

Series Title: **'Stronger: discovering truths for a resilient life'**
Message Title: **'Stronger...with a lot of help from my friends and Friend'**
Scripture Source: **2 Timothy 4:9-22**
Date: Sunday, January 29, 2017
Teacher: John Garner

The Last Lap

How would you describe his 'state of mind' from Paul's last recorded words? Hopeful. Grateful. Focused. Resolved. Yearning. Settled. There is not a hint of complaint or despair. His race is almost over, the finish line is within sight. In fact, in his mind, he has finished the race. He is simply awaiting meeting Jesus beyond the finish line. How has he managed to maintain his poise in the face of daunting circumstances? Where do the 'reserves of resilience' come from? Chained, left in a dark and dank dungeon like cell in the city of Rome, a robustness of spirit is clearly evident. Where does this strength of character find its 'roots' that nourish and inform? I think his final recorded words spell out how he has been able to finish well, with hope, purpose, and resilience.

Three choices: healthy relationships, honest responses to hard and disappointing circumstances, and fulfilling responsibilities that serve others, to the very end.

The Choice of Healthy Relationships: 2 Timothy 4:9-13, 19-22

Paul was anxious to spend time face to face with Timothy. "Do your best to come to me quickly" "Do your best to get here before winter." Vs.21 Immersed in a difficult reality, Paul wanted Timothy's companionship. It's as simple and real as that. There are some people whose presence lifts' our spirits and nourishes our souls. We really want to spend with them, face to face. Whose presence do you greatly appreciate? In the journey of life when good things happen or hard experiences unsettle, who do you want next to you? _____ Who breathes life into your soul and helps you with regaining a mature perspective?

Healthy relationships are cultivated by making time to be together, to do moments of life together in some meaningful manner...a shared meal, a shared vacation, some expression of service together.

Illustrate: Jesus with his disciples, and within the circle of 12, Jesus had a more intimate relationship with 3, Peter, James and John. Matthew 26:36-40

The Choice of Honest and Mature Responses to Hard Realities: 2 Timothy 4:14-16

This is a massively important insight to be gleaned from Paul's life, and then studied and personally applied. Life involves some deeply disappointing experiences, probably none more so than in the relational realm. Hasn't that been the case for you? It has been for me.

Paul speaks with candor and honesty about relational let downs and attacks. Vss. 10 Demas – "deserted me" Vs. 14 "did me a great deal of harm" (emotional and mental distress) Vs. 16 "everyone deserted me"

Paul doesn't ignore or minimize the pain he has felt, the distress of soul that he has tasted. Yet, note what he does with these hard experiences. He builds both bridges of forgiveness and boundaries of protection. Vs. 14: He hands Alexander into God's hands for coming judgement (Romans 12:19) and strongly encourages Timothy to build a relational boundary and stay clear of this evil and destructive man. "keep yourself away from him"

Yet, he builds a bridge of forgiveness so that he can continue in relationship with his friends who have let him down. He doesn't write them off. "May it not be held against them." Vs. 16

Friends, finishing well requires that we mature as wise and deliberate builders of both boundaries and bridges. We desperately need the wisdom of God's Spirit to know what needs to be built and how to do so appropriately. Illustrate: to allow destructive people to run roughshod over our lives is to insure that we...you...will not finish well. There will be too much damage to your soul and mind. Too much unwarranted suffering that will be profoundly difficult to live wisely with. God does not intend you to live a boundary less life. Boundaries are for protection. Do you need to courageously construct a boundary and explain why you are doing so? Who do you need to protect yourself and others close to you, from? I know how challenging and draining this construction project can be and how liberating and life giving it is when the boundary is built and lived, without shame or apology. Proverbs 22:24-25; Titus 3:10-11.

Yet, sometimes building a bridge of forgiveness can be very tough. Are we willing to have a face to face with one who has betrayed our trust? Taken our heart and broken it through selfish actions or cold hearted disregard...will we offer forgiveness and seek to do the hard work of rebuilding trust?

Sometimes we like nursing a grudge, making the other person sweat it out, wondering if forgiveness will ever be warmly offered. Man, we can be unloving and forgetful of how much we need fresh expressions of forgiveness!

Who needs to hear from you, 'I forgive you, let's learn from this and move forward.'

_____ With God's supernatural help we can say with Paul, "may it not be held against them."

The Choice of Faith in Jesus to fulfill Responsibilities: 2 Timothy 4:17-18

This is a defining choice of Paul and one that confronts any one of us. Paul believed in the active and engaged presence of Jesus in the midst of his challenging and painful reality. He believed that when God promised to be with us, he could be trusted. Hebrews 13:5-6

"Since God assured us, 'I'll never let you down, never walk off and leave you,' we can boldly quote, 'God is there, ready to help; I'm fearless no matter what. Who or what can get to me?'" (The Message)

Paul testifies that Jesus has given him the courage, resolve and strength to share the message of Christ in his present reality and he is confident that God will take him to his heavenly home safely. His body will die, his soul will live on and he lives as 'more than a conqueror.'

Would you and I live with purpose now and finish well one day? Then, we must come to grips with this fundamental question and answer honestly, 'Do I believe in the active and loving presence of Christ in my here and now life, or not?' Hebrews 11:6. Will I ask God to strengthen me by his Spirit and through his words of promise and purpose...or not? Will I live out the responsibilities God has given me, or not? Will I be 'more than a conqueror' or not?

God knows your current reality. He is not clueless or indifferent. Psalm 27:13-14
Feed your faith through Scripture reading and responsiveness to God's word. Do life with a few trusted followers of Jesus. Refuse to give up or give in. By his strong and wise Spirit, Jesus lives within the soul of his people, a supernatural fact that requires faith to be experienced. One day, one circumstance at a time, choose to run the race with purpose and grit, relying on God's supernatural help along the way.

And as we do, cheering each other on, supporting each other as wisely as we can, we will one day echo Paul's words of 2 Timothy 4:6-8...and we will be glad and grateful that we ran wisely and with our focus on Jesus, the great example who has gone before and waits for us at the finish line. Ready to cheer us...home.