

Man, Don't Walk Alone—Romans 16:21—6/16/2013

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Happy Fathers' Day again today to you men who are fathers!

And happy manhood today to you men and boys of all ages in a culture that generally rejects biblical gender roles.

Since biblical manhood and womanhood are so passionately under attack, I'm thankful to honor Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day.

I often do so with a message on parenting or marriage or mothering or fathering or biblical roles or some related issue.

This year I want to do the same thing with some thoughts that apply to men of all ages but also raise areas of application for women and girls.

To remind us of the importance of these issues, let me admit that I have never and can never birth a baby, nurse a baby, have a menstrual cycle or numerous other feminine functions.

I cannot because I am a man—I am the male gender of the human race and that is how God created me.

As a complement to me, God created the female gender and specifically gave me my wife to complete the abilities I lack physically, physiologically, emotionally, socially and more.

Let me tell you—and others can tell you too—that even if you don't like me now, you would have liked me far less before Melanie began having significant influences on me and my relationships.

Since God knew I needed a lot of help, He graciously gave me an exceedingly wonderful helper in my wife Melanie.

And God's glorious design for us by His grace is that we are not in competition with each other to take the role of the other one.

She's not designed to be the protector & provider & leader and I'm not designed to be the nurturer & helper & homemaker.

She is far better at her role than I ever could imagine being and everyone knows it, especially my kids.

And we treasure the joyful wisdom in how God designed us.

Of course, we are not sinless & we live in a fallen world & so we don't experience God's design perfectly all the time just as every one of us is touched by brokenness and failings at some level.

But I want to remind you of the obvious fact that God made humanity male & female as equal persons with different roles.

We can turn to Scriptures that highlight the different priorities for men and women, but I've done that before.

Today I raise the basic biblical complementarian position—that men and women are equal but different, simply to remind you that it is under attack.

And when it is under attack, so is our view of the Gospel that has Jesus leading, providing, protecting the church as His bride that submits, trusts, & follows Him.

And so is our biblical view of God who has equal persons with different functions within the Trinity.

If you don't think this is under attack, think how welcome these truths would be in a business meeting or news editorial or even on a conservative news channel and you may feel some fear to speak up.

Yet realize that the loneliness & selfishness & distrust & abuse & other ailments of our culture are transformed in the blessings of Gospel-motivated living in biblical complementarianism.

So if we love God and people, we will not retreat from proclaiming, and celebrating God's wise, loving design of male and female.

It may soon be taboo or even illegal to use the word father and mother because they highlight obvious gender distinctions.

And lobbies and agendas are being pushed in our society to eliminate all such talk in order to suppress these obvious truths.

So be thankful today to say, "Happy Fathers' Day" and rejoice over the important role of fathers and mothers in the lives of children and the church and society.

Be thankful and yet be ready for reactions or attacks against you.

One way to be ready is to realize that we are not alone as men and women and boys and girls who love the Bible and seek to live the biblical design of manhood and womanhood.

We are not alone and we gain strength from our fellowship together.

Men are especially tempted to be alone, to feed the pride of self-sufficiency and to isolate or insulate ourselves from others getting too close.

Boys—what I mean by that is that you need to guard against thinking you are so tough that you don't share with others how you feel.

You need to realize that being strong does not mean being too cool to care about others or to show anyone that you care.

I mean we need to take time to talk and learn to open up with your parents & church leaders to think through what you do and why and what God wants for you and how you can change.

And girls and ladies—these principles apply to you as well, but generally you are wired to live them more readily.

Of course, I've seen a fair share of pride-protecting, closed-up, isolated ladies too, so this is not merely a message for men.

But generally here on Fathers' Day, I thought we'd note a timely reminder from our study in Romans not to walk alone.

Man—do not walk alone.

Don't try it—don't hide and assume you look good on the outside so you can not admit your issues and not seek help.

We get that main point from the next verse in our study of Romans as we look at the Apostle Paul's example.

So we'll start there and then I'm going to develop the theology and practice of this principle a bit like I did last week in developing a biblical theology of the devil.

As I move through the grammar and context of verses, sometimes these topics come up in the text and warrant more expansion.

So this week—especially on Fathers' Day, I thought it helpful to highlight Paul's example of not walking alone and expand on how to go about that.

I'm going to outline for you 3 steps to not walking alone that can help us develop the strengthening relationships we need as Christians.

This is especially directed to men, but it applies to ladies also.

Look with me at Romans 16:21-24 where we'll get started. [READ]

We've covered the greetings to people in Rome and the connected warning to protect those loving relationships and the promise of victory over the devil that will finally come.

And now we come to the greetings from Paul's traveling companions in Corinth as he wrote from there.

Paul sent greetings from Timothy, Lucius, Jason & Sosipater in verse 21 and then his scribe Tertius sent greetings in verse 22 and Gaius his host and others sent greetings in verse 23.

So let's just state the obvious implication of these verses that gives us today's title and main point—Paul did not walk alone.

Paul had companions who sent greetings, so he was not alone.

If you read Acts, Paul was generally not alone when he traveled and ministered in various places all across the Roman Empire.

And when he was alone, it was often for his own safety as he escaped persecution somehow.

Here as he wrote, Paul was helped by a host, supported by a scribe, and aided by others that he kept in his company.

We've noted that before in our look at Phoebe and others he greeted in Romans 16, but here it comes up again in those he mentions as sending their greetings.

And in God's providential timing for us, this point in this verse comes up on Fathers' Day.

So I want to expand our thoughts from this point with applications of how we can follow the Christ-like example set by the Apostle Paul that we find here.

And by the way, it is ultimately like Jesus not to walk alone, isn't it?

Even in the Lord Jesus' perfect humanity, He was not alone.

Crowds followed Jesus, but He also gathered the 12 disciples around Him and He had a closer inner circle of the 3—James, John, and Peter.

So Paul was following Jesus' example in this.

And I know this is not rocket science or deeply profound theological intricacies that I'm sharing today.

I expect you to know this, but I also expect that it's a reminder that I need and it's probably also a reminder you need.

So here's a 1st point how not walk alone as we learn from what led Paul to this point of sending greetings from his ministry companions.

How did Paul as a single man and an elevated Apostle who was personally sent out by Jesus Himself get to this place?

#1—he welcomed spiritual brothers to work with him and that gives us a 1st application step today of 3 steps of how to not walk alone.

Step #1—welcome spiritual brothers to work with you.

We could say that all Christians should welcome spiritual brothers and sisters to work with you in life and ministry.

But in our focus on males here on Fathers' Day, we'll say #1, to welcome spiritual brothers to work with you.

The only way to stop being alone is to welcome others into your life and the responsibilities and ministries where you serve.

Welcome others into your life and what's going on in it.

When Paul was first saved he became immediately involved with other disciples, though Acts 9 tells us he was not welcomed by all.

When he was not trusted because of his background, Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and vouched for his conversion and resultant ministry.

So Paul knew the value of a brother who would stand with you.

Then in Acts 11, that same Barnabas was chosen together with Paul by the church at Antioch to deliver a gift to Jerusalem.

And later in Acts 13 that church chose Barnabas and Paul as their first missionary team to be sent out.

So Paul—or Saul as he was called earlier in Acts—learned early the value of ministry companions from Barnabas and those who welcomed him and affirmed him and sent him out.

It's interesting that Romans 16:21 mentions a man named Lucius, who may be the Lucius of Cyrene that was at the church in Antioch that sent Paul and Barnabas out.

Lucius is described as Paul's kinsmen or countryman along with Jason & Sosipater, meaning he was ethnically a Jew so he may not be the Lucius of Cyrene.

Several times in Romans Paul used that term to describe fellow Israelites or Jews, so it's not clear if Lucius of Cyrene is this Lucius.

Since that's true, this Lucius is likely not a variant of Lukas, whom we know as the author of the Gospel of Luke.

So the Lucius of Romans 16:21 is either the Lucius of Cyrene from Antioch or a man not known otherwise from the NT.

As for Jason, it seems more likely that we can identify him as one of the first converts of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica.

We can't know for certain, but a Christian named Jason is mentioned in Acts 17:5-9 as hosting Paul and being persecuted for it.

We also can't be sure who Sosipater is, though we have a clue.

Sosipater is a longer version of Sopater and a Berean named Sopater is mentioned in Acts 20:4 as accompanying Paul in travel.

So he may have been with Paul as he wrote from Corinth.

That's as much as we know about Paul's kinsmen Lucius, Jason & Sosipater in Romans 16:21 who greet the Christians in Rome.

But we know much more about the first one mentioned.

We know much more about Paul's fellow-worker Timothy in verse 21.

As we've said before, that term fellow-worker pictures getting into the yoke of labor together to pull in the same direction with the companionship and added strength of labor together.

Timothy was Paul's co-laborer in that way.

But before we say more about Timothy and how he became Paul's co-laborer, let's reiterate this first application we learn from the Apostle Paul's example in Romans 16:21.

Step #1 to not walking alone: welcome spiritual brothers to work with.

Some of these were new converts who joined Paul, but they had something to offer in joining the team to serve together.

Paul recognized that and he knew his need for others alongside of him and so he welcomed these brothers into the work with him.

Maybe Jason was this man who proved to be great host in Thessalonica who sacrificed his safety to provide for Paul.

We don't know, but we do know that Paul did not consider these brothers as insignificant because he mentioned them here.

The letter had apostolic authority because Paul wrote it, not because these other guys added greetings, but the Holy Spirit was sure to include these guys too.

And we want to learn from that.

What are you doing to welcome other Christians into your life?

I know it's messier to have others involved and it can sometimes fail.

I know it often seems easier to do it all by yourself—but that's usually not the NT pattern for a life of ministry.

So what are you doing to reach out and get others involved in the ministries you are serving in?

How are you working to connect in relationships and care about others and do the hard work of building friendships?

How open are you to share what you are facing and ask for counsel and prayer and to live like honesty is better than hiding?

Or if you are newer or younger in the faith or the church & don't know how to get involved, can you ask for direction?

What do you see that you could take initiative to help with?

We need one another—we were created and redeemed to live in community with other Christians.

The Christian life is not to be attempted alone and we could list a host of NT commands to practice with one another to further prove this.

But I think you know the basic point.

The question is whether you are going to obey the basic point—are you going to do anything to welcome others into your life & ministry?

Many of you are doing so already and I thank God for you and trust God will flourish your fellowship & ministry partnerships.

And I pray you will continue to do so with the next step we note today.

We said #1 to welcome spiritual brothers to work with.

Now #2—seek spiritual sons to mentor.

Again we can broaden this and refer ladies to Titus 2 to see the importance of mentoring younger women no matter your age.

How desperately needed are the older women of Titus 2 who mentor younger women to love their husbands and children and to live their biblical priorities of home and ministry!

So this certainly applies to men, women, boys and girls.

And yes, young people, this applies to you because there is always someone younger than you that you can be a blessing to.

There is always someone younger you can be a good example to and love and serve in your family & in church & outreach.

Your influence as a boy or girl or teen or single is far greater than you realize if you open your eyes and care about people around you.

But today on Fathers' Day, I especially want to remind myself & men to take this 2nd step & seek spiritual sons to mentor.

And I get that point from Paul's example with Timothy.

Paul's mention of Timothy in Romans 16:21 makes me want to be sure you understand their relationship and how it models much of what Paul even wrote in his NT letters to Timothy.

So let's talk about Paul and Timothy a bit by starting in Acts 16 where we first find mention of Timothy in the NT when Paul met him.

Follow along with me as I read Acts 16:1-3. [READ]

Apparently Timothy was already a disciple when Paul met him and Timothy's mother was already a faithful believer.

In 2nd Timothy 1:5, Paul mentioned Timothy's mother Eunice & grandmother Lois as having sincere faith that was passed on.

His mother had Jewish heritage though his father was Greek and it's probable that his father was dead by this time by the way he's noted.

Paul realized Timothy had a good reputation even as a young believer of late teens or early twenties & so he welcomed him.

It seems that Timothy went along for the ride from here though he's not mentioned being thrown in jail with Paul and Silas later in Acts 16.

But Paul circumcised Timothy so he could gain access to synagogues as not rejecting his Jewish heritage and that was important as Paul's ministry often began in city synagogues.

And Timothy must have learned as he went along because we find him left in Berea with Silas after Paul was taken away in Acts 17.

Later in Acts 18:5, Silas and Timothy return and then in Acts 19:22, Timothy and Erastus were described as two who served Paul whom he sent them to Macedonia as his representatives.

So it seems that Timothy increased in ministry responsibility as he learned and proved his faithfulness over the journeys.

Then read what Paul said about Timothy in 1st Corinthians 4:17 in sending Timothy to Corinth as Paul's example to them.

After urging them to imitate his ways, read what Paul wrote in 1st Corinthians 4:17—1st Corinthians 4:17. [READ]

Timothy was Paul's beloved and faithful child in the Lord who would remind them of Paul's ways in Christ.

Timothy would represent Paul just as Paul had represented Christ, not only in example but also in what he taught.

In other words, Timothy "got it" and he could pass it on—both in life and in doctrine and that made him an incredible asset and ministry partner to Paul.

And that's probably why Paul included Timothy along with Silas as co-authors in writing his 2nd letter to the Corinthians and referring to the preaching they received from all three of them.

Timothy is also mentioned along with Silas as coauthors to Paul's two NT letters to the Thessalonians.

You can read 1st Thessalonians 3:1-6 to see that the timing & reason for writing that letter was because Paul was concerned about that new church and sent Timothy to check on them.

When Timothy returned to Paul with a good report about the Thessalonians, then Paul sat down to write with delight.

That's the kind of responsibility Timothy grew into having and the kind of trust Paul had in Timothy's assessment.

Timothy is also mentioned as a co-author by Paul in his letters to the Philippians and Colossians and to Philemon.

So it's no wonder Paul gave the glowing words about Timothy that we can read in Philippians 2:19-23 so turn there.

Follow along as I read Philippians 2:19-23. [READ]

Paul mentions Epaphroditus as a faithful brother later in this chapter so it's not like Timothy was the only one Paul considered faithful.

But Timothy had the peak level of trusted faithfulness and proven love for people and certain unity with Paul's heart.

So God had crafted a special relationship for the 2 powerful NT letters from Paul to Timothy that are timeless treasures of pastoral wisdom!

Paul had left Timothy in charge as the pastor at the beloved church at Ephesus where Paul had spent 3 years and where Acts 20 tells us they all wept when he left them.

And he wrote the NT letters to Timothy that we have as a record of how to conduct church life and how to be a pastor.

2nd Timothy is even Paul's dying letter to this true son in the faith, this man who had become Paul's beloved son though Paul was never married and never fathered biological children.

So it's hard to underestimate the impact that Timothy had on churches of his times & on churches since then through what's written in the NT stemming from his relationship with Paul.

And it all started with Paul picking this faithful young man in Lystra to join him in his ministry travels and labors.

We find later in Hebrews 13:23 that Timothy persevered in faithfulness even in going prison and being released.

And this all started by God's grace when the Apostle Paul modeled this point to seek spiritual sons to mentor.

So realize the reward and lasting impact you can have through those you lovingly take along with you in life and ministry.

Realize that some you invest in will fail and disappoint you.

Demas loved this present world & deserted Paul & Mark disappointed Paul before being restored & requested as useful in Paul's dying letter.

Every investment is a risk in that way—you may care for someone and have it not turn out like you wanted.

You may choose to mentor someone and God may bring you great sorrow from it as part of His plan to grow you.

And that may prepare you to be a far better mentor the next time because you control less tightly and pray more fervently and communicate more clearly.

There's always a risk of being hurt or even betrayed.

But the risk is worth the reward and staying self-absorbed is never fulfilling anyway.

And it's certainly not obedient to Jesus who gave Himself for us.

So let's learn from the Apostle Paul's example to seek spiritual children to mentor.

Men and ladies—seek those to train & pray for & love & shepherd & involve in ministry and give opportunities to learn and fail and grow.

That's such an important part of our concept of church life too because we're tempted to think that everything needs to be performed perfectly and come off as slick and shiny.

But the only way to grow is to try and then to learn from what went well and what did not go well.

That's why it was a treat to have our junior & senior high students share and serve us for two Sunday evening services.

It gave them a ministry opportunity that stretched them and allowed them to learn and grow.

And that should always be part of church life in visible and invisible ways as we cultivate discipleship.

We can do that with teens and we can do it with adult believers no matter how long you have been a Christian.

We can mentor and be mentored.

It doesn't have to be formal or programmatic.

We can do so informally through life and ministry together as we share what's going on and what we're learning and what we're facing and we can provide mutual discipleship.

It doesn't even have to be all one-sided because we can all learn from each other no matter how long we've walked with Christ.

But the way to start it is to realize we need it & seek it.

Man, don't walk alone.

Instead, (1) welcome spiritual brothers to work with you; and (2) seek spiritual sons to mentor.

That's what we learn from the Apostle Paul's example in Romans 16:21 with Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, and especially Timothy.

But let me close with a final point that I'll extend as a Fathers' Day application from what the relationship of Paul & Timothy implies should be normal for fathers.

The implication of Paul calling Timothy his true son in the faith and his beloved son and the model example of his Christ-likeness to others is simply this—fathers, you need to disciple your children.

So as a 3rd point to close with—treasure the trust of fatherhood—#3—treasure the trust of fatherhood.

Timothy was not Paul's son, but the illustration fit because he learned so much from Paul that he could stand in for Paul in life and doctrine.

Do you understand what that teaches us to expect of fathers?

Your children should learn so much from you that they can basically substitute for you in displaying how to live and what to teach.

They may not have the same gifts or calling & they will not be exactly like us in every way, but our job as fathers is to impart truth & Christian living so clearly that our kids can copy us.

And since the other implication here is that sons are like their fathers—and kids are like their parents—then we should also examine what our kids are like to learn about ourselves.

We should check out the tendencies and temptations of our kids to see how those same issues exist in our lives.

Of course, that's not always true and every kid is responsible for his or her own choices and parenting is not deterministic and kids don't always embrace what their parents live & teach.

But this illustration does remind us to check what we're like.

And this illustration especially gives us a reason to consider what and how we are teaching our children.

What is your family devotional time like?

What are you reading in the Bible with your kids & how are you preparing them for Sunday School & for sermons and then reviewing & applying those truths with them?

The most precious and powerful mentoring relationship should ideally be from parents to children—and that starts with Dads.

Children grow up so fast—I'm sure you've all noticed that I have a son taller than me now—so we dare not waste a day.

To not walk alone, #1—welcome spiritual brothers to work with you; #2—seek spiritual sons or children to mentor; and #3—treasure the trust of fatherhood.

Pray with me that those reminders will help us at every stage of life.