

Fight to the Finish

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FIGHT - For What Matters Most | June 28, 2026 | Philippians 3:13-14; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Ephesians 6:12

Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

All right, I want to invite you to take God's Word and turn to 2 Timothy chapter 4. We're concluding our FIGHT series today with a message that I'm calling "Fight to the Finish." Fight to the finish.

This is a message that I wish our USA World Cup team would have heard on Thursday in their loss to Turkey, but they're moving on, okay? The next game is this Wednesday night. So, after our America 250 celebration, which I'll tell you more about at the end of our time together, we will get you home in time to watch America win in this next round, okay?

We all know that starting well is important, but today's message is about what matters most, what's most important, and that is that we finish well. We finish strong. This is true in sports, it's true in life, and it's certainly true for the Christian.

What I want to do today is break this message up into three sections. The first two sections are going to be relatively quick. They'll fly by. We'll spend the most amount of our time in the third section.

The first section is what I'm calling the call to finish strong. We're going to trace Paul's words throughout 2 Timothy, his challenge to his young son in the faith, as he terms him, and this charge to finish well, to finish strong.

Then we're going to look at Paul's motivation to finish strong. Paul kind of peels back the curtain, if you will, and gives us a little light into how he was thinking as he was beaten and stoned and left for dead. What kept him putting one foot in front of the other, not giving up and throwing in the towel?

Then the third section is going to be how to finish strong. We'll get real practical there as we talk about ways that we can finish strong.

Second Timothy is a book by the apostle Paul. These are the last words that we ever have from him. He's writing to, as mentioned earlier, his son in the faith, Timothy. This letter is all about affirmation and challenge and charge, and it culminates in this statement to fight the good fight of faith. Finish, Timothy, and finish well.

Paul has been following Jesus for 30 years, and he knows that, outside of a miracle, he is not getting out of this dungeon prison that he is sitting in. In fact, most scholars will tell you that it was within weeks of his martyrdom. Some say days.

And so he pens this letter. Our key verses that we're looking in on today are verses 6 through 8 of 2 Timothy chapter 4. The Bible says this:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

— 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Out of all the fighting messages that we have preached, this is by far the one that I've been looking forward to preaching the most, because my life verse is verse 7:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

— 2 Timothy 4:7

This is the verse that I want on my epitaph. Just put it on my tombstone. By God's grace, whenever it's my time to exit this world, I want to be able to say with integrity exactly what Paul said here.

The Call to Finish Strong

As Paul gives these words to Timothy, he gives them to us this morning. This is the call to finish strong.

Second Timothy 4:6-8 is in the context of the whole letter, and the entire letter is a challenge to Timothy. It is Paul speaking words of life over him and calling him to step up and continue on.

We can't look at every verse of every chapter, but let me just give you a highlight. This is chapter 1, verses 13 and 14. All of the Scripture references we'll look at will be on the screen. He says:

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

— 2 Timothy 1:13-14

You hear the challenge, the call, the charge.

Look 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.

— 2 Timothy 2:1-2

It's the tenderness of a father and a son, a mentor and a mentee. Here's the challenge, the charge.

I've preached this message before. I called the sermon "Last Words." You know, when someone's dying, you tend to listen to every word. You hang on every word that's being spoken because what are their last words going to be?

Well, here they are. He's challenging Timothy: Keep going.

You look at verses 22 and 23 of 2 Timothy 2:

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

— 2 Timothy 2:22-23

He knows his time is nearing, and he's putting it all on the line to Timothy.

Read chapter 3. Timothy, there's going to be godlessness in the last days. People are going to be evil, and it's not going to be easy to finish strong. The world in which you're living is going to be hard, but you've got to keep going. Continue to grow up in what you were raised in.

Then we get to chapter 4, and he charges him in verses 1 and 2:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season.

— 2 Timothy 4:1-2

Timothy, don't ever stop.

Go down to verse 5:

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

— 2 Timothy 4:5

Timothy, do what God has called you to do, and don't you ever give up.

Then he uses himself as an example:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

— 2 Timothy 4:7

Timothy, you are to do the same.

This call to finish strong Paul makes to Timothy, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the authority of the Word of God, he's making that call to us today. We have a responsibility, Christian, to not just start well, but to finish well.

The Motivation to Finish Strong

Secondly, we see a motivation to finish strong. This is verse 8. Paul says:

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

— 2 Timothy 4:8

It's amazing. You read about Paul's life, and being in a dungeon prison is par for the course. In 2 Corinthians 11, he says, "I've been beaten. I've been stoned. I've been left for dead. I have a daily anxiety for these churches that I've planted." He says he's been crushed. He's been afflicted. He knows what it is to suffer.

And yet, you look at Paul's life and there's a sense of joy, there's a sense of purpose, and there's just this not-giving-up attitude. It's amazing to think about. Where does it come from?

Well, Paul kind of gives us a look behind the curtain. In a word, it's a reward. That's his motivation. He said there is laid up for him a crown of righteousness. That phrase "laid up" means it's stored away. It's reserved. It's got his name on it.

He knows that when he crosses the finish line, if he runs according to the rules, if he's not disqualified, if he doesn't quit, if he just crosses over the finish line, he has this crown of righteousness laid up for him.

Paul loved athletic imagery. We read in 1 Corinthians about him running to win the prize. We read that he beats his body into submission, that he makes it his slave, lest, after preaching to others, he himself would be disqualified. Philippians 3 talks about him pressing on toward the goal. He loved this athletic imagery.

Here in verses 6 through 8, he calls life a fight. He says, "I've competed. I've fought. I've done everything that I was supposed to do." Like an athlete finishing his contest, he is ready to receive his reward.

Now, it wasn't just the reward that he was after, but it was who was going to give him that reward. Look at the text again in verse 8:

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.

— 2 Timothy 4:8

He was motivated not just by the reward, but by who was going to be giving him the reward.

Isn't it interesting? Here Paul is in a Roman prison, awaiting a magistrate's word to go to his death, and yet the only ruling he's concerned with, the only ruling he's consumed with, is the one the righteous Judge is going to hand down. He wants that reward, and so he's motivated to fight and to finish well.

Notice it doesn't say that you have to be in first place to get the award. It doesn't say that you have to be the most impressive athlete in the field to get the award. This award, the crown of righteousness, is for all of those who love his appearing.

In other words, Paul is running after a person. Jesus is his reward. He says anybody who loves him and is pursuing after him has a reward. It's waiting on them.

This is what kept Paul going. His future reward is what kept him putting one foot in front of the other and not

throwing in the towel. This future reward and the reward-giver kept him from getting in the ditches, from disqualifying himself, and from pursuing some false advertisement of the evil one. His focus and his motivation were this eternal reward.

So it begs the question this morning, just a question of application: If you're here this morning and perhaps tempted to throw in the towel, quit on your faith, give up, or stop running altogether, what's your motivation for being in the race? Where are your eyes?

I'm in the middle of my summer reading right now. I love summer reading. For me, it's when I get to read books that I want to read, okay? Without a pen in my hand.

Typically, from January to June and August to December, most of my reading revolves around sermons that I'm studying for, so I'm always reading with a pen in my hand. Well, the month of July, June, July, and the first part of August, is fun reading for me. I've got books that I'm going through.

This is an opportunity for me to just take a break over the next five weeks. I'm so grateful for our church. You allow me a few weeks out of the pulpit during the month of July so I can catch a breather. I've got great friends and staff members coming in to preach.

One of the books that I was reading earlier was talking about a study done by a professor at Fuller Seminary. His name was Dr. Bobby Clinton. He spent years researching biblical and historical leaders who finished strong and who finished well.

He looked at 49 people he would call major biblical characters. Of those 49, looking at the patterns of those who finished well and those who did not, less than 25 percent of the biblical characters he studied finished well.

He mentioned six barriers to finishing well. He calls them the "what kills you" list. Do you want to know what's going to take you out of the race? He gives six subjects here, and he gives biblical examples of people in the Bible whom each of these subjects took out and caused not to finish well:

1. Finances and greed. 2. Abuse of power. He talks about Saul there. He didn't even know that the hand of God had left him. 3. Pride leading to a downfall. 4. Illicit sexual relationships. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, didn't finish well. He married a bunch of foreign wives. 5. Family issues. 6. Plateauing, i.e., burnout.

I want you to look at this list right here. You can just keep it on the screen for a minute. I want to ask you, if you're tempted to quit or tempted to throw in the towel, where are your eyes? What is your motivation?

If it's any of these things right here, or a whole host of others that could lead to number six, burnout and frustration, if it's not Jesus, then you may not finish well.

Paul wasn't focused on any of these things. Money didn't move him. He didn't have any. Power didn't move him. It had been stripped from him. He's in a dungeon prison, his needs being met by someone else. Pride? He didn't have any pride. Illicit sexual relationships? He didn't have time for that junk. He was busy planting churches, advancing the kingdom, and penetrating darkness.

We don't know about his family issues, but certainly burnout wasn't happening. Why? Because he had a reward that he was after. His eyes were on someone who was going to hand him that reward.

He's encouraging Timothy, and me, and you, that if we want to finish strong, our eyes can't be on the things of this world. They have to be on the unseen, the eternal reward that is waiting for us if we'll just finish strong.

We have the call to finish strong. We have the motivation to finish strong. Now let's talk about how to finish strong.

How to Finish Strong

This is where we're going to spend most of our time, looking at Paul's life and what he writes here in verses 6 through 8. How can we practically finish strong?

I want to give you three statements that I think will help us all in finishing strong.

Live With the End in Mind

Statement number one: We need to live with the end in mind.

Several weeks ago, I was at a conference in Florida, and the artists and songwriters Shane and Shane were there. They had a conference before the conference, if you will, for worship pastors. They had contacted our office because they have a devotional that they do every week.

If you're a Shane and Shane fan and you like their music, I would really encourage you. We'll put it on the screen for you. If you text DEVO to 79316, every day, Monday through Friday, you'll get a 10- to 20-minute devotional sent to you by Shane and Shane. Sometimes they have a guest on, sometimes they don't, but they talk about a song - the words of the song, why that song is inspirational, and maybe the story behind that song. Then Shane and Shane sing that song. It's pretty good, Monday through Friday.

They called our office and said, "Hey, we know Pastor Jarrett is going to be in Florida. Would he mind being a guest on our show and talking about a song that he likes?"

I was like, "Sure, man. I'll do that. I love Shane and Shane. Are you kidding me?"

I was going to be at the conference anyway, not the worship part of it, but I went in when they told me to. When you listen to this devotional, it's in a studio most of the time, so I thought we were going to have this little interview in a back green room and be done with it. Fifteen or 20 minutes, and I'm out of there.

But I didn't know. I walk into a production meeting, and they say, "At this time, Pastor Jarrett, you're going to walk out. You're going to do that devotional live onstage in front of the people at the conference."

I was like, "We're going to do what?"

I thrive off preparation, all right? I was not prepared for that.

The song I picked was "Give Me Jesus" by Fernando Ortega. Do you know this song? "In the morning when I

rise..." Some of you do. All right.

I love this song. "In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus." Then it goes into a verse: "When I am afraid, give me Jesus." Then it ends, "When I come to die, give me Jesus."

I just love that song because I believe it encapsulates all of life, from the very beginning, from the time I wake up to the time I exit this life. What's it all about? Just give me Jesus.

I'm just telling you, the longer I live, the more I think about the end. I don't think that's morbid. I don't think it's because of my job, doing funerals and being with people in suffering. I think it's wisdom.

The psalmist said:

*So teach us to number our days
that we may get a heart of wisdom.*

— Psalm 90:12

The psalmist said in Psalm 90, verse 10:

*The years of our life are seventy,
or even by reason of strength eighty;
yet their span is but toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.*

— Psalm 90:10

I'm telling you, if we are going to finish well and finish strong, we need to live with the end in mind.

Earlier this month, I turned 48 years old. I had to look at it because I can't believe it. Forty-eight years old. In November, Debbie and I are going to celebrate 24 years of marriage. My oldest is getting ready to go off to college. Maybe I'm just super sensitive to it, but it seems like the days are passing by faster and faster and faster.

I remember when my mom turned 40 years old. I came home, and there was a party being thrown for her. There were over-the-hill balloons everywhere, and there was a wheelchair in the middle of our living room. She turned 40 years old, and I thought she was ancient.

I was talking to a college buddy around my birthday, and we were talking about how we probably have fewer birthdays to look forward to than we have behind us. That's sobering. It's crazy to think about.

I look at pictures on my phone. Do you not do that? I go, "Man, my golly, when was that? Three months ago? Ten years ago?" Life goes by.

As the days pass, I'm more and more convinced that if we're going to finish, and finish well, we've got to live today with the end in mind.

Paul uses that word "departure" there in verse 6. It's an interesting word. You study it, and we know the Greek language is very picturesque. It's a picture that sailors used of setting sail. Pull up the anchors, set sail, depart.

It's also a picture of a soldier who packed up his tent. The battle's over, and he's packing up his stuff and heading home. That's the word that Paul uses here.

If we're going to finish faithful, we've got to spend more and more time thinking about that day when we set sail for eternity, when we pack up this earthly tent, if you will, and go home. This will help us finish well.

Look again at that "what's going to kill you" list. What's going to prevent you from finishing strong? If you fall prey to any of these things, I promise you, you're not thinking of that day.

Number four is illicit sexual relationships. I read a proverb of the day as part of my time alone with the Lord every day, so I'm going to read Proverbs 5, 6, and 7 once a month. It's all about the adulterous woman and adulterous relationships.

Do you know what I have by Proverbs 5, 6, and 7? I have a list of names of pastors who have not finished well in this area of their lives. They forfeited their ministries because of an illicit sexual relationship.

I read their names every month, and I don't read them in judgment. I read them as a reminder to pray for them, but I also read them as a warning. I want to finish well.

I'll often go and speak at men's conferences, and at men's conferences you're always challenging men to step up, right? Love their wives. Be good dads.

Sometimes I'll take something from Randy Alcorn, who wrote the books **Heaven** and **Money, Possessions, and Eternity**. He's a pastor, theologian, and a great man. Talk about living with the end in mind. He sat down one day, and you can Google this, and he wrote "Consequences of a Moral Failure."

He just took time to write down every consequence he could think of if he were to cross the line sexually:

"Grieving the Lord who redeemed me. Dragging his sacred name into the mud. One day having to look Jesus, the righteous Judge, in the face and give an account of my actions. Following in the footsteps of these people whose immorality forfeited their ministries and caused me to shudder."

He had the names of pastors written down.

"Inflicting untold hurt on Nancy, my best friend and loyal wife. Losing her respect and trust. Hurting my beloved daughters. Destroying my example and credibility with my children. Nullifying both present and future efforts to teach them to obey God. Why listen to a man who betrayed Mom and us? If my blindness should continue, or my wife be unable to forgive, perhaps losing my wife and my children forever. Causing shame to my family. Why isn't Daddy a pastor anymore? Losing self-respect. Creating a form of guilt awfully hard to shake. Even though God would forgive me, would I forgive myself?"

He just keeps writing them, one after another.

"Forming memories and flashbacks that could plague future intimacy with my wife. Wasting years of ministry training and experience for a long time, maybe permanently."

It goes on and on and on.

What's he doing? He's reminding himself, in a tangible way, what not finishing strong looks like.

It would be a good practice for all of us, maybe not in this way, to sit back and write out a picture of what your life would look like should you not finish well.

I've got a buddy of mine who's a pastor here in this area, and every time we see a moral failure by a pastor, we send this picture to one another. Now, the picture has changed through the years because Neil's family has gotten older. But I texted Neil and said, "Neil, send me the most updated picture you've got, because we need a new one to text." I told him I was going to talk about it.

Neil Jeffrey was an elder at the church where I previously served. Great man of God. He played quarterback for Baylor, if you're interested, when they beat Texas about a hundred years ago. Anyway, that hasn't happened in a while, I don't think.

But Neil makes you want to be a better man and a better father. I love Neil Jeffrey. Whenever there's a moral failure, my buddy and I will always send this picture to one another.

Do you know why? Because, to us, this is a picture of what real success looks like. It's not what your name is. It's not what your title is. For pastors, it's not how big your church is. None of that matters. Are you kidding me?

Do you know what matters? It's having a wife you've been faithful to for years. You've got your kids and your grandkids all standing around you, and they're proud of you, and they're right there with you. That's what real success is.

It's just a reminder for my buddy and me that this is what we're going after. We want to finish strong, and we want to finish faithful. If we're going to do it, we've got to live with the end in mind.

Don't Be Surprised by Life's Challenges

Number two, we need to not be surprised by life's challenges.

Paul called life a fight. It's a battle, and it's going to be this way until Jesus comes.

Listen, I feel like we talk about this a lot. We talked about it in our sermon on suffering several weeks ago. We do not need to be surprised.

Some people want to quit and throw in the towel on God. They don't want to finish their race, or they go off the deep end because they're mad at God for a trial they're in, a trouble they're going through, or a dark night of the soul they're experiencing. The threat to quit when you're in a tough time is real.

But this is the Christian life. That word for "fighting" in the original language is where we get the word "agony." That's what life is. It's ups and downs. It's agony all the way through.

We shouldn't be shocked when something bad happens to us as Christians and then give up on God. "I can't believe you let me go through this."

Are you kidding me? The suffering you read about throughout the Bible is what the Christian signs up for.

Why? We've talked about it. For purposes that I don't understand, the glory of God is manifested in suffering. That's what purifies our faith. That's what refines our faith.

When Paul is looking at his life and writing this letter, notice what he says in verse 6:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

— 2 Timothy 4:6

That's the language of sacrifice.

In the Old Testament, when an offering was being put forward and a sacrifice was being made, to complete the sacrifice, the priest would take the wine and pour it around the base of the altar. They would pour out the drink offering, and that would bring the offering, the sacrifice, to completion.

Paul says, "This is my life." In the original language, the tense is that God is the agent pouring it out.

So it's interesting that Paul, as he thinks about his life in a dungeon prison, says, "Even if my life is being poured out as a drink offering, and God's the one doing it":

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

— 2 Timothy 4:7

We don't need to be surprised when we go through life's challenges. God is using them so that his name may be glorified.

I don't understand it. I don't even agree with what we have to go through sometimes. But we can trust him. He's building our faith.

We just need to understand that life, Paul calls it, is a fight. It's an agony. But he calls it a good one. It's a good fight.

I know I'm wrapping up here, okay? But I'm going to be out of the pulpit for five months - five weeks. So you're going to let me go a little bit further.

If you want to finish well, you need to live with the end in mind and not be surprised by life's challenges.

Remember the People Who Are Watching You

Third and finally, we need to remember the people in our lives who are watching us.

Now, this isn't explicit in the text, but I believe it's on every page. Paul is writing to Timothy. We see his concern for the churches. Paul knows that Timothy is watching him. He knows he's got people praying for him and cheering him on.

Understanding and realizing that he has people in his life watching him, he says, "I'm going to finish strong."

You have people in your life who are watching you. That's a good thing. Kids and grandkids.

I carry this picture frame in my travel bag every time I go out of town. Giving credit where credit is due, I first got this idea from Dr. Adam Wright, president of DBU.

We were traveling together one time, and he was going to his room and I was going to mine. As we were walking past his room and he was going into it, I looked in and saw by his bedside a picture frame that he had of his wife and kids.

I said, "I'm doing that."

For the last several years, I've carried with me in my travel bag this picture frame of me, my wife, and my kids. Wherever I travel, the first thing that comes out of my bag when I get to that hotel room is this picture frame. I put it on my desk or by my bedside just to remind myself that I've got a whole sorority house watching me, all right? I don't want to disappoint that sorority house.

When I was being ordained as a minister, Neil Jeffrey was part of my ordination. I remember him telling me at the end of the ordination, after I'd passed the test and answered all the questions, "Jarrett, if you ever did anything to hurt Debbie, I'd be so disappointed in you."

Man, I felt that in my heart because I thought, "I don't want to disappoint Jesus, but I don't want to disappoint Neil Jeffrey either."

I don't want to disappoint my wife and my kids. I don't want to disappoint my mom and dad. They raised me up, paid for my education, gave me every chance in life to succeed, and sacrificed for me.

I don't ever want to bring shame or reproach to Champion Forest. I don't want to get my eyes off the prize, fall prey to one of these things that is on the "will kill you" list, and have this church stop being known for advancing the cause of Christ and instead become known for a pastor who morally forfeited his ministry.

There's fear of God in my heart.

I don't want to disappoint my Savior, whom I'm going to stand before one day. God willing, he's going to give me that reward, and I'm going to lay it right back down at his feet, where it belongs.

Champion Forest, finish faithful. Keep your eyes on Jesus. When it's your time to depart, be able, with the apostle Paul and with integrity, to say:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

— 2 Timothy 4:7

Amen.