Paul's Friend List
Romans 16:1-27

INTRODUCTION: Hand me your phone, and I can tell you a lot about you. I don't need your photos or your search history. Just let me see your **contacts** and your recent calls. Show me who you text first with good news, who you call at midnight with bad news, and who you let go to voicemail, and I can just about tell you your future.

> **Charlie "Tremendous" Jones** said, *"You will be the same person in five years as you are today except for the people you meet and the books you read."*

Solomon said it first: **Proverbs 13:20** Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

> **Nothing can shape your future self any more effectively than the people you choose to associate with. Show me your friends, and I will show you your future.**

So what a gift this chapter is. After fifteen chapters of the deepest theology ever written, the Holy Spirit lets us scroll through Paul's friend list.

CONTEXT: **Tommy Nelson** says Romans *"starts so majestic and ends so common."*

Chapter 16 is the postscript, the P.S., on the letter, and most people skim it at best or skip it at worst. However, much of the reason Paul could write chapters 1-15 and they're included in the best-selling book of all of human history for TWO MILLENNIA is found here in his associates.

Look at the variety on this list:
- **35 names**: Phoebe in Cenchreae, 26 in Rome, and 8 who are with Paul in Corinth.
- **Ten women**, eight of them named, and almost every one praised for her work.
- **Jews and Gentiles**. Paul calls several "my kinsmen."
- **Slaves and Aristocrats**. Common slave names sit beside the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus.
- **Old saints and new converts**. Andronicus and Junia were "in Christ before me." Epaenetus was the first convert in Asia.

> What holds a list like that together? **Edward Donnelly** points out that one phrase appears **ten times** in sixteen verses: *"in the Lord"* or *"in Christ."* Paul's associates had almost nothing in common but Jesus. **And Jesus was enough.**

Paul's friend list is the practical application of his advice to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22 (ESV) 22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.
Romans 16 tells us…

1. Who to Run With (vv. 1-16)
2. Who to Run From (vv. 17-20)
3. What to Run To (vv. 21-27)

1. Who to Run With

Seventeen times in verses 3-16 Paul says **"greet."** And listen to how he describes them: "fellow **workers**," "**worked** hard," "**workers** in the Lord." Even Tryphaena and Tryphosa (v. 12), whose names mean something like "Delicate" and "Dainty," are called "workers in the Lord."

The word is *synergos*, where we get "synergy."

The **law of synergy** states that when two or more forces combine, their total effect is greater than the sum of their individual parts.

> **ILLUSTRATION: John Maxwell tells a** story about a horse pull in Canada. One horse pulled 9,000 pounds, another 8,000. Together you would expect them to pull 17,000 pounds. Not so! When teamed together, they pulled 30,000 pounds.
>
> **In his book The 21 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork, he said,** "*One is too small a number to accomplish greatness".* He said that no lone individual has achieved anything of value.
>
> - Frontiersman Daniel Boone had companions from the Transylvania Company as he blazed the wilderness trail.
> - Sheriff Wyatt Earp had his two brothers and Doc Holliday looking out for him.
> - Aviator Charles Lindbergh had the backing of 9 businessmen from St. Louise and the services of the Ryan Aeronautical Company, which built his plane.
> - Even the Lone Ranger wasn't really a loner… he had Tonto!
>
> **There are no spectators on this list.** Time won't let us meet them all, so let me introduce four.

a. Phoebe: A Sister Who Serves - Romans 16:1–2 (ESV)

1 I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a **servant** of the church at Cenchreae,

> Cenchreae was Corinth's eastern seaport, where Paul wrote this letter.

2 that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a **patron** of many and of myself as well.

> **Phoebe joins a long line of women the New Testament honors:** Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, who supported Jesus' ministry (Luke 8:1-3); the women at the cross and the empty tomb; Mary the mother of John Mark, whose home hosted the church (Acts 12:12); and Priscilla, Euodia, and Syntyche.

She is described as a SERVANT and a PATRON

- **"Servant"** is *diakonos*, the word that gives us "deacon." At times it means the office of Deacon, and at times it is used more generally of anyone who serves.

    - For example, it is used of the servants at the wedding in Cana (John 2:5)
    - Of the governing authority (Romans 13:4)
    - And of Christ Himself (15:8).

    It simply means a person who meets the needs of others. Combined with the second descriptor, Patron, it may give us some insight into the nature of Phoebe's impact.

- And **"Patron"** is *prostatis*, found only here in the New Testament; the word Patron means benefactor, so Phoebe was likely one of the people who underwrote Paul's gospel work.

So she met the needs of others as a DIAKONOS, and many of those needs were financial, as she is also described as a PATRON, or benefactor.

- Why is she **first on the list?** Almost certainly because Phoebe delivered the letter to Rome. There was no postal service for private citizens. If our church had written the most important letter in history, whom would we trust to carry it hundreds of miles by land and sea? It has been said that ***Phoebe carried under the folds of her robe the whole future of Christian theology.***

Get a picture of Phoebe. She lived in Cenchreae, a port city. She had significant financial means, serving as a Patron to the Church of Corinth and to the Apostle himself. She delivered the letter to the Romans. Therefore, she was likely a successful merchant who regularly traveled from Corinth to Rome to conduct business. ***Never get the idea that there is one way for a woman to be.***

Remember, even the **Proverbs 31 woman** was investing in Real Estate; she had a staff of servants, and she was in the Textile Industry.

A Couple of Thoughts – Paul didn't surround himself exclusively with men; there were faithful, successful, accomplished women in Paul's entourage. Teach your sons to follow that example; befriend women who are making a difference. Give your daughters biblical heroes like Phoebe to pattern themselves after.

b. Prisca and Aquila: - **Romans 16:3–4 (ESV)**

3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.

They are named six times in the New Testament, and Prisca is named first four times.

Aquila was a Jew from **Pontus**. Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, so they landed in Corinth, where they met Paul. All three were tentmakers (**Acts 18:1-3**).

They moved to **Ephesus**, where they took the gifted preacher **Apollos** aside and "explained to him the way of God more accurately" **(Acts 18:26).** So they were theologically astute and able to teach.

Now they are back in **Rome**, with a church meeting in their house **(v. 5).** In fact, every city they moved to was unchurched before they arrived, and every city had a church when they left.

Paul writes that they "Risked their necks" is literally "laid down their own neck," *trachēlos*, our word "trachea." It is the picture of a head on the executioner's block.

Ministry as a couple is powerful:

- **It Offers Balance.** She sees what he misses, and he sees what she misses.
- **It Offers Accountability.** They taught Apollos together, and privately.
- **It Offers Evangelism.** Sometimes only a couple can reach a couple.
- **It Offers Illustration.** I can preach a hundred sermons on Christ's love for the church, but the way I love Julie is the living parable.

c. Ampliatus: - "Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord" (v. 8).

Ampliatus was a common slave name. In the Catacomb of Domitilla, one of the oldest Christian burial sites in Rome, there is a finely decorated tomb with a single name: **AMPLIATI**.

A Roman citizen carried three names. A slave had one. We cannot prove it is the same man, but somebody named Ampliatus was a slave in Rome's eyes and an honored brother in the church's.

Tom Nelson ***says Philemon is the acid test of Romans***. If Romans is true, a runaway slave can come home "no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother" (**Philemon 16**). **In the world of masters and slaves, in the church there were brothers** (**Galatians 3:28**).

d. Rufus and His Mother: "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well" (v. 13).

In Mark's Gospel, written for Christians in Rome, he says the man forced to carry Jesus' cross was "Simon of Cyrene... the father of Alexander and Rufus" (**Mark 15:21).** Why name the sons unless the readers knew them? This is very likely that same Rufus.

Simon was chosen by a Roman soldier to carry the cross. His family was chosen by the God of heaven to be saved by the man on the cross.

And the woman who watched her husband come home with blood on his shoulder became a mother to the Apostle Paul, whose own family had likely disowned him **(Philippians 3:8).**

Who in this church needs you to be a spiritual mother or father to them? We have enough impressive big shots in the world; we need more dads and moms.

Well, not only who to RUN WITH…

2. Who to Run From

17 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.

Nelson says the symphony suddenly drops into a minor key. The man who just said "greet" seventeen times now says "avoid."

a. Who They Are - Paul is not talking about hair-splitting, or about immature believers with strong preferences. Those are **sheep**, and sheep are to be patiently corrected (Titus 3:9; 2 Timothy 2:23). These are **wolves**.

Acts 20:29–30 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, ***to draw away the disciples after them.***

They want more than anything, influence. They don't want to be under another's leadership. They want to lead. I have observed for over 30 years of ministry that, at times, if a man has no influence at work and no influence in his neighborhood, he will turn to the church to throw his weight around.

b. How They Work - "By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive" (v. 18).

Spiritual Wolves do not growl. They compliment. Jesus said they "come to you in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15). And they hunt the "naive," the unsuspecting, the way a lion picks off the young and the weak.

c. What We Are To Do - Three verbs.

- **Watch.** The word is *skopeō*, as in tele*scope* and micro*scope*. Look closely. Keep an eye on them.
- **Avoid.** Give a lost person the gospel in love every time. But do not give a false teacher a platform or a partnership (2 John 10). A drug can ruin a body. A false gospel can damn a soul.
- **Be wise.** "Wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil" (v. 19). "Innocent" is *akeraios*, unmixed, like wine with no water in it. You do not need a degree in error. You need to know the real thing so well that the fake feels wrong.

20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

> Paul reaches all the way back to Eden: "he shall bruise your head" (**Genesis 3:15**). This is the first time Satan is named in Romans, and he is named only to be crushed. And look whose feet: **yours**. **Christ won the victory at the cross, and He shares it with His church. Don't you love that!**

Paul's friends in Corinth add their greetings (vv. 21-23). One is "Erastus, the city treasurer." In Corinth today you can still see a first-century pavement inscribed with the name of an Erastus who paid for it in return for his public office. These were real people in a real city. Then the letter ends where every Christian friendship ought to end: in worship.

Who to run with… who to run from…

3. What to Run To

We end with a very simple explanation of the goal.

Vince Lombardi
1959, he went to the Green Bay Packers. In the previous years, they had lost 10 games, tied 1, and won 1. He took a team at the bottom of the division, assembled his troops, and because they hadn't done so well the year before, he said, "This is a football."

At a coaches' convention for 3 days, they were taking turns standing up and giving their offensive and defensive strategies. Many of them were complex, hard to understand, and highly complicated. On the 3rd day, it was Lombardi's turn. He stood up and said, "My offense and defense are kinda simple.

- When we are on offense and have the ball, we do our best to run it for a touchdown. We figure our best odds are knocking all the defensive players down, which helps us score.
- My defensive program, it's kinda simple too. Because they have the ball, we attempt to knock all their players down again. Because I found in coaching if your team knocks their team down, you win.

KISS – Keep it simple stupid…Well, Paul keeps it simple as he concludes the book.

25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...

- **His power:** He "is able to strengthen you." It is the same word as 1:11. Paul opened wanting to strengthen them. He closes by handing them to the only One who can.

- **His plan:** “my gospel,” the mystery “kept secret for long ages” and now disclosed through the Scriptures.
- **His purpose:** “to bring about the obedience of faith” among “all nations.” That exact phrase opens the letter (1:5) and closes it (16:26).

> That is the center of every true Christian friendship: the person and work of Christ and His Word. It crosses gender, race, class, and age, and it ends in the same place:

27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

CONCLUSION: On the National Mall in Washington, there is a wall of black granite with more than **58,000 names** cut into it. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial lists them in the order they fell. There are no ranks on that wall. A general’s son and a draftee from a farm town stand side by side. And every day people walk that wall until they find one name. They touch it. They lay paper over it and rub it with a pencil. And they weep, because **it is never just a list when one of the names is your loved one.**

> That is Romans 16. No ranks. A slave beside a city treasurer. And look at the last two names. “I, Tertius, who wrote this letter” (v. 22). “Our brother Quartus” (v. 23). In Latin, those are numbers: **Third** and **Fourth**. Names like that were often given to slaves. Rome gave Quartus a number. Paul gave him the last word about any person in this letter: **“our brother.”**

The world will give you a number. Jesus “calls his own sheep by name” (John 10:3). He told His disciples to “rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

- **Is your name in His book?** It is written there by grace through faith in Christ, not by your work. Call on Him today (Romans 10:13).
- **Who are your colaborers?** Find a Phoebe, a Prisca and Aquila, a mother in the faith. Then be one.
- **Who are the wolves?** Check the voices you are letting disciple you.