

Finishing Strong

2 Timothy 4:7 ESV

Most of us are ready for a new season - a new start - a fresh beginning. And the Bible is *full* of new beginnings. It's full of fresh starts. It's full of clean slates. Now, we get to clean the chalkboard again, and it's a good time to pause and reflect, and to look back over our year. When we do that, we'll remember a lot more. The practice of reflecting sharpens our memory and helps us think better. We pause and reflect, but then we also *realign*, because things happen within a given space of time. Life happens - hard things happen - and it all begs for realignment. To realign simply means *we're looking at God*, we're looking at his *Word*, and we're realigning *with him*. We're getting back in line. We're getting back *with him*.

The word *repentance* comes to mind where we turn and look at him - just being before him in his presence. We want to *re-align* - to be in alignment with him and with his heart. We want to be in alignment with his will and with his ways. We want to follow him as he leads. So, we're not just closing a *calendar* year, we're closing a *spiritual* year. We're about to close the chapter, but we're actually closing a *spiritual season*. We're going to turn the page and we can't go *back*. We have to move *forward*.

2 Timothy 4:7. ESV

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

This is a verse that that really speaks into what's happening. The Apostle Paul was in a Roman prison and he was awaiting execution. He knew his time was short and he was writing young Timothy this letter. Listen to those three elements. Paul said he fought the good fight, he finished the race, and he kept the faith. Paul understood the power of *finishing well*. He understood the power of finishing *strong*. And that's really the topic here.

How we finish one season will dictate and predicate how we start the next. We'd love to think that every time it's a clean slate. We'd love to think that we could finish one way and then just write it off and put it behind us, but what we do today matters for tomorrow, and the habits we form and the practices we keep will inform our life moving forward. This brings us to the idea of finishing strong and ending a season well as we're closing this chapter now.

Nobody wants to be the one who doesn't finish things, who doesn't finish what they started, and God is looking for faithful people who will be faithful to the *end*. So, here we are, closing this calendar year, and Paul says, "*I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I've kept the faith.*" We should all want to say that we've fought the good fight and finished the race - that we're running through the tape, finishing strong, and that we kept the faith. So, how do we end strong? How do we end *well*?

1] Gratitude Reframes the Past We're talking about pausing, reflecting, and realigning, and part of the reflection piece is to look back with gratitude, to be thankful for what happened - what came our way in 2025. When we look back over a difficult season, it's real easy to go back down the rabbit hole and to be depressed about it, to be ashamed of it, to be frustrated. And actually, sometimes if we don't reframe it right, it will reopen those wounds and we'll feel ourselves feeling pain again. Sometimes trauma that's not been resolved will re-ignite in us - but gratitude reframes the past.

How do we operate in gratitude? First of all, most of our prayers should consist of *gratitude*. We need to realize that if God had not have rescued us, delivered us, and saved us, we would be adrift and separated from him now. When we look back on our past and our failures, and we make a decision that gratitude is going to reframe and reshape our past, it will help us see it all differently. Now we can say with confidence and joy, "*Father, thank You! Thank You for that happening, because had it not happened then we wouldn't be here now.*" Even the hard stuff and the bad stuff, when we walk in gratitude and practice gratitude, literally reframes our past.

Psalms 103:2 ESV

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

Wherever we've been through hard seasons, we can look back and say, "*You know, that was a difficult season, but look what we got to do there, and look how we were able to trust Him when we were trying to figure out what was coming next, but look what happened in the middle of that - look how God showed up!*" God reminds us that he was right in the middle of the hard thing and the difficult season - that he had us. He had our *back*. He had our situation. Gratitude *re-frames*. "*Bless the Lord, oh my soul. Forget not all his benefits.*" One of the ways we bless the Lord is to recount his benefits to us. "*Lord, thank you. I remember when we were in that horrible place and You showed up in the middle of it. Thank You, Lord!*"

When we begin to recount his blessings to us, we actually bless him - “*Oh Lord, don't You remember when? Don't You remember? Lord, do you remember when You made a way where there wasn't a way? Do You remember when You sent somebody? Remember when You sent that text to me through a friend? It was exactly what I needed to hear, exactly when I needed to hear it.*” We recount his blessings back to him.

Lamentations 3:22-23 ESV

“*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*”

We could stop right there, but it doesn't end - his mercies *never* come to an end. They are new every morning. “*Great is Your faithfulness.*” We're going to need this when we're having one of those weeks, one of those days, one of those months, or maybe one of those years where we can go back and declare that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. “*Devil, I'm reminding you of this. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. You can hit me with everything you've got, but He never ceases. His mercies never end. In fact, they're new every morning.*”

When we got up this morning, we had a clean slate. It probably didn't take five minutes to get some marks on it, but, when we woke up this morning, his mercies were *new*. Every morning when we wake up, we get a new beginning. We get a *do-over* every day in Christ. Isn't that amazing? That's *powerful*. Every day, every morning we wake up, it's *clean!* We should wake up every morning saying, “*Good morning, Holy Spirit. Good morning, Lord Jesus. Good morning, Abba Father. I get to do this. Thank You for new mercies. Thank You that last night's dumb piece that I pulled is over and done with because I've got new mercies working on my behalf right now - new mercies right now. Lord, thank You for new mercies!*”

Gratitude re-frames the past. It doesn't necessarily erase the pain, but it absolutely anchors our perspective. It shifts our mindset to where what once was such a terrible thing, we can now say, “*Wow, that shaped me. That helped me. That challenged me. That gave me an opportunity to stand up when everyone else would have fallen down. I refuse to let anything be wasted in this life - the good and the bad.*” We can't step forward freely if we're still bound to regret. God's faithfulness deserves recognition before we ask Him for more.

John 8:32 says, “*Whom the Son sets free is free indeed.*” If we've been set free then we should say, “*Self, you are free. I'm just reminding you right now, you're free. You know what, self? I'm free in the name of Jesus. Jesus, thank You for setting me free.*” What happens? We move into *gratitude*, and then we'll begin to experience it!

It doesn't matter if we believe it or not. Our brain doesn't make that distinction. The emotional part of our brain that works with reason is tiny compared to the rest of our brain. Our brain is an organ that responds to what we tell it, but guess what? Our *spirit* is alive and well too. And when we *speak* it, our spirit grabs *hold* of it. When we declare the truth of God's Word, then it doesn't matter what we think about it emotionally. Everything in our body says, "*Yes, I agree!*" That's *re-alignment*. We're *re-aligning* ourselves.

Gratitude keeps the past from defining the future. When we walk in gratitude, we're not bound to who we *used* to be. When we walk in gratitude, we're not connected to the past like a bungee cord that's attached to our back. That's like we're running and starting to get some traction spiritually and then that bungee cord hits the end of its stretch and snaps us *back*. What is that bungee cord? It's *regret*. It's *being stuck*. It's allowing the past to define our *today* and our *future*.

We need to announce to ourself, to the devil, and to anyone else listening, "*I'm not who I used to be and I am not the sum total of my mistakes.*" When we say that, our mind doesn't even have to believe it, but when we say it, we're declaring the truth of God's word. And when we declare the truth, the truth sets us *free*!

2] Faithfulness Matters Most at the End

We're re-aligning ourselves. We're dealing with the past. We're going to embrace gratitude and move forward. But now, as we get to the end, that's where we tend to want to quit and just drop over the finish line or coast over the finish line. Many times, though, we try to talk ourselves out of it. We say, "*Don't get your hopes up*," because it's so easy to just chill out. But, instead, we need to say, "*Not today, Satan. Not today!*" And then the barrier will be *broken*, and we'll realize if we'll just go and run through the tape, finish strong, not give up, not quit, that's how we'll finish one season and start the next.

Galatians 6:9 ESV

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

That's a *promise*. When is "due season?" We don't know, but it's *coming*. Imagine having the faith to believe we've stayed faithful, so we can pray, "*Father, when's that due season coming? I'm ready for it now. Lord, I know there's a due season coming, and I declare it in the name of Jesus. Your Word says, if we do not give up, we'll reap the harvest. The due season is on its way!*

Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.”

How do we do that? We keep our eyes on the prize, looking to Jesus, the founder and the perfecter. The word *perfecter* means the *finisher* - the founder and the finisher of *our faith*. Weariness is not a sign of failure. It's often evidence of *faithfulness*. Most of us feel good when we build a fence, dig a hole, or do something that makes us tired at the end of the day, We can lie down and go, *“Wow, that was a good day. I'm really glad I did that.”* But sometimes, we can mistake weariness with being *uncomfortable*, and we now live in a culture that thinks being uncomfortable is *abuse*. If we're not comfortable in our job, that's our bosses being abusive. If we're not comfortable in our discipleship relationship, that's *our mentor being abusive and hard on us*.

Paul didn't say he *felt* strong, he said he kept the *faith*. He fought the good fight. He ran the race and finished it. He was probably tired, probably worn out. Obedience in the ordinary moments is how spiritual endurance is built. It's the accumulation of the little things we do that actually make the big difference. We're always looking for “epic.” Anything we look at online for more than five minutes, it's a bunch of epic stuff. Everything's *epic*. Everybody's living an epic life. And then here's our *ordinary* life. Do we want to have an epic moment or do we want to have a great life? Do we want to finish well, run through the tape, and finish strong? Finishing strong is about *faithfulness*, not *feelings*. We don't have to *feel* strong to *be* strong. Just *finish*. Just *complete*. Just keep running through the tape!

3] Hope Pulls Us Forward

Hope isn't just something that's just *wishful thinking*. It's actually *expectation*. What is hope biblically? It's *joyful and confident expectation of a desired good*. “Joyful and confident.” Are we hopeful in a confident way? If we know our God and if we know Jesus and we have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, we can be *joyfully confident* that there is a “*desired good*” coming our way. Hope pulls us forward - biblical hope, *not* wishful thinking. When we stay in biblical alignment with God, with his way, his will, and his Word, he begins to pull us forward.

Philippians 3:13-14 ESV

“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

This is a great way to start a new year - finish one and start one. Paul said, "*One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*" We get *him*. Jesus is the prize. We get a relationship with Jesus that is life-giving, that is aligned, and that brings hope and pulls us along.

Isaiah 43:18-19 ESV

"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

Finishing strong positions us to begin the next season with faith. How we end one season will dictate how we begin the next. Hope is *faith looking forward* to what *will be*. Let's not spend our time living in regret, but rather looking forward, by taking a spiritual knife - the Word of God, the sword of the spirit - and cutting this bungee cord that's holding us back, and let's move forward because hope is *faith looking forward*.

Our declaration in alignment with the truth of God's Word:

We thank God for His faithfulness in this past year.

We release regret, disappointment, and fear.

We choose gratitude over resentment.

We choose faithfulness over fatigue.

We choose hope over fear.

We have fought the good fight.

We are finishing this year strong.

We step into the new year trusting the Lord.

We don't know everything the next year holds, but we know the One who holds it.

Prayer

Father, we honor You and we're grateful that we can reframe the past so we can look forward. We want to run through the tape here at the end, but we are excited about starting 2026, so we are making this declaration. We're going to believe in our heart and declare it with our mouth that 2026 is going to be an amazing year filled with discovery, learning, excitement, beauty, joy, and life. Challenges will come, but Lord, You have prepared us to meet those challenges and they just make us stronger, not weaker. Lord, thank you for 2025. It's been a wild year, and yet, God, You have been faithful through it all, which means we can be faithful, too. In Jesus' name, we leave today with a clean slate, looking forward to what You have. We honor You in it all, and may Jesus Christ be lifted up in and through our lives every day in Jesus name. Amen