

Be Loyal to the Faith

In the December 31, 1989 *Chicago Tribune*, the editors printed their photos of the decade. One of them, by Michael Fryer, captured a grim fireman and paramedic carrying a fire victim away from the scene.

The blaze, which happened in Chicago in December 1984, at first seemed routine. But men firefighters discovered the bodies of a mother and five children huddled in the kitchen of an apartment.

Fryer said the firefighters surmised, "She could have escaped with two or three of the children but couldn't decide whom to pick. She chose to wait with all of them for the firefighters to arrive. All of them died of smoke inhalation."

There are times when you just don't leave those you love.

Craig Brian Larson, ed., *750 Engaging Illustrations*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "411. Loyalty".

Has any athlete had more fans than Michael Jordan? Probably not. Even so, Michael Jordan said something surprising about his need for emotional support to columnist Bob Greene. When Greene asked why he wanted his father to be in the stands during a game, Jordan replied, "When he's there, I know I have at least one fan."

Even the great Michael Jordan needs support. Loyal support. How much more do the rest of us need regular reminders that others are behind us—even when we aren't at our best.

Craig Brian Larson, ed., *750 Engaging Illustrations*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "696. Support".

According to Bill Jauss and Steve Rosenbloom in the *Chicago Tribune*, on July 19, 1996, Chad Kreuter, a reserve catcher for the Chicago White Sox, severely dislocated and fractured his left shoulder on a play at home. He underwent surgery, and the Sox placed him on the sixty-day disabled list. That's the kind of thing that makes a backup player feel even less like a part of the team.

But quite the opposite happened. Apparently Chad's teammates had a strong liking for him; each player put Chad's number 12 on his ball cap to show support. Chad was a member of the team whether he played or not.

As you can imagine, that meant a lot to Chad. Later in the season when he was able to suit up again, he showed his appreciation by, you guessed it, putting the numbers of each of his teammates on his ball cap.

All devoted to one. One devoted to all. That is what makes a team, and that is what makes the community of Christ.

Craig Brian Larson, ed., *750 Engaging Illustrations*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 74-75.

2 Timothy 1:15:

*You know that **everyone in the province of Asia** deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.*

“*Everyone in the province of Asia*” is most likely **hyperbole** (exaggeration: deliberate and obvious exaggeration used for effect, e.g. “*I could eat a million of these;*” “*Everyone hates me*”). Not everyone deserted Paul but a great many did.

2 Timothy 1:16:

*¹⁶ May the Lord grant mercy to **the household** of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain;*

Onesiphorus was a man who had risked everything for Paul. The reference to the “**household**” of Onesiphorus, rather than to Onesiphorus himself, suggests that he had already become a victim of persecution.¹ There are two ways to understand Paul's prayer for Onesiphorus:

- 1) Onesiphorus was dead at the time of Paul's writing. This may be understood by the verb “*grant mercy*” in this verse and to “*on that day*” in verse 18. This view is uncertain because of the mention of his household.
- 2) Onesiphorus was separated from his family at Ephesus for quite a while as he did missionary work. Paul wished God's blessing and mercy on his family.

Paul's strong prayer in verse 18 seems to indicate that Onesiphorus had died.²

Onesiphorus is a convincing example of courage, a man who was committed to helping people even if it cost him his own life. We see in this passage how much he loved Paul. When Onesiphorus heard that Paul had been arrested and imprisoned, he left immediately for Rome to see what he could do to help. He had some difficulty finding the prison where Paul was chained. For two years Paul had been allowed to live in a rented house and to use it as his living quarters despite the fact that he was a prisoner. But at some point he was put behind bars in one of the

¹ John Phillips, *The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring the Pastoral Epistles: An Expository Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 361.

² Bruce B. Barton, David R. Veerman, Neil Wilson, *Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1993), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: “2 TIMOTHY 1.”

security prisons where the most notorious criminals were kept. Onesiphorus did not give up his search. He "*sought [Paul]³ out very diligently.*" The idea is that he looked for Paul under very difficult circumstances until he found him. Note his ministry to Paul:⁴

- He refreshed⁵ Paul often. This would include visits and of course sharing Scripture and prayer. And, if allowed, it would include food and clothing and any medical or financial needs Paul might have had.⁶
- He was not ashamed of Paul's imprisonment and being identified with Paul as a friend and fellow believer in Christ. He stood by Paul as a follower of the Gospel.⁷

Because of Paul's deep affection for Onesiphorus, he prays that God will have mercy upon him on the Day of Judgment—that God will reward Onesiphorus for the many things he did for him when he was a prisoner.

The majority of friends may well desert us in the darkest hour of need; but the true friend is the man/woman who stands with us when we need support or encouragement.⁸

Let's look at some other verses and passages that touch on this same quality:

Matthew 20:25-28 (TLB):

²⁵ *But Jesus called them together and said, "Among the heathen, kings are tyrants and each minor official lords it over those beneath him.*

²⁶ *But among you it is quite different. Anyone wanting to be a leader among you must be your servant.*

²⁷ *And if you want to be right at the top, you must serve like a slave.*

²⁸ *Your attitude must be like my own, for I, the Messiah, did not come to be served, but **to serve**, and to give my life as a ransom for many."*

Acts 20:35 (NASB):

³⁵ *"In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner **you must help the weak** and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

Romans 15:1-6 (HCSB):

¹ *Now we who are strong have an obligation **to bear the weaknesses of those without strength**, and not to please ourselves.*

² *Each one of us must please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.*

³ Name added.

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⁵ Provided new energy.

⁶ , *The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, (Chattanooga: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1991), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "B. Charge Two: Hold Fast to the Lord Jesus Christ, 1:13-18".

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Oliver Greene, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to Timothy and Titus*, p.228f.

³ *For even the Messiah did not please Himself. On the contrary, as it is written, The insults of those who insult You have fallen on Me.*

⁴ *For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures.*

⁵ *Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement allow you [to live] in harmony with one another, according to [the command of] Christ Jesus,*

⁶ *so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice.*

Galatians 6:2 (TLB):

² *Share each other's troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord's command.*

Hebrews 13:1-3 (HCSB):

¹ *Let brotherly love continue.*

² *Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it.*

³ *Remember the prisoners, as though you were in prison with them, and the mistreated, as though you yourselves were suffering bodily.*

James 1:27 (HCSB):

²⁷ *Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

“He often refreshed me.” One could conclude from this comment that Onesiphorus visited the market frequently to pick up supplies for Paul and then looked for a chance to bring them into the prison.

“Lonnie J. Edwards, a physical-education instructor... was explaining square-dancing to his fifth-grade class at Hooper Alexander Elementary School in DeKalb County, Georgia. As he called the children to their places, boy-girl, boy-girl, Nancy, a little redheaded girl, said she was not coming. She started to cry and walked away, carrying a towel over her hands.

“Edwards approached the twelve-year-old child cautiously. With her back to the other students, Nancy privately revealed why she couldn't possibly hold hands with boys: she had been born with only her pinkies and two partial fingers. Amazingly, she had hidden her deformity from teachers—she was able to hold a pencil—but the students knew about it and were cruel to her.

“Gathering himself, Edwards said, ‘Nancy, we can't do anything about this problem, but I can help you overcome it and become the best you

can be. Now I want you to hold your head up. From this moment on, you will no longer use this as a limitation.'

"Slowly, Nancy gave him the towel, which he never returned. Four days later Edwards began the square dance as Nancy's partner. Soon all the children seemed willing—even eager—to touch Nancy's hands. That was in 1971. Over the next two years, Edwards continued to encourage her.

"In 1997, when this story first appeared it said:

"'Nancy Miller can do almost anything she sets her mind to, including play the piano and type about sixty-five words a minute. Married, she lives in Orlando with her husband and four children....'

"'I grew up because of one man,' Miller says."'⁹

"Do you know someone crippled by shame? In the presence of others, be the first to show you accept that person. Acceptance is a precious gift we all can give others.

"He... was not ashamed of my chain." The word translated "chain" is "halusis," which means "handcuff." Paul was literally chained to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day. It, therefore, took a lot of courage to bring supplies to Paul's cell because not all of the soldiers chained to Paul could have been very friendly. This would have been a high risk undertaking. Can you imagine your mood if you were the soldier whose job it was to be chained to a prisoner and have to go through that all day long, perhaps several times a week? Some of those soldiers may have believed Nero's lie that the Christians, of whom Paul was the leader, had been responsible for the burning of Rome. Perhaps a number of them had lost loved ones in the fire. The guards would probably have reported Paul's conversations and the names of his visitors to the authorities. In spite of all this, Onesiphorus refused to be frightened and continued providing for Paul. Paul prayed that the Lord would "grant mercy" and protect "the household of Onesiphorus."¹⁰

2 Timothy 1:17:

But when he arrived in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me.

"Onesiphorus lived in Ephesus, but for some reason had been in Rome and, while there, had gone out of his way to search for Paul until he had found him. If Paul had been largely "abandoned" by others, Onesiphorus may have had difficulty finding anyone who would even admit to knowing Paul's location. Besides, a stranger to the city may simply have had problems getting through the red tape and bureaucracy of the Roman penal system. In any case, the aging apostle saw in Onesiphorus a brother who allowed neither inconvenience nor potential embarrassment

⁹ Craig Brian Larson, ed., *750 Engaging Illustrations*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 9-10.

¹⁰ Ibid.

to keep him from tracking Paul down. Onesiphorus' visits had refreshed the lonely prisoner.¹¹

2 Timothy 1:18:

*May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on **that day!** And you know very well all the ways he served me in Ephesus.*

No doubt “*that day*,” also used in verse 12, was speaking of the day of the **believer's judgment**, when every child of God will stand before Christ to give an account of his life.¹²

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NRSV):

*¹⁰ For all of us must appear before **the judgment seat** of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.*

Paul prayed that his friend would receive mercy from the Lord on that final Day of Judgment. He was certain that there would be an accounting of each person's life, and that **unrewarded service for Christ in this life would be openly rewarded in Heaven.**¹³

Timothy was familiar with Onesiphorus and his service in Ephesus. Onesiphorus not only provided faithful service to Paul in Rome but he also had a record of service in Ephesus as well.¹⁴

Some scholars have suggested that Onesiphorus was dead at this writing, and the evidence from this passage makes that assumption possible. Because Paul hoped Onesiphorus' family would be granted mercy in the present (1:16), while his subsequent request (1:18) was that his friend would “*find mercy from the Lord on that day*,” it can be assumed that Onesiphorus was no longer around. Paul's expression “*mercy from the Lord on that day*” conveys deep appreciation to Onesiphorus, rather than a formal request to God for his fate in eternity. Paul was telling Timothy to imitate those, like Onesiphorus, who were faithful to Christ and unashamed to be associated with servants of Christ who were suffering or who were in prison.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Glen Spencer, *The Expository Pulpit Series – Second Timothy: The Making of a Good Soldier*, (Tunkhannock, Pa.: WORDsearch Corp., 2000), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 45.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.