



That hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” was written by Joseph Scriven, who was born over 200 years ago (1819) in Ireland to an affluent family. He graduated from Trinity College in Dublin. He fell in love with a young lady who was eager to spend the rest of her life with him. However, on the day before their wedding, she fell from her horse while crossing a bridge over the River Bann and got drowned in the water below. Joseph stood helplessly, watching from the other side. By the time he was able to get to her, it was too late. He described his sorrow, saying, “The bottom of my world seemed to disappear.”

In an effort to overcome his sorrow, he began to travel and eventually migrated to Port Hope in southern Ontario, Canada. He became a leader of a Plymouth Brethren church and started a school for orphans. He would often read the Bible to railway construction workers who were building the Grand Trunk Railway. He was highly regarded by the local citizens, known for his selfless service to others despite his own physical ailments and heavy heart.

Eventually he fell in love again with a 23-year-old aunt of a child he had been tutoring. The young lady’s name was Eliza, and they were soon engaged to be married. But tragedy struck again as Eliza came down with pneumonia and died before they could wed.

Joseph continued to live in Port Hope, ministering to the poor and sick. He served free of charge and even shared his clothes with those less fortunate than himself.

On one occasion when Joseph became ill, a friend who was visiting him discovered a poem by his bed and asked who had written it. Joseph said, “The Lord and I did it between us.” He thought his poem, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” would bring comfort to his mom, who still lived in Ireland. Joseph had not intended for anyone else to see it.

Aren’t you glad they did? Charles Converse, an American attorney and composer of church songs, wrote the tune for this precious hymn that is still sung by congregations around the world still sing today. *What a Friend we have in Jesus!*<sup>1</sup>

The apostle Paul would have appreciated such a hymn, for it was Paul and Silas who were praying and singing hymns to God around midnight from an inner dungeon with their feet clamped in the stocks – and this was after they had been severely beaten (see Acts 16:22-25).

That was in Philippi, years before Paul wrote his final letter to Timothy from another prison in Rome. This time there would be no release, but rather a “departure” from earth to heaven, as Paul’s life would be poured out as a drink offering to God. In the last chapter of his last letter, Paul issues his final charge to Timothy to “preach the word ... do the work of an evangelist

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<sup>1</sup> Lindsay Terry, “Story Behind the Song: ‘What a Friend We Have in Jesus.’” *The St. Augustine Record*, 23 April 2015 [online]. Retrieved on 03 July 2024 from <https://www.staugustine.com/story/lifestyle/faith/2015/04/23/story-behind-song-what-friend-we-have-jesus/16242223007/>.

... fulfill your ministry.” After Paul’s final charge, he shares his final testimony, that by God’s grace he has fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith, and would be crowned by the Lord on the Day of his glorious appearing. Paul concludes his testimony by reminding Timothy that this crown was not for Paul only, but for all who long for the Lord’s appearing.

Now as Paul begins to draw his letter to a close, he mentions several people who have had a significant impact on his life and ministry – both friends and foes. **[show highlight]**

### ***Friends and Foes*** **2 Timothy 4:9-15**

People impact our lives too – some positively, some negatively. Paul’s reference to how various persons impacted him can help shape our perspective of those who have impacted us and how we should regard them. So, let’s heed God’s Word as it comes to us through the pen of the apostle Paul, as he addresses his young protégé in 2 Timothy 4:9-15:

<sup>9</sup> Do your best to come to me soon. <sup>10</sup> For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. <sup>12</sup> Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. <sup>13</sup> When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. <sup>14</sup> Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. <sup>15</sup> Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

In verses 9-15, Paul mentions nine persons by name. The sermon outline in your bulletin includes a chart with all nine men divided into four rows that are represented by a combination of positive and negative signs. These signs reflect each man’s influence on Paul. Most are a “positive, positive” while Alexander is a ‘negative, negative.’<sup>2</sup> Demas and Mark changed their course, moving either from positive to negative, or negative to positive.

My guess is that some of these men whom Paul lists parallel people in your own life. A brief description of each man will be of use to us as we consider how to regard certain persons who have impacted our lives.

#### **1. Timothy, the Faithful Son (v. 9)**

Paul says to Timothy in verse 9, “Do your best to come to me soon.” Though Paul could be executed at any time, he holds out hope that he might see Timothy, his “beloved child,” one last time face to face. Though Timothy was not Paul’s biological child, Paul still addresses him this way at the outset of this letter because of the special relationship they shared. Paul was Timothy’s father in the faith, the one who may have led him to Christ and certainly mentored him in the things of the Lord.

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 216. Merida notes, “This idea is taken from an audio sermon on 2 timothy 4:9-18 preached by Mark Driscoll, though I never saw his chart.” I would further note that the descriptive designations underneath each man’s name is almost identical to those used by John MacArthur in his commentary on 2 Timothy (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 205-211.

Jesus said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). Earlier in this letter, Paul commended Timothy, saying, “You have faithfully followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness...” (2 Tim. 3:10).

Paul had many friends and co-workers, but none was so dear to him as Timothy. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul said, “I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel” (Phil. 2:20-22).

Timothy was as faithful as they come. It’s hard to estimate the worth of someone who is like a son or daughter to you. Paul did not take such a person for granted, and neither should we. If there was one person Paul wanted to see before he died, it was Timothy. He was definitely in the positive-positive category in terms of his influence on Paul.

Unfortunately, that was not the case with Demas.

## 2. Demas, the Unfaithful Deserter (v. 10)

“For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica” (2 Tim. 4:10). At one time Demas had been one of Paul’s closest associates. We know this because at the end of Paul’s letter to the Colossians, one of his other prison epistles, Paul said, “Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas” (Col. 4:14). Likewise in his letter to Philemon, Paul sends greetings on behalf of Demas, whom Paul refers to as his “fellow worker” (Philemon 24).

At one time Demas served alongside Paul. And it was during a season in which anyone who worked with Paul would risk sharing persecution and prison with him. “As the risk increased, Demas’ resolve decreased.”<sup>3</sup>

Why? Because Demas was “in love with this present world.” This may indicate that Demas was not a true believer. First John 2:15 states, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” It could be that Demas superficially accepted the gospel but not enough to be truly saved. Demas’s heart may have been like the “rocky ground” that Jesus described in the Parable of the Sower: “This is the one who hears the word and immediately received it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away” (Matt. 13:20-21).

On the other hand, Demas may have been a genuine believer who did not love the world *instead* of Jesus, but loved the world *more* than Jesus, more than his fellow Christians, more than the work of the Lord. John Calvin held that view of Demas, saying,

But we are not to suppose that he completely denied Christ and gave himself over to ungodliness or to the allurements of the world, but only that he cared

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<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., *2 Timothy*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 206.

more for his own convenience and safety than for the life of Paul. He could not stay with Paul without involving himself in many troubles and vexations and a real risk to his life; he was exposed to many reproaches, he was laid open to many insults, he was forced to give up caring for his own concerns, and in the circumstances he was overcome by his dislike for the cross and decided to look to his own interests.<sup>4</sup>

So he “deserted” Paul. “Deserted” (*enkataleipo*) is a strong verb that means “to utterly abandon and leave someone helpless in a dire situation.”<sup>5</sup> Demas was a friend through thick and thin: when things thickened up, he thinned out and set off for Thessalonica. We’re not sure why. Maybe persecution wasn’t as intense there. Or maybe Demas lived there in his pre-conversion days, in which case he may not have been known there as a Christian. Whatever the case, he brought much anguish to Paul, which made Paul want Timothy’s company all the more. “Do your best to come to me, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica” (2 Tim. 4:9-10).

Whereas Timothy was in the positive-positive category in terms of his influence on Paul, Demas was in the positive-negative category. He went from being devoted to deserting.

Perhaps you’ve known such a person in your experience – someone who let you down and caused you pain. You probably don’t like to think too much about them. Well, Paul felt the same way. He doesn’t dwell on Demas, who brought Paul pain. Besides, Demas’ desertion reminds Paul of other men who had left him – not because they had deserted Paul but because they had been deployed by Paul to serve elsewhere: “Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.... Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:10b, 12).

### **3. Crescens, the Faithful Unknown (v. 10)**

This is all we know about Crescens. His name appears nowhere else in Scripture. He is like millions of men and women all over the world who have faithfully served the Lord in all sorts of places but are relatively unknown except to the people who have been directly impacted by their faithful service. Paul was mindful of Crescens and was thankful for him, which is why he makes mention of him in his final letter. Crescens was gone from Paul but not forgotten by Paul. And Crescens along with every other faithful unknown believer is surely remembered and will be rewarded by the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ,

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

- Hebrews 6:10

### **4. Titus, the Faithful Comforter (v. 10)**

Most of us recognize the name Titus because of the pastoral epistle that bears his name. In that letter, Paul addressed him as “Titus, my true child in a common faith” (Titus 1:5).

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, 1, 2 Timothy & Titus (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 340. Cited in R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*. Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 276-277.

<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, 206.

So, Titus, like Timothy, was mentored by Paul and was like a son to him. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that when he came to Troas during his Third Missionary Journey, his spirit had no rest because he couldn't find Titus there. So, Paul went on to Macedonia. There Paul says that his body had no rest. He faced conflict from every direction, with battles on the outside and fear on the inside. Then Paul writes, "But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus" (2 Cor. 7:6 NIV).

Titus had a refreshing influence on Paul. His presence put wind in Paul's sails. Paul knew that other believers would benefit from Titus' influence, so Paul had sent Titus to Dalmatia, probably to strengthen the church there and to build up its leaders, just like Titus had done in Crete. Now that Titus wasn't around, his absence was felt, which made Paul want Timothy to do his best to come soon.

### **5. Tychicus, the Faithful Messenger (v. 12)**

In verse 12, Paul says, "Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus" – no doubt to deliver this very letter to Timothy and perhaps to replace Timothy temporarily as the pastor of the church in Ephesus so that Timothy could visit Paul in Rome. Tychicus also delivered Paul's letters to the Colossians and to the Ephesians (see Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7-8). Imagine hand delivering apostolic letters that ended up becoming books of the Bible! Tychicus was a tried and true servant of Christ. He could be depended on to deliver Paul's messages and do whatever else was required of him as a faithful servant of Christ. With Tychicus having been dispatched by Paul, along with Crescens and Titus, Paul's yearning for Timothy's companionship increased all the more.

### **6. Luke, the Faithful Companion (v. 11)**

"Luke alone is with me," writes Paul in the first part of verse 11. This is not a disparaging remark about Luke, as if Paul is saying, "Get here quick, Timothy, 'cause all I got is Luke!" No, Paul thought the world of Luke, as did so many other believers. Near the end of Paul's letter to the church at Colosse, he mentions "Luke the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14). Kent Hughes in his commentary refers to this faithful companion as "Dependable Luke," saying, "Luke was a tough friend for tough times. He was with Paul in prison from the first to the last. He was Paul's biographer, and the 'we' passages in Acts indicate that he was with the apostle during some of the most difficult times."<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps you've known a friend through thick and thin, who stuck with you in the toughest of times and maybe even had special skills that they used specifically to serve you. Luke was that kind of guy.

### **7. Mark, the Unfaithful Restored (v. 11)**

Immediately after mentioning Luke, Paul says something significant about Mark in the second half of verse 11. Paul tells Timothy, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry." If you look at the chart in your bulletin, you'll see that Mark appears in the negative-positive category. That's because he went from being unfaithful,

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<sup>6</sup> Hughes and Chapell, 286.

or undependable, to faithful and useful. You see, when Paul went on his first missionary journey, Mark went with him and Barnabas. But soon into the trip, Mark bailed and went back home. We're not sure why, but apparently it wasn't for a very good reason because Paul didn't want to take him on the next trip. Apparently he felt that he couldn't count on Mark and considered him dead weight – unreliable and useless. But Barnabas thought that Mark deserved a second chance. The rift between Paul and Barnabas was so strong that they decided to go their separate ways. Barnabas and Mark went one way, and Paul and Silas went another.

But at some point Mark proved to be faithful and was restored in the eyes of Paul. Mark was present with Paul during his first imprisonment (Col. 4:10). In his letter to Philemon, Paul refers to Mark as a “coworker” (Philemon 24), and Peter in his first epistle refers to Mark as his “son” (1 Pet. 5:13).

I like to think of Mark as the “comeback kid.” While I can't blame Paul for not wanting to take Mark with him on his second missionary journey, I'm glad that Barnabas didn't give up on Mark but saw his potential and kept investing in him and mentoring him. Barnabas' name means “son of encouragement,” and he was the person God used to mature Mark and make him into a useful servant of Christ. It's not how you start, but how you finish. Mark's turnaround reminds us not to write anyone off prematurely, including ourselves.

### **8. Carpus, the Faithful Host (v. 13)**

In verse 13, Paul writes to Timothy, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.” Apparently, Paul had left some valuable resources with Carpus in Troas, which may have been his hometown.

A “cloak” was a large, heavy garment that served both as a coat and as a blanket during cold weather. In verse 21, Paul tells Timothy, “Do your best to come before winter,” so it is easy to see why Paul wanted his cloak, especially since he was confined to a dungeon.

The “books” were probably papyrus scrolls, perhaps copies of Old Testament books. The “parchments” were vellum sheets, made of specially treated animal hides. They were quite expensive and were therefore used for only the most important of documents. These particular parchments may have contained copies of Paul's own letters or were blank sheets on which he planned to write additional letters. Even while in prison, Paul had no plans to stop studying or writing.

Given how valuable and essential these resources were to Paul, one wonders why he would have left them behind in the first place. Most likely it was because that Paul was arrested in Troas and had no opportunity, or was not allowed, to take these things with him.

The point, as far as our consideration of Carpus is concerned, is that he must have been a trustworthy man, a faithful host, if Paul had entrusted these valuable resources to his care. In all likelihood, Paul had stayed with this Christian brother while in Troas. Perhaps the church even met in his house. We know little about Carpus, but we have enough information from this single sentence to infer that he was a faithful servant.

## 9. Alexander, the Faithless Opponent (vv. 14-15)

“Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message” (vv. 14-15). The fact that Paul introduces him as “the coppersmith” indicates that this Alexander may have been an idol-maker who, like Demetrius the silversmith (Acts 19:24), fiercely resented Paul for preaching the gospel, which resulted in people turning from their idols, which made for bad business. Whatever the case, he fought against everything Paul said and did him much harm. The original wording indicates that Alexander may have even been responsible for Paul’s arrest. He was a vicious enemy, whose influence was all negative. Paul tells Timothy to watch out for him while assuring Timothy that the Lord would repay Alexander for all the harm he had done – because he was ultimately an enemy of God.

Paul’s words regarding Alexander help us as believers today to expect opposition and to take necessary precautions against those who seek to actively harm God’s people. What these vicious enemies oppose are not the good things that Christians do, but the gospel that we proclaim. As we show kindness to others, we must never compromise our message – and we must be willing to pay the price that comes from preaching “repentance for the forgiveness of sins ... in [Jesus’] name to all nations” (Luke 24:47).

### Conclusion

As we consider these nine names near the end of Paul’s final letter written shortly before his death, we see that *specific persons have a profound impact on a Christian’s life.*

#### ***Specific persons have a profound impact on a Christian’s life.***

There’s one name alluded to in this section that does not appear on the list that is the name of the person that has the most profound impact of all – “the Lord” (v. 14), that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul will highlight him in the closing verses, which we’ll consider next week.

For now, let us simply observe that the faithfulness exhibited by men such as Timothy, Crescens, Titus, Tychicus, Luke, Mark, Carpus, and even the apostle Paul himself, was owing to the grace of God in his Son, Jesus Christ, who in the book of Revelation is called “Faithful and True” (Rev. 19:11; cf. 3:14).

- Jesus is the ultimate “Faithful Son,” who completely fulfilled the will of his Father, by laying down his life as a sacrifice for sin, fully satisfying God’s righteous judgment against all who would repent and believe the gospel.
- Jesus is the “Faithful Messenger” who fully and perfectly declared the message of God in an ultimate and unique way, for he himself is *Immanuel*, “God with us.”
- Jesus is the “Faithful Companion” and “Faithful Comforter,” who will never leave us nor forsake us, whose very Spirit dwells in us and is there to help us.
- Jesus is the “Faithful Host” who presents a table before us in the presence of our enemies. He not only serves us, but he offers his very self to us (John 6:53-57).

In a few moments we'll partake in the Lord's Supper, which is a thankful remembrance of Christ and his death, symbolized by the bread and cup, that nourishes us spiritually, brings us into communion with God and one another, and fills us with joyful anticipation of the glory to come.

With that in mind, I'll close with four other practical principles:

1. **Our interpersonal connectedness:** One of the most famous lines of John Donne, a 17<sup>th</sup> century English poet, was declared not in a poem but in a sermon that he preached in which he said, "No man is an island." His sermon emphasized our interconnectedness as human beings and the influence we have on one another. This is all the more true for believers whom are all members of Christ's body.
2. **Our individual contributions:** We all impact one another in good or bad ways, by what we say and do and how we live. In the context of the church, "each [member] is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). We're to use our gifts to build up the body of Christ. Which limb of your body would you like to have amputated? What's it worth to you to keep all your body parts intact? In the same way, we should value each part, each member, of the body of Christ, because of its individual contribution to the building up of the whole body.
3. **The indispensable characteristic** is faithfulness. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." Faithful to God, faithful to the gospel, faithful to our word, and faithful in our service to others.
4. **The inevitable consequences:** "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Cor. 5:10). Either you will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Let's celebrate together!", or you will hear, "I never knew you. Away with you, you cursed one, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons." Thank God, instead of being cursed by Christ, you can be commended by him. How? By turning from your sin and trusting in Christ alone to save you. He will cleanse you from your sin, make your heart his home, and empower you to live a God-pleasing life. What more could a person want? Why wouldn't you trust Jesus to save you? What's holding you back? Will it be worth it when you stand before him on Judgment Day? Oh, friend, if you have yet to receive Christ, delay no longer. Repent and believe the gospel.