

# Fulfill Your Ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-8)

**Big Idea:** Fulfill your ministry even when it's hard just like Paul.

As an eight-year-old boy growing up in Hawaii, Brian Clay dreamed of winning one of the most prized gold medals in the Olympic games – the decathlon. He accomplished that goal in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

In the decathlon, athletes earn points for their marks in ten events over two days. With a commanding lead going into the last event, the 1,500-meter run, Clay could have just coasted to the finish line and still earned the gold medal. But when Clay was asked when he knew he had the decathlon wrapped up, he gave a surprising answer:

*In the last race when I was about 10 feet away from the finish line—that's when I knew I'd won. I'd worked, trained, and competed for eight years to be able to ... have the gold [medal](#) hanging around my neck. And if there was anything those eight years of competition had taught me it was that in competing against the best in the world in ten grueling events, anything can go wrong before you cross the finish line.*

The race isn't over until you cross the finish line. To run the race, you need focus, because anything can go wrong along the way.

Those words were said by a modern-day athlete, but they may have well been said by the apostle Paul. We've been looking at his last letter written to his young pro-

tégé Timothy. In the passage that we just read, Paul essentially says, "I've crossed that finish line. And now, Timothy, it's your turn. Here's what you need to do to run."

Let's look at Paul's words, and the challenge that they present to all of us. Three challenges.

## Fulfill Your Ministry (4:1-2, 5)

The broad, overarching command in this passage is in verse 5: "As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

This is going to look like it has little to say to most of us directly. It's written to a particular person, Timothy, who has a particular role. But it has application to all of us. It definitely has application to me as a pastor, but it also applies to how we operate as a church. And it applies to you as well.

### A General Assignment

Here are the commands:

- **Be sober-minded.** In other words, think clearly. Just like we can be under the influence of alcohol, we can be under the influence of other things too, like false teaching. We need to be able to think straight instead of being impaired by wrong ways of thinking about God and the world.
- **Endure suffering.** This keeps coming up. Not surprising, since it was written by someone in jail about to die. Pay the price. It won't be easy. But the call to follow Jesus is the call to suffer.

- **Do the work of an evangelist.** “An evangelist works where the church has been established, and from the church base tries to win converts among people nearby” (John Piper). In one sense, Timothy had a unique calling to be an evangelist. In another sense, we all share in this task. As the Philippians translation says, “make the preaching of the Good News your life’s work.” Don’t just keep the good news to yourself. There are thousands of people out there who’ve never heard it. Let them know too.
- **Fulfil your ministry.** Persevere until the job is done. Don’t quit halfway. Anything can go wrong before the finish line. Keep going.

All of this applies to Timothy, but it also applies to every single one of us. Stay sober-minded. Endure suffering. Tell others the good news. Don’t give up. Keep on going to the end.

I don’t care who you are. All of this applies to you. God is calling for your faithfulness. It’s a faithfulness that will cost you, but it’s a faithfulness that matters.

I hope you have discovered the truth that we don’t have what it takes. I hope you’ve discovered that Jesus does have what it takes. He invites us to come to him with our nothingness and receive everything from him, including a reason to live.

But then I hope you know that this is just the start. You are called to run the race all the way to the end, and it’s going to involve the things that Paul just mentioned: faithful, costly perseverance right to the end. That is your assignment. That’s the job before you.

## A Particular Assignment

Okay, that applies to all of us. Here's how it applies to one subset of us. Paul says in verses 1 and 2:

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

We all have a role to play. Here is Timothy's particular role: to preach the word. And here's how he's to do it:

- always, whether it's popular or not
- with particular application to a group of people, reproof, rebuking and exhorting them to faithfulness
- with an attitude of patience, because this is slow work and because people are messy

Paul charges Timothy before God and Jesus. This really matters. It's why we make such a big deal about preaching here. I agree with John Stott who said, "Nothing is more important for the life and health of the church than biblical preaching .... Churches live, grow, and flourish by the Word of God."

Okay, that's the first part of what Paul says: fulfill your ministry. You have a role to play. Your faithfulness matters. Timothy had a role to play, and so do you. It's going to be costly, but keep going right to the end.

Here's the second part of what Paul says:

## Even When It's Hard (3-4)

Fulfill your ministry, even when it's hard. Here's the hard part, in verses 3 and 4:

*For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

If you are going to fulfill your ministry, you need to be prepared: it's going to be hard. You need to be prepared for certain kinds of hardship that you are going to face as you follow Jesus:

- Some won't tolerate sound teaching. You can show them the truth from Scripture and they'll still reject it.
- They'll go looking for false teachers. They will not only refuse to hear the truth, but they'll find teachers – a heap of them – who tell them what they want to hear.
- They'll stop listening to truths and start believing things that aren't true – myths, conspiracies, that kind of thing.

And so Paul says to Timothy, "It's going to be hard." It's one of the things that's hard about following Jesus.

There's so much I can say here. Let's just say that Paul identifies one of the hard parts of fulfilling our ministries. Imagine a race that you're running. All around you, people are leaving the racetrack and heading off course. Others are tripping and you have to jump over their bodies. Others turn around and start running in the other direction. You're going to face all of that and more. Don't be surprised when it happens.

Keep running your race. Expect that it will be hard. Expect others to disappoint you. Keep going.

Fulfill your ministry even when it's hard. There's one more part to what Paul wants to say:

## **Just Like Paul (4:6-8)**

Paul is at the finish line cheering us on. He's run the race. He's dealt with the hardships. And he turns back to us and says:

*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:6-8)*

Paul knows his life is over. He's about to die by execution. But he uses some profound images for the end of his life: as an act of worship (a drink offering), a departure like a boat, the completion of a fight or a race. Paul is not panicked about his death. He knows that he's run the race well, and he has confidence that even his death will have meaning.

And what really gives him confidence is what he knows is coming. He knows God has seen everything, and he knows that on the other side of the finish line is the victory crown – the same crown that's waiting for all who have loved his appearing.

If you know Jesus, if you've been captivated by who he is and what he's done for you, then you have a ministry. You don't need a position. You don't need a title. You

don't even need to do a spiritual gift test. What you do need is to devote the rest of your life to loving Jesus more and sharing that love with as many other people as possible.

And so Paul says this to Timothy, and indirectly to all of us: **Fulfill your ministry even when it's hard just like Paul.** If you do, it will pay off for eternity.

Brian Clay didn't let up until he was 10 feet from the finish line of the decathlon. He knew he couldn't coast until he was on the verge of crossing that line. Paul didn't let up right to the end, right until he sat in a prison in Rome about to die. And neither should we. The crown is coming; right now it's our time to run the race like Paul, staying faithful to the very end no matter the cost.

Lord, help us to do this. Help us to fulfill our ministries, to not be distracted when others don't, and to stay faithful right to the end like Paul. In Jesus' name. Amen.