

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 6/7/2015
2 Timothy 1:15-18 “Faithfulness in the Face of Death”**

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Main Idea: In 2 Timothy 1:15-18, Paul urges Timothy, and us, to consider some role models of faithfulness, a couple of negative ones, and a positive one.

- I. Consider some negative role models of faithfulness (15).
 - A. We’re given a couple of names.
 - B. We’re told what they did.
 1. It’s possible for a soldier of Christ to desert his post.
 2. We all need to take inventory of how we are treating the gospel.
- II. Consider a positive role model of faithfulness (16-18).
 - A. We’re given his name.
 - B. We’re told what he did.
 1. He refreshed me (16).
 2. He was not ashamed of my chains (16).
 3. He searched for me (17).
 4. He found me (17).
 5. He helped me (18).

Make It Personal: Let’s ponder some questions.

1. Are you faithful to your Lord?
2. Are you faithful to your spouse?
3. Are you faithful to your children?
4. Are you faithful to your church?
5. Are you faithful to your gospel mission?

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 1:8-18

I’ve been challenged recently reading the biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Quite a gifted leader, by God’s grace!

In 1955 Martin Luther King, Jr. graduated with a Ph.D. from Boston University. He had a host of options in front of him and considered becoming a professor, but felt the Lord wanted to use him at the grassroots. So, at the age of 26 he became the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. After serving for just one year, the providence of God placed him into the national limelight.

In the 1950s southern segregation laws made it illegal for African-Americans to sit in the front of the public buses. King participated in a boycott of the Montgomery bus system, which resulted in a series of violent reactions from segregationists.

King urged his fellow-blacks to bring about reform through non-violence and if necessary civil disobedience. Consequently, his life was frequently threatened, and his home was bombed.

This began to take a toll on the young pastor, who had a wife and a baby to care for, plus a congregation who also began to receive bomb threats. Then something happened that God used to shape his life and eventually, the nation. His biographer, Stephen Oates, tells the story in *Let the Trumpet Sound*.

King took all this personally, feeling a terrible guilt that the bombs and threats and anxieties of his people were his fault. On Monday night, he addressed a mass meeting, and for the first time broke down in public. Clutching the pulpit, his face contorted in pain, he invited the audience to join him in prayer— and then felt seized by an uncontrollable emotion.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

“Lord,” he cried, “I hope no one will have to die as a result of our struggle for freedom in Montgomery. Certainly I don’t want to die. But if anyone has to die, let it be me.”

“No, no,” his people chorused.

King could not continue his prayer. Two ministers came to the pulpit and tried to get him to sit down. For several minutes he stood with their arms around him, unable to move. Finally some friends helped him to a seat.

“Unexpectedly,” King wrote later, “this episode brought me great relief.” After the meeting, many people assured him that “we were all together until the end.”

But the incident was cathartic in another way too: by praying that he be killed if somebody must be, he freed himself from his guilt that I am to blame, I have caused all this suffering . He was ready to lead again. He felt strong again. He felt God beside him, and he did not fear to die. It was as though he had told the forces of evil in the universe: kill me if you will, but the forces of light shall never cease to struggle for righteousness.¹

You learn a lot about someone when they’re facing the reality of death. I’ve entitled this message “*Faithfulness in the Face of Death.*” That was Paul’s predicament as he penned 2 Timothy. He was in a dungeon in Rome, facing death. And he would be faithful, by God’s grace, unto death.

But he’s writing this letter to Timothy because he was wavering, and needed help. He needed this call to faithfulness as he faced the reality of death.

You find out whether someone is faithful when they’re in the presence of death. Death is a revealer. Anyone can claim to be faithful. In fact, anyone can appear to be faithful when life is good and there’s no resistance. But in the face of hardship and possible death, the truth becomes clear.

In today’s text, Paul gives Timothy, and us, something intended to fortify us. He gives some role models of faithfulness in 2 Timothy 1:15-18, some negative ones in verse 15, and a positive one in verses 16-18.

Let’s set the context. 2 Timothy is a very personal letter. The apostle Paul is on death row. In the past couple of decades, he had traveled the known world of the Roman empire spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. Fifteen years earlier, while in the city of Lystra, he met a young man around 20 years of age named Timothy. He apparently introduced Timothy to Christ, and then later invited Timothy to join him in missionary service.

That’s what Timothy did. He labored by Paul’s side for 15 years. He was a great second man, an associate. But Paul’s impending death meant Timothy would soon be thrust into a new, unsolicited, and even uncomfortable, position of church leadership.

But Timothy was timid by nature. It really hurt him when he saw the Roman soldiers drag Paul away. He was intimidated, perhaps even embarrassed and ashamed.

Out of that background Paul wrote this letter we call 2 Timothy. The apostle was in prison in Rome. His spiritual son was leading the church back in Ephesus.

Paul’s appeal to Timothy was straightforward. He confronted him about his fear (1:8 “So do be ashamed...”). He reminded him of God’s sufficient grace (1:9 “This grace

¹ Stephen Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound*

was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time”). And he refocused his friend on his assignment (1:14 “Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you”).

In other words, Timothy, be FAITHFUL. Be faithful to Jesus Christ. Be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Be faithful to the people of Jesus Christ.

And then Paul became very practical. It's as if he stopped for a moment, reflected, and said, "Timothy, I don't want to lose you. I don't want there to be any confusion in your mind about what I'm asking. So let me give you a couple of examples. Some role models, both negative and positive."

What you're about to hear is nothing new for Timothy. "You know," Paul says in verse 15. And, "You know very well," he concludes in verse 18. But what he knew, he desperately needed to think about, to *consider carefully*. And so do we, for it has the power to inspire faithfulness in the face of death.

I. Consider some negative role models of faithfulness (15).

Verse 15 “You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.”

Notice two things.

A. We're given a couple of names. Verse 15, “Everyone in the province of Asia...including Phygelus and Hermogenes.”

B. We're told what they did. “Has deserted me.”

That's interesting. Naming names is gossip...*usually*. But there are times when names should be named, and since the Spirit of God guided the apostle Paul to record the names of two people who left their post, this is such a time.

“You know,” says Paul.

Yes, Timothy knew all too well what had happened in Asia (Asia Minor, modern day Turkey). That's where Timothy grew up, in the Lystra area. He had seen Paul come to Asia Minor on his first missionary journey (Acts 13). Paul introduced Timothy to Jesus Christ while in Asia Minor. Later on Paul's second missionary journey Paul returned to Asia Minor, and recruited Timothy for service in the ministry of the gospel. He was well aware of the fact that Paul had led many to Christ, and started many churches in Asia Minor. Timothy knew that well.

Timothy knew that Paul had devoted many years of his life to Asia Minor. He spent two to three years alone in the city of Ephesus. He spent months in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, and Perga.

So much so that Acts 19:10 says this concerning Paul's ministry, “All the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.”

Amazing. That's like saying everyone in southern Ohio heard the message of Jesus because of this man's ministry. ALL in the province of Asia heard of Jesus.

But what else did the ALL in the province of Asia do? Timothy knew. Verse 15, “Everyone in Asia has deserted me.”

The tense of the verb (aorist) “deserted” [KJV "turned away"] seems to refer to some particular event. Paul apparently has a specific scene in his mind. One likely scenario is the day Paul was arrested in Ephesus. Timothy may have actually seen the soldiers drag him away (in 1:4 Paul said he remembered seeing Timothy crying, perhaps at that time).

And when it happened, it knocked the wind out of the believers in Asia. They may have been embarrassed or ashamed of Paul. News spread throughout the churches. Paul was a convicted criminal. So the churches distanced themselves from this trouble-maker. In effect, they disowned him.

I don't think that verse 15 necessarily means that every single Christian in Asia turned from Paul. Nor that a total defection from the faith occurred. For we know that in another 25 years the apostle John is going to pen the book of Revelation and send it to what churches? The seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev 1:11).

But there was a massive desertion of this spiritual father of Asia Minor. In his great hour of need, the very people Paul had introduced to Jesus Christ turned their backs on him, wrote him off, and committed spiritual mutiny.

Crowds can be fickle. I'm convinced that a person can fill a church up with people if he wants. Just give people what they want, and they'll come. But Jesus Christ didn't tell us to fill up church buildings. He told us to make disciples (Matt 28:19).

I had an interesting conversation 25 years ago with Pastor Grollmund. I was in my 20s, and he was retired, having pastored this church back in the 1960s.

"Preach the Word," he told me. "That'll bring longlasting results. We tried the big Sunday School campaigns back in the 1960's. We went out and rounded up people to come and help us reach our goal. We even set the record--averaged 330+for a 6 week period. But you know, after the campaign was over, our attendance dropped back to right where it was before the campaign."

So it was with Paul. One day people were cheering him. Later they abandoned him.

But it wasn't just people in general. There were real people, with real faces, and real names.

"Of whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes?"

Have you ever heard someone say, "The Bible says don't judge! You don't have any right to judge that person!" That's true, to a point. We can't know what's in a person's heart. But we can see their life. Their fruit. And the fruit of a person's life reveals the condition of their heart (Matt 7:20).

Someone could say, "Well I don't like it when preachers name names!" To be honest, I don't either, usually. I think preachers are notorious for going overboard in criticising others who don't march to their drumbeat.

But sometimes it's necessary to name names. For the glory of God, for the reputation of the gospel, and for the good of His church.

Paul named names, carefully, yes, and intentionally. Especially in 2 Timothy. He spoke frankly to Timothy about real people who were jeopardising the ministry. Such as:

--1:15 Phygelus and Hermogenes (Their problem? Unfaithful)

--2:16-18 Hymenaeus and Philteus (Their problem? Doctrinal error)

--4:10 Demas (His problem? His priorities. He loved the world.)

--4:14 Alexander the Coppersmith (His problem? Pride, rebellion)

Friends, take note...

1. *It's possible for a soldier of Christ to desert his post.*

2. *We all need to take inventory of how we are treating the gospel.*

Who were Phgelus and Hermogenes? They're just strange names to us, but not to Paul. Perhaps out of all the believers in Asia Minor that turned away from Paul, these were the two that shocked him the most. Perhaps they used to be dear friends, helpers, close confidants.

My mentor, Pastor Dave, told me something a long time ago. "Don't minister to please your people. You can do it for awhile but the time will come when you'll have to tell them what they don't want to hear. Minister to please the Lord."

Who did David say betrayed him? "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." (Ps 41:9)

Who betrayed Jesus? The one into whom He'd poured three years of His life.

Perhaps Phygelus and Hermogenes had been some of Paul's biggest cheerleaders. But no longer.

Or perhaps they were the ringleaders of the defection in Asia Minor. Paul points them out to Timothy because they had some clout, but used their clout to spread cancer through the Body of Christ. Perhaps they didn't like Paul's apostolic authority. And his imprisonment gave them a good chance to undermine his and promote their own.

Whatever the case, Paul was heartbroken. And with great transparency, he shares his personal pain with Timothy. He says, "Timothy, you know this even before I say it. You know that there are *unfaithful* people in the church in Asia Minor. They've cast their vote against me. And they've cast their vote against the gospel of Christ. But Timothy, don't let that discourage you. Just be aware that not all who name the name of Christ are *faithful*. Don't be like them Timothy. Be *faithful*."

So why is Paul causing Timothy, and us, to think about these unfaithful role models. To caution us, right? Phygelus and Hermogenes didn't begin their journey with Christ intending on deserting the man Christ used to minister truth to them. But they did. And so can we.

Take heed, Timothy. Take heed, brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to consider these negative role models of faithfulness. Furthermore...

II. Consider a positive role model of faithfulness (16-18).

Faithfulness is a great quality. God's Word commends it highly:

Nehemiah 7:2 "Hanani... was a faithful man, and feared God more than many."

Galatians 3:9 "So then, they who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

Paul commended this quality in his associates:

Ephesians 6:21 "Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord..."

Colossians 1:7 "Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ."

Paul will eventually tell Timothy to find what kind of men to train for ministry? 2 Timothy 2:2 "And the things... commit to faithful men..."

But what does *faithful* really look like? Honestly, when I think of faithfulness, I think of a dog. In fact, it's my opinion that God created the dog to give us a living illustration of what faithful looks like.

You leave the house for ten minutes, and when you return, there she is, our faithful dog Maddie, as thrilled to see you as if you'd been gone a week.

We were on vacation last week. Actually, we didn't go anywhere because our dog, Maddie, was dying of cancer and filling up with fluid. The vet said she had three months to live *six* months ago. Sherry and I would check on her in the middle of the night, and she'd force herself to come and just stand by us. That's all she could do. That's *faithful*.

Then on Monday, we realized the time had come. I called the vet Monday evening, and asked if I could bring her in so they could put her to sleep. That was a hard call, after ten years of faithfulness. We'd been praying that the Lord would just take her, but we knew she was just suffering to breathe.

"Want to go for a ride?" I asked her. "Let's go to the vet."

And she perked up, trotted to the car, and hopped into the back seat. Again, faithful and obedient. After the five minute drive, I pulled into the vet's parking lot, and looked into the back seat where Maddie had been standing. And then I noticed she wasn't standing, but lying down, which she never did in the car. But did this time, for she had just died.

I watched her breathe her last breath. It was actually a moment of joy for me, as two thoughts came to my mind. First, "You are so kind, Father. You took her just like we asked." And two, "What a faithful dog, even to her death."

I love 2 Timothy 1:16-18! In a world full of people who seek their own interests, what a refreshing picture of a selfless, faithful servant! He is a positive role model for us.

A. We're given his name. Verse 16, "May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus."

His name means "a bringer of profit." We know very little of him. The Bible mentions him only here, and in 4:19, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus." That latter text suggests that Onesiphorus was presently in Ephesus with Timothy, and that he had a family that was worthy of commendation.

Outside the Bible, an apocryphal book written in the second century AD called "Acts of Paul and Thecla," tells us a few things about Onesiphorus. He had been a citizen of Iconium. He and his wife had entertained Paul in his first missionary journey, and in fact was converted to Jesus Christ by Paul.

Not sure if that's reliable or not, but we do know Onesiphorus was some person.

B. We're told what he did. Verses 16-18, "May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus."

Please notice something that's not in verses 16-18. Paul DIDN'T use the word *faithful* to describe Onesiphorus. He didn't have to. He merely told Timothy what Onesiphorus had done, for his actions spoke for themselves.

Nothing flashy about this man, just faithful. Paul tells us five things he did for him personally.

1. *He refreshed me (16).* Verse 16, "for he often refreshed me." Interesting word, "refreshed" = to give someone a breath of fresh air; to revive, refresh

What's one of the first things paramedics do for people? Make sure they can breathe, so they give them oxygen, if necessary.

Here's a man who gave Paul a breath of fresh air. And he did so, "often." Paul says, "Timothy, I could count on Onesiphorus, through thick and thin. When I needed him, he was there. When I heard the prison door rattle, and saw his smiling face, and felt his warm handshake, it was like a breath of fresh air in my foul-smelling prison cell. He refreshed me."

I thank God for those kind of people, and this church is full of them. People who refresh you, with kind words and deeds, unseen by the majority, but that's what makes them so refreshing. They're not done to be seen by the majority.

2. *He was not ashamed of my chains (16)*. What did Onesiphorus and Chuck Colson and Bob Litteral have in common? They were all involved in prison ministries. Like our brother Homer Sperry who goes to the jail each week. And our sister Fox Etta, and others.

Onesiphorus was some fellow. When everybody else fled in shame, he was not ashamed. So what if it wasn't good for his reputation to be seen associating with a criminal like Paul?! So what if it might hurt his chances for a job promotion?! He lived for a higher agenda, and therefore, he wasn't ashamed!

3. *He searched for me (17)*. That's what verse 17 says, and there's a word that catches my attention. "He searched *hard* for me." Another translation says, "diligently." That tells me two things.

First, Paul's imprisonment was harsh. He was locked away in some forlorn, forgotten hole in a Roman dungeon. It was hard to find him.

And secondly, Onesiphorus was committed. In order for him to see Paul, he had to travel from Ephesus to Rome, a trip of at least 800 miles. And getting to Rome wasn't the half of it. Once in that teeming capital city, it was no small task to find a prisoner like Paul. It was dangerous to ask questions about his whereabouts. If he asked the wrong person, he might be escorted to Paul, in chains himself!

But Onesiphorus looked and looked. Why? Because that's what faithful people do. When God burdens them to do something, they don't give up!

Again, I'm so thankful for this church for it's filled with unsung servants who labor week after week, refusing to give up. Ladies who walk up those steps and care for our precious little ones in the nursery. Teachers who carve out time so they feed their classes quality Bible teaching. Young people who serve on a team that's committed to presenting Christ to campers this summer.

Hard work? Yes. That's what faithfulness requires. "He searched *hard* for me."

4. *He found me (17)*. "He searched hard for me *until he found me*." This man didn't give up. Though he had reason to, though no one would have blamed him if he did.

What kept him going? His Savior. This wasn't for Paul, not ultimately, but for the One who brought Paul into his life.

God sent His Son into the world, who died on a wicked cross to pay sin's penalty for all who will repent and put their trust in Him. Then He rose from the dead, returned to heaven, and now directs His followers to take His gospel to others.

That's what motivated this man. He knew that the One who saved him had used this prisoner in Rome to rescue and transform his life. The Savior found him when he was lost, so now it's his joy to return the favor.

Do you see service that way? It's all about Him.

Refreshing Paul wasn't something Onesiphorus did just once. It was a pattern in his life, going way back to earlier days when Paul was a free man in Ephesus.

5. *He helped me (18)*. That's verse 18, "May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus."

There's what made Onesiphorus tick. There was the key to his faithfulness. Two words in verse 18, "THAT DAY."

Yes, Onesiphorus was dependable in ministry. Not because he got recognized for it, or paid for it. But because he lived with the same motivation that controlled Paul. He knew one day he would see His Savior face to face.

Beloved, *faithful* people live their lives with one clear focus. They're constantly thinking of "THAT DAY." By God's grace, they don't get sidetracked by their senses. They don't get tripped up by the trivial. They don't live for temporal pursuits. They pour their lives into things that will matter for eternity.

[Paul has more to say about this in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 "a crown...unto all them that love His appearing."

So that's what Onesiphorus did. He refreshed me. He was not ashamed of my chains. He searched for me. He found me. He helped me. In short, he modeled faithfulness!

Therefore, Paul says he was entitled to something. What can faithful people anticipate? Notice carefully what Paul told Timothy that Onesiphorus had coming to him. He mentions it twice.

Verse 16 "May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus."

Verse 18 "May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day!"

Verses 16-18 are actually a combination prayer and commendation for Onesiphorus. Some feel that Onesiphorus had died, and that's why Paul prays that his "household" will receive mercy. I don't think that conclusion is necessary (some use this to justify the practice of praying for the dead, which is another notion not supported in Scripture).

What's clear is this. Paul knew that faithful Onesiphorus was entitled to receive the blessings of God's matchless mercy. How did he know that? Because that's what Jesus said.

In the text that Brother Dave preached from last Sunday, Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." People who show mercy in the way they treat people will receive mercy from God.

Mercy is more than a theological word for Paul, and it should be for us too. We can't live without mercy, which is as vital to us as the air we breathe and the food we eat.

--It's because of God's mercy we are not consumed. (Lam 3:22)

--God is rich in mercy (Eph 2:4).

--It's because of God's mercy that we can experience the new birth (1 Pet 1:3).

--We can obtain mercy if we come to God through Jesus Christ (Heb 4:16).

So, there are two kinds of people in the world. Or to bring it closer to home, there are two kinds of people in this room. They are faithful people and there are unfaithful people. Dependable and undependable. Loyal and unloyal. Solid and shaky. Firm and

wishywashy. There are people like Phygelus and Hermogenes, and there are people like Onesiphorus.

Which kind of person are you?

Make It Personal: Let's ponder some questions.

Since faithfulness shows up in lots of ways, let's ask five questions.

1. *Are you faithful to your Lord?* He gave His life for you. Have you placed your faith in Him. That's where faithfulness begins. "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31)."

But faith doesn't stop there. Do you cherish the One in whom you believe? Do you spend time with Him regularly, reading His Word, praying, singing, reading good books, listening to Bible teaching, taking daily steps to get to know Him better? Are you faithful to your Lord, and if not, what needs to change today?

2. *Are you faithful to your spouse?* Here's where faithfulness first needs to show up, at home. Men, do you have eyes only for the woman God has given you? And ladies, do you? Is it a priority to you to be faithful to your spouse, to grow to know that person better, which means you carve out time to be with that person, to meet their needs, to give a clear message, "By God's grace, I am faithful to my spouse."

You say, "I'm single." Okay, are you faithful to the one the Lord may bring into your life? Are you doing anything right now that you would not do if your future spouse were present in your life?

3. *Are you faithful to your children?* Do you see your children as the first mission field in your life? Do you embrace the privilege God has given you to introduce them to Christ, and then model for them how to love and live for Him? That involves saying no to some things so you can spend time with them.

4. *Are you faithful to your church?* Appalachia is filled with people, I talk with them on a regular basis, who say, "I'm a Christian, but I don't belong to a church." The church is seen as something peripheral or optional.

But the Bible calls the church *the Body of Christ* (Eph 1:22-23). So to say we love Christ and not love His visible Body is sort of double-talk. We express our love for Christ by loving His Body.

And how do we love His Body? By spending time functioning in it, supporting it with our time and energy and money, praying for it, inviting people to it.

Again, I'm so thankful for those who are faithful to this church, and there are so many. Young people at Scioto Hills, it's our joy to welcome you into this Body this summer. But I hope you have a church back home that you love, to which you are faithful.

5. *Are you faithful to your gospel mission?* When Christ saved us, He called us to a mission. "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you," He told the disciples (John 20:21). We are not a status quo people, but a sent people. There are lost people all around us to whom we have been sent. Are you faithful to your gospel mission?

What does this gospel mission look like? We'll see the strategy next time, the Lord willing, as we move into 2 Timothy 2. But as we close our Bibles today, may we be reminded of 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."