

PAUL'S SWAN SONG

Looking Back—No Regrets

2 Timothy 4:6–8



LET'S BEGIN HERE

At the close of his second letter to Timothy, Paul had no illusions about his life. He knew it would come to an unnatural end, and soon. Yet he did not display a spirit of fear but of victory and satisfaction. Paul was a “dead man walking”—with no regrets. Like a libation flowing from a chalice, Paul poured everything he had—his education, privilege, body, talents, skills . . . *everything*—at the Lord's feet as an act of worship.

LET'S TRY SOME OBSERVATION

Read through 2 Timothy 4:6–8. As you do, make notes about what you observe. What images did Paul use to communicate his message? List the metaphors Paul enlisted to drive home the urgency of his words to Timothy. Use the space below to record your observations.



DIGGING DEEPER

NOW LET'S CORRELATE—Comparing Scriptures

Death is coming for every one of us, as long as Jesus delays His return. We can choose to ignore the certainty of death or we can live with sober awareness of death's inevitability. Paul had no illusions about death. On the contrary, his succinct summary of the theology of death was, “to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21 NASB).

Quotable

God plans all the courses and puts together all the journeys.

We run them. We are, according to Hebrews 12:1, to “run . . . the race that is set before us.” Folks, let me tell you: it is not your prerogative to set your course. It's your prerogative to run it.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

How do Paul's words in Philippians 1:21 relate to his testimony recorded in 2 Timothy 4:6–8?

In Paul's day, people washed and wrapped the bodies of their deceased loved ones (John 19:39–40). Paul himself held the dead body of Eutychus and, by the Spirit's power, restored the youth to life (Acts 20:9–12). Burial preparation was not outsourced to morticians but was an intimate family duty. Those who were dying were not hidden but rather were displayed for public view (Matthew 27:35–40).

In contrast, many of us live in contexts where death is sanitized. Our meat, fish, and fowl are skinned, fileted, and wrapped in cellophane. We don't have to kill, skin, scale, or butcher—we just cook and eat! We employ funeral homes to care for the bodies of our deceased loved ones. We even surround them with flowers to cloak the stark, grim picture of mortality.

At the same time we have been removed from the tactile proximity of death, we also have been desensitized to death itself. Social media spreads videos of people being beaten, shot, or committing suicide—in real time. Video games make sport of mass murder. Movies show graphic and even stylized images depicting death. As a result, our regard for human life has been compromised and our regard for human death has diminished.

How does your social context shape your thoughts about death?



Personal Inventory: Past, Present, and Future

What was Paul's conclusion about sin and living with regrets, according to Romans 8:1?



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LET'S DO SOME INTERPRETATION—What Does This Mean?

Looking Ahead

Paul had completed his course; all that was left was the confirmation, celebration, and consummation of victory. In the text, we first see the confirmation of victory: “In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8 NASB). Paul mixed two themes together in this statement—the athletic and religious. The garland or laurel crown was awarded to those who displayed outstanding performances in the games (1 Corinthians 9:25). In terms of living the life of faith, the crown is a “righteous” one. Such righteousness can be viewed in two ways (and both are probably applicable here):

1. Righteousness is something believers receive in full at the second coming of Christ (Galatians 5:5). In this sense, righteousness is a gift of God symbolized by the crown, something akin to glorification.
2. Righteousness is also the characterization of how believers ought to live on this earth, in holiness. The crown of righteousness then awaits all those who live lives of holiness.

We see next the celebration of victory: “which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day” (4:8 NASB). The idea of awarding here is very much like bestowing payment for deeds; it's a confirmation of having met the requirement for righteous living. Such payment will come at the end of days when the righteous Judge, Jesus, will reward “the living and the dead” (4:1). It's ironic that before Paul could appear before the righteous Judge and be crowned with life, he first had to appear before an unrighteous judge and be condemned to death.

Finally, we see the consummation of victory: “and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8 NASB). Paul could have concluded this section of his letter with verses one through seven—with the challenge and encouragement for Timothy to complete his commission. But instead, Paul went on to address all believers who long for Christ's second epiphany. Those who live their lives with determination and expectation, faithfully looking forward to Christ's return, will receive righteous crowns at the consummation of Christ's victory.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10–15, and answer the following questions:

What is the foundation?



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What do you think it means to “build” on the foundation?

What do you think “gold, silver, and jewels” and “wood, hay, and straw” represent?

On what basis is a person’s “work” judged?

What two possible outcomes does this passage describe?

The New Testament specifically mentions five rewards believers will receive. Mark which one(s) you might receive when you stand before Jesus. (We’re using the NLT version for this exercise.)

Crown	Reference	Meaning	You?
Eternal	1 Corinthians 9:25	Self-discipline over the flesh	
Rejoicing	1 Thessalonians 2:19	Evangelism/Discipleship	
Righteousness	2 Timothy 4:8	Longing to see Christ	
Life	James 1:12	Faithfully endure suffering	
Glory	1 Peter 5:1–4	Faithful as an elder or pastor	



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NOW LET'S MAKE SOME APPLICATION

Looking Back

Are you harboring resentment, anger, or vengeful thoughts against another person for past experiences?

Take time to think: Is there someone from your past to whom you need to apologize? Someone you wish you had a chance to reconcile with?

Have you been living with the weight of regret?

If your regrets stem from sinful behavior, read Romans 7:15–25. How did Paul describe his struggle with sin and regret?

Looking at Your “Now”

How would you describe your spiritual life? Would your loved ones agree with your assessment? (You may want to ask a couple of people whom you trust to answer this for you.)



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In what ways does your life uniquely reflect a commitment to Jesus Christ?

Is there anything hindering you from running your race well? Record it here, along with a prayer to God to shed that encumbrance.

Are there times when you'd like to give up on the Christian life? Explain.

How can 2 Timothy 4:7 encourage you to finish your race?

If death came today, would you be satisfied with how you had lived? Explain.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I am grateful for the cross, where I find forgiveness, strength to go on, and the ability to recover. Help me to walk in the strength of the Lord Jesus and in the power of His might. Help me to fight the good fight and finish the course, not simply run it. And all the while, may I keep the faith. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.



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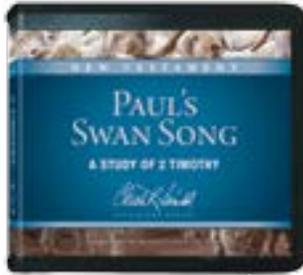
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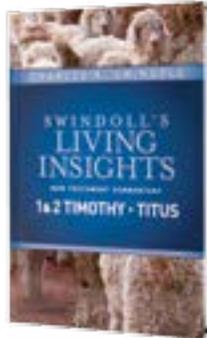
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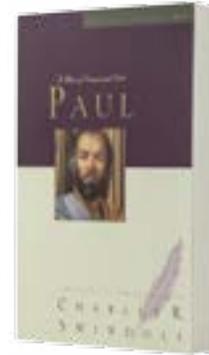
Tools for Digging Deeper



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A Study of 2 Timothy
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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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