

Are You Ready For Gospel Ministry?

2 Timothy 3:10-15 (ESV)

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1 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 11 my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. 12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

It was the first official race I ever ran, and I didn't even sign myself up. I was registered online by a friend and automatically received an email for a race called The Spartan Beast. I went online to learn more about this race and discovered an alarming description under the title "What To Expect." "You're going to be pushed beyond your limits. The Beast is 13 miles and 30 obstacles on some of our most epic terrain. Be prepared for steep climbs, fast descents, heavy carries, and maybe even a swim. The Beast will test your body, mind and spirit with every step you take, but you will be stronger for it." And if that wasn't enough, it finishes "This is where glory lives." And if the website could have just given me a fist-bump, it would have. For someone who has never run more than 3 miles in his life, and not in more than a decade, it was a very concerning paragraph.

And yet, something about this race was intriguing. I mean, most exercise programs that I could remember had this advertising strategy that was the opposite. They try to downplay the challenge as much as possible. They say things like "ten easy steps, fifteen brief minutes." There's no impact to your lifestyle. There's no impact to your diet. You'll hardly even know it was an exercise at all. But now, every morning I'm receiving these emails about how much pain I'm about to endure. (Laughter!) I'm being reminded and alerted to the fact that my life of comfort is over. I read subject lines like, "Unleash your inner beast" and "Will your back bend or break?" "No excuses." "Stop hitting the snooze button." Or my favorite, "Don't flip out, flip tires." (Laughter!) I would want to flip over or maybe flip some pancakes, but this was a different motivational strategy. It's based not on lowering the bar, but on raising it.

It kind of reminds me of military recruiters. Some talk about financial bonuses. Some talk about being all you can be or seeing the world. But then you look at some of these elite forces and maybe even the Navy Seals, these programs, and the strategy becomes about the cost and the risk. Actually, the worth of the commitment is revealed not by hiding it, but by highlighting it.

Paul is no stranger to pain, but the race he is running is more significant than any recreational marathon. And the mission he is on is far more meaningful than any Seal Team operation. He is running a race of faith. He's on a mission to take the name of Jesus and make it known around the world. And the cost has not been small. He's been in prison more than once. He's been beaten, stoned, wrongly accused, betrayed, abandoned, abused, mocked, and condemned. And now he's stuck in a dungeon waiting for execution. He's writing one of his last letters to one of his only remaining friends, Timothy. He is an apprentice that Paul had mentored for years. He's one that Paul trusted as a faithful follower of Jesus. And so Paul charges Timothy to carry this mission forward. He entrusts it to Timothy. It's a call to gospel ministry.

The word "gospel" just means "good news." It's the good news of what God has done through Jesus. It's that Jesus is the God-Man who came to reconcile guilty man with a good God. And through His perfect life and death and then resurrection, He has conquered death and made a way through an exchange that He paid the penalty and then we receive the life of righteousness that He performed. And now we can be restored to this good God in glory, in heaven. It's good news of hope. And "ministry" just means to give it or provide it, and all that it includes, to others. It's gospel ministry. This is what Paul has been doing to tell people this message. And then he's calling Timothy to join in this message and continue in it and be a witness of Christ.

That's what we've been thinking about the last couple of weeks; the charge from Jesus to be witnesses. It's to go forward and have a part in this gospel ministry. Paul and Timothy's part in this ministry was just in obedience to this great commission for Jesus followers to go and make disciples. That just means more followers. Make followers who will multiply and make more followers. And they are being faithful to that charge. But today we turn from the charge of witnessing to the challenge.

This won't be easy. Both of these men know the stakes. Both counted the cost. There's no use hiding the risk. Paul is waiting for execution even as he pens these words. This is no walk in the park. Gospel ministry is not something to take lightly. It's not something you just add to your life that won't have an impact. It's not something that you won't even notice is there. Sharing about Jesus with the world invites challenges that you would never encounter otherwise, but it's totally worth it. I think Paul would find it strange to hear us talking about following Jesus as if it's an easy thing to do. I think it would be strange to him to hear us making light of it.

To be sure, it is the best thing you can do. It is the most rewarding thing you can do. But it also is going to be the most demanding because Gospel ministry is worth everything that it costs. And what it costs is everything. It will cost you everything to be a witness

for Jesus! And sometimes well-meaning people downplay that cost and act like it's not going to be difficult. But that's not the tone or the experience that we see in the Bible. This is going to be hard. God is not guilty of not sharing the risks. He makes them very clear from the very beginning. To be a witness for Him, to honor this charge of Jesus is going to be a serious challenge.

So we've learned we have a role to play in sharing this good news and this gospel ministry. But the question is: Are we ready? Are we ready for gospel ministry? Are we prepared to give the good news about Jesus? We have an idea of what that means. We have an image in our minds of how that might go, but is it realistic? Have we truly counted the cost? Are we ready? Have we weighed how difficult it's going to be to tell real people the real message about the real Jesus? What would it cost us? It will surely cost us our comfort. It will definitely cost us our lifestyle and maybe some friendships. It could cost us a promotion at work, or our reputation with family or friends, relationships. It may cost us our career, our home, even our freedom, or our very lives. It could cost us that. Are we ready? Are we ready for gospel ministry? Paul would say, "Don't sign up unless you believe it's worth everything because that is what it will cost you."

The mission charge has been given. Jesus has authority over the earth and His commission has already been spoken. It's to be witnesses. The race is set before us. Are we ready to take on the challenge? Few other places in Scripture give us this clear of a picture of what it means to run and what we're going to face, and then to finish, other than Paul's second letter to Timothy. And we look here to help ourselves in what it means to ready ourselves for this task. So how do we ready ourselves for this call? There are three ways we'll look at this morning. There are three ways to ready ourselves for gospel ministry. First, we'll think about what it looks like, and then what gospel ministry guarantees, and then lastly, what gospel ministry demands. First, what gospel ministry looks like. We'll begin with a practical example to follow.

I. Follow the Pattern of Paul (3:10, 11)

I must have been about ten years old when I experienced the worst snow of my life. There were so many feet that actually it was above my head. Several of our neighbors were entirely snowed in. They couldn't get out, so they made some calls. I remember my mom getting the call and my dad and I being sent out. I remember my dad getting dressed up, dressing me up, and here we go, out into this cold weather, trying to free up some of our neighbors. As we go out, and we're suited up and geared up, the snowstorm is blowing against me. My dad was telling me, "Follow me." I realized that the only way I can make any kind of progress is just by stepping in the steps my dad had put before me. I stayed right behind him so I was sheltered a bit from the wind and the snow. And the only way I could make any kind of progress is just following right behind him. There's no innovation or creativity. There's no finding another path. It's just dependent on my commitment to just follow the pattern of steps laid before me.

The world is a storm of influences, and millions of people are telling us and calling us to go this way and that way. There are lots of alternate routes that appear more appealing.

The wind of popularity is blowing against us and the chill of the crowd blows hard against this path of gospel ministry. And Paul is calling Timothy to follow in the pattern he has laid out. You remember verses 1-5 that we just read. This is a tough context. The wind is blowing against anyone who would follow Jesus, and Paul is saying, “Gospel ministry is going to stand out and you have to follow this path. This will be the journey.”

Jesus, from the very beginning of His ministry said this: “Follow Me.” His followers are called disciples. They were just people following Him and calling others to do the same. Paul and Timothy are two links in this chain of so many people walking in the same footsteps that Jesus set before us; that we would endure this kind of storm and call others to do the same. If we’re going to be ready for gospel ministry, we need to follow Paul’s pattern. This is a very unique kind of lifestyle ministry that will stand out in this world. Here are a few patterns. We’ll look at four patterns of Paul’s ministry that stand out.

1. Follow His Integrity—Live On Mission (10)

It just means you’re whole or undivided. You’re honest and consistent in your commitment to follow Jesus in every place of life no matter what others might see, say or do. You’re going to live on mission for Jesus in every area of life, with integrity. And that’s something that Paul wants Timothy to consider. You can see the close examination Paul invites as scrutiny over his life. There are seven areas that welcome examination.

10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,

First, look at the integrity of Paul’s doctrine. He said, “Timothy, you followed my teaching.” It’s what he taught. In contrast to all the false teachers in the world and all the other messages, Paul is teaching the truth. What the truth is, is the gospel. And Timothy has been following Paul for years. He has seen him share this message in public and in private and all over the place in houses and one-on-one. He knows this true message. Timothy knows his doctrine and it has integrity. It’s consistent and it’s about Jesus. Paul proclaims Jesus Christ and Him crucified. So Paul says, “Timothy, you know that. You followed me.” It’s the integrity of his doctrine.

But also, there is the integrity of his deeds. He says, “You followed my conduct. It’s not only what I taught, but how I lived. You saw that my life matches what was coming out of my lips.” Paul didn’t just preach something and live another way, but he walked the talk. He is inviting Timothy to examine his life; the integrity of his doctrine, of his deeds, and the integrity of his direction. He says, “My aim in life.” It’s not only what he taught and how he lived, but where he was going. “You know what I’m about.” Paul is a man driven by purpose. He was a man of single-minded commitment. You remember what he said in Philippians.

Philippians 1:21 For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

That’s a guy with aim in life! You think of those t-shirts that say “Baseball is life” or

“Fishing is life.” Paul says, “Jesus is life and you know that’s my direction. You know where I’m going.” That’s what Paul said in Acts 20.

Acts 20:24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

His aim is unmistakable. It’s the integrity of direction. And then you see the integrity of his devoutness in what he believed. He said, “My faith.” It’s his trust; his confidence in God and his willingness to be consistent and follow. Paul was a man of devout faith. He stayed true. But you also see the integrity of his decency in how he related with people. He says, “My patience.” When people had made things difficult for him whether they were friend or foe, he had tremendous forbearance. Even at great personal cost, he showed a rare sort of decency. And then he says the integrity of his devotion. He says, “My love.” You see how he cared. He had love both for the people who followed him and his enemies. He had a great love that people would come to know Jesus. Even when it got hard, he had love. He was consistent. And you see that lastly in the integrity of his dedication, how he persisted. He says, “My steadfastness. Under great pressure and trial, when circumstances made it hard, I did not get discouraged, crushed and give up. I kept going.” This is his dedication toward this gospel ministry.

This kind of willingness to pursue this path, this pattern that he set for Timothy, is going to stand out in the world. He says, “Timothy, stick behind me. Follow this. Follow the pattern.” Follow what he taught, how he lived, where he was going, what he believed, how he related, how he cared, how he persisted. This is what we’re going to do as we ask ourselves, how consistent are we with living on mission for Jesus in every area of our life? Are there places at which that integrity starts to falter, whether it’s at home or at work or just in public, with certain friends, online? The use of our time or our money or our energy; are these things and our relationships with other people, do they reflect this kind of pattern of integrity in pursuit of living on mission for Jesus? Can we ask others to imitate us and say, “Follow this pattern”?

2. Follow His Agony—Brave the Cost (11a)

This is meaning suffering, his hurt. He says, “Timothy, you followed my ministry, but you also followed my persecutions and sufferings.”

11 my persecutions and sufferings

Now we move from the close examination he invited, to the intense experiences he underwent. It’s his experiences of agony and pain. He recalls three specifically for Timothy to remember.

that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—

We think first of his rejection at Antioch in Acts 13. He had gone in to share the gospel

there and eventually was driven out by the leaders. They didn't want that there and they said, "Get out of here!" So Paul suffered rejection and had to get out of town. They moved on to Iconium, but there, this persecution followed. In Acts 14, at the beginning, Paul experienced threats and aggression. They would start to form a plot about how to kill him. So he narrowly escapes with his ministry partners and they go on to the next town, which is Lystra. And this is Timothy's home town. Paul arrives there and starts to try to share the gospel, but these enemies followed him. And there, he experiences riots and eventually assault. He was chased, stoned, and left for dead. This was all because he was doing gospel ministry. He was being a witness, telling people about Jesus.

Timothy, in his home town, probably saw the climax of all this persecution. He probably saw that. He understood Paul. Paul eventually would recruit Timothy to follow him. And Paul is reminding him that this is the pattern that is one of integrity, but also one of agony. There is an agony to follow. He is just reminding Timothy that if you're going to live on mission, you have to brave the cost. We ask ourselves, do we know anything of this agony? Have we followed in this pattern of gospel ministry? We're not seeking out agony or pain or suffering or persecutions, but do we recognize ways in which following Jesus has cost us? Do we recognize ways in which witnessing to others has brought us affliction? Are we braving the cost?

3. Follow His Tenacity—Don't Give Up (11b)

This means being determined or persistent. We see the close examination that Paul invites, the intense experiences that he underwent, and in verse 11 we note the serious endurance he displayed.

which persecutions I endured;

He doesn't even go into them deeply. Think about that! After being stoned and left for dead, he could have highlighted that more. Or he could have just given up, retired, and then got a good book deal. "We're done here!" (Laughter!) But he endured and then kept going. He had tenacity. He didn't give up. At dinner time, when our family prays for missionaries, people going to share and be witnesses for Jesus, we pray often very simply, "God, please help them not give up." What can we do to help our fellow brothers and sisters? To help those that we've sent out, in our workplaces, our neighbors, with our families? Don't give up!

4. Follow His Security—Trust the Lord (11c)

We can follow Paul in his security, where he found safety and comfort. In verse 11 he says

yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

When I think of rescue, I think of the fact that he got stoned. I mean, how did that happen as a rescue? And yet, he survived and God used that to bring about furtherance of this

gospel ministry. And Paul views that as a rescue. He even quotes Psalm 34:19.

Psalm 34:19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

Timothy would have known that, and Paul's security was in God's protection. Now how does that work? Well remember what Paul said.

Philippians 1:21 For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

The security that Paul has was untouchable. As one writer says, "The Lord ever rescues His people frequently from death and sometimes by means of death. Either way, nothing ever separates them from His love." Now, that's an untouchable security! And that was what helped Paul keep going. He trusted the Lord. "Whether I live, whether I die, whether this hurts or not, I am trusting the Lord."

Do we? When it comes to witnessing, do we? Does it come out in our prayers? Does that kind of trust come out in our conversations? Does it surface in our actions? It will result in a real impact. If we're going to live on mission, we have to prepare to brave the cost, to not give up, and to trust the Lord. This is the pattern set by Paul, and it's not new to him even, because this is the pattern that he was following that was set by Jesus. Jesus says very simply in Mark 8:34

Mark 8:34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

This is the path that Jesus set. He's a Savior of following, a Savior of discipleship. He set this pattern of integrity, agony, tenacity and security in God, and told others to follow and then train others. This is what it means. This is what gospel ministry means. It's what sets it apart. It makes it stand out. That's what it looks like. That's a practical example. We follow the pattern of Paul.

Second, look at what gospel ministry guarantees. We're going to move to the unavoidable struggle that we must accept. Gospel ministry guarantees suffering. It may be distinct, but it's going to be difficult. So if you want to be ready for gospel ministry, then you need to

II. Brace For The Pain Of Persecution (3:12-13)

If you're like me, and I'm sure, probably Timothy maybe felt the same, as you hear about those sufferings you think, "Oh yeah, that was the worst. I wonder if there's a pathway that I could kind of sort of sidestep all of that sort of persecution? If I can avoid that kind of suffering?" Paul decides to take a few verses to really highlight something important here. He says, "In case you're wondering whether you can skip over this kind of agony, suffering is an unavoidable struggle for us to accept. If you want to be ready, you have to brace for the pain of persecution." Paul's boldness here reminds me of some missionaries

who have just been so courageous.

One of them who has some strong words for us to really consider is C.T. Studd. He was an athlete and had a large inheritance. He decided at one point to follow Jesus. He gave his inheritance away, pursued gospel ministry, and he's the one who wrote that poem, "Only one life will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last." And he goes into ministry across the world. At one point, he delivers this message called *The Chocolate Soldier*. He was thinking about soldiers who look really good, people who are ready to go. But as soon as the heat of battle comes, they just melt entirely. And he talks about chocolate Christians. Here are his words. "Dissolving in water and melting at the smell of fire. "Sweeties" they are! Lollipops! Living their lives in a cardboard box, each clad in its frilled white paper to preserve his dear little delicate constitution."

Those are hard words! Chocolate soldiers—people who look great, but when the heat comes, they melt. There's no courage, no commitment, no conviction. They are fair-weather followers. And if we're not ready, we can become entirely consumed in our prayers and our life with clinging to comfort and fleeing any kind of heat. Now, we're not trying to pursue pain. We're not trying to incite persecution. But we cannot be afraid of it. We cannot be controlled by comfort. And if we are, we are not ready for gospel ministry, because it guarantees suffering. In verses 12 and 13, you can see the challenges.

12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

There are a few challenges that make gospel ministry especially hard. We'll look at three challenges for which we need to brace.

1. Brace For Attack—Expect A Fight (12)

Hardship will come. Opposition will rise. You look at this rising opposition in verse 12. Here are three observations to note. First, it's targeted. It's a specifically aimed attack on the people who want to follow Jesus, who want to live a godly life in Jesus. He's not talking about life being hard in general. He's saying, "If you decide that you want to follow Jesus, then you're going to face a unique opposition for your faith. It's a specific attack that will happen only on a person who wants that." It's a targeted attack. If you're going to unite yourself with Christ, you're signing up for that. And this attack is going to be total. He says it's going to be on all, everyone who desires to live this life. Everyone! It's a targeted attack, and it's total on all these people. And it's definite. He says, "Indeed..." You can count on it! It will be certain that you will experience this attack. And any version of Christianity that doesn't convey that, is like someone offering some kind of miracle drug without sharing the risks and what comes along with it. We understand that when we follow Jesus, there is serious risk with that. This is not fine print. It's all over Scripture that you are going to need to brace for attack. Jesus said it from the beginning with his disciples. And then all throughout the early church and throughout the New Testament, we realize this is what Christians experience. Peter would say

1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

This is not strange. This is something to prepare for. Hardship will rise and it will grow. You brace for attack, but also

2. Brace For Decay—Know The Trends (13a)

This is the degeneration Paul prophesies will occur. He promises this is going to happen. It's a decay. It's a decline. It's something that just gets worse and worse. And you see the people that will decay into this sort of evil.

13 while evil people and imposters

These are people who are obviously wicked on the outside and then even people who are actively trying to draw others away from Jesus and are imposters. You could say enemies and phonies. These kinds of people will progress in decay. You see them go from bad to worse.

will go on from bad to worse,

Don't be surprised! Know the trends. When someone commits themselves to rejecting Jesus, this will be the trend. You will watch this over the course of their lives. It will go from bad to worse. Brace yourself for that.

3. Brace For Deceit—Watch For Lies (13b)

Here is the deception he warns is going to spread. This difficulty that is guaranteed and then he says is going to be intensified, now he says it is specified. Watch for lies; lying to others and lying to self. He says these people will be

deceiving and being deceived.

They will be tricking other people and find themselves tricked themselves. If you want to be ready for gospel ministry, you need to brace for that sort of pain; attack, decay, deceit. Expect a fight. Know the trends. Watch for lies. Christianity is a religion not just of following, but of suffering. Jesus promised this kind of attack would come. And He Himself is one who suffered the greatest threats and aggression and attack and was betrayed and falsely accused and then executed. Jesus said Himself

John 15:18-19 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

This is something to be expected. He says

John 15:20 Remember the word I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.

This is what it means to follow Jesus. Are we ready for that? We need to brace for this kind of challenge.

Well, we’ve thought about the sacredness of gospel ministry and what it looks like. We’ve learned a little bit about the suffering that it guarantees. Let’s look now at the stamina it demands. If you want to be ready for gospel ministry, you have to follow the pattern of Paul, you have to brace for the pain of persecution, and

III. Stick To Your Profession With Perseverance (3:14-15)

“Profession” is just how we’ve told everyone and declared, “We’re going to follow Jesus.” It’s our profession. It’s saying, “Yes, we’re going to do this.” And sometimes, the hardest thing is simply continuing.

I think it was about 99 years without change that Coca-Cola decided in 1985 to create a fresh formula for its drink called New Coke. I don’t know if you remember this, but the number of calls a day that the company received, tripled almost instantly. People wrote songs mourning the loss of “real coke,” they called it. There were groups and protests that spawned called “Society for the Preservation of the Real Thing” and “Old Cola Drinkers of America.” People were carrying signs that read “Our children will never know refreshment.” (Laughter!) Wow! After 79 days of panic, the company finally announces it’s going to focus on offering a flavoring called Coca-Cola Classic. Within two days, they received over 31,000 calls. People loved this! Back to the old thing!

Apart from all that, new can be good in many areas, but there are some things that shouldn’t be changed. We think about the fact of just continuing in truth and change. We don’t need to be innovative and creative with truth. We need to be faithful and stick to it and continue. And in a place where people loved bringing new teachings and new thoughts, Paul just says, “Continue.” Continue and stick to it. This is the commitment Paul urges Timothy to make.

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed,

“In contrast to all those deceivers, you stand out in a different commitment, in sharp contrast. Hold on to, continue, remain, abide in what you have learned and what you have firmly believed in.” And to drive it home, he brings up a special connection for Timothy to remember.

knowing from whom you learned it

Gospel ministry means sticking it out. Here are three reasons that make it possible.

1. You Know Your Teachers—Study The Sources (14)

Paul is recalling some spiritual influences. There are at least three we can consider that he is reminding Timothy of. The first is the most obvious, his mentor, Paul. Paul was a spiritual influence. He taught Timothy and Timothy had seen this. But when he says, “Remember from whom you learned it,” that word “whom” is in the plural, which means more than one. So it can’t just be Paul. Who else might he mean? Well, it could be many, but I think for sure, I think we’re at least looking at his mother and his grandmother. If you look back at chapter 1, verse 5, Paul opened and he said to Timothy

2 Timothy 1:5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

Paul is considering, “you learned it from even family.” And I think that’s highlighted even more when you consider that this has been from childhood.

Now, fathers are to play an essential role in teaching children about Jesus and explaining what it means to follow Him from the Scriptures, for sure. And Paul teaches that in Ephesians and we see it in Proverbs, where the father is speaking, but there’s also a really unique and special place of mothers. And here, Timothy’s dad was Greek, it says in Acts 16, I think it was. So it was left to these women to lead him in the Scriptures and to help him understand what it means to follow God. And then Paul explained this gospel. And so they’re following Jesus together with this faith, and it’s is a precious legacy that we see here.

I think it was in North Africa that Monica grew up. She was in a semi-wealthy family and brought to faith by a Christian maidservant in the family. She was given away in marriage actually to a non-Christian who she prayed for throughout life. Eventually, before he died, he became a Christian. But during that time, they had a son named Augustine. He was a pretty smart kid and had a good education. She hoped he would follow God, but he just defied his mother and ran away. He chased after pleasure and went and lived with a woman who wasn’t his wife and fathered a child. He got a position to teach in Italy, and this mom who was faithful and prayed for him, moved there. She attended a church there. The pastor befriended her son. And over time, he just had this intense inner battle. So much so, that he actually ran out into the courtyard and sort of fell on the ground. He was so convicted and confused about what to do.

As he was laying there and collapsed, in his own words, he said, “I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or a girl (I know not which) — coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again. ‘Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it.’” And so he decided, “I’m going to go read the Bible.” He went and he opened the Scriptures. He read just one verse, and he was confronted by his sin. And he said, “Instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.” It’s just this miracle! And you don’t think that behind that was a praying mom?

He goes and he tells his mother, Monica, and they rejoice together. He says of God, “You have pierced our heart with Your love.” He gives up his career and decides to go serve the Lord in gospel ministry. He has an impact that she never even got to see because she passed away soon after. He had deep grief and he said, “She neither died unhappy nor did she altogether die. And now she’s gone from my sight, who for years had wept over me that I might live in God’s sight.” Here is this man transformed.

We just think about the role that we have, whether it’s as a parent, or a sibling or even a church member. People that we’re teaching or talking to, modeling, they’re watching. They’re watching and they’re taking to heart what we’re saying, what we’re doing, and how we’re living. And then as we pray for them, no matter where they’ve been, whether they’re at home or away, and where they’re at, we can pray, and we don’t give up on them. God is working through these teachers and through the families that He brings His Word to bear in. And that’s what Paul highlights next. You know your teachers, but also

2. You Know The Scriptures—Soak It In (15a)

Paul says, “You can study the sources and see the lives of these women that have trusted. You’ve seen my life, but you also know the Scriptures and you can soak in God’s Word.” And this is the Biblical instruction he emphasizes.

15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings,

“You knew this from infancy. This started young. You knew God’s Word and it started to have an effect.” We’re never too young to hear God’s Word or to be speaking God’s Word to these little ones.

I don’t know if you have that experience when you get a little one and you kind of are looking at them for the first time and you’re thinking, “What do I do with you?” And they’re looking at you like, “You don’t know what to do with me.” (Laughter!) Whoa! They know me! They see through me. And then you’re kind of trying to talk to them and all of a sudden, out of your mouth just comes this song that you haven’t heard for decades. Maybe the last time you heard it, you were four years old. You’re like, “Where is this coming from? I remember that. My mom sang that to me.” These things have an impact that can come out and be unleashed decades later. These moments are so special.

I remember even coming to this church for the first time. I remember coming into Awana and having some leader sit there, I don’t remember who it was, and just walking through a verse. I’d never memorized a verse in my life. I think I was probably nine years old or something. They’re talking to me about the Bible. I’d never heard about the Bible. They’re helping me to open up Isaiah 53, and I remember them explaining to me the word “propitiation” on my first Wednesday at church! (Laughter!) And I was hearing about Isaiah 53, and I thought, “I think I understand it. Jesus took the place...I get that.” I remember that. I remember where I was sitting when my mom would open the Bible and would read and was crying. She was like, “Do you know what happened to Isaac and Abraham?” And she’s crying. I remember where I was sitting. These things matter from

childhood, from infancy, and we share God's Word. Paul says, "You know the Scriptures." It's powerful stuff, here! But Paul mentions not just the Scriptures. We'll have to just keep moving here.

When you think about this, Jesus came and there were people who knew the Bible. They had the Old Testament. They had all these Scriptures. They would memorize it a lot. They loved it, but they were rejecting Jesus. And Jesus said

John 5:46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.

Jesus is saying, "If you understand the Old Testament," which is what Timothy had, "it's all these promises that are now fulfilled in Me." And Jesus confronted them and said,

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.

And so here we kind of move from understanding, yes, you know your teachers. Yes, you know the Scriptures, but also

3. You Know the Power—Keep It Real (15b)

The power is the true Savior. These Scriptures are not only in and of themselves some kind of magic book that gives you salvation. But, they actually are

which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

They show you your need for a Savior and then they introduce you to the Savior. And the Savior is Jesus. The power is in that relationship, that through faith, we can be saved. Paul says, "Timothy, you know what happens. You've seen the power unleashed in your life and unleashed in others. It's not just some magic formula in a book, but these words are God's very words. They show you what is right. They show you what is wrong. They show you how to get right, how to stay right, what it means to follow Jesus, and that this person actually transforms everything about you." It's the power of knowing Jesus Christ. It reminds me of that quote from C.S. Lewis where he says, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen. Not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else." Timothy, you know the power. That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

What is going to help us be ready for gospel ministry in this world that is so difficult? Yes, we need to be faithful in teaching. We need to know the Scriptures. But we need the power of the Holy Spirit to enliven faith, to unite people's hearts to Christ so that they know Jesus. That is a power that we cannot conjure ourselves. That is a power from God and we trust Him for it with prayer. We can faithfully pray confidently because we know it is His will that we would be His witnesses. So we pray that He would ready us for this. Ready us to start the race, but also to finish it.

He broke the British record for the 400 meters in 1985. In 1986, he was a member of the

team that won the gold medal championships of the relay. He experienced some injuries over his athletic career, but he seemed in good shape in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. In the first round, he was the fastest and then he won the quarter final. But in the semi-finals, about 250 meters out, he tore his hamstring and his chances of winning were over. But something happened. He got up and he started limping. He was just going along the track, determined to finish. And then somehow, his father got around Security and burst out and then ran to his side. And then he walked alongside him and helped him hobble all the way across the line. Derek Redmond came ready to race. He was ready to run. He was ready to start. But most memorable was that he came ready to finish, no matter what opposition or pain would come. And he didn't have to finish alone.

Are we ready for gospel ministry? Starting means nothing if we aren't prepared to finish. Being a witness for Jesus is going to be tough. We know the charge, but now we know the challenge. Do not sign up unless you believe it's worth everything, because that is what gospel ministry will cost us. But who could measure the infinite joy that is ours to take place in the rescue of a soul? What price could we place on such a cost? Jesus has already shown us with His life. And He promised He would never leave us nor forsake us. His Helper is with us to carry us through, that we might finish, that we might join Him on this race with readiness to follow to the end, knowing that we don't have to run or finish alone.