LET’S BEGIN HERE

Death lurked in the shadows . . . and Paul knew it. Dropped into a dungeon during the reign of deranged Nero, Paul spent his last days lonely and cold . . . but not desperate and despondent. Writing by lamplight, Paul penned his “swan song” — one final, passionate letter to his “beloved son” Timothy (2 Timothy 1:2). A last will and testament of sorts, 2 Timothy is filled with strong exhortations, insightful instructions, and intimate reflections — and it spurred Timothy onward in his race of faith. It will do the same for us . . . if we hear and heed its admonitions. Then, when death comes, like Paul we will declare: “I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (4:7).

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. Let’s Learn Some Valuable Information

Written or spoken, profound or perfunctory, funny or serious, last words serve as an enduring memorial to the dead. For that reason, we should never take a person’s final words lightly. This is especially true when a person takes the time to carefully set down on paper his or her parting words, as was the case of Paul and his second letter to Timothy.

Quotable

The apostle Paul clearly determined to die well. He fought the fight and kept the faith. Let’s do the same.

— Charles R. Swindoll
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Urgent Words from a Dungeon

DOORWAY TO HISTORY
Doing Time in a First-Century Hoosegow

The Mamertine Prison could have been called the “House of Darkness.” Few prisons were as dim, dank, and dirty as the lower chamber Paul occupied. Known in earlier times as the Tullianum dungeon, its “neglect, darkness, and stench” gave it “a hideous and terrifying appearance,” according to Roman historian Sallust.¹

It sounds like suffice punishment to spend any amount of time in Mamertine, but prisoners in the ancient world were rarely sent to prison as punishment. Rather, prisons typically served as holding cells for those awaiting trial or execution. We see this throughout Scripture. Mosaic Law made no provision for incarceration as a form of punishment. Joseph languished in an Egyptian prison for more than two years, bearing the burden of a false charge of rape (Genesis 39:19–20; 41:1). Jeremiah was imprisoned under accusation of treason (Jeremiah 37:11–16) but was transferred to the temple guardhouse after an appeal to King Zedekiah, who sought to protect the prophet (37:17–21). And though Jeremiah was later thrown into a cistern, the purpose was to kill him, not imprison him (38:1–6).

During Paul’s first imprisonment, he awaited trial before Roman governors Felix and Festus (Acts 24–26). He then was under house arrest in Rome for two years (28:30), awaiting an appearance before Nero. Scholars believe Paul was released sometime in AD 62 because the Jews who had accused him of being “a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension” (24:5) didn’t press their case before the emperor. During Paul’s second imprisonment, however, in the Mamertine dungeon, he had apparently had a preliminary hearing and was awaiting a final trial. He didn’t expect acquittal (2 Timothy 4:16); he expected to be found guilty, in all likelihood, for hating mankind. From there, Paul believed only his execution would be left, which was probably carried out in AD 68 (4:6–7).²

2. Let’s Get an Overview of Second Timothy
Paul wrote this second letter to Timothy to encourage the young pastor to remain faithful to his ministry in Ephesus and to exhort him to remain loyal to his father in the faith, Paul. Paul knew his time was short. That’s why his last words are so personal and passionate . . . and filled with urgency. Guard the treasure! (2 Timothy 1:14). Endure hardship! (2:3). Continue the journey! (3:14). Proclaim the Word! (4:2).

Guard the Treasure (2 Timothy 1:1–2, 13–14)
**PAUL’S SWAN SONG**

Urgent Words from a Dungeon

*2 Timothy 1:1–2, 13–14; 2:3–4; 3:12–15; 4:1–2, 21–22*

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*Endure Hardship (2:3–4)*

*Continue the Journey (3:12–15)*

*Proclaim the Word (4:1–2, 21–22)*

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**LET’S LIVE IT**

Even with his life poised under the impending edge of the ax, Paul’s passion for Christ and the gospel was just as steely as it was when he first encountered the risen Savior (Acts 9:1–9). And Paul wanted Timothy to know—before the hobnailed sandals of the executioner echoed above the apostle’s head—that if the young man was to finish strong in his race of faith, he would need to be just as passionate about Christ and the gospel.

What was true for Timothy is true for us. So, we must keep these four facts and admonitions in mind as we run the race of faith.

- **There’s still a treasure to guard.** Guard it diligently and never loosen your grip.

- **There’s still hardship to endure.** Endure it patiently and never run scared.

- **There’s still a journey to continue.** Continue it faithfully and never get sidetracked.

- **There’s still truth to proclaim.** Proclaim it courageously and never get tongue-tied.
Paul’s Swan Song
Urgent Words from a Dungeon


How would you evaluate your dedication to the four admonitions mentioned on the previous page? Place an X in the boxes that apply.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Not Dedicated</th>
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Based on this initial evaluation, what are you hoping to learn or gain from our remaining study of 2 Timothy?

ENDNOTES
2. Paul must have languished in the Mamertine Prison for a couple of years before his beheading (as befitting his status as a Roman citizen), which, according to tradition, occurred on the Ostain Way about three miles outside the city. Eusebius notes that Paul and Peter were executed during the same Neronian persecution, though Peter was crucified upside down, as he requested. See Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 1, 2.25.6, 8 and 3.1.2, trans. Kirsoff Lake (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), 181, 183, 191.
SECOND TIMOTHY

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
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<td>Christ in 2 Timothy</td>
<td>Paul’s passing of the ministry torch to Timothy and encouraging him to stay faithful in the midst of hardship</td>
<td>Illustrations of the truth (soldier, athlete, farmer, workman, vessel, servant)</td>
<td>Suffering for the truth</td>
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<td>Theme</td>
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Jesus is the Judge of the living and the dead, who strengthens us in times of weakness and rescues us in times of danger (3:11; 4:1, 17).

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LET’S BEGIN HERE

Prison wasn’t something new for Paul. He had previously spent at least four years confined by Roman authorities (Acts 24:27; 28:30). However, his time in the Mamertine dungeon was something new. It was a cold, dark, foul-smelling place; little more than a hole in the ground under the crowded streets of Rome. And though Dr. Luke had cared for Paul’s physical needs (2 Timothy 4:11), the apostle longed to see his spiritual son. Timothy still ministered in Ephesus, some 830 miles to the southeast. Ministry was still troublesome. Heretical hounds still barked and bit. And the naturally reserved Timothy had grown weary and timid. A few tender words from his mentor were just the boost of confidence and courage the young pastor needed.

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. Spiritual Father . . . Beloved Son (2 Timothy 1:1–2)

Before Paul’s letter reached Ephesus, Timothy, no doubt, had heard of the great Roman fire and Nero’s persecution. The young pastor likely knew that his friend was imprisoned and wasn’t likely to escape the bloodlust of Nero’s madness. So when a courier arrived—Tychicus, perhaps (2 Timothy 4:12)—bearing a letter with Paul’s seal, Timothy must have opened it with abandon.

Quotable

Grace is God’s gift to the worthless.
Mercy is God’s ministry to the helpless. Peace is God’s promise to the anxious.

— Charles R. Swindoll
2. The Refreshing Power of Encouragement (2 Timothy 1:3–5)

It was because of God’s grace and mercy that Paul could be at peace. Standing in the center of God’s will (2 Timothy 1:1), Paul had no need to worry. Come what may, Christ was all in all. How else can we account for the apostle’s courage on death row and his encouragement of Timothy?

*Paul adopted an attitude of gratitude* (2 Timothy 1:3).

*Paul cultivated a heart of worship* (1:3).

*Paul maintained a clear conscience* (1:3).

“I constantly remember to pray” (1:3).

“I long to be with you” (1:4).

“I am aware of the faith that is within you” (1:5).

“I have great respect for you” (1:5).
3. A Needed Reproof (2 Timothy 1:6–7)
Timothy was a man of authentic faith, but he tended to wither under the heat of heretics. So after a word of affirmation, Paul offered a word of inspiration—encouragement to hold high the standard of authentic faith.

LET’S LIVE IT
It took courage to live for Christ in the first century. It’s takes courage to live for Christ in the twenty-first century. While we may never face physical persecution, we live in a world that is increasingly hostile to the things of Christ. This is one reason why mature believers need to actively fulfill three roles in the lives of less mature believers—roles Paul fulfilled in Timothy’s life.

First, we must fulfill the role of intercessor. Mature Christians pray not only for themselves but for others as well.

For whom do you constantly pray? When’s the last time you told that person you were praying for him or her?

Second, we must fulfill the role of mentor. Mature Christians pour their lives into younger believers to help them grow in the faith.

Whom do you mentor in the faith? If no one, why not? Whom might you mentor?
If you do mentor someone, what are you doing to mentor that younger believer? How rewarding is the relationship?

Third, we must fulfill the role of encourager. Mature Christians have longer histories with Christ and therefore can use their perspective and wisdom to encourage others.

Whom can you encourage this week? Thinking of this person, write down three or four things you know would be an encouragement to him or her.
LET’S BEGIN HERE

Following Christ ought to come with a warning label: Christianity is a battleground, not a playground. For thirty years, Paul had “fought the good fight” (2 Timothy 4:7), suffering for the cause of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23–27). Paul’s heroics are writ large over our faith, making it easy to conclude that every believer ought to be or have been just like him—charging the gates of hell with a bucket of ice water. Not so. Some of God’s choicest saints were reluctant (like Moses), rebellious (like Jonah), and fearful (like Timothy). Despite his timidity, Timothy was called to follow God onto the battleground. To do so, the young man needed courage to stand for Christ, even if it meant suffering.

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. An Important Clarification

The message of 2 Timothy 1:8–12 is stark in its simplicity: Stiffen your resolve! That’s what Paul was telling Timothy to do—Stand strong! Be brave! Buck up! And in a society that’s becoming spiritually soft and passive, it’s a message we’d be wise to heed, too . . . with one important caveat: we can’t do it apart from God.

Quotable

The apostle Paul clearly determined to die well. He fought the fight and kept the faith. Let’s do the same.

—Charles R. Swindoll
2. A Call to Courage (2 Timothy 1:8–12)
We’ve already said that Christianity isn’t for cowards. God has given us the Spirit of power (2 Timothy 1:7); therefore, we shouldn’t live our lives slinking in the shadows but rather standing boldly in the sunlight. Yet Timothy was afraid. Paul was in prison, and Christians in Rome were being persecuted. To Timothy, his choices were either shame or suffering. Paul told Timothy to pick suffering and gave him five action steps to stiffen his resolve.

Step Number 1: Do not be ashamed of the name of Christ (2 Timothy 1:8).

GETTING TO THE ROOT
The Shame of Being Ashamed
Paul didn’t say Timothy was already acting shamefully. Had that been the case, Paul would have used the present imperative tense of epaischynomai, which when used with the negative, forbids the continuation of an act already begun. Rather, Paul used the aorist subjunctive tense of the Greek term and paired it with the negative to forbid an act not yet begun. In this sense, Paul’s command—“do not be ashamed”—is a warning.

Paul used epaischynomai in this way four times in 2 Timothy (1:8, 12, 16; 2:15), suggesting that Timothy and the Ephesian Christians were tempted either to actively turn away from the gospel or passively fail to stand up for the gospel. We can learn more by looking at the root of the word, which doesn’t convey the feeling of embarrassment as much as the idea of being disgraced in public. In other words, the pressure for Timothy and the rest of the Ephesian church to become clandestine Christians came from public opinion.

Step Number 2: Do not be ashamed of the people of God (2 Timothy 1:8).
Step Number 3: Be willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8).

Step Number 4: Be sure your life is anchored in sovereign grace (1:9–11).

Step Number 5: Be convinced that God will vindicate your life (1:12).

LET’S LIVE IT

Stiffen your resolve! Paul gave us five steps to do just that. All that’s left is for you to answer one question—a question only you can answer: Are you willing to give God your very best? God gave His best—His Son, His grace, His gospel. What about you? Is God worth your best?

If you’re willing to start giving or continue giving God your very best, read the following passages and write in your own words the “resolutions” in each. Begin this week resolving to live by these new goals.

Proverbs 6:16–19
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Straight Talk to the Timid and Reluctant
2 Timothy 1:8–12

Micah 6:8

Philippians 4:4–8

2 Peter 1:5–8

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LET’S BEGIN HERE

Time was short. The end was near. At any moment, the executioner could yank Paul away, his letter to Timothy unfinished. Paul had to write quickly, but carefully. It’s foolish for prisoners on death row to waste words. Paul didn’t. Every verse in 2 Timothy, including the last six verses of chapter 1, echoes an everlasting truth: “All that is not eternal is eternally out of date.” 1 To that end, Paul reminded Timothy (and us) that only two things are eternal and worthy of lifelong investment.

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. A Brief Review

Before we look at the two eternal investments discussed in 2 Timothy 1:13–18, let’s review what we’ve learned thus far.
2. A Passionate Charge Regarding the Truth (2 Timothy 1:13–14)
The truth of God’s Word is eternal (Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35). For that reason, as an apostle of God’s gospel, the suffering Paul endured was only temporary (2 Timothy 1:8, 12). Condemned to die an earthly death, Paul invested the eternal truth of the gospel into the hands of his protégé with a dual command.

*Retain the Standard of Sound Words* (2 Timothy 1:13)

*Guard . . . the Treasure* (1:14)

3. A Realistic Reminder Regarding People (2 Timothy 1:15–18)
The truth of the gospel is eternal and worthy of our investment. So are people, who possess eternal souls and have eternity in their hearts (Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 3:11). But people carry a risk unlike those associated with God’s Word—our investment in people doesn’t always pay dividends . . . but sometimes it does.

*Those Who Disappoint Us* (2 Timothy 1:15)

*Those Who Refresh Us* (1:16–18)
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Two Eternal Investments
2 Timothy 1:13–18

A CLOSER LOOK
Praying for the Dead
Much has been made of the change of tense between verses 16 and 18 in 2 Timothy 1—“the household of Onesiphorus” and “what services he rendered at Ephesus” (emphasis added). This has led some to speculate that Onesiphorus had died—perhaps as a result of Nero’s persecution—by the time Paul wrote to Timothy. Those who hold to this view see in Paul’s prayer—“the Lord [Christ] grant to [Onesiphorus] to find mercy from the Lord [the Father] on that day” (2 Timothy 1:18)—a prayer for the dead.

Not so.
Paul’s prayer for mercy does refer to the day of judgement (1:12; 4:8). But nowhere in Scripture, whether by example or instruction, are Christians led to pray for the dead. So whether Onesiphorus had died or Paul was simply blessing Onesiphorus past deeds, as the apostle did with the very much alive Stephanas (1 Corinthians 16:15, 17), Paul’s prayer is better seen as a reflection of Jesus’ beatitude in Matthew 5:7; “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

LET’S LIVE IT
Investing is risky business. There’s no guarantee you’ll earn dividends. In fact, you could lose the shirt off your back. But Paul advised us on two investments that are always worth making because they are the only two things that will last into eternity—God’s Word and people. So let’s follow Paul’s example and invest in the eternal treasure of the truth and in the eternal souls of people.

What are you doing to “retain the standard of sound words” and “guard the treasure”?

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Do you have, or have you had, an Onesiphorus in your life? If so, write a prayer of thanksgiving for him or her.

To whom can you be an Onesiphorus?

ENDNOTE
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Two Eternal Investments
2 Timothy 1:13–18

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LET’S BEGIN HERE

Some things are easy to hear, bringing comfort and encouragement to smooth life’s rough edges. Other things are difficult to hear, telling of pains to endure and troubles to face. We grin at the one and grimace at the other. But if we’re honest, we know that growth comes through overcoming difficulties — by trudging down the rock-strewn, overgrown, untrodden path that takes us to vistas unseen. When Paul laid out a path of suffering for his protégé, Timothy, the young pastor may have grimaced. But Paul promised more than pain. The path, should Timothy choose it, would take him to heights unknown — to glory after death and to greater maturity in life. The same awaits us, if we choose the rough and rugged road of Christ.

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. When Preparing for the Difficult Journey (2 Timothy 2:1–2)

God didn’t promise to keep us from suffering (John 17:15–16); He promised to sustain us through suffering (Romans 8:28–39). Hardship is useful in the hands of God. “The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering,” Simone Weil wrote, “but a supernatural use for it.”¹ One of those supernatural uses is to lead us to greater maturity.

What We Must Pack in Our Luggage (2 Timothy 2:1)

How We Can Help Others Prepare for the Trip (2:2)
2. When Traveling on the Rough and Rugged Road (2 Timothy 2:3–6, 8–10)

Being strong in grace and enlisting others makes the difficult journey easier, but we must still make the journey. To aid Timothy, Paul encouraged his young protégé to consider the suffering of others and remember the promises of God.

Stay Focused like a Soldier (2 Timothy 2:3–4)

Be Obedient like an Athlete (2:5)

Work Hard like a Farmer (2:6)

Suffer Hardship like Christ and Paul (2:8–10)
LET’S LIVE IT

The way of faith isn’t easy; it’s narrow and strewn with obstacles. And though the rough and rugged road is meant to mature us, it’s often tempting to take the first exit and walk a while on the well-trodden path of the world. How can we stay on the right road when it seems unbearable to take another step? Paul offered two suggestions.

First, pause and take a moment to reflect on the truths of Scripture (2 Timothy 2:7).

What do you normally do, or what questions do you normally ask, whenever you’re suffering or it seems God has left you?

What did Paul advise in 2 Timothy 2:7? Why?

Second, hold fast to the promises of Scripture (2:11–13).

Read these passages and record God’s promises to you.
Matthew 6:30–33
Matthew 11:28–29
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Traveling a Rough and Rugged Road
2 Timothy 2:1–13

John 10:27–29

John 14:2–3

Romans 8:11

1 Corinthians 10:13

James 1:5

1 John 1:9

ENDNOTE
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Traveling a Rough and Rugged Road
2 Timothy 2:1–13

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“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is childish folly. Long after broken bones have healed, broken spirits remain broken. Words are powerful things. With them, we can lead people to life-freéing truth or life-imprisoning falsehood. Words are dangerous, especially in the mouths of charlatans and the duplicitous. That’s why Paul was concerned about certain men in the church who had “gone astray from the truth” (2 Timothy 2:18). They were teaching lies, and Timothy needed to counter both—the men and the lies—by presenting himself as an approved workman of God, “accurately handling the word of truth” (2:15) and always remembering that God is building a “firm foundation” (2:19).

1. Seeing the Big Picture
Paul didn’t know about cotton candy, but he did know preachers who peddled something very much like cotton candy—a false gospel that “upset the faith of some” (2 Timothy 2:18). Before we look at the details of what Timothy was to do about these false teachers, though, let’s get an overview of 2 Timothy 2:14–19.

An approved workman of the Word will always do a self-evaluation in the Word before preaching the Word.
—Charles R. Swindoll
2. Explaining the Role of Accurate Messengers (2 Timothy 2:14–15)
Paul was a practical preacher; he expected Timothy to be a practical preacher. So to deal with Christian charlatans, Paul instructed his young protégé to focus on the two most important aspects of his ministry: the public proclamation of the truth and the personal mastery of it.

GETTING TO THE ROOT

To Cut a Straight Road

The Christian workman’s primary responsibility in public is the careful exposition of God’s Word. But his primary responsibility in private is to practice what he preaches.

Most scholars interpret the verb orthotomeo, which translates to “accurately handling,” as a reference to preaching, since the object is “the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Ancient Greek usage by Sophocles supports this interpretation. But orthotomeo, which literally means “to cut straight,” was typically used by Greeks to describe a straight path cut over valleys and hills or how a farmer plowed a straight furrow in the ground.

Used in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, orthotomeo conveys the idea that submission to God results in the Lord’s straightening out the pathways of life (Proverbs 3:6). But also, righteous behavior clears the way for life, allowing the righteous one to walk a straight road (11:5). With this understanding, we could translate 2 Timothy 2:15: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, getting the word of truth straight in your preaching and straight in your practice.”
3. Exposing the Wrongs of False Teachers (2 Timothy 2:16–19)
We all must balance our books before God. For those engaged in ministry, the ledger will either read “approved” or “unapproved.” The former, like Timothy, need not be ashamed. The latter, like Hymenaeus and Philetus, need to be deeply ashamed.

LET’S LIVE IT
It’d be nice to think that heretics and heresies were the stuff of the first-century church. But “worldly and empty chatter” and “wrangling about words” continues today, often disrupting the faith of many. But like Timothy, we have two promises from God, guaranteeing that despite heretics and phonies, the foundation of His church stands firm and cannot be destroyed.

First, the true church consists of those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, the true church is filled with those who abstain from wickedness.

Do you belong to Christ? If so, how did you come to Him?
As one who belongs to Christ, how can you keep from wickedness, according to the following passages?

Psalm 119:9

1 Peter 3:14–17

ENDNOTE
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Accurately Handling the Word
2 Timothy 2:14–19

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LET’S BEGIN HERE

The world is in crisis because leadership is in crisis. The crisis of leadership, however, is not one of competency but of character. And since people in positions of power are most often judged by their competency and not by their character, it shouldn’t surprise us that scandals and legal battles often embroil our leaders. Character is no longer king; our culture champions competency. Scripture, however, champions character. So, for those of us who wish to lead in a Christian manner, character must always trump competency. That’s the message of the last seven verses of 2 Timothy 2.

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. An Understanding of the Context

Paul was a master wordsmith, hammering out analogies to help Timothy understand the responsibilities of those who lead in Christ’s church—not just the what (competency) but also the why (character) of leadership. Chapter 2 of 2 Timothy is filled with such analogies.

Occasionally, competence is more important than character. But not when it comes to leadership.

— Charles R. Swindoll
2. Vessels in a Large House (2 Timothy 2:20–22)
Paul’s analogies of the good soldier, competitive athlete, hardworking farmer, and approved workman all related to Timothy’s role as a leader. In 2 Timothy 2:19, Paul applied a different analogy to focus on what God was (and is) doing—building “the firm foundation” of His church. Paul then expanded that architectural metaphor in verses 20–22, refocusing his attention back on Timothy.

3. Servants of the Lord (2 Timothy 2:23–26)
Though he remained focused on Timothy, Paul changed the metaphor in 2 Timothy 2:23–26 from an honorable vessel in God’s house to a gentle servant in God’s house.
LET’S LIVE IT

Wrestling with false teachers according to their methods is like wrestling with a hog. You both get muddy, but the hog likes it. To stay out of the mud, we need to ask and answer three hard questions about our character.

First, Am I a vessel of honor or dishonor?
Second, Do I stop quarrels or start quarrels?
Third, Will I model gentleness or harshness when called upon to confront or correct others?

In your life right now, would you say you’re a vessel of honor or dishonor? Check the one that applies.
Honor: ____________________
Dishonor: ____________________

If you’re a vessel of dishonor, what do you need to do to “cleanse” yourself? (Hint: see 1 John 1:9 for where to start.)

If you’re a vessel of honor, what are you doing to keep yourself clean?

When wronged, what is your natural reaction? Does your reaction square with 2 Timothy 2:24 and 1 Peter 2:21–23? If not, what do you need to do to become more Christlike in this regard?
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LET’S BEGIN HERE

Reality in the raw—that’s what the Bible gives us. It tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And the truth it tells includes a ghastly story of godlessness. Human depravity marches across its pages. Sadly, many have grown so accustomed to watching the parade, whether in the Bible or the culture, that we’ve become numb to the depths of debauchery residing in the human heart. We’re no longer shocked and outraged. Perhaps that’s why the Bible sometimes backs up the truck and unloads a descriptive deluge of indecency on us. That’s exactly what we get in 2 Timothy 3:1–9.

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. A Harsh Reality We Must Realize (2 Timothy 3:1)
Early Christians, not unlike Christians today, believed the Lord’s return was just moments away (Acts 1:6). And with good reason. Even so, Jesus instructed: stop looking to the sky; build His kingdom until He returns (1:7–8). Why? Because time is running short.

2. An Unvarnished Exposé of “Last Days” Depravity (2 Timothy 3:2–7)
As we look at Paul’s exposé of “last days” depravity, remember his list of nineteen godless qualities isn’t the musings of a desperate man in a dungeon; it’s a description from the Holy Spirit of the reality of our times.

“In our natural depravity, we are first and foremost lovers of self—not lovers of God. Praise God for His supernatural empowerment to change!”
—Charles R. Swindoll
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Depravity on Parade
2 Timothy 3:1–9

“Lovers of money”

“Boastful”

“Arrogant”

“Revilers”

“Disobedient to parents”

“Ungrateful”

“Unholy”

“Unloving”

“Irreconcilable”

“Malicious gossips”
“Without self-control”

“Brutal”

“Haters of good”

“Treacherous”

“Reckless”

“Conceited”

“Lovers of pleasure”

“[Not] lovers of God”
3. A Biblical Example of Opposition (2 Timothy 3:8)
The description of depravity in the last days (2 Timothy 3:2–5) and the warning about those who enter into spiritually weak women’s houses (3:6–7) were startling—and theoretical. So to illustrate just how base and vile false teachers can be, Paul provided an example from history.

LET’S LIVE IT

We sometimes get distracted and discouraged because evil seems to have the upper hand. But God specializes in overcoming overwhelming odds. Jannes and Jambres were eventually found out for the frauds they were (Exodus 7:12; 8:18; 9:11), and so, too, will false teachers be in the last days (2 Timothy 3:9). Falsehood may be fashionable for a while, but in time, the folly of falsehood becomes “obvious to all.”

What did Jesus promise in Matthew 16:18 and 28:20?

After studying 2 Timothy 3:1–9, how encouraged or discouraged are you about the present and the future? Explain.
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Depravity on Parade
2 Timothy 3:1–9

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LET’S BEGIN HERE

Facing reality in the raw, as we did in the previous message, can damper even the most hardy spirits. It can convince us that these days of darkness are a deepening shadow. Not so! Evil may go “from bad to worse” (2 Timothy 3:13), but God has limited its progress (3:9) and commanded us to soldier on for truth (3:14). It’s the only way to make a durable difference. Don’t be distracted by difficulties or hampered by hardships; don’t despair because you don’t have the highest IQ, the richest portfolio, or the finest pedigree. Rather, master a few great, majestic, unchanging, simple, glorious truths—and let them master you.

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. The Goal: To Make a Lasting Difference

Passion. It’s the stuff of which dreams are made . . . and accomplished. It’ll change the world. But change doesn’t just happen. It comes from possessing the right qualities and the determination to pursue the right goals. And the goal for believers, according to Paul? To make a lasting difference in the lives of those around us.

Quotable

To make a lasting difference we must hold to the truth, stand on our convictions, and refuse to be fearful.
— Charles R. Swindoll
2. The Past: To Model the Truth We’ve Been Taught (2 Timothy 3:10–11)
Looking to the past, we find the courage to make a lasting difference. A powerful link exists between remembrance and continuance—a link forged on the anvil of a heart that’s learned truth. Paul instructed us, therefore, to learn from the past—to model the truth we’ve been taught, regardless of tests and trials.

GETTING TO THE ROOT

Living Someone Else’s Lifestyle

The Greek verb parakoloutheo, translated “you followed” in 2 Timothy 3:10, has a broad range of meaning. It can either mean “to follow one as to be always at his side, to follow faithfully (a standard or rule),” or “to conform one’s self to.”¹ In other words, parakoloutheo could mean to follow physically—to walk beside someone through life’s travails; to follow intellectually—to be a student of a mentor; or to follow spiritually—to be a disciple of a master’s way of life.

Timothy fulfilled all three—he was Paul’s true comrade, student, and disciple. However, the emphasis in 2 Timothy 3:10–11 is on the last meaning—Timothy was a dedicated disciple who followed Paul’s lifestyle.
3. The Future: To Face Tomorrow Realistically (2 Timothy 3:12–13)
Looking to the future, we find the conviction to make a lasting difference. It’s axiomatic that the godly will provoke the ire of the worldly and that things will go from bad to worse. But Paul prepared us for the future—to face tomorrow realistically, regardless of how hard the times become.

4. The Present: To Be Ready for Whatever May Occur (2 Timothy 3:14)
Looking to the present, we find the command to make a lasting difference. Paul closed the chain between remembrance and continuance by forging one last link—living the truth. That’s why Paul summons us in the present—to be ready for whatever may occur, regardless of how dark everything appears.

LET’S LIVE IT
Paul challenged Timothy to make a difference where he lived, in Ephesus—a city filled with every conceivable falsehood. The challenge is ours as well. Therefore, let’s make a lasting difference by holding fast to the truth, standing strong on our convictions, and refusing to be fearful.

How do you develop convictions?
Name five convictions you're willing to live and die for. Explain why you chose each.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

ENDNOTE

PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Making a Lasting Difference
2 Timothy 3:10–14

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LET’S BEGIN HERE

No one enters a race hoping to come in second. Runners run to win. And though it’s important how runners start and maintain their pace, the real difference in the outcome depends on the amount of “kick” each runner has on the last lap. What’s true on the track is true in life—the goal is to finish well. If it wasn’t, Paul wouldn’t have told the Corinthians: “Run in such a way that you may win” (1 Corinthians 9:24). Paul ran to win (2 Timothy 4:7–8). And he wanted the same for Timothy—for him to finish well. But how? Second Timothy 3:14–17 provides the answer.

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. Continue in What You Have Learned (2 Timothy 3:14)

It’s been said that life isn’t a sprint; it’s a marathon. According to Paul, life is like the 4 x 400-meter relay in the Olympics. If we run each leg well, we’ll finish well. The first leg is knowing the truth.

2. Become Convinced of What You Know (2 Timothy 3:15)

Knowing the truth gets us out of the starting blocks. But we only hit our stride when we become convinced that the truth is more than mere facts. That’s the second leg: being convinced that the truth is “sacred.”

Quotable

When we place value each day on what God has revealed in the Bible, we are well on our way to finishing well.

— Charles R. Swindoll
3. Place Value on What God Has Revealed (2 Timothy 3:16)
With the race in full stride, it’s time to quicken the pace. It’s not enough to know truth or be convinced of truth’s sacredness. In the third leg, we must also believe that the sacred truth is the Word of God and treasure it.

4. Allow Truth to Change Your Life (2 Timothy 3:17)
It’s the last lap, and the finish line is in sight. We need one more “kick” as we lunge toward the tape and accomplish our goal of finishing well. The final leg is applying the sacred truth of God’s Word.

LET’S LIVE IT
Timothy finished well (Hebrews 13:23). And he did so as a man of God who was first and foremost a man of the Word of God. This is a lesson to take to heart. For we can only finish well if we too take seriously our commitment to Scripture—to know it, believe it, treasure it, and live it.

How would you describe the spiritual environment of the home you grew up in?
Regardless of your childhood environment, what do you know and believe about Scripture today?

Lives have been changed just from reading Scripture. How has the simple Word of God affected your life?

What needs or difficulties are you facing today? Look at the concordance in your Bible (or online) for key words, and jot down passages that speak to those needs. During the next week, meditate and memorize some of these passages, and write down what God is teaching you.
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
God-Breathed Truth
2 Timothy 3:14–17

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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application
LET’S BEGIN HERE

At any moment, Paul might have been pulled from his prison pit and marched to the axman’s block. He had said everything he needed to say to his “beloved son” (2 Timothy 1:2)—nearly. A few things remained. Paul wrote to Timothy without panic and with purpose. The young pastor had a timid temperament and a tender heart; he would take Paul’s departure hard. Nevertheless, the days were depraved and dangerous, and Timothy needed to read Paul’s never-to-be-forgotten final charge in order to complete his ministry. Pastors today who carry on the ministry, regardless of age, location, or culture, need to hear and heed that same timely and timeless charge.

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. A Minister’s Call
Whether he’s a mild-mannered Clark Kent or a blaze of fire streaking through the sky like Superman, every pastor has the same job profile, beginning with a summons to ministry.

2. A Passionate Charge (2 Timothy 4:1)
Ministry isn’t a hiring; it’s a calling. And well that it is, because every pastor stands under the shadow of the divine Judge’s bench and the conquering King’s throne.

Quotable

A calling to ministry is a divine summons, a heaven-sent command that we must not shirk.
— Charles R. Swindoll
3. Five Urgent Commands (2 Timothy 4:2)
The pastor’s job isn’t to be successful — to convert the world or fill the pews. That’s God’s job. The pastor’s job is to be faithful — to carry out five divine commands.

“Preach the word”

“Be ready in season and out of season”

“Reprove”

“Rebuke”

“Exhort”

4. A Relevant Prediction (2 Timothy 4:3–4)
Faithful preachers proclaim the Word with urgency, relevancy, patience, and intelligence because a day is coming (and has already begun) when people will no longer have ears to hear the truth.
Turning back to Timothy and the traits that should have characterized his life and ministry, Paul issued four final commands (2 Timothy 4:5):

Stay steady and cool.

The word translated “be sober” (nepho) in 2 Timothy 4:5 is the same word translated “temperate” in 1 Timothy 3:2, 11 and Titus 2:2. Look up the word temperate, and write the definition in your own words.

Why is the command to “be sober” or “temperate” so important for pastors?

Be willing to endure suffering.

Paul said a time was coming when people will not “endure sound doctrine” (4:3), and he warned of difficult days (3:1). Do you think we are living in those days? Explain.

Why might preachers of truth suffer hardship, according to 2 Timothy 3:2–5?
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Every Pastor’s Job Profile
2 Timothy 4:1–5

Keep on giving out the good news.

What is the gospel?

Do you know anyone who needs to hear the gospel? Write a prayer asking the Lord to give you the courage and opportunity to share.

Persevere full bore all the way to the end.

What ministry has God given you?

What are you doing to fulfill that obligation?
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Every Pastor’s Job Profile
2 Timothy 4:1–5

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Herman Melville, author of *Moby-Dick*, was a man of regrets. Unlike his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne, literary fame and fortune eluded Melville. “Life is so short,” Melville wrote to his brother-in-law, “and so ridiculous and irrational (from a certain point of view) that one knows not what to make of it, unless—well, finish the sentence for yourself.” Compared to the long history of humanity—to say nothing of eternity—each individual life is short, “just a vapor” (James 4:14). But the span of our lives, no matter how long they may be, need not lead us to Melville’s conclusion. Paul didn’t think life ridiculous or irrational—even with his head on the axman’s block. In one of the finest epitaphs found in literature, Paul celebrated life, without reservation, remorse, or regret.

**LET’S DIG DEEPER**

1. **A Change of Subject**

Paul dramatically shifted tone when he got to the sixth verse of the fourth chapter in 2 Timothy. Up to this point, Paul had repeatedly used the phrase *su de* — “but you,” referring to Timothy. From this point on, Paul focused on *ego* — “I.” The link between the two? “But as for you, Timothy, you must fulfill your ministry... for I have finished my ministry and I am at the point of death, and I now await my reward.”
2. A Time to Reflect (2 Timothy 4:6–8)
Those who are older often have a lot of time on their hands and little to do with their hands. So, they reflect on times gone by. But reflection often reveals regrets. This wasn’t true of Paul, however. In his prison cell, he had “free” time, but his reflections included no regrets—whether he looked at his present situation, his past experiences, or his future reward. To learn to live regret-free, let’s look more closely at Paul’s pattern of thought and action.

First, Paul acknowledged the reality of his present situation (2 Timothy 4:6).

Second, Paul remembered the challenges of his past experiences (4:7).

Third, Paul claimed the assurance of his future reward (4:8).
LET’S LIVE IT

None of us live completely without regrets—there’s always something we wish we had done or hadn’t done. But regrets ought not encumber us. As William Shakespeare wrote:

Let us not burden our remembrance with
A heaviness that is gone.²

We can follow that good advice by asking and answering three questions.

First, **Have I acknowledged the reality of my present situation?**

*Are you living your life as a sacrifice to God? What led you to answer the way you did? Be specific.*

If death came today, would you be prepared? Explain.

Second, **When I remember the events of my past, are there regrets I need to address?**

*What wrongs do you need to confess and ask forgiveness?*
What other regrets do you need to make right or take to the cross?

Third, *Can I claim the assurance of some future reward?*

The New Testament specifically mentions five rewards believers will receive. Mark which one(s) you might receive when you stand before Jesus.

<table>
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<th>Crown</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>You?</th>
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<td>Life</td>
<td>James 1:12</td>
<td>Faithfully endure suffering</td>
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<td>Glory</td>
<td>1 Peter 5:1–4</td>
<td>Faithful as an elder or pastor</td>
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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application
LETS BEGIN HERE

Leadership isn't for the faint of heart—not because it's so demanding (though it is), but because it's so isolating. This was true of Paul. All his life, he had engaged in the nitty-gritty of ministry. But sitting in a dark dungeon awaiting death, loneliness crept into his lap and refused to leave. So Paul picked up his pen and wrote his friend. In his letter, he described his circle of honor and dishonor—those who had remained loyal and those who had done him harm. More painfully aware of his aloneness with each word, Paul pled for Timothy to come . . . and come quickly.

LETS DIG DEEPER

1. An Urgent Plea (2 Timothy 4:9)

Paul faced his present circumstances with courage, his past with conviction, and his future with confidence (2 Timothy 4:6–8), but that didn't mean he was a spiritual Superman. He was a man. He needed companionship to soothe his soul, warmth to comfort his body, and Scripture to strengthen his resolve. So, in the loneliness of his dungeon cell, he begged Timothy to come . . . quickly.

Quotable

When someone is hurting, he or she needs a loyal advocate. Can you be that for someone today?
—Charles R. Swindoll
2. Two Painful Memories (2 Timothy 4:10, 14–15)
Timothy had to hurry! Paul’s death was imminent; winter was coming; and the memories of one who harmed him and hurt him were painful.

Demas who “deserted me” (2 Timothy 4:10)

Alexander who “did me much harm” (4:14–15)

Five Faithful Friends (2 Timothy 4:10–12)
Paul had been wounded by disloyal coworkers. But sandwiched between the description of these dishonorable men is a list of five faithful friends—four who were away and one who remained. These five made up the honorable portion of the apostle’s circle.

Crescens who went to Galatia (2 Timothy 4:10)

Titus who went to Dalmatia (4:10)

Luke who remained in Rome (4:11)
Mark who was useful (2 Timothy 4:11)

Tychicus who went to Ephesus (4:12)

Three Practical Requests (2 Timothy 4:13)
Even with Luke, the Mamertine was a lonely place. Paul needed companions—especially Timothy and Mark. And the apostle needed two more things: a cloak to keep him warm and books to keep him occupied.

“Bring the cloak”

“Bring . . . the books, especially the parchments”

LET’S LIVE IT
Loneliness is a leader’s constant companion. But loneliness isn’t restricted to leadership—we’ve all known the longings of loneliness. During lonely times, keep these reminders in mind.

First, when you’re lonely, you need caring, close friends.

At your loneliest, which friends do you want with you?
Second, when you’re hurt, you need loyal advocates.

Who in your life is one “who sticks closer than a brother” or sister (Proverbs 18:24)?

Third, when you’re loved, you need to be grateful.

Review the names you listed above. If you were to tell these people how much they mean to you, what would you say?

Fourth, when you’re needy, you need to admit it and ask for help.

What needs do you have right now? Who will you ask for help, and when?
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
A Circle of Honor and Dishonor
2 Timothy 4:9–15

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LET’S BEGIN HERE

Death focuses our minds. In light of eternity, the lights of this world lose their luster. Few think about possessions owned or monies earned. Instead, our thoughts turn to people loved—and who loved in return; to joys and sorrows, victories and defeats. Sadly, some die with resentments for harms done and regrets for dreams unfulfilled. These die without dignity, for they die without grace. A grace-filled death only comes about after a grace-filled life. Like few others, Paul lived with grace and died with grace—grace to the very end.

LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. A Testimony Marked by Grace (2 Timothy 4:16–18)

Demas’ desertion hurt Paul, but it left no bitterness in his mouth. Alexander’s opposition harmed Paul, but it left no pangs of revenge in his mind. And though loneliness lingered, it lingered only for a moment—dispersing in the presence of the Lord of grace.

Quotable

We demonstrate God’s grace when we refuse to hold grudges against those who hurt us. After all, God did that for us.

—Charles R. Swindoll
DOORWAY TO HISTORY
The Injustice of Roman Justice

Law should be the protector of justice. But when madmen make law, justice becomes perverted.

When Paul was arrested, he was brought before a tribunal to determine whether sufficient evidence existed for a formal trial. This “first defense” (2 Timothy 4:16) or prima actio included a presentation of the case against Paul, as well as his opportunity to present his case for innocence. Afterward, the court would have rendered one of two decisions: a non liquet, meaning there was insufficient evidence to proceed, followed by an order to release Paul; or an amplius, meaning there was sufficient evidence to proceed, followed by an order to schedule a secunda actio—the trial itself.

Paul had the right to an attorney and to call witnesses, but at his prima actio, he defended himself without witness testimony. We’re not sure whether Paul’s prima actio was conducted in private or public, but there’s little doubt that his secunda actio—the trial which condemned him to death—was a public affair.

Nero presided over the trials of other Christians, and because Paul was a leader of the sect, we can assume Nero served as Paul’s judge too. Trial before the imperial court took place either in the forum or the emperor’s private Vatican gardens. In judging Paul’s case—and those of all Roman Christians condemned to die—Nero was no legal expert. Legal historian Detlef Liebs noted, “Judges, advocates, interested parties, and authorities were often guided in their legal decisions by public opinion, their own experiences, and their personal attitudes about justice.” And as Tacitus made clear, Nero’s sense of justice was a thinning thread.

The mad ruler sentenced Christians to the most ghastly forms of death. “Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.” Did they suffer such horror to satisfy justice? No! To satisfy the gluttony of “one man’s cruelty.”

2. A Farewell Filled with Grace (2 Timothy 4:19–22)
The God of grace stood alongside and strengthened Paul. And Paul gave Him glory. Then, at his final hour, the apostle of grace stood with and strengthened the people of God.
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Grace to the Very End
2 Timothy 4:16–22

LET’S LIVE IT

“There must pay for everything in this world one way and another,” novelist Charles Portis wrote. “There is nothing free except the grace of God. You cannot earn that or deserve it.” Praise God that His grace doesn’t come with a fee! God’s grace is needed as we live and as we die, and God freely provides it.

We can’t live graceless lives and expect to exit this world gracefully. We die as we lived. Paul’s life and his pen overflowed with grace from the moment of his conversion to his death. And just before the axman’s ax fell, Paul demonstrated six habits of grace we would do well to emulate.

Living and dying with grace means . . .

1. Asking the Lord not to hold offenses against those who offend us
2. Expressing enormous gratitude for God’s work in our lives
3. Anticipating God’s rescue from this evil world
4. Claiming our secure heavenly home
5. Finding delight in the fact that God still has a plan for others
6. Releasing others from our expectations of perfection

How gracious are you in these six areas? Place an X where appropriate.

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<th>Grace #</th>
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Based on how you’re living today, do you think you will die with grace?

What can you do to become more “Grace-full”? Be specific.

ENDNOTES
1. We don’t know specifically what Paul was accused of or what evidence the prosecutor brought against him. Historians of the period, like Tacitus—who said Christians were condemned for their “hatred of mankind,” meaning their refusal to involve themselves in the social and civic life of Rome, which involved pagan worship, including fornicking with temple prostitutes—recorded that Christians were accused of atheism because they refused to worship the Roman gods and participate in emperor-worship. Christians were also accused of cannibalism because of their practice of eating Christ’s “flesh” and drinking His “blood” at the Eucharist. See Tacitus, Annals, 15.44, in Annales, Historiae, Agricultura, Germania, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2009), 354; and John R. W. Stott, The Message of 2 Timothy: Guard the Gospel, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), 123.
5. Tacitus, Annals, 15.44, 354.
PAUL’S SWAN SONG
Grace to the Very End
2 Timothy 4:16–22

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