

Delivered from the Lion's Mouth **(2 Timothy 4:9-22)**

People were always at the heart of Paul's life and ministry. He invested in people, shared the good news of Jesus Christ with people all around the Roman Empire, and at the end of his life he longed to be with the people whose lives he'd touched. People mattered to Paul, and people matter to God. Paul was facing almost certain death at the hands of Nero. In what appears to have been the first phase of his trial Paul's sentence was delayed—he was “delivered from the lion's mouth.” But Paul would soon die as a martyr, truly delivered from constant danger to blissful safety in heaven. Because God loves His people He will deliver His people. We can confidently entrust our lives and our eternity to the Lord Jesus Christ. The last verses of 2 Timothy encompass the themes of building relationships, facing trials, and finishing well.

Building relationships involves taking risks— people will be a source of both blessing and pain (4:9-15).

Paul knew the importance of teamwork. He never traveled or served alone. He always surrounded himself with people. But sometimes those very people whom Paul nurtured turned away and deeply disappointed him. We cannot engage in ministry to people without risking painful disappointments. People give us joy as well as sorrow. Such is the nature of ministry.

God comforts us in our loneliness through meaningful relationships (4:9-13).

Twice Paul urged Timothy, “Make every effort to come” (2 Timothy 4:9, 21). He desperately wanted to see Timothy again. Paul found himself in a lonely place in his prison cell in Rome. In our loneliness we can certainly rest in the fact of God's presence, but we still find deep value in meaningful relationships. Paul had such a relationship with Timothy.

But sometimes our relationships take downward turns. Demas had been a close friend and ministry partner to Paul in the past (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24). But now, in Paul's dark hour, Demas had abandoned him, returning to Thessalonica. Paul stated that Demas “loved the present world,” possibly indicating that Demas had fled to preserve his life when it became apparent that Paul would face execution. This departure must have grieved Paul's heart, both over the loss of a friend as well as for Demas' own spiritual condition.

Others were absent in this moment of need as well, but presumably for more noble reasons. Paul informed Timothy that Crescens, an otherwise unknown individual, had gone to Galatia (possibly Gaul). Titus, another close ministry partner and a church leader in Crete (Titus 1:4-5), had gone to Dalmatia. Luke alone remained with Paul and must have provided a great deal of comfort in Paul's lonely condition.

Paul expected Timothy to leave Ephesus and join him in Rome. He also asked Timothy to bring Mark with him because Mark was “useful” to Paul in the ministry. John Mark had traveled with Paul in the past but had proven unfaithful to the ministry, warranting Paul’s censure (Acts 13:13; 15:37-38). But to Mark’s credit he re-earned Paul’s trust and became useful to Paul’s ministry again (Colossians 4:10).

Another ministry partner, Tychicus (Acts 20:4; Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7; Titus 3:12), followed Paul’s instructions and returned to Ephesus, possibly carrying this epistle to Timothy. Tychicus would replace Timothy in Ephesus so that Timothy could be with Paul in Rome. Paul asked Timothy to travel by way of Troas so that he could bring a cloak, a heavy outer garment that would have been essential to Paul as winter approached, that Paul had entrusted to a man named Carpus (only mentioned here). Paul also asked Timothy to bring his “scrolls” (the Greek word from which we get “book” and “Bible”), probably referring to precious papyrus documents. Paul was especially eager to receive his “parchments” (the Greek word for animal skins), probably referring to more durable writing material made from leather that may have included copies of the Scriptures. Even in his final days Paul longed to feed his mind and soul. Like all Christian leaders, Paul was a lifelong learner.

People are important in our lives, especially in times of trial and loneliness. God can comfort us in such times through meaningful relationships with others.

God vindicates us in our hardships through just judgment (4:14-15).

Ministry attracts not only people of character but also people of disrepute. Paul had his critics, to be sure. One significant antagonist was a man named Alexander, a metalworker (the term originally referred to those who worked with copper). This may or may not have been the same individual as is mentioned in Acts 19:33 and 1 Timothy 1:20. Paul warned Timothy that Alexander had done him great harm. Paul also trusted God to vindicate him, stating, “The Lord will repay him for what he has done.” (Many ancient manuscripts use a verb form that implies that Paul hoped for this judgment to fall on Alexander, an attitude of justice that doesn’t necessarily conflict with grace.) Those who hurt God’s people will be subject to God’s judgment. Paul warned Timothy to be on guard for Alexander, who had “strongly opposed” their words. Alexander likely stood in vocal opposition to Paul’s grace based gospel message (and may even have spoken against Paul in an earlier phase of Paul’s trial). People can be a source of blessing or pain. Building relationships requires taking risks.

**Facing trials involves trusting God—
the Lord will sustain us both now and into eternity (4:16-18).**

Paul was facing the trial of his life. Literally, Paul was going on trial in Rome for his faith in Jesus Christ. God had preserved him through the first phase of that trial, but martyrdom seemed imminent. Paul trusted God to sustain him in life and in death.

Sometimes people will deeply disappoint us, but we must demonstrate grace (4:16).

Paul mentions his “first defense,” probably referring to a preliminary trial leading up to his yet future official trial. At that first defense no one stood up for Paul, but “all abandoned” him. While Paul rightly expected at least some of his ministry partners or some of the members of the church in Rome to stand at his side, none did. “May it not be held against them,” Paul prayed. Times were indeed difficult, and merely identifying with an apostle of Jesus Christ could have put one’s life at risk. Paul recognized the danger and graciously understood why others were reluctant to stand with him in his trial.

Never will the Lord disappoint us, so we must demonstrate faith (4:17-18).

However, Paul was not really alone during the first phase of his trial. “The Lord stood with me and strengthened me,” he declared. The Christian is never truly alone. The Lord Jesus Christ is present even in our darkest hour. As a result of the Lord’s presence Paul was able to proclaim God’s truth, contributing to his work of helping all Gentiles (literally “peoples”) hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Apparently Paul declared the gospel at his hearing. At the end of that phase of the trial Paul “was delivered out of the lion’s mouth,” a figurative description of his narrow escape from death (compare Psalm 22:21). The threat of death by wild animals in the arena was unlikely for Paul, who was a Roman citizen. But God’s protective hand was no less present for Paul in that moment of trial. In fact, Paul was confident that the Lord Jesus Christ would “rescue” him from every evil work and “save” him into the Lord’s heavenly kingdom. In others words, whether alive or dead, Paul was safe in Jesus Christ. For this reason Paul could exclaim that Jesus Christ deserves glory forever and ever. “Amen!” While people will disappoint us, God will never disappoint us. Our lives and our eternity are secure in Him.

**Finishing well involves showing gratitude—
we will prevail when we honor both people and the Lord (4:19-22).**

Paul concluded this letter with words of affirmation for those who were a part of his life. Showing gratitude for people characterized his life, a life that he would finish well for the Lord.

We should surround ourselves with trustworthy people (4:19-21).

Paul asked Timothy to greet Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila, a ministry couple that played a large role in Paul's life (Acts 18:1-3). He extended a greeting to the household of Onesiphorus, a man who had rendered Paul great support during this Roman imprisonment (2 Timothy 1:16-18). A man named Erastus was next in line for Paul's affirmation. We can't be certain that this was the same man mentioned in Acts 19:22 and Romans 16:23, but we can be certain that Erastus was admirable. Paul simply states that Erastus stayed in Corinth, presumably strengthening the work that Paul had established in that city. Another traveling colleague, an Ephesian named Trophimus (Acts 21:29), was unable to continue on with Paul due to illness, and Paul had to leave him behind in Miletus, not far from Ephesus. Timothy may have already been aware of Trophimus' condition. It's interesting to note that even as an apostle, Paul was not at liberty to heal anyone he chose. Certainly he would have chosen to heal an ailing ministry partner, but instead had to leave Trophimus behind.

Paul repeated his urgent request for Timothy to hurry to him in Rome, urging him to arrive before the winter months made travel more difficult. Furthermore, the timing of Paul's trial was uncertain. Speed was essential if these two men were to see each other again before Paul's martyrdom. We can only speculate as to whether or not Timothy reached Paul before the apostle's death. We hope that Paul was granted this brief pleasure before his martyrdom.

Paul did have some friends in Rome who sent greetings to Timothy. These included Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and "all the brothers." These names are unknown elsewhere in the New Testament and testify that Paul was still bearing fruit even while imprisoned. Linus may have been the same man by that name who, according to church history, became a bishop in Rome. Paul certainly surrounded himself with trustworthy people and acknowledged their contribution to God's work. We, too, should honor those who have made a difference in our lives.

We should anchor our lives in the Lord Jesus Christ (4:22).

Paul concludes his final letter with a blessing for Timothy. "The Lord be with your spirit." Paul desired that Timothy would sense in the deepest region of his soul the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul also offered a blessing to those who would read this letter, saying, "Grace be with you," using the plural for "you." Paul knew that this personal letter would earn a wide audience. While Paul mentored Timothy in ministry, his letter continues to mentor God's people today. Following Paul's example, we must strive to serve well and to finish well, knowing that we can confidently entrust our lives and our eternity to the Lord Jesus Christ.