



Life Principles Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God

WHEN OTHERS FAIL US

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Timothy 4:9-18 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 57:1-4 | Isaiah 43:1-4 | Matthew 27:46 | Luke 23:34 | John 14:16-18 | Acts 1:8; 7:60 | Philippians 2:13 | Colossians 1:27 | 2 Timothy 1:15 | Hebrews 13:5 | 1 Peter 5:10

SUMMARY:

Friendship brings us some of the greatest joys in life—but it also can cause immense pain.

You've probably experienced the sting of rejection and desertion. Sometimes they are caused by people whom you spent hours with, encouraging and building them up in the faith. Other times, a spouse or close friend leaves—despite your best efforts to be loving, faithful, and selfless. And if you haven't experienced rejection or betrayal yet, you probably will some day. What is the best way to react when others disappoint you?

We can learn how to handle abandonment and disappointment by examining the apostle Paul's response to painful relationships. He knew what it meant to have strong relationships. And he experienced betrayal as well. Amazingly, Paul forgave others for their failures and reconciled with them when appropriate. Let's discover how he dealt with betrayal and abandonment by trusted friends.

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES:

Friends sometimes fail us.

Paul experienced pain from unfaithful friends. He wrote, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me" (2 Tim. 4:14-16; see also 2 Tim. 1:15).

The apostle wrote these passages near the end of his life. He had spent years establishing churches in cities such as Thessalonica, Philippi, and Corinth. He was beaten, stoned, and thrown in prison numerous times because of his missionary efforts. But despite his faithfulness to the Lord, his friends failed him. They weren't reliable when he desperately needed them.

What are some reasons why friends desert us in times of trouble? Sometimes they feel inadequate—unsure of how to help. In other cases, they don't want to be identified with the loser in a conflict. People also leave because they are jealous, so they hope to see us fail. Others are selfish and don't want to sacrifice their time to support you and me. Lastly, friends abandon us because they judge us for our mistakes. Rather than being available to help, they can excuse themselves from any responsibility. In other words, when friends disappoint us, it's often because of a deficiency in their character, not necessarily because we've failed them somehow.

Forgiveness must prevail.

Paul's friends left him to face one of the most difficult situations of his life—all alone. How did he respond? With forgiveness: "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; *may it not be counted against them*" (2 Tim. 4:16, emphasis added). Our Savior said something similar as He hung on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). The apostle also may have been influenced by Stephen, who was stoned to death in Paul's presence. The young martyr ended his

life with the words: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” (Acts 7:60).

Paul was practicing what he preached—the importance of forgiving. Don’t be a fair-weather friend, interested only in what you can get from another person. Those who mistreat you will often need help later. Will you be available? Waiting for a chance to get them back—to let them down as they did to you—shows you have an unforgiving spirit. The godly response is to refuse to hold anything against those who hurt you.

The presence of the Lord sustains us.

Paul could forgive others for three reasons:

■ **He knew that God would never leave him:** “The Lord stood with me” (2 Tim. 4:17). Even though all of Paul’s friends had abandoned him, he knew that the Lord Himself would always be with him. Christ promises all believers, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). If you are a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives within you to comfort and guide you (John 14:16-18). The most faithful Friend is always with you, even if everyone else leaves you.

■ **The apostle knew that God would empower him:** “The Lord . . . strengthened me . . . that all the Gentiles might hear” (2 Tim. 4:17). Paul could rely on the presence of God to accomplish his calling—taking the gospel to the world. He knew that the Lord works within believers, strengthening us to accomplish His will (Phil. 2:13). Despite persecution, physical assaults, and imprisonment, the apostle never abandoned sharing the good news.

People *will* persecute you; some of your friends *will* abandon you in tough times. But adversity eventually ends: “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you” (1 Pet. 5:10). If you depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, your life can be fruitful and productive despite the trials that come your way.

■ **Paul was confident that God would deliver him:** “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly

kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18). Listen—sometimes the Father delivers us *from* something. Other times, He allows us to experience hardship in life. But He sustains us *through* whatever we may face (Isa. 43:1-4), and in some cases, He decides to take us home to be with Him.

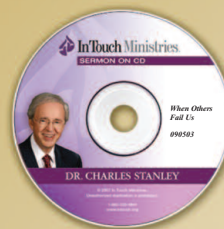
In Paul’s case, shortly after he wrote this passage, Emperor Nero executed him. Perhaps that doesn’t sound to you as if God delivered Paul. But four years later, the ruler committed suicide. I believe this was a direct consequence of Nero’s persecution of believers. No one can violate the principles of God and avoid His judgment. The next time you face a difficult situation, remember that your heavenly Father stands with you, even if everyone else deserts you.

CONCLUSION:

What kind of friend are you? Are you dedicated to those you love? Or do you often disappoint them? Perhaps you are faithful, but your friends consistently fail you when trouble comes. They are happy to spend time with you when all is going well. But when their support is needed, they are unavailable.

I urge you not to hold it against them. Hurt and rejection are painful, but often unavoidable, parts of life. You can’t make anyone love you. It’s impossible to force them to be faithful to you in difficult times. But you and I can always find healing through forgiveness. Without it, you will never develop close, dependable friendships.

Focus on becoming a genuine, trustworthy, loyal person—who can forgive when others disappoint—and you will attract reliable friends. Lean on Jesus, the perfect Friend, and you will become the type of person others take delight in knowing. ✨



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