

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 11 March 2019

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 2 Timothy 1:1 (NIV).

Welcome back, good friend. We're here by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. You and I may not consider each other familial (as in father to son, or son to father), or perhaps we do. This blog goes to a great many of my actual family members. And, as we are brothers and sisters in Jesus, we ARE family. I can almost hear Sister Sledge now.

But it's true. We are family. Paul considered Timothy, his mentee and protégé, to be his spiritual son. You and I are friends, and whether we know each other well or simply in passing, I consider you to be family. I hope you do me the same honor. We're family by the will of God. He wanted us to be family. He arranged the circumstances of our lives, things we call "chance" or "coincidences," so that this would be so. So that we could meet and be in relationship. We're family because God wanted us to be together. Our relationship isn't just ordinary. God willed it, making it extraordinary in an ordinary world.

What's more, we're family and this is so because of the promise of life that is in Jesus and Jesus alone. Jesus is the giver of life; His friend, John, recorded that for us. Everything that is here today was created through Him and for Him and because of Him; Paul testified to that, in Colossians. He made everything and put His special touch – life – in things that breathe that life. Especially in man, which He called "very good." God made our lives so that we could know Him better and share Him with each other. He promised to give us all things, meaning His eternal life through the love He shares through us. Only He can do this; only God through His son Jesus could arrange things as so.

All this because He first loved us. He spoke things into creation. He saw this world as incomplete without people, without you and me. He willed us to be and willed this as so because of His love, through His love. Through the love of Him that is in Christ Jesus. Paul, the specially called servant of Jesus, in keeping with the life that is His love, created you and me to be in a family relationship so that we may share His grace, mercy and peace. Today, starting a new book, let's begin with that at heart.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 3:6, Titus 1:2, John 1:3, Colossians 1:16, Genesis 1:31, 1 John 4:19, 2 Timothy 3.

Loving Savior, thank You for creating me to share Your love today.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 12 March 2019

I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. 2 Timothy 1:3 (NIV).

Ministry is a family business. I know more than a few ministers whose parents and even grandparents were also ministers. Me, I'm not a pastor, minister, reverend, or called servant of Christ. Except for the desire He puts on my heart to help others and write these words, I'm not much of any kind of minister at all. I've simply never felt that kind of a calling. Nobody in my ancestry ever did, either. Yet I know many ministers whose family history is service to God. Multiple generations going into ministry; spouses, children and siblings all working in various kinds of ministry. They put their all into it, usually for many hours of low-paying but Godly, satisfying work.

So I thank God, as my ancestors did, that there are men and women who feel God's personal call into ministry. They are formal, recognized servants of His Word. They do a tough job so others don't have to. They actually do spend long periods of time, usually daily, in communication with the Lord. Sometimes it's formal, private, on-your-knees kind of prayer; sometimes it looks more like self-talk. But it's the kind of activity that even we of this skeptical age would call "constantly remembering us in their prayers." That's a big deal, you know. Prayer isn't just a wish list or some psychological panacea designed to make you feel better. It's a vital tool in the arsenal of a Christian warrior. It's involving God Almighty in everything for which we pray. Pastors aren't bystanders in the daily battles of life: they're warriors, leading from the front (as all good leaders must).

Our society favors those who work in a family business. Farmers, military officers, politicians, stockbrokers, academics, factory workers, even athletes: some of the most famous names in these fields come from families where multiple generations live, earn and serve in the same field. It should be no surprise that Godly ministry favors the same dynamic. Nobody in my family has ever gone into called ministry, though I do have an uncle who worked in prison ministry for many years and he's the strongest believer I know. Some of my best friends are pastors; it might surprise you to learn I've even partied with them...on multiple occasions. Pastors are people too. I thank God for them in my prayers because, long ago and over and over again, they've thanked Him for me in theirs.

For further reading: 2 Timothy 4.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for calling women and men to serve you in ministry. Uphold them, strengthen them, give them courage and health and wisdom.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 13 March 2019

Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. 2 Timothy 1:4 (NIV).

I have a good friend who seems to cry at the drop of a hat. Many who know him joke about it, and he's of a good, self-deprecating humor about the whole thing. He can be talking when, out of nowhere, tears come to his eyes. He'll casually wipe them away, then keep right on talking.

The older I get, the more I understand his feelings...and admire him for it. The older I get, the more emotional I become about things because now it doesn't take much to put tears on my face. It can be a random thought, or the end of a Hallmark movie (yes, I said that), or talking about a particularly dear memory. The more I think about it, the more I consider that this is actually a gift from God.

Tears are a gift from God? Absolutely. They're a way of showing on the outside thoughts that matter to you on the inside. So is a smile; so are frowns. Our outward indications of how things are affecting us in the heart are gifts from God, who knows us better than we admit to knowing ourselves. Jesus didn't give us all these emotions simply to bottle them up. He gave them to us pieces of Himself for us to use in living our lives. Feelings aren't always a good thing to trust when forming all our rational decisions, yet they're almost always a barometer of what we think deep inside about an item of reason. When your feelings spill over as tears, that's a gift from Him who's telling you "this matters."

Paul recalls how he and Timothy would cry for joy. It was probably in departing but could have been any time. Yet isn't it telling how Paul says he's "recalling your tears" when he talks with his young successor. Looking back on good memories, Paul could tell that they also mattered to Timothy. That could only have deepened their bond. Perhaps that's what Jesus intended all along.

Years ago, when we would visit family, there usually came the inevitable moment for goodbyes. We would gather up to get the kids in the car, then hug, and then the tears would come. At the time, those were uncomfortable moments for me; I felt embarrassed, even childish. Now I look back and see they were 'the good stuff.' They were times when we let our guard down along with our tears to show what matters most. Age helps us to see that better. So bravo to my friend who cries so often. I'm there with you, brother. Now I need a Kleenex.

For further reading: Acts 20:37, 2 Timothy 4.

God of eternity, forgive me when I scorn my tears. Thank You for such a wonderful gift. Teach me to consider them today and to help others through theirs.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 14 March 2019

I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. 2 Timothy 1:5 (NIV).

The other night, during our Tuesday night online Bible study, we were talking about sharing our faith. About how this can be a difficult thing to do, especially in our age of trepidation over what to say in public (lest someone else be so easily offended). One of the participants brought up that talking about faith is a way of planting a seed. We speak honestly (without being a jerk about it), and trust that Holy Spirit will do whatever He needs to do in order for our words to help His work. At the time, we probably won't know if we've helped someone. But later, in some time of need, perhaps what we say will have taken root and lead them in some Godly way. That part isn't up to us. It's up to Him.

Reading today's verse, that discussion becomes a little clearer. In verse 4, Paul talks about remembering Timothy's tears. Here Paul says that this memory reminds him of Timothy's sincere and honest faith in Jesus. Timothy obviously walked and talked the same message, and something he did – crying – was an honest expression of that. What's more, Paul goes on to praise Timothy's grandmother and mother, who had been the first people to express this faith to Timothy. Maybe they cried a little, too.

Seems like they'd have lots of company. What they did was to share their faith and their honesty about it. Our outward posture often reflects our inward positions. For Timothy (and probably Paul, Lois and Eunice), tears were an outward posture that reflected the inward position of a rock-solid faith in Jesus. Timothy knew the Gospel was all true, that Jesus was the way, the truth, and the life. He had seen it for himself in the faith of others; he lived it out as he ministered to believers in Asia Minor.

That faith matters when the chips are down. Times of need are one of the reasons why we're encouraged to grow our faith in Christ because, through Him, we can have the strength to endure and overcome them. People who see that know it. Paul wrote 2 Timothy when he was imprisoned and knew he would soon be executed. There could be no time of greater need, so sincere faith mattered deeply. It matters the same to us, day by day. Indeed, our daily practice of faith is perhaps more essential if we are to act on it when those critical times arrive.

For further reading: Acts 16:1, 1 Timothy 1:5, 2 Timothy 6.

Lord Jesus, when times are tough, abide with me. Strengthen me to strengthen others to stand true and firm in our faith in You. Most important, teach us to live that out in love so that others might come to know You as well.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 18 March 2019

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 2 Timothy 1:6 (NIV).

Laying on of hands: that's an old, old custom. In the Bible, it goes back at least to Aaron, who would lay his hands on a sacrificial goat, pray the sins of the people into it, then send the scapegoat out into the wilderness. Or how Aaron would also install his brother Levites as priests by laying his hands on them. Or to his brother, Moses, who laid his hands on Joshua to install the son of Nun as the new leader of Israel.

In modern congregations, pastors are installed in Scripture-heavy ceremonies in which other, senior pastors lay their hands on the one being installed, praying over them and citing Bible verses to strengthen them.

When someone lays their hands on you in this way, they are symbolically infusing you with God's power, His Spirit. They're doing something to set you apart for special work, for installing someone into a unique position. As one website said, it's a special way to connect the Message to the messenger (see <https://www.gotquestions.org/laying-on-of-hands.html>). There isn't anything magical about it; there isn't anything required about it; there's nothing in any service that says we must do this. Yet it was originally a God-ordained command to Aaron (as the lead priest) for him to set aside people and things deemed sacred.

Like I said, it's an old custom but it's a good one, a custom worth revering. As you can read, Paul believed it was important because he used laying on of hands to charge Timothy as a minister of Jesus' Word. It wasn't necessary that Paul install his protégé in this way, but it was helpful. It was special. It tied back to Aaron, that first official minister of God's Word.

You and I do this as well. Have you ever prayed with someone and held their hand, or put your hand on their shoulder? Have you ever been right beside someone when they're going through a tough time (like childbirth, injury, or pain)? We're laying our hands on them to signify that we want God's healing presence in and through them. We lay our hands on our loved ones so that our prayers may be symbolically channeled through our hands and into said loved ones. We want to connect them to ourselves and to something more powerful than ourselves. It's a unique way to pray over someone and to share faith with them.

Next time you want to feel a unique connection, when you pray with someone, try it.

For further reading: Leviticus 16:21, Numbers 8:7-14, Numbers 27:18-20, Acts 6:6, 1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 6.

Lord Jesus, You laid Your hands on my soul and healed me, forgave me, invested Your love into me. Ordain it so today that I will meet someone to share this gift with them as well.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 19 March 2019

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV).

Paul laid his hands on Timothy to ordain the young man as a preacher of Jesus' Gospel. In doing so, Paul symbolically infused Timothy's life with God's Spirit. We don't know whether Timothy was bold or timid before this, but after it he could only have been bold because God's Holy Spirit makes us bold.

Most of the pastors I know are generally humble men and women who like people and love God. I know of a couple who are loud and boisterous, and a couple who are jerks. Pastors are people too. But if you get them away from a crowd, most are quiet and private. Yet almost to a person the pastors I know have a quality that sets them apart: that boldness. They'll talk about Jesus anywhere, any time, sometimes using words. Put them in a group to talk about Jesus and usually they listen first, then boldly speak good truths. Put them in a group of other pastors and none of them will shut up.

It's the Spirit of God at work. Holy Spirit gives us the power to be bold, to love where people seem unlovable (because we all are), and the self-discipline to not overstep (even though we sometimes do). He gives us those fruits of Himself as behaviors for us to use in living out the mission Jesus sets before us. Holy Spirit gives us the best of Himself so that we might live His way with others: in bold harmony and praise.

Mind you, we muck that up regularly. Don't believe me? Look around. Better yet, look in the mirror. Got skin? Got sin. Even more, if you're a mess with stress like the rest of us, you need some divine intervention. God gives us His power to be bold where He wants us to be. After all, it's bold to walk over to a person who's hurting and give them a hug. It's powerfully bold to say, "I'll pray for you" and then do it. It's bold to speak your mind in love, especially when it is to help build up another. It's bold to say, "I believe."

It's the Spirit of God at work, giving us power, love, and self-discipline to be bold instead of timid. Where He is, no timid man can stand. When He speaks, He speaks in bold, loving authority. Not all pastors speak with authority, or even in love. But, usually, when they do, and when you realize "man, that was REALLY good," it's because you heard God's Spirit speaking through them. Give up some applause next time.

For further reading: Jeremiah 42:11, Romans 8:15, Hebrews 2:15, Isaiah 11:2, Galatians 5:22-23, 2 Timothy 8.

Spirit of God, You are love and power and boldness. Remake my flaws and use them to Your advantage. Speak through me, work through me, live in me.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 20 March 2019

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. 2 Timothy 1:8 (NIV).

Dear fellow believer, we're going to suffer for this. You and me, because we boldly say, "I believe in Jesus," are going to suffer. In just these last few days, hundreds of Christians have been murdered by Muslims in several African nations. In Iran, a pastor was recently detained and will serve 10 years hard labor for talking about Jesus. Churches in China are being torn down by their communist government. Here in the good old USA, the Federal government is actively trying to tear down a war memorial in Maryland because it's the shape of a cross. In schools, universities, and work-rooms everywhere, talking about Jesus is a no-no while words about the NCAA brackets and Game of Thrones are encouraged.

Let's be real: 'suffering' in America, for now, is pale compared to the persecution our brothers and sisters face overseas. That simply means the physical pain hasn't reached our shores yet. Don't be daft about it, my friend: it's coming. Disaster, like grace, can come on us in an instant.

Because that's so true, we shouldn't be ashamed to be followers of the one true God. We should be proud to follow Jesus, proud to let Him work through us. We have become 'captive' to His Spirit and are prisoners of His good news. He holds the keys to our 'captivity' and loves us enough for us to stay in His confinement as long as we so wish. Fall under the love and gaze of the King of Kings and you'll want only to remain prisoner in His presence.

But make no mistake about it. It'll cost you. This world, fallen and rebellious to Him, will make you pay for professing your belief in Jesus Christ. The Romans, at the behest of the Jews (and then later on their own) imprisoned and abused Paul before eventually executing him. All for following Jesus. All for the rebellion of saying "no, I believe in Jesus of Nazareth." It happened in the past. Even here in peaceful America, it can – and will – happen again.

You and I will be made to suffer for this belief, for this thing that is protected under our Constitution's first amendment. We will emotionally suffer, economically suffer, physically suffer. In time (and it could happen quickly) the things (like worship) that we think are protected could change and a world hostile to Christ will turn against Him by targeting you.

When that happens, friend, let's celebrate. Let's smile in the face of the adversity, turn the other cheek while standing up for our faith, and be prepared to meet Jesus when our government does to us what Paul's did to him.

For further reading: Mark 8:38, Ephesians 3:1, 2 Timothy 9.

Praise to You, Lord Jesus, that I may suffer for You.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 21 March 2019

He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. 2 Timothy 1:9 (NIV).

How are you doing with living your holy life? Let me be clear: this is NOT to guilt you, to make you feel bad. If you're like me, your bad language and dirty thoughts and petty grudges and not-so-clever hypocrisies and just plain judgmental attitudes that comprise "daily life" have corrupted your holy life. If you're like me, you stink on ice at living out your holy life even when you want to live it out better.

Welcome to our daily need for Jesus.

He knows it. He hurts when we turn our backs from Him. When we do, say, and think those things that are contrary to the holy life He designed for us, those holes in His hands and feet must pain Him. I can almost hear Him say to Himself, "I'm so sorry you're going through that, Dave" when I choose words and deeds that aren't what He originally had in mind. And when I've realized, yet again, how I messed up and how much I need Him to make me clean, I can also hear Him say "of course I love you. I've been here with you all along." He went through those same sins that pain me. Amazing.

Jesus saved us from the death that is separation from Him. He saved us from that awful truth designed for those who actively reject Him. Instead of creating us for hurt and pain and hell, Jesus created us to call us to live a holy life; a life declared sacred, consecrated, dedicated to serving Him. For some that means serving in the formal church. For others it means using our talents as parents, welders, managers, engineers, dentists, teachers, and every talent you can think of in helping others and providing a thankful living. We don't do the work we do just because it's good work (which it often is). We do it because He calls us to do it.

Jesus did this not because we're so wonderful (though in His eyes we are) but because He is a loving, just, holy God who was this way since before we were born. He understood we would love Him but rebel against Him and, therefore, need Him to make things right again. Every time we do work well, we get to look to Jesus and say "thanks. I need You!" Every time we realize we're thick with our sins again, we get to look to Jesus and say "thanks. I need you!"

So I'll ask again: how are you doing with Your holy life? The better answer is "forget that." Focus on Jesus instead.

For further reading: Romans 8:28, Romans 11:14, Ephesians 2:9, 2 Timothy 10.

Lord Jesus, thanks. I need You!

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 25 March 2019

He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 2 Timothy 1:9-10 (NIV).

Jesus didn't just call us to live a holy life. He called us to live a holy life because doing that here is the start of living it forever. We're part of eternity now. When we say "I believe," Jesus begins the process we call "living" of remaking our hearts and heads to align with His. His Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, minds, and hands, and begins living us more like Him.

So last night I watched a PBS special about Prince Charles. No, I'm not going to claim Charles, heir to the British Throne, is a holy man, exemplary for the kind of life to which Jesus calls us. He isn't; neither am I, and it's highly doubtful the future king of England and I will ever cross paths; ditto for you, my friend. But one thing came through in the special: Charles is a decent man, an apparently kind man, a man of good character and good heart. One day he will indeed be head of the church of England, so I hope the man portrayed in the TV program is the same kind of man who will occupy that position.

I'm hopeful that there is a place in heaven for Charles of Windsor to live forever with Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through His Good News. Something kind guides him here; I'll believe it's Jesus.

Jesus didn't call Prince Charles to live a holy life because He thought Charles ought to do it. Jesus doesn't call me or you to do the same. He calls us to live more and more like Himself because to do so communes with His nature, that is to commune with true love, peace, joy, justice, kindness and all that is Him, is best in the world. Jesus calls us to do this because He wants us to live our lives knowing that we are in eternity with Him today, whether its you and I working our daily jobs, or Prince Charles learning more and more how to be a king.

Jesus calls us to live holy lives because He wants us to know this can be forever, because He has already destroyed death, destroyed eternal separation from Him, and made us righteous. You, me, and Prince Charles get to stand side by side, hand in hand, and LIVE.

For further reading: Ephesians 1:9, 1 Timothy 6:14, 1 Corinthians 15:26 & 54, 2 Timothy 11.

Victorious Lord Jesus, You have defeated death. Thank You! All praise to You!

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 26 March 2019

And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 2 Timothy 1:11 (NIV).

Herald: I like that word. I like “teacher” as well, but perhaps “herald” has a more urgent meaning in our day. You see (and this is no surprise to those who know me), I’m a loudmouth. I like to speak boldly, proudly, loudly. Few things please me more than speaking something about which I’m passionate. Forgive me this pride but I’m channeling my inner Paul. I suspect he felt the same. But I’m no Paul.

Now, I’ve never been appointed anything. God hasn’t called me to do it other than putting in on my heart and in my mind to do so. Yet you’re reading it, and maybe doing that will prod you to think about it, talk with others about it, even share it (share the blog with my blessing!). That’s the point of doing it: to let God talk to you through the words in the hope that you’ll share what YOU believe, that they’ll be a small way of getting you closer to Jesus. Mission accomplished.

Paul was personally commissioned by Jesus. His words were divinely inspired. His missionary journeys served to expand the church more than any other single missionary in history. His letters comprise much of the doctrinal basis for our church. I’m no Apostle Paul; I’m no apostle at all. But I am a herald and thankful, proud to say so. I’m inviting you to stand up with me and herald the risen Jesus in your way, too.

In ancient days, heralds would arrive in advance of a king, or a general, or a leader of significance. They would announce news about the leader to prepare for his arrival. Heralds were advance-men, ambassadors, messengers. A herald would herald the good news to those who are intended to hear it. To herald Jesus, God used miracles, and prophets, and John the Baptist, and the Twelve, and Paul. Today, God uses pastors and blogs and sermons and radio shows and you and me to herald His Good News that Jesus came to call us all. He calls us to Himself, to His forgiveness, to His peace, to His Spirit and all the good that comes from Him. Jesus calls us to live holy lives by allowing Him to take control and live through us. And when we do that, great things happen.

That’s news worth talking about. I’m challenging you to herald it today, in your own way, in your own time. If necessary, even use words. God gave you breath to live and speak. I hear your trumpets. Let’s start today.

For further reading: Acts 9:15, 1 Timothy 2:7, 2 Timothy 12.

Great King Jesus, all praise to You. I’ve not been worthy to be used by You as Your herald. But speak through me today and let me share You with people in my life that glory may be Yours.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 27 March 2019

That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. 2 Timothy 1:12 (NIV).

The “whom” Paul believed in is obviously Jesus; duh. What about the rest of the verse? What is it that Jesus is “able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day?” What does it mean to you?

By the time Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he knew the executioner’s axe was imminent. Can you imagine the emotional suffering? This letter is his farewell to both his protégé and his earthly ministry. Years before, Paul vowed to live out the years of his life in service to the Lord Jesus, who met him on a desert road to Damascus. Paul had spent years prior to this fully committed to destroying the nascent church of “the Way”. He had been responsible for destroying numerous small congregations and torturing, even killing, some of their leaders.

The Apostle knew what was in store for him when he agreed to follow this Jesus who struck him blind, then healed him. Paul would live out his life as a herald for Christ, proudly, boldly, confidently, and wisely. On that road, Paul entrusted his entire future – both temporal and eternal – to Christ because he had personally experienced who Jesus really was. That which Paul had entrusted to Jesus was simply everything, only his life, only what mattered most. Paul saw things as they were, perhaps for the first time in his life, and reasoned that the only real reason for living was to follow this Jesus who was exactly who the prophets and other apostles said He was.

What does that mean to you?

I get uncomfortable when people talk about their ‘personal relationship with Jesus Christ.’ Or when they outline how He talks to them (and they talk back). That simply isn’t my experience with Him. I’ve said it before: I don’t recall any particular “saving” moment in my past. I simply know I was saved because He did it. My parents had me baptized when I was a baby. My family regularly attended church, where I learned the basics of the faith. As an adult, I was blessed to learn more. I can’t remember when Jesus saved me in my own timeline but I’ve felt His peace in numerous times since. I always wanted “God-moments;” I’ve been blessed to know many.

And like Paul (and hopefully you), I entrusted to Him that which matters most: everything. It’s really quite liberating to realize He’s in control and we never really are. If the future means suffering, so be it. If it is celebrating, so be that too. I’m all in.

For further reading: Mark 8:38, 1 Timothy 6:20, 1 Corinthians 1:8, 2 Timothy 13.

Lord Jesus, I again today give everything to You. It’s Yours alone.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 1 April 2019

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. 2 Timothy 1:14 (NIV).

I have taken to walking around a nearby pond. Whenever I'm home, I walk laps around the pond until I reach my steps-goal for the day, usually a minimum of 10000. When she is available, my wife also walks with me. It's a pretty little area; an open space in the middle of a north Texas housing development. The pond is probably 6 acres wide, with paved walkways all around, benches, trees, and pretty houses lining the sides. It's a mostly level walk, and I usually walk it listening to the radio, or old sermons, or sometimes just in silence.

That place is nature, full of life and death. And it's a blessing I want to guard.

That realization came on me there while I was watching some newborn ducklings the other day. There were 8 of them, toddling around beside a wary mama duck. She shooed them here and there, keeping them nearby and teaching them how to swim, walk, avoid hazards, and be cautious. Above all, she was teaching them to be cautious because there are also predators around. There are hawks that swoop out of the sky, aiming for a quick meal.

Life comes from death. Hawks eat ducklings and small birds. Ducks eat small fish, bugs, grass, and most things you find in the water. Fish eat other fish and unsuspecting bugs that land on the water. Bugs live in the grass and eat things on the ground. Other birds eat the grass, and bugs, and worms. You get the picture. Something dies so that something can live, even if the thing that dies is as innocuous as a living piece of grass. When you watch a duck dive into the water, it's doing so to feed, to kill something and eat it for survival.

And it's full of life, full of the Spirit. That Spirit that gives the protecting duck mother her instinct to be wary gives you and I the instinct to be bold. Sure, we can and should be wary of some things but, until we trust in Jesus and let His Spirit live through us, we can only be wary and never be bold. The message of salvation is that good teaching Paul implored Timothy to keep and share. Paul calls us to do the same, and he calls us to do it in a world where life and death every day are the norms even in the smallest, most peaceful places.

That's a blessing to guard. Not to guard it so as to keep it confined, but to guard the purity of it, to not amend or change it but, instead, to share it and help it grow in the harsh world of nature.

For further reading: Romans 8:9, 2 Timothy 15.

Holy Spirit of Jesus, teach me to guard Your message by sharing it.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 1 April 2019

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. 2 Timothy 1:14 (NIV).

I have taken to walking around a nearby pond. Whenever I'm home, I walk laps around the pond until I reach my steps-goal for the day, usually a minimum of 10000. When she is available, my wife also walks with me. It's a pretty little area; an open space in the middle of a north Texas housing development. The pond is probably 6 acres wide, with paved walkways all around, benches, trees, and pretty houses lining the sides. It's a mostly level walk, and I usually walk it listening to the radio, or old sermons, or sometimes just in silence.

That place is nature, full of life and death. And it's a blessing I want to guard.

That realization came on me there while I was watching some newborn ducklings the other day. There were 8 of them, toddling around beside a wary mama duck. She shooed them here and there, keeping them nearby and teaching them how to swim, walk, avoid hazards, and be cautious. Above all, she was teaching them to be cautious because there are also predators around. There are hawks that swoop out of the sky, aiming for a quick meal.

Life comes from death. Hawks eat ducklings and small birds. Ducks eat small fish, bugs, grass, and most things you find in the water. Fish eat other fish and unsuspecting bugs that land on the water. Bugs live in the grass and eat things on the ground. Other birds eat the grass, and bugs, and worms. You get the picture. Something dies so that something can live, even if the thing that dies is as innocuous as a living piece of grass. When you watch a duck dive into the water, it's doing so to feed, to kill something and eat it for survival.

And it's full of life, full of the Spirit. That Spirit that gives the protecting duck mother her instinct to be wary gives you and I the instinct to be bold. Sure, we can and should be wary of some things but, until we trust in Jesus and let His Spirit live through us, we can only be wary and never be bold. The message of salvation is that good teaching Paul implored Timothy to keep and share. Paul calls us to do the same, and he calls us to do it in a world where life and death every day are the norms even in the smallest, most peaceful places.

That's a blessing to guard. Not to guard it so as to keep it confined, but to guard the purity of it, to not amend or change it but, instead, to share it and help it grow in the harsh world of nature.

For further reading: Romans 8:9, 2 Timothy 15.

Holy Spirit of Jesus, teach me to guard Your message by sharing it.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 2 April 2019

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. 2 Timothy 1:15 (NIV).

When Paul wrote this verse, he was in prison, awaiting execution. Phygelus and Hermogenes were assistants, acolytes of Paul who (apparently) had helped him during his ministry in Asia Minor. Whether they had deserted him there or in Rome we don't know for sure. All we do know from this verse is that they deserted him. Not only, but Paul wrote that EVERYONE he had met in Asia had stopped contact with him, denied him, deserted him; a hyperbole, to be sure, but that probably isn't how it felt to Paul. He knew the Romans wouldn't let him live long and he felt desperately lonely.

That must be how Jesus felt on the cross. Not long before the end, Jesus must have felt abandoned and alone. In a mystery we won't understand this side of heaven, God the Father abandoned Christ there, turning his face from His Son while still being fully one and with and in Him at the same time. It's how Jesus redeemed us from our sins. And we don't know how long that time lasted, only that it happened.

It must have felt desperately lonely.

I think of Paul under arrest, probably in a cell. His friends have gone. His guards denigrate and mock him. He knows the feeling of the whip and knows what it is like to be bound in chains. Did Phygelus and Hermogenes abandon God by abandoning Paul's ministry? That seems plausible, but we don't really know; against Paul the intellectual, that might have been the worst thing a person could do. All we know is that Paul was there in prison, nearing his date with the executioner, and his soul was in pain because these two people, whom Paul had counted as friends, were dead to him.

It must have felt lonely but Paul wasn't really alone. He never was, not even once. Neither are we.

When you're going through divorce; when you're fired from your job; when you're in stage four chemo; when you watch someone die; when the car from nowhere slams into yours; when the IRS audits you; when your friend breaks your heart...when, when, whenever. Whenever you feel most alone, don't believe it. It's a ruse from the evil one to take your eyes off Jesus, who is with and in and beside you. When you hurt, He hurts. When you're worried, He is saddened. When you're in tears, He cries with you. He did with Paul, too.

I read the verse and I feel sorry for Paul. But take heart, good friend. There are better words ahead. Just as there were better days ahead for Paul, especially after the swing of the Roman axe.

For further reading: 2 Timothy 16.

Loving Jesus, You are never away from me. Forgive me for forgetting this. Stay with me today, and help me to help encourage others.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 3 April 2019

May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. 2 Timothy 1:16 (NIV).

Contrast this verse with the (hyperbolic) news Paul shared in the previous one; you remember, about Phygelus and Hermogenes and abandonment and being alone. Then consider this today: if you're sensing that you're having a particularly blessed moment, it could be that God is answering someone else's prayers for you.

God isn't some wish machine; insert prayer A and get reward B. But He does reward prayers of people who implore Him for the welfare of others. He does it in His own ways, for the good of the Kingdom and the other person. And in doing so, He rewards the person who prays.

If traffic goes your way, it may be God's mercy. If you have a positive outlook, it may be God's mercy. If you have enough money in your wallet for the Whataburger you're craving, it may be God's mercy. You can see where we're going. If something goes well for you today, consider that it may be God answering some other person's prayer for you by blessing you in some recognizable way.

But let's go further. If you have air in your lungs, you're living in God's mercy. If you have a heartbeat, you're living in God's mercy. Clothing, a place to sleep (and sleep, too), neural activity between your ears, food, all the basics: you're living deep and richly in God's mercy, even in the bad days. Even on the days when you think everyone has abandoned you. Even on the days when they have.

I have a friend who broke his arm trying to help homeless people. He was performing the innocuous task of simply moving a box when a particularly nasty one snapped his upper arm. Mercy. Real mercy. I have another friend who is adjusting to life after learning he's HIV positive. Mercy there, too. We each have our moments when we seem bound in chains by the troubles of the world, and good people do sometimes abandon us in them. Yet God never does, Jesus never leaves us. More often than not, I find that, even in those tough times, God soon blesses us with people doing things that help and usually in unexpected ways.

Those are people and times for which we can be thankful. They're good times to lift up prayers of thanksgiving for those people. For God to bless them because they blessed us. Paul did that. He did it right after revealing his anxiety over how he felt people he trusted had deserted him. He'd fit in well in our so called modern world.

For further reading: Mark 8:38, 2 Timothy 17.

Lord, bless those who are hurting, suffering, and in anguish. And bless, more, those who help during those times.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 4 April 2019

May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus. 2 Timothy 1:16-18 (NIV).

Notice that Paul prays for the blessing not just for his friend, Onesiphorus, but also for that man's house. It wasn't enough for Paul to ask for God's blessing / Jesus' presence in the life of the man who had helped him. No, Paul prayed blessing and kindness on the people who mattered most to Onesiphorus.

That's going over and above. The more you walk in faith-moved circles, the more you see people praying for the benefit of others, the health and prosperity of strangers, the peace of people they don't even know. It isn't enough to get the fruit of Jesus' Spirit in our lives; see Galatians 5. No, when that happens, you have to share it. You want other people to know what that peace means, what it feels like. You want them to know Jesus, too, so that they can receive those blessings, those fruits in their lives..

You want it so much that you want them to experience it forever. Paul prayed Jesus' mercy over Onesiphorus' household: his family, his extended family, and anyone who may have moved in their circle. He prayed eternal life over their home so that they would continue to abide in the Lord when Paul was (soon to be) gone. Only God could give the kind of peace that would last forever. Onesiphorus had shown kindness and loyalty to Paul. Now, in his darkest hour, Paul repaid that kindness in the only way he could: through prayers in Jesus. That matters most.

If you don't believe these things are true, or if you only have one toe in the pool of this faith-life, then these things might not make much sense to you. This isn't some Christian game of "I've got a secret" or playing goody two shoes. It's a life and death battle we're in and we're in the armies of the living God. We want you on our side because we want you, with us, to live forever with Him. We want you for Him because He wants you for Himself more than we do. Because He loves you. Because He is true and real love and the only real peace there is. Allah and meditation can't do that. Jesus does.

For further reading: Galatians 5:22-23, Hebrews 6:10, Acts 21:33, 2 Timothy 2:1.

Lord Jesus, only in You is found mercy and peace. I've messed up before; help me to not do it again. Bless those who are around me today, especially those with whom I barely come in contact. Abide with them; live through them; bless them.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 8 April 2019

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 2:1 (NIV).

Lately, I've been struggling with going to the gym each morning. For years, my alarm has been set to 0500 hours (5 AM to you non-military readers). I go to the gym soon after for cardio and weights. These last few months, however, I have struggled. I tire more easily, and I find it tougher to get motivated to go. Physically, I'm in pretty good shape though I'm carrying more weight than I want to or should. But I tire quicker, and, most days, I would rather just turn off the alarm and go back to sleep.

This won't be one of those stories where Jesus rushes in to save the day, however (even though He does). I wish I could say I felt the strength of the Savior pull me into the gym and go all Arnold on the weights, but that hasn't happened yet. What does keep me going is a goal of losing weight, of being able to walk freely and easily when I'm 80. The thought of being in better health than my parents were also motivates me because my genes are, unfortunately, working against me. The combination of that and bad choices means I'm fighting an uphill battle. On my own it's tough. That's where Jesus comes in. And when I recognize that He's motivating me, I begin to see that He's been there all along, before I even started.

That's always the case in our lives because daily living is an uphill battle without the strength of God to encourage us. To push us to always give just a bit more. I like to think that He wants me to be in better overall health, so He does motivate me to get up and go, to walk those 10000 steps per day, to eat a little healthier. As my health slowly improves, it really isn't me improving it: it's Jesus, who is motivating me to be better. The spark of inspiration to improve comes from Him, from Him giving me the desire to take better care of the body and life He gave.

In fact, the only real strength there is in this world is from Jesus Christ. Human strength (and the desire to fight the alarm clock) eventually fails. Yet strength from Christ is always constant, always there. He gives it freely. Sure, we can train up and tone our bodies and minds and even our hearts to better perform. But we don't earn it or deserve it or work it out. Strength isn't ours just because we worked hard. It's ours because Jesus gives it.

For further reading: Ephesians 6:10, 2 Timothy 2:2.

Lord Jesus, You are strength. You are the only real strength in this world. Thank You for abiding with me and strengthening me

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 9 April 2019

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. 2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV).

One eyewitness is both a witness and an opinion. Many witnesses can make a movement. Paul knew this, so here he reminds Timothy that the things taught to him (Timothy) were important, verified, and part of something larger that would grow into the greatest movement the world would ever see.

Tell me: should just anyone be a teacher? I struggle with that question. On one hand, everyone has a unique talent, something to bring to the table that is valuable, should be preserved to the next generation. On the other hand, not everyone has the talent to teach those things, and teaching is a unique, important skill worth venerating. Paul thought this, too.

The Word of God is written on all our hearts, even those of women and men who don't teach. We all have an intrinsic knowledge of right and wrong, and we learn consequences for doing both; Paul wrote this to the churches in Rome. But we each require someone to teach these things to us, to teach us what it means to know right from wrong and to know how Jesus lives through us when we do each. He appoints some people to the special task of teaching what all this means. From your parents to your school teachers to teachers at church to professors to mentors: there are people whose calling from God is to pass on what they know.

Such people must be reliable. Face it: we each go through times when we aren't reliable. When others can't count on us. I've been there; I'm betting you have as well. Imagine how tough it must be to find reliable people to become teachers, especially in this day of social media that lives online forever. It's tough enough to find reliable employees for 'regular' jobs. Imagine how much more difficult it must be to find teachers who are spiritually reliable who can teach others about the word of Jesus.

Should just anyone be a teacher? Can a throng of witnesses testify to their reliability? What is impossible for men is possible with God.

For further reading: Romans 2:15, 1 Timothy 6:12, Luke 18:27, 2 Timothy 2:3.

My Lord, help us to find reliable people to teach us Your Word. Help me to be more reliable, have more integrity, in living out Your witness to others.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 10 April 2019

Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. 2 Timothy 2:3-4 (NIV).

In Roman times, unless you were Julius Caesar, this was true. In our times, it's still true. Twelve of our presidents were generals in the Army, most of them serving during the Civil War, yet no general has been president since Dwight Eisenhower, and out of our last four presidents (including the current one), only one has even served in the military. Today, the US military is the smallest it has been since the early 1930s even as the 'military industrial complex' (a term coined by General Eisenhower during his farewell address as president) continues to have great influence in the affairs of government. I dare say that this same situation is likely true in most countries of the West.

Despite all this, soldiers, sailors, and airmen don't usually get involved in non-military matters. They do their jobs and then go home, eventually returning to civilian status themselves. Until that day, they serve under commanders who they work to please. Those who command you have great influence and power over your situation. They can control your daily work, even your daily routine outside the workplace. They influence your career with evaluation ratings, future assignment choices, and present duties assigned. Those in command above you can make your life pleasant or hellish. And they hold the power to enforce orders that may very well lead to your death.

Suffering in the US military is WAY different from suffering in, shall we say, the North Korean military (where you may still starve and be beaten indiscriminately). Yet nobody who has seen war could ever say that war – the primary business of a soldier – isn't suffering, isn't persecution. In that knowledge, the analogy makes sense because we of the Lord's Army soldier on for Him. Occasionally that means suffering. Persecution – yes, it really happens – and discrimination (that happens too, especially in corporate America), ridicule, rejection, hatred, and even death: all of those await the person who stands up to say "I believe in Jesus."

Yet we march on, refusing to let ourselves be dragged into the 'civilian affairs' of living as the world commands. We learn self-control by submitting ourselves to His control. We get to live out the fruits of His Spirit as our line advances, overtaking the world's evil by living His good. We sometimes fail; sometimes the line falters and we fall back. Sometimes, when we allow ourselves to be swayed by the world, we suffer. Yet our cause of Christ always advances, even in adversity, because He walks before us. We work to please Jesus. We soldier on.

For further reading: Galatians 5:22-23, 2 Timothy 2:5.

General Savior, lead me, Your soldier, today. Command and guide me to follow Your words and not the tempting ways of the world around me.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 11 April 2019

Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. 2 Timothy 2:5 (NIV).

My wife and I have an ongoing rib about rule-following. She's a dedicated rule-follower. I'm more of a rebel. It wasn't always this way; over the years we've switched roles. That happens in relationships. But, overall, one of her more admirable character traits is her devotion to following rules, staying in-between the guidelines.

This character gift stems from the years she grew up playing in competitive sports. Basketball, volleyball, and especially softball: my wife played on numerous teams over the years. She has a box full of trophies that testify how she was good at it, too. I never played organized sports. My parents were anti-athletic, discouraging me from team athletics. I never took the time to learn how to compete by the rules, or train for the race, or run a victory lap. It's one of the things I would do over if I could.

Still, that doesn't negate what Paul says here in verse 5. In Paul's day, the Greeks still conducted the Olympic Games. Thus, his verse here would have meant something to the people of that day who were familiar with the athletic culture that surrounded the games. They would have understood what it meant to prepare for competition, to race against the best in the sport, and to do so within the confines of rules that made competition fair. And they would have understood that the competition was for a trophy and the glory that comes with it, both of which don't last. If they last, then tell me who were the great champions in the ancient Olympic Games that ran for over a thousand years?

Jesus does that same thing, you know.

Jesus says that human glory dies but He doesn't. Jesus knows that the trophy for which we strive – the cross – was already won by Him for us. Jesus understands that we prepare every day for competition, to race our races, and that He lives within us to encourage us to strive for what is best, competition or otherwise. And Jesus knows that so much of our life is made up of living in a culture that requires we abide by rules, how His rules – love God and love your neighbor – supersede all human rules while helping us to still live within them.

More and more, I think that's why my wife is such a rule-follower. She is constantly improving her outlook, her behavior to live more like Jesus, to share His Spirit with others in how she conducts herself. THAT is the race she sets out to run every day, and she's much better at it than I am. That's the race that matters.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 9:25, Mark 12:30-31, 2 Timothy 2:6.

Lord, help me run my race today! Thank You for running with me.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 15 April 2019

The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. 2 Timothy 2:6 (NIV).

This verse, along with the previous ones, should be considered all together to get their full impact. Together, verses 1-6 say “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.”

Think of it this way: keep your eye on the ball because the reward for this is better than anything else you can imagine.

Sometimes I wonder where I fit in. I’m working at my fifth company in three years. To be honest, that sometimes shakes my confidence, especially when your work is done or the client moves in a new direction. The reasons for moving around so much are many, but they all end at this place: I’m currently employed at a great company, and I’m so thankful for it. Yet even here, after so many moves, even when I’m thankful to be working and working where I am, I wonder where I fit in.

I wonder if farmers feel that way. It must be a challenge to stay motivated to get up every day and work patiently at growing crops, husbanding animals, and maintaining your homestead. It’s good work, peaceful work, rewarding work I’m sure. But it must also be frightening at storm times, or when the rains come too early, too much, too little or late. Athletes prepare for competition; farmers prepare for the harvest (and then for the rest months, and then planting, weeding, and the next harvest). Like athletes who are always preparing for the next competition, or consultants who are always implementing the last version of software in anticipation of the next future implementation, farmers prepare now for the next harvest and the times after that.

Sort of like Jesus did for us, preparing us now for the next harvest after this life. That means we need to heed Him, let ourselves be prepared, and keep our eyes on the ball of His presence, His teaching in our lives; let Him reward us as He sees best. It prepares us now for both living here in the fallen world and the harvest in heaven when the full crop of His believers are brought together in eternal praise and celebration. THAT is the place we’ll fit in best.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 9:10, 2 Timothy 2:7.

Awesome “farmer” Jesus, prepare me now, I pray, to serve You better.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 16 April 2019

Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. 2 Timothy 2:7 (NIV).

One of my pastor's favorite pieces of good advice is to take 5 minutes daily with God. In that five minutes, simply be silent. Clear your mind; focus only on God and whatever He may say to you. It may take a hundred days; it may take only five minutes. Eventually, no matter how long it takes, you'll begin to perceive more of what God says to you in His Word, in messages He gives you through others and the world, in matters put on your heart. He's speaking; we listen.

Paul would have understood this. He was advising Timothy to do much the same thing. Paul was telling Timothy to be still, to know God is God of all, and to let Him speak to his heart.

That's still good advice today. Just ask Pastor Mark.

Indeed, we need insight more than ever. Just yesterday, I was called a hypocrite online by a politically opposite friend...and she was right. What's more, her rebuke was enjoined by my own daughter, who was also right. I had resorted to name-calling in a comment, and it took the rebuke from a political adversary and my flesh & blood for me to see they were correct. A man of better insight (maybe Timothy or Paul, or even my friend, Mark) would likely have seen that sooner, maybe not even posting the words at all. When I saw what they were saying, I quickly deleted the name. Seems I should have done some more reflecting before posting yet another political opinion. Yep, I need insight more than ever.

And just yesterday, Notre Dame cathedral burned. We don't know why, though the cause is most likely something innocuous. But it's still suspicious given the number of unaccounted church vandalisms in France, as well as the fact that it's Holy Week and the cathedral would make a ripe target. Yet even pushing that suspicion aside, we need insight about the event. Not insight into why it happened but, perhaps, insight into the good things that Jesus will do through the efforts of first responders, engineers, and builders to restore this ancient house of God.

It's the insight into what Jesus is saying that Paul was invoking into Timothy. It's that kind of insight we would all do well to contemplate today. Then act on it.

On behalf of my friend, let me invite you to act today by taking five minutes to be still and know that Jesus is God. That He will speak to you as He does. That He loves and forgives you. That He wants to work through you today. Take five for insight, my friend.

For further reading: Psalm 46:10, 2 Timothy 2:8.

Insightful Lord Jesus, open my eyes to Your purpose for me today. Guide my thoughts, words, and actions to better serve Your purpose.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 17 April 2019

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. 2 Timothy 2:8-9 (NIV).

Another word about Notre Dame. Reflect on what happened, on the Parisians who sang Ave Maria as the church burned. Reflect on the heroism of the firemen struggling to save the magnificent church. And then, most of all, reflect on what Jesus has now started doing through the financiers, and politicians, and the unknown people who will use kindness and talent and heart to rebuild it for the glory of God.

God's word is not chained. Nothing on this planet can chain it, bind it, contain it. God's word is the power of life and eternity.

God's word is best spoken from the cross. God's love is found in His only Son, Jesus, dying there so that we may live. God's loving Word is found at the empty tomb, on Easter Sunday, when it crushed death and gave the world real hope. God's Word lives in you and me and the singing Parisians as His Spirit that came at Pentecost and now lives with us so many centuries later.

God's word isn't chained up by a beautiful church building that can be burned. God's word is written on your heart, fused into your DNA, living in your bloodstream and in the thoughts that course through your mind. When you reach the end of this life, God's word is the only thing you'll have left. What will you think of it then? Will you have used your time to get to know Him, to confess your need for Him, and to have accepted His gift of salvation?

A friend of mine died on Monday. What I knew of Kim (Page) Granger was that, in her last years, when the world had literally taken everything from her, she held on to faith. That wasn't easy, given that she came from a background of abusive relationships and a family history of dysfunctional religion. Yet in the end, she still believed in Jesus, meaning that her end here this week was the start of a forever with Him. Kim and I had been co-workers over the years, and she supported me through my own tests of faith. I'll miss my friend, but am happy that her pain here is over – she had brain cancer – and that she met Jesus in person. God's word didn't keep her chained to pain here forever. God's word broke her chains because His word itself can never be bound in chains. It's true in Paris. It's true with my friend. It's true with you today.

For further reading: Acts 2:24, Matthew 1:1, Romans 2:16, Acts 9:16, Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 2:10.

Lord Jesus, nothing can contain You, or Your Word. Forgive me when I fail You. Teach me Your better ways.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 18 April 2019, Maundy Thursday

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. 2 Timothy 2:10 (NIV).

Today is Maundy Thursday. Think of it as election day. We are the elected. Think about that.

How do you obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus? Everything that could be done to save mankind from the second death of damnation has been done by Jesus. He did it on Easter Sunday, which we'll celebrate in a few days. The ONLY thing you do to put that salvation into effect in your life is believe. With belief comes love. That's it; nothing more, nothing less. All the work, all the spiritual battling, all the sacrifice, all the love: Jesus did it all. The only thing we do is believe. And not lip service; real belief. Believing means surrendering to His will, surrendering control of your life to Him. It means letting His Spirit guide your heart to remake your life away from sinful ways. It means replacing enmity with amity, questions with understanding, hate with love.

The payoff for it? Eternal glory. That eternity starts now, here on the Third Rock, there in your life where you live now. You participate in it now and will for the rest of your life here, until the time your life here is ended and you move to eternity with Jesus in person. Then the fun really begins.

And who begins this journey for you? You know the answer: God does. Jesus did from the time in Eden to the last moment of your life. In love, God is eternally all-knowing. He knows ahead of time who will end up with Him at the end of time, yet He loves us enough to put aside this knowledge and grant us free will. You and I don't HAVE TO believe in Jesus. We get to. We get to choose whether or not to believe that He has done everything for salvation or not.

With that comes accepting – or not – that He loved us before we even knew Him. You and I can love Him because He first loved us, or we can choose to not believe it and allow to be so for God to turn us over to the consequences of our choice. Love respects choices, and God has that kind of love for us. He will keep working on us, providing what we need to make the right choice up until the moment we die. After that moment, it's too late to decide. We will all meet Him. Will you stand in joy for your choices, or fall in damned defeat because of them? He elected you, chose you, through love. On this Maundy Thursday, what will you do?

For further reading: Colossians 1:24, Titus 1:1, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 1 Peter 5:10, 2 Timothy 2:11.

Lord, thank You for electing me to be saved. Help our unbelief. Forgive our sins.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 22 April 2019

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself. 2 Timothy 2:11-13 (NIV).

Happy Day After Easter, when Jesus is still risen, still alive again, still King of Kings. To be honest, the day after Easter has always had the potential to be like the day after Christmas: a let-down. We had a great day yesterday, with church, a great meal, and lots of time together as a family. It tired me out greatly, but I was sad to see it end. Today, it's back to work; today the kids and grand-kids go home; today is just Monday. Today feels like a let-down.

Except it isn't. Here is a trustworthy saying: if Monday seems dull, it's because the light shines bright. If disappointment rules the hour, joy rules the day. If it's tough to get started back at the routine, the routine is a gift from God, an embodiment of Jesus in our daily lives. All these contrasting things are gifts from a loving Jesus Christ, whose gift of resurrection provides the hope of today and tomorrow to the believers He elected in eternity. A fallen world can't contain Him; a bad today can't stop a beautiful tomorrow. He defeated death, He defeated Satan. Nothing can stop Him. The contrasts make the difference between Jesus and everything else stark.

It wasn't just Paul who spoke of these contrasts. Peter did as well, and Peter knew Christ, man to man, better than most anyone else in Jesus' ministry. Peter talked about us rejoicing in the sufferings of Christ because it would mean that His resurrection and eternal glory would be all that much better. The apostle lived in a barbaric time not unlike our own: we simply have better tools and technology. But the words he left would have been just as striking to readers of that time, maybe even more so when you consider how those readers personally knew Peter, how some might have personally known Jesus. We didn't know Peter or Jesus man to man; we simply have their words.

Think about that and then consider that this is a trustworthy set of statements, a thing on which we can rely. Jesus lived, died, and lives again because He said He would. Jesus suffered so we could rest. Jesus died so we can live. Jesus lives because the world can't contain Him. That's great news on the Monday after Easter when the bloom seems to be off the rose and the daily world tries to take hold again.

For further reading: Romans 6:2-11, 1 Peter 4:13, Matthew 10:33, 1 Corinthians 1:9, 2 Timothy 2:14.

Easter Savior, You are the reason for our living. You are the Lord. You died and live so we may live.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 23 April 2019

Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. 2 Timothy 2:14 (NIV).

I'm becoming a fan of the Facebook snooze feature. If a friend of mine sends a view or opinion that is particularly difficult to abide, or if what they say is particularly hostile, I turn off notifications for those comments. I don't want to un-friend them, but I don't need the negativity. Our comments may be well-received by some but also may be hurtful to others. The better way would be to simply delete this social media so as to avoid the temptation. But I enjoy Facebook for the ability to keep up with family and friends, and to share things like this blog, family moments, and things I believe both secular and faith-based. So, until the point of staying off it altogether, I'm using the snooze. I bet quite a few folks have done this to my comments already.

Thank God He doesn't snooze us. My friend, John, said (on Facebook about Facebook) that social media is a mile wide and an inch deep. It's designed to keep us quarreling, not really for our betterment. Quarreling about words ruins us. It ruins our relationships. It ruins our families. It ruins our politics. It ruins our lives.

Paul wrote these words two millenia before social media existed. In his day, social media was called "personal conversation." And if you think about it, those personal conversations have been made even easier to destroy by the advent of social media. Online, you and I can say what we want without the responsibility for prudence that comes with saying those things face to face. If you say something objectionable to someone face to face, they can (and often do) call you out on it, sometimes physically. If we do that online, there's no real response except to that the recipients' emotions are activated.

Nothing good comes from that. The book of Titus says that these are unprofitable and useless, producing nothing good that benefits anyone. It was true then; it's true now. I need to act differently. How about you?

This is the day after the day after Easter. Jesus is still risen. He is still alive, at work, living through you and I and all we think, say, and do. We have the gift of electronic communication to enable us to reach each other instantly across the planet. How will we use that today? I'm working to do better, so I'm challenging you to do the same, even if that means snoozing it.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 1:4, Titus 3:9, 2 Timothy 2:15.

Forgiving Lord Jesus, help me to use the gifts of conversation and media responsibly, for Your benefit, in ways that help others.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 24 April 2019

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV).

On its own, this verse is (obviously) good advice. Always tell the truth because you're upright before God in doing so. Yet don't forget that verse 15 comes in-between other verses that caution us against engaging in useless conversation. Useless quarrels about words and godless chatter are the opposite of what is God-approved.

Pseudo-political rant commences: I'm baffled and discouraged by how our government, for political reasons, handles classified information. I used to hold a clearance; it was required for my job in the military. So I'm boggled and really discouraged, even angered, at the cavalier attitude some of my countrymen display regarding misuse of classified information. Whether it's a candidate doing it with a disregard for law (for reasons we still don't know), or an FBI director leaking to seek revenge, or an activist traitor who refuses to testify after he is cornered, I can't see anything good for the country with these people being handled gently. When you agree to handle classified information, you sign papers with your agreement to do so honorably and carefully. Jesus forgives them and I'm glad for that. Our legal system should prosecute them harshly because what they willingly did endangers all of us. Here endeth the rant.

I say all that because we need to correctly handle words, especially the truth. Have you ever been ashamed to say or do something because you KNOW Jesus' Spirit lives within you yet you say or do it anyway? I've been there; how about you? God gives us this unique, truly special Word to transform lives for Him and we profane it by our misuse, our words and deeds. It's similar to handling classified, if you think about it. We don't sign paperwork, but we do say "I believe." We can't be prosecuted for believing, but we will be judged appropriately if we reject Him. All through our lives we can snooze conversations about both politics and religion. Yet, when we come to the end of our lives, the politics won't matter but what we believe about Jesus will.

Is this just a useless quarrel or godless chatter? I'll leave it for you to decide; I don't like talking politics here. Christ included us in His family when He planted His Word in our hearts. He gave us words to be able to share His Word with other people, so they, too, might believe and receive Christ's adoption. We are his brothers, sisters, and friends, not slaves or subjugated. Those words aren't trifles. They are the only lasting love and power in the universe. We should handle them respectfully

For further reading: Ephesians 1:13, Colossians 1:5, James 1:18, 2 Timothy 2:16.

Sovereign Lord, forgive me for my misuse, my carelessness with Your Word. Teach me Your better way to use it today.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 25 April 2019

Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. 2 Timothy 2:16 (NIV).

Sorry ahead of time: another rant. I get into many debates online, standing up for what I believe in (just as those who are on the opposite side do the same). I wish I could get back the countless hours and words I've expended online because I don't think it has made much of a difference. It's a good thing to let others know that you support them, that they have allies. Beyond that, I don't see how my debating done much good. Indeed, I'm ashamed of many things I've said; many words were unkind at best, contrary to this faith I profess here. Hypocrisy: I'm guilty. Here endeth this rant as well.

We spend so much of our time these days talking about things that don't really matter. Our news is comprised of celebrities, meaningless sports, banal entertainment, and opinions disguised as facts. Even worse, we gossip online; what else is social media but a new way of saying "look at me" or "did you hear about so & so?" Even worse still, we thrive on 'the chew' in person. Don't believe me? Try breaking into a clique the next time you go to church. They're there, just as exclusive as any schoolyard clique. And they talk. Boy do they talk! I mean...boy, do WE talk!

Welcome to the fallen world. It's a world of godless chatter, of ancient tendencies and mis-behaviors given new life in person and online. The more we indulge in it, the more we sully the good words of Jesus, who is still alive in us, who rose and is still King of Kings, here in the fallen world. The more we do it, the more ungodly we become. We become hypocrites.

Paul's advice? Avoid it. Stop it if it starts with us, or passes through us. But if we can't effect it for good, then avoid it. Stop the gossip chain with you, or me. Gory TV? Switch channels. Political arguing? Back out of it. Better yet, pray for the other guy, and their candidate, and for our overall peace. Part of a clique? Go introduce yourself to the new guy. Maybe give him a cup of that free church coffee and a donut.

It was good advice in the time of Paul, when true persecution really happened quite often. It's good advice here in the land of plenty, where we're far from that kind of physical persecution...at least for now. Let that be on our list of things to do in our fallen world now that winter has come (and gone), and we're in a fresh season of growing.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 2:17.

Lord, help me to avoid godless chatter, changing my ways for Your good purpose. Forgive me the ways I've failed You.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 6 May 2019

Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. 2 Timothy 2:17-18 (NIV).

My wife and I went to the Ark Encounter in Kentucky last week. If you haven't seen it, it's a full-size recreation of what Noah's Ark may have (even probably) looked like; a three-story museum of what it must have taken to create the Ark, then to tend to the animals, then to repopulate the world. Ken Ham Ministries, which operates the museum, did a great job intertwining this story of how God saved physical life through the Ark with the account of how God saved spiritual life through the Good Friday Easter ark who is Jesus Christ.

At the end of walking through, it occurred to me that I had absorbed the message: Jesus is the only way. It was no surprise, but it was pleasantly shocking how much I agreed with it, how easily I identified with it. Jesus is the antidote to false teaching. He's the opposite of all our sinful experiences. Jesus as He was, is, and is to come. Jesus as He is presented in the Bible is the only truth that matters. In Paul's day, the gangrenous teaching that Hymenaeus and Philetus had spread had already been overcome by Jesus and His resurrection. All that Jesus said and taught was the highway to heaven. Whether we receive that teaching in a tourist attraction, our neighborhood churches, online, or in person is all part of our human experience.

Duh. Better do it while we can.

Back in Noah's time, nobody other than his family believed that God had told Noah to build the ark because devastation was coming. After Noah's descendants repopulated the world, few believed that God would send His Messiah to redeem us from our sins. In our world, even though there are over 2 billion Christians, there are also over 5.2 billion non-Christians who think our faith in God's Son as Messiah is foolishness. Some reject it as that. Others, like Hymenaeus and Philetus of Paul's day, spread false teaching about it for ungodly reasons. Still others would have you and I suffer or die for our belief in Jesus. Think ISIS or other radical Islamic sects; think Communists in China, Cuba, and elsewhere. Think even about dilettantes here in the peaceful US of A.

Noah or now, some things never change. Through it, the message of the Ark Encounter remains: Jesus is the only ark, the only way to live through this terminal adventure called humanity. How will you share that message today?

For further reading: 1 Timothy 1:19-20, 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 2 Timothy 2:19.

Saving Lord Jesus, You are the only ark into eternal life. You are the only truth. Forgive me when I've failed You. Thank You for today in which to do better. Help me to do so.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 7 May 2019

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness." 2 Timothy 2:19 (NIV).

My Concordia Bible is held together with duct tape and it's falling apart again. For the third or fourth time, I need to carefully remove the existing tape, re-glue the spine, and re-tape the cover to hold it all in place. I have read this Bible most every day for over 25 years now, and it has traveled with me to over half the states in the US and three continents, including into Communist China. Not long ago, I saw a meme that said 'a Bible that is barely held together is usually owned by someone who isn't.' That's true. I'm better, different because of God's word. Tattered or torn, the foundation in God's book stands firm.

I'm His. He knows I'm His. He has taught me that I'm His and that I need to turn away from wickedness to heal. It's not just that God is holy and can't be defiled by my sins; my God isn't puny enough to depend on sinful little me for His own well-being. No, my God taught me through my ragged Bible that He loves me and wants me to be healthy in spirit and body both. Turning from wickedness is the only way to be that healthy. It's the only way to change behaviors to better walk through life with belief in Him. God doesn't depend on me, but I definitely depend on Him.

So I read every day in my threadbare Bible that goes with me when I hit the road. I read it in this troubled world that seems to be getting darker and darker how His light overcomes that darkness without much trouble at all. I'm in His light. He saved me by dying on the cross, then rising three days later. He marked us who profess our belief in Him as His own, as believers who follow Him in devotion. In a crowd of thousands, He could identify us instantly because we identify with Him. And when we identify with Him, we don't want to be sullied any further with the dirt of the world that we used to bathe in. This is the way of the follower of Christ.

I'm no better than you. My Bible isn't better than yours if you don't read yours as often. More than a few folks who read these words actually study their Bibles more and better than me. I applaud them and admire them. If you haven't consulted your Bible in awhile, now's a good time to change. Pick it up. Start in the Gospels and work your way back. Follow Him.

For further reading: Isaiah 28:16, Exodus 33:12, Numbers 16:5, John 10:14, 1 Corinthians 8:6, 2 Timothy 2:20.

Lord Jesus, I follow only You. Only You are the Christ, the Savior.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 8 May 2019

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. 2 Timothy 2:20-21 (NIV).

There is beauty in commonness, simplicity. Indeed, there are vastly more common, simple people than there are beautiful, self-anointed celebrities, athletes, or glitterati. Not hating on them; Jesus loves celebrities, athletes, and self-anointed glitterati, too. But they aren't common or seemingly holy (or useful) anymore.

My wife and I took our 30th anniversary trip last week to Tennessee and then to northern Kentucky (where we honeymooned in 1989). We struggled for years to make it to other anniversaries so we determined to mark this one with a memorable trip. No marriage is perfect; ours hasn't been; if you're a long-time reader here, you know that. But we're common people; ordinary Americans making our country, our families, and our lives extraordinary by living faith-based lives that God gave us. We follow Jesus. We learn from our failures. We make the most out of what we have.

So we took a trip to the Smokies, line-danced in Nashville (where we also toured the Grand Ole Opry, seriously one of the best tours ever anywhere), walked through the Ark Encounter, sipped our way through a bourbon distillery, and even went to the Kentucky Derby (where we placed a bet for our grand-daughter on the long-shot horse that eventually won).

Along the way we met other common people like ourselves, good ordinary folks living those extraordinary lives. People like Steve and Paula (and Todd) at a Jimmy Buffett concert. Or Mark and Gina at a winery near Lexington. Austen at Maker's Mark; Clark and Kathleen and their friends from Florida at Dolly's (Dixie) Stampede; clerks, attendants, waiters and waitresses and people on hiking trails you greet with a nod and a smile. All of them: common, good people just doing their best to live godly lives and being friendly.

You know: like Jesus is. You know: just plain old wood and clay tools, made ordinary and common by the Master to live extraordinary, uncommon lives in His Kingdom. All together, we make the world go 'round.

Don't get me wrong: I like silver and gold. The few pieces of it I own are wonderful; heirlooms I enjoy and will gladly pass along to my kids and grandkids. But, once upon a time, even silver and gold were common elements underground. They're extraordinary, too, and attractive. But they aren't common. And they don't make things really work. You and I: we're common. There's a place and a purpose for each of us, celebrity or commoner alike. That purpose is in Jesus' work.

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 9:8, Ephesians 2:10, 2 Timothy 2:22.

Lord Jesus, thank You for using common me in Your Kingdom work.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 9 May 2019

Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:22 (NIV).

More good Pauline advice that re-iterates or re-enforces statements made in earlier letters. Paul's message was consistent: flee evil and pursue good.

Notice that he doesn't say "fight the evil desires of youth." Let's face it: there is no fighting them. Sin is strong enough to defeat us. Except for Jesus, it has defeated every human ever born. Without Christ at our side, we can't fight evil and we can't win against it because evil is stronger than we are alone. With Christ at our side, we can't lose and evil doesn't stand a chance.

Instead of fighting it, Paul tells us to flee from evil desires. So many in pop culture ridicule Vice President Pence for adhering to the Billy Graham practice of not being in a room alone with another woman. I pity them. Pence is staying blameless by living out an admirable practice. Rev Graham did the same and it kept impropriety and gossip away along with any chance to even consider evil desire because even Billy Graham was human. Ditto President Harry Truman, who once was called to a private meeting only to find it was a set-up with a woman. Truman immediately turned and walked out, fled.

When tempted to give in to desire, turn and walk away. Then run. Rhetorically run; physically run if you need to. Get away from the situation because there's danger there. On your way fleeing, then pray for strengthened faith, love, and peace, calling on the Lord in thanks for the opportunity to flee. In my own experience, when I've done this, instead of desperation, I feel empowered. I'm betting the same would be said by you. In my own experience, too many times I wish I had fled; I'm betting you'd echo that as well.

The unspoken result of doing these things is best spoken in Acts 2:21: the Lord will save those who call on Him. Live a life that pursues Him and you'll find He's calling you. He's already saved you, so live a life reflecting that by fleeing evil desires when they come to you. Others might be inspired to do the same and accept His truth, and that matters because their eternity matters most, too.

Sure, these seem like simple, common solutions to complex problems, but first principles are usually the best starting point when trying to address complex issues. Stick to the simple: flee from evil when we see it, then seek Jesus in thankful prayer to feel the bliss of protection and forgiveness.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 1:14, Acts 2:21, 1 Timothy 1:5, 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 2:22.

Lord Jesus, You are the only desire of my recovering heart. Welcome me back as I flee desires when they tempt me. Strengthen me and help me to strengthen others.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 13 May 2019

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 2 Timothy 2:23-24 (NIV).

Let it be. That was the subject of a recent devotion my wife and I did. Now, you know I've confessed to arguing over dumb things on Facebook. Most of them are political, and it's unlikely that neither my opponents nor I will be changing our views. Except for letting allies know they aren't alone, such arguments are foolish, stupid, unproductive. Yet I continue to make them, though less and less. Perhaps I'm beginning to see the wisdom of Paul's command in these verses.

Mainly I don't want to be a quarrelsome servant of the Lord. I don't resent the people with whom I disagree, but I do understand that such long-term useless quarrels do eventually morph into resentment. How do we stand up for good things in which we believe without becoming insulting or hurtful? After all, it isn't wrong to stand up against someone who hates Jews or minorities or gays or others, but it becomes wrong if, in standing up, we become insulting or depart from the truth into mere opinion. It isn't wrong to stand up against the senseless violence political street factions have recently caused, but it becomes wrong if we let it evolve our opposition into desires for counter-violence or retribution.

In other words, things become wrong when we depart from God's peace. God desires for us to live peaceful lives, sharing and growing peace in Him, which is the only real peace there is. Giving us His peace is central to Christ's salvation. If not to share God's true presence with us, Christ came for this reason. Only through Him can we find the peace that lasts, both here and in eternity. It is only through modeling His behavior that we can spread peace.

Sometimes that means standing up in silence; sometimes it means standing as the angry, righteous Jesus against true wrongdoing. Sometimes we have to flee. We must do our parts to vanquish the wrongdoing but then also extend Christ's peace to the wrongdoers, lest we become them ourselves.

So perhaps the best thing to do with most of our political, cultural, and even moral rot is to let it be. It isn't that these things are unimportant. It IS that God Almighty is much stronger than they are. He knows what He's doing and He gave us the mission to spread His peace and love to others who don't know about it. He can handle the rest. When the opportunity to argue arises, instead, let it be.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 3:2-3, 2 Timothy 2:25.

Good Lord, forgive me for how I have failed to sow peace. Forgive me for when I've shared in stupid quarrels. Only You can restore me and instill real peace.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 14 May 2019

Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:25-26 (NIV).

More about wading into discussions or arguments with opponents. While the spirit of the idea applies to any discussion, keep in mind that Paul's advice here regards those who opposed Timothy in spiritual matters. There were people in Timothy's circle who were living in sin, or whose beliefs were contrary to Jesus' gospel. Some embraced Gnostic beliefs that were heretical to what Paul had taught; some were perpetuating the traditional Jewish laws in the new Christian church. Paul reminded Timothy that his purpose was to help them to see their need for Christ and return to Him.

How does this apply today? It might seem fun to think that 'the other guy' and his wacky politics are Satanic, but that probably isn't true. And even if it were, it's better to remember that Jesus wants that other guy in His Kingdom as much as He wants you and I. Perhaps Jesus has you or I in their lives to spread His Gospel to them. Preach that Gospel constantly; if necessary, use words. Remember that 'the other guy' is probably as sinful and confused as me and you. None of this is saying we should compromise godly principles or surrender our faith. It is, however, saying that we should uphold that faith while being empathetic towards understanding another's predicament.

We do all this because Jesus wants them for His Kingdom, too. Your worst enemy is Jesus' dear child. The overbearing progressive, the strident conservative, the bully who makes your life awful: all are precious in His sight. He mourns their sins as much as He mourns mine, and He wants them to be gently instructed, lovingly reminded that God in Christ loves them, forgives them, believes in them. Jesus' enemy, the devil, works overtime to pull down those on the fence. You and I, soldiers in the Lord's Army, then, get the mission of running into the breach, of standing between those opponents and the devil who would destroy their souls. We get to stand up for Jesus because they won't or can't. We get to stand for Him and witness to the devil that he is defeated, unwelcome, cast out.

I suppose that's pretty far afield from why we shouldn't wade into foolish arguments, but the bottom line of it is the same. We're followers of Jesus, in some cases His called servants. It's our place to witness boldly, lovingly, and kindly, especially to those who would oppose what we say. In doing so, the stakes couldn't be higher.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 2:4, 1 Timothy 3:7, 2 Timothy 3:1.

Lord Jesus, let Your Spirit put the words in my mouth as I speak for You today.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 15 May 19

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 Timothy 3:1 (NIV).

This section of 2 Timothy talks about the end times. It's heavy stuff, not for the faint of faith. And it's heavy stuff that people have been hauling, dreading, and contemplating for two thousand years.

Wikipedia defines "Christian eschatology" as "a major branch of study within Christian theology dealing with the "last things." Eschatology, from two Greek words meaning "last" (ἔσχατος) and "study" (-λογία), is the study of 'end things', whether the end of an individual life, the end of the age, the end of the world or the nature of the Kingdom of God. Broadly speaking, Christian eschatology is the study concerned with the ultimate destiny of the individual soul and the entire created order, based primarily upon biblical texts within the Old and New Testament."

Yep. What they said.

Even from the beginning of the Christian church, we've contemplated the end of it here. Not long before His crucifixion, Jesus spoke of it extensively in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. And He inspired John to write extensively about it in the Revelation. If you haven't done so, go read these accounts for yourself. It isn't for the faint of faith. Yet read them again and again and you'll find your faith strengthened.

That's a good thing because we're in the last days. Face it, my friend: this life is a one-way death trip. Every day we celebrate life and live we are one day closer to death. Whether these are the last days of terrestrial history or simply the last days of our lives, we are living through them now. Do you think terrible things happen?

You know the answer.

Paul warned Timothy about it. He warned Timothy to teach that people should love Jesus every day, should live as God's chosen followers every minute of every day because any day may be the last. Paul and Peter may have been talking about the end of time as the "last days" yet their advice pertains to both those last days of Earth as well as all of our days on Earth.

Scoffers gonna scoff; haters gonna hate. Those who are determined to be unpersuaded of this man Jesus will remain so. It's their choice, their self-inflicted misery. They aren't happy with that knowledge and are determined that you be as unhappy as they are. So they'll insult you, ridicule your faith, persecute your actions, hate you for who you believe in. It was this way in 1st Century Judea and Asia Minor; it is the same way now. It's heavy, not for the weak to bear even as they, too, must find a way to bear through it. That way is found only in Jesus Christ.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 4:1, 2 Peter 3:3, 2 Timothy 3:1.

Lord Jesus, come quickly. These times are as You predicted, full of evil scoffers. Come and remake all things new.

May only be used with permission from aspiringwriterdt.com

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 16 May 2019

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NIV).

These are harsh words about how people will behave in the end days. They're some of the worst qualities of mankind, and Paul prophesies that the end days will bring them out in full. Whether those end days are now or later, they will be marked by these kinds of behaviors.

These verses apply to Hollywood. They apply to Wall Street, corporate boardrooms, country club dealing, and the jet set. These verses could have been written about the American suburbs, or about the ghettos. They could have been written about people in our universities, in our workplaces, on the road and at the mall and, yes, they could have been written about people who sit every Sunday in a church pew. They're HBO; they're Facebook; they're Las Vegas; they're Mainstreet USA. They're our living rooms. These verses could have been written about any of the 7.7 billion people breathing here on Planet Earth. Two thousand years after He left us, come quickly, Lord Jesus, and set things right again.

Especially if these are the last days. In fact, I hope they are. Heaven has much more to offer than our world, which is full of we who could be described by these ugly words. Those words are a mirror, held up for me and you (and a dog named Boo) to look into and see ourselves as we really are. Even the best of us is guilty of being like one or more of those words say we are.

Paul told Timothy to avoid people like those he described above. If Paul met me today, would he see a follower of Christ or a sinking work in progress who loves himself, money, pride and boasting more than Jesus? Who would Paul see in you? Even more, if Jesus does come back today, will He see us as we are, or will He see us through the lens of His love? You know the answer, and thank God Himself for it. We are guilty of being those awful things Paul mentions, and only a Savior who isn't could set things right. Only He could save us. When He comes back, He'll see His followers in His own mirror, and welcome us. Doesn't it follow, then, that we should use our time today to kindly love on people who don't know Jesus so that they'll have the same eternity?

For further reading: 2 Timothy 3:6.

Lord Jesus, come quickly. These times are as You predicted, full of evil scoffers. Come and remake all things new.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 21 May 2019

They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NIV).

Game of Thrones is done. It's over. We now know the outcome of the struggle for the Iron Throne. My wife and I were late-comers to the GOT hysteria, but we enjoyed the show and are both sad and glad it's done. At first I thought there were so many reasons to reject the show because its not-subtle themes of violence, sex, and intrigue were antithetical to Christian views. Yet there are also lessons people of faith can learn from shows like Game of Thrones. In fact, I challenged a pastor friend of mine to do a sermon series on several of the show's storylines. I'll be interested to see if he takes up the challenge.

The more you think about it, the truer it becomes for every TV show, every activity in life: "the faith" is our benchmark for EVERYTHING. Whether it's a fantasy TV series, the new Alabama abortion law, where to get gasoline, or what to do over Memorial Day weekend, if faith in Christ isn't highest on our list of filters through which we judge our activities then we're doing it wrong.

We can have the argument about a TV show being or not being a Christian activity. Yet the shield of faith is the shield that resists for us when the themes of violence, sex, intrigue, or anything else threaten to worm their way into our homes and gain control over gullible people like us. People who oppose the faith with their parsing of Christianity or the droning, ever-constant labeling of Christians as killers and hypocrites are actually the people standing on quicksand. They scream loudly, perhaps not knowing that projection is a psychological condition, and those who would worm their way into our faith-lives are sick with it. Faith in Christ is the foundation of resisting that sickness.

I won't spoil the end of the show in case you haven't seen it. Personally, the more I think about it, the more I like the way it ended because it ended with a note of hope. That's the greatest gift of all from following Jesus in faith: hope. Without Jesus, there is no hope. With Him, there is. I enjoyed the show, and I'll miss it. But there's always the hope of re-runs.

For further reading: 2 Timothy 3:6.

Lord Jesus, YOU are my shield and my hope. Help me to resist those who would worm their way and try to divide us. Help me to stand in love.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 22 May 2019

...always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. *2 Timothy 3:7 (NIV).*

Are you a fan of college or are you a fan of high school graduates learning a trade? I have three college degrees: an associate's in Intelligence Collection, a bachelors in Business Management, and a master's in Adult Education. If it weren't for student loan debt, they wouldn't be worth much. Even years ago when I went, many professors were politically polarized.

And if you think about it, politics is pretty small. It doesn't mean much in the eternal, long run. Can you tell me what most of the popular issues were in ancient Sumeria? Or Babylon, Persia, Greece, or Rome? We don't even know most of the local politicians back then, or even most of the high-ranking advisors in those empires. More and more, even though I spend much time talking about politics and political matters, this talk is wasted time. It's like I'm always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the real truth.

What about those professors and that collegiate education? The most common critique I hear about college education is that, other than trade-related colleges (such as medical school and law school), most college degrees today don't prepare people for critical thinking. They no longer provide people with deep education on matters of common history, logic skills, or non-specialized topics. We pay thousands of dollars for higher degrees that are fairly useless in a workforce driven by detailed skills, both white and blue collar. Yet that topic is a third rail, an off-limits critique of academia intellectual decline. Its like the people who run colleges are always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

That's because faith in Jesus Christ is the foundation of all truth. His truth that we are to love God and love our neighbor, that apart from Him we can do nothing, IS truth. He, the I AM, IS, is truth, is reason. Nearly all the great philosophers before the 20th century were religions (even those of antiquity). And those between 1600 and the late 1800s were nearly universally Christian. Only in the knowledge of God can we begin to truly learn things that are most necessary to succeed, especially in the hereafter.

As we age, we yearn for truth; as we age, we also don't stop learning. Brooks & Dunn sang about truth in believing, singing "I'm finding more and more truth in the words written in red." They were talking about the words of Christ. There is much to learn in our world; thank God for that. Thank God, most of all, that we can best learn the meaning of it by first learning the meaning of Jesus and His teachings.

For further reading: Mark 12:28-31, John 15:5, 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Timothy 3:8.

Lord, You are the only real truth. Forgive me when I've forgotten that. Help me to remember it more today.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 23 May 2019

But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone. 2 Timothy 3:9 (NIV).

Take this verse in the context of the section in which it falls, one that talks about godlessness in these last days, then about the kind of people who use their God-given resources to distract people from following Jesus.

In general, people spot a fake. True, some charlatans are especially good at fooling large populations of people for a long time, but even they are eventually found out. And it's true, some people simply don't want to admit they are being fooled. When I was a kid, my aunt, Joyce, helped to put a man in Federal prison. She worked at a credit union in a small Minnesota town and noticed when large sums of money were being deposited into the union by a mysterious newcomer. This newcomer had done marvelous things for the town; large civic projects, donations to needy groups, befriending people who were easily fooled. He even convinced the town to rename Main Street – which it had been since the 1850s – to “La Grande Avenue.”

It turned out that he was laundering drug money through the credit union, and when my aunt spoke up (and later testified), there were those in the town who were less than pleased. She spotted a fake; so did others around her. Yet some others didn't, or didn't want to, admit the flashy out-of-towner was shady. Even when his criminal connections were exposed, they still didn't want to admit they had been duped. Over thirty years after the events occurred, the only thing residents of the small town can agree on (if they talk about it) is that there was a lot of folly involved all around.

That seems about right. People who are fake usually can't snow a crowd for long. Their folly, usually pride, will eventually undo them. Worst of all, they aren't fooling God, who always sees what they're up to. News flash, my friend: that goes for you and me, too. God can see what we're doing; we can't hide. He lets our world play out as it does yet sees it all and works as He will to advance His Kingdom in spite of us. Those who would oppose him, even in little things, embrace evil, even petty evil. They won't get far.

Because they never do. Superficially, it seems like evil gets away with it. And all those end-times prophecies tell us that things won't get better until after the end. In fact, they'll get worse. But people can spot evil, can spot a fake, even when they don't want to. You and I: let's be ones who do.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 4:6, 2 Timothy 3:10.

Lord, forgive me for the times I haven't rejected evil. Help me more and more to spot it, to resist it, and to move forward past it.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 28 May 2019

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. 2 Timothy 3:10-11 (NIV).

Paul always provided full disclosure and full credit to God in his letters. It's one of the things that, 2000 years later, still gives him credibility. Paul genuinely suffered at the hands of unbelievers, Jews, Romans and even friends; read 2 Corinthians 11:23-27.

Do you and I really suffer? I mean, REALLY suffer. Paul was tortured on the command of his fellow Jews. Paul was beaten and flogged (and think "Passion of the Christ" type of flogging, not just a few lashes with a bullwhip). Everyone who had cherished him in his life prior to conversion had turned on him. Everything he owned was gone. He who was used to being admired and adored was now rejected and scorned. He had been imprisoned, stoned, left for dead, shipwrecked, and admonished for saying and doing the right things.

Has that ever happened to you or me? Probably not, at least not in those ways. Yet there are places in our world today where that happens, where people are tortured and murdered for believing in Jesus.

The Lord rescues all of us. He has rescued you and I because we live in relative comfort, away from such terrors. He rescues those who are tortured and murdered by staying with them and welcoming them home after these things have ended.

Granted, in this verse, Paul was talking about how God had physically rescued him from his own terrors; how Paul had physically survived them and stayed faithful to Jesus. Yet the bigger lesson comes in remembering that Jesus allowed Paul to endure those trials and yet He stayed with Paul during them. Christ endured with him; Christ suffered again with him; Christ gave Paul the strength to endure and forgive and preach Him crucified despite what was happening.

That bigger lesson matters most because it's also what Christ does for us today. He speaks through your conscience, through your experiences, through things around you, in your heart. When you are down, His voice is the encouragement you hear at just the right moment. When you're in need, His voice comes through the kindness of a friend or stranger. When you're questioning, His voice hears the questions and stays true in its response, not leading you further into despair or loneliness. Jesus gives us answers, sometimes through more questions, but always in His truth.

Centuries after Paul wrote his words, he and they still reverberate in our lives, not because of Paul but because he, in full disclosure, always pointed to Jesus.

For further reading: Acts 13:14, 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, Romans 15:31, Psalm 34:19, 2 Timothy 3:12.

Jesus, my rescuing Savior, You rescue me every day. You are true and kind and strong.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 30 May 2019

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:14-15 (NIV).

Paul is a delight to read because he talks lovingly to his protégé, Timothy, while also reasoning with him. He doesn't preach to Timothy; he doesn't condescend to the younger man. Instead, he uses reason and care that talks with us strangers so many years later. Indeed, break down these two verses and you can digest some of the tones in which Paul communicates with his "son."

"Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of:" that could almost be a commencement address. Good teaching speaks for itself and convinces us of truth. Convincing us of the truth is the primary goal of all education.

"You know those from whom you have learned it." Paul is talking about both himself but especially about Timothy's mother and grandmother, who raised him. They were early followers of Jesus who taught the young man about Christ, preparing him for mission with Paul and then service to the church abroad. They were honest and trustworthy people.

"How from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures." Then as now, Jewish boys are taught the Torah and the Talmud starting at around age 5. It begins a life-long pursuit of knowing God more through His word. It's the reason why so many Christians so strongly advocate Christian education for the young.

"The Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise." True wisdom comes only from God, is imparted only by Him and through His Word. On our own, we the people aren't wise. With the Lord, His wisdom becomes an inevitable gift of grace.

"Salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Jesus did the work of salvation. He and only He forgave our sins and made it possible for us to live forever. Yet that doesn't happen if we don't put our faith in Him. If we choose to reject faith in Christ, He allows us the consequence of our choice. Yes, we will live forever, but the Scriptures say it won't be with Jesus.

All these things Timothy knew. And he knew that persecution was all around him, and would come for him, too. History says that Timothy eventually became a bishop in Ephesus, in modern Turkey, where he was beaten to death during a pagan feast when he tried to minister the Gospel. He and Paul understood these things because they pursued Godly wisdom from Jesus. We can do the same.

For further reading: John 5:39, Deuteronomy 4:6, Psalm 119:98-99, 2 Timothy 3:15.

Wise Savior, only You are truly wise. Wisdom comes only through You. Thank You for teaching us Your wisdom through people like Paul and Timothy.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 31 May 2019

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV).

These are two of the most famous verses in the New Testament. They're a common-sense exposition of a basic truth: The entire Bible is the Word of God. All of it. Not just the meek and mild Jesus parts: all of it.

We of the Christian faith find it easy to ignore the Old Testament. It's almost as easy for us to ignore the OT as it is to ignore all hymns before year 2000. Some of the Old Testament is brutal history. And we don't like explaining that the same God who smote the Philistines is the same God who died for our sins, who loved the little children, who forgives us anything. Yep: same triune God; same Jesus; same Father and Spirit. We can only understand this if we read that Old Testament instead of selectively ignoring it, which many of our churches do (including my own).

The Word of God is a tool for us to live. We can (and should) use it for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training, praising, thanking, repenting and living in every way possible. Paul identifies only four specific behaviors (teaching and the other three) in order to make a point (that they are especially useful in encouraging righteousness). Yet the bigger point is that ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED AND IS USEFUL...SO THAT THE SERVANT OF GOD MAY BE THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.

Every good work. Witnessing and teaching. Pouring concrete. Preaching sermons. Welding I-beams. Configuring software. Raising kids. You name it: every good work we can conceive of is made possible when we are equipped with the peace from God's word that transcends all understanding.

Mind you, Paul's foremost concern for Timothy was spiritual work of the church body. Yet his point almost certainly meant every good work that we could do. And then consider this: God teaches and places us where He does to prepare us for those works. My friend, Phil, recently preached about David and Goliath, and one of the points he made was how God prepared David years ahead of time to fight Goliath. Over time, our God developed David's skills with bravery, simple weapons, and faith most of all. Stepping out to battle the tall Philistine was the result of much quiet preparation, not just a teenager's faithful bravado.

In the same way, God uses our work, our lives, to prepare us for things He has for us to do, both now and later. Every work, then, can be a work for the Lord. All of them. No wonder these verses are famous. All of the Bible is God-breathed and for our use.

For further reading: Philippians 4:7, 2 Peter 1:20, Romans 4:23-24, 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 4:1.

Lord, all of Your word is useful and holy. Thank You for it!

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 3 June 2019

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge. 2 Timothy 4:1 (NIV).

One of my favorite movies is "Independence Day." The original; not so much the sequel. In the first movie, Will Smith gives Jeff Goldblum a cigar before they attack the alien mother ship. "This is important," Will says. "This is our victory dance." Goldblum sort of shrugs it off and they get about their business of saving the planet.

"This is important." Will Smith was paraphrasing the Apostle Paul in verse 1. Paul's formal language invoked the presence of Christ Jesus, complete with the reminder of Christ' eternal vocation and prophecy. It's an attention-getter.

"Listen up, Timothy. This is important."

One day we will each stand in the physical presence of the Lord Jesus. We will stand before Him and we will plainly see Him without the veil of sin covering our eyes. We will see Him as He is in glory and splendor and awe-inspiring power.

Pay attention; this is important. (At least) Three things are easily predictable about that moment. One, Jesus will be all powerful. Two, we'll each know that and be awe-struck by it. And, three, what we believed about Him in this life will matter because it'll determine how we'll feel in that moment. For the believer, it'll be the summation of life, the moment of deepest faith, knowing without a human doubt that all your faith was true. It'll be the moment we long for, wait for. We don't and won't fear it, but we'll likely be overwhelmed by it, feeling the depths of our souls filled for the first time we can remember by being in the presence of the One who makes them complete. It'll be the ultimate victory dance.

And if you don't believe in Jesus? You'll likely feel a different kind of overwhelming. It will be a moment of unimaginable dread. I wish it wasn't true but it is. God and Christ Jesus, who offer you Their Holy Spirit now to fill you with His peace, will judge the living and the dead. In the climax of human history, God will judge each of us according to what we believed about Him. Did we put our faith in Him and let Him use us for the glory of the Kingdom? Or did we reject Him, believing we could do better ourselves. Did we focus our hearts on the Creator or the created? In that last judgment, God Himself will be saving the universe He created. He will be restoring all things to their Edenic perfection.

If you don't put your faith in Jesus here, when that moment comes, you'll be judged.

This is important.

For further reading: Acts 10:42, 1 Timothy 6:14, 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

Lord, I hear You because it's important. Fill me with Your love and peace so I can share them.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 4 June 2019

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. 2 Timothy 4:1-2 (NIV).

It was worthwhile to revisit the charge, the important commission, Paul gave to Timothy, in the context of how Paul told him how to do it: “with great patience and careful instruction.” That matters when you consider verse 3, which talks about the time to come. Or, as many think, our time.

So, in terms of “our time,” when is the season to be patient and careful? You already know the answer (always and always). How do you know that?

Think of it in terms on the Golden Rule: do unto others as you'd have them do unto you. We want to be patient and careful with how we interact with everyone else because we want them to be patient and careful with us. It's a fairness thing. More than that, however, it's a Jesus thing. Not only was that a lesson He taught during the Sermon on the Mount: it's a primary motivator for human behavior. We each want to satisfy our own needs and desire to be fairly treated by others while we do so. In order for that to happen, we must be willing to be patient and careful ourselves. Simple, right?

Not so much. If it were so simple, there wouldn't be crime, war, or Facebook.

God watches us and will judge us when this life it through. I'm not preaching hell-fire here; I'll leave that to others. To paraphrase a friend, I wouldn't be surprised if, in judgment, He doesn't find a way to have saved even the unrepentant. Our God is a marvelous God. But whether He does or not, we're promised that He'll judge us. This is important and He wanted us to know it.

And one of the things He'll judge us on is how we dealt with others. Did we do so in the way He wanted, namely in love? Did we exhibit the fruits of His Spirit as we lived and dealt with others? Were we patient and careful with how we listened and how we responded? Jesus was patient and careful all through His ministry. Each of the members of the Trinity has been patient and careful with each of us all through history. Are we following His lead and repeating that good behavior?

If not, now is the time to change it, to change how we think and act.

For further reading: Matthew 7:12, Titus 2:15, Galatians 2:6, Acts 10:42, 1 Timothy 6:14, 2 Timothy 4:3.

Lord, thank You and all praise to You for your patient care with me and all of us. Help me today to be more patient and careful as I deal with people.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 5 June 2019

For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NIV).

This is now. This is 1939. This is 1914. This is 1860. This is 1774. This is...this is the way of humanity. Paul wrote these words two thousand years ago. He wrote them to and about people familiar with the idea that some in society will ignore God and, instead, seek out what they want to hear. If it wasn't true then, Paul wouldn't have written it. It meant something to people then. Tell me, do we really think there are new things under the sun? They who turned their ears away from the truth and turned aside to myths, like those who would do so today, are but the shadows of people who have done so since we were kicked out of Eden.

Danger, Will Robinson, that you and I don't fall into that trap. The siren song of false politics, "if it makes you happy" soma, arguing endlessly, and a hundred other falsehoods are tempting to believer and unbeliever alike. Or haven't you heard of Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, the Schuller family and the rest of the popular televangelists who succumbed to sin? Or the Catholic 'churchocrats' who've made careers out of secretly hiding the gross offenses of predators? It has happened for years; it happened just before great wars and monumental events. People tire of sound doctrine and give in to something else. And disaster inevitably follows. In the last days, it will get worse.

But in the face of it, the antidote is kindness. Let's not become weary in doing good because doing good turns back the untruths and the myths and the pop culture lies. If the cure for the common sin is Christ, then the first tool He gives us to build up His following is to simply do good. Be kind. Live nicely and gently and patiently and carefully. Preach the Gospel at all times; when necessary, use words. The opposite of unsound doctrine is sound doctrine, and the evidence of the sound teaching of Jesus Christ is kindness to others.

So that's our challenge for today: be kind to someone. When someone wants to argue with you over some (largely meaningless) point, respond in patience and kindness. Let the guy from the other lane merge in. Do some random act of kindness today...just because. Tomorrow may indeed bring disaster so let's prepare for it with a smile today.

For further reading: Ecclesiastes 1:9, Galatians 6:9, 2 Timothy 4:5.

Lord Jesus, You always showed kindness to people, even to those who made themselves enemies to You. Help me to do that today, to be kind, to smile, to help.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 6 June 2019

They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:4 (NIV).

Another thought about this verse: belief is a choice.

You and I don't have to believe what we do: we choose to. Yes, we're compelled by faith from within. We can't begin to believe in Christ unless He first (through His Spirit) plants the thought in our receiving heart. We can't follow a political leader or ideology without watching it, learning about it, experiencing it. And as much as I believe some people quickly fall in love, we don't do that, either, without first being moved about the other person.

We choose those things. Faith, following, love: they're choices. Just like turning away from the truth. That, too, is a choice.

Nobody forced the Canaanites to follow their pagan gods or demonic, detestable practices. They chose. The Jews of Jesus' day weren't forced to conspire against Him: they chose to. Germans of the 1930s weren't forced to follow Nazism (at least not at first): they chose to follow evil. Parishoners at Jonestown, followers of Elijah Mohammed, members of the Lord's Resistance Army, the Manson family: they weren't forced to do the things they did. They chose.

So it is with those who turn away from God's truth and turn aside to myths. To be honest, it's another person's American right to follow Zoroastrian mysticism, follow the Maharishi Yogi, or run around naked in the forest to celebrate Mother Gaia. It's their right to turn aside to myths. In America, our Bill of Rights preserves our right to believe or not believe what we want. In other words, what we choose.

So it is with God as well. Even God respects that right. God doesn't force us to believe in Him. He asks us to. He asks us to, then teaches us through His word and our experiences why His teaching is the true way. His word, the constant miracles of nature and our world, the tangible results of faith in the lives of those who believe, our own experiences, love: all of these scream proof that Jesus is who He said He is. It's up to us to believe or not believe, to choose what we will take to heart about it.

Sure, NOT believing is easier said than done. It isn't easy to stop believing in something without a drastic event occurring. Yet that, too, is a choice. It was this way in ancient Judea; it is the same today. In the days that make up the end times, it will only get worse. Even obvious proof won't sway the choices of those determined to not be swayed.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 1:4, 2 Timothy 4:4.

Lord, use me and what I say and do to witness You to those who choose unbelief. Help me to not judge. Help me to live out Your word better. For them.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 10 June 2019

But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. 2 Timothy 4:5 (NIV).

It's tough to keep our heads in all situations. It's a tough thing to get attacked for what you believe, who you are, the way you comport your faith and not respond in kind, lash out, seek retribution or revenge. Paul reminds Timothy to keep his head and NOT respond in kind when people attack him. It's good advice that applies equally to us down through the ages.

Make no mistake: God did not create us to be miserable. He didn't create us to always "take it" and be beaten down so others can puff themselves up. Instead, He created us to be in communion with Him, to share Him, to trust Him. Paul knew that meant Timothy would be attacked, ridiculed, even persecuted because Paul had personally experienced these things. Yet Paul advised his protégé to keep his head, to endure these hardships knowing that Jesus was with him in Spirit; knowing that Jesus had endured much worse out of love for Timothy AND those who would do that persecuting.

In survival training, they teach you to keep your head, to keep focused and not try to win a battle of wits. You can win a battle of wills, but only if you keep your head about you even when things get bad. If you read about Louis Zamperini, you find that, in the worst days as a POW (in Imperial Japan), he kept his head. He hated what he was going through, and he didn't understand why he was singled out for particularly cruel torture, but he kept his head, sought peace, even occasionally sought God. Many years later, when Zamperini became a believing Christian, he realized that God had been with him throughout his imprisonment and had kept him through such hardship for the life he would now lead. Millions of people were encouraged by Louis' story. If you haven't read or seen "Unbroken," do it.

This is part of the life we choose when we choose to accept Christ's invitation. He doesn't force us, and He doesn't hide it from us that we will endure hardships for His sake. In fact, Jesus reminds us that, if we are to follow Him honestly, we must embrace the hardships, take up our sufferings for His sake, and follow His example. In the middle of it, He will always be with us, always encouraging us to love instead of hate, to forgive instead of nursing grudges, to seek understanding instead of festering anger. Even when it's tough to keep our heads, our wits, about us, Jesus promises us that He will help us overcome in the ways that matter most.

For further reading: Acts 21:8, Ephesians 4:11, Matthew 16:24, 2 Timothy 4:6

Lord Jesus, help me endure and overcome today!

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 11 June 2019

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 2 Timothy 4:6 (NIV).

You can lose everything in a flash. My son-in-law's mother lost everything in the storm that roared through Dallas on Sunday. You may have seen it on your news yesterday. A crane crashed into an apartment building, and that was the building in which she lived. It turns out that the crane destroyed the building. Between that damage and the storm winds, the building shifted and the parking garage was declared a loss. She and her husband (along with all the other people who lived there) lost everything. Home, car, belongings, clothes, mementos: everything, because it isn't safe to go back into the building.

The Apostle Paul knew his end was approaching. For two years he had been under house arrest in Rome. Innocent but accused of defiling the Temple, as a Roman citizen, Paul appealed his case to Caesar. He was kept under house arrest in Judea for several years, then sailed to Rome where he was incarcerated for another two years, awaiting his appeal with the Emperor. But the Emperor of the day was Nero, and it is thought Paul was executed not long after the great fire of Rome, set by Nero. Paul knew the insane emperor had no love for him, and he knew how his fellow Christians were being persecuted by Rome.

So he anticipated his death, using his final months to write letters, encourage his friends and fellow believers, and likely even minister to his guards. He compared the approaching end of his life to a drink offering, a sacrificial offering of wine poured on the altar or over a burning sacrifice to the Lord. Yet the comparison is even more vivid because Paul might also have been alluding to his life being poured out in the manner of Christ's, whose very blood was offered in sacrifice for mankind's sins. Jesus knew ahead of time that His death was approaching; so did Paul.

Yet my in-law relations had no idea of what was coming for them. They woke up Sunday morning to just another typical Sunday. By the end of the day, everything had changed. Insurance will pay for much of it, and things can be replaced. Yet you can't replace the sentiment of mementos, the memories they bring. You can't easily shrug off the shock of such a thing. Please pray for their peace, and that of all who were affected by the tragedy. Pray they'll be able to keep peaceful in the days to come, that they'll find their way to a new home, and that they'll feel God's real presence in this time of crisis. The best, and not the worst, is yet to come.

For further reading: Numbers 15:1-12, Philippians 2:17, 2 Timothy 4:7

Lord, grant the peace only You have to these people who have been hurt. Pour out Your love and hope into them.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 12 June 2019

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 2 Timothy 4:7 (NIV).

Today is my nephew's graduation day. He has worked hard for 13 years to get to this day, and it's a good time to both reflect and look forward. In my opinion, graduation addresses are boring and easily forgotten. This particular young man also doesn't have an active Christian belief, doesn't practice much in the way of faith, and doesn't believe in Jesus. To be honest, that's ok. Jesus believes in him. As long as he lives, unless today is the last day of his existence, Jesus will keep working, keep providing, keep helping and hoping, keep loving him until time runs out. It's what the Lord does.

For this young man – and actually for all graduates – I wish him well, congratulations, and endurance. The phase of life that starts today for him will be a fight, will be a long race, and will need faith. He may not understand that, and being a kid he rebels against that; most of us do at one point or another. But that doesn't stop the fight, stop the race, or negate our critical need for faith.

Without faith in Jesus, the fight isn't worth fighting. Give up and just dive into the world. You'll get what you get and I hope it doesn't eat you alive because the world won't care if it does. And if you don't want to run the race, give up. You'll have a tough time getting past that, and I'll be happy to console you, but I won't feel sorry for you. Indeed, I hope nobody does. There's a difference between giving up and stopping because you leave the outcome to the Lord. That's a hard difference to see, to even comprehend, without trusting that Christ knows what He's doing and is helping us to get through the hard fights and long races.

Keeping the faith means trusting Him in all things, all ways, always. That isn't easy. It defies that world that's fighting against us, racing against us. But the crazy miracle is that the faith makes all the difference in our lives. It makes the tough fight 'fightable.' It makes the race winnable because it has already been won for us. We get to cross the line and receive the laurel from God Almighty Jesus Himself. It doesn't matter what the fallen world thinks of us. What matters is keeping the faith, believing, submitting to Jesus and His better way, His purposes. Jesus is the finish line; Jesus is the bell at the end of the round.

Paul knew this 2000 years ago. It's still true today. God bless the graduates. Enjoy this day you worked for and winning this race. Then line up and get ready for the next one. You're in it already.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 9:24, Acts 20:24, 2 Timothy 4:8

God bless those graduating and running their race.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 13 June 2019

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing. 2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NIV).

If you don't believe in Christ, these verses together are complete nonsense. It's understandable why non-believers would think this; it really is. No honest person could blame you for feeling that way, thinking that way, and, yes, believing that way (because un-belief is a conscious belief. It's a choice.). If you reject these things taught about Jesus Christ in the Bible, then none of what Paul says here is sensible. There is no crown of righteousness. The Lord doesn't judge because there is no Lord or post-existence judgment. Jesus Christ, if He existed, was just a man. Those who long for His appearing have wasted their time because there's nothing.

And you'd be right about that last point, how there's nothing...for those who unbelieve.

You'd be wrong about the rest. Not only does the Bible provide countless examples of life after death, of God being the God of both living and dead people (meaning the dead still exist), of those who once had physical life returning (such as Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration), but the Bible talks about the after-life being a very real, tangible thing for those who reject Jesus as much as for those who accept Him. "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth:" there are six specific times in Matthew and Luke when Jesus talks about how eternal separation from God – weeping and gnashing of teeth in anguish – is a real thing. When we die, we don't simply stop functioning or transform into oblivion. There are consequences for what we believe here and now. For those who choose to reject Christ, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And for those who choose Him? For us, there will be the ultimate graduation ceremony. The communion of saints that is living in Jesus' presence is where we will be crowned with His righteousness. He will meet us, embrace us, bestow on us His eternal life and peace. We're part of that eternity now, part of heaven now even while we're here on the Third Rock. We get to embrace His peace, His honesty, His righteousness, His love now...and we get to share that with others, especially those who struggle with that. Not out of compulsion: out of caring, out of love.

We get to do that. Christ doesn't force us: He invites us. Will you take up His invitation?

For further reading: Matthew 8:12, Matthew 13:42, Matthew 17:1-8, Matthew 22:13, Matthew 24:51, Matthew 25:30, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36, Luke 13:28, 2 Timothy 4:9

Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 17 June 2019

Do your best to come to me quickly. 2 Timothy 4:9 (NIV).

For those who say that Paul made up the things in his letters, there's this little nugget of reality. When you're in trouble, you call for help. When things are rough, you reach out a helping hand. You do it; I do it; we all reach out for help when things become desperate. They were desperate for Paul when he wrote 2 Timothy.

When you read the entire letter, you pick up on Paul's attitude of completion, of his resignation to his coming execution. He's thankful to have led this ministry that Jesus Himself personally began. And he understands that the world will kill his body but he as Paul and a follower of Jesus Christ will live on. Yet you can't miss the undertones of sadness that Paul transmits. He's thankful to be ministering on, soldiering on until the near-term end, yet he seems sad.

He seems sad because his ministry – his life's work – is approaching its end and there is more Paul wanted to do. Another missionary journey was desired but would not happen. Reaching out to believers in Spain, in Gaul and Germania, and deeper into Asia would not be things that Paul would do. Despite all he had personally done to reach out to non-believers and questioning Jews, Paul probably wanted to do more. He had personally experienced Jesus Christ and desperately wanted other people to know about Him. Yet Paul's work was done and his mission was winding down. The Romans would kill him and Jesus would call him home. Paul doesn't seem afraid to die, just sad that it is going to happen.

Again, realism. If you or I had lived the life Paul lived, perhaps we would feel the same. What's the most logical response? Paul says, "Help me. I need help now because time is running out. Do your best to come to me quickly...because if you take too long, I'll be gone. We won't be able to talk about things that we need to talk about. There are things the Lord wants to do through this, and I need you to help me while we can."

Consider how a lie would have been simpler: "I'm doing ok. Everything is fine. No, they aren't going to kill me. Everything is peaches and cream." Those who knew Paul wouldn't have accepted that because they knew him, understood him, had grown in the faith with him. That simpler lie might have fooled a few but, like all lies, would have been hollow and meaningless. If Paul had simply made these things up, why would he feel sad about them? Indeed, if his works are all lies, why would he feel anything about them?

Because Paul shared these things in so few words, his genuine feeling comes down through the years.

For further reading: Acts 17:1, 2 Corinthians 2:13, Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24, 2 Timothy 4:10

Thank You for Paul's mission work, Lord.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 18 June 2019

Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 2 Timothy 4:9-10 (NIV).

Here are a few more realistic, matter-of-fact verses that give credibility to Paul's account. Paul was asking Timothy to come quickly to his aid because Paul knew his death would be soon. At the end of his ministry, the apostle felt deserted because some of those whom he had trusted to partner with in that ministry were gone. Demas, who was also mentioned in Colossians, had fallen away from Paul's work, and had gone to Greece. Crescens is mentioned in Scripture only here. While we don't know whether or not he and Paul parted on bad terms, we do know he was away. And Titus, to whom Paul would write another New Testament letter, had also left. Because of that book of Titus, it's unlikely that he and Paul had a falling-out.

Sometimes people are in our lives for a season; other times they're in our lives for a reason.

No matter the season or reason, Paul was mostly alone and lonesome. Have you ever felt that way?

I grew up that way. We moved around a lot when I was a kid because my Dad worked for the Army. We'd live someplace for a few years and then move to a new place. We'd be there just long enough to make some friends and then leave them. One summer, I felt especially lonely after moving back to Iowa. I been able to re-connect with friends I had known before, and felt abandoned by my friends from other places. Kids don't write letters, this was before cell phones, and long-distance phone calls weren't cheap.

So I can identify with how Paul must have felt here; perhaps you can too. Perhaps there has been a time in your life when you were (or at least felt) abandoned by the people you counted on most. Perhaps you're in that season of life now.

You know what's coming: we're never alone. Paul was never really alone because Jesus was with him. I was never really alone during that long Iowa summer because Jesus was with me. You're not alone now, even when the wolves howl outside, because Jesus is with us.

"Some consolation that is," you might be thinking. "I can't see, feel, or sense Jesus here." Yet He's here all the same. He closes your eyes at night and keeps watch by your bedside. He feels your loneliness when you feel abandoned. He cries inside when you do. He's real because you're real, because He promised to always be with us, even to the end of the age.

For further reading: Titus 3:12, Colossians 4:14, 2 Corinthians 2:13, Matthew 28:20, 2 Timothy 4:11

In season and reason, You are with me now, Lord Jesus. I'm asking for Your comfort and help.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 19 June 2019

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. 2 Timothy 4:11-13 (NIV).

“Emanuel” is a new movie that focuses on forgiveness. It’s a contemporary docu-drama about how the members of a Bible study group at Emanuel Baptist Church forgave the man who tried to murder them. Powerful stuff about a powerful action.

When considering forgiveness, consider Mark. Mark is Mark the Evangelist: the author of the Gospel of Mark (probably the earliest of the four Gospel accounts), also known as John Mark. Paul had known Mark (who, as a young man, had known Jesus) for many years. Earlier in Paul’s ministry, when it was Paul who was new to following Jesus, Paul and Mark had disagreed. Prior to this, in Pamphylia, Mark had ‘abandoned’ Paul, leaving Paul for reasons we don’t know. The reason could have been serious or it could have been a slight; we simply don’t know.

All we know is that, in Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas (who had been ministering together) sharply argued and then split up over John Mark. Paul and Silas went one way, and Barnabas and Mark went another. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, and Paul and Silas continued on through Syria. Where God would have done great things through the four of these men together He did greater things by splitting them up, allowing the Gospel to be shared with more people than if the group had stayed together.

Some time later, Mark and Paul reconciled. They shared mutual forgiveness for the previous incident. They reconciled to the point that, for the rest of human history, Paul’s words about Mark being helpful in ministry were recorded to encourage us to forgive. We are to do it because it’s what Jesus did – and does. We are to do it because it’s healing, because it is cleansing; because it’s helpful to others and to us.

Letting go of animosities and burdens and wrongs done to us frees us to better focus on the wonderful things God is doing every day. We get to choose to let optimism or pessimism rule our outlook. We get to look for good things instead of navel-gazing on the problems that follow us. Those problems may still follow us, but we can keep them in perspective and use the empowering freedom of knowing we’re forgiven (and can forgive others) to live lives that help, that help others, that help others know Jesus and His Good News.

ANYTHING is forgiveable. See “Emanuel” now. See it to see how even the worst things done by terrible people can be forgiven.

For further reading: Acts 15:37-40, Acts 16:8, Acts 20:4, 2 Timothy 4:14

Lord Jesus, thank You for forgiveness. For forgiving us when we’ve wronged You. Inspire us to forgive others as You do.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 21 June 2019

Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. 2 Timothy 4:14-15 (NIV).

Notice the contrast between Paul's attitude towards John Mark – forgiveness – and his attitude towards Alexander – un-forgiveness...yet.

We're the same.

My Concordia Bible says (in Acts) that Alexander was a coppersmith who had apparently been involved in a riot against Christians in Ephesus. Abiding by Paul's teaching there, Ephesian believers denounced the pagan Temple of Artemis. Said temple was a great source of income for many of the prominent people of Ephesus; they weren't thrilled at losing a source of their income. So someone fomented a riot that involved denouncing the new "Way" that was the nascent church. Alexander was put forward by the Jews of Ephesus to denounce, perhaps renounce, these followers of this Jesus of Nazareth.

The next place that Alexander is mentioned is in 1 Timothy, where he had renounced his faith in Christ. Paul turned him over to Satan: effectively excommunicating him from Christian fellowship. Alexander had been living as a hypocrite, accepting favor and the name of Christ yet living publicly in ways defiant and contrary to it. Jesus Himself had laid the foundation for excommunication, describing it in Matthew 18 as a way to treat wrongs so as to cherish the soul of the wrong-doer.

Thus, it wasn't that Paul held a grudge. If these Alexanders are the same man, then Paul actually said what he said out of Christian love. On the surface, it seems Paul is being overly harsh on Alexander, but this simply isn't so when this man's background is considered. It wasn't that Alexander couldn't be forgiven: it was that human forgiveness should be withheld until Alexander humbled himself before Jesus and saw his need for it.

Again, we're the same. I'm Alexander to some people; so are you. There are some people who won't forgive us no matter what we do. And there are some people who we have wronged who aren't ready to forgive us until we see how we've wronged them. And let's be honest: there are some people who we aren't ready to forgive either.

Knowing that, it's good to remember that Jesus forgave us when He didn't have to. It's helpful to remember that forgiveness heals us, that it helps us to let go of things that hurt us from the inside. Whether Paul forgave Alexander we don't know. What we do know is that Paul advised people to be wary of him because Alexander's behavior had been destructive.

If forgiveness is to work, we need to believe in it. Alexander apparently didn't. Here's to hoping that changed.

For further reading: Psalm 28:4, Psalm 109:20, Matthew 18:15-20, Acts 19:33, Romans 2:6, 1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 4:16

Lord, help me to forgive in love, and in Your justice. And forgive Alexander.

May only be used with permission from aspiringwriterdt.com

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 24 June 2019

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 2 Timothy 4:16 (NIV).

Paul was given to hyperbole, but here in this verse, he probably wasn't being hyperbolic. It's likely that there actually were people around him who did physically support him – with food, with friendship, with camaraderie, with prayer. That's isn't what he's talking about. When Paul was called before the Jewish, then Roman, authorities, he was probably alone. He was probably left to defend himself with only the words of Jesus' Spirit to guide him. Everyone else, even his closest friends, either deserted him or sought self-preservation from the hell-bent Jewish and Roman overseers.

That's understandable, you know. We can only do so much. While God calls us to boldly proclaim and love Him in all ways even unto death, He asks us more to model the attitude of self-sacrifice; the heart to give everything in His service. That's the heart Paul had, the kind of heart that guided him through the times when the government and the religious authorities actually persecuted him for proclaiming Christ crucified.

My Concordia Bible makes an interesting parallel between this verse, especially the last section of it, and Acts 7:60. In the Acts verse, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is being stoned to death by over-eager Jews. Stephen had just rhetorically devastated these men, who had called him to testify as to why he was proclaiming the forbidden "way" of Jesus. Stephen used that occasion to relate how the Jews had followed God in an up-then-down manner from the time of Abraham until that day. He then bluntly denounced them for mocking God in their hearts because they had murdered Jesus, God Immanuel. The Sanhedrin stoned Stephen for that, and it was Paul, then known as Saul, who had overseen the murder.

So it's ironic that, in the verse from 2 Timothy, years after the death of Stephen, Paul asks a prayer for the people who have deserted him. Stephen wasn't alone in his dying moments: he saw heaven open and Jesus. Paul knew that he, too, wasn't alone. That even when his friends left him, he still had Jesus there to bring peace to his heart and forgiveness as its best desire.

We're in that same boat, you know. We are given to thinking we're all alone, certain that the world is set against us and that only disaster and despair are ahead. Yet it's a mirage; it's an exaggeration of our circumstances; hyperbole. We are never all alone, even when we feel alone. Stephen wasn't. Paul wasn't. You aren't; I'm not. Even in the worst day, Jesus endures with us, giving us strength to pray for the forgiveness of others.

For further reading: Acts 7:60, 2 Timothy 4:17

Lord Christ, forgive, uphold, restore, and enrich those who would hurt me today. Grant them and myself Your peace.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 25 June 2019

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 2 Timothy 4:16-18 (NIV).

Adding in verses 17 and 18 makes the previous blog entry more complete. It's not enough to think Paul thought himself alone. The more important point is that Paul KNEW he wasn't alone, that Jesus was with him, that Jesus and His message did and would prevail. That Jesus delivered Paul. That Jesus WILL deliver Paul (and us) from the evils of this world so we will triumph with Him.

So let's talk those evils. I know a young man who was hit by a car two months ago. He's a star athlete at a west Texas college who has a bright future in sports ahead of him, likely in professional baseball. Out of the blue, a stranger did a hit and run on him. One minute my friend is sitting at an intersection; the next minute he's paralyzed in a crushed car.

He's spent the last two months in the hospital, learning how to walk again. As of today, he's not only walking: he's doing wind sprints down the hall. As his mom put it, 'it was like God flipped a switch.' He had been told he might never even move his toes again, the damage to his spine was so severe. Physical therapy was long, torturous, and critical. And all of a sudden, things fell back into place and he's not just walking again but running. He'll be discharged this week to continue outpatient therapy and gradually return to full activity.

Miracle. A miracle of God. There's no other way to look at it. The Lord allowed this disastrous accident to a believing young man and the young man still believed. The Lord rescued him through the accident, then through the process of rehabilitation, then into health again. The Lord's grace, mercy, and healing were displayed in ways it hadn't been before. And the Lord is with the man still, carrying him forward into a promising future, not just with sports, but to display God's grace and tender mercies.

My friend has never been alone. Family, friends, and doctors have tended to him since the accident. Yet I'm sure he FELT alone at times; even Paul must have felt deserted. In those times, faith that Jesus hadn't abandoned him sustained both Paul and my friend. And in living out that faith, they both provide shining examples for the rest of us.

For further reading: 2 Timothy 4:19

Lord, thank You for healing Aaron. Keep it up!

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 26 June 2019

Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers and sisters. 2 Timothy 4:19-21 (NIV).

This seems like a Southern goodbye. My wife frequently notes that people from the American South take a long time to say goodbye. You (or they) say “well, I have to get going” and you may start for the door or intend to hang up the phone. Yet the person on the other end of the conversation then says “Yeah, me too,” pauses, and then continues with :....and then I was in my kitchen...” or something like that, extending the conversation through a protracted goodbye. A five-minute talk easily stretches to a half-hour or more.

That’s a Southern thing. True, you see it in other places. I was born a Yankee. I have northern friends and family who do this. But it’s almost a way of life in the American South. Maybe it’s the way we’re raised (see “Southern thing”). Or maybe they tell you the same thing several times. The older I get, the more I find myself doing this. Either way, it takes longer.

When you think about that, think about Paul. It reminds me of how Paul signed off his letters. In Paul’s time, letters were the only long-distance means of communication. That means that you’d have added greetings to your letters, sending greetings from or to people you knew lived near the recipient. Paul often did this: it’s how he signed off Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, here (in 2 Timothy), Titus, and Philemon. In all his letters, Paul sent (at least) generic good-bye’s. But in most of them, he sent greetings from and to the people mentioned above as well as others he knew would be nearby.

Paul might have fit in in North Texas. He’d understand the Southern goodbye. Sure, it can be time-consuming and, yes, it can even be annoying. But it’s great that people want to be involved in our lives. It makes me want to be involved in theirs. It’s love and mutual affection, mutual respect. I like the art of conversation, and I like that someone wants to talk. In a way, I feel sorry for folks in our electronic world because that art is changing. Text messages are so brief, so impersonal, so incomplete. Emails are intended to be direct and to-the-point. My wife is constantly urging me to go back to writing letters and cards; perhaps she has a point. Paul might agree.

So let’s keep talking. In fact, my best to you, to your X and Y. In the name of Jesus.

For further reading: Acts 18:2, Acts 19:22, Acts 20:4-29, 2 Timothy 1:16, Titus 3:12, 2 Timothy 4:22

Lord Jesus, thanks for long goodbyes, for people who want to send their love to us, and for ways of communicating.

Practical Proverbial, from 2 Timothy, 27 June 2019

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all. 2 Timothy 4:22 (NIV).

Here we are again, at another ending, at the end of another book. If you're a ten-year reader of this blog, thank you! I hope it's a blessing to you. You'll remember we've reached endings together of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Mark, Hebrews, James, 1/2/3 John, 1/2 Thessalonians and now 1/2 Timothy, as well as the topics of the Ten Commandments and Santa Claus. That's thirteen books of the Bible and 15 topics overall; well over a million words. We've spent some time together. God-willing, we'll keep doing that.

And if He isn't willing, if this is the last of these posts, then the Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all. I mean that. We've (hopefully) learned from Paul to end our conversations genuinely, to infuse our parting with the same Spirit and love that we (hopefully, again) brought into our meeting. As Paul closed out his letters with greetings from and to friends, he also closed them out by praying the Lord over the recipient.

That's a bold thing to do, you know. Paul understood these letters would be widely-read. He probably didn't envision they'd ever be part of canon Scripture, but he probably did imagine many people hearing them (or hearing about them). He put down on paper both his personal affections for the reader as well as his prayers for the same. In a time when that could get you killed, that's bold.

And you know that time is now. Praying Jesus Christ in public today can get you arrested or killed in North Korea, China, Cuba, Vietnam, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan, and many nations in Africa. In the US, it can get you fired. Putting those prayers on paper can have the same effect because then you involve those recipients. Yet, if we really believe in Jesus, then we're compelled to do it. The heart of the Gospel is agape love: undeserved gracious love that goes out without any expectation of anything in return. No matter the consequences.

It's that love that nailed Jesus to the cross. It's that love that kept Him there, that rolled back the Easter stone. It's that love that called Paul on a road into Syria. And it's that love Paul wanted shared with his friends no matter what it would cost him. Not long after writing the letter, it cost Paul his life. Praise to God that He inspired Paul to be willing to do that.

So, at another ending, let us each be inspired to have that same faith and courage. To wish Christ's love infuse our souls and bring grace and peace to each other. Grace and His love to you until the next time.

For further reading: Galatians 6:18, Colossians 4:18, Titus 1:1

Lord Jesus, thank You for endings and beginnings, for Your grace and love being in both. Thank You for lettings us have these times together.