

Encouragement in Ministry

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Date: 24 August 2025

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[0 : 00] Thanks very much, Bogdan. And what you won't know is that I said to Bogdan, no, you can certainly read the passage tonight instead of me. So you can have a go at all those names.

But it's a really great privilege of mine to be here tonight. So as Bogdan said, my name's Craig. I'm the pastor in training here at Brunsfield. And all through the summer, we've been going through this great letter, 2 Timothy.

This wee, wee book towards the end of the Bible, but it's so packed full of really, really important stuff for how we operate as a church.

How gospel workers should, the things that they should really prioritize. So it's a really, really key letter for us, even though it's so small.

But to start us off, I wondered if you've ever looked at an old photo album. You know, the old photos that you used to get, the glossy, wee piece of paper that sort of size.

[1 : 04] If you've ever flicked through an old photo album, there might be landscapes, there might be people in those photos, there might be pets or family members, but there's usually one character who's missing in a photo album.

Who is the man behind the camera? Who is the person taking the picture? And most of the time, that person is not featured. They're missing because they're on the other side of the camera.

Maybe you've watched a sports match and you're so familiar with a commentator's voice, but you've no idea what the commentator looks like.

Who is the commentator behind the voice? Or maybe the painter. Who is the painter behind the painting? So we're going to be thinking a lot about the man behind the pen.

Who is this Paul? Paul. So through most of this letter, we've been learning bits and pieces about him, but most of his focus has been instructions to Timothy.

[2 : 07] This is what I want you to do after I've gone, after I've died. This is what I want you to focus on as you lead the church into the next generation, as you take this gospel baton from me, and as you pass it on to the next generation.

And what we've learned about Paul in this letter is that he has committed his life to preaching the word. And last week, in this passage that we looked at last week, we saw him strongly command Timothy to do the exact same thing, to make sure that preaching the word was his central task, the main thing that he does, what he prioritizes above everything else in church.

Why must Timothy preach the word? So that people will hear the gospel and be saved. So that Christians might be built up in their faith and come to maturity.

And thirdly, so that a new generation of leaders might be identified and equipped so that they can be the ones that lead the church into the future.

So Timothy must preach the word. But all the way through this letter, we've also been remembering that Paul is in prison. As he writes this letter, he is in a Roman prison, and he knows that he's soon to be put to death because he's remained faithful to Jesus, he's stuck with Jesus, and he's stuck to his task of preaching the word.

[3 : 41] And that's why he's in prison. That's why he's going to be put to death. We know that Paul has fought the good fight. He's finished the race. He's kept the faith. That's what he tells us just before this passage.

But we also know that Paul has been staunchly positive about the fact that he's going to die. Even though the storm clouds are gathering, even though the gloom of death is getting nearer and nearer, he has been staunchly positive.

But in this passage, we are drawing attention to his suffering. Paul wants us to know that he is truly suffering. He doesn't draw attention to his physical suffering, though.

The things that he wants Timothy to know about are the things that are crushing his spirit, namely the isolation that he's feeling and the opposition that he's recently faced.

Isolation and opposition. These are the things that he wants to draw Timothy's attention to. But we've always got to ask the big question, why? Why is Paul wanting to draw attention to these struggles?

[4 : 50] Why does he give us this passage in 2 Timothy? I think it's because he wants Timothy and all church leaders and preachers and teachers and all the people that are going to follow Timothy down through the ages, he wants them to know that they are going to experience the same things as Paul, the same sense of isolation, the same serious and painful opposition, if they remain committed to preaching the word.

And these things, the sense of isolation, the strong opposition that Paul faces, we need to take this seriously because these things can seriously knock the pastor or the church leader or the elder. And we need to take this seriously because if a pastor is knocked hard enough by these things, it can be enough to knock his church it could knock his ministry, it could knock his family, it could stop him from preaching the gospel altogether.

But Paul doesn't just leave us with these negative things. What does Paul say that's going to keep him, Paul, and fellow pastors going to the end? Well, it's another two things, the companionship of fellow believers and the Lord's strengthening presence.

So in times of isolation and opposition, we're going to see that the pastor can depend on the Lord's strengthening presence and be bolstered by the companionship of Christian friends.

[6 : 30] So we're going to look at the two things that can crush the spirit of the pastor, isolation and opposition. But then we'll look at the two things that Paul says can strengthen the pastor, the companionship of believers and the Lord's strengthening presence.

So let's jump in. So let's look first at the pastor's sense of isolation. So if we think about Paul, if you know a thing or two about Paul, we know that he had a mighty faith in the Lord Jesus.

But even still, his prison experience must have been really tough. How would you feel if you were locked up in a hole in the ground and at any moment, the prison governor could come, unlock your cell and lead you out to the firing squad?

Imagine going to sleep at night or trying to go to sleep at night, not knowing if you would make it to the morning. At any moment, you could be led out and put to death. This experience must have been extremely trying for Paul and a real test of his faith.

This was not a nice experience for Paul. This was not a 21st century prison where he could play on his PS5 and go out for his exercise in the gym every day.

[7 : 53] This was really tough for Paul, but what would make it even worse would be having to endure all these things utterly alone. Paul is alone.

But we've got to ask the question, where is everyone else? I don't know if you noticed, if you counted, but there are 18 individuals mentioned in this passage. Where is everyone?

Well, the first person we're going to focus on is someone who's abandoned Paul and we read that in verse 10. We're told that Demas had deserted Paul and he'd gone to Thessalonica because he loved the world.

Demas is mentioned in two other places in the New Testament which shows us that he's quite a key player. He shows up in Colossians and he's mentioned in Philemon as well and he's described as a fellow worker of Paul's.

He seems to be on a par with Paul's dear friend, Luke, the physician who writes the gospel of Luke. So Demas is a proper player.

[9 : 01] Demas had been a longtime companion and a close friend of Paul's. He'd been a fellow worker in the gospel. He'd likely witnessed and experienced the same massive highs of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, seeing people coming to faith, but he'd also experienced the massive lows of gospel ministry as well and experienced that same persecution.

But I think when push came to shove, when Demas began to feel the heat of persecution, it clearly became too much for him.

And when Paul was arrested, he ran for the hills. He abandoned Paul. And when it says he loved the world, what does it mean?

Well, I think it means that Demas desired the comfort that the world offers rather than the suffering that the gospel guarantees. And then I suppose we need to just imagine what it felt like for Paul

then when Demas abandoned him.

Well, I think it must have been an absolute kick in the teeth for Paul. Paul had taken this man under his wing. He'd possibly led him to faith. He disciplined him.

[10:13] He'd given him opportunities to step up and be useful. He had loved him. And he'd spent many highs and lows with him only for Demas to turn his back on it all and to walk away.

Now, I think every pastor that we meet today could share a similar story of desertion. It is crushing when we see keen and promising Christians walk away.

But can you imagine how crushing it must be for the pastor who has taught that person and who's invested in that person and done all that they can? Desertion can be deeply unsettling for the pastor because they can begin to question, what did I do wrong?

Could I have done more? Could I have prayed for that individual more? Were there any warning signs that I missed? Were there some struggles behind the scenes that I could have helped with? Paul keenly feels the pain of Demas' desertion. And I'm sure he writes, I'm sure as he writes about him, I'm sure he's also praying for Demas.

[11:26] Paul knows where Demas is after all. And he's told Timothy where Demas is. He's in Thessalonica. And we can only imagine what Paul must be thinking about Demas.

But I think Timothy might even be tasked to go, go and visit him on his way back to Ephesus. We can only wonder. There are some people we shouldn't give up on just yet, but we need to pray for them.

So that was Demas. Demas the deserter. But where's everyone else? Well, Crescens has gone to Galatia. Titus has gone to Dalmatia.

Mark has gone to Philippattia. No, I'm just joking. We don't know exactly where Mark is, but he is a really helpful worker, we're told. But he's elsewhere. He's not with Paul.

Tychicus is on his way to Ephesus. Carpus is in Troas. Priscilla and Aquila are in Ephesus. And so is the household of Anesiphorus.

[12:27] Erastus is in Corinth. Trophimus is sick in Miletus. It seems that only faithful Luke has stuck with Paul.

But these people who are scattered all over Europe, these people are not like Demas. They haven't deserted Paul. These people have been sent out to preach the gospel in other places.

But as a result of these people being scattered all over Europe, Paul has been left alone. And he's missing the company of these other believers. Now, if we think about pastors today, despite shepherding the flock, despite being in church, despite having their own families, despite being surrounded by people all the time, pastors can end up feeling isolated.

How can this be? Well, perhaps they alone are laboring for the gospel in their church. Perhaps people are unaware of the demands that they are experiencing.

Perhaps they are unaware of the sleepless nights that the pastor has been having. Perhaps they're unaware of the pastoral strains that he is experiencing and the burdens of caring for the flock.

[13:49] And pastors who are feeling isolated can begin to ask themselves the question, does anybody truly understand what I'm having to do? Does anybody really know about the burdens that I'm having to carry?

If only I had someone laboring alongside me, getting alongside me, to share these burdens with me. Pastors can feel isolated. And when Paul is at his lowest ebb, when his life is fading away, when he's got maybe just weeks to live, he is feeling isolated and he's needing the support of his friends.

Pastors today can experience feelings of isolation and loneliness and they can take a real knock when people walk away. Pastors are in need of Christian companions who will come alongside them and who will stand with them.

And we're going to think a little bit more about that in just a minute. But the next thing we're going to think about is the other thing that can crush the spirit of the pastor and that is opposition. So if we look again at verses 14 and 15 in our passage, we see that Paul has faced some serious opposition.

He explains that Alexander, the metal worker, did him a great deal of harm and he strongly opposed the gospel message.

[15:15] Now we don't know exactly what this harm looked like. Maybe Alexander physically harmed Paul or maybe Alexander played a key role in Paul's recent arrest.

Maybe he gave evidence against Paul as he stood trial in court. Whatever harm Paul experienced at the hands of Alexander, Paul considers this man a considerable threat to Timothy. And Paul trusts that the Lord will repay Alexander for what he's done, for the harm that he's inflicted because he has opposed the proclamation of the word. This guy hasn't just come along and just given Paul a whack in the chin.

This guy has seriously opposed the proclamation of the gospel. And this is precisely how Satan operates. Satan denies the good news of Jesus and he tries all that he can from the Bible message from being shared and he seeks to harm the servants of Jesus who dedicate themselves to preaching the word.

So what this guy is doing is serious. Might there be redemption for this man, Alexander? Well, we know that anything is possible with the Lord. Paul, after all, was a type of Alexander.

[16:34] If we remember his life, he was going out there, he was bashing Christians, he was putting them in prison. But the Lord visited him and turned him around. But Paul's instruction to Timothy is not to reason with Alexander, not to visit him, not to explain the gospel to him.

Paul says, be on your guard against him. Watch your back, Timothy. Avoid him altogether if you can. It's quite possible that Timothy might have to cross this guy's path on the way up to Rome. But again, we ask the question, why is Paul writing these things to Timothy and why has he left them for us today? Well, I think he wants to remind Timothy and all pastors like him to be aware of opposition.

There are dangerous people who will confront you and harm you and oppose your gospel message and they will try all they can to prevent it from being preached. So be on your guard.

So a pastor's spirit can be crushed when they experience isolation. A pastor's spirit can be crushed when they experience opposition. And they can experience this opposition outside the church.

[17:50] We know that. But they can also experience opposition within the church as well. There are people who are going to strongly disagree with what the pastor preaches. There's going to be people who are going to strongly deny what the Bible says.

There are people who are going to try and drag their pastors through the mud and write about them in the papers and take them to court. Often the opposition from within the congregation will be less obvious.

Nobody, after all, sees the barbed emails that the pastor receives on a Monday morning. Nobody will be aware of the recent thing that the pastor hasn't gotten right in their eyes.

This opposition from within can be very wearying and it can leave the pastor again questioning themselves. Am I doing it right? Am I actually preaching what the word says?

So we've seen the ways that the pastor's spirit might be crushed. But what is the hope for battered pastors like Paul and Timothy and those ministering today? Paul has two things that will strengthen the pastor's heart.

[19:00] Christian companionship and the Lord's presence with him. So Christian companionship and we've already hinted at this already but we've skipped over what Paul says in the first verse of this passage and that is a big request.

Paul wants Timothy to come and visit him before he dies. In verse 9 we read do your best to come to me quickly.

Verse 21 do your best to come before winter. I might not make it till then. But this is not the first time that we've seen Paul making this request.

All the way back in verse 4 in chapter 1 Paul says I long to see you so that I might be filled with joy. Paul wants Timothy to come and see him so that he will be filled with joy.

What can lift the apostle's spirit his faithful friend coming to be with him catching up praying together encouraging one another face to face.

[20:10] And in verse 11 we say that Paul wants Mark to come along too. If we know the story of this guy Mark we know that he abandoned Paul at one time just like Demas.

he walked away the heat was too hot but they had reconciled. Paul and Mark had got back together again. They'd gone on some missionary journeys together and now Paul says in verse 11 that he considers this guy Mark to be helpful to him in his ministry.

How helpful it is for the pastor to be supported by those who have proven themselves to be useful and who are willing to come alongside them and labour in this costly ministry.

So guys like Paul even though they ran a mile in the past they've proven themselves faithful they're willing now to get alongside Paul and to suffer with him. Bring Mark along too.

Then in verse 13 we see a couple of very practical things. Paul wants Timothy to bring his cloak and his scrolls and especially the parchments. Why is this?

[21 : 17] Well for starters we thought already this is no 21st century prison. There's no central heating in his cell. Paul needs his thick cloak to keep him warm as winter approaches and he needs something to occupy his time.

Now during the week when I'm working I often go and work in a cafe somewhere and Costa Drive-Thru down at Cameron Toll is probably my favourite place to work.

It's a great space if you've ever been there. But as I've sat in there whether it's been Costa Drive-Thru or Pret-Manger just around the corner or Cafe Nero I've often seen the retired folk coming in through the door and I've often been envious as I've seen them opening up their newspapers and as they read through their papers and then as they get to the puzzle section at the end and as they do their Sudoku puzzles I thought oh man what a way to live.

I love that. But I wonder will God be pleased that when we get to the end of our lives as we go to be with him will he be pleased to see that we've become masters of crosswords and Sudoku puzzles. God wants us to use our years well. Paul wants his scrolls I think so that he can meditate on God's word. he can use his time reminding himself of what God has said in his word and his parchments so that he can write so he can write letters like 2 Timothy so he can write his thoughts down write down his prayers maybe copy some of the things that he's written up before.

[23 : 00] Paul wanted to make the best use of the time that he had left in prison. So that's Christian companionship. Paul wants Timothy to come along and spend some time with him but the second thing that we see is the Lord's strengthening presence.

This is the second thing that's going to strengthen the pastor and Paul. In verse 16 if we look there again Paul shares a story.

This is a story where Jesus himself stood by Paul's side and strengthened him and enabled him even in handcuffs to preach the word.

And Paul says in verse 16 At my first defense no one came to my support but everyone deserted me may it not be held against them.

Paul is probably speaking about his most recent arrest and trial. When Paul stood up in the dock after he'd been arrested and he made his first defense to the Roman court he says that everybody deserted him.

[24 : 10] Again he's been deserted. Nobody stood with him. Nobody defended his cause. Nobody stood up and said I'm with Paul. What are you saying is true?

There was nobody that stood up and defended Paul. Paul's support team vanished leaving him utterly alone when he needed them the most. Just in the same way that Jesus' followers all scattered in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested.

How crushing must it have been for Paul when none of his friends were willing to stand with him. But Paul continues 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.

Paul explains that though everyone deserted him in this time of need ever faithful Jesus stood with Paul as he stood up in the dock and made his defense Jesus Jesus was there strengthening him taking away his fear of man and remarkably Jesus used this situation to open the door for Paul to preach the word to the masses.

Paul was sustained so that the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. Now this guy Paul he's been going around Europe for probably 15-20 years a lot of people are going to know who this guy is and now he's in prison and everybody wants a piece of it.

[25 : 52] It is likely that there are many hundreds of people who are there in the court who want to witness Paul's trial and Jesus stood with him and he presented Paul with a golden opportunity to fully explain the message of the gospel even in his handcuffs to the masses.

Paul could have used this opportunity to save his own skin and say look I didn't do it trust me I'm not who you think I am but he was prepared out of season to preach the word to everyone listening. Now when we think of lions if you imagine a lion for a minute I wonder where your mind goes maybe you're thinking of the lion king or Aslan maybe you're thinking of a cute and cuddly version

of a lion or maybe you think about the sleepy lions who lays around all day in the sun well I think we often forget that lions like all carnivorous animals are looking for something to devour to rip to shreds they are immensely powerful beasts and when they hunt their prey they are brutal and if you've ever seen a video of a lion on the hunt you'll know what I mean I certainly wouldn't want to meet one of these lions Paul says that when Jesus stood with him at his defence he wasn't just presented with an amazing opportunity to preach the gospel but he also says that he was delivered from the lion's mouth Jesus delivered

Paul from the schemes of Satan the one who prowls around like a lion looking for someone to devour and despite standing before Satan's representative on earth at that time the evil emperor Nero who was doing all that he could to crush the Christians and crush the gospel Paul's life was spared for a little longer enabling him to write this letter 2nd Timothy and to meet with friends like Timothy one more time so Paul preserved him and in light of this past tense remarkable event that Paul is remembering Paul now says in verse 18 that in the same way that the Lord rescued him then physically Paul has complete confidence that Jesus will rescue him from every spiritual attack and safely deliver him not into physical safety but into his heavenly kingdom notice the difference he's not going to be spared from physical suffering but he's going to be rescued into heaven Paul is no fool he knows he's going to be killed but as his death gets closer and closer he can be confident in Jesus' ongoing strengthening presence with him and the eventual rescue out of this dark world into Jesus' marvelous kingdom of light and we see that as Paul thinks about that glorious day he is excitedly anticipating that day and we can see that in the way that he praises the Lord Jesus in verse 18 he says to him be glory forever and ever amen Paul is so excited about that day when God will rescue him out of this world and into his heavenly kingdom for the last time we're going to ask ourselves why did Paul write these things to Timothy well so that Timothy and all pastors like him can have complete confidence in Jesus' strengthening presence with them to continue preaching the word and to have complete confidence in Jesus' spiritual protection from ferocious lion-like attack and complete confidence in Jesus' promise to rescue them and take them home and this is what

[30 : 02] Paul speaks about as he signs off in verse 22 the last recorded words of Paul may the Lord be with your spirit may his grace be with you did you notice the all may the Lord be with you all may his grace be with you all I thought this letter was just written to Timothy what does he mean you all who are these people well I think this letter was intended to be shared with the church so that we also might know what Jesus intended to say what Paul rather intended to say to Timothy and so that we might also know that Jesus is going to stand with us and he is going to deliver us too from all of sitting's evil schemes and rescue us into his glorious kingdom may his grace be with you may the Lord be with your spirit Paul writes so as we draw these things to a close we've considered

Paul's last few days on earth we thought about the way that he was deserted we've seen the way that he felt isolated we've seen the opposition that he faced and we've drawn parallels with pastors and church leaders in our day today now if we think as we start to apply these things as we think about our church pastor or other pastors and churches that we know or if we think about church leadership as we think about our elders we don't often know the particular issues that our church leaders are dealing with we don't know the pastoral burdens that they are carrying we maybe don't recognize the strain of responsibility that they feel as they seek to teach the word faithfully week in week out we maybe don't know what they're experiencing down to a T but that aside we need to consider how we can be a support to our leaders people like Paul and here are some of the ways that we can support them

I've just got a couple of a few bullet points some questions to ask ourselves can we be a friend to our leaders will we champion them or will we shoot them down are we willing to labor alongside our church leaders are we willing to get behind them in their central task of preaching the word I think this is the most important one will we commit to praying for our church leaders will we be an encouragement to them can we tell them what we've been learning can we tell them the ways that God has been working in your life that can be very encouraging for our church leaders will you align yourself with them will you be willing to share in their suffering for the sake of the gospel and then the other thing that we acknowledge is that

Jesus can do a much better job than humans can at standing with our leaders and strengthening them so how can we be pointing our leaders back to Jesus can we ask God to deliver our leaders from spiritual attack again can we be on our knees praying for our leaders leaders and finally can

we ask God to preserve our leaders to keep them going so that they can faithfully proclaim the gospel and to preach it to the masses so I'm going to pray and let's just be thinking about the ways that we can be getting behind our church leaders and being a support to them but remembering that Jesus can do a much much better job than we can so let's pray our heavenly father thank you so so much for giving us second timothy thank you for the months that we spent looking at it thank you for this message from paul to this next generation leader timothy and thank you for the way that you've preserved your gospel all the way down through the ages 2,000 years of faithful passing the gospel baton from one church leader from one generation to the next thank you for all that we've seen in second timothy and for this central task that all church leaders must commit themselves to preaching the word lord would you help us to get behind our leaders as they seek to commit to that task lord we acknowledge that we don't always see what our church leaders are experiencing we don't always know the sense of isolation that they may face we maybe don't know the opposition that they are experiencing we maybe don't see the emails that they are receiving but lord would you show us how we can be a christian companion to our leaders filling them with joy would you show us how we can be an encouragement to them would you help us to commit to praying for them and would you help us to remember that you are truly the one that can strengthen them we thank you that the lord jesus at that time when paul stood in the dock he stood with paul when paul felt alone and he strengthened him and lord we know that jesus can do the same today and lord we thank you that he jesus has promised to be with every single one of us through our lives and so would you help every one of us to trust in jesus's committed faithful ever present and strengthening presence with us help us not to lean on ourselves but to lean on him fully completely so lord please take all my messy rambling words and would you press them into our hearts that the true message that you want to leave us by your spirit and would you be with us in the week to come we thank you that jesus will be there with us and we ask all these things in his name amen