

Unbroken Chain

September 24, 2023

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

2 Timothy 4:1-8

Session Outline

1. The Charge (2 Timothy 4:1-2)
2. The Need for Preaching (2 Timothy 4:3-4)
3. Fulfill Your Ministry (2 Timothy 4:5-8)

Theological Theme

Paul wrote to Timothy at the end of his life to give a solemn charge of how to be a godly, effective pastor. His words are helpful for any believer who wants to live a life of impact.



Leader Guide

Unbroken Chain

Introduction

Transitions are a part of life. We all experience times when someone hands a position of responsibility or influence to someone else. The one passing the torch typically spends intentional time preparing the one who will receive the leadership role and take over when the previous leader is gone.

Both parties in a transition have important roles to play. The one handing off must be willing to do what is necessary to impart the needed information or training so that the one who is taking over can handle his or her new responsibilities well. Although the process can go wrong in plenty of ways, there are also many examples over the years of those who have had very successful transitions. Today, we will look at Paul's words to Timothy in a time of transition.

- ❓ When have you been involved in passing the torch in some way?
- ❓ What kinds of things make this process easier or more difficult?
- ❓ What are some important attitudes each person needs for a successful transition of leadership or power?

Session Summary

In a letter to his son in the ministry, Timothy, Paul gave some strong, sound advice about how to stay focused and effective. The solemn charge was direct and applicable for Timothy and any believer who wants to glorify the Lord. Paul explained why this charge matters and how to accomplish it. Paul passed the torch as he neared the end of his ministry to Timothy, a young pastor who was just getting started.

Each of us who follow Jesus have been called to reach the world with the gospel. To fulfill this calling, we need to be intentional about sharing what we know from the Word, obeying the Word ourselves, and taking advantage of every opportunity we can find to do the work of an evangelist. Our goal is to be like Paul who looking back at his life was able to say confidently that he knew a heavenly reward was coming his way.

1. The Charge (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

The apostle Paul sent this letter to his ministry protegee, Timothy. Paul did much of his teaching and discipling through letters. In this letter, Paul gave Timothy a strong charge regarding his continuing work as a young pastor. Paul's use of the word "charge" emphasized to the seriousness of the words that would follow. If Timothy wanted to be a godly pastor, he needed to heed Paul's instruction.

Paul reminded Timothy who would judge his work in ministry. Timothy was not only accountable to Paul or those who ministered to but also to the Judge of all, Jesus Christ.

To be prepared for the day when Jesus returned, Paul gave specific advice to this young pastor that all Christ followers can take to heart and apply to our lives. First, he challenged Timothy to preach the Word. It was not enough that Timothy knew the Word or believed the word but that he was diligent to preach the Word. This is still true for all pastors today. They must be dedicated to preaching the Word and keeping their focus on Scripture without getting distracted by other things. Those who are not called to be pastors will not preach in the same way, but we are to meditate on and speak the Word to ourselves and others constantly.

- ❓ How might the average believer apply the idea of preaching the Word each day? You may not have opportunity to speak in front of a room, but what influence has God given to share His truth with others?


Paul also told Timothy to be ready in season and out of season. Timothy was charged with being ready and prepared to preach at any moment. Whether it is a perfect setting or not, a godly pastor needs to take advantage of each opportunity that comes his way to preach the Word. All Christians need to be ready to share the Word and how it applies to our lives with others.

- ❓ How can you be ready "in season and out of season" (v. 2)? What preparation is required for this?

Paul continued his charge with the specific goal of preaching the Word. Timothy needed to help people see how God's Word impacted their lives. When handled appropriately, Scripture can guide, encourage, motivate, convict, and challenge the choices we make in our daily lives. Preaching is all about holding up the Word of God before people and letting the Holy Spirit do His work.


Ready to Speak

Paul's concluding charge stressed the need to preach the word (4:1-5). Like Timothy, all believers are to be prepared in any situation to speak a needed word, whether of correction, rebuke, or encouragement.


 Application: How do you need God to work through His Word in your life?

2. The Need for Preaching (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Paul also laid out the reason behind his strong charge. There is power and motivation in knowing why something is a big deal. When people understand the “why,” they are more likely to take up the charge with passion and dedication.

 Why would it be important for Timothy to understand the reason Paul encouraged Him toward preaching the Word faithfully? How would this be helpful when it became difficult to continue in ministry?

People are not naturally inclined to welcome God’s Word into their lives. They are much more apt to look for what they want to hear. Paul described this as us having itching ears and looking for what would scratch and make them feel better. Think about how you’ve seen this to be true in your life and in the lives of those around you. Most of us would rather hear what we desire and feel better about ourselves than be convicted by hearing the Word of God. The same was true of the people in Timothy’s day.

 What are some “itching ears” of the world? What specific ways do “itching ears” threaten the integrity of the church today?

The tendency to pick what is easiest for us to hear and deal with is strong. Paul said those who desire such things will accumulate teachers who reinforce their desires. This is a good reminder that the teachers who make us feel the best are not always the ones we need. We can’t assume teachers are sound or faithful to God based on their number of followers. Comparing what a person teaches to Scripture is the best way to determine the validity of their teaching. Each person must test what they hear against the Bible, and every teacher or preacher must be committed to the things Paul taught Timothy.

Accumulating the wrong kind of teachers is dangerous and will lead people to believing anything that comes along. Not only might they reject God’s Word, but they are also susceptible to buying into whatever the world tells them to believe. Not many of us set out to trust a lie of Satan, but when we choose to reject the truth, we will be easily swayed and wander off into believing myths.

Consider all the different myths the world promotes that Christ followers can be vulnerable to believing. Some believe people can or must earn their way to heaven. Another myth says if the good things a person does outweigh the bad things he or she does then that person is set for eternity. A different myth claims God only loves us when we are good, and we can do bad things to extinguish His love. The list goes on and on because what Paul told Timothy is still very true in our day. People look for teachings that back up the way they want to think and feel to their own detriment. That is why preachers must preach the Word faithfully and every Christ follower should beware of the danger of rejecting Scripture.



Application: How might you be guilty of looking for teaching to feed your selfish desires, even subconsciously?

3. Fulfill Your Ministry (2 Timothy 4:5-8)

The broken state of the world should not make Christians feel defeated but should make us even more zealous about fulfilling the work of the ministry. Thinking about the way the enemy deceives lost people should cause those who know Jesus to be more dedicated than ever to focus on what God has called us to do.

Think about it. What would be different if all church members paid attention to their lives and were serious about living for the Lord? Consider what Paul told Timothy to focus on and how your life could have more impact if you chose to follow these same instructions. To fulfill the ministry you've been called to, you must be sober minded about everything and willing to endure suffering. We need to stay submitted to the Holy Spirit and follow Him in all things, being prepared to trust the Lord even when things get tough.

Paul also encouraged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. Even those who are not gifted in evangelism are called share the gospel. In the Great Commission, Jesus made it clear that anyone who follows Him is called to go and evangelize wherever and whenever he or she has opportunity. We are all evangelists about something—whether about fitness, essential oils, homeschooling, public school, good deals, or anything else. We all talk about what we believe in.



How can you seek to be more intentional about being an evangelist for Jesus?

Going back to the idea of transition, Paul referred to himself as a drink offering that was typically poured out completely on the altar. As he considered his death, Paul used this picture to describe the way he had lived and poured out his life for the Lord. He was passing on the torch to Timothy, knowing he was almost finished with the work he had been given on earth.

- ❓ A drink offering was poured out completely. Can you say that you have lived your life this way for the Lord? Why or why not? Where might you have held back in living for God's purposes?

Paul knew when he finished his race, a reward would be waiting for him, and he was ready to receive that reward. He wrote with great confidence at the end of his life, just as he had lived with great confidence since his salvation. It is almost as if he was picturing the award ceremony at which he would be honored. Being motivated by heavenly rewards to come isn't wrong, as those things are all found in Jesus. On that day, those who live faithfully will hear Jesus say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21). Stay the course and fulfill the ministry you have been given.

- ❓ Application: Where is God calling you to stay the course right now? Why can you trust Him to sustain you, even when it's difficult?

Conclusion

This passage of Scripture is sound advice for pastors. Although most followers of Jesus are not actually called to full time pastoring, Paul's words to Timothy provide excellent application for the average believer too. With all the world uses to come against Christians, it is imperative to stay focused on the calling of God on your life.

For pastors, this means to keep preaching the Word, even when the message is difficult. For those not called to be pastors, the goal is to keep sharing what you learn and know about the Word so you can help evangelize the lost world. People are attracted to what makes them feel good about themselves and their choices. Paul described this as having itching ears and looking for something to scratch that itch to give relief. We are called to proclaim the truth in a world of lies.

Every one of us has opportunities to share truth with those who need to hear it. Paul reminds us that even though it can be tough at times, it is always worth it to obey the Lord and bring glory to Him. Our goal is to be like Paul and live in such a way that at the end of our lives we can confidently say we know we will receive a heavenly reward for the choices we made.

- ❓ What stands out to you from today's lesson? Where is God calling you to change or adjust to live faithfully for Him?
- ❓ How can we as a group encourage one another to stay on guard and not give in to our "itching ears" when it comes to the Word of God?
- ❓ How is God calling you to live as an evangelist? Who will you seek a gospel conversation with this week?

Prayer of Response

Thank the Lord for giving you the best way to live. Ask Him to lead you to live faithfully for Him all your days, seeking to share the Word with others at every opportunity.

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* by David Platt, Daniel Akin, and Tony Merida
- *Be Faithful* by Warren Wiersbe
- *1-2 Timothy and Titus* by R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell

Prayer Prompts:

1. What do you need to submit to the Holy Spirit to fulfill the ministry you have been called to?
2. What opportunities has God given you to live out your faith and preach the gospel in your day to day life?

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Gospel First and Always

Main Passages

- Romans 1:1-17

Session Outline

1. The Gospel of God (Romans 1:1-6)
2. Encouragement for the Church (Romans 1:7-15)
3. Not Ashamed (Romans 1:16-17)

Memorize

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching. - 2 Timothy 4:1

Historical Context of 2 Timothy

Purpose

In 1 Timothy Paul directed Timothy to actively oppose false teaching. He also gave instruction on the type of behavior that should characterize those in the church. The letter to Titus shows a similar purpose, albeit briefer in scope. As Paul addressed the character of church members, he presented it in light of the work of Christ. The message in 2 Timothy, Paul's final letter, is quite different. It is much more personal, a letter from one friend to another. Paul was preparing Timothy to carry on the work of ministry after he was gone.

Author

As stated in the opening of each letter, these letters were written by Paul (1Tm 1:1; 2Tm 1:1; Ti 1:1). However, many scholars today assume that Paul did not write them. This opinion is based on the differences from his other letters in vocabulary and style, alleged differences in theology, and uncertainties about where these letters fit chronologically in the life of the apostle. But the differences in style and vocabulary are not troublesome when one considers that authors often use different vocabulary when addressing different groups and situations. Rather than addressing churches in these letters, Paul was writing to coworkers who were in unique ministry settings. Hence we would expect different vocabulary. Also, the traditional view of the historical situation in which Paul wrote these letters is reasonable and defensible. Therefore, in spite of significant opposition by some scholars, there is a solid basis for accepting the Pastoral Epistles as Pauline.

Setting

Paul most likely wrote these letters after the time covered in the book of Acts. Acts closes with Paul in prison. Traditionally it has been believed that Paul was released from this imprisonment, then continued his work around the Mediterranean, perhaps even reaching Spain (Rm 15:22–29). During this time, he visited Crete and other places. First Timothy and Titus were written during this period of further mission work. Timothy had been left in Ephesus to handle some problems with false teaching there (1Tm 1:3–4). Titus had been left in Crete after the initial work to set up the church there (Ti 1:5). Eventually Paul was imprisoned again, and this led to his execution. During this final imprisonment, Paul wrote 2 Timothy to request another visit from Timothy and to give final exhortations as he anticipated his martyrdom.

Special Features

First Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus have been referred to as the “Pastoral Epistles” since the eighteenth century. It is reasonable to consider these letters together since they have striking similarities in style, vocabulary, and setting. These letters stand apart from the other Pauline letters because they were the only ones written to Paul's gospel coworkers. The Pastoral Epistles deal with church structure issues and, unlike Paul's other letters, were addressed to men serving in pastoral roles rather than to churches. But we must also recognize these are separate letters with their own distinctives. They were not written primarily to describe church structure or pastoral ministry (contrary to popular opinion), but to teach Christian living in response to the gospel.

Extended Commentary

2 Timothy 4:1-8

4:1–8 These verses flow naturally out of 3:10–17. The strong statements about the saving and edifying power of Scripture in 3:15–17 lead to the command to proclaim this Word (4:1–4).

4:1 The solemnity of the charge is heightened by references to living before the gaze of God, to the fact that this God is judge, to Christ's second coming (appearing), and to the reality of his present reign over his kingdom.

4:2 This could be the life verse of any gospel minister. The word is especially the gospel but includes the entirety of the Christian tradition taught by Paul and the other apostles (2:15). It is equated in 4:3 with “sound doctrine.”

4:3 Since Paul exhorted Timothy in how to respond when these things occurred, it is apparent that he did not refer only to some time in the distant future, but to a situation he expected Timothy to face or was already facing.

4:4 The word myth is used five times in the NT—four times in the Pastoral Epistles and once in 2Pt 1:16. In each instance, “myth” characterizes teaching that is fanciful and without a serious basis (1Tm 1:4).

4:5 Paul's first charge here is for Timothy to exercise self-control. This is not a charge to avoid humor, but to ask in every situation, “What does Christ want of me here?”

4:6 By referring to a drink offering, Paul used OT sacrificial language to refer to his own death (Gn 35:14; Ex 29:40–41; Lv 23:13; Nm 15:5–10). This suggests he saw himself as laying down his life for the sake of the gospel.

4:7 To call his life the good fight uses imagery that portrays a struggle (cp. 1Co 9:25–26; 1Tm 1:18; 6:12). Paul did not sail through life with a constant smile on his face. On viewing his life as a race, see Ac 20:24. And Paul kept the faith in that he contended for the faith and he persevered in believing.

4:8 Crown of righteousness probably means “the crown which consists of righteousness,” referring to the final righteous state of believers. Thus, it will be given not only to Paul but to all those who have loved his appearing, a reference to all believers.¹

References

1. CSB Study Bible: Notes, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017),

Author Bio

David Platt (Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy)

David Platt is the author of three New York Times bestsellers, including *Radical*. He is lead pastor at McLean Bible Church in metro Washington, D.C., the former president of the IMB (International Mission Board), and founder of Radical Inc., a global center for the unreached that serves churches in accomplishing the mission of Christ. Platt received his master of divinity (MDiv), master of theology (ThM), and doctor of philosophy (PhD) from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia with his wife and their children.

Daniel Akin (Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy)

Daniel L. Akin is the president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. He holds a Ph.D. in Humanities from the University of Texas at Arlington and has authored or edited many books and Bible commentaries including *Ten Who Changed the World* and *A Theology for the Church*.

Tony Merida (Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy)

Tony Merida is lead pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, NC, and associate professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC.

Warren Wiersbe (Be Faithful)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of *Back to the Bible*, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

R. Kent Hughes (1-2 Timothy and Titus)

R. Kent Hughes (DMin, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is senior pastor emeritus of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, and former professor of practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Hughes is also a founder of the Charles Simeon Trust, which conducts expository preaching conferences throughout North America and worldwide. He serves as the series editor for the *Preaching the Word* commentary series and is the author or coauthor of many books. He and his wife, Barbara, live in Wyncote, Pennsylvania, and have four children and an ever-increasing number of grandchildren.

Bryan Chapell (1-2 Timothy and Titus)

Bryan Chapell, (Ph.D. Southern Illinois University), is president and professor of practical theology at Covenant Theological Seminary. He is much sought after as a speaker in churches and conferences around the country and is the author of several books.