for that's the clearest evidence.

How do I know I'm a real Christian is a question I get a lot in college ministry. One guy ask me 'how do I know for sure I'm a Christian?' There are different good ways, obviously not contradictory that you can answer that question with passages you can take them to, but this is a good one – are you longing for His appearing? You are not sinlessly perfect but do you really want Him to come back and do you understand the implications of that and what all that means? If you do, then you do want Him to come back. You will want to see Him face to face. That is one of the clearest signs of genuine Christianity – to be longing for His return.

Are you longing for His return or are you getting distracted with perhaps not being as far in your career as you would like to or wanting to be a little more successful or wanting a little bit better name, reputation and prestige or wanting to make more money for that lake house or wanting to get married? It's not wrong necessarily to want some of those things but it is wrong if you want them in such a way that says 'Jesus can you just put the brakes on until I get there?' It's like going to a great steak restaurant that you have never been to and on the way to the restaurant your friend say 'you know they have great rolls here too.' You're thinking 'ok I like rolls but I'm not coming for the rolls, I'm coming for the ribeye.' Then you get there and the waitress says 'we just ran out of rolls.' If you get mad about them not having rolls and don't want to eat there anymore, then something is wrong with you and I don't care if you're vegetarian. The ribeye will make it worth it, whereas if the rolls come and are that good that you don't want to eat the ribeye, then there is something wrong there too.

Let's not get distracted with ribeye and it's fine to enjoy the gifts of God because that's part of what makes Him such a good God. God is so generous that He overwhelms us with good gifts but part of the danger in having so many gifts and those of us who live in America in the 21st century have been overwhelmed with gifts, is they can distract us from our pure devotion to Christ and we don't ever want that to happen. Don't love the gifts more than the Giver. Don't get addicted to the gifts, hold them loosely. Hold onto the King tightly. Worship Him, love Him and look forward to His return.

In conclusion, whether your 70 and can identify with some of what Paul is saying here for you feel like the end is near for you or you think you have at least 70 more years to go, the application is the same. You have to persevere, fight hard and be sober-minded. It is not going to be easy. Even if you have been faithful for the last 70 years, it is not a guarantee you will be faithful for the next 20. It would be nice if it was but it doesn't work that way. Here is what is so frustrating in one sense about this instruction – sometimes I look at the last 40 years and it's been a rough ride so far so I don't know how encouraged I am for the next 40 years. We all have to say that by God's grace, sober-minded, I'm going to persevere, be faithful and will fight hard to the end but here's the foundation of our faithfulness, fighting well and finishing well – it's the faithfulness of Christ.

Paul is an amazing example, probably the best example we have of how to finish well except for the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only perfect example we have, right? Hebrews 12:1–3 says [1] *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. [3] Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.* Jesus was faithful, endured hostility and faithful to the end in our place. He suffered in immeasurable ways because He suffered the wrath of God in the place of all His people. It wasn't fun. It wasn't easy, but He persevered to the end. When I think of His faithfulness it motivates and strengthens my faithfulness.

Why should we be faithful? It is because we love Him and long for His return. Think about this; why was He faithful? It was because He loved us and loved us to the end. His love ought to lead to our love and His faithfulness ought to lead to our continued faithfulness. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we are in love with You and we are not near as in love with You as we ought to be. We pray You would use Your Spirit, Your Psalms, Your Word to strengthen us, grow us and sanctify us. Would You give us great courage and hope when we think about the cross and meditate on Your faithfulness in our place? What an example You are, what a Savior You are and we give You all the thanks, all the praise, and all the glory and only in Your Name, we pray Amen.

Power Point

ALWAYS BE FAITHFUL, BE FIGHTING HARD, BE FINISHING WELL

I. Faithful (5)

- A. Be sober
- B. Be Tough
- C. Be Evangelistic

II. Fight Hard (6–7a)

III. Finish well (7b–8)

- A. Stick to the true Gospel—*don't fall into false teaching; love this Bible; read; study; meditate; obey*
- B. Live the Gospel—*live faithfully; it's not about perfection of your life, it's about the direction of your life*

Application (10)

CONCLUSION

Faithfulness, finishing well, fighting hard to the end is founded on the faithfulness of Christ.