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April 11, 1999

**You've Got a Friend**  
**II Timothy 4:9-15**

I'd like to sing a song written by one of the great theologians of our time, James Taylor. When your down and troubled and you need some love and care, and nothing, no nothing is going right.." You just call our my name and you know wherever I am, I'll come running to see you again. Winter spring summer or fall, all you have to do is call and I'll be there yes I will, you've got a friend."

Do you ever find yourself down and troubled and in need of some love and care and nothing, no nothing is going right...Maybe life is crashing in around you and even those closest to you are hurting you and deserting you. Maybe it feels like they are ripping out the very heart and soul of you. We need a friend don't we.

We look around and it seems like some people don't need anybody. They seem like they could storm ahead, like superman and blast through any obstacles, get out of the way I am coming through no matter what lies in the way. They are rugged, resilient, they seem emotionally kevlar tough. No bullets of pain and hurt could ever pierce their spirit or dampen their drive. They are like the lone ranger that prefers to work alone so others don't get in their way. They don't need anybody. Maybe you know a few people who seem like that. Super Christians who are never down, never hurting, never seem to need anybody, never share their personal and practical needs, they can get by just fine on their own thank-you. Maybe you know some who have decided that they don't need anybody, let alone the church body. Maybe they have been burnt so often in the past they just haven't got time for the pain. Maybe...just maybe you are one of those who have long since given up on the idea that you need a friend, in tough times you have decided to just grit your teeth and plow through...all by yourself.

If anyone in the Bible would fit this superman, just me and God will do it all, people just get in the way. Paul would be the most prone to do it all. His bull in the china shop, high D, driving personality naturally

sets him apart from people. He is not naturally a people person. Paul has no stomach for the slackers, the cowards, the lazy. He doesn't have time for those who can't pull their weight or want to bail out. If you read the first part of the last chapter in II Timothy he is on a crescendo. His final charge to the tape. He exhorts Timothy to preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort. Fulfill your ministry. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. That would be a ending statement of going out strong. Dum ta da dummmmm! But, that is not what Paul the driver ends. He moves from superman to real human in one verse.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of II Timothy. Look at verse 9 of chapter 4. He writes to his good friend Timothy, "Make every effort to come to me soon." Come and see me soon. Paul misses his friend, kindred spirit Timothy. Timothy is a Pastor in Ephesus. He knows what it is like in Christian leadership. Their hearts beat for the same thing. Paul in the first chapter of 2nd Timothy says "Longing to see you even as I recall your tears so that I may be filled with joy" There is nothing like a good friend near when you are down. Paul got real. He writes, I need friends. I need people. That would be the first point of encouragement for those of us who are feeling down and troubled and in need of love and care. Point 1 Foster a heart for People. even if it doesn't come naturally. People are incredibly important to the spiritual life. Fellowship with believing friends is not an option because Christianity is not an individual sport. It's a team sport. We know what kind of trouble occurs when an individual is playing a team sport like it is an individual sport. It doesn't work very well. Paul's gifting and personality all screamed for him to go it alone, all by himself. But, he knew he was involved with a team sport. So he fostered a heart for other people on the team. Paul rarely traveled alone. He wrote much about the people of Christ working together and needing each other. He wrote all about the one anothers. Why does Paul write so much about the need for people? My guess is Paul learned the hard way of struggling to do it alone. He realized early the Christian life was never designed as an individual sport. Until its missing we never fully realize this truth.

Some people have this strange idea that God's elite, the super spiritual are those who don't rely on anybody. They can be parachuted

into enemy territory like an Army Ranger and survive for years on their own, relying only on their own abilities and brain and clever hunting and evasion techniques. Christ satisfies all their needs. They don't need to come to church. They don't need to come to a LIFE Group. People just get in the way. all they need is God and the Bible.

When I was in 10th grade I had a very painful experience. I had a close friend desert me, turn others against me. My words were intentionally maligned and I was misrepresented. Friends were very important to me and my world as I knew it imploded within. God used this very difficult experience to draw me to Him in a deeper way. God became very real to me as I prayed and looked through His words for comfort, wisdom and answers. My faith went deep with God. For some years I would reflect on that time and tell people that God became a real friends during that time. I was rocked enough to stop and talk with Him. I realized I needed more than just people who were friends. But I would go on to say, "I learned that all I needed was God..he was my all in all and my total sufficiency, all I need is God."

That is incomplete thinking that can lead to wrong thinking. My hurt from people drove me to think I didn't need people. That I had gone deeper with God away from people, led me to think that the spiritual life goes better without people. Not true. God does not call all of us to monkdom. We need God...to be sure, but we also need people. Trying to live for Him while at the same time ignoring them is a losing proposition. In v. 10 we read of one who was once a close associate of Paul's deserting him at his time of great need. It got too hot in the kitchen for Demas. He loved His life, the stuff of this world, more than the hope of the appearing of God. He was more concerned for the temporal than the eternal. Demas left and he was the loser. He lost Paul's friendship. He lost a godly friend. I don't know the specific details of what caused Demas to check out and leave. He was probably either enamored with the world or exasperated with some people in the church. So he left. He left and was only punishing himself.

We need fellowship. It is not optional. It keeps us challenged and focused and encouraged. When you are down, feeling like checking out and giving up. When it seems easier to just do the Christian life all on your own. Stop and pursue what doesn't come naturally. Foster a heart

for people. Get yourselves involved with other people who love God. Don't sit at home and whine because nobody calls you or stops by for a visit. Get out there and you take responsibility for what you know you need and they need. Proverbs tells us "the one who has friends must, show himself friendly." People are imperative to spiritual health because Christianity is a team sport.

Point number 2. God doesn't write anyone off, so we shouldn't either. It seems like everyone is deserting or leaving Paul. Demas goes off to Thessalonica. Crescens gone to Galatia. Titus goes to Dalmatia. Interesting that Titus was Paul's fix it man. He was sent to iron out problems in the church at Crete and now off to Dalmatia. If Titus were in Dalmatia now he would be taking a lot of flak, since Dalmatia is modern day Yugoslavia.

Verse 11. Only Luke is with me. Luke the doctor, caring for Paul's need. Luke who had been a long time friend and companion on that first missionary journey. Then Paul writes to Timothy, Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. Wow! What an encouraging thing for Mark to hear from the words of the great Apostle Paul. Mark. I want him near during these last few months of my life, he could be a great help.

If this verse was all we knew about the relationship between Paul and Mark, we might think that they had always been the very best of friends and got along just as well as Paul and Timothy. But its not true. Flip in your Bibles over to Acts 15. Paul had allowed Mark to go on a mission trip with him, but partway through the trip, it became too tough. Mark deserted Paul and the others. 15:36-39. Barnabus was trying to give Mark a second chance to come again on their next missions trip, but Paul kept insisting no way, not Mark the deserter, not Mark the one who gave up when it got tough, not Mark who couldn't pull his own weight. They got into a big shouting match. They split ways. God formed two mission teams. Just a note. Sometimes we can be involved in God's will, but it may turn out to look entirely different than we imagined.

God seemed to have changed Mark and Paul. Mark got with it and was teachable by God. Paul was humble enough and teachable enough to know that God can change lives. God can change people and He can also change my attitude toward them. Mark deserted and Paul who had

little stomach for cowards, wimps, and lazy bail outs said sorry, not again. I can't have people on my mission team that can't pull their own weight. Most of us tend to become more rigid, a little less tolerant, a little less forgiving, a little more prone to bitterness, a little more set in our ways in our older years. But something changed, not only Mark's actions, but also Paul's attitude toward Mark. He continued to allow God's refining process to shape him, his heart, his attitude toward others.

Is there someone you are thinking of this morning who has deserted you. Maybe you feel they have let God down. Maybe you feel like they are really some extra baggage and worthless...Maybe it's someone who used to be a good friend and has since checked out. Maybe it's a teen you would label as an impossible rebel. Does God want you to give them a second chance? God has the ability to change them, and also your attitude toward them. God doesn't write anybody off...so neither should we. Pssst. that goes for you as well. Don't write yourself off.

It can be very discouraging when I watch gifted men and women take themselves out of the game and give up. I get sad when I see men and women who are so caught up in what trinkets the world has to offer that they walk away from fellowship, but what a great feeling when they come back strong. I think Mark was mentioned here to remind Timothy and all of us, that God never wants to write anybody off, so we shouldn't either. God desires that none should perish but that all come to repentance. Who have you mentally written off that God wants to use to encourage you when your down. That person may surprise you. We know that Mark came back because here Paul has recognized what God has done in his life and of course we know he got it because, guess who wrote the gospel of Mark?

Point number three. When you are down and troubled and you need some love and care and nothing, no nothing is going right. Point number three. Admit your practical needs. There is nothing unspiritual about voicing your practical needs. In fact, when you are keeping your needs to yourself it unveils attitudes of independence. Pride. I don't need anybody. We may not share our practical needs because we are embarrassed. We are embarrassed because of our pride and failure to see the body of Christ for what it is. Family. Paul was man enough to get

down and practical. The great apostle Paul was lonely. He needed people. But look at verse 13. We see a practical glimpse past the theological mind of the Apostle Paul. Here is a real man with real needs. "When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus and the books, especially the parchments." Maybe Paul forgot the winter coat that helped keep the rain and cold away. Maybe he had to leave Troas too quickly to pick up these items. Maybe he was arrested. Whatever Paul needed a good warm coat for the winter was coming soon. He also wanted the books. There was that book I wanted to finish that book...would you bring that book when you come to visit? We don't know what the books were. Probably study books, the scriptures. The Parchments that Paul especially wanted were animal skins, more expensive writing medium. Possibly Paul's personal notes or others ideas. Paul had needs and wasn't embarrassed to let people know.

If you were locked up in a prison and had just two months to live, what would you ask for? Paul needed people to warm the spirit. He needed a coat to warm his body. He needed some books to warm his soul and exercise his mind. Why are we sometimes hesitant to share our needs...really its quite a spiritual thing to do. When you admit your need and allow others to help meet them, it brings joy to the relationship. Meeting others practical needs and having your own practical needs met fosters a heart for each other, a heart for people. It brings joy. If you fail to let anybody know your needs, you are robbing others and yourself of joy and blessing.

One thing I love about this verse is Paul's attitude. He is sitting on death row awaiting execution but he doesn't have an "I might as well give it up" attitude. He is the apostle Paul but he also doesn't wear an "I've already arrived attitude." He doesn't try to kid himself into thinking he knows it all. He never stops learning. He wants to read more and learn more and study more. I have heard people say, I have no need of books. The Bible is all I need. Just me and the Bible and the Spirits inspirations. Somehow it seems more spiritual if I refuse to consult other books. I believe reading insights from other Godly men and women do us well. God talks to more people than just me. Every week after I have done my study of the Bible, just me and God and the Bible, I am always curious to read what God has shown to others regarding this particular

scripture. So I will read 20 plus books just to see if perhaps God would use another individual to speak to me, as I pray for God's discernment of truth. God uses other people in the body of Christ and their gifts of insights and writing to minister to me. I never want to stop learning. I love the way Paul here never stops reading books, learning and has developed a thirsty heart and hunger for God's word. How thirsty are you?

There are some amazing similarities between William Tyndale and the Apostle Paul at the ends of their lives. Tyndale was the man whose translation of the New Testament is practically the basis of our English versions today. He brought the Bible to the people. He made great sacrifice to the point of being burned at the stake to give us what we hold in our hands, the Bible. Do not take it lightly. Men have died so that we could read God's word. Lives were lost to bring it out of the academic-clergy and into our language. If you hold an English Bible you have more than a lifetime of study in your hands.

Tyndale was imprisoned in 1535 by the persecutor at Vilvorde Belgium. He wrote not long before his fiery martyrdom a letter to the Marquis of Bergen, Governor of the castle. "I entreat your lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I must remain here for the winter you would beg the commissary to be so kind as to send me, from the things of mine which he has, a warmer cap; I feel the cold painfully in my head. Also a warmer cloak, for the cloak I have is very thin. He has a woollen shirt of mine, if he well send it. But most of all, my Hebrew Bible, Grammar and Vocabulary that I may spend by time in that pursuit."

For those of us who have studied God's word in the original languages, if you want a Hebrew grammar and vocabulary book you are a real scholar. Wow. There was a guy who was not content to sit inactive in a cold castle cell. He had a thirst for study of God's word and was not too proud to let his practical needs be known to others.

Fourth point. When your down and troubled and in need of love and care and nothing, no nothing is going right. Point Number 4 Don't let the critics dilute your drive or dismantled your disposition. Don't allow the critics to run your life or your faith. In verse 14 Paul warns Timothy about Alexander the Coppermith. He has done Paul much harm. V.15 He vigorously opposed Paul's teaching. We are not sure

exactly who this Alexander was. He may have been the one Paul excommunicated from the church along with Hymaneuos in I Timothy 1:20. He could be the Alexander in Acts who was involved with the rioting town people. Alexander is a common name and obviously Paul knew that Timothy would know which Alexander he meant by noting the coppersmith. We do know that this Alexander was maligning Paul's teaching, Paul's words were misrepresented. Literally the words, "did me much harm" mean that he "laid false information against me"

Timothy, Be on guard against him. Don't let that critic malign your testimony. Don't let him drive you to dilute your effectiveness. Critics will wear you down and burn you out if you let them...but don't you let them. They will want to keep your focus off issues that burn up a lot of emotion, but really don't do much for furthering God's kingdom. They will hurt you and desert you...they will cause you to question your ministry and calling. But don't you let them.

As leaders we must realize that there will always be a certain level of annoyance with people. If at least someone is not upset with you, then you are probably not challenging people to get out of their comfort zones and grow as they should. We certainly don't have to pursue offending people. For leaders know a certain low level annoyance comes naturally with the territory. We must know the difference between a low level annoyance and a nuclear bomb getting ready to explode. One must be dealt with the other must be ignored.

A friend of mine described it to me last week. In the marines this particular drill sergeant, while taking his platoon on marching drills would pass a certain house. Every day this little yippee dog. You know the type. Little teeth, big mouth. This dog would run out at the sergeant leading the group and run all around the man and yip and bark and try to nip. It would be tempting to grab the dog, to heavily brush the dog aside with your combat boots. But the Sergeant never even looked down at the dog. He ignored it and kept on doing what he was intent on doing. I am not saying we are to ignore our critics. We can't do that. We must stay close to our critics or they will sabotage and subvert when we least expect it. We can't ignore our critics. But we need to be able to discern which items are yippee dogs that need to be ignored and which ones are nuclear bombs that need to be defused and dealt with.

When you are down and troubled and in need of love and care and nothing, no nothing is going right. Sometimes critics will spot the weakness and kick you when your down. Don't let you let them get you down. Don't let the critics drive your ministry, dilute your effectiveness, or dismantle your disposition. When it seems nothing, no nothing is going right...we need a friend. We need Jesus as our close and constant companion? Absolutely. But don't stop there. We need people. Foster a heart for people. Maybe people have let you down and bailed out on you. Don't write people off that God hasn't' written off, psst. Don't write yourself off. When nothing, no nothing is going right. Don't be so proud that you refuse to share your practical needs with other people. Admit your practical needs. Develop a hunger for God's Word. Remember you've got a friend. Ain't it good to know you've got a friend.