

Title: Lesson 17: Make Friends with Those Who Serve the Lord!

Text: 2 Timothy 4:19–21

Did you know that you can only maintain a limited number of meaningful relationships at any given time?

Research suggests our relationships tend to fall into layers. You may have about **5 very close relationships**, around **15 good friends**, roughly **50 friends**, and up to **150 meaningful connections overall**.

That means no matter how large the church is, your real circle will always be relatively small.

So, think about that.

You only have a handful of people who are truly close. A slightly larger group you do life with. And then a broader circle of meaningful relationships.

Which means this question matters:

So, think about that.

Whether you are in a church of 50, or 500, or 5,000, you are still only going to have a small circle of real relationships.

Which means this question matters:

What are you going to do with your circle?

Are you going to wander through relationships casually?

Or are you going to intentionally invest in people who love Christ, who will sharpen your faith, and who you can help grow as well?

Because godly friendships do not happen by accident.

They happen when you choose to pursue them.

The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone.

As Paul closes his final letter, he does something very personal.

He mentions people. Names. Friends. Ministry partners.

Just a few verses earlier he said:

“Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.”

Let’s be honest for a moment.

One of the hardest parts of following Christ is not just the work...
it's when people walk away.

When someone you prayed with... served with... trusted...
is no longer there.

Paul felt that.

'Demas has deserted me.'

That hurts.

But not everyone left Paul.

Some stayed faithful.

Some helped him carry the burden of ministry.

These final greetings reveal something important: **Paul did not serve the Lord alone.**

And do you know what? Neither should we.

The ministry, which we all are called to, is not meant to be done alone.

It is to be done in community.

We need godly, enriching, friendships as we serve the Lord.

There is truly strength in numbers.

Main Idea: Faithful, Godly friendships are vital for ministry.

What kind of friendships strengthen our faith and sustain us in the work of the Lord?

In these closing verses Paul shows us three characteristics of friendships that honor Christ and strengthen ministry.

1. Treasure Long-Term Gospel Friendships (v. 19)

2 Timothy 4:19 ESV

¹⁹ Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

Paul begins with two names that appear repeatedly in the New Testament: **Priscilla and Aquila.**

Priscilla and Aquila are a beautiful example of the kind of friendships that strengthen ministry.

They were a husband-and-wife team who served the Lord alongside Paul for many years.

Paul first met them in Corinth in Acts 18, and from that moment forward they became close partners in gospel work.

Acts 18:1–3 ESV

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.

They opened their home for ministry, disciplined others like Apollos, and even risked their lives to protect Paul.

Over the years they served Christ in several cities, faithfully supporting the spread of the gospel wherever they went.

What is striking is that by the time Paul writes 2 Timothy, decades have passed since they first met.

Yet Paul still remembers them. He still values them. He still greets them.

That is what faithful, godly friendships look like.

Philippians 1:3–5 (ESV)

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

They are forged in the work of Christ and strengthened through years of serving the Lord together.

Priscilla and **Aquila** remind us that some of the greatest gifts God gives His servants are faithful friends who labor beside them in the gospel.

Paul also mentions the **household of Onesiphorus**.

Onesiphorus is a wonderful example of the kind of friendship we should pursue in ministry.

His name means “**bringing help**,” and that is exactly what he did for Paul.

He was from Ephesus, where Paul had planted a church, and it appears his whole household had come to faith in Christ.

When Paul wrote this letter, he was sitting in a Roman prison during one of the hardest seasons of his life.

Some men who had once stood beside him had now deserted him.

But Onesiphorus did not walk away.

In fact, Paul tells us earlier in this letter that he searched diligently until he found him and visited him in his Roman prison.

No small task, by any means.

That took courage. In those days it was dangerous to be associated with a Christian prisoner, especially someone like Paul who was considered an enemy of Rome.

But **Onesiphorus** was not ashamed of Paul's chains. He refreshed him. He encouraged him. He stood by him.

And that is exactly the kind of friendship every believer should pursue—friendships with people who love Christ, who remain faithful in difficult seasons, and who strengthen one another in the work of the Lord.

These friends of Paul tell us something about the nature of Christian friendship.

It is built on shared devotion to Christ.

Jesus is what we have in common.

His Word unites our minds.

His Spirit enflames our hearts.

His church pulls us together unlike anything else could.

Think about soldiers who serve together through a long deployment.

When men and women walk through battle together, their bond becomes unbreakable. They understand each other in ways no one else can.

The same thing happens in gospel ministry.

When believers labor together, pray together, suffer together, and serve Christ together, those friendships become lifelong treasures.

You should intentionally treasure the believers God has placed in your life.

Some of the most valuable relationships you will ever have are the people who:

- pray with you
- serve with you
- encourage you when you are discouraged
- and point you back to Christ when you are weak.

Do not take those friendships for granted.

Proverbs 17:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

And that leads us right into what Paul shows us next...

Paul treasured long-term gospel friendships. But those friendships also carried one another through hardship.

2. Support One Another Through Trials and Need (v. 20)

2 Timothy 4:20 ESV

²⁰ Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus.

This verse shows the very real difficulties of ministry.

The trials of separation.

“Erastus remained at Corinth”

Paul is explaining where his coworkers are.

Some are in different places because ministry requires it.

Earlier in the chapter:

- Crescens went to Galatia
- Titus to Dalmatia
- Tychicus to Ephesus
- Luke stayed with Paul

The point is that **ministry partners often serve in different locations**, but they remain part of the same gospel work.

This teaches an important truth:

Faithful friendships in ministry are not limited by geography.

Even when believers serve in different places, they are still **supporting the same mission**.

Paul is not criticizing Erastus for staying in Corinth.

He is simply acknowledging that ministry assignments sometimes separate friends.

Christian friends serve one another by **sharing the burden of ministry wherever God places them**.

But the second statement is even more striking.

“I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus”

When Paul says, *“I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus,”* he is giving us more than a travel detail.

He is giving us a glimpse into the real-life challenges of ministry.

Trophimus was a faithful ministry partner.

He had traveled with Paul, served alongside him, and helped carry out the work of the gospel.

But at this moment, he became seriously ill.

And because of that, he could not continue the journey.

Paul had to leave him behind.

That was not what either of them wanted.

This was not a strategic decision. It was a necessary one.

Ministry had to continue, but a friend was left in weakness.

And here is something important to see. Paul did not heal him.

That reminds us that even in the apostolic age, miracles were never at the command of men.

They were acts of God, given according to His will.

Even a man like Paul had to entrust his friend to the Lord in a moment of suffering.

Trophimus likely remained near Miletus, close to Ephesus, where he could be cared for.

But the point is this—ministry does not remove hardship.

Even faithful servants of Christ face sickness, limitation, and disappointment.

And that is exactly why godly friendships matter.

1 Corinthians 12:26 (ESV)

²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together...

In the body of Christ, we are not disconnected individuals.

When one of us hurts... we all feel it.

That is how God designed it.

Because there will be moments when one of us cannot keep going.

There will be seasons when strength gives way to weakness.

And in those moments, we need brothers and sisters in Christ who will stand with us, pray for us, and care for us.

Trophimus reminds us that no one serves the Lord without facing trials. And no one is meant to face those trials alone.

Christian friends must support one another through seasons of weakness, sickness, and hardship.

Paul himself experienced physical weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:7–9 ESV

⁷ So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Timothy also had health problems.

1 Timothy 5:23 ESV

²³ No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

The New Testament never promises believers a life free from suffering.

But it does promise that we walk through suffering together.

Think about a group of mountain climbers ascending a steep ridge together.

When climbers move across dangerous terrain, they often tie themselves together with a rope.

That rope connects the whole team. If one climber slips, the others brace themselves and hold the rope so that person does not fall down the mountain.

Why do they do that?

Because no climber is strong every moment of the climb.

Sometimes one person loses footing.

Sometimes someone becomes exhausted. Sometimes someone gets injured.

But the rope keeps them together, and the strength of the group carries the one who is weak.

That is a picture of Christian friendship.

Galatians 6:2 (ESV)

² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

That is what it looks like to hold the rope.

In ministry there will be seasons when you are strong and someone else is struggling.

And there will be seasons when you are the one who needs help.

God designed the church so that believers would hold the rope for one another.

That is what faithful friends do.

They support one another through trials and need.

Real Christian friendships are not built only in good times.

They are proven in suffering.

When a brother or sister is sick, discouraged, grieving, or struggling, that is when friendship matters most.

Support one another in those seasons.

Pray. Visit. Encourage. Carry burdens.

Paul treasured friendships and relied on them during hardship.

But he also shows us something else about Christian friendship.

It must be intentional.

3. Be Intentional in Your Friendships (v. 21)

2 Timothy 4:21 ESV

²¹ Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.

“Do your best to come before winter.”

This is the third time in the chapter Paul urges Timothy to come.

Earlier he said:

4:9 – “Do your best to come to me soon.”

4:13 – “When you come, bring the cloak...”

4:21 – “Do your best to come before winter.”

Paul clearly **wants Timothy with him.**

Why before winter?

Winter travel across the Mediterranean became extremely dangerous and often impossible. If Timothy waited too long, he might not reach Paul until spring.

Paul likely knew his execution was approaching. Time mattered.

This reveals something important about Christian friendship:

Paul is **not passive in his hope that Timothy will show up.**

He **asks him to come.**

That is intentional friendship.

“Do your best to come before winter.”

“Timothy... don’t wait.

Don’t delay.

Because there are some opportunities in life that don’t come back.

Winter is coming.

Travel will stop.”

And Paul knows... his life may end before spring.

Listen...

There are conversations you need to have.

There are relationships you need to strengthen.

There are people you need to pursue.

And if you wait too long...

you may not get another chance.

Healthy Christian friendships require **initiative.**

He also mentions several believers who send greetings: Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and the brothers.

These are believers in Rome who stood with Paul.

Throughout his Christian life, Paul surrounded himself with people who loved Christ and cared for one another.

Christian friendship does not happen accidentally.

It requires effort, intention, and initiative.

Paul told Timothy: make the effort to come.

Christian friendship requires intentional presence.

Friendships fade when they are neglected.

You can go years without speaking to someone and suddenly realize the relationship is gone.

But strong friendships are built when people intentionally spend time together, encourage each other, and remain connected.

That is what Paul is asking Timothy to do.

Come. Be here. Be present.

“The church is the church only when it exists for others.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison

There are tremendous benefits to cultivating these kinds of relationships.

Proverbs 27:17 ESV

¹⁷ Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

God uses other believers to refine us, strengthen us, and help us grow.

Colossians 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

That is what happens in godly friendships.

We speak truth into each other’s lives.

We build relationships with one another that can bear the weight of truth.

Left alone, we wander. We justify sin. We grow dull.

But when we walk closely with other believers, we are sharpened.

We are strengthened. We are pushed toward Christ.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 ESV

⁹ Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

There will be moments when you stumble, when you are discouraged, when your faith feels weak.

And one of God's primary means of grace in those moments is a faithful friend who lifts you up and points you back to Christ.

Hebrews 3:13 ESV

¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Sin blinds us. It deceives us.

And God protects us through relationships where truth is regularly spoken into our lives.

That is the benefit.

But with that benefit comes responsibility.

Hebrews 10:24 ESV

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

That means you do not wait for it to happen. You pursue it.

Galatians 6:2 ESV

² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

That means stepping into someone's life.

Showing up. Listening. Praying. Encouraging.

Walking with them through both joy and hardship.

Romans 1:12 ESV

¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

This is not one-directional. We give and we receive.

So, here is the reality.

You are not just called to have godly friends.

You are called to be one.

You cannot do that passively.

You cannot do that occasionally.

It requires intention.

It requires pursuit.

It requires presence.

Do not assume strong Christian friendships will happen automatically.

You must pursue them.

Be intentional about:

- spending time with believers
- encouraging one another
- praying together
- serving Christ together.

And the reason we can pursue others like this...

is because Christ pursued us.

We were not looking for Him.

We were not reaching for Him.

But He came for us.

He drew near to us.

He laid down His life for us.

And now He calls us to reflect that same love in how we pursue one another.

Conclusion

This passage captures a key tension in 2 Timothy.

Paul is calling for steadfastness. For costly, unwavering faithfulness to the gospel.

And yet, at the same time, he is experiencing deep personal loss. Some have abandoned him. Others are scattered in different places while he is facing his inevitable death.

But Paul is not isolated.

Even after a lifetime of travel, he had built deep and lasting friendships. And you can see it here. He remembers people. He names them. He values them.

That reminds us of something important.

Faithful ministry does not mean isolation.

It means intentionally weaving your life together with others who share your love for Christ and your commitment to the gospel.

Even when circumstances separate you... those relationships remain.

And those relationships matter.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (ESV)

¹² And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

When your life is woven together with other believers, you are stronger than you would ever be alone.

Faithful Christian friendships strengthen and sustain us in the work of the Lord.

Without godly friendships, the pressures of life and ministry will eventually wear you down.

This week, intentionally encourage one believer who serves the Lord alongside you.

Send a message. Pray with them. Spend time together.

Strengthen that friendship.

At the end of his life, the great apostle Paul did not list accomplishments.

He listed people.

And that says something powerful about the blessing of having friends who serve the Lord together.