

Friends, Enemies, and God

Three Key Relationships in the
Ministry and Message of the Gospel

2 Timothy 4:9-18

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Introduction

Does God really care about my relationships? The friends we make – even our enemies. Are these people important to God? If life is a web of connections, with yourself standing at the center, does God see it all and does he care?

In my life, I've struggled with people leaving me. I'm not trying to be dramatic – but I'm talking about just losing friends, losing connections, losing time together. Some of this comes from my current life stage. The older you get, with marriage, kids, and other responsibilities – the harder it is to make and maintain friendships. I wonder, God, why would you let good people leave me?

I can also talk about enemies in my life. Now I don't think I have any real enemies in the sense that someone is trying to kill me. But I've faced opposition before. People who get in the way of some goals that I have, even people who get in the way of my relationship with God and when I try to do the work of the Gospel. I wonder, God, don't you know what this person is doing?

Context

This is Paul's last letter, and he's leaving Timothy some final instructions. The heading in this section is actually personal instructions, and you'll see that a lot of people are mentioned, people that Timothy and Paul know personally. We don't know much about these people, but their names are preserved in Scripture. These relationships Paul lists glorify God as he reflects on them at the end of his life.

Sermon Preview

Our sermon today will share three key relationships in the ministry and message of the Gospel. This is actually one of my favorite texts because it is so personal. I'm going to try to personalize my applications to different students here – those who are entering and currently in junior high, underclassmen in high school, and upperclassmen in high school. Of course, I think we can all apply the text, but I'm going to cater it specifically for our wide range of ages here today. Let's get started.



1. Friends of the Gospel

The first key relationship in the ministry and message of the Gospel are friends of the Gospel:

*Do **your** best to come to me soon. For **Demas**, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. **Crescens** has gone to Galatia, **Titus** to Dalmatia. **Luke** alone is with me. Get **Mark** and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. **Tychicus** I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with **Carpus** at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. (2 Timothy 4:9-13)*

There are eight people listed here. You might miss it, but the first friend is Timothy. Remember, Paul is writing to Timothy. This entire letter, what we call 2 Timothy, is addressed to Timothy. We already mentioned that Timothy is Paul's protege, his padawan, his young pastor in training. Timothy is Paul's friend. They are partners in ministry. Paul is asking Timothy to do his best to come to him soon. This is not a casual comment like "see you later" or "I hope we meet again." Paul is pressing him. There's a sense of urgency. And he gives us a reason: For (or because) Demas, in love with this presented world, has deserted and gone to Thessalonica.

In the past, I was fascinated with Demas deserting Paul. Demas appears in Paul's letter to the Colossians, and in Paul's letter to Philemon he's identified as a fellow worker. By identifying Demas as a deserter, Paul is warning Timothy about the dangers of falling in love with the world. But I don't think that's the main point he's trying to communicate. The point Paul is pushing is for Timothy to do his best to come to him soon because his friend Demas left him and he wants Timothy's presence. He wants his companionship. He wants his fellowship.

Look at how he continues. Unlike Demas who had deserted, these next two names had most likely risen as strong Christians in the early church: Crescens had gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. I don't think Paul needed to say more about these brothers. He's not complaining or giving warnings here. But he is saying that God has taken these friends to go on and minister elsewhere. He wants Timothy to come.

Luke is next, but I want to emphasize that he says Luke alone is with him. Luke has been a faithful friend to Paul all this time. This is not something to skip over. There are some friends that God sovereignly ordains to stick together. Paul is stressing to Timothy: “it’s just us, as always, and we really want you here.”

Mark is interesting. Before all of this, Paul and Barnabas disagreed about taking Mark as a missionary. Paul and Barnabas would split, with Barnabas taking Mark and Paul taking a man named Silas instead. But in our passage today, after time has passed, we see Paul telling Timothy to bring Mark with him, for he is very useful to Paul for ministry. Their conflict has been resolved. It’s a beautiful picture of reconciliation and restoration. And so Paul requests not just for Timothy, but to bring Mark along as well. And doing ministry together is on Paul’s mind.

Tychicus is said to have been sent by Paul to Ephesus. The book of Ephesians actually says that Tychicus had delivered Ephesians to the church in Ephesus, so this is incredible as we get a glimpse at how God used people to spread Scripture around the world. Back when there were no emails or postal service, letters were delivered by personal couriers. So Tychicus is a person that Paul had to trust and send away as a part of his ministry. This was a necessary sending away, and Paul is saying he now needs Timothy to come as soon as possible.

Paul ends this section by asking Timothy to bring the cloak that he left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. So there’s the eighth friend, Carpus at Troas. Apparently he was a hospitable friend and housed Paul, and Paul left his cloak at his place. It must have been cold and uncomfortable in prison, so it makes sense for him to make this request. But he also asks for the books, and above all the parchments. What’s most important to Paul are the parchments – the scrolls of holy Scripture. Paul would use these parchments to read, study, and write. He was going to keep working. Paul’s priority, more important than his cloak and physical condition, were sacred Scripture and his spiritual health. The words of God would keep him warm. He asks Timothy to bring them to him, as he intends to continue spreading the message of the Gospel.

With all of these people, we see the importance of having friends of the Gospel in our lives. Some will be younger brothers and sons like Timothy. Some will desert like Demas. Some will be like Crescens and Titus that God will take and use elsewhere. Some will be lifelong friends, like Luke. We might have broken relationships with friends at times, just like Paul and

Mark, but there is hope for them to be restored. Carpus is an example of a friend in our hometown, or home church if you will. And Tychicus is a friend who is sent out for ministry. I've had all of these types of friends in my life. God is glorified when we don't take them for granted.

Cherish Your Christian Friends

So, will you cherish your Christian friends? Our Christian friends are friends who can help with your physical needs, like bringing your cloak, and your spiritual needs, like bringing God's Word to you. Even Jesus had his apostles, his closest friends in ministry.

I want to apply this directly to the junior high students right now. Tim Challies wrote a book called *Run to Win: The Lifelong Pursuits of a Godly Man*. He dedicates an entire chapter to friendships. He specifically says that we should foster our friendships. We must encourage, promote, and develop friendships. They don't happen by chance. There is intentionality, and this must be especially true with our Christian friends.

I made my best friends in junior high – and by God's grace they're still in my life. But in junior high, that's when I started realizing that I could and did spend more time with my non-Christian friends. In some ways, I became closer to my non-Christian friends. I exhort you to especially cherish your Christian friends. Devote yourselves to them. Look out for each other. If you go to the same school, you can do this more easily. When you see your church friends at school, don't be a stranger – you are brothers and sisters in Christ. I'm not telling you to not have any school friends – that would be silly. But it is interesting that the people Paul lists are connected to Christ in one way or another. Your Christian friends are special. God has given us great ways to make friends here at church. He has given us time to spend together and opportunities to serve together. Every Sunday, for sure – and Friday night fellowships as well. Don't neglect meeting together, go and serve with one another.

If you don't have any close Christian friends, I encourage you to not give up and to keep putting yourself out there and to trust that God will give you friends. He wants you to have them. For those who make friends more easily, let this challenge you to make even more, maybe those who are new or who need a friend now. If you are fighting with a friend, if things are awkward between you and someone else – Christians are called to reconcile and make things right. The world will know that we are Christians by our love for one another.



2. Enemies of the Gospel

The second key relationship in the ministry and message of the Gospel are enemies of the Gospel:

*Alexander the coppersmith **did me great harm**; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for **he strongly opposed our message**. (2 Timothy 4:14-15)*

I consider our enemies as a key relationship because it's critical to know that we are opposed. Paul warns Timothy to beware of someone specific – Alexander the coppersmith. This is the only time in the Bible that Alexander the coppersmith is mentioned. We don't know much about him, except that he did great harm to Paul. This could be physical harm. It could be a spiritual type of harm. It could possibly be both, as this warning to beware of him seems rather serious coming from Paul, as well as the mention that he strongly opposed their message. We don't know why God allowed Alexander the coppersmith to be prominent in Paul's life. Sometimes we see that God uses adversaries to grow us – but that's not really shown here in today's text. So it's safe to say that sometimes we just don't know why God puts opponents into our life. Notice that Paul does not tell Timothy to fight back or take matters into his own hands. He says that the Lord will repay Alexander according to his deeds. God is glorified when we trust him over our enemies. He is a God of justice and will not let evil go unpunished. Vengeance belongs to God. This is said in Deuteronomy 32:25-26, alongside the fact that the Lord will vindicate his people, and again in Romans 12:19 with God saying he will repay. We are to be gracious to our opponents, and let God be the judge. Nevertheless, we must not be naive. We must be prepared for opposition.

Prepare for Opposition

So, will you prepare for opposition? I've said this before: I have not experienced the type of persecution that Paul has endured. Here in America, we are the outliers. So this is a very real warning and call for us who live comfortable lives as Christians. Think about the Olympics. We don't even need to talk about the opening ceremony. I want you to think on a more grounded level. I'm not talking about art – although I do believe it is significant – but more importantly I'm talking about governments and authorities that go against Christianity. Countries that actively oppose or significantly restrict Christianity. Look it up for yourself and learn about what our brothers and sisters across the world go up against in their faith.

I want to speak to the freshmen and sophomores. Here in America, it might be more meaningful to talk about the ideas and the views that are found in our faith and how they compare to our culture. You might not have noticed, but the culture is against Christianity. There are specific places you can look and see how our culture affects society at large. This is especially true if you're looking at the more elite academic institutions – in the cosmopolitan sectors of society. And it's true in Hollywood, here in our backyard. So think about your school, and think about movies, and just see the ways they go against our faith.

When you prepare for tests, you anticipate test questions. Maybe one of the best ways to prepare yourself for opposition to your faith is to see how you would answer the question: Why are you a Christian? Some of you might say you are a Christian because you “grew up in a Christian family” or because your parents are Christian. That's something we should not take for granted, but we must all come to terms for ourselves about if we really believe for ourselves, not just because it's what we know or because our parents told us so. Some other questions might be: How do you know God exists? How do you know the Bible is true? How do you know Jesus resurrected? Read the Bible for yourself. And when you know what the Bible says, stand your ground on God's Word. Don't compromise. Remember that God will have the final say in our suffering. Have a humble disposition that displays your trust in God.

Prepare for opposition now, before you get to college. When I was in high school, it was more common for people to identify as a Christian just because Christians were still perceived as good people. But now, here are some terms I've heard more of towards Christians today: Hypocritical, judgmental, intolerant, unaccepting, self-righteous, preachy, narrow-minded, closed-minded, backwards, bigoted, out of touch, exclusive, exclusionary, oppressive. To be fair, this is not really new or unexpected. The Bible says that If you're not with Jesus, you're against Jesus (Luke 11:23). There is no indifference. And the world will hate us because they hated Jesus first (John 15:18-19). But Jesus promises us: “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (Matthew 5:11).



3. God of the Gospel

The third key relationship in the ministry and message of the Gospel is the God of the Gospel:

*At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But **the Lord stood by me and strengthened me**, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was **rescued** from the lion's mouth. The Lord will **rescue** me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:16-18)*

Paul talks about before his imprisonment, when he had to make a defense when he was on trial before Rome. Remember, the reason why Paul was in prison was for preaching. He recalls how no one came to stand by him – all had deserted him. And as if continuing his mindset of trusting the Lord to be the judge of all, he says to not charge those who deserted him! He is not bitter, but displays a gracious disposition throughout his persecution. Back in Acts 7:60, Paul was not yet a Christian – he was a persecutor of the church when he heard Stephen say, as he was stoned to death, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” And maybe Paul was amazed at the words of Christ during his crucifixion in Luke 23:34, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Paul goes on to say that even though no one came to him, the Lord was faithful to stand by and strengthen, and this is why: so that the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. The God of the Gospel is faithful to his own ministry and message. He stands by and strengthens. He ensures we endure. He promises perseverance.

Paul says he was rescued from the lion's mouth. This could be a literal lion, like Daniel in the lion's den. It may be a metaphorical lion of danger and death. Or it could be the spiritual lion of Satan, who prowls around like a roaring lion waiting to devour. In all cases, God is in control. We can be confident that he will rescue his children from evil deeds, and safely bring us into his heavenly kingdom. In a dark prison cell, Paul points his eyes towards Heaven with praise and worship, saying to God be the glory. God is glorified as we remain confident in our Heavenly Father, knowing he will stay faithful to his own Gospel ministry and message.

Entrust Your Life to the Lord

So, will you entrust your life to the Lord? Entrusting your life to God can mean two things. You can mean your spiritual life – believing in Jesus saves you from Hell and gives you eternal life in Heaven. That’s entrusting your life, and specifically the eternal life of your soul, to God. But what I mean here is your physical life – believing in Jesus makes you God’s child and knowing that God takes actual physical care of his children. This is a more direct and appropriate application because Paul is talking about evil deeds – things that were actually done to him.

I want to talk to the upperclassmen now, the juniors and seniors. Entrusting means to give it all. Paul was ready and willing to give and risk it all for the sake of the Gospel. What if I didn’t revolve my life around money? What if I didn’t revolve my life around my kids? I’m not saying that we neglect these things. But I take Jesus seriously when he says you cannot love both God and money. I take Jesus seriously when he says we must hate our father and our mother – our family – when we compare them to our love for Jesus. When Jess and I started thinking about adoption, we were really worried about money. It takes a lot of money to have kids in general, but it takes even more for adoption. It came to the point where we had to understand that God would provide for us if this was really God’s plan for us. And by his grace, he has proved true.

For some of you students, your life revolves around school or college. What if you revolve your life around Christ? For some of you with boyfriends and girlfriends, your life revolves around a significant other. But what if your life revolved around your Savior? Video games. Sports. Band. What makes you get up in the morning? What if you got up because of God?

The risks we face are not greater than the reward. We must consider if we are really following Christ with all of our hearts. Don’t hold back. I think it’s fair to say that Paul sometimes put himself in danger. He took some calculated risks for Christ. Paul’s life serves as an example, an inspiration, to really give your entire life over to God.



The Gospel

The name Jesus means “God saves, God delivers, God is salvation, God rescues.” And restoring our relationship with God is an intrinsic part of the Gospel. Paul wrote in Romans 5:10: “For if while we were **enemies** we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be **saved** by his life.” And Jesus says John 15:15: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you **friends**, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

Big Idea

Christians will have friends and enemies in this world. God will be faithful to believers and to the ministry and message of the Gospel.

Conclusion

Let’s go back to the beginning again for our conclusion. I asked you: Does God really care about my relationships? If life is a web of connections, with yourself at the center, does God see it all and does he care? The answer is yes. By his providence, he places friends and enemies into our lives. Some will stay and some will go. Cherish the friends that are here. Trust God’s plans when people leave. Prepare for enemies and opposition, and be confident in God as you give your life to him. Our relationships can give God glory as we tend to the ministry and message of the Gospel. At the end of the day, our Heavenly Father always proves faithful.

As I get older, I’m learning to not see people based on their relationship with me – but in their relationship with the Gospel. Jesus is the key to unlocking and understanding all of our relationships. I see everyone in how they relate to Christ. Do they know him or not? Instead of myself at the center, the Son of God sits at the center. This gives us the proper perspective, as we remember Paul’s last words, the people God places with us, and the life we have to live:

*When **Christ who is your life** appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:4)*



God is Our Great Rescuer

*This prayer poem is focused on 2 Timothy 4:18: The Lord will **rescue** me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.*

Christ our true companion
From enemies to friends
For God is our great rescuer
And faithful til the end

Christ our strong defender
From all who take offense
For God is our great rescuer
And faithful til the end

Christ our one salvation
From Heav'n, the Son was sent
For God is our great rescuer
And faithful til the end

References

- 1-2 Timothy and Titus: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary by Andreas J. Kostenberger
- Run to Win: The Lifelong Pursuits of a Godly Man by Tim Challies
- [Friends and Foes](#) by John MacArthur
- [The Sadness and Beauty of Paul's Final Words](#) by John Piper
- The ESV Study Bible by Crossway
- The Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary on 2 Timothy by Paul Jeon

Reflection Questions

1. Who are the Christian friends in your life that you are closest to? How can you show them appreciation and support this week?
2. Are there any Christian friends you have drifted away from? What steps can you take to reconnect and strengthen that relationship?
3. What do you know about opposition to Christianity around the world?
4. Can you share an example of ideas in academia or Hollywood that go against Christianity?
5. What cultural or social pressures do you face that challenge your faith? How can you respond to these pressures in a way that honors God?
6. Reflect on a time when you had to stand up for your faith. What did you learn from that experience, and how can it prepare you for future challenges?
7. What's a question about the Bible or about your faith that you are not prepared to answer?
8. What does your life revolve around? What gets you up in the morning?
9. Reflect on a specific area of your life (e.g., academics, relationships, future plans) where you need to fully trust God. What steps can you take to surrender that area to Him?
10. Consider your future plans and ambitions. How can you ensure that these plans are aligned with God's will for your life?