

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES



Grace to Grace 2 Timothy 4

T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Grace to Grace: 2 Timothy 4

The Pastoral Epistles: Grace to Grace: 2 Timothy 4
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2 Timothy 4: Introduction

Paul concludes his second epistle to Timothy with warnings, encouragement, and a reminder of the importance of teamwork.

This has been a very personal letter, but it has large implications and applications for all readers. What Paul was reminding and teaching Timothy about, he would have passed on to his congregations in Ephesus. And what those believers needed to hear and know, we need to hear and know as well.

And the most important message of all is of the unfailing grace of the Lord.

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1 A Man for All Seasons

Pray Psalm 57.7-9.

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;

I will sing and give praise.

Awake, my glory!

Awake, lute and harp!

I will awaken the dawn.

I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples;

I will sing to You among the nations.

Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 4.1, 2.

Prepare.

1. What verbs does Paul use to describe the work of preaching?
2. What does it mean to be ready “in season *and* out of season”?

Meditate.

Paul emphasizes the importance of preaching the Word of God. It is a solemn charge upon Timothy not to draw back from this work. Let’s look more closely at what preaching entails, and why it is so important. But not only to Timothy. All who know the Lord are called to be His witnesses and make disciples. God has set His Word in the frail vessels of our flesh, so that His grace may work powerfully in us to make known the Good News of Jesus (2 Cor. 4.7, 15).

Preaching the Word means that the message we proclaim is that which God shows us in His Word. Those who are charged with preaching must bring the Word of God to bear on the hearts and lives of their hearers, so that the Spirit can take that Word, show hearers the glory of God, and work to transform those who hear into the image of Jesus Christ.

Preaching that accomplishes this takes a variety of forms, often in the same message. People must be *convinced* of the truth, so we must speak plainly and clearly, and let the truth do its soul-piercing work (Heb. 4.12). Sometimes we may need to *rebuke* for some false view or sinful practice. Preaching also entails *exhortation* or *encouragement* – speaking to the hearts of people by vision and promise, pointing the way to new and glorious acts of obedient love. We must be *patient* (longsuffering) in our preaching, because people can only receive the Word line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. And we must *teach*, that is message the Word by a variety of means into the souls of those who hear us, using illustrations, examples, and a variety of exercises to bring people along in the faith.

All this is urgent work. We must be ready at every opportunity to share the Word of God – whatever the occasion, need, or impulse of the Spirit requires, in season and out of season. Timothy must stay at this urgent work, and so must we, because one day Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead, among whom will be people to whom we either did or did not preach the Word as Paul charges us to do.

Reflect.

1. What does “preach the Word” require of you?
2. What are the keys to being ready to preach the Word “in season and out”? How can we prepare for this each day?

3. Paul points to the return of the Lord to motivate Timothy and us in our work. Why does he do that?

The opportune time for preaching and teaching is when the sinner needs the prophylaxis that will lead him to repentance. The sinner will be helped at exactly the right moment between the intention to sin and the commission of sin and will turn to penitence instead. Severian of Gabala (fl. ca. 400), *Pauline Commentary from the Greek Church*

Make me ready today, Lord, to tell Your praise to...

Pray Psalm 57.1-3, 9-11.

God will perform all things for you, even giving you the strength to tell His praise among the people you see today. Seek Him for specific opportunities to tell others of His mercy and love.

Sing Psalm 57.1-3, 9-11

Psalm 57.1-3, 9-11 (*Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*)

Lord, be gracious, gracious to me, for my soul retreats in You.

In Your shadow keep me safely till the storms of life are through.

I will cry to You, the Most High; You do all things well for me.

You will save me when I thus cry, routing all who threaten me.

Praise and thanks among the nations I will sing with all my might!

For Your truth and love are stationed far above the highest height!

Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!

To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

2 Whose Desires?

Pray Psalm 57.1, 2.

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me!
For my soul trusts in You;
And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge,
Until these calamities have passed by.
I will cry out to God Most High,
To God who performs *all things* for me.

Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 4.3, 4.

Prepare.

1. If sound doctrine represents God's desires, what do our "own desires" represent?
2. What happens when preachers and teachers cater to human desires rather than to God's?

Meditate.

Sound doctrine, rightly understood, expresses the will and wisdom of God – what God desires. Whatever God desires – sound doctrine – is right and true and just what we need.

Why are we so prone to turn away from sound doctrine, to satisfy the puny longings of our mortal lives?

Two reasons: First, understanding and submitting to sound doctrine takes time and patience. We must be willing to study, pray, and step out in new areas of obedience if we are to fulfill what God desires for us, and to carry out His will. Sound doctrine must be *endured*; that is, we have to work hard to learn it, so that we fruitfully live it.

On the other hand, caving-in to fleeting emotions, fleshly desires, and familiar views is no struggle at all. And when we give up on sound doctrine, we'll look for preachers and teachers who will tickle our "itching ears" with whatever we want to hear – whatever we desire. Given a choice, and left to themselves, most children would choose sweets of one kind or another as their daily fare. No loving parent would allow that, however. Children need to learn to eat what *we* want them to eat, and not what *they* want to eat, for the simple reason that we know better than they what's good for them. Once they learn what's best for them, they'll make better choices.

This is true in our relationship with God as well. If we don't want to end up living fables and made-up stories about what's best for us, we'll take up the Lord's challenge and the solid meat of sound doctrine, and resist every tendency to pander to our selfish, sugar-coated desires.

Reflect.

1. What's involved in learning to "endure sound doctrine"? Why is it important that we do this?
2. What's wrong with looking only for teaching that speaks to our "own desires"? Doesn't God want to satisfy our desires?
3. How would you be able to tell whether a preacher or teacher was committed to sound doctrine or to merely tickling itching ears?

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When they will no longer endure sound doctrine in their eagerness for godlessness, they will gather teachers together for these things which they desire. They will compile a doctrine that fits in with their desires, since they are no longer eager to be taught. They want to bring together teachers for that which they already desire in order that this large number of teachers whom they have sought and assembled may satisfy the doctrines of their own passionate desires. Hilary of Poitiers (315-367) On the Trinity 10.2

Help me to hunger for Your Word, Lord, and for the sound doctrine You desire, and keep me from...

Pray Psalm 57.1-3.

Today, you will need the grace of God for everything you do. Seek Him earnestly for it, setting before Him in detail your needs for this day.

Sing Psalm 57.1-3.

Psalm 57.1-3 (*Fabian: Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*).

Lord, be gracious, gracious to me, for my soul retreats in You.

In Your shadow keep me safely till the storms of life are through.

I will cry to You, the Most High; You do all things well for me.

You will save me when I thus cry, routing all who threaten me.

3 Fulfill Your Ministry

Pray Psalm 57.7.

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and give praise.

Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 4.5.

Prepare.

1. What was Timothy's "ministry"? What is yours?
2. How can you fulfill your ministry?

Meditate.

Paul exhorted Timothy to fulfill his ministry. The Greek word is *διακονία*, *diaconia*, and means simply, "service". We have a tendency to think that only ministers, missionaries, and a few others have a "ministry". The rest of us are ministered *to* by those who care called to the ministry.

But in Ephesians 4.11, 12, Paul says every church member is to be equipped for works of "ministry". He uses the same word as here with Timothy. Every believer is called to serve, to *minister*. And every one of us should be concerned to *fulfill* our ministry to the best of our ability.

Paul mentions three keys to fulfilling your ministry. First, "be watchful in all things". The idea behind this is that we're always thinking about our lives in terms of ministry, how we can serve the people around us with the love of Jesus. We're preparing for and paying attention to opportunities to serve others, and not allowing our minds to be so consumed with our own interests that, in effect, we become drunk with ourselves. We must "be watchful" so that we can make good use of the time God gives us for fulfilling our ministry (Eph. 5.15-17).

Second, Paul says we must "endure afflictions". Afflictions are those painful or burdensome things that come our way and threaten to derail our ministry. We endure afflictions by rejoicing in the face of them and pressing on in our ministry (Rom. 5.1-5).

Finally, Paul says we fulfill our ministry by being ready witnesses for Christ. Each of us is called to do the work of showing and proclaiming Jesus, both to lost folks and to our Christian friends. The more we talk to lost people about Jesus, and show them His love, the more opportunities the Spirit has to work on their soul. The more we talk about Jesus with our fellow believers, and serve them in His love, the more we build one another up in Him for righteousness, peace, and joy. Jesus appointed us to *be* His witnesses (Acts 1.8). Doing the work of an evangelist – one who shows and tells Jesus to others – is crucial to fulfilling the ministry God has appointed for us.

Each of us has a ministry, which we daily pursue in terms of good works and true words in our Personal Mission Field. We must aim at fulfilling that ministry every day, and that means being attentive, ready, set for ministry, determined to persevere at it, and boasting about and showing Jesus at every opportunity.

Are you fulfilling your ministry?

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Reflect.

1. How would you explain your ministry to a new Christian friend?
2. What can we do to be always ready with a word of witness, whether to a believing friend or an unbeliever?
3. How can believers help one another to fulfill their ministries?

Timothy, by watching, and by patiently enduring afflictions, and by constant teaching, will succeed in having the truth of his ministry established, because from such marks all will acknowledge him to be a good and faithful minister of Christ. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 2 Timothy 4.5

Help me to fulfill my ministry today, Lord, as I...

Pray Psalm 57.6-8.

To whom will you sing the praises of God today?

Sing Psalm 57.6-8.

Psalm 2.57.6-8 (*Fabian: Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*)

Nets and pits they set before me; overwhelmed, my soul bows down.

Let them all in their own works be thrown and scattered on the ground.

Let my heart no more be shaken, I will sing Your praises, Lord!

Harp and glory, now awaken to extol God's faithful Word!

4 Keep the Faith

Pray Psalm 57.7-9.

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and give praise.
Awake, my glory!
Awake, lute and harp!
I will awaken the dawn.
I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing to You among the nations.

Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 4.6-8.

Prepare.

1. What images does Paul use to refer to his own ministry? Why are these apt?
2. What is the “crown of righteousness”? Who should expect to receive it?

Meditate.

Paul, as he supposed, was nearing the end of his life. As he reflected on his service to the Lord, four powerful images assured him that, having been faithful in his calling, he would be received into the Lord’s presence with joy.

First, Paul likened his life to “a drink offering” (v. 6). A drink offering involved pouring out a precious liquid such as wine to the Lord, for His consumption and delight, so to speak. Paul, who spent and was spent for the souls of those he served (2 Cor. 12.15), and who exhorted all his readers to make an offering of their lives to the Lord (Rom. 12.1, 2), saw himself as a drink offering – all he was and did was for the Lord.

Second, as his “departure” from this life approached, Paul reflected that he had “fought the good fight” all his days (v. 7). He probably refers here to the spiritual warfare he described in Ephesians 6 and elsewhere. He insists that he always showed up for battle, armed to gain victories for the Lord. He mastered the disciplines of a spiritual warrior, and these made him always ready to overcome every foe. He also admits that his life as a follower of Christ was no cushy enterprise; he had to fight and struggle against all kinds of opposition.

Third, Paul links his life with the Olympic games, seeing himself as having run a good race for the Lord (v. 7). He ran to win, as he said elsewhere (1 Cor. 9.24, 25), and win is exactly what he did. He never lost sight of the goal, and he never broke stride; he didn’t drop out; and he was faithfully handing the baton to Timothy, for the next leg of the race (2 Tim. 2.2).

Finally, Paul resorts to a familiar and much-loved image, that of a keeping vessel (cf. Rom. 9.21-23; 2 Cor. 4.7; 1 Thess. 4.4; 2 Tim. 2.20, 21) – like a wineskin, a serving dish, or a safety deposit box (v. 7). The faith that God deposited with him by grace, Paul kept and invested so that it produced a far-reaching return for the Lord’s glory.

No wonder he’s confident about the crown of glory and righteousness that awaits him (v. 8). All who love the soon appearing of our Lord, and who conduct their lives as Paul did, can look forward with joy to that same crown of righteousness. But we must be diligent; we must keep the faith.

Reflect.

1. What are the most important components of a life of keeping the faith?
2. How do you experience your Christian life as a fight and a race? How should you prepare for these each day?
3. Paul passed the baton to Timothy. To whom are you passing it?

So it is a great and most wholesome struggle to concentrate on prayer once begun, and with God's help to show lively resistance to the temptations of the enemy, so that our minds may with unflagging attention strain to be ever fastened on God. Then we can deservedly recite Paul's words: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Cassiodorus (485-580), Explanation of the Psalms 101.1

Help me to persevere today, Lord, no matter what I have to confront. Grant me grace so that I...

Pray Psalm 57.1-3, 6-11.

What opportunities for keeping the faith will you be presented with today? Use this time in prayer to prepare for them.

Sing Psalm 57.1-3, 6-11

Psalm 57.1-3, 6-11 (*Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*)

Lord, be gracious, gracious to me, for my soul retreats in You.
In Your shadow keep me safely till the storms of life are through.
I will cry to You, the Most High; You do all things well for me.
You will save me when I thus cry, routing all who threaten me.

Nets and pits they set before me; overwhelmed, my soul bows down.
Let them all in their own works be thrown and scattered on the ground.
Let my heart no more be shaken, I will sing Your praises, Lord!
Harp and glory, now awaken to extol God's faithful Word!

Praise and thanks among the nations I will sing with all my might!
For Your truth and love are stationed far above the highest height!
Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!
To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

5 Teamwork

Pray Psalm 57.11.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;

Let Your glory be above all the earth.

Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 4.9-15.

Prepare..

1. Paul involved many different people with him in his work. Why?
2. Even though he was in prison, Paul wasn't done yet. How can you see that?

Meditate.

Paul understood the importance of having a team of men to help him in his ministry. Just as Jesus did, Paul brought men into his work, taught them the Word and helped them grow in Christ, and gave them work to do within his ministry. In this way, he ensured a legacy of leadership for the days after his life was over.

At the time of this writing, Paul is alone, except for Luke. Demas had quit the work for now, and had become enmeshed in worldly desires. Others trailed off in their own directions or were sent by Paul to continue the work somewhere else. It's interesting to see that Paul asks Timothy to bring Mark to him, since he would be useful. Paul didn't always feel that way (Acts 15.36-41). Evidently, the time Barnabas invested in Mark did the job, and now Paul knew he could rely on him.

Paul wants to keep reading and studying, "especially the parchments" – probably a reference to books of the Old Testament. There is always more to learn and more to do in serving the Lord, regardless of the physical constraints that may be upon us.

Paul warns Timothy against Alexander the coppersmith. Paul had some negative encounters with this man, and he did not want Timothy to have to go through the same.

Team ministry is always more effective than loan-wolfing. But you have to work at this, and even then, there's no guarantee that all the men you invest in will keep the faith and finish their course with honor.

Reflect.

1. How could Demas have walked away from ministering with Paul? Are we susceptible to that kind of snare? How can we avoid falling into it?
2. Why is it important to be always learning and always serving, no matter our physical constraints?
3. How can you tell when someone is resisting the Word of God? Why must we be careful around such people?

What had he to do with books, who was about to depart and go to God? He needed them much, that he might deposit them in the hands of the faithful, who would retain them in place of his own teaching. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on 2 Timothy 10

In my Personal Mission Field, Lord, whom can I encourage in their walk with You today? Help me to...

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Pray Psalm 57.1-3, 9-11.

Praise God for the Christian friends who encourage, support, and pray for you.

Sing Psalm 57.1-3, 9-11.

Psalm 57.1-3 (*Fabian: Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*).

Lord, be gracious, gracious to me, for my soul retreats in You.

In Your shadow keep me safely till the storms of life are through.

I will cry to You, the Most High; You do all things well for me.

You will save me when I thus cry, routing all who threaten me.

Praise and thanks among the nations I will sing with all my might!

For Your truth and love are stationed far above the highest height!

Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!

To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

6 The Strength of the Lord

Pray Psalm 57.2-5.

I will cry out to God Most High,
To God who performs *all things* for me.
He shall send from heaven and save me;
He reproaches the one who would swallow me up.

Selab

God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.
My soul is among lions;
I lie *among* the sons of men
Who are set on fire,
Whose teeth are spears and arrows,
And their tongue a sharp sword.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory *be* above all the earth.

Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 4.17-21.

Prepare.

1. How did Paul respond to his imprisonment?
2. Who are these various people Paul mentions?

Meditate.

Paul did not allow imprisonment to prevent him from preaching the Gospel (cf. Phil. 1.12-18). The Lord, he said, “stood with me and strengthened me.” How amazing is that? Have you ever experienced the Lord standing with you and strengthening you in the midst of some great trial? The fact is, He’s always with us, and His strength is always at work in us, and always available for more power to serve Him.

But we have to determine, like Paul, that no amount of adversity is going to keep us from fulfilling our Kingdom-and-glory calling (1 Thess. 2.12). The world can throw at us what it will, but we will serve the Lord. If Paul could be delivered “out of the mouth of the lion” – a clear reference to Daniel’s experience – then we can stand firm against whatever “lions” might want to devour – or at least roar loudly at – us today.

Look to your eternal destination, and the promise of glory that awaits us in the Presence of King Jesus (1 John 3.1-3). Then live with all your might to further His gracious rule.

And make some friends along the way, who will work with you, learn with you, pray with you, stand with you, and who will devote themselves – like Paul’s friends – to the ongoing work of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are true friends, who will come to visit you in your times of trial, and will join you in your work, and in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflect.

1. What “lions” do believers face as they seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God?
2. How can we prepare each day to stand firm with the Lord?
3. Have you surrounded yourself with Kingdom-minded friends? Would your friends consider you to be a

Kingdom-minded friend?

Story has it that the apostle, after defending himself, was again sent upon the ministry of preaching and coming a second time to the same city met death by martyrdom under Nero. While he was being held in prison, he composed the second epistle to Timothy, at the same time indicating that his first defense had taken place and that martyrdom was at hand. Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340), Ecclesiastical History 2.22

Stand by me today, Lord, and strengthen me as I...

Pray Psalm 57.1-5.

What challenges to your faith will you face today? Call upon the Lord to stand with you and strengthen you, then go in obedience to live for His glory.

Sing Psalm 57.1-5

Psalm 57.1-5 (*Fabien: Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*)

Lord, be gracious, gracious to me, for my soul retreats in You.
In Your shadow keep me safely till the storms of life are through.
I will cry to You, the Most High; You do all things well for me.
You will save me when I thus cry, routing all who threaten me.

Send Your truth and lovingkindness; raging lions seek my soul.
Threats and sland'rous words without rest they against me fiercely roll.
Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!
To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

7 Grace to Grace

Pray Psalm 57.7-10

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and give praise.
Awake, my glory!
Awake, lute and harp!
I will awaken the dawn.
I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing to You among the nations.
For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens,
And Your truth unto the clouds.

Review 2 Timothy 4.

Prepare.

1. There is a sense of urgency about this final communication of Paul to Timothy. How do you see that?
2. Imprisoned, poured out, abandoned, and nearly alone. Yet Paul still has the grace to seek grace for Timothy. How can we have that grace each day?

Meditate.

Paul would not allow adversity to keep him from being an agent of grace. He might have sulked and felt sorry for himself, there in that Roman prison. Instead, he drew on the grace of God to instruct Timothy on matters of great importance to his work as a pastor. The book begins acknowledging the grace of God, and it ends the same way. It is an epistle of grace, from beginning to end.

This is the great lesson for us all. As surely as God called Paul and Timothy to their respective works, He has called each one of us, as agents of grace, to fill our world with the presence of Jesus. Opposition must not deter us. Setbacks must not discourage us. Persecution may squeeze us, but that only allows grace to seep out in new and more powerful ways.

As Jesus stood with Paul and Timothy, to strengthen them for their respective callings, so He will stand with us. We can know His Presence, dwell in His promises, and draw on His power to fulfill our calling to His Kingdom and glory, that righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit might be the ambience in which we journey, and that which others experience from us.

The world seems to be descending into a moral and spiritual winter. We need to come to Jesus before winter; sink our roots in the rich soil of His Word, beneath the permafrost of this world's unbelief; and pray and work for a new spring of grace to blossom throughout over all the earth. That's Paul's message to us from this second epistle to Timothy.

Reflect.

1. How was Paul able to rise above his adversity to continue being an agent of grace?
2. What do we learn from Paul about the importance of surrounding ourselves with Kingdom-minded friends?
3. What would you like to say to the apostle Paul in response to this second letter to Timothy?

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For we owe "fruits" to those who minister spiritual doctrine to us through their understanding of the divine mysteries. We owe these to them as men. We owe these fruits also to "the living souls" since they offer themselves as examples for us in their own continence. Augustine (354-430), Confessions 13.25.38

Send me out into my Personal Mission Field today, Lord, ready and eager to...

Pray Psalm 57.

This is an excellent psalm to use as you prepare for a day in your Personal Mission Field, anticipating opportunities to witness and challenges to your faith. Let David guide you as he sought the guidance of the Lord in his own time of trial and challenge.

Sing Psalm 57.

Psalm 57 (*Fabem: Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him!*)

Lord, be gracious, gracious to me, for my soul retreats in You.
In Your shadow keep me safely till the storms of life are through.
I will cry to You, the Most High; You do all things well for me.
You will save me when I thus cry, routing all who threaten me.

Send Your truth and lovingkindness; raging lions seek my soul.
Threats and sland'rous words without rest they against me fiercely roll.
Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!
To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

Nets and pits they set before me; overwhelmed, my soul bows down.
Let them all in their own works be thrown and scattered on the ground.
Let my heart no more be shaken, I will sing Your praises, Lord!
Harp and glory, now awaken to extol God's faithful Word!

Praise and thanks among the nations I will sing with all my might!
For Your truth and love are stationed far above the highest height!
Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!
To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

Grace to Grace: 2 Timothy 4

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. We said that 2 Timothy was a more personal letter than 1 Timothy. How do you see that? We need both 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy to help us fulfill our calling. Explain.
2. What can you do to keep from drifting away from sound doctrine to more of a focus on yourself? Why must you resist this drift?
3. Put yourself in Timothy's shoes, reading this second epistle for the first time. What do you think would have most stood out to him? Why?
4. How can we make sure to know the Presence of the Lord, standing with us and strengthening us at all times?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from 2 Timothy 4? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

For prayer:

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Thank you.