

I often start sermons with a question... and I have one for you today. ... *What role do fellow Christians play in your spiritual journey? ... Do you grow more on your own or with a friend?* (That may look like TWO questions... but really it is only one.) ... But how would you answer: *What role do fellow Christians play in your spiritual journey? ... Do you grow more on your own or with a friend? ... [ P A U S E ] ...*

There are times when every believer needs help. ... Even the apostle Paul faced such times — times when he desperately needed the help of other believers. ... The situation for his writing our passage today... was one of those times. ... (As you may recall) he was in prison waiting to face his final trial on the charges of being an insurrectionist and trouble-maker for Rome. AT ANY MOMENT he was to appear before the emperor Nero... and he was expecting to be executed. ... Whatever weight and pressure hangs over a man's head — whatever needs are created by being imprisoned and facing execution — all this and much more... pressed ever so heavily upon Paul.

He needed his friends. ... It's easy to forget that heroes have human needs (like everyone else.) We place them on a superhuman pedestal... but even ancient heroes of the faith struggled as we do today. ... The Apostle Paul understood the importance of friends — and especially the importance of friends during tough times.

Paul's closing lines in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Timothy reveal a man strong in his faith... and sure of his convictions - yet very much in need of a friend. ... This was a tough time for Paul... perhaps his toughest. ... And Paul knew the importance of "*Tough Friends for Tough Times*"—the importance of

Christian relationships to Christian persistence. ... So the old apostle took charge of his relationships and called for his “tough friends” to come to him.

Paul needed Luke’s... Timothy’s... and Mark’s... presence and encouragement for his final hours. ... Facing his final days upon earth... Paul needed and wanted the company of three tough friends.

When was the last time you picked up your phone... called someone... and said: “*Hi, today’s a really tough day for me. I need you right now*”? ... If you’re a guy – probably NEVER. ... Even women might find it difficult. ... Two things (very often) restrain us from expressing that kind of raw vulnerability: pride and fear. ... Pride and fear may be holding us hostage to so much misery. ... Here was the apostle Paul (a man with strong faith and conviction) - but he still needed his friends. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

You don’t have to read far into your Bible to discover: human beings were created to be combined with other human beings. In Genesis 1... God makes the world and then He declares: “*It is good.*” ... But after creating a man... God said (what?) ... “*It is not good.*” ... Why? ... Because the man was alone. ... There was only one of him... and humans aren’t meant to do life one at a time. ... So God made Eve from Adam’s rib to be his life - partner... and only then did God say, “*It is very good.*” (You see) human beings were made to be connected. ... We were created for community.

That’s because we are created in God’s image (Gen 1:27). God (of course) is a Trinity — completely One... yet in Three Persons. ... From eternity past... the Father... the Son... and the Spirit have lived together in perfect community. ... God is all about relationship. Since before the beginning of time... the Father... the Son... and the Spirit have enjoyed each other...

served each other... valued each other... understood each other... and loved each other. At the center of the universe lives a Divine Community... (three Persons Who are inseparably and wonderfully *connected*.)

As humans created in God's image... we too are *made for relationship*. A solitary human being can never fulfill his destiny. (LISTEN!) You will never finish well - on your own !

We *need* community. ... That's why God invented the church. The Christian life is meant to be a life *lived together*.

Too many in our culture say they're committed to *Jesus*... but not the *church*. ... Disillusioned with imperfect churches... they take a "just-me-and-Jesus" approach.

But not even Jesus did that. ... He gathered a very imperfect community of twelve to share life with. ... Have you ever wondered why Jesus taught us to pray "*Our* Father... Who art in Heaven..." – instead of "*my* Father"? ... While the gospel is certainly *personal*... it is never *individual*. ... If you belong to Jesus... you also belong to everyone else who belongs to Jesus. Imperfect as it is... the church is part of the package.

Fellowship in Scripture is the Greek word *koinonia*. This is more than church potluck dinners. ... Too often we sit in the church fellowship hall... eat casserole... talk about the weather... the football game... and our truck's gas mileage... and then leave with a farewell... like: "*Nice fellowshiping with you, Fred.*" ... (Now) *this* is Christian *socializing*... (which can be enormously rewarding). ... But there is a difference between Christian *socializing* and Christian *fellowship* (or *koinonia*.) ... It is the difference between going over to Wikiup Junction and eating a donut – and

going out to the Cowboy Dinner Tree and eating a sirloin steak meal. The latter is far more substantial. ... Christian koinonia gets past surface conversation... cracks open the door of our heart... and shares spiritual life together.

With Christian koinonia... we talk about what we don't understand about the Bible... what God is teaching us as we read... where we're struggling... what decisions we face... and what blessings we're experiencing. ... We encourage... admonish... comfort... challenge... serve... rejoice with... mourn with... submit to... forgive... share with... bear with... care for... and pray for one another. - That's *koinonia*... and whenever we are privileged enough to be part of it... we are able to face the most challenging of times.

As we conclude 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy... these final verses demonstrate true Christian koinonia. We are about to see that faithfulness is a crucial component... and so is forgiveness. (Both are rare commodities today.)

It is easy to see how rare they are. When you have disappointed someone else... the offer of a second chance is nothing short of a marvel. ... That's because the law of this world... is certainly not grace! ... (And even less)...the default human setting is not forgiveness - it's revenge! ...

I heard of a guy who dialed a friend's phone number and got this message:

*"I am not available right now, but thank you for caring enough to call. I am making some changes in my life. Please leave a message after the beep. If I do not return your call, you are one of the changes."*

No... Second chances aren't our first instinct. ... But things are different in the community of koinonia fellowship. However... let's be quick to acknowledge that the Bible is very honest about the challenges of living in community. ... The New Testament does not paint a picture of the church

as people who live together in perpetual smileyhood and niceness. Community gets messy... and that's why there are Scriptural admonitions like:

- Be patient with one another (implied: "because people **WILL** annoy you.")
- Bear with one another (implied: "because people **WILL** aggravate you.")
- Forgive one another (implied: "because people **WILL** hurt you.")

Yes... when others disappoint us... we are tempted to wash our hands of them. ... But Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that true community ***begins*** with the expectation of ***disappointment***. ... Real *koinonia* begins when we painfully realize that someone isn't perfect - ***and we choose to love them anyway***. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

Now before we go any further... I am going to give two ***side-points***... (these are two powerful take-aways) that our text today will illustrate. Are you ready...?

#1. ***We can't love people for who we wish they were. We can only love them for who they actually are.***

#2. ***True Christian koinonia has no disposable relationships.***

(Watch for these powerful points demonstrated in our passage.)

***Eventually*** the apostle Paul had to learn these. He didn't ***initially*** model them. But we will see in our passage that ***somewhere along the way***... the Apostle Paul learned them and put them into practice. ... Where *koinonia* exists ***our failures are not necessarily fatal***. (You see) *Koinonia* exists in an environment where God's grace is experienced... and given out to others.

I have taken a little longer than usual to set it up... but we are ready now for our passage.

### 2 Tim 4:9

Why does he say this? ... Because he is lonesome. ... (Duh?)

Paul's insistence that Timothy come "quickly" was demanding (to say the least.) ... The journey would take Timothy four to six months over land and sea — mostly land — by way of Troas... Philippi... and then on to Rome. ... Paul was counting on the slow... grinding pace of Roman justice to allow Timothy to beat the apostle's appointment with death.

We don't know for certain that Timothy made it before Paul died. An early Church Father (Clement of Rome) who wrote about Paul's death... wrote that Timothy... Luke... and Mark - were all with Paul on the morning that he was taken outside the city of Rome... and beheaded.

### 2 Tim 4:10

Demas demonstrates the opposite of what it takes for koinonia. He was not faithful. ... Why did he desert Paul? ... Paul says it was "*because he loved this present world.*" ... .. **When we have the wrong loves - we live a wrong life.**

Demas had excellent potential. In Paul's earlier prison letter to Philemon... Paul honored Demas by referring to him as a "*fellow worker*" along with the likes of Mark and Luke (v. 24). ...He was part of the inner circle... in close communion with these other greats. ... Demas was a spiritual man of substance. ... Consequently ... in Paul's letter to the Colossians... Demas

is included as one who sends greetings — “*Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings*” (4:14).

(LISTEN) Demas wasn't a lightweight. He had been with Paul in many ups and downs. But this time... the situation in Rome was apparently too much for him. ... Paul was not under house arrest as before... but was in the infamous Mamartine prison... on his way to a sure death for sedition. ... Nero (the Roman Emperor) was on a rampage against Christians. ... So Demas packed his bags and took off to Thessalonica.

(But let's be clear about something... here) There is no suggestion in the text that Demas became a heretic or apostate. Demas may not have deserted the faith... but he deserted the apostle in his time of need.

Demas probably had no intention of quitting his Christianity. (I am not the only one who thinks this. John Calvin expressed it in his commentary... and many others have... since then.) ... In fact... there was a healthy body of believers in Thessalonica... and that is where he went.

Paul's assessment that it was “*because he loved this world*” does not make Demas a villain... but merely a man... so much like many who fill our churches today. ... BUT (!) He exemplifies why koinonia is so rare!

Koinonia requires faithfulness. If we want our church to have it... EACH OF US had better consider the cost. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

Two other men are mentioned in verse 10 - Crescens and Titus. (They appear to have this requirement for koinonia – FAITHFULNESS.) ... We know nothing about Crescens... but we don't really need to know. He was another faithful laborer who assisted Paul in an hour of great need. That he

is mentioned with four other notable men suggests Paul thought highly of him.

Titus is someone we know a little more about. (In fact next week I will begin to preach on Paul's letter that is addressed to him.) ... *Titus* was Paul's close associate... and... along with Timothy... he was a trusted "troubleshooter." ... Paul had left Titus in Crete to straighten out the problems in the churches there (we will see Titus 1:5). This was a tough assignment. (And) here in verse 10... we see that Paul sent him to another very difficult assignment. He sent Titus to Dalmatia (which is modern-day Yugoslavia). In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century... the people were notoriously stiff-necked... as they stubbornly resisted Roman domination over them. The land was full of bands of roving criminals... and ocean pirates.

When I look back on my High School youth group... many of us (from that group) became pastors and missionaries. When I look upon my college years... many of us (from THAT group) became pastors and missionaries. Both of these times in my life is where I experienced koinonia fellowship. There is just something about a close Christian fellowship that nurtures... enlivens... and encourages a high level of ministry commitment.

## **2 Tim 4:11**

Because prisons provided only the most meager provisions... prisoners depended upon family and friends to bring food... water... clothing... and medical supplies — usually by bribing the guards. ... By this time... Luke had probably written his Gospel... as well as Acts. The "beloved physician" knew of Paul's many injuries...) and had (no doubt) witnessed many of Paul's beatings and stoning. He was invaluable to the apostle.



He began accompanying Paul just prior to Paul going to Philippi on his second missionary trip. ... Luke was with Paul from then on. He was with Paul in the famous shipwreck recorded near the end of the book of Acts. His staying with Paul to the very end is a mark of great Christian faithfulness. Luke was all that Demas wasn't.

But now... we come to my favorite. ... "Mark," the fourth faithful man... refers to (John) Mark... the cousin of Paul's oldest Christian friend - Barnabas. ... This short affirmation of Mark's "*usefulness*" testifies to the forgiveness and redemption that is always available... where koinonia exists.

Mark had been a remarkably advantaged young man. His mother's home had been one of the centers of the Jerusalem church. It was the home to which Peter came when the angel delivered him from prison... and no one would let him in... because they couldn't believe God had answered their prayers for his release. (Acts 12:12).

John Mark had known all the apostles since boyhood. So when Paul embarked on his first missionary trip... John Mark accompanied him as a helper on the campaign through Cyprus. ... But for some unknown reason... (not even half-way through the trip) John Mark left Paul in Pamphylia and went home (Acts 13:5, 13).

Paul considered this nothing less than a desertion. And later when his cousin Barnabas wanted to let John Mark accompany them on a subsequent journey... Paul would have none of it. A huge argument ensued between these two close friends (Paul and Barnabas.) Anger was

so sharp that Paul took Silas and went one way... and Barnabas took John Mark and went another (Acts 15:36–40).

We have no record of exactly what happened to Mark afterward... but evidently the time with Barnabas was a time of healing... because we find that Mark was again with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment: “*My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas*” (Colossians 4:10). Paul also called him a “*fellow worker*” (Philemon 24).

And now (in his time of greatest need) Paul called for John Mark—“*Bring him with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry*”— Mark had rocketed from uselessness to usefulness! ... There is also this beautiful fact: John Mark (the missionary dropout) became Mark (the Gospel writer) – which was probably the first of the 4 gospels to be written.

What profound encouragement we find in the life of John Mark. With true Christian koinonia... past failure (even rejection) does not prevent present usability. ... Even a shirker can become a major worker.

Mark’s life had its “hiccups.” But by God’s grace and with the help of Christian leaders who were willing to allow for growth and willing to forgive... Mark’s story became one of success. Koinonia always allows for growth and is always willing to forgive. It fosters Christian ministry success.

## **2 Tim 4:12**

*Tychicus* willingly accompanied Paul and probably ministered as a personal servant to the apostle. ... He was with Paul during his first imprisonment. Paul first sent Tychicus to Crete to relieve **Titus**. ... Now we see him

sending Tychicus to Ephesus to relieve **Timothy**. What a blessing it is to have people who can replace others!

In Major League Baseball... a relief pitcher may not get all the glory... but he is essential for preserving the win for someone else! Christian koinonia shows us that a lot more can be accomplished – because the concern is NOT “*who will get the glory?*” ... You can accomplish so much more – if you don’t care whether or not you’re recognized. It thrills you to preserve the win for someone else.

### **2 Tim 4:13**

Paul wants his books, especially his Bible, for the sake of his mind. He wants his cloak for the sake of his body. But most of all, he wants the companionship of Timothy and Mark for the sake of his soul. When our mind is bored – we need books. When our body is cold – we need clothing. When our spirit is lonely – we need friends.

### **2 Tim 4:14-15**

Paul didn’t expose Alexander in these verses so that he could embarrass him for these past two thousand years. He called attention to the danger of Alexander as a warning to Timothy. Paul would soon die. Alexander would remain. ... Koinonia helps others succeed... by passing along practical insight.

### **2 Tim 4:16**

The Roman judicial process initially involved a preliminary defense hearing before the emperor or a magistrate (roughly equivalent in purpose to a grand jury hearing.) ... This turned out to be a solo event for Paul. There

was no witness or advocate standing forward in Paul's behalf. ... No one was there at all! ... (There are at least 100 different men and women named in Acts and Paul's letters... as a part of his circle of friends and fellow laborers.)

We assume that Luke and Tychicus (who were now with Paul) were on missions or perhaps had not arrived... because otherwise they would certainly have been there. ... But it is a complete mystery why no members of the church in Rome... with whom he was so close... were there. Not one! ... Perhaps it was because of fear of the Roman authorities.

Whatever the reasons... the situation was pathetic — scandalous! Here was the great missionary general... who had weathered the storms of several continents for the gospel... standing at the end alone before the Roman court.

Perhaps equally remarkable was Paul's attitude—"May it not be held against them". ... No bitterness here—only a prayer for forgiveness. Here is the crux of koinonia. It doesn't exist without the free-flow of forgiveness and grace!

### **2 Tim 4:17-18**

This is why we can forgive those who fail us. ... Even when others do not help us, God will be with us. No greater declaration could be made: "*But the Lord stood with me.*" Men may not stand with us, but the Lord will. He will never forsake us no matter how grave and threatening the situation may be. We can extend grace to others – only if we believe this!

But there is also another vital component that we need in order to show grace to others. He kept his eye on the ball (what was important.) ...

NOTICE that Paul's concern was not for his own safety or comfort. It was the preaching of the Word so that Gentiles might be saved. He never lost sight of his special calling (on the Damascus Road) to minister to the Gentiles.

We can show grace to others if we keep our eye on the ball. We must keep our mission in mind. Once we lose sight of it... we focus on trivial matters – like our personal comfort... our mistreatment... or how undeserving others are - of our respect. True Christian koinonia helps us to stay focused on our *ACTUAL* mission.

Paul's personal goal was to get to the Heavenly kingdom without disgracing God's name. ... (He did not want to deny the Lord.) ... For a Christian... there are things even more dangerous than suffering and death. Paul wanted to end his life-race free from any lapse of courage leading to disastrous sin. ... Soon after he wrote this – he WAS executed... but he was rescued from the mouth of the lion. (He did not dishonor God.)

### **2 Tim 4:19-20**

Trophimus had proven himself a good servant of the Lord in the past. We first meet him in Scriptures as part of a group of men who accompanied Paul as he returned to Jerusalem on his third missionary journey.

Trophimus was a faithful companion of Paul. No doubt... it had to be tremendously disappointing to leave Trophimus behind because of illness. BUT - koinonia fellowship helps us accept God's plans over our own plans and desires.

(By the way... another side-note... here)... ... Why did Paul **not** heal him...? Paul had quite a healing ministry in Ephesus *several years before* -

(That is according to Acts 19:11 and following.) ... .. HERE IS WHAT I BELIEVE: *It is not the will of God that all believers who are sick should get well* ... and it was not the Lord's will for Trophimus to be well at this time. So Paul was not given the ability to heal him. ... God has *His* reasons... and we must always be willing to *submit* to them. He ALONE is all-wise!

### **2 Tim 4:21**

Earlier Paul complained that all had deserted him and that he stood alone before the Roman court in his first trial. Where were Eubulus... Pudens... Linus... Claudia... and "all the brethren"? They lived in Rome... yet only Luke attended to Paul. He could have judged them for their silence and absence... but instead he sent greetings to Ephesus on their behalf. This is another example of Paul's grace. There is so much grace in koinonia!

### **2 Tim 4:22**

There it is again. It is dominant in our passage. *There must be grace.* Grace to accept the life you are given. Grace to face the death that awaits you. Grace in your response toward people. Grace for those ministering to you. Grace for those who harm you. Grace to bear the worst from other people... other believers.

Whenever we think of toughness in another human being... we usually think of a body builder – with an attitude. Or maybe it's a leather-skinned (Clint Eastwood) cowboy type of person. ... .. But those are **WIMPS** compared to someone who is strong enough to show grace! ... How tough are you...? ... .. Times are tough for believers – and will only get tougher. We need Christian koinonia. We need... (and we need to be)... tough friends for tough times!