

Ready! Set! Go!
Continuing Lessons on Perseverance
2 Timothy 4:9-21

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Introduction to Text: First and foremost, Paul's second letter to Timothy is a call to perseverance. Interestingly, Paul's letter comes from prison. His encouragement to persevere is not theory, it's testimonial. (4:6-8) It is widely held that 2 Timothy is Paul's last letter before his death.

We have given the summer to walking through this whole book, basically verse by verse, certainly section by section. We have given this theme to this book: Ready, Set, Go. The idea behind this theme is two-fold. First, it is an adequate description of what is happening in this letter. This book originally is a letter from Paul to Timothy. Paul is preparing Timothy in this letter to take the baton, to assume a greater role of leadership in the life of the Church—to take his place. The second idea behind this series is for God to use this teaching to prepare our hearts for a challenge that I want to issue to you individually and to us as a church this fall.

In our ONE Day service (on August 31) and beyond, I will issue the challenge to “Do Something” for God that you have never done. We will ask God as a church collectively to unify us around one thing that we can do together that we have never done before in the history of our church.

But today we conclude our walk through 2 Timothy.

Text: ⁹ Make every effort to come to me soon, ¹⁰ for Demas has deserted me, because he loved this present world, and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry. ¹² I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come, bring the cloak I left in Troas with Carpus, as well as the scrolls, especially the parchments. ¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did great harm to me. The Lord will repay him according to his works. ¹⁵ Watch out for him yourself because he strongly opposed our words.

¹⁶ At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the proclamation might be fully made through me and all the Gentiles might hear. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

¹⁹ Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰ Erastus has remained at Corinth; I left Trophimus sick at Miletus. ²¹ Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, as do Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers.

²² The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Introduction: Sometimes we tend to breeze through the end of Paul's letters. We see the personal greetings that Paul extends in these closing words and dismiss these words as irrelevant to our lives. However, all of God's word is relevant. Remember what we read just a few Sundays ago: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3:16) So, let us pay attention to these closing words of the second letter to Timothy and learn some practical lessons.

This list of names represents people—real people. In these people are lessons for the rest of us. We don't have time to deal with every single one in the list and not enough is known about all of them, but we do get several rather important lessons.

The Lesson from Demas:

Nobody gets beyond Worldliness.

Demas is mentioned three times in the New Testament. First, Paul refers to Demas in Philemon verse 24 when Paul referred to him along with some others as a "fellow laborer." Then in Colossians 4:14, Demas is simply mentioned by Paul as being one who sends his greetings (implying that Demas is still a partner in the Gospel). The third time is here at the very end of Paul's life. Demas' story seems to be the story of so many. They "flame out." Demas' story seems to represent that downhill spiral that so many take. Perhaps the reason that so many fall out of the race is that they fall in love with one of life's 4 major targets of temptation.

4 Major Targets of Temptation:

(1) Power

(2) Pleasure

(3) Popularity

(4) Possessions

We all know the story of someone who fell to the temptation of worldliness. Let their story along with Demas' story remind us that this could happen to any of us.

The Lesson from Luke:

Nobody gets beyond usefulness.

Out of all of Paul's companions only Luke was with him. Not all left in the way that Demas left, but nonetheless, at this point, only Luke was with him. Often persons were allowed to have someone with them in this prison arrangement, and it seems, that Luke was the one willing to be with Paul. Luke is the one who is keeping the evangelist going. He's not the great preacher or the big personality, but without Luke, Paul would not have been who he was. Do you ever feel like Luke? Everybody else is doing some glamorous work, and you are just doing your job. You are just "pressing on" doing what God has called you to do.

I think about the Lukes of our church—Lukes who teach Preschool children, school aged children, Junior and Senior High School students. Some Lukes visit the sick and shut-in. Other Lukes serve as greeters and ushers and sing in the choir. They seek no glory. They seek no reward, except that reward when they hear from their Heavenly Father, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Not everyone can be a Paul, but everyone can be a Luke.

During World War II, England needed to increase its production of coal. The story is told that Winston Churchill called together labor leaders to enlist their support. At the end of his speech, he asked them to imagine a scene. He envisioned a parade in the streets of London following victory. Churchill painted the mental picture of the sailors being the first to be heralded because they kept the vital sea lanes open. Next would come the foot soldiers who had come home. Then the pilots who had driven the enemy from the sky would take their turn. Last of all, Churchill described the long line of sweat and soot soaked miners. Someone might cry from the crowd, “Where were you during the critical days of our struggle?” Churchill said, “And you will be able to shout back, ‘We were in the deep of the earth with our faces to the coal.’”

Not all jobs seem as prominent, but the people with their faces to the coal play a vital role in helping us accomplish our mission to reach the world for Christ.¹

The Lesson from Mark:

Nobody gets beyond forgiveness.

The lesson that we get from Paul’s mention of Mark is that nobody gets beyond forgiveness. Do you remember the relationship between Mark and Paul? As recorded in the Book of Acts, Mark (called John Mark) leaves in the middle of the first missionary journey. When the time came for the second journey, Barnabas indicated the need to bring John Mark with them. Paul strongly disagreed so much so that the Scripture indicates that there arose a sharp disagreement between them. The disagreement was so pointed that Paul and Barnabas parted ways. Barnabas left with Mark, but Paul traveled with Silas.

Fast forward many years to the end of Paul’s life, and he records this about Mark, “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.” Not just useful, but useful “to me.” We don’t have the details, but somewhere along the way, Mark became more than the young man who left Paul in the middle of the mission. He became a man used by God to write one of the four Gospels. Here is a great lesson on forgiveness. Let’s say three quick things about forgiveness.

- (1) Failure is not fatal or final.
- (2) Everyone deserves a second chance.
- (3) It is never too late to receive or give a second chance.

¹ Story told by Don McCullough in *Waking from the American Dream*. Craig Brian Larson, *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, 222.

In April 1995, Bud Welch's 23-year-old daughter, Julie Marie, was killed in the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Listen in Bud's own words to his move from anger to forgiveness.

"Three days after the bombing, as I watched Tim McVeigh being led out of the courthouse, I hoped someone in a high building with a rifle would shoot him dead. I wanted him to fry. In fact, I'd have killed him myself if I'd had the chance.

Unable to deal with the pain of Julie's death, I started self-medicating with alcohol until eventually the hangovers were lasting all day. Then, on a cold day in January 1996, I came to the bombsight – as I did every day – and I looked across the wasteland where the Murrah Building once stood. My head was splitting from drinking the night before and I thought, "I have to do something different, because what I'm doing isn't working."²

What he did different is to begin to forgive. He even went to meet the father and sister of Timothy McVeigh to tell them that he forgave.

Do you need to forgive someone? You can. You need to forgive. You can't progress forward in your relationship with God until you forgive.

The Lesson from Paul

Nobody gets beyond humanity.

The final lesson comes from Paul, himself. The whole end of this letter shows the depth of Paul's loneliness. He's tired, one time associates have tried to harm him, he is dreading winter, and missing his friends. I think there are a couple of lessons in Paul's loneliness. The first lesson applies to the lonely. Loneliness is a very human feeling. The spiritually mature are not necessarily immune from this kind of feeling.

Notice what Paul does. He reached out to his friends, God's Word, and God, Himself. Surround yourself with as many friends as you can. Reach out to them and reach out to God and His Word.

Fifteen hundred years another great man—William Tyndale—was confined to prison. He was a translator of the Bible. His crime was that he dared to give the Bible to people in their own language. He also wrote to a friend: "Send me, for Jesus' sake, a warmer cap, something to patch my leggings, a woolen shirt, and above all my Hebrew Bible."

Conclusion: We encourage every member and attender of our church to participate in a Sunday School class. Sunday School is not just for kids. Whatever we call it, Bible Study, Small Groups, Bible Study classes, Cell groups—it does not matter—we all need to be part of a small group to study the Bible. It is in that small group of people that we have accountability so that we don't fall victim to the world. We learn that all are useful. In a small community, we learn forgiveness. We meet the needs of the lonely.

² Taken from a website called "The Forgiveness Project"

One last thing, we ought to note from the writer of this letter's life. Nobody is beyond being saved. If ever there is a person that teaches us that lesson, Paul is that person.