

2 Timothy 4:9-22 | “The Joys & Hardships of Ministry”

Preached on April 2, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 4, and we will be finishing out the book of 2 Timothy this morning, starting at verse 9 and going all the way to the end. *[pause]*

Here at the end of Paul’s letter to Timothy, he wraps it up with some final parting words.

And in his final words, he shows us that life and ministry is often a mixture of feelings, a mixture of ups and downs, a mixture of joys and hardships. *[pause]*

Isn’t that much like our lives and ministries?

Life has many ups and downs. *[pause]*

Just think about the past year and you probably have some joys that you can remember, but you also have some hardships that you can’t forget.

And this not only can happen in a year, but joy mingled with hardship can happen within even one day. *[pause]*

A day can start out joyous, but end up grievous - or the other way around. *[pause]*

It can all feel like a roller coaster - up and down, up and down.

And just so you know, this isn’t something that only you experience, or only we as modern day Christians have experienced.

For even Paul experienced the joys and hardships of life and ministry.

And here in his last recorded statements of his life, we see this mixture of joy and hardship stick out to us.

See if you can notice what I’m talking about, as I READ, starting in verse 9. *[READ VERSES 9-22]*

The text this morning shows us some mixed aspects of life and ministry. First...

I. Some people will help us, others will disappoint us. (9-13, 19-21)

Hard times reveal who our true friends are.

Many people may act like they are our friend, but when the going gets tough, some get going, away from us. *[pause]*

The true revealer is when it becomes hard or inconvenient for the other person to help you.

That’s when you start to see the truth. *[pause]*

I'm sure you have experienced this sort of thing, where when you needed someone the most, they weren't there.

This isn't some new phenomenon, but it's a tale as old as the Fall. *[pause]*

But then there are others who reveal that they are truly a good, solid friend.

They are there when it's hard or inconvenient because they care for you. [pauseeeee]

Paul also faced this mixture of steady and fair weather friends in his life and ministry.

On the one hand, he had those who encouraged him and aided him in ministry. [pause]

Timothy was a prime example of that.

Both in verses 9 and 21, Paul tells Timothy to "do your best to come to me soon."

Timothy was to make every effort to eagerly and quickly go visit Paul.

And a big reason was because Demas had deserted him, others were sent on missions, and only Luke was left. [pause]

So it seems as though Paul needed Timothy for encouragement and aid in ministry. *[pause]*

You see, Paul and Timothy were close, like a father and a son.¹

So he longed for Timothy to be with him, especially as he considered his soon departure from the world. *[pause]*

We also see that he needed Timothy to bring some necessary items with him. [pause]

He was to bring a person, Mark.

He says of Mark, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry." [pause]

Mark is John Mark, who was the cousin of Barnabas, and he's the same one that Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement over.²

But interestingly, here we see that Paul considers him useful for ministry. [pause]

So something changed, didn't it?

There was reconciliation and restoration between Paul and Mark.

Though Paul deemed him useless before, now he deemed him useful. *[pauseeee]*

¹ See 2 Timothy 1:2.

² See Acts 15:37-40.

Mark is a wonderful reminder that our past doesn't have to dictate our future.

Though you may have failed in the past.

Though you may have been deemed useless by others.

That doesn't have to direct what you do with your future.

You can start serving God faithfully now.

You can redeem the time that's left, you can have restored relationships, and be used mightily by God!

Remember John Mark, and be encouraged. *[pauseee]*

So Timothy was to come, bring Mark, and also, he was to bring Paul's cloak, books, and parchments. *[pause]*

This shows us that Paul was just like us.

He needed things, and asked for them.

He was probably going to be cold, so he needed his cloak.

He wanted to read and write, so he needed his books and parchments.

Most likely, some of those reading materials were the Scriptures. *[pause]*

Paul was human, just like us, and he needed the encouragement from others, and he desired to have certain items with him, while he was in prison. *[pause]*

There's nothing wrong with this.

As John Stott says, "To admit [these things] is not unspiritual; it is human."³ *[pauseeee]*

We all desire the company and encouragement of other people.

Life isn't meant to be lived in seclusion, but in community with others. *[pause]*

Other people play a vital role in our lives.

We can be uplifted by their presence and helped by their aid. *[pauseeeee]*

Think about the friends and fellow workers in the church who have helped you greatly.

Maybe they have encouraged you, or aided you in ministry.

³ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 121.

Why don't you thank them today?

Why don't you call them up and set up a time to spend some time together soon?

We all need others, for there's just something about dear fellow workers and friends, who encourage us and uplift us. *[pause]*

This is why when other people desert and disappoint us, it hurts so badly.

One such person for Paul was a man named Demas. *[pause]*

Demas was called a fellow worker by Paul in the book of Philemon, and even sent his greetings to the Colossian church in the letter to the Colossians.⁴

Yet later on, we see that Demas deserted Paul and went to Thessalonica. *[pause]*

Here was someone who was working with Paul for some years, but he stopped.

When Paul needed him most, he abandoned him.

Just imagine the disappointment that Paul must have felt from that. *[pauseeee]*

It's easy sometimes to think that Paul's ministry never had disappointments, and that it was all going well, like some church growth "experts" tend to portray that we can experience.

Yet here's the great Apostle Paul, who has people disappoint him and leave him.

He is even in prison, not able to do ministry like before. *[pause]*

By our modern day church "success" metrics, he would be deemed a failure.

But we know that that's not true, for this is what ministry is like.

Ministry has its ups and downs. *[pauseeee]*

Ministry has its faithful workers like Timothy, who bring us great encouragement.

Ministry has its restored workers like Mark, who didn't let failure dictate his future, but though he started out not so good, he ended up being a great fellow worker.

And sadly, ministry has its disappointments, like Demas, who started strong, but ended up throwing it all away. *[pauseeee]*

If someone leaves and disappoints you, know that you aren't the only one that this has happened to, for even Paul faced that very thing. *[pauseeee]*

⁴ See Philemon 24 and Colossians 4:14.

As a pastor, I can so easily let the disappointment of people leaving draw me downward into a pit of despair. *[pause]*

We have seen people come and go - some for good reasons, others maybe not so much.

We have invested in the lives of some people, and they have worked alongside us, but they all of a sudden left.

That can be disappointing, but know that Paul went through this.

It's not just you, it's not just us, but ministry in this current world is like this...

There are joys and hardships, people who help and people who hurt.

But our task is to remain faithful through it all with our eyes on Christ, knowing that the disappointments don't outweigh the blessings of following Christ Jesus our Lord. *[pauseeee]*

You see, that was Demas' problem - he didn't see the blessing of following Christ as more important than the cost.

Instead, he loved this present world. *[pause]*

You can't love this present world and love Christ's appearing at the same time.⁵

In 1 John it says, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."⁶

And James tells us that, "friendship with the world is enmity with God."⁷ *[pause]*

It's not that Demas just really liked mountains and scenic sights, but he loved this current evil age.⁸

He loved what the world loves and values, which are against what God loves and values.

This led him to desert Paul. *[pause]*

Most likely the reason is because staying with Paul meant persecution and ridicule, hardship and loss.

He didn't want that.

Instead, he valued what the world valued, which is pleasure and comfort, ease and indulgence.

⁵ A reference back to 2 Timothy 4:8.

⁶ 1 John 2:15.

⁷ James 4:4.

⁸ The word translated as "world" here is actually "age" referring to this current evil age. Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

He probably wanted to pursue what the world loves, which is money, worldly success, and recognition. *[pause]*

Yet I wonder how often we tend to be like Demas in our love of the world?

I wonder how many of our values are conformed to this world, rather than transformed by the renewal of our minds?⁹

Have we slowly let the love of this world capture our hearts? *[pause]*

If we were honest and evaluated ourselves rightly, we are probably more like Demas than we would like to admit. *[pause]*

Like Demas' example shows us, it's when following Christ is hard and costs you something that your true love is revealed.

So evaluate your own life, are you in love with this present world?

Hardships and trials will disclose what you truly love. *[pauseeee]*

Going back to Paul's experience, he was deserted by Demas and that was surely disappointing.

Likewise, we will face disappointment as other people hurt us or forsake us.

Yet amidst that, there will be others who help us and aid us, like a Timothy. *[pause]*

That mingling is bound to happen as we continue ministering for Christ.

But will we let those disappointments cause us to stop running the race, or will we continue on in faith? *[pauseeeee]*

In this passage, we also see that...

II. Some people will oppose us, but the Lord will repay. (14-15)

Sort of in the middle of this passage, Paul mentions a man named Alexander the coppersmith, who did him great harm.

This Alexander is most likely the same Alexander that Paul mentions in his first letter to Timothy.

He was one of the men making shipwreck of his faith and who Paul handed over to Satan.¹⁰
[pause]

So this guy was bad news.

⁹ A reference to Romans 12:2.

¹⁰ See 1 Timothy 1:19-20.

In fact, here Paul says that he “strongly opposed” his message.

He was very much against the truth and the good news of Jesus Christ that Paul was preaching. *[pause]*

He most likely did all that he could to try to silence Paul or discredit him or the message.

And Paul tells Timothy to beware of this guy.

Literally, Paul is telling Timothy to be on guard and protect himself from this person. *[pauseeee]*

The truth is that there are some people who strongly oppose us, for they hate the message of the Cross.

They will do everything they can to prevent us from spreading this message.

We must beware of them, for they can cause such trouble. *[pause]*

While many people may listen to us, but ultimately close their ears to us in a non-aggressive way.

Others will be very aggressive in opposition to the gospel. *[pause]*

Jesus faced that exact thing, Paul did, Timothy, and others.

And Christians today face it as well, as there are some out there who are so strongly antagonistic towards Christianity that they will try everything to stop it.

Just look around or turn on the news, and you will see glimpses, if not, clear demonstrations of this. *[pause]*

This is the reality of spreading the message of God in a fallen, dark world that is under the control of the prince of the power of the air.¹¹

So do not be surprised by this.

Strong opposition is one of the hardships that comes along with ministry. *[pauseeee]*

As you think about facing strong opposition to the gospel, what is the primary temptation that comes along with that?

Isn't it a discouragement that makes you think, “Is it worth it?” *[pause]*

When people so vehemently oppose us, and won't stop, it leads us to be discouraged and want to just back down.

So what does Paul show us about the key to not being discouraged and giving up?

¹¹ See Ephesians 2:2 for this title for Satan.

What does he say? “The Lord will repay him according to his deeds.” *[pause]*

That’s how we don’t stoop to bitterness or vengeance!

That’s how we keep going and we don’t give up!

We remember that the Lord will repay. *[pause]*

We could say it this way: endurance against opposition takes a trust in God’s all-knowing, righteous justice.

If we truly believe that God knows all about the opposition that we face, then that gives us confidence to keep going.

We know that nothing will escape his ever-watchful eyes. *[pause]*

And if we truly believe that God is a God of righteous justice, then we can keep going.

For we know that He will make all things right in the end.

He won’t just let things slide, but he will deal with people according to their deeds.

Vengeance is the Lord’s, not ours.¹² *[pause]*

Unlike the many movies where the main character seeks out vengeance, we are not to be like that.

Instead, we leave it in the best place - the righteous Judge’s hands.¹³ *[pause]*

To do that, we must actually trust the Lord.

For when you seek vengeance, it’s actually a sign that you aren’t trusting God’s righteous judgment, but you are putting yourself in the place of judge. *[pauseeee]*

In ministry, some people will oppose us and the message we share, but don’t despair, the Lord’s got it.

Someday He will make all things right, do you believe that? *[pauseeee]*

The third thing that comes out of this passage about life and ministry is that...

III. Some people will desert us, but the Lord never does! (16-18, 22)

Sadly for Paul, Demas wasn’t the only person who left him high and dry.

There were others who deserted him, when he needed them the most.

¹² A reference to Romans 12:19.

¹³ A reference back to 2 Timothy 4:8.

He says, “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.” *[pause]*

So here is Paul, arrested for the cause of Christ, and facing his first defense.

But as he looks around, everyone is gone.

No one is there supporting him, helping to defend him, or even just being there to encourage him.

What a discouraging thing to experience! *[pause]*

Some people may not have been able to make it because of an innocent reason, but others must have been fearful to stand with Paul.

Maybe they thought that they, too, would be imprisoned for identifying with Paul. *[pause]*

It reminds us of what Jesus went through as all of his disciples fled when he was arrested. *[pauseeeee]*

When Paul is facing one of his hardest moments, no one is around.

Just think of what you would feel. *[pause]*

There’s a certain sadness that can come upon us in that type of situation.

We would be saddened that none of our friends were willing to be there for us.

You would feel like, “Don’t they care about me? Am I not worth the risk?” *[pause]*

With that would come discouragement.

You’d feel dejected and disheartened.

It could cause you to not want to even go on anymore, for it’s like, “Why don’t they want to be with me? Should I even put up a fight against the accusations?” *[pause]*

We would probably think of all of the ways that we have helped *them* when they needed it, and now we are thinking, “They can’t stand by me?”

We could become bitter and resentful when thinking about what they did, or better, what they *didn’t* do. *[pause]*

Those are all the feelings that Paul could have let overtake him, but what does he say?

“May it not be charged against them!” *[pause]*

Talk about love!

Talk about forgiveness! *[pause]*

Paul doesn't want what they did put onto their account, but he's willing to forgive them for it.

Would you do the same in his situation? [pause]

We'd probably be so angry and bitter at what they did.

We'd be thinking, "How could they?! They deserve whatever comes to them!"

Yet forgiveness is radical; it defies all the odds of natural, human reckoning.

It is only possible by a heart that has experienced the radical, loving forgiveness of Christ, who could hang on the Cross and say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."¹⁴

[pause]

That's the only way someone can forgive such a hurtful deed as Paul experienced.

You must first experience the forgiveness of God extended through the Cross of Christ. [pause]

When you have understood the immensity of your sin against God that was forgiven, how could you not forgive the sin of others against you?

Though others deserted Paul in his trial, he couldn't help but think of Jesus alone in his trial because of his sin. [pauseeee]

Are there some people in your life who you need to forgive?

Have you been holding it in and has it been causing you to become more and more bitter and resentful towards them?

Remember the amazing forgiveness of Christ for your own sin, and when you truly reflect upon his forgiveness, how could you not forgive others?

Make it right today, forgive that person who has hurt you. [pauseeee]

The truth is, people will hurt you.

They will leave you high and dry when you need them the most. [pause]

Sometimes you'll look around you in your darkest trials and say, "Where is everybody?"

But here's the thing, the Lord never leaves you.

As Paul says, "But the Lord stood by me." *[pause]*

Though all others deserted him, the Lord never did. [pause]

What an amazing reminder!

¹⁴ Luke 23:34.

The God who said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” always comes through.¹⁵

He stands by our side, though all leave.

He remains with us, though all others are gone. *[pauseee]*

As a believer, you are never truly alone.

And that’s why Paul could end his letter to Timothy by saying, “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”

Because His presence and grace never leave us, and it’s His presence and grace that we need.

[pauseeeee]

But not only is the Lord present with us, but he strengthens us, too. *[pause]*

Paul was strengthened by the Lord to proclaim the message, so that others would hear.

Therefore, we see that God strengthens us to do His will.

He gave Paul what he needed in that moment, and He gives us exactly what we need as we look to Him.

But here’s the thing: we must use the opportunities that are given to us. *[pause]*

For Paul, he couldn’t let discouragement or bitterness drive him to anger and despair.

Instead, remembering and empowered by the Lord’s presence and power, he used his situation for God’s glory. *[pausee]*

That’s how we can remain faithful through any circumstance that we face.

That’s how we can remain faithful even if everyone else forsakes us.

The way is to remember the presence and power of the Lord. *[pause]*

Though all forsake us, we remember, “But the Lord stands by me.”

Though we feel weak, we remember, “Yet the Lord strengthens me.”

Though we are faced with a trial, we remember, “But I can use this trial to speak the Gospel.” *[pause]*

That’s the thing.

Paul was always focused on the mission, whether that’s writing letters from a prison cell, or speaking the gospel in a courtroom. *[pause]*

¹⁵ Hebrews 13:5.

Here he was in a Roman court, in the heart of the Roman Empire, and he's able to share the gospel with people who wouldn't normally hear it. *[pauseeee]*

Focusing on His presence and power enables us to still minister for Him even in the most difficult places, for we know who our Lord is...

He's the God who is present, the God who strengthens, but also, the God who delivers. *[pauseeee]*

Paul said, "So I was rescued from the lion's mouth." *[pause]*

Paul reflects upon what happened at his first defense and realizes that in that moment, God spared his physical life.

Like Daniel, the lion's mouth was shut, so that they couldn't take his life in that instance. *[pauseeee]*

You see, Paul saw the hand of God in the everyday moments.

He couldn't help but see God's saving work in preserving his life in that moment. *[pauseeee]*

This is something to rest upon: if it is not our time, God will deliver our physical lives, so why fear?

But that is not our ultimate deliverance, for even Paul knew that the end of his physical life was near.

Instead, he couldn't help but think of how the Lord eternally saves us. *[pauseeee]*

God's delivering of his physical life was only a snapshot of his eternal deliverance.

Though his physical life was soon to be snuffed out, his life would go on into eternity with the Lord. *[pause]*

This is because God guards us from every spiritual attack and brings us safely to be with Him.

He guards His children's souls, bringing them into His heavenly kingdom. *[pauseeee]*

As Paul faced his ever-nearing physical death, this was his hope, is it yours?

If you have trusted in Christ, God will bring you safely into His heavenly kingdom - your eternal life is protected!

And if you have never trusted in Christ, this can be your hope, if you trust in Christ alone to save you from your sins. *[pauseeee]*

Praise God!

That's all we can do when we really dwell upon these things, and that's how Paul ends, too - with praise.

He says, "To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

He deserves all the glory and praise. *[pauseeeee]*

As we think about Paul's final parting words, they remind us that...

Though ministry has its joys and hardships, the Lord never abandons us!

How is it that even through all that Paul faced, he still remained faithfully on mission?

The difference was his "God-shaped" mindset. *[pause]*

Though Alexander the coppersmith did him great harm, he knew that God would deal with him.

Though everyone deserted him, he could forgive them because God forgave him.

Though everyone forsook him, he knew that God was with him.

Though he was weak and faced a difficult situation, He knew God would strengthen him for the task.

And though he faced threats, he knew that God would ultimately deliver. *[pause]*

So yes, he experienced the ups and downs of the joys and hardships of ministry...

...But through them all, he knew that the Lord would always be there, being and giving him everything he needed. *[pause]*

What a life changing truth!

Imagine the impact that a "God-shaped" mind would have on your life. *[pause]*

Like Paul, no matter what is thrown our way, we can be stable and steadfast...

...Because we know that through the good times and the bad, we have a God who is there, and who gives us all that we need, all the way through to eternity.

"To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."