What To Look For In A Christian Leader

Rich Nathan
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2 Timothy: Passing on the Faith Series
2 Timothy 4:1-8

The race for the presidency is beginning to heat up. In a few days Ohio will be holding its presidential primaries. People over the next nine months will be making a decision about who they want to be the leader of this country, and in many ways who they want to be the political leader of much of the world.

Now, you might want to nuance that a little bit. Many folks would say, "Well, I'm not really choosing who I want to be the leader of this country, or the major political leader of the world. I'm really just choosing a man based on the menu that's been handed to me. There are a number of people I might choose to lead, but they aren't on the ballot."

Nevertheless, people will be making a choice in the next nine months regarding who they want to have as president. And it is interesting to listen to people's reasons for their choices.

- I like so-and-so because he looks honest.
- He seems like a nice guy. He doesn't seem mean or angry like that other candidate did.
- He seems friendly.
- He has a good vocabulary. He talks really well.
- I like his wife. So if she likes him, I guess I'll vote for him.
- He's very good looking. He reminds me of Bobby Kennedy.
- He seems to be for people like me, so since I like me and my personal interests, I'll vote for him.

Or more substantively:

- I like his stand on 1-2 or 3 issues, so I'll vote for him.
- My parents and most of my friends vote this way. I've never really thought of voting for the other party.

It is interesting to listen to people regarding why they choose the political leaders they do. The Bible, of course, has a lot to say about leadership – leadership in the world, and leadership in the church. Those of us who are followers of Christ are constantly in the position of having to think about the criteria for choosing a leader.

For example, if you a follower of Christ, at some point you will look for a church. Well, what should you look for in a church? Do you just consider a church's size

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and say, “Well, I just feel more comfortable in a church of this size, or that?” Do you just look at a church’s facility or how convenient it is to drive to the church?

One of the things you ought to consider, if you are choosing a church, is what are the church’s leaders like? Church leadership will determine in large degrees, what kind of church it will be. And you need to evaluate a church’s leaders. Evaluating Christian leadership is something that many churches are engaged in as they go through pastoral transitions. I have some friends around town who are long-time Christian leaders in this community. Their churches are very well known. And they are in the process of retiring in the next year or two. I talked with several of them recently about the process that their church is undergoing in choosing new pastoral leadership. Whenever a church is in transition, the issue of choosing Christian leadership becomes a really live one.

Our church is committed to plant many churches. Vineyard Columbus has planted 16-17 churches around the nation in the last decade. We’re going to pray for and release several more church plants this next year. And so we are constantly faced with the issue of whom do you choose to be the pastor of the church plant?

The issue of aging that I mentioned before raises significant issues for denominational and para-church leadership. Several of the men who have provided global leadership are well up in their 80’s – men like Billy Graham, Pope John Paul II, John Stott, an English pastor who for years has been a leader of the evangelical movement around the world. Who is going to take these men’s places? What should we look for in choosing the person who will step into these men’s shoes?

In the text that we’re going to look at today, the early church was facing a transition in leadership. The apostle Paul was about to be killed at the hands of the Roman government. Leadership of the early church was passing to the next generation. Paul laid out some timeless principles that apply to every generation’s selection of leaders. As we conclude our study in 2 Timothy, I’ve called today’s talk, “What To Look For In A Christian Leader.” Let’s pray.

> **2 Timothy 4:1-8:**
> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. For I am already

> being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

These words, or at least the first five verses, are often used in graduation services at seminaries, or in ordination services when commissioning new pastors. These words contain much of the job description of a Christian leader.

We read in verse 1 about the fundamental mindset that a Christian leader always ought to have.

> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge.

A Christian leader worth following should live with a constant apprehension of future judgment and the second coming of the Lord. The backdrop, in other words, for a Christian leader's activity is always the felt reality that the leader, along with the rest of the world, will have to give a full account before God on the day of judgment. Christian leaders are reminded of this in virtually every book of the New Testament. For example, the apostle James says in James 3:1:

> Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

> **Luke 12:42-44 and 48**
> Who then is the faithful and wise manager whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant, whom the master finds doing so, when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of his possessions.

Jesus goes on and says:

> From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded. And from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

The reality that God will judge our lives and judge this world is something that the apostle Paul constantly lived with. It was in the foreground of his mind, not just the background. Paul wrote in Romans 14:10-11:

> For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written as surely as I live says the Lord, every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God, so that each of us will give an account of himself to God.

And it is this reality of judgment that gives Paul his urgency in preaching. He knows he is going to be judged and he also knows that the world is going to be judged. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:9-11:

> So we make it our goal to please him whether we are at home in the body or away from it, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.

What should you look for in a Christian leader? We should look for someone who fears the Lord, who takes God seriously, who doesn't cross boundaries because he or she knows that they are going to have to give an account. Look for someone who seems urgent, about whom you could say, "There is a seriousness, there is an intensity about this woman or man in their activity. They seem to live with the idea that we don't have all the time in the world, and that men and women are racing to judgment and we don't know how long any of our lives are going to last. So we need to decide now where we stand with Christ."

Well, with judgment as a background, what is the charge that Paul gives to Timothy? He says to Timothy,

> Preach the Word!

When you are looking for a Christian leader, you want to find someone who preaches the Word. Paul was talking about someone who preaches the Word of God, the scriptures. Paul was talking about someone who lives under the authority of God's Word and urges others to live under the authority of God's Word.

Now, you and I know that there are a hundred other things that a preacher could preach other than the Word of God. A preacher could preach his or her own words. We can share our ideas about sexuality, marriage, politics, or what we think really happened in the last week of Christ's life.

A preacher could preach the thoughts of other people. We can get a good self help book, or pop psychology book, whether Christian or secular. We could echo the opinions of lots of different scholars. A preacher could preach the ideas of others.

Paul says, "Preach the Word." Don't preach your own ideas. Don't just preach from the ideas of other people. Submit your thoughts and your messages to the

scriptures. And make sure that when you are preaching the Word, don't twist it. Don't tamper with it. Don't subtract from it or add to it.

Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:13-14:

> What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit that lives in us.

Paul was about to leave the scene. He's calling Timothy to view preaching as a sacred trust. God has put on deposit, Timothy, his word. He has entrusted you with the scriptures. The image that comes to my mind is of a banker, who oversees a bank in which people have placed their life savings. Guard it. Don't lose it. Don't fritter it away. Don't mess with it. Don't add to it. Don't subtract from it.

Let me give you a different picture, one that I'm borrowing from John Stott. He says an Englishman's favorite breakfast is bacon and eggs. He said suppose a householder told his housekeeper each morning, "I want the household served bacon and eggs." But the first morning the housekeeper thought, "I have a better idea." So she threw the bacon and eggs out and served fish. She contradicted the householder's will. The next morning she served eggs, but no bacon. She subtracted from the householder's will. The third morning, she served bacon and eggs covered with salsa. (Stott didn't actually use this illustration.) She added to the householder's will.

What you ought to look for in a Christian leader is someone who preaches the Word, who is passionate about bringing their own lives and lives of the people in their group, in their ministry, or in their church under the authority of God's Word. No subtractions, no additions, no contradictions.

Paul goes on to say:

> Preach the Word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.

Great preaching is not just inspirational. Wow, that was exciting! I just got so jazzed listening to that preacher! It was like watching Red, White and Boom downtown on the 4th of July. I'm so pumped.

Great preaching is not just inspirational. Paul calls Timothy to preach the Word, look at the end of verse 2:

> …with great patience and careful instruction.

Literally, “Preach the word with great patience and with teaching. Preach with teaching.” In other words, preaching is not just an emotional appeal. There needs to be and a foundation laid of content, a foundation for your mind upon which you are then inspired to act. Preach with teaching. And you can tell that Paul is concerned about an intellectual component to a preacher’s ministry by what he calls the message. Look at verse 2:

> Preach the Word.

Verse 3, he speaks about sound doctrine”

> For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.

Verse 4, he talks about the truth. A leader ought to help people make decisions for their lives not based on an emotional appeal, that’s going to evaporate, but on the truth. Live this way because it is true. Believe this because it is true. Function this way because this is the way the universe really is. Because this is real and solid and you can build your life on it.

What should you look for in a Christian leader? Someone who can act as a father or mother. Verse 2:

> Preach the Word! Be prepared in season and out of season, correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.

Now, Paul doesn’t explicitly in this text use the metaphor of a father or mother. But the commands that he issues for a Christian leader, “be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience” these are all instructions borrowed from the world of parenting.

If you have a Bible, I want you to turn back to 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12. Paul has finished describing his ministry as a mother to the Thessalonian church. And now he talks about being a father.

> For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of god, who calls you into is kingdom and glory.

Several of these words are repeated in 2 Timothy – correct, rebuke and encourage.

What should you look for in a Christian leader? Look for someone who doesn’t only know the scriptures, but someone who also knows people. See, there are different kinds of people who need to be led. And so the leader responds differently to different people in different situations. Sometimes they need to

correct. Sometimes they need to rebuke. Sometimes they need to encourage. But always with great patience.

Christian leaders need to be able to do two things at once very well. Christian leaders need to love people and, at the same time, Christian leaders need to love God's Word and submit to it. And leaders who do both are worth following.

Some Christian leaders love people, but they don't love God's Word. And so their ministry is one of accommodation to people's demands, to people's changing lifestyles. You see this all the time.

"Well, people today simply can't be abstinent until marriage. It's unrealistic to preach abstinence from the pulpit."

"Real people today can't stay in a bad marriage. It is unrealistic to preach perseverance."

"Real people can't possibly change their sexual orientation. Once gay, always gay."

There are lots of leaders, small group leaders, Christian counselors, and Christian pastors who love people, but they don't equally love God's Word.

And there are other Christian leaders who love God's Word, but they don't love people. And so they don't fall into the error of accommodation, they fall into the error of irrelevance. So much bad preaching is really the result of a message having a far-off quality to it. People in the congregation say to themselves, "This preacher doesn't get it. This preacher doesn't get me. Maybe he spent a lot of time in his study and he can tell me the exact tense of the verb in this passage, but he clearly doesn't understand what its like to be in an office where I have to listen to dirty jokes all day long, or where I'm the only Christian."

"Maybe they love God's Word, but they clearly don't understand what it is like to be in a classroom and have your faith made fun of all the time."

Or what it feels like to really be in a bad marriage, or have a rebellious child, or lived for years in a certain way that you are now ashamed of.

Bad leadership communicates to people that the leader doesn't live in the world of the people he or she is trying to lead. This person never seems to struggle with temptation. They don't know what it feels like to argue with a 14-year old daughter about what she's going to wear. They don't ever seem to fight with their wife or husband. Their kids are always perfectly obedient and want to go to church.

You know, when I think of bad preaching, I just don't think of preaching with a far-off quality. I think of messages in which the preacher makes the Christian life sound so easy – if you just believe enough, if you just give enough, if you just pray enough then you shouldn't have any problems, or at least you shouldn't have the problems that you really are having with your family, your job, with you anger, your depression. It is very clear that the reason why you are having financial problems is you didn't give enough.

When I'm thinking about following a leader, I want to know, "Leader, do you live in the same world I do?"

Preacher, do you live in the same world I do? Because the world I live in is a world full of mystery, in which bad things happen to good people. I live in a world in which parents can abuse physically, emotionally, and sexually. Parents can abuse their children. I live in a world in which 21 year old boys, who are honorable, can get accidentally killed in helicopter crashes in Iraq, and young moms of three kids can lose their lives to drunken drivers. I live in a world in which babies die for no apparent reason.

And I want to know, leader, do you live in the same broken, fallen world that I do? Do you live in a world, leader, where you can't always fit all the pieces together? A world that the kingdom of this world has not yet become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ?

Preacher, do you guarantee healing? Do you guarantee success? Do you guarantee a fulfilling job or protection from crime, if I just follow a certain formula? Do you guarantee Christians lives that are easy? Christian lives that follow formulas?

Loving fathers and loving mothers don't only love God's Word, loving fathers and mothers love their children and they know their children intimately. You see, loving dads and mothers seek to understand their children. They know their children. They know their children intimately. They pick up on shifts in mood and behavior. Loving dads and moms are constantly asking the question: what makes my child tick? What motivates them? I want to know them. I want to understand them.

It always broke my heart, as my kids were growing up, to find myself in a place where I felt like I didn't know them, or understand them. Love seeks an intimate knowledge of the beloved. A loving spouse wants to know, wants to understand their mate. A loving friend wants to know what is really going on in the life of their friend.

God, your father, knows you intimately. It says in Acts 1:24:

> Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart."

Jesus is the heart knower. And leaders worth following are heart knowers. You have a sense around leaders: This person knows me. This person understands me.

It was out of this love and understanding that a parent brings correction to their children.

> Preach the Word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct…

Literally, the word is better translated "rebuke," the same word used in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking…"

From time to time a loving and understanding parent needs to get in their child's face concerning a certain attitude or behavior. Loving parents love enough to confront. In today's world, of course, we really struggle with the connection between love and confrontation. Mark Sullivan, who heads up our counseling center, came to a group that my wife, Marlene, and I lead on Thursday nights here at the church for parents of prodigal children. Mark made the very insightful point that parents today feel terribly guilty, when we confront, get angry, or raise our voices, when we get in our children's faces. Parenting books today tell you to always be perfectly calm, to show perfect self-control, to never scream. Your kid is allowed to go crazy. Your kid is allowed to be a disrespectful snot. You parents must field everything your kids throw at you, or throws up on you, with total grace.

Listen, God doesn't stop being a God of love when he rebukes us from heaven. Hebrews 12:5 says this:

> And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons, my son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son [and I'll add in daughter].

Rebuking, correcting, is simply the hard side of love. And any leader worth following is willing from time to time to not accommodate bad behavior, or bad attitudes. And by the way, I think correction and rebuking is part of a deep friendship. When you pick up a really bad attitude in a friend, they are becoming really cynical, or being really critical of a church or person, challenge them.

And a leader mixes correction with encouragement. There's an old saying that a pastor is called to afflict the comfortable and to comfort the afflicted. Paul says:

> Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.

People come to church with lots of heartache. A woman may be broken-hearted because her boyfriend broke up with her. A student may be broken-hearted because they didn't get into graduate school. A middle-aged couple may be struggling because they have to care for an elderly parent, who is physically or mentally declining. Someone else may be hurting because they've been laid off and their self-esteem is taking a beating.

Real people come to church with gnawing doubts. Does God really answer prayer? Does God really hear you? You pray and pray, but nothing ever seems to change. In fact, sometimes when you've prayed, things seem to get worse, not better. Does God still heal? We hear stories about healing, but some of you have never seen a healing for yourself, or at least never seen a healing through you. Does God still work miracles? Does God still save, even really hard people, stubborn people, apathetic people, rebellious people – people like some of the folks in your own family. Does God still save really lost people?

Many people struggle with anxiety. Anxiety, if not the #1 problem in America, has to be the #2 problem in America, after depression. You may be anxious about your health, anxious about retirement, anxious about having enough to live on, anxious about your teenager or your child. You may be anxious and discouraged because you are single. And when you are with your married friends, or in a small group with lots of couples, you feel like 5th wheel, you feel out of place in lots of settings. You feel unnecessary. You are acutely aware a lot of times of being without a partner, someone to help you put up wallpaper, or watch a video with, or just hang out for a cup of coffee with, or go to a bookstore with.

Some of you are single and in your 30's and 40's. And I know that you dread going to extended family gatherings because you just know what people are saying: "What do you think the problem with her is? She seems normal." "He seems normal and nice enough."

We fear the whispers are, "Do you think the problem is sexual? It doesn't seem like that." "Do you think that he is just too picky?" "Do you think they send out bad vibes that the opposite sex picks up?"

And you just want to scream, "Darn it! I'm normal. I really am. I'm smart. I have a great job, or at least a good enough job. I have a really good sense of humor. I'm really funny, except when I'm around you people. Then I'm depressed. But normally, I'm really funny. I just haven't found a spouse yet, really. I've tried. I really have. I mean it. I've really tried."

See, leaders like good moms and dads encourage people. Literally, they put courage in folks. They say, "I understand what it feels like to be around non-believers who don't share your faith all day long. But you can do it. You can persevere. You don't have to collapse into self-pity and cynicism. You can keep

going and not give up. You can live the Christian life." See, a leader worth following understands that God's Word is designed to shatter the hard-hearted, and to serve to comfort the broken-hearted, and to strengthen the faint-hearted.

What should you look for in a Christian leader? Paul says:

> For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations. Endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Paul says, "Do the work of an evangelist," he is telling leaders literally, "Preach the good news." Do not try to be Billy Graham, or try to be a street preacher. Share the good news. The Good News is not going to be found in the newspaper or on the evening news. The Good News is not going to be found as you listen to politicians vying to be president. You'll find spin there. You'll find carefully crafted messages. But you aren't going to find the Good News. You aren't going to find the Good News in self-help literature, or in another person.

We find the Good News in Christ. Christ is the content of the evangelist's message. Christ is the content of the Good News we speak. The Good News is that God has finally acted in Christ, to do what you and I can't do, to free the world from its slavery to sin, to rescue us from damnation, to reconcile us to himself, to adopt us into his family as sons and daughters, to empower us to live better lives, to overcome the power of death, and to secure for us a place in his eternal kingdom.

The Good News is found in Christ, in Christ's sinless life, in Christ's sacrificial death, in Christ's resurrection, his ascension, and his second coming.

And now, the Good News is that you and I can have meaning and purpose now and forever, if we respond in faith and repentance.

Everyone in America it seems is talking about the movie, The Passion. It is on every news show. It is on the front page of the newspaper. I'm actually going to do a series for Lent on the Passion of Christ. I'll be finishing up the gospel of John that I started last year. I moved away from it, and now I'm going to finish it up. So starting next week, I'll be doing a series on The Passion of Christ, leading up to Easter. If you have friends who are interested in hearing about The Passion, invite them out.

But critics and moviegoers are weighing in on all sides. I've read their remarks in the paper and seen people interviewed. Some people found the movie too violent. A pastor in town said he wasn't put in touch with God's love through this

movie. He couldn't find God's love. A Bible scholar wondered why there would be a movie about the Cross anyway. Why not focus on Jesus' teachings? This particular scholar doubts the historicity of the Cross altogether. The Anti-Defamation League felt that the movie was anti-Semitic. My last congregational email concerned that. You can find my own perspective in The Mix that is being handed out this week.

Some people felt that the movie definitely caused them to more deeply meditate on and appreciate Christ's suffering. Particularly coming from a Protestant orientation, we tend to rush from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday and not stop at Good Friday. Most folks from a Protestant tradition do not meditate deeply on the sufferings of Christ. In the Protestant tradition, we have an empty Cross. Catholics, of course, use a crucifix. There is more emphasis on the brutal suffering of Christ.

The point is, this movie has been subjected to a hundred different opinions and a hundred different judgments. But you see, this is the way the world treats Christ. The world is constantly judging Christ. Some people are downright hostile. They rail against Christ. They hate the mention of his name.

Other people are uncommitted. They never clearly declare themselves for or against Christ. Other people are confused. Some people are ignorant. They really don't understand the message.

Christ is constantly on trial before the world. And it is the leader's job to act as a witness to what God has done in Christ. Do the work of an evangelist. Christ is on trial. Your job, leader, is not to be the defense attorney for Christ. That's the Holy Spirit's job. Your job is simply to be a witness for the defense. Think of your job, as I've been talking about extending the faith, in a courtroom sense. Christ is on trial and your job is to be a witness in defense of Christ as the world is judging him, before the day when Christ judges the world.

Well, the job of the evangelist is not primarily to talk about themselves, but to talk about Christ. So many testimonies are sometimes exercises in narcissism. Let me share with you for 20 minutes how awful I was, the fifty terrible things I did and then I found Christ, and let me tell you about me now. The evangelist points to Christ. The evangelist says, "Good news is found in Christ."

You may feel utterly disconnected from God. You may want a relationship with God, but it feels like God is a million miles away.

Good news, the evangelist shouts. Christ has done everything necessary for you to connect with God. You can now confidently come to God, because Christ has removed the barriers that existed between you and God, namely your sin. Your family may be dysfunctional. You may have grown up in a broken home. Your parents may be divorced. You may never have known your dad or your mom.

Good news, through Christ you can be adopted into a new family. You don't have to be a member of a dysfunctional family any more. You can be adopted into a new family – God's family. And God will be your Father. Christ will be your older brother. And Christians will be your brothers and sisters.

You may be an addict. You may be addicted to drugs or alcohol. You may have an eating disorder. You may be addicted to sex, or work. Good news, you can be set free from your slavery to sin through the redemption that is in Christ. Christ died to buy people out of slavery.

You may be successful and empty. You constantly have a gnawing feeling that something is missing in your life. Good news. You can live a life of meaning and purpose. Jesus said, "I came that they might have life and have it to the full."

You may have an incurable disease. You may have cancer or heart disease. We all, by the way, have an incurable disease. It's called aging. We're all in the process of dying and we will all die whether by natural causes, or by an accident or disease, if Christ doesn't first return. Good news, for the dying. Jesus said in John 11:25:

> I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies.

We can live forever.

You may have wrecked your life by your own bad choices. You may have continually chosen wrong boyfriends, girlfriends, or escapes. Your bad choices may not only have hurt you, but other people. You may have hurt your own children, your parents, or your friends, or your mate. You may have spent decades living in the proverbial pigpen. Good news, the evangelist says, you can be entirely forgiven and welcomed into God's family, according to Jesus' story. Every prodigal who comes to their senses, who sees the truth and decides to leave the pigpen and head for the Father through Christ, will be welcomed by God, forgiven and cleansed.

Christ is the content of the Good News.

What do you look for in a good leader? Someone who preaches Good News in Christ. What do you look for in a good leader? Someone who finishes well. Let's look at 2 Timothy 4:6-8, in closing:

> For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will appear to me on

> that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

What should you look for in a Christian leader? You should look for someone who is finishing well. Paul was in jail, facing capitol charges; he was about to be given over to a full Roman tribunal, where a death sentence would be handed down. History tells us that Paul was beheaded on the Ostian Way, probably around 68 AD.

Paul is anticipating his death and he uses some different images to describe his imminent death. He says:

> The time has come. I am already being poured out like a drink offering.

In the Old Testament, along with a sacrifice of an animal, an offerer might in addition pour out a cup of wine. It was a symbol of pouring out your all. Paul looks back on his life and he says, "I didn't hold anything back. I didn't give God my leftovers, my excess. I didn't give God a few crumbs off my table, and then ask God to bless every aspect of my life. I gave my all. I gave God my heart. I gave him my emotions, my mind, my time, my body, my energy, my money. I gave everything for Christ and the extension of his kingdom. Every ounce of strength, all I could muster. What I have done so many times, I am going to do one last time. I am about to be entirely poured out to the last drop."

John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard, used to say, "We are change in God's pocket." Paul is saying all the change is about to be spent.

Friend, do you see your life that way? Do you say regularly about yourself, "I'm just change in God's pocket. If he wants to spend me on this elderly relative, or on my disabled child, or in Christian missions, or on the poor, or on being a light at my job, which is a very dark place, that's God's prerogative. I'm just change in his pocket." Do you live with that reality? "Lord, just spend me."

Paul says he is about to depart. The image is that of a boat being untied and pushed away from the dock. It's like the end of the Lord of the Rings where Frodo and Gandalf and many of their friends get on the boat and push off the dock and sail off for eternity.

That's what Paul is saying, "My ship is pulling up anchor and I'm about to sail for heaven." Do you live with a sense that one day you will be hoisting anchor, departing for somewhere?

And then using two athletic metaphors he said:

> I fought the good fight, I finished the race, I kept the faith.

I have fought the good fight. Life is a fight. Contrary to 21st century American views, life is not meant to be easy. Life is not meant to be a day at the beach in a time-share on vacation. Life is not a walk in the park. That may be your day off. Life is a fight. Life is hard for the vast majority of people. Life is often unfair. Life often hurts.

And the Christian life, in particular, is a fight. It is a fight to discipline your emotions. It is a fight to break patterns of sin, if you want to be a follower of Christ. It is a fight to say "no" to yourself and "yes" to God and his will. And not every fight is a good fight. Most fights we engage in are bad fights. Marital disputes are usually bad fights. Church fights over the carpet color, style of worship, who gets what position. Usually church fights are bad fights.

Paul has fought the good fight. The fight to extend God's Kingdom, the fight to bring the message of salvation to the lost, to bring healing to the hurting, food to the hungry, financial help to the poor, and justice to the oppressed. Paul fought the good fight in breaking down racial barriers between Jews and Gentiles. Paul fought the good fight in breaking down barriers between men and women, between slaves and free people.

May I ask you a question? Are you involved in any bad fights right now? Stupid fights? Irrelevant and wasteful fights? Are you involved in any good fights?

Paul kept the faith. In other words, he remained faithful. He stayed true to the Lord. At the end of his life, he was still in love with Jesus Christ and in love with Christ's church. He hadn't grown bitter or cynical. He still wanted the will of God. His soul was burning with passion, even though his body was tired. His spirit was alive in Christ, as alive as it had ever been. He didn't spend his life burning bridges. He still loved people. He still had friends to the end.

And he kept the faith. He didn't change the message, or accommodate the message, or subtract from the message, or add to the message.

So, let me ask you a question. Are you on your way to finishing well? If life is a book, it contains a lot of chapters. You can tell if the book of your life is going to end well, by whether you finish each chapter well. Do you finish jobs well? Do you leave working hard to the last day, or have you left jobs a month before you physically left?

Do you leave churches well? Most people don't. Lots of people get a lot of blessing and help in a church, and then just leave. No thank you, no I want to go to this other church in order to be more useful to the king. Often people leave churches and they spit at the church as they leave. Do you leave churches well?

Whenever you close a chapter in your life, ask yourself, am I leaving well? Am I finishing well?

The apostle Paul was a great leader. He left instructions concerning how we in the church ought to lead. If you are looking for leadership, Paul tells you what to look for. If you are a leader, Paul tells you how to lead. Let's pray.

What To Look For In A Christian Leader

Rich Nathan
February 28-29, 2004
2 Timothy: Passing on the Faith Series
2 Timothy 4:1-8

I. A Preacher (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

A. The Preacher's Mindset (Verse 1)

B. The Preacher's Message (Verse 2)

II. A Father or Mother (2 Timothy 4:2)

A. A Parent's Love

B. A Parent's Knowledge

C. A Parent's Correction

D. A Parent's Encouragement

III. An Evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5)

A. Christ on Trial

B. Christ the Content

IV. A Person Who Finishes Well (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

A. The Sacrifice

B. The Departure

C. The Fight

D. The Race

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