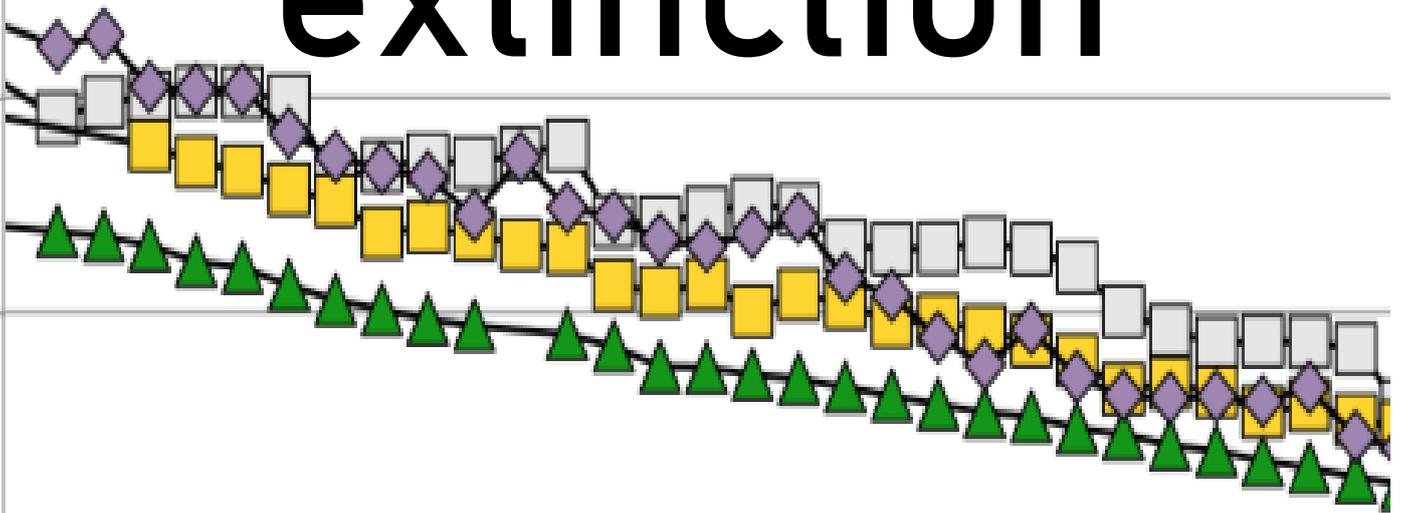




One generation from extinction



Bible Studies in 2 Timothy
By Becky and Matt Lee

St John's Home Growth Groups
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ONE GENERATION FROM EXTINCTION

The graph on the front cover shows Church of England attendance from 1990-2019. If the current decline continues, no-one will attend by 2060.

Becky and Matt were inspired in writing these notes by a series of talks by Charlie Skrine on 2 Timothy, called “one generation from extinction”.

CONTENTS

- Introduction to 2 Timothy p4-6
- Notes on Group Bible studies p7-9
- Study 1a: (1:1-14) Paul and Timothy p10-11
- Study 1b: (1:15-2:2) Desertion in Asia p12-13
- Study 2a: (2:3-2:13) Sticking to the task p14-15
- Study 2b: (2:14-26) How to be useful p16-17
- Study 3a: (3:1-9) Understanding the culture p18-19
- Study 3b: (3:10-4:5) Holding to the Scriptures p20-21
- Study 4: (4:6-22) Never alone p22-23

USING THESE STUDIES

2 Timothy flows together as one letter, so you could split it up in a number of different ways. There are 7 short studies in this booklet but you can combine them depending how many gatherings you will have. See below for some suggested combinations.

4 studies	1a/1b	2a/2b	3a/3b	4			
5 studies	1a	1b/2a	2b/3a	3b	4		
6 studies	1a	1b	2a	2b/3a	3b	4	
7 studies	1a	1b	2a	2b	3a	3b	4

Introduction to 2 Timothy

By Rev. Peter Breckwoldt

This letter of Paul to Timothy is usually referred to as one of the Pastoral letters. This is to say, it is one of the letters Paul wrote, not so much to individual churches, but to individual leaders about the shape and direction of their pastoral ministry. It has a wide application for us today. It has been a significant letter in the life of God's church for nearly 2,000 years and has given much insight into how ministers should be working with those around them.

This is Paul's last letter. Paul is now a prisoner in Rome on trial for his life, knowing that at any moment he may face his death. Paul is writing to his favourite son in the faith, Timothy, who has settled at Ephesus as a pastor/teacher and who had a special place in Paul's affections and concern. You will recall the letter to the Ephesians which was to play such a vital role, not only in the life of the Ephesian church, but also across the church for 2,000 years. It is clear from both 1 and 2 Timothy that Paul has a deep love and concern for this young man (1 Timothy 1:3). As you read through the letter, that this is also very personal to Timothy and full of good advice, strong teaching, and challenges for his pastoral ministry. While Paul is conscious that he is now passing on his work, he is also conscious that these may be some of the very last opportunities that he will have to give clear Christian teaching to the new generation.

Destination and purpose

Timothy was on the island of Crete when Paul wrote to him (Titus 1:5). Timothy had been left to guide the church at Ephesus. Paul almost certainly wrote his first letter after his visit to Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3). He writes this second letter in Rome, recognising that his death is coming. This brings us to the purpose behind the letter. Timothy had been one of Paul's long-time friends. He had been with Paul towards the end of his first imprisonment in Rome (Philippians 2:19-24). After this, Paul returned to Crete and Ephesus,

then left Titus in Crete and Timothy in Ephesus. Both of them encountered false teachers who had virtually taken over the local churches. This was in line with Paul's predictions to the Ephesians (Acts 20:29-30). He left Timothy in charge of the church, giving him instructions how to deal with those false teachers.

At this stage Paul writes again to Timothy, shortly before his death, imprisoned and chained in Rome. The letter itself has a twofold purpose. Firstly, he is lonely and longs for Timothy to come to Rome and support him during this time of trial. It seems as if no one else could quite meet Paul's needs like Timothy, but since he is about to die he knows that also he must encourage Timothy to continue in the ministry he has begun. Clearly, the theme of Paul's last letter is bound up in the fact that he is about to die and that he is writing to a close colleague. From the letter we find that the apostle Paul is more interested in making sure that Timothy is prepared to carry on the work than to recount his own achievements. Time and again, two key words will hit home to us: endurance and faithfulness in the truth. We might sum up the whole letter thus: "persevere in the proclamation of the gospel".

You will remember that Timothy, though Paul's junior, was one of his most trusted friends and fellow-workers. At this point they have been separated. Paul is now writing to give Timothy strong advice as well as much needed encouragement. If we wanted to summarise Paul's message, we could do no better than turn to 2 Timothy 2:1-2. *"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others"*. Paul's great passion is that the truth and nothing but the truth needs to be held and to be passed on. His over-riding ambition is that the Gospel will be clearly held, neither altered nor slandered, and successfully passed on to the new generation. You can see at once that this is also very relevant to our situation today. As you study this letter, you will see an older Christian writing to a younger Christian, not just to give advice but also to give encouragement.

Paul knows that the church has false teachers at work, denying the central doctrines of the apostolic faith (2 Timothy 2:17-19). Paul sees also an awful prospect of moral decline in the church, culminating in its moving away from the Gospel and no longer being willing to accept or hold on to orthodox teaching. (Sounds familiar). It is both surprising and shocking to our ears to learn that, as Paul's life comes to an end, the work at which he had laboured for most of his life seems now at the point of collapse. It is only God and his Word that will be critical and crucial for this ministry to continue and to be effective.

All that Paul has to set against this decline is Timothy and a few other faithful teachers. Timothy, was not always in the best of health nor always very confident, but he has been entrusted with this word and this work. Amazingly, God is planning to use someone so weak as his human agent. In turn, this will display the very power of God.

In 2 Timothy, Paul is preparing to face his death but he leaves this world in the confidence that, by the power of God's Spirit, by the grace of Jesus Christ and the sufficiency of Scripture, there are enough resources to enable the church to persevere and for the Good News of Jesus Christ to spread across the world.

What is the application of the letter?

The man or woman of God must be prepared for every situation. We are to see ourselves as soldiers, contestants, farmers, workers, vessels, and servants in the kingdom of God. But be aware that many people who claim to be followers of Christ will cause you pain by their actions. We can see something of this in the current crisis in the Church of England. They will love the present world and its culture more than the Lord. They will be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Pursue right living and preach the word of God at all times. Avoid empty talk, bickering, and youthful desires. In the end, we will receive our reward.

I am sure that you will find this letter extremely helpful if for no other reason, because it is very down to earth. I hope that, with me, you will find that it is of great encouragement and will keep us on track, seeking to serve our Saviour and our Lord.

Group Bible Study

By Rev. Peter Breckwoldt

The priority of any Bible study is to seek to understand what the Bible is saying to the people to whom it was first written as well as to understand it for our particular day and generation. So, the top priority is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant.

Here are some pointers to help you as you study the Bible:

PRAY

Our preparation for any Bible study should begin and end with prayer. We need to ask God, through the help of the Holy Spirit, to guide us as we read the Bible and prepare for a study.

ASK

In order to understand the Bible properly, we need to keep in mind six important questions:

- 1. Who is speaking?** Everything in the Bible was written by men who were inspired by God. Though God inspired every writer of the Bible, sometimes the writers record words which come from the hearts of evil men. So, dealing with the question “Who is speaking?” will help us to know whether the words we are reading are words that we should obey today.
- 2. Who is spoken to?** We need to realise that not every command that comes in the Bible is a command for us today. For example, the command by God to Noah to build an ark is obviously pertinent and relevant for Noah, but not for us.
- 3. When is the Bible writer speaking?** In answering this question, we will need to make a distinction between those who are living under the law and those who live under the guidelines and principles as outlined to us in the New Testament, the way of Christ. Therefore, the principles we see with regards to worship in the Old Testament have a

relevance to us, but we need to read them in the light of the New Testament. It is always important to bear in mind that one part of the Bible can often help us to understand another part.

4. What type of language is the writer using? The languages used are usually one of two types: either literal or figurative. Sometimes both will be mixed together in one passage – for example, Jesus is spoken of as the Lamb of God, which is clearly a figurative form of speech. However, he is also described as the one who takes away the sin of the world, which is literally true for those who believe. So, Jesus was not an actual lamb, but he was the one who became the offering for our sins.

5. What are the conditions or circumstances in which this writing is given? If we can get to grips with the particular circumstances the writer is facing when he writes, it helps us to understand what he is saying.

6. What is the context of the Bible passage? Think about what has just been said and what is about to be said in the particular book of the Bible, as well as the context of the Bible passage within the whole of the Bible. The Bible is indeed God's inspired word – it is his revelation to all mankind.

So, in order for us to understand the Bible we must seek to study it properly. Only then can we “correctly handle the word of truth”. And if we keep these six simple questions in mind as we prepare our study, we will find that we can indeed get to grips with God's word.

PLAN

For those who are preparing and leading a study, the following steps should prove helpful:

1. Try to break the passage into parts or sections so that you can clearly divide up the passage you are looking at.
2. Think about what you don't understand in the passage and therefore what others might not understand as well. What parts do you need to gain more background and information about? Be ready to deal with puzzles that people will ask you about. So, for example, when studying

John 3, people might ask ‘What is the kingdom of God?’, ‘What is a Pharisee?’. These are obvious things that people might need to have some more information about.

3. Having broken the passage up into sections, we then come to thinking about questions. You can use the questions that are in this book. However, you may want to write your own, which is of course perfectly all right. Questions can be one of three types.

A Understanding. The first type of question should be aimed at trying to draw out our understanding of what the passage is saying.

B Significance. Only once we have begun to understand the passage can we move on to questions that try to highlight the significance of the passage in the light of the particular book or letter, and of course against the backdrop of the whole Bible.

C Application. Then we move on to questions which apply to the situations we are facing today.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- Do make use of clergy and commentaries and other Christians who have a maturity which you can rely upon when you are seeking to tackle Bible passages.
- It will sometimes prove helpful to have more than one translation as this will give you some fresh insights into the verses which you are focusing on.
- As we come to study the Bible we need to keep in mind that all the books of the Bible have one great theme: that is God’s plan to save mankind from his sins through Jesus Christ.
- Fundamentally, make sure that whatever you do, you seek to do it to honour and glorify God.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16)

Study 1a – Paul and Timothy

Main point: Guard the gospel - don't be ashamed because it brings life

This passage introduces some of the key themes of the letter. Paul is an apostle of Christ Jesus “in keeping with the promise of life.” This promise of life is going to be important, as Paul will be exhorting Timothy to hold onto the gospel even though it will bring suffering and shame, because of his confidence in the future (v12).

In verse 5 we see how the gospel has been passed down the generations, which is going to be Paul's big strategy for the preservation of the gospel in 2:2.

Timothy has sometimes been called ‘timid Timothy’, because of verse 7, but there is no evidence that he was timid; quite the opposite. Paul is incredibly warm towards Timothy, calling him his ‘son’ because of how dear Timothy had become to him. Acts 17:13-15, 1 Corinthians 4:17 and 1 Thessalonians 3:2-3 show how bold Timothy was. So if Timothy was tempted to be ashamed (v8) it shows how bad the situation of the church had become (v8,12).

Why would Timothy continue to follow and preach this gospel which brings shame and suffering? Verses 9-12 explain the goodness of the gospel which he is not to move away from. Jesus has destroyed death and given you life (v10) - why would you move away?

The main command in this passage is to guard the good deposit - that is the gospel (see v13). What does it mean to guard the gospel? To ensure that it continues to be proclaimed so that others may believe. With the backdrop of suffering this guarding may seem like an impossible task, but Timothy will not do it alone. It is by the power of the Spirit that Timothy will be able to fulfil Paul's charge (v7,14).

We may not be church leaders, but we are still tempted to be ashamed of the gospel. Like Timothy, we have the power of the Spirit and the promise of life so we can hold onto the gospel despite suffering.

INTRO: How do you feel when some asks... “would you be able to do something for me?”

READ: 2 Timothy 1:1-14

What is going on for Paul (see 1:8,15,16, 4:6,14,16)?

Why does Paul turn to Timothy? (v3-6)

- Why does Paul feel such a strong bond?

Why shouldn't Timothy just keep his head down? (v6-14)

- Why can he trust God?

When/why are we tempted to keep our heads down?

- Is there a verse here that will strengthen you?

Study 1b – Desertion in Asia

Main point: Don't let the gospel die out; pass it on to others.

In 1:1-14 we saw Paul exhorting Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel, but to guard it despite the shame and suffering involved. This passage tells us more about the pressure Timothy was facing, and how he is to guard the gospel.

Verses 15-18 show us just how isolated Timothy was. Everyone in the province of Asia (that is, modern-day Turkey), has deserted Paul. This does not just mean people have deserted Paul, but also his gospel and his deputy in Ephesus, Timothy. It isn't just a few who have tinted away, but 'everyone'. Even Phygelus and Hermogenes have deserted him. We don't know any more about this pair from the New Testament but clearly it was a big blow to Paul - think of the people you would least expect to abandon the gospel. Onesiphorus is mentioned as exemplary because he was the only one who was not ashamed of Paul's chains. Think how intimidating this mass desertion of the gospel would have been for Timothy.

And yet, Paul asks him to be strong, and to guard the gospel by entrusting it to faithful men (2v2). It has been said that the gospel is the only thing you guard by giving it away. That is what Timothy is to do. The faithful men he teaches are to be able to teach others also, and in this way the gospel will not die out but will be passed on from generation to generation.

We may not be church leaders with this particular responsibility, but we can all be involved in passing the gospel on. We can do this directly of course, but also by supporting our church leaders and others in set aside gospel work like our global action partners.

INTRO: Have you ever been the only one who was standing up for something? How did it feel?

READ: 2 Timothy 1:8-2:3

RECAP: What is Paul's connection with Timothy?

Why did everyone in Asia desert Paul? (v15)

- What is the repeated phrase in 1:8, 1:16?

What did it mean for Onesiphorus to not be ashamed? (1v16-18)

What will it mean for Timothy not to be ashamed? (2v1-3)

- What does Paul want Timothy to do?

- Why will it be hard?

What will it mean for us to not be ashamed?

Study 2a – Sticking to the task

Main point: Suffer and work hard for the gospel because of future glory

In the previous passage we considered Paul's charge to Timothy to guard the gospel by passing it on (2:2). He then uses three metaphors to elaborate on what gospel work is like in the present. As verse 3 explains, guarding the gospel will involve suffering as Paul does. All three images, the soldier, the athlete and the farmer, engage in hard work. Their work involves toil and suffering. It may be tempting to get distracted (v4) or try to cut corners (v5). But all of these people are single-minded because they are focused on their goal. Whether it be pleasing their commanding officer, receiving the victor's crown, or enjoying their share of the harvest, these three endure suffering now because they are looking to the future reward.

Paul tells Timothy to remember the resurrection of Jesus, a future which is awaiting all believers (v8). Paul is willing to suffer because he cares about others hearing and receiving the gospel, and sharing in that glorious future too (v10). Paul may look like he can't do anything significant in prison, but God's word is not chained. As Paul writes to Timothy from prison, urging him to pass the gospel on, God's word is unleashed to accomplish its glorious purpose of saving people for eternal glory.

The poem in verses 11-14 underlines this point that it is worth suffering now because of the glory to come. The first two phrases say exactly that. However the opposite is also true. If we opt for an easy life now by disowning Jesus or being faithless, Jesus will one day disown us, being faithful to himself.

INTRO: At what point would you give up on a task, if it is proving really hard?

READ: 2 Timothy 2:1-13

RECAP: What themes from chapter 1 do we see in 2v1-3?

Reflect on the 3 images of soldier, athlete and farm labourer (v3-7)

- what do they have in common?
- what are the different temptations they face when the task is hard?
- which of these temptations is strongest for you? In what way?

When it gets difficult, how does Paul find strength? (v8-13)

- what encouragement is there here for persecuted Christians?
- how do we know persecution cannot stop the gospel?

What from this passage will encourage you to keep going, even when serving Jesus is difficult?

Study 2b – How to be useful

Main point: don't get caught up in arguments, but gently instruct those who oppose the gospel

In this passage we learn more about what is going on in Ephesus as Paul is writing. There is clearly some false teaching around (v17) which is leading to ungodliness (v16) and causing people to fall away (v18). One particular false teaching is mentioned, that the resurrection has already taken place - not meaning the resurrection of Jesus which has already happened, but the resurrection of Christians. You can imagine how this teaching might destroy people's faith as they hear that the end has come and God's promises have been fulfilled, only to experience the disappointment of continued suffering and pain living in a broken world.

Notice that Timothy will have no need to be ashamed before God if he 'correctly handles the word of truth'. Shame has come up a number of times already in the letter (1:8, 1:12, 1:16). Sticking with the gospel now will mean shame and suffering for Timothy at the hands of people, and yet 2:15 tells us he will not be ashamed before God, which is better by far. It is possible for Timothy to be useful to God (v20-21), if he seeks true godliness, unlike the false teachers (v16).

We might think that an outspoken and argumentative leader is needed to deal with quarrelling and false teachers. However Paul says that Timothy is to 'flee the evil desires of youth' which may want to engage in one-upmanship and winning an argument, and instead he must be kind and instruct opponents gently. Timothy must not give space for these false ideas to be publicly debated within the church (v23), but he is to continue a loving dialogue with the teachers themselves (v25-26).

INTRO: Is it possible to have a good disagreement?

READ: 2 Timothy 2:14-26

RECAP: What task had Paul given Timothy in Ephesus?

What sort of disagreements were going on in the church in Ephesus?
(v14-18)

- Were they important or not?

Why does Timothy not have to win every argument? (v15-19)

What should Timothy's priority be? (v20-26)

- how does the household image show God's attitude?

How will this help you when you face disagreements?

Study 3a – Understanding the culture

Main point: these are terrible times, but they are only temporary

So far in the letter Paul has exhorted Timothy to guard the gospel by passing it on to faithful men who will teach others (2:2). This will involve suffering and hardship for Timothy now (2:3). In this passage we see why it will be such hard work for Timothy.

The 'last days' in 3:1 refers to the period of time between Jesus' ascension to heaven in Luke 24 and his return when he will make all things new. So both Timothy's church and ours are in the last days. In this time we can expect people to be as described in v2-4. Perhaps this may seem too bleak a view of humanity, but if we are honest we can see love of money, pride, abuse, ingratitude and the rest all around us. Perhaps it may be shocking to find that some in the church will be like this too (v5). There will be some who claim to be Christians and want to be considered godly but in fact love pleasure instead of God, thereby denying the true power of godliness.

In Timothy's time some such people in the church were taking advantage of the vulnerable (v6), and there are sadly too many examples of this happening in our day too. But this passage is not all bad news. They may sometimes be difficult for us to spot, but these false teachers do not fool God. Just like Pharaoh's chief magicians, James and Jambres, they are clearly in opposition to God (v8). God will reject them, and it will become clear to all that they are on the wrong side (v9). It may not be immediate, but one day it will be seen what side they are on.

This passage might seem very bleak, and it is. But it should make us want to be on Timothy's side - to be those who are sticking with Paul's gospel which truly has power to make us godly and to give us life, two things the false teachers are tragically missing out on.

INTRO: If you had to sum up our culture in 3 words, what would you use?

READ: 2 Timothy 2:22-3:9

RECAP: How was Timothy to deal with the disagreements in his church?

Why should Timothy expect his ministry to be hard?

- Why do people not love God? (v1-4)

- How does this list resonate with our culture?

In what ways are these people dangerous to the church? (v5-9)

- How can we avoid being led astray?

- What encouragement is there for us from the story of the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses (see Exodus 7:8-13)?

Study 3b – Holding to the Scriptures

Main point: continue to preach the word in all circumstances, with Paul as your model

The previous passage made for devastating reading as it outlined the ungodliness of these last days before Jesus' return and even of some teachers within the church. In contrast (3:10), Timothy is meant to follow Paul's example; his teaching, his godliness and also his persecutions. Not that Timothy is to seek out persecution, rather it is inevitable for anyone who would follow God (v12). We might expect that if we live a godly life then we will be popular and respected. But suffering for our faith doesn't mean that something has gone wrong – it is normal for disciples of Jesus.

Despite the persecution, Timothy is to continue to believe and to preach the gospel (3:14, 4:2, 4:5). Note the serious nature of Paul's charge to Timothy in 4:1-2. Because of Jesus who will return to judge, it is vital that Timothy preach the word, so that people may be saved for the kingdom. He is to preach all the time, whether it is popular or unpopular (in season and out of season). Sadly it will often be 'out of season', as people will seek out teachers to tell them what they want to hear, rather than what God says (v3-4). Don't we see this happening in our world today? How many want to come to church simply to hear a message that affirms them and their way of life, rather than to be challenged or changed by God's word?

We are to be those who want to hear the truth from God's word. Yes, to be encouraged by it, but also the less comfortable experience of being corrected and rebuked (4:2). It is not anything about Timothy that means the church should follow him. Rather because he has the word of God he is thoroughly equipped for his work (3:16-17). The Bible is not merely a book written by humans about God. It is a book from God, God-breathed, so the Bible is what every person in every culture in history needs, to hear from God.

INTRO: How would you answer someone who asked 'Why is the Bible so important to you?'

READ: 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5

RECAP: Why is Timothy in a tricky situation in his church?

How does Paul encourage Timothy to keep going? (3v10-13)

Why should Timothy keep to the Bible? (3v14-17)

- How does Timothy know he should trust it?

- What power does the Bible have?

Why should Timothy keep preaching, even when it's unpopular? (4v1-5)

- Who is the most important member of his congregation?

- What are the marks of a faithful preacher?

In what ways do you find it hard to treat the Bible as the word of God?

Study 4 – Never alone

Main point: Stick with Paul, as he has stuck with Jesus

This final passage of 2 Timothy contains many personal details about Paul, but that does not mean it is irrelevant to us today.

It becomes clear in 4:6-7 that Paul is nearing the end of his life. But he is confident, almost jubilant, because of his faith in Jesus to fulfil his promise of life, awarding Paul the crown of righteousness. This is not just a reward for Paul the apostle, but for all Christians, those who long for Jesus' return (v8). Timothy can be encouraged as Paul urges him to endure (3:10, 3:14, 4:5) by Paul's example and his confident faith in Jesus.

Earlier in the letter we heard that 'everyone in the province of Asia' deserted Paul, and here we see how alone he is. Instead of loving the prospect of Jesus' return (4:8), Demas loves this world, and so has abandoned Paul, just like those described in chapter 3 verses 1-9.

We don't know any more about the circumstances of Crescens and Titus' departure, but perhaps they have similarly deserted Paul. At any rate, Paul is isolated, cold in prison (v13), and persecuted by the likes of Alexander the metalworker (v14), facing his imminent death (v6). What is Paul's concern at this time? Verse 17, that the message may be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

His confidence in v18 echoes v8. Not that Paul is saying he will not experience suffering; that is clear from the rest of the letter. However he trusts that nothing can ultimately harm him and prevent him from being with Jesus in his kingdom (v18). What an example for Timothy to follow! What an example for us.

INTRO: What would you like your final words to be?

READ: 2 Timothy 4:1-22

RECAP: What has been Paul's main message to Timothy in his letter?

Why could Paul face death peacefully? (v6-8)

- How had he fulfilled his calling? (see Acts 20:24)

What will determine whether we stay true to our calling? (v8-10)

- Why had Demas deserted Paul?

How is Paul going to endure to the end?

- What are his physical needs? (v11-16)

- What is his spiritual strength? (v17-18)

How does this passage help us to know how to endure to the end?