

## Forgotten Lives

### *Onesiphorus*

2 Timothy 1:15-18

May 31, 2026 am

HDBC

From my earliest memories in church I have loved the stories of the great heroes of the Bible. Men and women who faced overwhelming odds, yet triumphed through courage and faith in a God who could deliver.

**Noah** who ignored the chatter and built an ark.

**Stephen** who faced his executioners with stones in their hands.

**Elijah** who squared off against the prophets of Baal.

**David** who ran toward Goliath with a sling and a few stones.

**Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego** who stood firm before the fire.

**Daniel** who refused to stop praying, even in the face of certain death.

**Paul** who was stoned, scourged, beaten, imprisoned and beheaded.

These stories created within me a desire to be courageous and faithful to God regardless of the costs. And added to these, I've read the biographies of great servants of God during the post N.T. days. These too, have motivated me greatly.

We can all benefit from those heroes of the faith, both in the Bible and after the Bible times. But in my later years **I've been drawn also to those who found themselves laboring in the shadows, often overlooked and forgotten.** The Bible is filled with them. Men and women who were used of God, yet who **remain obscure in the minds of most believers.**

In this series we are going to examine some of them. We can learn from those in the shadows, those *Forgotten Lives*. But we will also consider some lesser-known characters who were not great examples. Some who failed miserably, but whose stories can teach us and motivate us. In many cases the ones we consider will have been **overshadowed by another person.** In other cases they will pop onto the scene for a brief moment, then fade back off the stage never to be referenced again. I hope this will be instructive, but more importantly, I want it to lead us to be more like Jesus.

We're going to start with a man named Onesiphorus. He is mentioned only in a few verses in the book of 2 Timothy. He is a great example of the kinds of forgotten lives we will consider. He was a hero whom you will meet in Heaven. And when you don't want you to stammer and stutter, not knowing anything about him. I want you to walk up to him and thank you being such a great man of God. Then let him know you know all about him.

He is introduced in 2 Timothy 1:15-18, and mentioned then again in 2 Timothy 4:19. **Read 2 Timothy 1:15-18.**

This is a **very personal section written** by Paul about this faithful man who should not be a **forgotten life**. He may be overshadowed by the champion of missions whom he served, yet he was instrumental in Paul's life. To borrow an overused phrase he was like the wind beneath the wings of Paul, **blowing silently and secretly, keeping the great man soaring.**

Note three things in the text.

### 1. **The abandonment from Paul (15)**

This letter was written during the final days of Paul while he was incarcerated in the infamous **Mamertine Dugeon** in Rome. This was a **dismal, dark and hopeless place** where condemned prisoners were held awaiting execution. It is described by one historian as being a place where the stones were **black with age**. It was cold, damp and suffocating. No wonder Paul asked Timothy to **come before winter** and to bring his outer cloak.

Paul indicates that **all who had been with him at the start had fled**, abandoning him in that difficult place. He even specifically names Phygelus and Hermogenes. What a horrible thing to be remembered for all eternity as one who abandoned Paul. Why would they do so?

It was hard to be a friend of Paul at that time. He was considered an enemy of Nero, who was a crazy emperor who had the power of life and death. Paul was not in a good place. It would be difficult to visit him,

assist him, support him. It would take effort and be risky. And so . . . they left. Paul says that was true of ***all who were in Asia***. No one stuck with the faithful evangelist.

This must have been so hard for Paul. He was strong and had a deep faith in God but he also felt the sting of betrayal just as any of us would. **If you have ever been betrayed or abandoned you have tasted this bitter pill.**

## 2. **The prayer of Paul (16a)**

Against the backdrop of betrayal Paul presents a bright ray of light as he mentions his prayer for Onesiphorus. We can learn somethings from the prayer of Paul.

**Note first** that he prays for the ***household*** of Onesiphorus. We find a similar phrase at the end of the letter when Timothy is asked to greet the ***household*** of Onesiphorus. A couple of things to note.

### **Onesiphorus was part of a Christian family.**

When Paul listed the names of people he wanted to greet in his letters it was because they were fellow believers who were associated with Paul and his ministries. They were almost certainly converted in Ephesus under the ministry of Paul during his 3rd missionary journey.

It is a marvelous thing to be saved. Nothing is more important than that. But **what a wonderful thing it is to also be part of a family of believers.** What a blessing when mom and dad, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandmom and granddad are all saved. What a powerful blessing to know that you have spiritual brothers and sisters right there in your own home.

**My heart goes out to those believers who are alone in their own families.** At best they are misunderstood and at worst they are persecuted. Onesiphorus did not have that problem. He was blessed.

**Also, it could indicate that Onesiphorus had already died.**

This would explain the focus on the household rather than on the individual. There is also some speculation that he later died as a martyr under the emperor Domitian. This could also simply mean that Paul was praying for a blessing on the entire household because of his friend.

**Second**, it was a prayer for mercy for this family. Could this mean that the family was under attack or persecution as a result of Onesiphorus' connections with Paul? We don't know. But any prayer for mercy would likely reveal some potential harm or trouble brewing. And that brings us to his ministry to Paul. Just what did he do for Paul?

### 3. **The ministry to Paul** (16b-17)

Four things revealed in Paul's brief paragraph about his friend.

#### 1) **He served Paul in Ephesus.** (18)

*You know what services he rendered at Ephesus.* This tells me that Onesiphorus understood the importance of serving Christ and serving others from the very beginning of his walk with Jesus. He did not wait until he had reached a prescribed level of maturity to begin to serve. He just jumped in and did it.

We are not told what kinds of things he did for Paul in Ephesus.

Perhaps he served as a **scribe**.

Perhaps he helped Paul **household chores**.

Perhaps he assisted Paul with the **logistics of a growing church**.

Perhaps he traveled with Paul on **evangelistic trips** outside the city.

Perhaps he **helped with children** as Paul taught adults.

Perhaps he assisted Paul with **health issues**.

**You are never too young in Christ to serve.**

**You are never too old in Christ to serve.**

#### 2) **He made it his mission to find Paul.** (17)

We are not told how Onesiphorus learned of Paul's imprisonment, but when he did he made it his personal mission to find him. BTW,

that would have meant a 1000-mile trip from Ephesus to Rome. It would have been expensive, time-consuming, and dangerous. Yet he would not be deterred.

I can imagine him **walking down street after street** in Rome, asking everyone he saw if they knew a man named Paul who have been imprisoned by Nero. I can also imagine one after another person refusing to even consider answering the question for fear of being perceived as an enemy of the insane emperor. Day after day and possibly month after month he continued on his quest. He would not be stopped until he found the battered apostle.

**3) He stood with Paul when all others ran and hid. (16)**

*And was not ashamed of my chains.*

He was unafraid to be associated with Paul, even though it would have been extremely dangerous. Paul as held by the state and condemned to die. Anyone associated with him would have been in danger of being arrested to face the same fate. But this loyal, courageous friend refused to let that stop him. Again and again he came to Paul's side, not caring who saw or who knew. He was willing to stand tall when everyone else had run.

**It's easy to stand with the one who is powerful, popular and strong.**

But how much more difficult it is to stand with the weak, condemned, imprisoned, or rejected. Who stands for the underdogs in your life?

**4) He encouraged Paul when he needed it the most. (16)**

*For he often refreshed me.*

What an interesting phrase for Paul to use. **Refreshed.**

It means **to blow upon or to cool off. Like a mom blowing on a scrape after applying the medicine. Or like cool breeze on a hot day.**

And notice that he added the word **often**. This was not a one-time

thing. He came back again and again. With each visit Paul's spirits were lifted. Each visit eased his suffering and encouraged Paul.

The Living Bible paraphrase captures it well. *He visited me and encouraged me often. His visits revived me like a breath of fresh air.*

Who do you know who is in a dark place and needs to be refreshed? Maybe it's a dungeon of . . .

Discouragement	Depression	Despair
Physical sickness	Financial	Spiritual
Marriage	Parenting	Work Problem

You may be the one God is calling to be their Onesiphorus.

## **TAKEAWAYS:**

Onesiphorus is forgotten by most, but was a hero to Paul. You and I can be heroes to others as we learn from this *forgotten life*. I see four things Onesiphorus had that we can emulate. When we do, we will refresh others.

### **1. Unselfish attitude**

He served early and often. He had served Paul in Ephesus but did not assume that he had completed his responsibilities. He served early and late. Don't let your age or the longevity of your ministry be the cause for failing to step in. Be unselfish.

### **2. Determined mind**

He was intentional about finding Paul. He didn't wait to see if someone else was going to step in. He saw the need and took ownership. It did not matter what anyone else did.

### **3. Courageous spirit**

He went to Paul even when it was dangerous. He was willing to risk his own freedom, health and life. He was not concerned about his reputation with others. He did not care what others thought.

**He stepped up and stepped in.**

**4. Unbreakable loyalty**

He was present, even when no one else was. Never underestimate the power of just being in the room, just being with the person in need. Your presence is more powerful than any gift you might bring or any words you might say. Just be there!

If you want to be one who refreshes others, be like Onesiphorus.

Of course all four of these character traits were first seen in Jesus. That's where Onesiphorus learned them. When it came His mission to provide salvation for lost sinful people, like us, Jesus had a . . .

**Unselfish attitude**

**Determined mind**

**Courageous spirit**

**Unbreakable loyalty**

Therefore, He is worthy of our trust, our commitment. Do you know Him? Have you trusted Him.