

## Buck Up!

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Theme: The Christian life is a life committed to transmission of the gospel to the next generation.

Text: II Timothy 2:1-13

Series: Live With the End in Mind

One of the most deflating moments for the United States in the history of the Olympic Games occurred in 1988 in Seoul, Korea. The American 4 X 100 men's relay team was poised to break the world record. There was no thought that this team could lose. As one of the last events in track and field, it was much anticipated. The crowd followed the clock knowing where the baton had to be passed to each runner, if the world record was to be broken. The noise swelled as the third runner stretched to make connection to the last one, who would take it across the finish. By now there was no question as to who would win, but only by how much and whether the world record be broken. Then the unthinkable happened. The hand off was not completed. The Americans dropped the baton. The crowd, electrified moments earlier, was hushed into stunned silence. Having relied arrogantly on their inherent speed, the Americans had failed to sufficiently practice the handoff.

This is exactly what Paul is attempting to avoid—the dropping of the baton. The baton in Paul's second letter to his dear Timothy is the gospel—the message of good news. Paul writes a letter to his spiritual son and protégé to inspire the hand-off. But Paul sees people all around him dropping the baton and walking off the track. Quite frankly, he is fearful that this might be Timothy's lot as well. The early converts in Asia, now modern Turkey, were recanting their faith under heavy persecution. Paul sits confined in a prison cell with iron bars criss-crossed over a one foot opening in the ceiling. Like Jesus at trial when his companions of three years scattered in his time of need, Paul is seeing the same thing happen to him. In II Tim. 1:15 in what must be hyperbole, Paul writes, **"You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me..."** In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter Paul returns to the subject of his desertion, calling on Timothy to come to him before winter and bring his cloak, because only Luke is with him. In regards to his trial under the Roman Emperor Nero he writes, **"At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me."** (II Tim. 4:16).

With what appears to be wholesale abandonment, Paul continues exhort Timothy to complete the link to the next generation.

### Read II Timothy 2:1-13

When Paul says, **"You then, my son, be strong..."** this is a earnest plea to his beloved in the face of the trend of desertion. Don't be the next victim. Not you, too. Don't you disappoint me! Perhaps the greatest pain in this life is that of betrayal. You make an investment in a child as a parent, in a partner in a

## Buck Up!

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business, as a discipler with a disciplee, only to have your values rejected. But Paul is not just saying to Timothy, be strong, as if he is to endure, grit his teeth, or set his jaw in the face of peril. You might as well ask a turtle to run, or a snail to hurry. Paul says to Timothy, **"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."** (II Tim. 2:1) Find strength that comes from the undeserved favor that was bestowed on you, the love that pursued you into the arms of Jesus Christ. This is a love that is lavish and beyond measure. Let this grace be your strength in these tenuous and strenuous times.

Carry out your purpose, Timothy. This purpose is succinctly stated in the often quoted verse II Tim. 2:2: **"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to the reliable men who will be also qualified to teach others."** In this verse Paul envisions the four legs of the relay race; the baton pass to future generations. **Leg 1:** Christ to Paul; **Leg 2:** Paul to Timothy; **Leg 3:** Timothy to reliable men; **Leg 4:** reliable men who can teach others.

**1. Christ to Paul:** Paul is convinced that the gospel that he proclaims is not of human origin. In fact, he says that he got it not through the normal human means of transmission, but directly from Jesus Himself. Writing to the Galatians Paul says, **"I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ"** (Gal. 1:11, 12). Most certainly Paul is at least alluding to his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus where he received his call to be an apostle of the one whom he had vigorously opposed.

**2. Paul to Timothy:** This same gospel, Paul says, is the one I passed onto you before many witnesses. Why does Paul speak here of the public transmission of the gospel? In other words, the gospel I instructed you in private is no different than the one you heard me declare in open air markets, synagogues, and public forums in Athens.

This might be a good time to take a brief excursion. Paul is making allusion to those who might think that they have special knowledge or *gnosis* from which we get the word Gnostic. Gnostics have special insight into the mysteries of the universe and revelation not available to the average person. The recent blockbuster bestseller *The DaVinci Code* makes a number of outlandish claims that run counter to orthodox Christianity. Since Dan Brown begins his novel with claims of fact, it has been disturbing to many that a grand conspiracy may have been perpetrated upon the church. One of the many claims in this book, is that it was at the Council of Nicea (325AD), from which we get the Nicene Creed, that Jesus was elevated from a **"mortal prophet, a great and powerful, but a man nonetheless"** to the **"Son of God."** Constantine, the Roman Emperor at the time, had political reasons for elevating Jesus to deity. The only trouble was

## Buck Up!

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that there were a lot of gospels around at the time that supported the mere humanity of Jesus. Constantine had a new Bible commissioned and financed, which we have today. But he also had to complete the conspiracy by gathering up these other gospels, outlawing them and having them burned. These were the Gnostic gospels, such as the Gospel of Thomas, Philip, Mary, etc.

So the conspiracy goes that we have a deified Jesus today, because of a 4<sup>th</sup> century intrigue. That Jesus was a mere man had to be cleansed from the record of the first 300 years in order to pull off this hoax. Your faith in Christ is a house of cards, a charade, so goes a thesis from this book. Talk about rewriting history! Where do you think we get the view that Jesus was divine who is the gospel? I think it is a fair statement to say that every page of the 4 gospel accounts of Christ's self-consciousness raise the question, "Who does this person think he is? God or something." The apostle Paul simply echoes Jesus self-stated divinity when he says things like, "He [Jesus] is the visible expression of the invisible God (Col. 1:15)"..."though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped...(Phil. 2:6)". This was no invention of 4<sup>th</sup> century origin, but is founded in the life and ministry of Jesus Himself.

Paul is saying to Timothy that the gospel we proclaim is an open book. It requires no secret knowledge. There is not some hidden revelation for a few. What you see is what you get. This leads us to the third leg of the baton pass.

**3. Timothy to reliable men:** This is the gospel that Timothy is to "entrust to reliable men and women". As we discovered last week the word "entrust" is a favorite one of Paul's in this letter. We noted that this word comes from the commercial banking setting of the day. The gospel is a deposit, treasure, or trust that is given to a bank or put into a safe deposit box for safe keeping. It must not be tampered with, distorted, or lost in any way. The church acts as a repository, trustee, or steward of the grace of God. Paul is saying to Timothy, I was entrusted with a message directly from Christ, I have passed it on to you. Now don't lose any of it as you pass it to select people.

Don't just invest this gospel in anyone, but find reliable, dependable, loyal, responsible people. Look at the character of those with whom you spend considerable time. Are they teachable? Is there a hunger for God? Are they able to become self starters or self-feeders?

**4. Reliable men to teach others also:** Timothy in addition to those who are reliable, find those who are able to teach others the message of the gospel and complete the transmission to the next generation after them. Paul may have in mind those who are elders here at the very least, but also those who can be equipped to effect the hand-off. Is this not the role of every Christian parent? Yet many of us struggle with the sense that we are not confident and competent

## Buck Up!

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to even teach our own children. This is an area that we want to address in our disciple-making model here at Christ. We envision core communities for those who are actively parenting. In this supportive fellowship we as a church want to be an equipping community where we come alongside you and give you the tools so that you can be the primary disciplers of your own children. Parents, would you find that helpful?

Built into the discipling vision that Paul outlines here is generational multiplication. From Christ to Paul, Paul to Timothy, Timothy to reliable ones, reliable ones to those who can teach others. The calling of the church is to equip you for this vocation.

We have a wonderful example of this model in our confirmation process that starts at 9<sup>th</sup> grade here at Christ Church. It is called a Mentor-based Confirmation Program, because someone older in the faith has two or three high school mentees with whom they are walking over a 7 month period from September to March. It is a thrill to hear the impact that this has on the lives of our students and I suspect on the mentors as well. Let me read you an email from one of students (used by permission), Kyle, to his mentor, Dave. "I just wanted to thank you for all the time you put into my confirmation adventure; I will never forget the experience. You really impacted my life and brought me closer to the Lord more than any church service or school could even come close to doing. I always looked forward to our meetings, even if I was half asleep during the services. I am going to miss spending the time and walking with you in the path of the Lord, so I really hope that we can keep a relationship going. You were the reinforcement I needed to help me realize that God is always there for us in any and every situation. You know they have the bracelets 'What would Jesus do?', well I think 'What would Dave do?' because you are the most Christ like person I've met, and I can deal and speak with you physically. You are a blessing to me and I am so grateful that you were my mentor; there is a reason for everything. Thanks for being there."

This is the kind of impact that Paul envisions here. I am sure when Dave read this, he was stunned. To be considered the most Christlike person Kyle had met. Wow! People, don't let those high standards keep you from participating in this kind of relationship, if our high school team comes calling.

II Tim. 2:2 is quoted in Christian circles as the model of discipling and has been used to establish discipling as a one-on-one paradigm. It comes out in the formula each one, teach one. I have the sense that the legacy of my life may be to have influenced the model of disciple-making into a paradigm of discipling that is different than the one on one model. If you have your ears to the ground you may have heard people talk about something called *triads*. Instead of disciple-making being considered a one on one investment, my experience has been that

## Buck Up!

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small, reproducible units of three or four provide the maximum benefit for both transformation and multiplication. They are springing up all over Christ Church. It is one person inviting two or three others on the journey of growing into Christlikeness in a covenantal relationship over about a year meeting weekly. The idea is to systematically cover some of the foundational or essential content of the faith in a deep relational setting of trust and life change accountability.

I have had the privilege since last May of walking three of our leaders, Carl Dill, Jim Easterling, and Greg Rocque, who are Trustees. This has been for me one of the most significant experiences of community I have ever had. These three men have become closer than brothers. We have shared a journey together through life's inevitable ups and downs. In each of our services I have asked one of them to share briefly with you this morning two things: 1. How has your life been changed or transformed as a result of this time?; 2. How you been have been equipped to teach others also?

Paul underscores this vision of gospel transmission by painting a picture of the nature of the Christian life through three metaphors. All three metaphors, soldier, athlete and farmer make a singular point: The Christian life is a life of discipline.

**v. 3, 4 Soldier:** "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer" (II Tim. 2:3, 4). Paul had ample opportunity to observe a well disciplined soldier. In one of his imprisonments it was members of the elite palace guard that were chained to Paul. They would come in shifts, chained by the wrist to their prisoner. It was always a question of who was the real prisoner here. Paul had a captive audience. He was able to beat their ears with the gospel so that he could say in Philippians, "As a result [of his imprisonment], it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard...that I am in chains for Christ" (Phil. 1:13).

He noted that the best soldiers were those who did not get distracted or entangled in civilian affairs, but remained focused, concentrated on what their commanding officer wanted from them. They were under orders or authority. Just so Timothy has a commanding officer in Jesus Christ, he is under orders. On this Memorial Day weekend where we honor those who have served in defense of freedom, this is an appropriate image. A disciple lives as if there is a war on.

**v. 5 Athlete:** "Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules." If you cross the finish line in a relay race without the baton in your hand, you do not get the prize simply because you were there first. Most likely, Paul had the standard of the Olympic or the Isthmian Games in mind here. To compete as an athlete one

## Buck Up!

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had to swear before Zeus that they been involved in strict training for 10 months prior to competition. If one wants the prize, an athlete must enter a regimen of training, day in and day out, putting themselves through the monotony of repeated exercises to bring their bodies under submission. This is no different for a disciple.

**v. 6 Farmer:** “The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops” (II Tim. 2:6) Paul almost seems to be stating a redundancy. Isn't a farmer hardworking by definition? Up before dawn. Work not done until after sunset. Could a lazy farmer survive? Paul established here the agricultural principle: the law of returns. You reap what you sow. You get out what you put in. The farmer gets to enjoy the firstfruits of his harvest, the pleasure of his labor.

The picture is here is so clear. Like anything in life, it takes discipline and hard work to achieve what it is you want to accomplish. And yet we continue to get snookered into believing that you can, in fact, get gain without pain. I have a particular weakness. Because of this weakness I am the brunt of jokes from my wife and daughter. If there is such a place as an exercise equipment graveyard, I have made considerable contributions to the stockpile. I am a sucker for infomercials. Just tell me that I can be in great shape three minutes a day, I am there. 6 second ABS; you bet. Yes, I have been known to make that phone call to the number on the TV screen. Now, don't laugh, because I know many of you have turned your treadmills into clothes hangers. With all good intentions we say, we are going to get into shape, except that it requires one thing—discipline.

Why is it that we understand this principle when it comes to other aspects of life's pursuits, but when it comes to the Christian life, we think it should be easy. We get it backwards. Mother Teresa put our problem simply when she said, “The work is not our vocation. Our belonging to Christ is our vocation. People are confused.” We think our work is our calling, rather than living as followers of Jesus as our calling. So we put our efforts into graduate degrees to pursue our work careers. We know what it is to put in the long hours at the office, or bring material home to prepare for the next day. We understand if you want to get anywhere in life, it is going to require focus and diligence. This truth is not lost on us. But when it comes to our Christian life, which is our life that underlies everything else, we treat it as our avocation. Being a Christian is like a hobby. Something we do in our spare time.

Paul makes it clear here that the biblical paradigm or image for being a follower of Jesus requires the same devotion as a soldier, athlete, and a farmer. I am not trying to describe a joyless existence of toil, but relate to a principle we all understand. 90% of life is perspiration; 10% is inspiration. But you don't get that inspiration without the perspiration. We need to adopt a training paradigm

## Buck Up!

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for Christian living. The quote on the front of the bulletin from John Ortberg says it, "This need for preparation, or training, does not stop when it comes to learning the art of forgiveness, or joy, or courage. In other words, it applies to a healthy and vibrant spiritual life just as it does to physical and intellectual activity. Learning to think, feel, and act like Jesus is at least as demanding as learning to run a marathon or play the piano."

This is why we encourage you to get into triads, be a mentor, engage in 9 month journey's such as *Nehemiah Ministry* to explore your call, or *Growing Your Soul* to develop the disciplines of communion with God, or to be on Global Outreach Team to some part of the world so that God can get a hold of your heart. These are a part of training program here at Christ Church. One of these days we may be able to each have a spiritual personal trainer to help us get in shape.

Let me rush through v. 8-13 to our conclusion this morning. In v. 8-10 Paul further motivates Timothy to this life of discipline by referring to our Lord as one who suffered and then rose triumphantly. In v. 8 Paul says, "Remember Jesus Christ..." Then he turns to himself as a model of suffering. "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect..."

**v. 11-13:** Paul concludes this section with two couplets. Many commentators believe this was from a hymn sung in the early church. The first couplet is a promise, while the second is a warning.

"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."

In other words, if we remain faithful, there is a great reward.

But the second couplet is frightening:

"If we disown him, he will disown us;  
If we are faithless, he will remain faithful,  
For he cannot deny himself."

Some have tried to turn this into a positive statement. Even if we are not faithful to the Lord, God will remain faithful to us. Certainly there is some truth that, because we are never, ever fully faithful. But Paul has in mind here faithlessness that is a desertion and recanting of the faith. To make sense of the parallel structure, the only thing that this couplet can mean when it says that God "cannot deny himself", is that God must act consistent with his character of

## Buck Up!

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holiness. If we do not remain true to the end, and don't finish well but turn on our backs on the Lord, the Lord can only but grant our desire, and will turn away from us.

The message to Timothy and to us is...regardless of the cost, discipline, invest and stay true to the end. Finish well.

Let me conclude with a familiar story that comes from the life of Winston Churchill. After WWII Churchill returned to Eton, the scene of his childhood education. The student body had gathered to listen to their most illustrious alumnus. By this time, Churchill had developed a reputation for being a word merchant. You dared not get into any repartee with Churchill for you were bound to lose. The playwright George Bernard Shaw tried it once. On the occasion of the opening of one of his plays, Shaw sent Churchill an invitation: "Dear Mr. Prime Minister, here are two complimentary tickets to the opening night of my new play. One ticket is for you and the other is for a friend...if you have one."

Churchill immediately replied, "Dear Mr. Shaw. Thank you for your invitation and generous gift of tickets for your new play. Unfortunately, my schedule prohibits my attending opening night. However, I shall surely be in attendance on the second night...if there is one."

Churchill's fame as a speaker created great anticipation, even for British schoolboys. The moment was at hand to hear the great man display his oratory. As he stood to approach the podium, the assembly hushed. He grasped the lectern and thrust forward his bulldog chin and said with ferocity, "Never, Never, Never...give up!" Then he sat down.

This weekend we honor soldiers, because when they enlist they in it for the duration. Are we? Desertion surrounded Paul. They weren't it in for the duration. He had placed great hope in his spiritual son, Timothy. Paul looks down the ages to our time and raises the same question. Will you finish well? Don't drop the baton. Complete the hand-off.