

“Friendships Don’t Fail”

Proverbs 18:24; Acts 16:1–5;

1 Corinthians 4:14–17; Philippians 2:19–24; 2 Timothy 1:1–5 (NIV)

Friends are patient, friends are kind. Friends do not envy, friends do not boast, friends are not proud. Friends do not dishonor friends, friends are not self-seeking, friends are not easily angered, friends keep no record of wrongs. Friends do not delight in evil but rejoice with the truth. Friends always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere.



Most often, when we examine the ministries of Paul and Timothy, we focus on Timothy’s support of the great apostle’s work. This time, we want to get a sense of their personal relationship, their friendship, for it endured over many years and, to our knowledge, never failed.

We first meet Timothy on Paul’s second missionary journey in the early 50’s AD. Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us that the two met in Lystra, in southern central Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), where local believers spoke highly of the young man. And so, Paul decided to take Timothy with him as a companion and co-worker in Christ. We wish we knew more about the back-story of these two men. Paul had visited Lystra on his first missionary journey a few years before. Perhaps that is when Timothy and his family came to Christ. Or, perhaps another Christian evangelist had been to Lystra.

We would like to know more, but we do know that Paul once wrote, “I have no one like him . . . like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel” (Philippians 2:20-22). Or this: “Timothy, my son whom I love’ (1 Corinthians 4:17). Timothy is mentioned throughout Paul’s correspondence and there is no hint of any break or discord, such as there was between Paul and Barnabas, just before Paul began his second journey (Acts 15:36-41).

Unsurprisingly, given the years they worked together, Paul came to know Timothy well. In the letter, 2 Timothy, Paul urges Timothy to:

...continue with the things you have learned and found convincing. You know who taught you.
¹⁵ Since childhood you have known the holy scriptures that help you to be wise in a way that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, ¹⁷ so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good. (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

Because of his mother, Timothy had evidently been steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures from a very early age. Paul reminds him that those sacred writings were given to teach him and help him truly live out the Good News.

As an aside, we also need to remember that the writings Paul refers to in these verses is not the entire Bible, but only the Old Testament, for he is writing only 30-35 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. It was not until 367 AD that the church father Athanasius first provided the complete listing of the 66 books, we now call The Holy Bible.

So comfortable is Paul with Timothy that he is ready to send Timothy to Corinth so that he might be a role model—as Paul would be if he were there: “Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason, I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church” (1 Corinthians 4:16-17).

Enduring friendships require care, humility, grace, patience, and more. Essentially, and here is the key, ***lasting friendships require the Christian virtues***. Thus, friendships between disciples of Jesus should be a **mark of our discipleship**, as was the friendship of Timothy and Paul.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. As in most things Christian, putting friendship in the context of discipleship changes our understanding. Just consider the NT images of Jesus as friend. The words “friend” and “friendship” appear at critical moments in John’s Gospel. For example, in John 15:12-17, Jesus instructs his disciples that they are to love one another and that “no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus goes on to say that he calls the disciples his friends because he has confided to them everything that God the Father has confided in Jesus.

Do your friendships with other Christians differ from your friendships those who are not Christian?

If so, how?

2. Paul and Timothy’s friendship and ministry persisted, but we can be sure there were some rough spots along the way.

In your experience, what sorts of problems do friendships run into?

What role do you think forgiveness plays in getting rocky friendships back on track?

Why is true forgiveness so difficult for us?

Have you ever lost a friend because of your own pride . . . or because neither of you were willing to be the first to bury the hatchet (...and not in each other’s back)?

How can we get better at forgiving?

How do we go about learning that forgiveness is something positive, not a sign of weakness?