

# Grace Has the Last Word

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2 Timothy 4:9-22

Sermon Series:  
Kingdom Legacy

*...it's hard to  
part with old  
things.*

**D**o you possess something old that you positively cherish? It may have little value to anyone else, yet you are sentimentally attached to it. It may be an accessory of some kind or an old item of clothing. Your family begs you to replace this ancient relic, but you can't quite seem to part with it. People are legendary for hoarding things of sentimental value. If our house was ever to catch fire and I had time to retrieve a few items, I wouldn't pick things of monetary value. I would likely retrieve sentimental keepsakes.

I still have in my possession an old watch that can't be repaired, owned by my grandfather, a tattered rugby shirt worn in college and numerous yearbooks dating back to high school. I possess an ancient pair of flip flops that date back 25 years or more. I've worn these flip flops so long that the rubber is cracking and the straps are fraying. The soles of these flip flops are worn so low that my heels nearly touch the ground. Yet, every summer I retrieve these flip flops from the back of my closet to take to the beach with us. Every year, Chris offers to buy me a new pair of flip flops. "No, don't be silly." I protest, "These old flip flops work just fine."

This Bible I am holding is a lot like that old pair of flip flops. This

Bible has been my preaching companion for 20 years. It takes time to break in a new Bible. When this Bible was new, it was stiff and uncooperative. This Bible is now "broken in." It falls open to most any page. I can even roll it up like a newspaper.

Earlier this year, the back 30 pages of this Bible broke away from its binding. I lost the entire book of Revelation (some of you think we're better off without this imposing book!) and most of John's epistle. It broke away while I was preaching. I left it somewhere in this sanctuary, but I can't seem to locate it. I'm offering a reward to anyone able to find it.

To add insult to injury, a second portion of the New Testament has become unglued from my Bible. This time, another 30 pages of the New Testament has separated from its binding. Ironically, it split right down the middle of 2nd Timothy, which has been our text this summer. I'll debut a new Bible soon but, as I said, it's hard to part with old things.

Last Sunday, I preached from chapter four of 2nd Timothy. As Paul looks back over his ministry, he writes, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (4:7). You might expect Paul to conclude with these lofty words, but instead he goes on to pay tribute to people who have

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shared in ministry with him. He mentions 16 people in a span of 11 verses. This is the kind of Bible passage you hope no one ever asks you to read. I spent time yesterday on the pronunciation of these odd sounding names.

Who really cares about all these names? God cares! Every time I encounter a grocery list of names in the Bible, it reminds me that God cares about people!

Some of the people whose names appear on this list serve on the front lines of ministry with Paul. Paul credits Mark and Luke in verse 11 for their faithful witness to the faith. Both of them write gospels that bear their names. But most of the people cited in this letter work behind the scenes. They serve supporting roles. There are Crescens and Titus in verse 11, who have been dispatched by Paul to carry the gospel to distant lands. There is Tychicus in verse 12, who serves as a courier for many of Paul's letters. There is the husband and wife team of Priscilla and Aquila (who sound like ideal names for a late '60s singing duo!), who opened their home to early believers for worship (1 Corinthians 16:19). There is the household of Onesiphorus in verse 19, who is credited earlier in this same letter for providing care to Paul in prison (1:16). There are also names in verse 21 of which we know nothing, such as Eubulus, Pudens, Linus and Claudia, although early credible sources tell us that Linus succeeded Peter as the second leader or bishop of Rome.

There is, undoubtedly, a story behind every one of these 16 names, but I'll confine myself to one name in this passage, Mark, who also goes by the name John in Acts (12:12). (Mark is his Roman name and John is his Hebrew name.)

John Mark accompanies Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. For some inexplicable reason, John Mark leaves Paul and Barnabas for Jerusalem (13:13). We're not told what happens; we read later it was a defection of some kind. When Paul is ready to inaugurate a second missionary journey to revisit every city where they established churches, Barnabas agrees, proposing to take John Mark with them (15:37). Paul, still smarting from John Mark's desertion, flatly refuses to have John Mark accompany them. Their disagreement becomes so heated that they end up splitting into two mission teams. Barnabas and John Mark set sail for Cyprus, while Paul and Silas travel west on foot.

How ironic that Barnabas's name means "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). Every time Barnabas surfaces in the Bible, we find him in the role of an encourager. Barnabas is determined to invest in the life of John Mark. Leave it to Barnabas to find some redeeming quality in John Mark. Lord, send us more Barnabases who see your potential in people!

Second Timothy is likely the last letter written by Paul before his death by execution. Paul, knowing his days were numbered, asked for two people to visit him: Timothy and John Mark. Paul wrote in verse

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11, “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry.” What happened in their relationship that Paul would write words of commendation for John Mark? Did Paul overture John Mark and offer pardon or did John Mark request his forgiveness? We’ll never know. What matters most is that they reconciled.

This reconciliation says something significant about Paul and John Mark. These two disciples order their personal lives around kingdom principles. We’ve been talking about the kingdom of God for seven months now. As one football coach used to say, “Okay, once more for the lineman!” The kingdom of God is not merely a place believers go after they die. Jesus said, “The kingdom of God has come near.”

One of the core principles of behavior in the kingdom of God is forgiveness. Jesus prayed on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:24). Paul and John Mark took to heart Jesus’ message of reconciliation. We prayed earlier in worship, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12).

To be fair about it, Paul mentions people in his letter who have deserted him. In verse 9, we’re told that Demas deserts Paul, who, Paul adds, “is in love with this present world.” Earlier in one of Paul’s letters, Demas is singled out as a fellow laborer in the gospel (Philemon 24). Perhaps he became a follower of Jesus before he counted the cost. In verse 14, Paul

writes about Alexander the copper-smith “who did me great harm.” Although Paul warns Timothy to avoid Alexander, he also cautions him not to take action against him. God will repay him!

At Paul’s preliminary hearing before the magistrate in verse 16, Paul tells us, “no one came to my defense.” But then, Paul hastens to add, “May it not be counted against them.” Although everyone has abandoned Paul, he writes in verse 17, “The Lord stood by me and gave me strength.”

Paul has every right to feel betrayed by people. He has put his life on the line for the sake of the gospel, yet even some of his closest associates betray him. Paul, however, remains absolutely committed to Christian reconciliation. He writes in his second letter to the Corinthians, “From now on we regard no one from a human point of view.... If anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation. The old has passed away; everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:16-18).

Where do you need to be reconciled? Reconciliation begins with God. People often tell me as they near death, “I’ve made my peace with God.” When people say this to me, I want to interrupt them. “You can’t make peace with God, not when God has already made peace with you. God offers us peace through Christ’s death on the cross for our sins. Since you cannot reconcile with God, God reconciles

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with you. Reconciliation is a gift God wants to give you through faith in Jesus Christ.

Reconciliation begins with God and moves to touch the people God has placed in our lives. Is there someone in your life with whom you need to reconcile? Is there someone you need to pardon or who needs to pardon you?

In 1754, a dispute broke out between George Washington and William Payne over an upcoming election. Colonel George Washington said something offensive to William Payne. Payne hit Washington so hard with his cane that he knocked Washington to the ground. Washington's troops rushed from their barracks and would have made short work of Payne had not Washington intervened. Washington retreated to his chambers and chastised himself for his words of impropriety. He resolved to make reparation with William Payne the following day. The next morning, he sent Payne a note requesting his company at a nearby hotel. Payne went, expecting to settle the score in a duel. To Payne's great surprise, he arrived to find Washington sitting at a table with a decanter of wine and two glasses. Washington rose to meet Payne and said with a smile, "Mr. Payne, to err is human, but to correct our errors is always honorable. I believe I was wrong yesterday...If you deem it sufficient, here is my hand. Let us be friends." From that point on, William Payne became an ardent admirer and friend of George Washington.

If 2nd Timothy serves as Paul's last letter, then the words of the benediction in verse 22, "Grace be with you," frame for Paul his last recorded words. Paul concludes on a word of grace. How appropriate that grace has the last word!

