

Series Title: **Stronger: discovering truths for a resilient life**
Message Title: **Finishing Well: It happens by choice, not by chance**
Scripture Source: **2 Timothy 4:1-8**
Date: Sunday, January 22, 2017
Teacher: John Garner

Words to Live By: 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Each of us will finish the race of life. That fact is settled. How we finish is largely up to us...and the choices we make, the mid-course corrections we courageously act on and the perception of the end of the race and what lies beyond we hold to. Read verses.

Some finish with lament and regret. Illustrate: Some finish well, with integrity, gratitude, and a sacred anticipation of who and what lies beyond the finish line.

What can we learn from the aging servant of Christ, the apostle Paul? I believe we can learn some invaluable lessons, insights and perspectives that can help us run with purpose today and finish well someday.

Paul was anxious to convey these insights and challenges to his younger friend in ministry, Timothy. Again, what does it take to run with purpose now and finish the race with gratitude and hope down the road, regardless of how long or short the road may be, or how many or few laps we have to run.

Be Aware: 2 Timothy 4:1 (regarding God)

Paul is convinced of the reality of God's active and engaged presence in the world at large and in people's lives specifically. And, he is persuaded that one day Jesus will return and new heaven and new earth will be established. Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Peter 3:10-13.

Are you aware of God's presence in your life and the lives of others? A chosen and nourished faith in God can steady our steps and give us hope when life is hard and uncertain. Hebrews 11:6, Psalm 27:13-14.

There are many who live as if God is dead, non-existent, irrelevant, or disengaged. What do you believe? If you struggle with faith in a good and wise God, why? Is it disappointment with God, unanswered prayers, unmet expectations? Consider reading Disappointment with God by Philip Yancey. Is it disappointment with so called Christians? Please don't confuse the character of God with the inconsistent behaviour of people of faith. Is it disenchantment with what you see going on around you...suffering, injustice? Address these realities with a trusted friend or credible spiritual guide. Be resolved to grow in understanding the God of history and the Bible. Consider Alpha, intro Feb 5.17.

Be Resolute: 2 Timothy 2:2-4 (regarding God's truth)

Paul urges Timothy to remain faithful in teaching God's word, regardless of what contemporary culture offers...there are many dead end roads out there. Illustrate: the 'myth of more', unbridled self-reliance, etc. What Paul urges Timothy to be and do he has done, with God's help. Finishing well requires building on a solid and credible foundation of truth. At Redeemer we believe that the Bible is God's trustworthy and life changing word to people like you and me. As pastors and leaders we are committed to teaching God's truth boldly, compassionately and prayerfully, even when hard truths must be spoken publicly or privately.

We all take our cues for what to believe and how to live from some source. Are you at peace with your source?

If we would finish well, we need to be teachable and ready to change as God's word directs. Let me ask, what makes it hard for you to stay true to the Bible and not 'turn away from the truth'? Vs.4 Interaction, and Stephen's prayer

Be Alert: 2 Timothy 4:5 (regarding tough circumstances and emotional challenges)

Don't be easily swayed by different kinds of outlooks and philosophies; be alert in your thinking.

Be self-disciplined emotionally. Be mindful of your responsibilities and diligent in following through. Keep your Christian faith close to your heart and be ready to share the message of Jesus with others. Understand that at times it will be tough...tough to live by biblical standards of morality and ethics, tough at times to refuse to give in to the cynicism and ridicule of some, tough to do the right thing when you wish, just this once you could indulge yourself and just do...whatever you want. Tough at times to be held accountable for shoddy behaviour and tough at times to hold others accountable for hurtful behaviour. But, God gives grace and strength to help us stay true and running the race wisely and well.

Be alert, and join with a few others in running this race together. This choice is essential to finishing well.

Look Ahead: 2 Timothy 4:6-8 (regarding the finish line and the award ceremony with Jesus)

Read his descriptive words, he knows that his day of departure is just around the corner, his last lap is being run. He feels that truth in his bones, yet hope, resolve, and anticipation radiate from his words to Timothy. Departure: a ship being loosed from its mooring, sailing away...that's how Paul sees his future, moving into the very presence of God. Illustrate: with Dave and family in the hospital. "absent from the body, present with the Lord." 2 Corinthians 5:8

If we would grow stronger in faith, hope and love we must choose to believe in the life hereafter, a life with God. John 14:1-3. Through faith in Jesus.

And yet with Paul there is more, a face to face with Jesus, receiving from his nail scarred hands the crown of righteousness. This is an amazing, mind stretching thought...an actual encounter with Jesus. "well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord." Being presented an award can be humbling and exciting, such as golf awards.

Yet, to be warmly affirmed and applauded by Jesus, with a wide smile on his face. That can move us forward in this race of life. None of us know how many laps we have left, it could be many, or a few. Keep looking ahead to the One at the finish line. He cheers you on. He gives you strength by his Spirit to run according to his truth.

"Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!" Hebrews 12:1-3 (The Message)

And next week, finishing well with a lots of help from our Friend and friends...2 Timothy 4:9-22