

I want to conclude this series on 2 Timothy the way Paul does, with a reminder about the enduring power of friendship. The last recorded words of the apostle Paul contain a shout out to his friends. He mentions 16 people in the final 14 verses of this letter. Friendships are the difference between living a lonely, solitary life or a life full of inspiration and encouragement. You may have seen a video going around demonstrating the healing power of friendships...watch this...

Sometimes it takes the innocence of a four-year-old to remind us of what is truly important in life. As Paul neared the finish line, he was thinking about his friends. Some of these friends contributed greatly to his life while others proved to be unpredictable, even dangerous. There in that prison, Paul had nothing but his faith and his friends. And that's enough. In fact, I truly believe that if we had more friends we would need fewer pastors and counselors. Almost everything our churches provide could be accomplished better through deep, meaningful friendships. On this last day of our series, I want to remind you of the importance of friendship. In 2 Tim. 4:9-22 we can identify several types of friends.

Demas is the fickle friend...4:9-10. Fickle is a word that means unpredictable, unstable, subject to change. It is telling that Demas is the first person Paul thinks of as he appeals to Timothy to join him as soon as possible. He had been a co-worker in the ministry. Col. 4:14, "Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and *also* Demas." Now he says, "Demas having loved this present world, deserted me." The only hint Paul gives for being deserted was that Demas loved the world. We don't know the details of his departure but it is clear that Demas concluded that his relationship with Paul was a hindrance to what he really wanted in life. Associating with a condemned criminal doesn't exactly catapult your career. Ironically, if fame is what Demas was after, he got it, he's in the Bible...as a bad example. There is a line in *Lord of the Rings* that goes, "Faithless is he that says, 'Farewell' when the road darkens."

There is another painful kind of friend mentioned in vv. 14-15.

Alexander - the hurtful friend...vv. 14-15. Alexander was a common name so he adds, "the coppersmith." We don't know what Alexander did. Did he turn Paul in? Did he turn on him? If this is the same Alexander mentioned in his first letter to Timothy, we know that Alexander not only deserted Paul but he deserted the faith. "Fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme." 1 Tim. 1:18-20.

Paul reminds Timothy that there are some people who at first appear friendly but will ultimately turn on us. We sometimes refer to these people as "fair weather friends." Sadly, Demas and Alexander weren't the only fair weather friends in Paul's life, look at v. 16, "All who were in Asia turned away from me. No one came to stand by me." Then he adds, "May it not be counted against them." Paul knew that even the best of men are only men at best. You will be disappointed.

How should we respond when we are betrayed or abandoned? Respond by drawing closer to the One who will never abandon you. Paul says in v. 14, "The Lord will repay him according to his deeds." He said in v. 8, "The Lord is the righteous judge." The Judge of all the earth will do right. There is a higher court than all the courts on earth. When all accounts are settled, everything will be made right. Paul learned this from the example of Jesus. His suffering was not just physical. He was betrayed by a close friend, abandoned by those he loved. Peter says, "For you have been called for this purpose..." Wait! What purpose? To suffer the injustice of a fallen world while trusting the righteous Judge. "Since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." 1 Pe. 2:21-23.

Your friends are just people. One day you will marry someone who is just a people too! People are imperfect. Even the best of men are men at best. You will be disappointed but don't despair. Just make sure you choose the right BFF.

The rest of the people mentioned in these verses are faithful friends. There is no surer foundation for a beautiful and lasting friendship than a mutual commitment to a common faith. Paul's closest friends shared his commitment to the gospel.

Luke - the beloved friend...v. 11. In Col. 4:14 Luke is called "the beloved physician." Luke was well loved because he loved well. He was there for Paul not just to encourage him but no doubt to take care of him physically.

Mark - the useful friend...v. 11. This is John Mark, the same man that Paul had considered useless earlier in his life. Acts 12 tells of Peter's release from jail. His friends are gathered at John Mark's house praying for him...12:12. Mark's home was a gathering place for Christians. This may have even been the location of the

upper room. Some scholars speculate that this is where the disciples gathered for prayer at Pentecost when the Spirit came upon the church. What a home!

Paul and Barnabas were sent out to spread the Good News (Acts 12:25; 13:2, 5) with John Mark as their apprentice. Shortly into the trip, Mark bailed. "At Pamphylia is where John called it quits and went back to Jerusalem." (13:13, *The Message*.) Let's read Acts 15:36-41...Paul the apostle has a bias for action. He is task oriented. We've got places to go and people to preach to. Barnabas is an encourager. He is also related to John Mark. His name is really Joseph but they called him Barnabas because it means "son of encouragement." When Paul was converted, Barnabas had sponsored him when everyone else was afraid of the former Pharisee. Now Paul lost his temper over Mark causing a sharp disagreement which ultimately lead to the doubling of their efforts. Disagreements happen.

When Paul gets to the end of his life, he softens. Mark had proven himself. Now he is useful to Paul. How useful? Think about this - Paul ends his life in a Roman dungeon accompanied by Luke, Timothy and Mark. In 2 Tim. 4:13, he asks for his cloak "and the books, especially the parchments." Two of these men, Mark and Luke, compiled eyewitness accounts of the story of Jesus. What if some of the parchments were descriptive fragments of the life of Jesus? What if Paul said, "Take these statements and write a gospel."

Mark is the comeback kid. He serves to remind us that we should never give up on people. I'm so thankful for those who never gave up on me. I could name them but it would take too long. I've done so many stupid things over the years. The friends that are most precious to me are the ones who had the grace to overlook my flaws and continued to believe in me.

Tychicus - the loyal friend...v. 12. Tychicus was an Ephesian believer who is mentioned five times in the NT. He is called a "dear brother and faithful servant" in Eph. 6:21. In Col. 4:7-8, he is referred to as "a beloved brother, a faithful minister, a fellow-servant of the Lord." He was there with Paul during an earlier imprisonment. He distributed Paul's letters to the churches. He even took this letter that we have been studying to Ephesus. He was loyal. He could be trusted.

Eric Felten, who writes for the Wall St. Journal, has written a book called *Loyalty*. In it he says, "Our modern rootless times do seem to be a particularly inhospitable environment for loyalty. We come and go so relentlessly that our friendships can't but come and go too. What sort of loyalty is there in the age of Facebook when

friendship is a costless transaction? A business of flip reciprocity. 'I will list you as one of my friends if you will list me as one of your friends.' Friendship held together by nothing more permanent than hyperlinks is hardly the stuff of selfless fidelity."

Priscilla and Aquila - the resourceful friends. They were tentmakers so they had something in common with Paul. They worked together. Some of the most influential friends in your life will be those who are in the same profession as you. They also serve as a shining example of how a husband/wife can serve together to further the gospel. Acts 18:1-3, 24-26

Onesiphorus - the refreshing friend. 2 Tim. 1:16ff.

But there is one friend who stands above all the rest.

Jesus - the perfect friend...vv. 17-18. "The Lord stood with me and strengthened me." But it wasn't just to make Paul feel better. The Lord stood by him so that those who were living in ignorance and idolatry would hear the gospel and turn to the one true God. The presence of the Lord *with* him was directly related to the purpose of the Lord *for* him.

I sometimes wonder if we do not feel the presence of God when we are indifferent to the purpose of God. "Lord I want your help but I don't want to make any major changes to my life." It reminds me of some who drop by the church and say, "I need help." Unfortunately, what they usually mean is, "I don't want to do anything to get out of my present circumstances but I want you to come alongside and help me so I can continue the irresponsible behavior that got me to this place." Paul says the reason the Lord stood by him was not just to get him out of a jam but so he could "live out his God-given purpose in Christ" in his final days.

At the end of v. 17 he says, "I was rescued out of the lion's mouth..." What was "the lion's mouth?" We don't know if he is speaking literally or figuratively. Is the lion Nero the evil emperor or the beasts in the Coliseum? "I will be rescued from every evil deed." Does that mean I will never suffer or never die? Obviously not. It means that no matter what happens in this life, it's not the end of the story. The story ends in a great rescue.

All scripture is inspired by God but not all scripture is equally inspiring. 4:19 is hardly as inspiring as 4:7. But these verses remind us of the power of friendship.

Reminded
A Friendly Reminder

2 Timothy 4:9-22

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Tim Kimmel story..."Who are they?" If you can't name six friends it's time to get busy. How can I have friends like Paul had? Start by making friends with Paul's best friend. You will be amazed at how many others share the same best friend.