

# Further TOGETHER

2 Timothy 4:9-18

October 6, 2019

*Please read 2 Timothy 4:9-18 before reading this transcript.*

Last month I challenged us, as a church, to try to make it to church for 5 Sundays in a row: 5 for 5. Today is week #4 in our sermon series on Spiritual Training. How are you doing? Have you made it to the first 4? I know some of us are keeping up by watching the service Simulcast from home or by reading the transcripts. If this describes you, way to be!

As we continue to think about our spiritual training, we need to keep it in mind that Christianity is NOT a solo sport. Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus TOGETHER...

1) ...means that TOGETHER is an intentional choice. TOGETHER should be our default setting. Our first and best option. It's not that we are unaware of the other options, but we choose the TOGETHER option. Even if TOGETHER means slower. Even if it's harder. Even if, at times, it seems less efficient. We are following Jesus TOGETHER. Even, if there are some disappointments along the way. We see the spirit of this in today's Scripture reading. In 2 Timothy 4, verses 9-22, Paul closes his letter with some personal remarks. He mentions over 15 different people by name. Each one of these was a Bros./Sis in Christ who was running the race with him, TOGETHER. Men and women who were working together, encouraging one another, and becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus TOGETHER. These were people with names like: Crescens<sup>1</sup>, Titus, Luke, Mark, Tychicus<sup>2</sup>, and Carpus. Priscilla, Aquilla, Onesiphorus<sup>3</sup>, Erastus, Trophimus<sup>4</sup>, Eubulus<sup>5</sup>, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia. It's been said: "If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." In other words, we can go "Further TOGETHER." Paul seemed to understand this. We're going to talk about going this today.

Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus TOGETHER means that TOGETHER is an intentional choice. When we consider the New Testament record, it's clear that Paul was intentional about bringing others along with him. We see this in other places as well like Romans 16 and Colossians 4. Perhaps one of the best illustrations for this is found in the story of Team Hoyt. This father and son duo, Dick and Rick Hoyt, have an incredible story of intentionally choosing to run TOGETHER. Dick's son Rick was born a spastic quadriplegic but that didn't stop him from asking his dad if they could go running TOGETHER. If you can, please take a few minutes and watch this video clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaZwpD1Paag>

The video ends with the phrase, "Walk with me." The key word here is "WITH," as in TOGETHER. But couldn't this dad go much further and much faster running alone? Probably... Then again... maybe not. Here's what I mean. One has to wonder whether this dad would have run at all, were it not for the inspiration of taking his son with him. There would be so much less purpose and drive for him to run hard and run long, if he were just doing it alone, just for himself. In fact, here's what Dick says about his son, Rick, "He's the one who has motivated me because if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be out there doing triathlons."<sup>6</sup> You see, personal ambition and racing for medals and trophies, only goes so far in this life. So many athletes report getting to the pinnacle of their career and then realizing that it wasn't nearly as satisfying as they had envisioned. But not THIS dad. Finishing TOGETHER, with his son, is what made all the difference. THAT prize, is greater than any other prize he might have been able to win running on his own. So I'll put the question to you: Who are you

---

<sup>1</sup> KRESS uhnhz

<sup>2</sup> TIC ih cuss

<sup>3</sup> ahn ih SIF uh russ

<sup>4</sup> TRAHF ih muss

<sup>5</sup> You BEAU luhs (I'm grateful for help with all of these pronunciations from Severance, W. M., & Eddinger, T. (1997). In *That's easy for you to say: your quick guide to pronouncing Bible names* (p. 131). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>6</sup> Read more at <https://www.triathloninspires.com/thoytstory.html>

bringing along in your race? Who are you bringing with you? Who would you list in your 2 Timothy 4? For the body of Christ, TOGETHER is an intentional choice. I know that you can probably run faster alone. But when you get to the finish line of this life, it won't just be important to finish the race yourself, it will also be important to bring others WITH you!

Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus TOGETHER also...

**2) ...means we risk some disappointments.** Any time we choose to rely on someone else, we take a risk of them failing us or disappointing us in some way. This is a baked in component of being in any relationship. Whether it's family, friends, classmates, or business partners. This is why some of us dread group projects. In fact, if we were honest, some of us avoid working on a team, exactly because of the risk it requires. Perhaps we've been burned before, perhaps it's our pride, or perhaps it's our personality. Following Jesus TOGETHER means we risk some disappointments.

Paul tells us about one of his disappointments in 2 Tim. 4:10, "for Demas<sup>7</sup>, because he loved this world, has deserted me...." We don't have the whole story here, but clearly Paul was discouraged by this. Previously, Demas is mentioned positively in the letters of Colossians and Philemon. In fact, just a few years earlier, Demas had been a loyal, fellow worker with Paul and his other ministry partners.<sup>8</sup> But NOW, he abandoned Paul, in his time of need. It's even more troubling to learn that Demas is not the only one who had deserted Paul. Earlier in this same letter to Timothy, Paul says, "You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including PhyGELus<sup>9</sup> and Hermogenes."<sup>10</sup> (2 Timothy 1:15) Paul wrote 2 Timothy during an especially difficult time in his life; he is writing from prison. During some of his earlier incarcerations, Paul spent his time in a rented house; but not this time. Now he is in chains, imprisoned during the rule of the Emperor Nero.<sup>11</sup> (A nasty fellow to say the least.) So, not only is he languishing in a cold dungeon while he writes this letter, but he is also feeling very alone and abandoned. This is why he pleads with Timothy in verse 9 "Do your best to come to me QUICKLY" and then AGAIN in verse 21, "Do your best to get here BEFORE winter." Sure, he needed his winter coat, but there's more to it than that.

Paul makes this appeal to Timothy, in the context of his absolute confidence in the Lord. In verses 16-17, Paul declares: "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength..." In other words, it WASN'T that Paul hadn't learned to stand on his own two feet. He had experienced God's deliverance. He knew that he could trust God to rescue him from every evil attack and keep him safe. Even so, we find this tough, well-seasoned, strong and mighty, Apostle Paul (the one who is now writing his 13<sup>th</sup> New Testament letter), THIS Paul feels an urgent need for help and support from other Christians.<sup>12</sup> Brother or Sister in Christ, Christianity is NOT a solo sport. We are in this TOGETHER. We need each other.

But following Jesus TOGETHER, means that we risk some disappointments. As we share in life and relationships together, we all come with different needs and expectations. But sometimes we fail to meet each other's needs and sometimes we don't meet each other's expectations. A while back, one of my Brothers in Christ shared an article with me titled, "Nobody gets the church they want."<sup>13</sup> The title alone compelled me to read the article. It's by a pastor who works in the Washington D.C. area, named Bobby Jamieson. He writes: "Every church is a work in progress. Sometimes, then, even the good hunger to be part of a mature, thriving church might lead you to be impatient with the immaturities and struggles of your own congregation. ...Nobody-that's right, nobody-gets the church

<sup>7</sup> "DEE muhs" Severance, W. M., & Eddinger, T. (1997). In *That's easy for you to say: your quick guide to pronouncing Bible names* (p. 131). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>8</sup> See Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24. *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2477.

<sup>9</sup> "Fih JEL uhs" Severance, W. M., & Eddinger, T. (1997). In *That's easy for you to say: your quick guide to pronouncing Bible names* (p. 131). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>10</sup> Consider 1 John 2:19.

<sup>11</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2045.

<sup>12</sup> Consider this video challenge by Josh McDowell, "We Need More Than Jesus." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nw9Jbz9zfVc>

<sup>13</sup> Read the full article at <https://www.9marks.org/article/nobody-gets-the-church-they-want>

they want. We all have opinions, preferences, and sometimes even convictions that won't perfectly match any actual assembly of God's people. ...God made us co-laborers in the gospel so that we would image the gospel by putting others before ourselves....Christ set aside his rights to serve us, and that's what you do every time you sacrifice a preference to promote the body's growth. Putting others before yourself will cost you....God may not give you the church you want, but he's more than capable of giving you the church you need. So take a look around. Maybe he already has."

This segues into our final main point. Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus TOGETHER...

**3) ...means we learn to treat each other with grace.** Paul goes on in verse 11, "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry." Mark, also known as John Mark, "had deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey."<sup>14</sup> We can read about this back in Acts 15:37-40, "Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left...." Encouragingly, this does not prove to be the end of the partnership between Paul and Mark. In fact, later on we find their relationship restored and Mark faithfully serving alongside Paul during yet another imprisonment. Colossians 4:10 reveals, "My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas."<sup>15</sup> So here we find Paul and Mark working alongside each other once again. At some point, these two Brothers in Christ reconciled. That is why we read Paul saying in 2 Timothy 4:11, "...Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry." Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus TOGETHER means we learn to treat each other with grace. We strive to make amends, to find a way forward as partners in life and ministry.

But sadly, sometimes damaged relationships between Christians never get repaired. It takes both people, fully invested, fully humble and willing to admit their own mistakes and complicity. And then, it takes the long, hard work of reconciliation. In 2 weeks, we will be celebrating the Lord's Supper together. Each time we eat the bread and drink the juice, we are called to re-examine ourselves first. We are called to consider how we can make peace with our fellow Brothers/Sisters in Christ.<sup>16</sup> We can't afford division in the church. We won't make it, without one another to rely on. Let me highlight this truth with a closing illustration.

I'm a bit of a tree guy. I've actually been known to hug trees in public. I spent much of my childhood running around in the woods of northern Wisconsin with my black lab named Sheba. I was into building tree forts and stuff like that. Don't get me wrong, I know trees are a renewable resource. Sometimes we have to cut them down so that we can build things or heat our homes. But it sure is nice when we don't cut them ALL down. Some of you have probably heard of the section of woods called the "Lost 40." It's an area that was accidentally skipped over by loggers back in the 1800s. It's located ~30 mi. east of Blackduck.<sup>17</sup> Back in September The Bemidji Pioneer newspaper had a nice article on it.<sup>18</sup> I had a chance to go see the Lost 40 a while back and it's worth the drive if you've never been up there.<sup>19</sup> That is, unless for some reason you don't love wandering around in the woods looking at trees. If that's the case, you might find it pretty boring, because that's all it is: a bunch of really cool, old trees.

<sup>14</sup> See Acts 12:12 and 13:13. *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2050.

<sup>15</sup> See also Philemon 24.

<sup>16</sup> Consider Romans 12:18.

<sup>17</sup> It's between Alwood, Wirt, and Pomroy, just north of Dora Lake.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.bemidjipioneer.com/news/4670240-Get-Lost-Forty-remains-an-untouched-gem-in-northern-Minnesota>

<sup>19</sup> "Lost 40 SNA owes its old-growth pine forest to a surveying error that occurred during the Public Land Survey in 1882. As the story goes, the pines were missed by loggers because surveyors mistakenly mapped the area as Coddington Lake. (The lake is actually located a half-mile to the southeast. Oops.). The site was re-surveyed and the error corrected in 1960. Shortly after, it was incorporated into Big Fork State Forest and its old trees have since endured. The literal crowning feature of this SNA is its nearly 32 acres of designated\* old-growth white pine – red pine forest.... A 2009 study found the oldest individual trees within the SNA to be red pines 230-240 years old. The stand on adjoining land within Chippewa National Forest reportedly originated as early as 1745, and includes the "champion red pine" of Minnesota's Native Big Tree Registry, measured at 115" in circumference and 120' high." <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/snas/detail.html?id=sna01063>

One of the things on my Bucket List is to visit the Redwood Forests in California. I hear that the trees there are AMAZING. Their official Latin name is sequoia<sup>20</sup> Sempervirens.<sup>21</sup> The Sequoia can grow up to 300 feet tall! By comparison, Tamarack Hall at BSU is about 150-feet tall.<sup>22</sup> So this tree can grow up to 2x taller than the Tamarack building. This 300-foot monster of a tree is even more impressive when we learn how deep its roots go. Shockingly, this 300-foot tree, has roots that only go down about 12 feet! How is this possible? Simple: these massive Redwoods find “the strength to withstand powerful winds and floods by extending their roots [outward] more than 50 feet from the trunk and living in groves where their roots can intertwine.”<sup>23</sup> Many of these trees have stood for 100s of years! The key is living in groves where their roots can intertwine. It’s important for us as Christians, to be DEEPLY rooted in Christ for our strength, but the Sequoia helps to illustrate that there is also a strength from being rooted TOGETHER with one another. To extend our roots outward and to intertwine with one another as a source of strength. God has designed the church to be a body made up of many parts that are intricately and powerfully intertwined.



**Brother or Sister in Christ, we can go further TOGETHER!**

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
on October 6, 2019 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

---

<sup>20</sup> For any of you “word geeks,” sequoia is such a super cool word. Not only does it have a Q in it, but also uses all 5 vowels!

<sup>21</sup> (Seh COY ah) (SEM per veer ens)

[https://sempervirens.org/redwood-facts/?gclid=CjwKCAjwldHsBRAoEiwAd0JybRi6sh4oWfmADbDunymXMjlbN1HOkIjbhZhW3T238LuQ6JXffNv3rRoCuWEQAvD\\_BwE](https://sempervirens.org/redwood-facts/?gclid=CjwKCAjwldHsBRAoEiwAd0JybRi6sh4oWfmADbDunymXMjlbN1HOkIjbhZhW3T238LuQ6JXffNv3rRoCuWEQAvD_BwE)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.emporis.com/buildings/127642/tamarack-hall-bemidji-mn-usa>

<sup>23</sup>

[https://sempervirens.org/redwood-facts/?gclid=CjwKCAjwldHsBRAoEiwAd0JybRi6sh4oWfmADbDunymXMjlbN1HOkIjbhZhW3T238LuQ6JXffNv3rRoCuWEQAvD\\_BwE](https://sempervirens.org/redwood-facts/?gclid=CjwKCAjwldHsBRAoEiwAd0JybRi6sh4oWfmADbDunymXMjlbN1HOkIjbhZhW3T238LuQ6JXffNv3rRoCuWEQAvD_BwE)