

THE NEED TO GET PERSONAL

2Timothy 4:9-22 • Faith Community • 11/26/23

Intro: Dr. Lillian Rubin, noted psychotherapist and author, in her book, “Just Friends: The Role of Friendships in our Lives” identifies friendship as “the most neglected social relationship of our time.” The statistics are staggering: People who isolate themselves from others, who have no friends, have 2-3x the risk of early death, regardless of whether they smoke or exercise regularly. Cancer strikes isolated people more often than those who have close ties with others. Pregnant women without supportive relationships have 3x the time of complications as do pregnant women w/equal stress but stronger personal relationships. She notes that a mobile, impersonal society where the smartphone is king, divorce is rampant and the family unit is much less defined intensifies the need for positive human relationships. Her contention: [“People who need people are among the healthiest people in the world.”] (SD Tribune, 9/27/85) [x]

•And if anyone ought to have great relationships, if anyone ought to enjoy deep and healthy friendships, it ought to be us who have responded to the Gospel. Think of it: when we admitted our sins and failures, and put our whole trust in what Christ did—in His taking our place and paying for our guilt with his death, He made us right with God. He opened the door to a relationship with God that is secure and will never end! And not only that, but He adopted us into His family, and made us citizens of His kingdom—so that we now have not only a personal relationship with God, but the potential of meaningful personal relationships with all others who share His Spirit. People matter. You matter. And believe me, we all have a need to get personal with each other. The Gospel demands it. You can see it in these final few paragraphs of Paul’s letter.

•Despite all the trouble and frustration and hardship and suffering that has filled Paul’s life, now on death row, he is remarkably upbeat. We find him planning for the future, still wanting to learn & to read the Scriptures, and to make contact and amends with others. This is a life filled w/relationships—with others, and w/the Lord. Mentions 18 people by name! In this final few paragraphs of 2Timothy, we hear Paul get personal. I want us to listen in to his last words, and draw four practical insights about people:

I. A CALL FOR HELP!

4:9-13

A. WHAT? COME! (vs. 9)

Do your best to come to me soon.

Why *soon*? Two reasons: 1) Winter was approaching when the sea lanes would be too treacherous to navigate, the passes would be snowbound, and travel would grind to a halt. This was late fall, and if Timothy didn’t start right away, he’d miss the window of opportunity to travel, and would have to wait until a later time,

perhaps spring. And time is something Paul knew he didn't have. 2) He was facing execution; though no date was set, it was imminent. He had days or weeks left, but probably not months. So why *Timothy*? At one time, Paul was Timothy's mentor, but over time, they became co-workers, and fast friends. At the beginning of this letter (1:2), he calls him "my dear son" —referring to his longstanding and committed relationship with the young man. Still, he had more on his mind than merely a last visit to say goodbye:

B. WHY? I'M ALONE AND NEED HELP. (vss. 10-11a, 12)

vs. 10-11a: **For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me.**

vs. 12: **Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.**

- Many who teach this passage suggest that because everyone was gone, Paul was lonely and simply wanted company. However, I don't think this is about loneliness at all, for a couple of reasons: 1) He wasn't really alone: "Only Luke is w/me." If this is about companionship, how would this make Luke feel? "What am I—chopped liver?" 2) If loneliness is the key, why in the world did he send people elsewhere? No—something more is going on here. Let's break it down: First, he says, "Demas deserted me..."

1. Demas: *the disappointing deserter*

- Who was this guy? He's mentioned in earlier letters: [Col. 4:14, Philemon 24/x] Obviously, he was one of Paul's inner circle, one of his trusted associates. He was with Paul during his first imprisonment, and had been for some time.

- The idea isn't just that he left Paul (which others did as well), but that he left him in the lurch; Paul was counting on Demas, and Demas dropped the ball and walked away. The separation wasn't just physical, it was emotional & spiritual.

- NB *why* he left: *because he loved this present world*. Remember that Paul promised that the Lord would give a crown of righteousness to "all who have loved his appearing" (4:8)? Well, Demas fell in love with something else—life on this side of the grave with all its pleasures and treasures. Paul is deeply disappointed in Demas. I don't want to be too hard on this guy; I don't think he renounced his faith, he just abandoned Paul. He probably grew tired of the hardships, the constant struggles, the lack of comfort, safety or freedom that most enjoyed. So he left. Where he went wrong is that he clearly had important responsibilities that he did not follow through on; he simply dropped the ball and walked away. With Demas gone, who would pick up the slack? Well, Paul says, "others are on assignment."

2. Others left on assignment. EG:

•Crescens according to tradition was a church-planter, whom Paul sent to *Galatia*.

•Titus, one of Paul's top troubleshooters, who had straightened out the mess on Crete was sent to *Dalmatia* (not where spotted dogs are bred; actually parts of present day eastern Europe.)

•Tychicus (vs. 12), who often delivered Paul's correspondence to individuals and churches, Paul sent to *Ephesus* where Timothy was. He went not only to deliver the letter but also to be the interim pastor of the church there while Timothy went to Rome to see Paul. So, Paul's inner circle of co-workers were all gone. All except one:

3. Luke, the Physician stays with Paul. Luke had been Paul's constant companion and attending physician for years. As old or older than Paul, and entrusted with Paul's health these final days, Luke had his hands full. Whatever Paul had in mind to do or direct, Luke was not an option to delegate to. He needed help. He needed others. So "*Timothy—come ASAP!*"

C. WHAT? "*BRING...*" (vss. 11b, 13)

(ss. 11b) **Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.**

(vss. 13) **When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.**

Three items on his list:

1. Mark—because he is "helpful to me in my ministry." You know his story? [Acts 12:12] The church in Jerusalem met in Mark's mother's home, so he had been exposed to Peter & the other leaders. Paul and Barnabas took him along on their first missionary journey, as a helper and to mentor him, but: [Acts 13:13]. Apparently, it was too much for him, and he deserted them and went home. Later, Barnabas wanted to give him another chance, but Paul felt like the young man had let them down and couldn't be trusted: [Acts 15:36-41]. The team split over it, and went separate directions. Was Barnabas successful? During Paul's first imprisonment, he wrote these words: [Col. 4:10]. Now, at the end of his life, and wanting very much to entrust to others key responsibilities, he turns to Mark. (Just the opposite of Demas who started well, and then in time, quit; Mark had quit early on, but in time, became useful. See why I think there's always hope—even for Demas? Who knows—maybe one of the things Paul intended to entrust to Mark was to go see Demas.) *A 2nd item on the list:*

2. My cloak—because winter is coming: The *cloak* was a thick, woolen poncho-like covering, which would have been welcome in that damp cistern serving as a holding cell for death-row prisoners, & all the more as winter approached. The reason he had left it w/Carpus in Troas (a port city), wasn't

because he forgot it, or had no more room in his bags, but because that's where he had been suddenly arrested, and given no time to gather his things before being taken into custody & transported to Rome. So his coat, and:

3. "My notes & Bible"—because I value them. The *books* (lit. biblia) were made of papyrus, the common paper of the day; some think they were his important documents (like his citizenship papers), or more likely his study notes, or even copies of some of the teachings and eyewitness accounts of Jesus. The "parchments" were made from the skins of animals (*membranas*, membrane), which were much more expensive than papyri, but also much more durable. Most think these were copies of portions of the OT. In other words, as Paul faced death, he wanted to expose himself again to those things that anchored the truth in his life—the Scriptures and his study of them. To have these things, he would need the help of others.

[*Insight: Despite some who will disappoint you, if you are to be useful to God, you must rely on others.*] If you rub shoulders with others long enough, they'll disappoint you. They'll let you down, drop the ball, say one thing and do another, and encourage a measure of mistrust in you. Don't get cynical. Don't stereotype everyone because of the negative impact of a few. Rely on others. *To do what?* To do more than you can. Give them responsibility. Ask them for their help to do what you can't. Turn them loose to help people whom you can't reach (like Mark going after Demas!) You need others if you are to be useful to God. *Paul turns from a call for help to:*

II. A WARNING TO HEED

4:14-15

(vss. 14-15) **Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.**

A. WHAT ALEXANDER DID: *Harmed Paul, opposed the Gospel*

- There are 3 people named Alexander in the NT—may or may not be the same person. One is a Jew mentioned in Acts 19 who tried to disassociate the Jews from Christians during a near riot; another is the heretic pointed out in 1Tim. 1 as a teacher who "shipwrecked people's faith" by doubting the resurrection. Then this guy. Some think all three were same guy, but I doubt it. *Alexander* as a name was as common as "David" is today, and the fact that his occupation is given is probably to distinguish him from others.

- So what did he do? Whatever it was, it *harmed Paul and opposed the message* of the Gospel. Most people suspect he was the reason Paul was targeted as a key Christian leader, and arrested, taken to Rome, thrown into this dungeon, and put on death row. Most likely, he went out of his way to misrepresent/slander Paul, undermine the truth of the Xian message.

B. WHAT TIMOTHY SHOULD DO: *Be on your guard around him*

•NB it doesn't say, "avoid him" or "give up on him" but *be on your guard* around him. The idea is that you don't trust him, and do suspect that if he has a chance, he'll hurt you too. Paul himself was an example of someone who hurt others before he himself believed in Christ: [Acts 22:4] Believers were wary of him, as they should have been, though Christ had other plans for him. [x] In any case, Timothy should watch out.

C. HOW PAUL SHOULD RESPOND: *Don't get even, but trust God.*

•Paul did not attempt to get even, but to trust that God would make things right. You familiar with this well-known prayer? [Serenity prayer modified] Paul's conviction is a bit different: [Rom. 12:17a, 19-21/x] What Alexander did merits judgment—and Paul rested in the fact that either Alexander would meet Jesus as Savior and the debt would be paid by Christ, or he would meet him as the Judge of all, and Christ would impose righteous justice for what the man did. Either way, Paul should trust God w/the outcome.

[*Insight: It is not wrong to identify and warn against those who oppose the Truth.*] Sometimes people get upset when we point out organizations or individuals (whether celebrities or people in our community) who oppose the Truth of the Gospel or seek to harm X's work. It's not wrong to warn others and name names. Paul did—time and again. Sometimes, it's important to get personal about those who seek to tear the church or the truth down.

III. A TESTIMONY TO CONSIDER

4:16-18

A. PAUL'S EXPERIENCE

1. ...with disappointment and forgiveness

(vs. 16) **At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!**

Upon coming to Rome, Paul would have had a quick preliminary hearing of the charges, something called an *primo action*, which Paul refers to as his *first defense*. This is when others individuals of significance to Rome (e.g. Roman citizens, or well connected people), would appear as character witnesses for the defendant. None of Paul's inner circle (like Luke) had yet reached Rome, and those who could have shown up to stand with Paul, got cold feet and stayed away: (1:15) **You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.**

Being a practicing Christian, remember, was outlawed. Being a primary leader of an outlawed group didn't bode well for him. I can only imagine how Paul must have felt, waiting for the hearing to begin, waiting for someone to show up who might stand with him, but no one did. It reveals his heart that he whispers this

prayer, his heart to forgive them when what they *didn't* do must have deeply disappointed him. BUT

2.with God's power and deliverance

(vs. 17) **But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.**

Lit. the Lord stood next to me and *infused me with strength*. When it came time to hear the character witnesses, and none were found (and I wonder if Alexander had anything to do with no one coming), then to hear Paul's defense, he stood, sensing that he was not alone, but feeling the invisible presence of Jesus next to him, and experiencing the supernatural strength to open his mouth and clearly, winsomely and fully testify to the truth of X's death and resurrection! The result was that all in the courtroom understood the gospel, and must have went out talked about it throughout the city.

• Sometimes these hearings went badly, and a man was quickly condemned and summarily executed. With no witnesses vouching for him, and an unpopular message, and with Alexander working against him behind the scenes, one would expect the worst. But, "*I was delivered from the lion's mouth.*" Paul isn't saying that he didn't get thrown to the lions in the Colosseum (a fate from which Roman citizens were exempt); nor does it refer to Caesar, or Satan; it really is a figure a speech, much like what we'd say, "I really dodged the bullet" (though no one actually shot at me); means, "I escaped a dangerous situation."

B. PAUL'S CONFIDENCE

(vs. 18) **The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him bve the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Paul expected the curtain to drop on his life very, very soon, so the escape he pictures isn't physical; but he is certain that up to and through death, Jesus will protect him from all evil, and usher him into the heavenly kingdom. He might have been thinking of the Lord's prayer: "and deliver us from evil, for yours is the kingdom...."

[*Insight: Though others may let you down, the Lord never will.*] Expect both. Some will disappoint you and let you down: forgive them. The Lord will never, ever do either. Count on Him. *The Letter ends with touching and personal notes:*

IV. PEOPLE TO CATCH UP WITH

(vs. 19-21) **Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Caludia and all the brothers.**

These last four verses are filled with references to others. You might be tempted to skip over them, thinking he's just wrapping up the letter w/some personal references, which mean little to us. You'd be right...and wrong. He is being very personal, but he expects it to say something to you: The last phrase (vs. 22), "*grace be with you*" —is *y'all*—plural! He expects others to be listening in to this public reading. NB:

A. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS:

- Who were *Priscilla and Aquila*? [Acts 18:2-3] They were a married couple sold out to the Lord. When Paul first arrived in Corinth, he was short of funds, discouraged with the less than stellar results of his ministry, and alone. This couple's trade was tentmaking, as was Paul's, so they invited him to join them, not only in the trade, but to stay in their home. Eventually, the church met in their home, and through the years were great supporters and a constant encouragement to Paul. [Rom. 16:4] Wow! [x]

- Onesiphorus, we met in chpt 1—the man who went out of his way to find and encourage Paul after he had been thrown into prison.

- Erastus held a prominent position in Corinth's city government [Rom. 16:23]. Archaeologists have found a block of stone in a paved square in ancient Corinth, w/the Latin inscription: "Erastus, commissioner of public works, bore the expense of this pavement." He used his own funds to improve his city. Pretty cool.

- Trophimus, an Ephesian, is mentioned twice elsewhere as a close confidant and trusted companion of Paul. Apparently, at the seaport of Miletus, Paul had to leave him because he was sick and couldn't travel. (Some Christians think that anyone sick should be healed—but the Apostle Paul, who saw and actually did his share of divine healings, didn't/couldn't heal his friend. Sometimes sickness is just part of this fallen world.)

- We know nothing else of *Eubulus*. *Pudens* was supposedly a Roman senator converted through Peter's ministry earlier. *Claudia* was the mother of *Linus*, who acc. to tradition went on to be one of the key leaders in the early church at Rome. To Timothy, he simply repeats, *Please come before winter sets in*.

- NB What is Paul doing? He's catching Timothy up on common friends! We care about others, and want to know what they're doing. And he longs to see his friend again in person. NB one more very important relationship:

(vs. 22): **The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.**

B. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD: this isn't a formality, but a blessing on Timothy. Let me paraphrase it: "What has carried me through these lonely and discouraging days, facing an approaching execution and death, is the near presence of the Lord. What I want for you is what I have experienced: His

closeness. His nearness. His presence. May you know it as I have known it." *That what I want...*

[Insight: *In the end, your relationships are what will matter most.*] You've heard me observe this before: As a pastor, I have been at the bedside of many people as they were dying. One of the mysteries I have noticed is that individuals seem to be able to "touch the brakes" —to retard or slow the process of dying for a short while if they have a strong enough reason. Want to see their grandson born. Want to see their daughter graduate. Hang on until the family gets there. Then, they go. But when people are dying, I've never heard them touch the brakes, and say, "Would you go get my golf clubs? Would you bring me those new shoes I snagged on Amazon? Would you grab my iPhone so I can check my email & update my schedule?" People touch the brakes...for people. It is in those final moments they want what matters most, and almost all say, "I want my family and friends."

Concl: Relationships are the stuff life is made of. People are what matters. Paul's last words echo in our hearts: Engage with others. *Get personal*. Even if it costs you. *Pray*