

Famous Last Words

“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God”
(Acts 20:24).

I magine your life as it nears the finish line. You have a few minutes to speak your last words. What would you say?

Have you ever been called to the bedside of a dying loved one? Recall how you strained to hear the final words. Do they linger in your memory as if it were yesterday?

Think about the great men and women in your life. What last words would they have to whisper to you?

Why are last words so special?

- Last words give a glimpse of what is important to the dying person.
- Last words remain as a special memory after the person is gone. Last words are lasting words.
- Last words are usually encouraging—words of blessings that help affirm the hearers.
- Last words could contain final instructions, advice or directives to family.
- Last words are special because they are the final words you will hear from a loved one, soon to depart this life.

Warren Wiersbe in *Be Faithful* says, “A great person’s last words are significant. They are a window that helps us look into his heart, or a measure that helps us evaluate his life.”

The Apostle Paul had a final message for his son in the gospel, Timothy. It would be great if Paul had a message for all of us. He does. His last words were not only to Timothy, but also to all that follow Christ. How did Paul get the news to us? He wrote. Like all who reach life’s end, Paul had a desire to leave a legacy to generations to come.

“Write these things for the future so that people who are not yet born will praise the LORD”
(Psalms 102:18, NCV).

Paul’s words did not come from a sickbed in a hospital. He wrote them from a dark, cold, filthy prison cell. He sat alone with only an occasional visitor. He did have a faithful companion—his writing materials. He waited on death as if he were a common criminal. What was his crime? He was condemned for preaching the gospel. He set prisoners free from the chains of sin and tradition.

Paul penned his letter so he could pass the torch of leadership and truth on to the next generation. He reminded Timothy—and each of us—what is truly important. Paul's last three letters were to those that would carry on the church after his death. They reveal the heart, mind, and soul of a beloved mentor to his friends.

Paul knew that it was imperative to entrust truth into the hands of dependable men who could teach others. In 2 Timothy 2:2 he is saying, "I trust you to carry on!"

"You have heard me teach many things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Teach these great truths to trustworthy people who are able to pass them on to others" (2 Timothy 2:2, *NLT*).

You and I have heard the gospel because men like Paul and Timothy were faithful to teach others. The truth has been passed from disciple to disciple, and from generation to generation. The chain has never been broken. We must continue the process.

Gary Erickson in the *Christian Educator* describes teachers as a link in the generational chain; large vessels pouring truth into empty ones; bridges connecting one generation to another; and passing the baton of truth.

"But watch out! Be very careful never to forget what you have seen the LORD do for you. Do not let these things escape from your mind as long as you live! And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren" (Deuteronomy 4:9, *NLT*).

We are always one generation away from extinction. We joyfully repair the breach between the generations, and pass the baton on to them. As we remain faithful, the race will one day be finished.

As Paul reviews his lifetime he may have recalled his words at Ephesus, "But life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God's mighty kindness and love" (Acts 20:23-24, *TLB*).

Years had passed since then. Examining his life he wrote, "As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful" (2 Timothy 4:6-7, *NLT*).

Life is an offering to God.

Paul looked at life as a sacrifice to God. He did not think of success in terms of what one gains, but in what one gives.

"I have been a constant example of how you can help the poor by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20: 35, *NLT*).

"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is" (Romans 12:1-2, *NLT*).

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, *NIV*).

In ministry and the Christian walk, we have troubles. God never promised a problem-free life (Genesis 35:10; Psalms 18:32-34). Troubles are opportunities for growth. They purify our character; build our trust in God; work for our good (Romans 8:28); strengthen perseverance (Romans 5:3-5); and develop our sensitivity to others as they experience problems (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). Some turn to God thinking that they will escape troubles. God does not promise that but He gives power to go through suffering. The testing of our faith develops endurance and makes us strong (James 1:2).

Life is short.

Job asked, "Are not my days few?" (Job 10:20). He answers his own question, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." Life is described in several ways throughout Scripture: water spilled on the ground (2 Samuel 14:14); a pilgrimage (Genesis 47:9); but a step between life and death (1 Samuel 20:3); a shadow (1 Chronicles 29:15); swifter than a weaver's shuttle (Job 7:6); like the wind (Job 7:7); like grass that grows in the morning, and in the evening it is cut down and withers (Psalms 90:5-6); a morning fog—here a little while, and then gone (James 4:14).

"LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered, and that my life is fleeing away. My life is no longer than the width of my hand. An entire lifetime is just a moment to you; human existence is but a breath." We are merely moving shadows, and all our busy rushing ends in nothing. We heap up wealth for someone else to spend" (Psalms 39:4-6, *NLT*).

Life has a purpose.

We are not here by accident. God has us here on purpose—for a purpose. He has a plan for our lives. We finish the course and win the prize when we run according to God's plan.

“Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails” (Proverbs 19:21, *NIV*).

The Bible resounds with stories of triumphant men and women who followed God's purpose.

Consider the testimony of King David. "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep." (Acts 13:36, *NIV*).

Jesus came to earth for a purpose—with a plan.

In Gethsemane He was able to say, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4-5, *NIV*).

Hours later on the cross, Jesus said, "'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (John 19:30, *NIV*).

Paul made up his mind that he was going to press toward the mark, run the race, and win the prize (Philippians 3:14). Early in his ministry he proclaimed, "So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step" (1 Corinthians 9:26, *NLT*).

His life closed with this epitaph: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

Paul had settled his destiny years before, and defined his journey in light of it. Kenneth Boa in *Conformed to His Image* suggests that we ask two questions:

- What do I want my life to add up to, and why?
- At the end of my stopover on earth, what will I want to see when I look back?

He says, "From the biblical perspective, the real question is not what we will leave behind (the answer to this is always the same—we leave everything behind) but what will we send on ahead (Matthew 6:20)."

Today's decisions determine tomorrow's destiny. Look ahead and establish your last words. Mine will be, "I have fought long and hard for my Lord, and through it all I have kept true to him. And now the time has come for me to stop fighting and rest" (2 Timothy 4:7, *TLB*).

His words to me will be, "Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:23, *NKJV*).

What about you? What will be your last words?

Study Questions

1. List three reasons why last words are so special. _____

2. What did Wiersbe say about a person's last words? _____

3. Where do we find Paul's final recorded message for his son, Timothy? _____

4. What did the Psalmist tell us to write? _____

5. From what location did Paul write his final recorded message to Timothy? _____

6. Why did Paul write this message? _____

7. How does Gary Erickson describe teachers in this lesson? _____

8. How is life described throughout Scripture? _____

9. What two questions does Kenneth Boa suggest we ask ourselves? _____

10. What do you want your last words to be? _____
