

PAUL'S SWAN SONG

Looking Back—No Regrets

2 Timothy 4:6–8



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Herman Melville, author of *Moby-Dick*, was a man of regrets. Unlike his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne, literary fame and fortune eluded Melville. “Life is so short,” Melville wrote to his brother-in-law, “and so ridiculous and irrational (from a certain point of view) that one knows not what to make of it, unless—well, finish the sentence for yourself.”¹ Compared to the long history of humanity—to say nothing of eternity—each individual life is short, “just a vapor” (James 4:14). But the span of our lives, no matter how long they may be, need not lead us to Melville’s conclusion. Paul didn’t think life ridiculous or irrational—even with his head on the axman’s block. In one of the finest epitaphs found in literature, Paul celebrated life, without reservation, remorse, or regret.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Change of Subject

Paul dramatically shifted tone when he got to the sixth verse of the fourth chapter in 2 Timothy. Up to this point, Paul had repeatedly used the phrase *su de*—“but you,” referring to Timothy. From this point on, Paul focused on *ego*—“I.” The link between the two? “But as for you, Timothy, you must fulfill your ministry . . . for I have finished my ministry and I am at the point of death, and I now await my reward.”



Quotable

*The great thing
about the life
of the believer?*

*We have a future
that's far greater*

than any

earthly life

could be. And

it's eternal!

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. A Time to Reflect (2 Timothy 4:6–8)

Those who are older often have a lot of time on their hands and little to do with their hands. So, they reflect on times gone by. But reflection often reveals regrets. This wasn't true of Paul, however. In his prison cell, he had “free” time, but his reflections included no regrets—whether he looked at his present situation, his past experiences, or his future reward. To learn to live regret-free, let's look more closely at Paul's pattern of thought and action.

First, *Paul acknowledged the reality of his present situation* (2 Timothy 4:6).

Second, *Paul remembered the challenges of his past experiences* (4:7).

Third, *Paul claimed the assurance of his future reward* (4:8).



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LET'S LIVE IT

None of us live completely without regrets—there's always something we wish we had done or hadn't done. But regrets ought not encumber us. As William Shakespeare wrote:

Let us not burden our remembrance with
A heaviness that is gone.²

We can follow that good advice by asking and answering three questions.

First, *Have I acknowledged the reality of my present situation?*

Are you living your life as a sacrifice to God? What led you to answer the way you did? Be specific.

If death came today, would you be prepared? Explain.

Second, *When I remember the events of my past, are there regrets I need to address?*

What wrongs do you need to confess and ask forgiveness?



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What other regrets do you need to make right or take to the cross?

Third, *Can I claim the assurance of some future reward?*

The New Testament specifically mentions five rewards believers will receive. Mark which one(s) you might receive when you stand before Jesus.

Crown	Reference	Meaning	You?
Imperishable	1 Corinthians 9:25	Self-discipline over the flesh	
Rejoicing	1 Thessalonians 2:19	Evangelism/Discipleship	
Righteousness	2 Timothy 4:8	Longing to see Christ	
Life	James 1:12	Faithfully endure suffering	
Glory	1 Peter 5:1–4	Faithful as an elder or pastor	

ENDNOTES

1. Herman Melville, as quoted in Nathaniel Philbrick, *Why Read Moby-Dick?* (New York: Viking, 2011), 127.
2. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 5.1.199, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1994), 1157.



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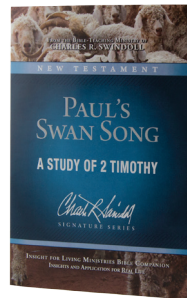
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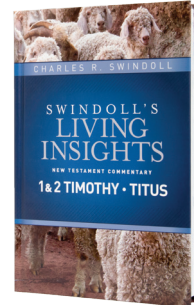
Tools for Digging Deeper



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