

Ready! Set! Go!
Live like You are Dying
2 Timothy 4:5-8

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Text Introduction: First and foremost, Paul's second letter to Timothy is a call to perseverance. Interestingly, Paul's letter comes from prison. His encouragement to persevere is not theory, it's testimonial. (4:6-8) It is widely held that 2 Timothy is Paul's last letter before his death.

We have given the summer to walking through this whole book, basically verse by verse, certainly section by section. We have given this theme to this book: Ready, Set, Go. The idea behind this theme is two-fold. First, it is an adequate description of what is happening in this letter. This book originally is a letter from Paul to Timothy. Paul is preparing Timothy in this letter to take the baton, to assume a greater role of leadership in the life of the Church—to take his place. The second idea behind this series is for God to use this teaching to prepare our hearts for a challenge that I want to issue to you individually and to us as a church this Fall.

In our ONE Day service (on August 31) and beyond, I will issue the challenge to “Do Something” for God that you have never done. We will ask God as a church collectively to unify us around one thing that we can do together that we have never done before in the history of our church.

But today we continue to walk through 2 Timothy, nearing the end. We have now come to the signature verses of this book.

Text: But as for you, be serious about everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸There is reserved for me in the future the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved His appearing.

Introduction: In 2008, we had a guest preacher one morning named Sammy Gilbreath. Sammy is the Director of Evangelism for the Alabama Baptist Convention. Several of you ask me from time to time how he is doing and if he is even still alive. As of this week, he is still alive and well and preaching. The reason for the question has to do with his story.

Sammy told us that day that he has a very rare medical condition. First, he has a disease called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. He told us that morning that in addition, he has the largest blood clot of any living person. On top of that he has an aneurysm. Sammy was told in 2004 that he had at most 6 months to live and that when he died he would die “very quickly.” What did Sammy do? Did he go home to die? No, he kept living. He keeps preaching. He figures that if God gives him another day, God intends for him to keep fulfilling his purpose for his life. He told us that morning that he was living like he was dying. Then, he reminded us that all of us are dying. We may not have a medical condition, but all of us are dying.

I couldn't help but think about Sammy's message as I studied this text this week.

How do you live like you are dying? Let the text guide us to two ideas.

Fulfill God's Purpose for your Life.

"What is the purpose of my life?" Or, as Rick Warren so famously asked a few years ago in his classic work, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, "What on earth am I here for?" Students ask this question. Young adults often ask this question. People reach middle age and sometimes go through what some refer to as a mid-life crisis. As a result of disappointment of what has been perhaps, and fear of what is to become, these people sure want to sort out the purpose of life. Senior adults want to know "What now is the purpose of my life?" They may ask, "Did I miss my purpose?" or "Is it too late?" So, it's an important question. It one of life's ultimate questions.

Verse 5 generally deals with God's purpose for every believer. What is that purpose?

- Keep a clear head about everything.
Others are losing their head, so you keep yours. Some translate this "be sober." William Barclay said about this phrase, "The Christian is not to be the victim of crazes; stability is his badge in an unbalanced and often insane world."
- Endure hardship.
People are very quick to give up when hardship comes.
- Do the **Work** of an evangelist.
See the most important word! Work! Evangelism for most everyone is work.
- Fulfill **your** ministry.
See the most important word! Your! Here is where Paul might get a little specific with Timothy. We must fulfill our ministry—not someone else's ministry. In Colossians 4:17, Paul addressed someone named Archippus specifically when he said, "Pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord, so that you can accomplish it or fulfill it." Your ministry is urgent because it is unique and unfulfilled.

Fulfilling your purpose in life takes priority. Priority drives decisions.

Focus on a Godly Perspective of Life.

Verse 5 gives us the exhortation to Timothy; verse 6 gives us the example of Paul.

- Total Surrender in this life.
The drink offering imagery probably harkens back to a Greek idea of ending every meal with a drink offering to a god. Paul is making a Christian use of this imagery by indicating that his life is already being offered to God. As he said in Romans 12:1, he understood that his life was an offering.
- Timing of death.
Paul said his departure is close. Paul used a word that was used in the first century world in a number of interesting ways that sheds light on his use. The word was used in reference to...

- Untying an animal from a tool
- Loosening bonds as in freeing a prisoner
- Untying ropes from a tent as in to break camp
- Untying ropes from a ship as to prepare to launch into the sea

Death is all of these things for the believer. But, here the point is also that it is close. For us, death is uncertain. We need to live like that. I keep in my Bible verses that guide me and one quote from Richard Baxter, a 17th century Puritan preacher. Baxter said, "I preach as never sure to preach again and as a dying man to dying men."

- Triumph is in finishing.

In verse 7, Paul used 2 metaphors and a phrase of exclamation. Here is how we live like we are dying. We want to finish well.

- Treasure comes at the end.

Verse 8 gives us one more glimpse of why we live like we are dying. Here is the perspective beyond this life.

Sammy Gilbreath was asked, "What do you want to say to people?" He says, "I want people to sit on that cardiologist's table with me and hear those same words that I heard. I want them to hear 'You are dying and when you die, you will die very quickly.'" Those are the kinds of words that ought to change the way we live.