**New Hope Sermon: People who need people**

**Introduction**

These days I am going through 2 Timothy for the daily meditations in Scattered Flock. In chapter 1 are many doctrinal truths and personal testimonies for Paul, but these are interlaced with Paul’s interactions with people – specifically, Timothy, Timothy’s mother and grandmother, Phygelus and Hermogenes, and Onesiphorus. Phygelus and Hermogenes deserted Paul and that obviously brought much pain to him. But their desertion is wonderfully overbalanced by Timothy, his ancestors and Onesiphorus. Paul was not just a towering intellectual figure in his day; he was also deeply connected with people in every church he planted and every place he visited. He genuinely cared for people -People with histories; people he partnered with; people he ministered to and who ministered to him. Paul was not a lone ranger Christian. He cared about the people in every church he founded in Asia Minor and Europe.

This fact brought to mind Barbara Streisand’s famous song called “People.” Here is the soundtrack connection on YouTube that I encourage you to listen to before you continue reading (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPlQ6EtArSc>).

 “People, people who need people are the luckiest people in the world.

We’re children needing other children and yet letting our grown up pride hide all the need inside.

Acting more like children, than children. . .

 With one person, one very special person a feeling deep in your soul says ‘You were half, now you’re whole.’

 No more hunger and thirst. But first be a person who needs people.

People, people who need people are the luckiest people in the world.” (composed by Jule Styne with lyrics by Bob Merrill for the 1964 Broadway musical Funny Girl starring Barbra Streisand)

The words are as applicable in the Christian world as they are in the secular world. Perhaps more so. In this first chapter of Paul’s second letter to Timothy we see this lived out.

**Paul’s tribute to people in his second letter to Timothy**

Paul calls Timothy his “true son in the faith.” (I Tim.1:2). This is in itself significant because Paul had a blueblood Jewish heritage – a Hebrew of Hebrews from the tribe of Benjamin (Phil.3:5). But Timothy was of mixed heritage – his mother was a Jew and his father a Greek Gentile. Yet Timothy’s faith in Jesus Christ and deep connection to Paul made him a true son in the faith. He joined Paul on the second missionary journey and was with him – e.g. in Corinth, Macedonia, Ephesus and Jerusalem. They labored together, and somewhere along the way, Paul laid hands on Timothy and anointed him with spiritual gifts for his future ministry. But persecution and conflict plagued the early Christian communities and this must have held Timothy back. Paul addresses this issue in this final letter. But he also reveals the depth of his love and commitment to Timothy.

Timothy, I thank God for you—the God I serve with a clear conscience, just as my ancestors did. Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. 4I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with joy when we are together again.

5I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. 6This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. 7For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. 8So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don’t be ashamed of me, either, even though I’m in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. NLT

“Night and day.” This is not the only time Paul speaks of his constant prayers for those he loved. Nor the only time he mentions the pain of separation and joy anticipated when he is with his co-laborers and church communities (e.g. Phil 1:3-7, Acts 20:17-37, I Thes.3:6-10). In his care for Timothy and others he also admonished them to hold to the highest in their ministry – thus he urges Timothy to “fan into flame the spiritual gift God gave him.” Paul’s love was not just sentimental mush. It specifically addressed the issues people were facing and the power of God to equip them to carry on as a true minister of the gospel.

But, obviously, those sentiments did not work for everyone. Paul reminds Timothy in this letter of those who deserted him in his imprisonment:

“5As you know, everyone from the province of Asia has deserted me—even Phygelus and Hermogenes.”

His reminder to Timothy of Onesiphorus balances out that pain: ”

16May the Lord show special kindness to Onesiphorus and all his family because he often visited and encouraged me. He was never ashamed of me because I was in chains. 17When he came to Rome, he searched everywhere until he found me. 18May the Lord show him special kindness on the day of Christ’s return. And you know very well how helpful he was in Ephesus.(2 Tim.1:15-18)

Onesiphorus certainly owed so much to Paul as Paul advocated for him to his master Philemon. And so it is out of gratitude that Onesiphorus, sought Paul out in Rome and refreshed him, as he had in Ephesus. Paul’s love was full of mercy and grace, forgiveness and compassion. He did not hold onto people’s past mistakes but provided new hope and new pathways for a meaningful life for them. It is no wonder that these early believers who were following Jesus loved Paul.

The song I thought of when I wrote of Onesiphorus in Scattered flock this week was Will You Let Me Be Your Servant: “Will You Let Me Be Your Servant, let me be as Christ to you? Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant too. We are pilgrims on a journey, here together on the road; we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.” words and music: Richard Gillard). They are wonderful words applicable to all of us who serve the Lord.

Conclusion

So from the Apostle Paul, this intellectual giant in the faith, we see modeled God’s agape love in many practical ways. We see his constant vigilance in prayer and his ability to encourage, admonish and strengthen those who shared the gospel ministry with him. We see his remembrance of their family history when they had believers in their background and his urging them closer to the family of God when they were the first converts out of paganism. That kind of love and commitment to others in the Body of Christ is what we need as we relate to people all around the world today. As my [Spirit of Generosity sermon](https://www.maryloucodmanwilson.com/copy-of-sermons?lightbox=dataItem-kwxy99t4) illustrated last week, this is the kind of full-orbed, practical love that has equipped us and sustained us in our move back to Wheaton.

May God continue to help us to be His servants to one another each day, expressing His love in all the ways Jesus modeled and now empowers us to do. Amen. Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson 12/15/21