

# Stand By People (2 Timothy 4:9-22)

**Big Idea:** Stand by people, even when they disappoint, because of how God stands by you.

I want to press into this passage today, because I think it has an important message for us.

But we need to start with acknowledging the truth about ourselves: we're all probably a bit scared. I know I am. I'm a little bit scared of letting you into my life, because you may not like all that you see. And I'm a little scared of letting you too close because you may hurt me. That's just the reality of relationships. Nobody likes to be rejected; nobody likes to be hurt.

It's the dilemma of relationships. C.S. Lewis said:

*To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.*

- Option one: protect your heart so it becomes hardened.

- Option two: love and be hurt.

Those are the only two options. How we choose will determine how we live. How we choose will determine what kind of church we will become.

And here's what I want to say to you from this passage today: choose to risk. Choose to get hurt. Choose to let people into your life. Choose community even when it's scary. Let people see the real you. Lean into community so that you see the real them. You will get hurt, guaranteed. But you can do it. Here's what I want to say to you: **Stand by people, even when they disappoint, because of how God stands by you.**

We're in the last sermon in 2 Timothy looking at the last words that Paul ever wrote, at least that have been preserved. Paul is in prison and about to die. Winter's coming, and he's sad and lonely.

And what you see in this passage at the end of the letter is people. We may be tempted to skip over this passage, but we'd be missing out. We see people: 17 of them mentioned by name in these few verses, plus Timothy. Here's what we learn as we read this passage.

## People Disappoint

That's one of the major lessons we learn in this passage. Here's Paul, who's done more than anyone else to spread Christianity. Many of the people in this passage owe their spiritual lives to him. And what do we find? Disappointment and hurt.

- Demas, someone he'd called a fellow worker, deserted him (4:10).

- Alexander the Coppersmith did him much harm (4:14). It's possible that Alexander was the one who turned Paul in to the Roman authorities.
- At his first defense (probably his pretrial), nobody stood with him (4:16).

Some of his friends were gone for legitimate reasons. Paul mentions three of them: Crescens, Titus, and Tychicus. But two of his friends had left him for the worst of reasons, not to mention all those who didn't stand by him when he needed it the most. Paul poured his life into people, but he still found himself alone with only one person, abandoned by many he'd loved.

Mark my words: people will disappoint you. They disappointed Paul, and they will disappoint you and me as well. Let's get specific: people *in this church* will disappoint you. Sometimes it will be the people you least expect, the people you think you can count on.

The biggest source of pain you will experience will probably be relational pain. It will be the source of your greatest joy and the source of your greatest anguish. People will hurt you. People will disappoint.

So what do we do in light of this? I think I'd tend to withdraw, but look at what Paul shows us instead. Here's the second thing we learn from this passage:

## **Stand By People**

Paul is abandoned and alone, except for Luke. What does he do? He writes a letter to Timothy, telling him to carry one where he's left off. He doesn't give up on people. He says in verse 9 to Timothy, "Do your best to come to me soon." In verse 11 he says,

“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.” That’s very interesting, because Mark is someone with whom he’d clashed earlier in his ministry.

And then in verses 19 to 22 he writes:

*Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.*

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

What about those who didn’t stand with him in his pretrial? “May it not be charged against them!” he writes (4:16).

Paul hasn’t abandoned those who abandoned him. He’s doubling down in pouring his life into people. He’s more committed than ever to pouring his life into theirs.

In his book [Why I Love the Apostle Paul](#), John Piper reflects on how Paul loved people.

*We in the modern West—I mean the last three hundred years or so—have a love affair with the strong, independent, self-sufficient, self-assertive hero who accomplishes great feats against all odds, with little help from others ... as a whole, it is not the kind of life that Paul extolled or encouraged or modeled.*

*Never Alone in Ministry by Choice*

*In Paul’s entire ministry, as we read about it in his letters and in the book of Acts, he always traveled and ministered with others. The instances that look like they might be exceptions only prove the rule when you examine them closely.*

I love that. He was never alone by choice. Even when he'd been hurt, he kept pouring himself out. He didn't become jaded. He didn't become cynical. He kept serving. He kept loving.

Some of my heroes are the same. One of my pastor heroes was crushed by a church. He and his wife "took about a year to try not to die, to pray, and to re-think at a profound level." Out of that came the most profound ministry of their lives, one that has shaped and continues to shape the lives of hundreds of people.

Christianity is highly relational. You can't live the Christian life alone. We need others. And we're going to continue to need others even after they've disappointed us, even when we've been hurt.

I love the honesty of this passage. People disappoint, but we still need people. You can be a saint, but you still need warm clothes and good books to read (4:13). We see Paul at his most real here, and I like what I see. He's still reaching out after all he's been through.

Stand by people, even when they disappoint.

Okay. Sounds like a nice idea, but how do we do this? Here's the final part of what we see in this passage.

## **Stand by People, Even When They Disappoint, Because of How God Stands by You**

What gave Paul the ability to rise above the hurt and the pain? What will give us the ability to keep loving even after those who love hurt us over and over?

*At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:16-18)*

I love every word of this.

When Paul was brought in to his preliminary hearing, he was alone. Roman law allowed him to use an advocate and call witnesses. "Among all the Christians in Rome there was not one who would stand at his side in court either to speak on his behalf, or to advise him in the conduct of his case, or to support him by a demonstration of sympathy" (Andrew Plummer).

Nobody stood by him. Paul was presumed guilty this time, and to be associated with him was potentially dangerous. Everyone deserted him.

But one person didn't desert him. The person who mattered most was with him and strengthened him. Paul says that the Lord did three things:

- **The Lord stood by him.** God just refuses to abandon his people. He is with us even when everyone else deserts us. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "He has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5-6). No matter who abandons you, the Lord will never abandon you. He will stand by you no matter what you go through.
- **The Lord strengthened him.** Paul was in one of those situations in which all human strength would have been exhausted. But the Lord poured his strength into Paul so that he was able to speak the good news about Jesus

to those at the trial. Paul's goal was always to preach the gospel in Rome, in the center of the empire, and the Lord gave him strength to do this.

- **The Lord rescued him.** "So I was rescued from the lion's mouth," Paul said. I don't think Paul's talking about a literal lion. He could be using the term lion to represent Satan, the emperor Nero, his prosecutor, or death. Paul seems to be saying that God rescued him from immediate death, and even though he knew he would soon die, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom." The worst thing they could do to him was kill him, but even that would be good news to Paul.

Why was Paul able to stand by people even when they disappointed him? Because God stood with him. Because God stood by him, he was able to stand by others even when they disappointed.

Let me say it again: People will let you down. But don't protect yourself. Choose to get hurt. Choose to let people into your life. Choose community even when it's scary. Let people see the real you. Lean into community so that you see the real them. You will get hurt, guaranteed. But you can do it with God's help. **Stand by people, even when they disappoint, because of how God stands by you.**

Lord, lead us into this kind of community even when it's hard. Thank you that you stand with us, so that we can stay connected to others even when it's hard. Make us into that kind of church. In Jesus' name. Amen.