



Central Peninsula Church

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2 Timothy 4:9-21
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Come To Me Soon

SERIES: A Life That Counts: Studies in 2 Timothy

William Tyndale grew up during a time when people were not allowed to read the Bible for themselves. The Church did everything it could to keep the Bible out of the hands of the common people. Even if they could get a hold of a Bible and were able to read, most people wouldn't have been able to understand it because it was written only in Latin. Tyndale changed all of that. He had a passion to put the Bible into the hands of ordinary people; written in their own language. As a young man he said to a priest, "If God spares my life, and many years pass, I will cause a boy that drives the plough to know more of the Scriptures than you do." And he succeeded. In 1525, while living in exile in Germany from his native England, he completed the first ever translation of the Bible into the English language. Many of those Bibles were smuggled into England and that translation became the basis for the KJV.

But Tyndale paid a price for his passion for the Scriptures. Ten years later, while translating the Old Testament in the Netherlands, he was arrested and taken to the state prison in the castle of Vilvorde, near Brussels. A year later he was put on trial and condemned as a heretic. On October 6, 1536, at the age of 42, Tyndale was executed by strangling and then burned at the stake. His last words were, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

William Tyndale was a great man. He was a spiritual giant. But being a spiritual giant didn't negate the fact that he had real human needs. While he was in prison in the castle during that final year of his life, he wrote this to the warden of the castle, "I entreat you...by the Lord Jesus, that if I must remain here for the winter you would beg the Commissary to be so kind as to send me, from the things of mine which he has, a warmer cap; I feel the cold painfully in my head. Also a warmer cloak, for the cloak I have is very thin. He has a woolen shirt of mine, if he will send it (too). But most of all, my Hebrew Bible, Grammar and Vocabulary, that I may spend my time in that pursuit."

Tyndale reminds us that even spiritual giants have real human needs. Fifteen hundred years earlier, another spiritual giant named the Apostle Paul, himself imprisoned in Rome, wrote something similar to his friend Timothy.

"Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren" (2 Tim. 4:9-21).

As you let these final words of Paul soak in, you can sense his very human feelings of loneliness and isolation. Though he is the great Apostle Paul, he's a creature of flesh and blood, a man of like nature and passions as us. Although he has finished his course and waits his crown, he's still an ordinary human being with ordinary human needs. Several factors contributed to his isolation.

I. Believers experience loneliness and isolation.

A. Paul has been deserted: First of all, Paul has this feeling that he's been deserted. He mentions in particular a guy named Demas (v. 10). Demas had been a real disappointment to Paul. He had great potential. When Paul wrote to Philemon years earlier, he called Demas his "fellow worker" along with the likes of Luke and Mark. Demas had no doubt been with Paul in hard times. He'd seen some of the ups and downs. But this time the

situation was just too much for him. He could see that Paul would soon be executed. The stakes were rising. So Demas packed his bags and headed off for Thessalonica. Paul took that personally. He says, "He deserted ME."

I don't think Demas had become some kind of heretic or even quit being a Christian. There were believers in Thessalonica and he may have rejoined them. Paul says he left because "**he loved this present world.**" That doesn't make him a villain, but just a man, much like us. Demas followed a well-worn path to disgrace. We don't know what it was about this world that he loved, but it was too precious to him to lose for the sake of the gospel. It might have been his home or his family or a special relationship. We don't know. Maybe early on he had failed to count the cost. Or maybe it was just the passing of years that chipped away at his ideals. William Barclay says, "the years have a way of taking our ideals away, of making us satisfied with less and less, of lowering our standards. There is no threat so dangerous and so insidious, as the threat of years to a man's ideals."

Whatever the excuse for his desertion, one thing is for sure - it hurt Paul. Our deepest hurts come from those we've been closest to. At times we think that the body of Christ is the last place on earth that we should have to be hurt, but people are people, and it happens. Even though Paul knew that, this was a bitter pill for him to swallow.

B. Paul had been opposed: But that's not all. Paul had also been opposed. Down in v. 14 he warns Timothy about a man named Alexander. He was a coppersmith. Paul says "**he did me much harm.**" There are people like that in our lives. They aren't friends and they never were friends. They hurt us and harm us. There is a hint in the Greek that Alexander "informed many evil things" about Paul. Scholars believe Alexander was the informer responsible for Paul's arrest. Paul also adds, "**he vigorously opposed our teaching.**" Alexander was the kind of guy you'd like to pay back; the kind of guy you find yourself thinking about at 3:00 AM. Paul really couldn't do anything about him, but he could warn Timothy to watch out for him, and he could find a little bit of solace in the fact that not he but the Lord would repay him for his deeds.

C. Paul had been unsupported: What might have been harder to swallow is the fact that when Paul attended the preliminary hearing of his trial in Rome, no one supported him. He says in v. 16, "**At my first defense, no one supported me...**" In the

Roman justice system, a trial was preceded by a preliminary investigation. Roman law permitted Paul to call witnesses to stand up for him. But even among all the Christians in Rome at this time there was not one who stood by his side to advise him or support him. We don't know why. Perhaps they were afraid. Perhaps they were too busy. Perhaps they were out of town. Perhaps they just didn't know about it. But it had to have hurt. Here is Paul, bald head and bandy legs, the great missionary general who had weathered the storms of several continents for the gospel, standing all alone in the great Roman court. He was hurt, but he wasn't bitter, and so he prays, "**May it not be counted against them.**"

D. Paul has been left alone: Sometimes it's really no one's fault that we're left alone. Paul mentions several others in this passage who for good reason just weren't around. In v. 10 he mentions Crescens and Titus. In v. 12 he says he has sent Tychicus to Ephesus. He was probably the one who carried this letter with him to deliver to Timothy. In v. 20 he mentions Erastus and Trophimus. Trophimus might have been with him except for the fact that got sick and couldn't travel and had to stay in Miletus. Paul had been known to heal, but his prayers for Trophimus had remained unanswered.

Paul's sense of loneliness and isolation reminds me of Jesus at his own hour of need. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus took a few of his friends into the garden of Gethsemane. He asked them to keep watch and pray for him while he went deeper into the garden. Scripture says instead they fell asleep. Jesus asked them, "**Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?**" Later, when the Roman cohort came to arrest Jesus with swords and clubs, it says that all of his friends "**left him and fled**" (Mk. 14:37,50). Jesus knew what it was to be deserted, abandoned and left alone.

We can't help but be reminded that Paul's story and Jesus' story will also be our story. Perhaps it's the loneliness or rejection of a divorce. Or the sense of rejection we feel when a good friend turns her back on us, especially when we need her. It might even be a son or a daughter who all of a sudden wants nothing to do with us. Tim Hansel writes, "Loneliness is a wrinkled and unappreciated feeling...like a well-worn pair of faded jeans. It's the kind of feeling you find in the corner of the closet when you're not looking for it. A leftover ache, rumbled in the corner - which somehow manages to penetrate your whole being. I have thought that there is no pain quite so empty as loneliness. It's the pain of simply being alive. We've all tasted it. There is no life without relationships - and there can be no relationships without loneliness. Loneliness and love are inseparable twins." It would be nice to think that the presence of God absolves us from the pain of loneliness,

but it doesn't.

It didn't for Paul. And so in the midst of his own "leftover ache" Paul asks Timothy for several things.

II. Believers have real human needs.

A. Paul needs people to keep him company: First and foremost he asks Timothy to drop everything and come to Rome. He says in v. 9, "**Make every effort to come to me soon.**" And then, almost as if he fears that Timothy has not caught the urgency of this, he says again in v. 21, "**Make every effort to come to me before winter.**" Paul knew it would be impossible to cross the Adriatic Sea during the winter months so it was all the more critical for him not to tarry. Even if Timothy left now, the journey would take four to six months over land and sea, by way of Troas, Phillippi, across the Egnatian Road and on to Rome. At the root of this is Paul's affection for Timothy. He began this letter by calling him "**my dear son**" and saying "**I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy**" (1:2, 4). It's safe to say that Timothy was the son Paul never had and he ached for his presence.

Paul didn't want Timothy to come alone either. He orders him in v. 11 to "**pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.**" The story of Mark is one of the most encouraging in all of Scripture. Mark had many privileges. His mother's home was one of the centers of the Jerusalem church. He'd known the apostles since boyhood. So when Paul started out on his first missionary journey, he took Mark with him as a helper. But Mark had failed to stick it out and he deserted Paul in Pamphilia and went home. Later, when Mark wanted another chance, Paul refused to take him along. That was 20 years ago, and here we see that through time Mark had regained Paul's respect. It's good to know that a missionary dropout like Mark can be restored to usefulness in the service of Christ.

B. Paul needs his cloak to keep him warm: In his loneliness, Paul wanted the people that meant the most to him by his side. But that's not all Paul asked for. In v. 13 he also asks Timothy to stop at Troas and pick up the cloak he left at Carpus' house. When your son leaves his jacket at school it might help to remember that even Paul forgot such things. In those days a cloak was an outer garment made of heavy material, circular in shape with a hole in the middle for your head. It could also be used as a blanket at night. Paul is old and winter is coming and he needs to keep warm. Again, we see Paul's humanity in this. The Holy Spirit wouldn't keep Paul warm! Paul wasn't so spiritual that he could do without his cloak.

C. Paul needs his books to keep him occupied: But it wasn't just his body that had needs; it was also his

mind. He was bored. He wanted to stay occupied; to stay mentally engaged. And so he asks Timothy to also bring the books and the parchments. These books were actually scrolls made of papyrus. They might have been his own writing materials for correspondence. The parchments, on the other hand, were made of animal skins and were very expensive. We don't know for sure what they contained, but it's likely these were copies of the OT Scriptures and even written narratives of Jesus' life and teachings which later were used by Mark and Luke to write their gospels.

These were Paul's requests and they reflect his very real human needs. If as spiritual a man as Paul was as open and honest about his real needs, why aren't we? We're not "denaturalized by God's grace." When our spirit is lonely, we need friends. When our body is cold, we need warmth. When our mind is bored, we need books.

I think of this as it relates to what we call mid-life. At mid-life women struggle with the physical and emotional challenges of menopause. Some men would say they struggle with it too! But men also experience their own crisis at mid-life. It's interesting to me that often times these challenges coincide with children growing up and leaving the nest. I'll be honest, I never thought a Spirit-filled believer needed to worry about any of that. But I was wrong. I realized that when I began to experience what a lot of men do at mid-life. I didn't buy a sports car or dye my hair or have an affair, but I really felt something was changing. It was "half-time" for me and there were realities I had to face about my past failures and future fears. It's not an easy time, even when you have Christ. Don't deny your humanity. Don't deny the fact that you need friends, and you need to stay warm, and you need to stay occupied.

But we might ask the question, what DOES the Lord do for us in those times? How does the Lord get us through? We see in this passage that though we have real human needs, the Lord provides in a real way.

III. The Lord provides in a real way.

A. The Lord provided a loyal friend: Notice that he provided a loyal friend for Paul. In v. 11 after lamenting the desertion of Demas and the departure of Crescens and Titus, he says, "**Only Luke is with me.**" I guess there are two ways to take that. It may sound like he's saying, "Only Luke is with me, but he doesn't really count." That's not what he means. He's saying, "Thank God, Luke is still here!" Luke was the opposite of Demas. He traveled with Paul during his missionary

journeys. He wrote our longest Gospel and the book of Acts. He stuck with Paul through thick and thin. He was with him in prison the first time, as he was with him now in his darkest hour. In one of his letters Paul called him the **“beloved physician”** (Col. 4:14). He no doubt tended to Paul’s ailing bones and doctored his thorn in the flesh. He may have even been Paul’s secretary for the writing of this last letter. I can just see Luke’s wry smile when Paul had him write, **“Only Luke is with me.”**

B. The Lord provided help and strength: But Luke wasn’t the only one with him. In v.17 he says **“the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.”** Though everyone else deserted him at his first defense, he says the Lord helped him and gave him courage to preach. Five years earlier something similar had happened in Jerusalem that might help us understand. Luke tells us in Acts 21 that Paul was arrested and the whole city was in an uproar. A mob formed and they were trying to kill him. If it weren’t for some Roman soldiers protecting him, they would have succeeded. The Romans kept him in custody just to protect him from the crowd. This was a dark time for Paul. His dream of going to Rome to preach the gospel was going up in smoke. But Scripture says, **“The following night, the Lord stood near Paul and said to him, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’”** When Paul heard those words, “Take courage!” it must have jump started his soul. In the Greek it’s just one word: “Courage!” It’s the same word Jesus spoke to the bedridden paralytic and the hemorrhaging woman and the scared disciples on the storm tossed Sea of Galilee. “Courage!” This is what the Lord does for us in our darkest hour. He stands by us and he strengthens us. He says, “Courage!” We realize that we’re not really alone. He’s standing by us. That’s what Paul experienced once again here in Rome. He says the result was that he was **“delivered from the lion’s mouth.”** That was a way of saying he was delivered from death.

C. The Lord provided hope: But Paul knew that it was just a matter of time. He didn’t expect acquittal. But still the Lord provided something else - hope. He says in v. 18, **“The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed...”** And then he even breaks into worship, **“to him be the glory forever and ever.”** Isn’t that wonderful? Right there in prison, with death staring him right in the face, Paul was so confident that he just lost himself in worship for a moment. **“From him - strength; To him - glory.”** That was Paul’s

testimony. Yes, he was human. Yes, he had moments of loneliness. Yes, he had real human needs. But the Lord provided the companionship of a friend like Luke, the courage to stand up and preach, and the hope of soon being in his heavenly kingdom.

About three years ago I completed 14 years of ministry at CPC and was scheduled for a sabbatical. It came at just the right time for me. I was weary and discouraged. I was beginning to think that maybe it was time for me to move on. I shared this with the elders before my sabbatical because I didn’t want there to be any surprises when I came back. I took about three months off and I did everything I knew how to do to try and figure out what the problem was and what the Lord wanted for me next. When it was over, I told the elders that I was about 99% sure that it was time for me to leave, but I wanted to work a few more months to be sure.

During that time a number of things happened. The first thing was Sept. 11, which was a devastating time for our country, but it was also a time when people were flocking to churches in search for some answers. I found it thrilling. The second thing was just a new found sense of passion. I realized that much of what I had felt three months earlier was due to exhaustion and I had just needed a rest. The third thing that happened was we moved into this new building. It doesn’t sound very spiritual, but I sort of liked preaching in this place better than the other. Finally, the Lord brought me a new friend; a guy I hadn’t seen for 26 years showed up at church and we struck up a friendship that proved to be a great encouragement to me. The combination of those four things brought new life to my ministry and convinced me to stick around.

I’ve thought about that time a lot since then, and it seems to me this is how God works in our life. In the midst of our real human needs, whether it’s loneliness or weariness, he provides in real ways. His answers may not come in the way we think they will, but he provides.

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