

Watch People (2 Timothy 1:15-18)

Big Idea: Learn from negative examples, and learn from those who are unashamed of Jesus and his people.

Whenever a crisis hits, as it seems to a lot these days, I see a quote from Mr. Rogers posted on the Internet. It's a good quote, too. It says:

When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of 'disaster,' I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world.

I like that.

It's so easy to look at the negative. It's all around us: twitter attacks, public shaming, acts of racism, hatred, and cruelty. Fred Rogers tells us to look for the helpers and to be encouraged by the good people who are all around us.

That is similar advice to what Paul tells us to do in the passage we just read.

Just a little background on what we've been reading.

Paul, who spread the gospel all throughout the Roman world, is in prison in Rome and about to die. He's writing a letter to his protégé, Timothy, who is a leader in the church at Ephesus. If I were to sum up the message of chapter one so far it would be the words found in verse 8: "Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor

of me his prisoner" (2 Timothy 1:8). Paul keeps hammering away at this theme, and we've been looking at this so far:

- Paul's willing to suffer and die for the gospel. It's so valuable that it's worth dying for. They can take everything from you, but they cannot take away what God has done through Jesus to transform us and to guard the good deposit he's given to us.
- He then tells Timothy – and us – to stop being ashamed and to rekindle the gift that God's given us.
- And he tells Timothy – and us – to follow the pattern of sound teaching and to guard the good deposit, even in the face of the pressure to let it go.

But it's time to get real now. It's time to look at what this looks like in the lives of real people. And so Paul gives us two case studies to watch: one negative, and one positive. He tells us to look for the people who do it wrong, and to pay attention to that, and also to look for the people who get it right.

Learn from Negative Examples

Here's the negative case study, found in verse 15: "You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes."

Mr. Rogers said, "Look for the helpers." But Paul wants to direct our attention first to those who are not helpers so we can learn from them and avoid being like them.

"All who are in Asia turned away from me." Does anyone else find that depressing? Paul writes to Timothy to tell him not to be ashamed, and here he provides some examples of people who are ashamed. Don't be like them! The problem is that Timothy

is leading a church in Ephesus, which is in Asia. The very people that Timothy has to lead are the people who are ashamed of Paul and his message!

Years earlier, Paul spent two and a half years in Asia. Things went so well that Acts 19:10 says, "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Many believed. Now "all of Asia" had deserted Paul, or so it seemed. The tide had come into the area; now the tide seemed to have gone out.

And the ringleaders are named: Phygelus and Hermogenes. We don't know anything about them, but Paul is most disappointed in them. They'd let him down and hurt him.

Later on, in chapter 4, Paul lists other former friends who had deserted him. He says, "At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!" (2 Timothy 4:16). It seems that out of all the Christians in Rome, nobody stood by Paul. Nobody showed up to support him. He was unsupported and alone.

What do we learn this?

From the very beginning, people have claimed to follow Jesus and joined his church who have later walked away. It happened in Paul's day. It's happened at Liberty Grace Church. It happens all around us.

If you're here and exploring what it means to follow Jesus, we love that. Our prayer is that you will trust Christ who gave his life to give us life. We want you to receive this good news, just as the people in Ephesus did.

But we're not just called to believe once. We're called to follow, to remain unashamed of the one who gave his life for us. Following Jesus is not just a decision. It's a beginning of a new way of life. And it seems that not everyone follows through.

It's tragic spiritually, but it's also tragic relationally. You can sense the pain in Paul's words. When people are ashamed of the gospel, they're often also ashamed of people who cling to Jesus, and that hurts.

Paul says to look at these people. Take note of them. What led them to begin to slip away? What patterns do you see in their lives that you would do well to avoid? What kinds of things can you put in place to help you avoid their mistake?

Char and I have a deal that every time we see someone compromise their marriage, that we check in with each other to see how we're doing so that we avoid doing this to ourselves. What about doing the same thing spiritually? Every time you see someone drift away from Christ and the church, take stock of how you are doing so that you don't drift away too.

I have friends. Like Paul, I could name names. This is not an abstraction. It's one thing to say, "People can desert Jesus and fall away." That's a true statement, but it's abstract. It's another thing to say, "Nate and Rebecca and Sam – you guys remember them, right? – they've all deserted Jesus and fallen away."

I want you to notice, by the way, how relational this all is. We tend to think we are autonomous humans who make our own choices. We rarely do. We're social creatures who copy our friends. Who is in your life? Take a good look at the people who you hang out with, because for good or for bad they will influence you and pull you closer or farther away from God.

Take a good look at those who become ashamed of Jesus and his people. Take stock of your life so that you don't follow them. Learn from negative examples.

But Paul doesn't just give a negative example. He gives a positive one too.

Follow the Unashamed

After reading about how many people abandoned Paul, be encouraged as you read verses 16 to 18:

May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

Sometimes what you need is one good man, one good woman, and it makes all the difference. And that's what happened with Paul.

We don't know a lot about Onesiphorus. Everything we know is in this letter. We read in these verses that he often refreshed Paul. He may have brought food to Paul. He most certainly spent time with Paul, encouraging him. Unlike the others, he wasn't ashamed of Paul.

This meant even more because of the effort that he put into finding Paul. Onesiphorus had to search all over for Paul before finding him in the dungeon. Spurgeon imagines Onesiphorus going around Rome from one jail to another. "Have you seen a little Jew with weak eyes? ...He is a friend of mine. I want to speak with him."

When everyone else turned their back Onesiphorus went the extra mile.

And that wasn't all. He also did something in Ephesus that meant a lot to Paul, but that we don't know about.

And so Paul prays for him, both for his household in 16 and for Onesiphorus himself. In a time when almost everyone turned away, this one faithful friend made all the difference.

Notice again how personal it is. Onesiphorus isn't ashamed of the gospel, and he's not ashamed of God's people either. The two really go together.

This is another reason why what you do matters. Your faithfulness to God matters, not only because of what God does through you, but because you then serve as an example to others. We can watch you, learn from you, and imitate you. Your faithfulness matters!

Why does Paul spend some time giving us a look at these two kinds of people?

Not just because he wants to blame some people and praise others. Paul's agenda goes farther than that.

It's because he wants to Timothy real, flesh and blood examples of what to avoid and what to do. "Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner," Paul writes. And then he says, here's what it looks like to be ashamed. Don't do that! Here's what it's like to be unashamed. Follow that example.

Mr. Rogers' mother said, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." Paul says, "Look for those who are unashamed. You'll always find people who are unashamed. Follow their example."

Who is your Onesiphorus? I know I have some. I'm following them. I need to. Who's your Phygelus and Hermogenes? Who serves as warning in your life, as an example of someone you *don't* want to follow? What's the trajectory of your life?

Be careful who's influencing you. Be careful of a gradual drift away from Jesus and his people. Do not be ashamed of Jesus, his message, or his people.

The old former monk Martin Luther said:

There are many kinds of sorrow on earth, but the deepest of all sorrows is when the heart loses Christ, and He is no longer seen, and there is no hope of comfort from Him ... All comfort has gone, all joy is ended, there is no help from

heaven or sun or moon, from angel or any creature. There is even no help from God. But the world rejoices.

Learn from negative examples, and learn from those who are unashamed of Jesus and his people.

Father, we realize that we're all capable of drifting. Tie us to the mast of Jesus and his people. Help us to learn from those who are ashamed, and keep us from following in their steps. In Jesus' name. Amen.