

What Should I Do Today?

By Steve Burchett



After so often exhorting Timothy verbally and in written form over fifteen years or so, it's as if Paul summarized it all when he wrote this to his son in the faith: "As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5). Timothy could wake up each day, ask, "What should I do today?" and say, "Oh yeah, I've got to be sober-minded, endure suffering, evangelize, and do the ministry I've been called to."

We are not in the same situation as Timothy, Paul's apostolic assistant. Unless you serve as a

missionary or an assistant to a missionary, your answer to the question, "What Should I Do Today?" will look different than Timothy's. However, what he is called to do, in some ways, applies to any believer's life. Consider each command.

"Always be sober-minded."

A different translation says, "Keep your head in all situations" (NIV). Paul was urging Timothy, "Stay steady; remain calm; control yourself. Don't be distracted away from what is critical and guaranteed." One situation in which this was critical for Timothy was in dealing with false teachers. They needed to be rebuked, but they also could become all-consuming and gospel-suppressing. So Paul said things to Timothy like, "Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels" (2:23).

You may not have false teachers coming into your life. Still, you have to deal with conspiracy theories and a constant news cycle meant to stir you up, as well as possibly frustrating posts on social media that seemingly beg for a response (and another, and then another). Rise above it and ask, "Is this worth it? Am I too worked up about this? Do I really need to engage? Will it even matter? Might this keep me from denying myself and following Christ?"

"Endure suffering."

Paul was nearing the end of his life when he wrote 2 Timothy (see 4:6). He urged Timothy to keep advancing the gospel, but he was very clear that suffering was inevitable (1:8). The suffering Paul had in mind in 2 Timothy 4:5 was primarily persecution. However, Paul also mentions multiple times the pain of desertion. For example, multiple coworkers turned away from him (1:15; 4:10), and he was even deserted by every believer at his preliminary hearing in Rome (4:16). "Timothy," Paul says, "persevere through the inevitable trials ahead."

As I contemplated these two types of suffering — persecution and desertion — I asked, "Which one has hurt more in my life and ministry?" I quickly answered, "Desertion!" It's possible that if I

experienced harsher persecution, my answer would change, but I'm not so sure. They both really hurt, whether on the mission field or not. Expect them both. When the suffering comes, ask God for strength to endure and embrace Paul's eternal perspective: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom" (4:18).

"Do the work of an evangelist."

This doesn't mean Timothy was an evangelist in an official capacity, but that he was to do what an evangelist does — "preach the word" (v. 2). "Timothy, proclaim the good news! Keep on telling people about the person and ministry of Jesus." I'm sure the "work" also included building relationships with unbelievers with the aim of sharing the good news with them.

I've noticed a trend in reading biographies and autobiographies of missionaries: most, at some point, discuss distractions or disruptions that prevent them from fulfilling their initial burning desire on the mission field — proclaiming Christ. For example, when Don McClure was a young missionary in Sudan, he observed personality conflicts among the missionaries that led to an inability to even decide peacefully where to hold their Christmas dinner. "Life here is not one grand united effort to bring Muslims to the new life in Christ. We are all too human" (Charles Partee, *The Story of Don McClure: Adventure in Africa*, Zondervan 1990, pg. 38).

We need the reminder that everyone we engage who does not know Jesus is headed for hell. Therefore, even for 10 minutes on a lunch break, "Do the work of an evangelist."

"Fulfill your ministry."

"Timothy, give yourself fully to your calling. Do everything that the Lord has equipped you to do, and his Spirit will empower you to do. Fulfill your ministry."

Think about that word "your." We are each gifted by God and called to various ministries and responsibilities within the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12f) and in life. This does not mean that the person with a gift of administration is never supposed to stack chairs, but it does mean that he is to steward the gift God has given him for the benefit of the church. Fulfill *your* ministry. This kind of thinking simplifies our lives, unifies the church, and honors the Lord.

It is true that you are not identical to Timothy. You have to go to work tomorrow. Or take care of the kids. Or drive the bus. Yet, in another way, we can each wake up tomorrow and ask, "What should I do today?" and answer in part: "The Lord wants me to control myself no matter what happens, endure suffering, build relationships with the lost and tell them about Jesus, and do what he has called me to do."

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