

Stay on Target

2 Timothy 2:8-15, 1 Timothy 1:5-7, 2 Timothy 2:19-26

Slide 1

One of the most fascinating things in life is that it's only at the end that we get a true perspective on what really matters.

Think about it. If you want to understand what really matters, listen to someone who's facing their final stage when life is stripped away and simplified.

Today we continue with the gift of hearing from such a life. What we're reading here in 2 Timothy are the last words of the man who helped change the world.

These are the last words of a man who's writing to his spiritual son about finishing well and these words are meant to be heard by us.

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2 Timothy 2:8-10, *"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."*

In referring to Christ as descended from David, Paul was reminding Timothy, and us, that God said He was going to send a Savior, a descendent of King David, and He would be a Savior for all.

A Savior who would bear our shame, taking the consequences of death upon Himself but then be raised up and exalted.

Jesus Christ, descended from David and raised from the dead is the One to whom everything was pointing. Christ rose, now lives and has brought eternal salvation.

When Paul said, *“This is my gospel.”* He meant it was the good news, the ultimate news, the kind of news that interrupts everything else because it stands above everything else.

He’s telling Timothy that’s why I can endure everything because I know what God has done.

Paul wanted Timothy, and us, to know that what matters most is not the circumstances we’re in, but where we stand in relationship to the purpose of God which has been set in motion.

The Word of God cannot be chained. It is unchanging and unstoppable.

Slide 3

2 Timothy 2:11-13, *“Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”*

In these verses, Paul adds a piece of liturgy. Now, you may ask, *“What are you talking about?”*

Liturgy is a fixed set of ceremonies, words, etc., that are used during public worship. Usually, you see this word in connection with Protestant or Catholic worship services.

Paul says, *“Here is a trustworthy saying.”* Then he draws upon what must have been a part of a liturgy of the times, something akin to a hymn that may have been sung, before Paul came along.

An event has to have been experienced widely to become familiar enough so that Paul could refer to it when writing to a broader audience.

In other words, it would have to be rooted in a shared reality with early historic roots.

These beliefs didn't grow out of the early church, the early church grew out of these beliefs, and it's here we hear what the early Christians first knew.

"If we disown him, he will also disown us." Paul's simply saying the effect of disowning God won't leave God out, it will leave us out.

Humanity has a strange idea that if we don't believe in God, He doesn't exist. The reality is it's we who end up lost in the outer darkness.

God has made Himself known and has provided a way for us to have a life with Him. How? When we receive Christ, we can live and reign with Him.

That's the Gospel. There may be a lot of things we don't understand, but we can know what is central.

As finite creatures we can't understand the infinite. What we need to understand is that human life was created with a purpose.

And the source of that purpose has revealed a plan that both redeems and reveals the goodness of what exists outside the state of this world.

Jesus was very clear in describing Himself, *"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Religious leaders' confronted Jesus because He received sinners and ate with them.

Jesus responded by telling three stories about the joy of finding what was lost: of a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son prodigal son. That tells you what matters to God, you do.

I don't know if you wake up some days doubting your value. I don't know how valuable you feel in your workplace, school, marriage, or family.

But I can tell you this: even if you aren't valuable to anyone else, you are incredibly valuable to God.

If you were that one lost sheep, Jesus would be willing to leave the other ninety-nine sheep just to find you.

Paul's telling Timothy that this is the news that stands above all. I've come to know what really matters; to know the purpose of which my life is a part and that's powerful.

It's the target that everything is moving towards. That's why he's telling Timothy to stay on target. Paul knows that other purposes can try to take over so it's vital to stay on target.

Slide 4

2 Timothy 2:14-18, *"Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some."*

“Keep reminding God’s people of these things.” “These things” are what he had just described: the word and working of God that cannot be chained. These are what matters more than any temporary circumstance we face.

“Warn them before God” or *“charge them before God.”* God’s always here, but bringing God’s presence into focus brings forth the point that what matters is what serves God’s purpose.

So, what’s Timothy to warn them against? *“Quarreling about words.”* What kind of words? Words that have no value.” So, how do we distinguish what words have no value?

Paul provides an example, the idea that the resurrection had already taken place. There were those who believed that the material world itself was evil.

With that idea in mind, they taught that they had already been resurrected by having overcome all sin and denied that there could be an actual resurrection.

Such teachings, if not stopped will spread like gangrene. This is a good description as gangrene cuts off blood flow causing flesh to die.

It was these kinds of vain ideas that led the earliest church to develop the creeds of faith, the core teachings of Christ, confirmed by the apostles.

So, the first thing Paul raises is the need to guard against wandering off into vain ideas. To do this Paul tells Timothy to *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”*

In other words, don't focus on what might get people's attention but on being approved by God. Be someone who isn't ashamed of how to handle the word of truth.

When Paul speaks of correctly handling the word of truth, it suggests intensive academic study of the Bible.

And it would be valuable to read the Bible in order to understand the original intent by valuing the context, the genre, and more.

But the emphasis here is being careful not to chase rabbits and lose the purpose that God is after. Avoid getting sidetracked by focusing on non-important matters. As Paul says, it *"ruins those who listen."*

This was a significant point Paul had spoken of in his first letter to Timothy when he said in 1 Timothy 1:5, *"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."*

If our instruction doesn't end in *"a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith,"* then we missed the mark in our teaching. So, guard against wandering off into vain ideas.

Slide 5

2 Timothy 2:19-22, *"Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness. In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.'"*

Paul now shifts from what distracts and diverts us to what can influence us. He's essentially warning us to guard against what seeks to take control of us.

In this section Paul says we must *"turn away from wickedness"* and *"Flee the evil desires of youth."* That may sound like a slight on youth, but I don't think Paul wants Timothy or anyone to look down on youth.

In fact, he told Timothy in his previous letter don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

What he's suggesting is the propensity to sell ourselves out. Don't sell your purpose for pleasure.

In both places his focus is not simply on what to stop doing but on living out the higher calling for which our lives were meant.

When we're young, we're naturally navigating this thing called our lives and there will be desires within us that will be stirred and chase whatever we think will fulfill them.

Paul's talking about what's often referred to as the "lusts" of life which we associate with sexual pleasure, greed, and the need to control others.

This turning away from wickedness is not limited to youth. This isn't about a particular age.

Separated from God, human life seeks power and pleasure in the consumption of others. But Paul's saying, you know God's purpose, so *"set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."*

If you want to keep your life on target don't confuse pleasure for purpose. We were made for more. Guard against what seeks to take control of you.

Slide 6

Conclusion

2 Timothy 2:23-26, *"Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."*

Lastly, Paul tells Timothy to guard himself from harmful contempt towards those whom he may contend. Paul says, *"Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments."*

So, how do we know what are valuable ideas to engage and what are not? *"Because you know they produce quarrels."* It may not always be clear initially but soon enough you know when it is when a quarrel starts.

Paul said, *"The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful."*

John Wimber would often say, *"Your brother is not your enemy even when they act like it."* Paul's charging us to become more constructive than contentious.

If you want to show that a stick is crooked, you can hold up the stick and shout "you're a crooked stick" or you can get a straight stick and lay it down next to it.

Shouting about a crooked stick may be therapeutic but allowing a straight stick to reveal what's crooked is more constructive. The point is, don't lose focus contending over secondary issues.

We're being charged to stay on target. Remember Jesus. For some of us that means we need to recenter ourselves and re-embrace God's unchanging purpose.

Maybe we've realized we've gotten diverted; that we've allowed other things to divert us or control us. It's time to join God's unchanging purpose.

It's been said, *"There are two great moments in a person's life: the moment you were born and the moment you realize why you were born."*