

Would you be my Friend?

2 Timothy 1:15-18

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

Friendship is “a reciprocal relationship characterized by intimacy, faithfulness, trust, unmotivated kindness, and service.”¹ Surviving in a fallen world where chance happens to everyone (Ecclesiastes 9:11) and persecution for believing and pointing to the one true Light, Jesus Christ (John 8:12, 15:18-25), is far from easy! To help us not merely survive but thrive believers have not only been given a Comforter (John 14:16) but also the church whose members are called to help each other grow and mature in the faith (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Love for one another is one of the defining marks of being a disciple of Christ (John 13:35) and yet despite the interconnectedness of our world through travel, phones and internet lines believers often find it incredibly difficult to develop and maintain genuine friendships. If only we could learn to love our enemies, forbear, and celebrate differences, forgive real or imagined grievances, then maybe we would have a chance at finding true friendship! Even if one does all these key “love building” activities these alone do not guarantee genuine, intimate friendship will blossom because for one to obtain true friendship one must be willing to put the needs of others sacrificially and continuously above that of one’s own (Philippians 2:3)! Today’s sermon is going to review 2 Timothy 1:15-18 to illustrate how genuine friendship is found through unconditional love that continually seeks, helps and prays for other believers, even when they are going through tribulations and/or being persecuted for righteousness sake! To help us better understand today’s passage lets do a quick review of Paul’s circumstances at the time he wrote this passage.



Paul’s Farewell Party

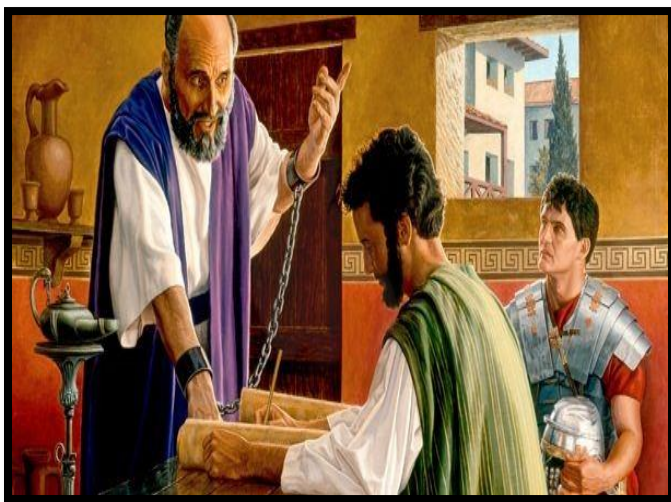
Imagine starting out your ministry and being told “I (Jesus) will show you much you will suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:6)! I wonder if Apostle Paul had any idea on the day he said YES to Jesus that he would one day be flogged, receive forty lashes minus one five times, beaten with rods, pelted with stones, shipwrecked three times and his life continually threatened by bandits, Jews and Gentiles (2 Corinthians 11:22-29)? And yet despite these hardships Paul fearlessly preached the Gospel to the Gentiles (Ephesians 6:19)

¹ Taken from Logos Bible Software, Fact book.

in three missionary journeys that spanned from Perga, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe all the way to Philippi, Corinth, and Athens! Upon completion of his missionary journeys Paul was compelled by the Holy Spirit to set sail for Jerusalem (Acts 20:22). Knowing that he would not return to the region Paul stopped and said his goodbyes to both the elders of Ephesus (20:17) and the believers at Tyre (21:4). Despite their pleas to forgo what would be incredible persecution and eventual death, Paul told them he considered his life worth nothing to himself and his only aim was to finish the race and complete the task of “testifying to the good news of God’s grace” (20:24). Paul left Tyre, went to Ptolemais and then onto Caesarea where a prophet named Agabus who told him the Jewish leaders would bind and hand him over to the Gentiles (21:10). When the people pleaded, wept, and begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem again he refused. His response this time was he was “ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (21:13). Despite the love of all those who said their goodbyes nothing would change Paul’s mind; he must obey the Spirit and in chains testify about Jesus Christ all the way to Rome!

Being Imprisoned for Righteousness Sake

Upon his arrival in Jerusalem the brothers and sisters received Paul warmly, praising God for all that “was done among the Gentiles through his ministry” (21:19). Despite undergoing purification rites (21:24-26), when the Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple,



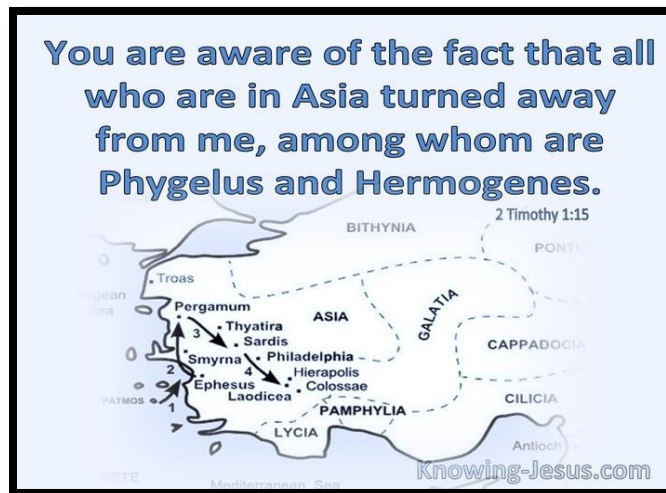
they convinced the crowd that he was against the Jewish law and therefore deserved death (21:28). While the crowd was trying to kill him the commander of the Roman troops arrived, bound him with two chains and had him carried away by soldiers to the barracks (21:33-36). Before entering, Paul witnessed to the crowd about his conversion and calling by Christ to preach to the Gentiles (22:1-21) but this further angered the crowd (22:1-21). After having discovered their plot to kill him and due to his appeal of being a

Roman citizen (22:22-23:22), Paul was subsequently sent to Caesarea with armed guards to stand trial before Governors Felix and later Festus. Despite the Jewish chief priests and leader’s accusations that Paul was stirring up riots and was trying to desecrate the temple (24:5-8), instead of charges being laid Paul appealed to Caesar (25:11) and was first sent to king Agrippa for further questioning (25:23-32) and then onto Rome. Upon arrival he was not likely placed

into a military or government prison but instead was chained to a guard and put under house arrest at his own expense.² In Paul's words he was "the Lord's prisoner."³

Being a bad Friend (verse 15)

Paul began this part of his letter to Timothy with a painful declaration that everyone in



Asia had deserted him. While we are not given the specific circumstances of Paul's writing⁴ it was most likely during his second arrest and preliminary hearing before the Emperor (Acts 27:24).⁵ Having spent three years in Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia,⁶ Paul confessed it hurt him deeply that his key friends that used to support him were no where to be found.⁷ Some deserted Paul on account of fear of Emperor Nero,⁸ others because of shame of the Gospel message,⁹ but upon reflection in those

lonely prison hours¹⁰ Paul concluded what hurt him the most was that Christian friends like

² David J. Williams, [Acts](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 450–451.

³ Robert W. Wall, "[2 Timothy](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 665.

⁴ J. N. D. Kelly, [The Pastoral Epistles](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1963), 169.

⁵ Gordon D. Fee, [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 296.

⁶ J. N. D. Kelly, [The Pastoral Epistles](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1963), 168–169.

⁷ J. N. D. Kelly, [The Pastoral Epistles](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1963), 169.

⁸ Peter Gorday, ed., [Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon](#), Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 237.

⁹ Gordon D. Fee, [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 236.

¹⁰ Ralph Earle, "[2 Timothy](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 398.

Phygelus and Hermogenes had deserted him for personal reasons.¹¹ While Paul’s statement that “everyone” had deserted him was an exaggeration,¹² such an open admission to Timothy¹³ reflected the pain and agony of finding out how many of his “friends” were nothing more than superficial, convenient but temporary acquaintances! From Paul we learn it is far easier to share our friends’ successes than to support them in their tribulations! Friendship based on superficial appearances, popularity, money, or power are not sustainable nor genuine for the moment the storms come affection soon changes our attitudes towards another to indifference or worst yet intolerance! O how deeply the knife cuts into our souls every time we find out our friendship is based on anything other than unconditional love! Now that we know how to be a bad friend lets explore four points on how to be a good friend.

Being a Good Friend (verses 16-18)



Seeking to Help one Another (verse 17). Living in Ephesus¹⁴ a man named Onesiphorus demonstrated true friendship by diligently seeking to find Paul in Rome. There were many prisons in Rome and since Paul was unlikely in a public prison¹⁵ it would not have been an easy task to find the particular one in which Paul was housed.¹⁶ Whether Onesiphorus “traced Paul’s whereabouts via the network of Christians in Ephesus,¹⁷

¹¹ J. N. D. Kelly, [The Pastoral Epistles](#), Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1963), 169.

¹² Gordon D. Fee, [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 235–236.

¹³ Robert W. Yarbrough, [The Letters to Timothy and Titus](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 367.

¹⁴ Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 187.

¹⁵ Gordon D. Fee, [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 237.

¹⁶ Ralph Earle, [“2 Timothy,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 398.

¹⁷ Robert W. Yarbrough, [The Letters to Timothy and Titus](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 368.

or made inquires himself in Rome, his “zeal, determination and persistence”¹⁸ paid off for he got the opportunity to not only refresh Paul with food but was able to give words of encouragement to cheer him up as well.¹⁹ From Onesiphorus we learn to be a genuine friend one must go beyond our “ME” culture, one that seeks to first gratify the desires of one’s own heart, to constantly look out for the interests of others (Philippians 2:3). The goal of helping others is not to make oneself look good but to show another that the foundation of one’s friendship is firmly grounded in in Christ’s command to build each other up in the faith (1 Thessalonians 5:11) and to love one another (Matthew 22:37-38).

Giving a Helping Hand (verse 16). Knowing that prisoners were expected to rely on help from their relatives and friends to provide for their needs²⁰ and the that fact that Paul was



being looked down upon by his “friends” due to the cultural shame of being in Roman chains,²¹ Onesiphorus went out of his way to not only find Paul but to practically help him as well! Even though in the past Paul had told the church at Philippi he had learned to be content without his physical needs being met (4:11-13),²² this did not stop Onesiphorus from honoring the three years of labour Paul had done earlier within his home community of Ephesus²³ through a sacrifice of time, money and

fellowship!²⁴ Onesiphorus was not paying Paul back but merely showing the friendship they established during those three years was not conditional but sacrificial. True Christian love and

¹⁸ Robert W. Yarbrough, [The Letters to Timothy and Titus](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 368.

¹⁹ Gordon D. Fee, [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 236.

²⁰ Robert W. Yarbrough, [The Letters to Timothy and Titus](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 368.

²¹ Donald Guthrie, [Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 153.

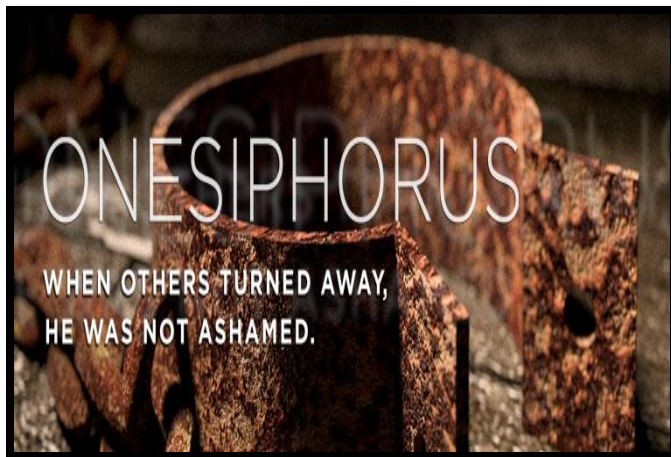
²² Robert W. Yarbrough, [The Letters to Timothy and Titus](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 368.

²³ Robert W. Yarbrough, [The Letters to Timothy and Titus](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 369.

²⁴ J. N. D. Kelly, [The Pastoral Epistles](#), Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1963), 170.

friendship does not claim the places of honor in our churches (Matthew 23:1-12) by merely talking about giving “cups of cold water” (Matthew 10:42) while practically doing nothing but instead always “protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13:7) to sacrificially find a way to help those in need. For a genuine friendship to occur “love” must not be primarily an intellectual or a feeling word, it must be one that promotes good deeds in the name of the God the Father (Matthew 5:16)!

No Shame in Persecution (verse 16). Despite the social stigma associated with being in chains in a Roman prison²⁵ and the fear that associating with a state criminal might transfer the guilt of another’s crime upon oneself,²⁶ Onesiphorus was not ashamed but eagerly sought to find and help Paul! Rome practiced what was called religious syncretism. Every time they



conquered a land, they took on their foreign gods and in return expected them to take on the full plethora of Roman gods. Nero’s reign was the beginning of widespread persecution of Christians because they refused to worship no more than but one God! Onesiphorus demonstrated to be a good friend one must love unconditionally, especially during times of religious persecution! While we are unlikely here in North America to face imprisonment for our belief that Jesus²⁷ is the only way to heaven (John 14:6), we must be

prepared to stand by our Christian brothers and sisters and as one church family and give the reasons why we have hope (1 Peter 3:15)²⁸ to a society that disapproves, mocks and excludes any who believe in absolute truth as outlined in God’s word.²⁹ As those who cherish freedom we as God’s people also should be the first to be like Onesiphorus and seek out and provide for

²⁵ Robert W. Wall, [“2 Timothy,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 664–665.

²⁶ Gordon D. Fee, [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 236–237.

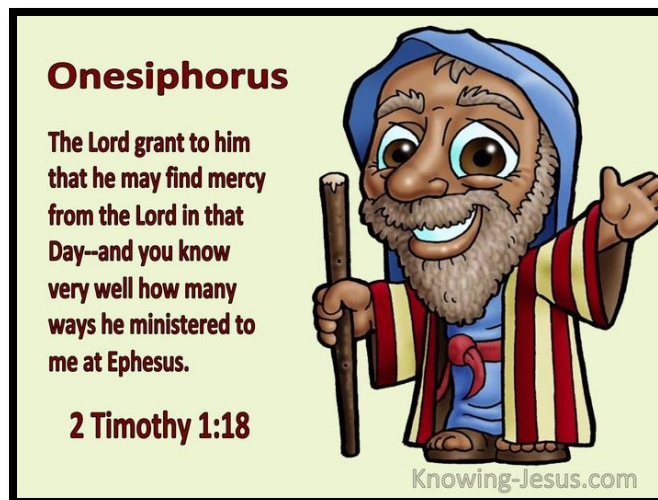
²⁷ Walter L. Liefeld, [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 240.

²⁸ Walter L. Liefeld, [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 240.

²⁹ Walter L. Liefeld, [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 240.

the needs of Christians in this world³⁰ currently being imprisoned and beaten for righteousness sake. Good friends know the success of a person is not based on what the world thinks but on faithfully loving God and one another!

Prayers for Mercy (verses 16, 18). The final and most important thing we need to do to be a good friend is to pray for one another. Paul prayed that Onesiphorus and his family might receive mercy on the Day of the Lord.³¹ Most commentators assume Paul praying only for the



family in verse 16 meant that Onesiphorus had died before Paul wrote this letter.³² This passage though is not to be taken as theological proof³³ one should pray for the dead³⁴ but merely as a statement of hope in the “full sufficiency of Christ’s work to deliver from judgment those who trust in Him (2 Tim 4:8, see Rom 8:1 and Phil 1:6).”³⁵ We started our this sermon by defining friendship as a reciprocal relationship characterized by intimacy, faithfulness, trust, unmotivated kindness, and service. From Apostle Paul we learned that true friendship is not based on superficial appearance,

popularity, money, or power but on a genuine desire to fulfill God’s command to love Him and one another. To have genuine lasting friendships one must place the needs of others above that of oneself by seeking, doing acts of kindness, and continually praying that God will show mercy to us sinners saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

³⁰ Walter L. Liefeld, [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 241–242.

³¹ Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 188.

³² J. N. D. Kelly, [The Pastoral Epistles](#), Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1963), 171.

³³ Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 188.

³⁴ George W. Knight, [The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 386.

³⁵ Robert W. Yarbrough, [The Letters to Timothy and Titus](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 369.