

# Remember the Future

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[ 0 : 00 ] with Andy and Andrew. Good morning. We're on page 1197 of the Church Bibles. 1197.

And that's 2 Timothy 2 and we're reading verses 1 to 7. 2 Timothy 2 beginning at verse 1.

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. This is high today.

[ 1 : 41 ] Morning everyone. Let's pray as we begin. Father, we thank you for your word and we pray that you would humble our hearts now before you and before your word.

Please make us willing receivers of it. And we ask for your spirit's work in our lives as we hear your word.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, why is the letter of 2 Timothy in the Bible? Why is it there? It's a great question to ask of any Bible book.

I think the answer is that this letter is a call and a charge and an inspiration to leaders and churches to guard the gospel in our generation.

In that sense, this letter is more of a cold shower than a warm bath. Sometimes Bible books are full of comfort and encouragement.

[ 3 : 14 ] I think the letter of 2 Timothy is a little bit more of a sober up kind of book. You're in a race. Now is the war.

Share in suffering. We've talked about Timothy's crossroads or his Y-junction or as I was... It's been further refined. I think it should be a fork in the road.

So that's where we are now. It's a fork in the road. And that is the crossroads that every generation of Christians must face. The decision of which way to go.

We've talked about Timothy's task. The task of every generation. Just look down at 1 verse 14.

Timothy's task. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

Guard the good deposit. That is the gospel entrusted to you. And we've talked about how there is nothing to be ashamed of about this gospel.

[ 4 : 14 ] That's chapter 1. And the question I think for the rest of the letter becomes okay, if we want to be unashamed of the gospel if we want to take our turn to guard this wonderful gospel about a saviour who has abolished death for the next generation by the way, God will guard his gospel come what may but if we want to be faithfully those through whom he does it rather than to waste our lives what's it going to take?

What's it going to take for us to guard the gospel in our generation? And that then becomes the question of the rest of the book of the letter chapters 2 to 4 and two things of first priority as Paul moves into chapter 2 verses 1 to 7 Firstly we need leaders strengthened by Jesus to train future leaders and secondly we need leaders strengthened by Jesus for a lifelong struggle with eyes fixed on the eternal rewards now this will affect what sorts of leaders we want to give our lives to getting behind it will affect what sorts of churches we want to go to it will affect what we pray for our leaders and it will affect our own perspective on our lives and why we are here so first leaders strengthened by Jesus I've added and churches in brackets because of course 2 verse 14 remind them that's the church of these things

Paul threw out this letter it's an open letter it's relevant for the whole church just look down at chapter 2 verses 1 and 2 you then my child be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also just want to pause on verse 1 here it's easy to just slip straight past verse

1 you then my child be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus two observations from this verse two lessons number one there is no natural strength that will enable a Christian leader to stay faithful to guard the gospel through the whole of life under all the pressures that will come pressures from outside the church pressures from within the church pressures from within the heart of every Christian leader sin you will know many leaders

Christian leaders who have stumbled or who have even fallen along the way because of sin and it is after all to Timothy 2 verse 1 only the supernatural divine strengthening of Christ that will enable a Christian leader to guard the gospel I wonder have we fully graphed this Timothy therefore well what was he supposed to do with the command be strengthened it's interesting is it be strengthened what was he supposed to do I take it first to be humbled to understand that the strength to stand up and to be unashamed would never come from him first to be humbled and then to pray all the time Lord strengthen me Lord strengthen me but notice Timothy I think could pray with complete confidence that he will be strengthened sometimes in the Bible you get prayers that we know the answer before we pray it notice in verse 1 by the grace that is in Christ Jesus not the grace that might be in Christ Jesus for you but is in Christ

Jesus there is grace in Jesus for salvation we know that Jesus died for us and there is grace in Jesus for strengthening there is grace in Jesus for salvation and there is grace in Jesus for strengthening Paul here is referring to the latter there is no shortage of it and he is not going to withhold it from his leader who humbly comes to him and asks for it Jesus who died to save Timothy will surely strengthen him for the task so there is no natural strength but there is ample and free divine strength in Christ for the leader who would come to him dependent and humble now what should we all do with this will we pray for our leaders whatever whether small group leaders whether staff team because they will never keep going without strengthening from Christ and what a difference it will make for a whole church to be praying

[ 9 : 31 ] Lord Jesus please strengthen him by grace for this work you may get better teaching you will get more faithful leaders and a healthier church but be strengthened for what two things very clear I think in these verses number one be strengthened first for the work of training future leaders verse two and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also Timothy is going to need strength for this work rugby I think is full of great illustrations for this letter I almost wonder whether the Lord created rugby just in order to illustrate his letter to 2 Timothy here's another one how do you guard the ball in rugby a lesson I learned the hard way when I played rugby once and was hospitalised

I probably should have learnt this lesson earlier you guard the ball by passing it on as you know before you yourself get cluttered how has Paul guarded the gospel he's passed it on to Timothy before he himself as is about to happen gets cluttered by the Romans how does Timothy guard the gospel he passes it on to other men who will be able to teach others in other words how do you guard the gospel it's counterintuitive you think you should just cover it up no you guard the gospel by passing it on the word does mean men it can also refer to mankind to humans just as the English word men can but I think Paul has in mind here particularly men because those who are going to be formally entrusted with the gospel as he has and able to teach others in the context of Paul's writings in 1 and 2

Timothy are men and so therefore though there may be broader applications this has to be primarily about the training of the next generation of future leaders and teachers within the church three observations firstly Paul envisages this is going to be hard work he's going to need the strength of Christ for this work I looked up apparently it takes three or four years to train a primary school leader teacher anyone involved in training will know that it doesn't happen over a 30 minute coffee Timothy had been 15 years with Paul this work is hard work notice also that Paul doesn't spell out the details of how Timothy is to do it entrust to faithful men he leaves the details to how how's Timothy going to actually go about that work well

Timothy needs to work that out in his context with the people that he has and so do we the second thing about this verse and I think this is a surprising thing is it seems to be the priority for Timothy now I reckon most of us would think of training future leaders as the thing that we want our leader or church to get round to doing if there's any time left after everything else after the regular teaching of the church family after you as you rightly expect me to be involved in evangelism and sharing the gospel once all of that's done if there's any time left then by all means get on with this work of training others but isn't it interesting that it's the first thing that Paul says to Timothy about how to

guard the gospel later in chapter four he comes to the conclusion preach the word in season and out of season do the work of an evangelist yes but isn't it interesting doesn't the placing of this suggest almost

Timothy if you do nothing else make sure you do this do you find that surprising what would it look like to share this priority at grace church which brings us to the third observation from this verse Timothy therefore is to have a long sighted not a short sighted view of his ministry and so are we now I think the temptation will be for all of us will be to be short sighted I know it is for me and to give our energies as a church primarily to the present generation and what benefits us why because it's partly because it's easier and partly because we want to see fruit now in the presence church numbers etc I certainly know that's true for me but the Lord Jesus would have it otherwise there are many ways to be a short sighted leader or church you could have a leader who's devoted to dealing with pastoral issues all the time a spiritual fireman that is often the expectation in churches you could have a leader devoted only to teaching the church family in a very general way on [15:06] Sundays building our faith you could have a leader who is essentially a manager organising church events but if we want to be a church living all out for the glory of Jesus and his people that not only believes the gospel in our generation but guards it well then we will want to be long sighted in fact you as a church have benefited from the long sightedness of others for the last 20 years I sent a text to Simon Dowdy who many of you if not all of you know well and I asked him who were the biggest influences on him in his training he sent me a brief text which won't surprise you David Jackman at Cornhill William Taylor at St Helens what gospel ministry means what the gospel is and then thirdly serving actually in an

RML Bible study training leaders group why then does Grace Church Dulwich exist why are we here because humanly speaking men like David Jackman and William Taylor were long-sighted and those around them William Taylor spent quite literally months of their time entrusting the gospel to men who would be able to teach others also there's a lot of stuff that he wasn't able to do because he was doing that well let's think what this might mean for us practically then at Grace Church freeing up Bible teachers for this work is a whole church activity I think this number started in the city on probably quite a lot of money gave it up after two years and spent the last 25 years of his life serving as an administrator at church and he has freed up the

Bible teachers there to train any number of men for the next generation the Lord has used him I don't want to embarrass Vicky but isn't it wonderful to have administrators and let's think seriously and be clear that it is well worth giving to that end youth work secondly youth work so easy for youth work to be seen as just a nice to have or even to have quite an inadequate view of what youth work is for is youth work just so the adults can learn in peace or so people with families might be more likely to come also kids can get a little bit of extra input but what about training future leaders of the church think about how much entrusting of the gospel can happen between the ages of 13 to 18 for a young man I would suggest most of it can happen in that period

Dulwich is a hub of schools so let's be ambitious let's be willing to throw resources at youth work and you're already doing this not only to do this so that boys and girls might be saved yes but also so that we as a church can play our part in raising up future leaders for the church think how the Lord God has used the camp ministry in the last decades how many of our leaders have been trained there and so our youth ministry here at Grace Challenge I suggest should not be a nice to have but an absolute priority in light of 2 Timothy 2 verse 2 and it goes without saying that the role of women in this work is vital I feel slightly silly even saying it but because we're talking about raising up men we should mention this how much do we owe under

God to the unseen work of faithful women in raising up leaders teaching children praying giving shouldering the burden well we will find out on the last day but I suggest it will be astronomical and therefore the vital role of women's ministry training women with a deep mature and humble faith who will throw themselves behind this work and lastly on this verse just a comment on students and young adults now who we can reach as a church is in the end in the Lord's hands church but I suggest that reaching this group should not only be an evangelistic priority for us as a church but a training priority if we're not reaching students and young adults there should be

[20:48] I suggest a godly dissatisfaction among us with this given the demographics as soon as you step outside of Dulwich village perhaps someone will commit to praying that the Lord would open a door among this group for us as a church among the coming months and years so firstly leaders who will train leaders secondly we need leaders and churches strengthened by Jesus for a

lifelong struggle with eyes on the eternal reward and that's three to seven share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus no soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules it is the hard working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops think over what I say for the Lord will give you understanding in everything Paul gives these three pictures to

Timothy as to how to understand his life on earth together I suggest they make the same point lifelong struggle eternal reward but they do emphasize different features of this struggle the soldier now is the war soldiers get shot at soldiers are in constant danger they must put themselves in harm's way for the cause and they can't rest until the war is over they don't get entangled in civilian affairs they can't rest until the war is over the athlete this is about endurance now is the race the marathon runner must press on through pain barrier after pain barrier until the finish line actually I've never run a marathon so I wouldn't be able to tell you from personal experience but I'm told that's what happens they can't stop and they can't cheat cut a corner if they want the crown the farmer well this is about hard work blood sweat toil now is the harvest rest is not for now but for then the point then is simple it is lifelong struggle focused patient hard under fire lifelong struggle eternal reward and what a prize to live for eternity in the kingdom of the

Lord Jesus enjoying his commendation forever I think Rico Tice put it like this sustained by the joy into eternity of the commendation of the commanding office of the Lord Jesus enjoying the crown the glory of a life well spent for him forever enjoying the best fruits of the harvest in the new creation forever well Timothy needed to think you see that verse seven he needed to think and to get a right perspective on his life he needed to know that rest is not for now but for then a couple of implications the ongoing temptation of any Christian leader will always be to give up on the long hard struggle and in

Paul's words to get entangled in civilian pursuits in other words to put down arms and to give up the fight this happens in many churches across the church of England if you ask what the vicar is actually doing what do you find you find their life looks like a life of leisure and no different from the world around and they've stopped preaching the gospel and no wonder because it's a long race and a hard fight and we them it's not easy the only leader who will make it to the end is the one with eyes fixed on the eternal reward the finish line second implication yes this is about leaders but Paul is deliberately writing an open letter for the church you see that in the last word of the letter you you all it's plural because he's inviting every

Christian to share this mindset and so this is for all of us the soldier the athlete the farmer if it feels hard to be a Christian I wonder if you find that feeling that at the moment you feel hard to be a Christian that's right it is if it feels like hard work yes if it feels like running a marathon with endless pain barriers yes if it feels like being in a war a struggle yes that's right because rest is not for now but for then most people around us some of you in your workplaces or in schools involved in a career long struggle with eyes fixed on retirement or something like that the

[ 26 : 51 ] Christian is involved in a lifelong struggle with eyes fixed on the eternal glory to come the finish line is slightly further down the road the prize will last a little longer and will be a little better shall we say let's pray our loving father we thank you for a wonderful hope the finish line we thank you that the lord jesus is risen from the dead the offspring of david that the finish line is real and true that he is the king of eternity and his eternal kingdom and of peace there will be no end we thank you for a short struggle and an eternal reward father strengthen us we pray in christ with all the grace that is in him to press on help help us as a church to play our part in training leaders and enable us as individuals and a church to run the race right to the very end and we ask it in jesus name amen it i tent