

In Conclusion... TAKE RESPONSIBILITY
II Timothy 2:1-13 (AFBC 2/3/19)

So far in what we believe to be Paul's final letter, we have heard him urging Timothy and the church he served to Stay Strong, to Remain Faithful; and today, in chapter two of II Timothy, we are encouraged to Take Responsibility.

Maybe you've tried to communicate this message to your child, your spouse, your employee, or even yourself. Most of us know if we're living and acting responsibly... or not.

In our text for today, Paul points out that although God is always available to help us, He also expects us to do our part to prepare for the opportunities and challenges that come our way. In other words, we take on certain responsibilities as followers of Jesus; and life is better when we handle these in a responsible way.

I heard a story about a young man who desperately needed a job. He got an interview with a good company. He did his best to make a positive first impression.

The human resources director asked him, "Young man, are you a responsible person?" "Oh, yes," he said. "On my last job, whenever anything went wrong, they said I was responsible."

Sometimes things go wrong because we're not being very responsible—even in our walk with the Lord; and this can get in the way of the blessings God wants to give us. Hold that thought as we turn to our text for today, **II Timothy 2:1-13:**

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. ³ Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. ⁵ Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. ⁷ Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point

of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.

¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

¹¹ Here is a trustworthy saying:

**If we died with him,
we will also live with him;**

**¹² if we endure,
we will also reign with him.**

**If we disown him,
he will also disown us;**

**¹³ if we are faithless,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.**

Paul saw great potential in Timothy. He was counting on him to be a responsible, trustworthy servant-leader in the church.

But Timothy was young, inexperienced, and evidently, rather timid. So this tells you right away that Paul is not talking here about Josh Hunt—not specifically anyway.

On the other hand, what Paul is trying to communicate could be aimed at any of us. He wants us to take responsibility for being the most effective leaders, followers, and servants of the Lord and one another that we can be.

Now, keep in mind that the church at Ephesus was a “tough crowd.” They weren’t unique in this regard—plenty of other churches have been labeled as such—including this one at times in the past.

There in Ephesus, though, many people had been hostile toward the Gospel and toward Paul himself as he worked among them to start a church. And, listen, there are lots of people who are hostile toward the Gospel and toward those who attempt to live it and share it today. So, what will taking responsibility look like for us?

1. First of all, Paul talks about **WITNESSING RESPONSIBLY**. Look again at vv. 1-2: **You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.** **² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.**

“Then” is a “hinge” word for Paul. When he says, “You, then,” he’s referring back to something he’s already talked about in this letter. “You then, my son, be strong...and entrust the things you have heard me say to reliable men.” What is Paul referring back to?

Remember Phygelus and Hermogenes from last week? These were the two who had deserted Paul. They’re the other side of the “You, then” coin. They provide the contrast. ‘Don’t be like them,’ Paul warns. ‘And don’t entrust the Gospel to anyone like them.’

Bottom line, they are unfaithful and unreliable. They cannot be trusted to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ to others.

I can’t help but wonder what Paul would say about us in this regard? Are we being faithful witnesses to the Gospel?

What would happen in our community if just the group gathered here this morning—if we went out from this sanctuary focused on being faithful witnesses for Christ? What if we consistently spoke a good word for the Lord, or for His church? What if we simply seized the opportunities we have to invite others to come?

Evangelism is not so much memorizing the right lines as it is sharing our own personal experience of being in relationship with Christ. It’s not telling what happened to us in a revival meeting when we were twelve, but what does our relationship with Jesus Christ—and His Church--mean to us now?

It’s not always easy to put this into words--nobody said it would be. Paul says, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” He acknowledges up front that strength is needed to share the Gospel with others; and it won’t happen unless we depend on the grace of God in Christ. We need help—God’s help—to do this.

Evidently Paul and Timothy were rather weak from a physical standpoint--the Bible seems to indicate this about both of them--but they were made spiritually strong by the grace of God.

The message of salvation was passed from Jesus to Paul, and from Paul to Timothy. Now Timothy is assigned the responsibility of passing it on to others, who in turn are to share it with still more who have yet to hear the Christian Gospel and respond to it.

And so it has continued, friends, for 2,000 years; but the Christian witness, as has often been pointed out, has always been just one generation away

from extinction. Only as one person teaches another who teaches still another does faith in Christ continue.

That's a tremendous responsibility! Are we taking responsibility for our Christian witness? Strong, effective churches are filled with people who understand that their witness for Jesus Christ matters.

2. Now, here's another important factor in this: **LIVING RESPONSIBLY.**
(1. Witnessing) And many of you are thinking, 'but that's part of our witness, isn't it?' Well, yes, of course it is.

I heard a fellow discussing his struggle with sticking to a diet. "As I was driving down the road," he said, "I remembered a doughnut shop just ahead. They make really great doughnuts! Man, wouldn't a cup of coffee and a doughnut hit the spot," he thought.

Then he remembered his diet. So he said a prayer: "God, if you want me to stop for a doughnut, then let there be a parking space right by the front door." And sure enough, he said, on his seventh trip around the block....

I can relate to that little story—on several levels. Maybe you can too. Could it be that this lack of discipline exists in many aspects of our lives? Are spiritual disciplines any easier than physical ones?

Paul said elsewhere, "I buffet my body"—some of us get the pronunciation wrong (buffet)—we may find ourselves in a buffet line of some kind today. But when Paul says "I buffet my body," he means he's disciplining his body in order to live responsibly.

Paul uses three different pictures in this text to help us see the disciplined life. There's the picture of 1) a soldier, 2) an athlete, and 3) a farmer. All three occupations require discipline.

A soldier is responsible for obeying orders. To do his job, he must endure tremendous hardship at times. He's often required to do, not what he wants to do, but what he must do.

A soldier is disciplined. He does his duty. Friends, have we lost sight of the fact that there are duties in the Christian life as well. It's not always easy. It requires discipline.

The next picture Paul gives us is that of an athlete. I played some high school football. I wasn't very good. There are half-backs and full-backs. I was a drawback.

Actually, I played on the line—left guard on offense and right tackle on defense. All I've got to show for it is a scar on the back of my leg from a deep cleat mark, and memories of long, hot practices that were something akin to torture.

Funny how things work out. Several years ago, I ran into my old high school football coach. He told me he was a Baptist preacher now. I struggled to make that fit in with the impression I had of him. I also secretly hoped his deacons would give him fits!

Not really. The fact of the matter is, though, if you are going to play the game of football, you've got to practice and train hard.

But listen, if you're going to live the Christian life and be an effective member of God's team in this world, there are disciplines involved: learning, growing, giving, praying, serving, and more.

Then, there's one other picture here. It's that of a farmer. Lazy farmers don't make it. Farming requires hard work and perseverance. You stick with it in good times and bad.

Some seasons you work hard and end up with nothing to show for it. But as you keep on responsibly doing your job, you eventually make a crop. In the Christian life, years of faithful service are sometimes required before we begin to see the fruit of our labors.

So, here are the three pictures Paul paints for us: the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer. All three include important responsibilities. Paul is simply reminding us: so, too, the Christian life. Live it responsibly.

3. Now, Paul mentions one other important responsibility we have as followers of Christ and members of His church. We'll call this **BELIEVING RESPONSIBLY**.

Verse 8 begins, "Remember Jesus Christ." How simple and straight forward: "Remember Jesus Christ." Paul was in prison, a condemned man. He wouldn't be writing many more letters.

So Paul didn't waste any time saying, "Hey... how y'all doing?" Instead, he wrote about crucial concerns. "Remember Jesus Christ," he said, "raised from the dead, descended from David."

There's a whole lot packed into those two brief phrases. The words "raised from the dead" are a reminder of Jesus' divinity.

The people of Ephesus had lots of gods and goddesses. They had a temple in town dedicated to the worship of the Greek goddess Dianah. It was considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world. None of their gods, however, had any answer for death.

But Jesus Christ does. He... is "raised from the dead;" and He says to everyone who places their faith in Him, "Because I live, you will also live" (John 14:19). "Jesus Christ, raised from the dead!"

That second phrase, though, "Descended from David," is a reference to Jesus' humanity. He took on human flesh and, thus, endured the same kinds of problems and challenges we face.

He was one of us. Because of this, Jesus knows us well. He completely understands us. Paul wanted Timothy, along with all those to whom he ministered, to be well-grounded in Christ.

"Remember Jesus Christ," he says. Remember who He is. Remember what He has done for you.

Remember to make Christ Lord of your life, and He will sustain you through the hard times. He can do this only because of who He is: Son of God and Son of Man. He is the "Word of God" for our lives.

Paul says he's having a hard time writing this letter because of his chains. But then he goes on to say that no chains can bind the word of God—which is true, whether we're talking about God's written word, the Bible, or His Living Word, His Son, Jesus Christ.

In *Arabian Nights*, Sinbad the Sailor warns his shipmates about a great magnetic rock in the Indian Ocean. He tells them the magnetism of the rock is so powerful it will pull all the bolts and nails out of passing ships, causing them to sink.

There are so many harmful influences in our world that people, including many Christians, are being drawn to—pulled like metal to a magnet; and lives, and families, and even churches are falling apart—even sinking--as a result.

It happens when we fail to make Jesus Christ Lord of our lives. We don't keep Him in that rightful place. Our foundation weakens, other things take priority, and we're no longer grounded in Christ.

Each new day brings with it the responsibility to decide how we will live that day: 1) will it be our way or Christ's?; 2) will we try to get by in our own strength or trust in His?; 3) will we live our lives for others or only for ourselves?

Bottom line: who or what will be our rock, our foundation? Will it be Christ Jesus, or will it be something or somebody else?

"On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand." Remember to keep Christ first.

Staying grounded in Christ is vital. So let's begin each new day with a prayer that goes something like this:

"Lord, I give my life to you today. I'll need your help to live it to its best and fullest. There will be some things that come my way this day that I won't know how to handle.

There will be some difficult people. There will be temptations to overcome. There will be opportunities to serve You and others that I shouldn't overlook. So, you take control. Be Lord of my life this day. Guide me by Your Spirit and strengthen me by Your grace. Thank you, Lord. Amen."

A prayer like that says that we're serious about taking responsibility as faithful followers of Jesus Christ and as members of His body in this world. It says that our faith, our lives, our witness, are rock solid. "On Christ, the solid rock... we stand!"