

***In Conclusion... BE YOUR BEST***  
**II Timothy 2:14-26 (AFBC 2/10/19)**

Our text for this morning is II Timothy 2:14-26. As we make our way through this final letter written by the Apostle Paul, he encourages us to be strong and effective in our work for the Lord.

We'll get to our Scripture in just a moment, but first this. How many of you grew up going to BTU—that's short for Baptist Training Union? If you did, you likely know one verse in this passage quite well.

II Timothy 2:15 says: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed; rightly dividing the word of truth." That's the way we learned it—in the King James.

Now, if any of my teachers understood what "rightly dividing the word of truth" meant, I wish they had told us; but we all knew the verse. We committed it to memory, and we knew that it had something to do with studying the Bible and respecting what it says; and we also knew that to not do that would be shameful!

When we read through this passage and listen closely to what it's saying, we discover that there are things we do that help you and me to be our best, while there are other things we do that get in the way of our being our best.

As we go to our text, be listening for both (**II Timothy 2:14-26**):

<sup>14</sup>Keep reminding them (the church) of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. <sup>15</sup>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. <sup>16</sup>Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. <sup>17</sup>Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, <sup>18</sup>who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. <sup>19</sup>Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

<sup>20</sup>In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for

ignoble. <sup>21</sup>If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

<sup>22</sup>Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. <sup>23</sup>Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. <sup>24</sup>And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. <sup>25</sup>Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup>and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Well, did you hear what I was talking about? Paul tells us some things we must avoid and other things we must do if we are to be our best as followers of Jesus Christ and witnesses for Him in this world. And in case I've never mentioned this before, preachers tend to really identify with passages like this one.

Paul was a preacher, and he addresses this letter to another preacher, Timothy—so you would expect there to be some passages like this—preacher talk! But stay with me. There's something here for all of us—including those present who've never attempted to preach or pastor a church!

Paul simply wants young Timothy to excel in what the Lord has called him to do. So some of what Paul says relates directly to the pastor's job. Still, I think it applies more broadly to all of us who want to live the Christian life well and be effective in whatever we are called to do for Christ and His Church.

Paul was all about excellence. We speak of people today as being "driven"—well, Paul is a case in point! Whatever he was involved in, he was "all in." There was not a "just do enough to get by" bone in his body—you know what I mean? Paul was 100%--all in!

Paul's resume' was impeccable. He was educated in the highly regarded school of Gamaliel. He was a rabbi and a Pharisee who was so trusted by his colleagues that Paul was chosen to carry the torch against the followers of Jesus. Everybody recognized the potential in Paul's life—he consistently "did his best."

Evidently the Lord also recognized this about Paul. Once He got hold of Paul's life there on the Damascus road, all that drive and energy and pursuit of excellence was re-directed into his service to Christ and His Kingdom.

Paul spent the rest of his life "pressing on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). He still aimed for excellence, but now it was in pursuit of a higher calling.

I don't think Paul was asking Timothy to be just like him. Paul wanted Timothy to take his own calling seriously and to give whatever that involved his best. We do better and last longer at whatever it is we're involved in if we have the desire to do it well.

Paul yearned for Timothy to have this same attitude. And as he looked forward in time, Paul wanted every follower of Jesus to pursue excellence in their Christian walk. This will help to sustain any of us when troubles come our way. Let's take a closer look:

**1.** To be our best, we need to **Remember What Matters.** Look at **II Tim. 2:14: "Keep reminding them of these things."** What things? Well, I'm glad you asked.

Paul has been talking about the Gospel and our need to be faithful to it, and responsible with it. Then he adds, "Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen." Does this sound familiar?

How easy it is for us to get sidetracked by issues and concerns and preferences that don't really matter. Things get accomplished when we focus on what matters most and do it... rather than just debating about what's wrong and doing nothing. In every aspect of life, we need to set our sights on the things that actually matter.

Railroads were once the number one movers of people and freight in our nation. The need for an effective system of transportation was recognized. Trains and tracks emerged as the best way to meet this need. This resulted in huge and prosperous railroads.

But then something happened. The railroads forgot what was most important. They began—remember--as the best, most efficient means of moving people and things from place to place. This is what mattered. This was their focus—in the beginning.

Over time, however, the railroad companies began to see their mission as maintaining trains and tracks. All the while, other, more efficient means of transportation were being developed.

The railroad companies could have begun using trucks or planes to transport people and freight, but they didn't. They just kept doing what they had always done, even as newer methods of transportation began to take over. The railroads began to die.

So, how does this relate to us? In many ways; but let's begin by thinking about parenthood. What matters most about this role?

Well, parents provide for the needs of their families—their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs. In an effort to do this, many parents will elect to get a job.

Jobs are good, of course, as long as we don't lose sight of the reason we got that job. The reason, again, is to provide for the needs of our family. But what happens when the job becomes an end in itself—when it begins to occupy more and more of our time-time that used to be family time?

I'm not trying to put us on a guilt trip—I've struggled with this too. I'm simply suggesting that we can lose sight of what's most important--sometimes with tragic consequences. We must keep reminding ourselves what it is that really matters.

I kept a newspaper article about Jermale Kelly, a Greenville native, who played football for Lou Holtz. As a big game was approaching, Kelly's father died. The sports writers were pressing Holtz to say when Kelly would return to practice.

This is how Lou Holtz responded: "My feeling is this: Your Number One priority is your faith. Number Two is your *family*. You've got to handle this. If he does not handle it in an appropriate manner, he'll regret it for the rest of his life. So I told him, whatever you do, do this thing right and let's work football around it."

Well, "Dr. Lou" was right on! Having the right focus, and staying true to it, helps us to be and do our best in all aspects of life.

Sometimes churches struggle with this. What matters for churches is bringing people into a right relationship with the Lord and with one another. Buildings are built, staffs are called, programs are developed--all for this purpose.

If we're not careful, though, maintaining and maximizing our stuff will become more important than carrying out our mission of reaching and discipling people for Christ. To be our best, we have to stay focused on what matters most.

**2.** Here's another requirement for being our best. Paul tells us to **Seek God's Approval**. "Do your best," he writes in verse 15, "to present yourself to God as one approved."

We enjoy the approval of our peers, don't we? We often talk about the peer pressure that young people face—it's a powerful influence during adolescence; but listen: at no age are we exempt from the influences of peer pressure.

And these can be harmful. Peer pressures can coerce us into doing things we would not otherwise do. Seeking the approval of the wrong person or wrong group can drag us down, hold us back, and influence us to make all kinds of bad decisions.

How different life is when we aim for God's approval instead. He made us. He gave us this wonderful gift called life. Because of this, God knows what's best for us.

In the early days of the automobile, a man's Model T Ford stalled in the middle of the road. Nothing he tried to get it started worked.

About the time he was ready to give up, a chauffeured limousine pulled up. A wiry, energetic man stepped from the back seat and offered to help.

After tinkering under the hood for a few minutes, the stranger said, "Now try it!" The car started right up. It was only then that this well-dressed gentleman introduced himself.

"Hello," he said, "I'm Henry Ford. I designed and built these cars, so I know what to do when something goes wrong."

Friends, God designed and built us. He knows how to fix us when we're broken. So it's God's approval we should seek!

**3.** Now, here's one more aspect of being our best: **Be Useful**. That can mean a lot of different things; but I promise you, we are never at our best until we are being useful to God and others.

**Look at II Timothy 2:20-21: "In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."**

Houses are kind of like us--a mixed bag. Houses contain some good stuff, and some bad stuff. It's important for us to know the difference so that we can add to the good and dispose of the bad.

I talked with a man about his family's experience during a devastating tornado. He said something I've never forgotten, and these verses brought it back to mind.

He said, "Jim, when something like that is coming at you, you realize that not much of what's in your house is really important."

Now let's apply this to our lives. How many of us allow unimportant stuff to pile up until it becomes a problem—something that critically needs to be addressed? There are a variety of problems that need to be fixed in order for us to be useful to anyone!

Paul spends the rest of this passage telling us how to go about fixing our problems. In verse 22, he tells us to "flee evil and pursue good." In verse 23, he warns against getting "caught up in a lot of talking that will just lead to stupid quarrels." Lord, help us!

And in verses 24-26, he encourages "kindness and gentle instruction" as we find and fix the problems that exist. We tend to just talk and complain about all that's wrong; but that doesn't solve anything.

Many people talked about the suffering caused by the polio virus, but Jonas Salk worked day in and day out until he developed a vaccine to eradicate it.

Many people suffered from the injustices of segregation, but Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus and sparked the civil rights movement.

Lots of people talk about what's wrong. Useful people FIND the problems, and then they find SOLUTIONS. They FIX them.

Here's the challenge for us—when life is good, but even more so when life gets hard:

- 1) First, **Remember what Matters**--the things related to your faith, your family, your church and community. Learn from the Lord where your focus needs to be, and keep it there.
- 2) This means we **Seek God's Approval**. He knows us through and through and wants only what's best for us. So God's approval is what we're after. If others also approve—good. If not... well, it's not their approval that we need, is it?
- 3) And finally, **Be Useful!** USEFULNESS in life, usefulness in the Kingdom of God, is what gives life meaning and makes it abundant—which is exactly what our Lord desires for us.
- 4) Friends, God wants to use each one of us to fix some of the problems that exist in this world—beginning with the problems in us that hold us back from being our best. But listen: there are some problems that only He can fix.

The problem of sin and death, for example. Jesus Christ died on a cross for us, so that our sin problem could be fixed, our enemy death could be defeated, and eternal life could be ours.

If you've never responded to Christ's invitation to follow Him, this is where your focus needs to be right now. He loves you. He died for you. He lives again to be your Savior and Lord.

And He invites you to come and follow Him, to experience His love and forgiveness, and to enjoy the abundant life we only find in Him.

If you're already a Christian, then you need a local body of believers—a church, a body of Christ—to which you belong, and in which you are involved and are actively serving and supporting. This is a wonderful church. I invite you to join this one!

I didn't come up with this plan—God did. He called me to preach the word and let you know—which I have tried to faithfully do.

So focus right now on what matters most for your life. Seek God's approval. Make yourself useful in His Kingdom! And never settle for anything less than your best—for Christ's sake. Amen.