

## Committed to the Call

**The Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it (2 Timothy 4:17).**

**Scripture:** 2 Timothy 4:9-18

**Song:** “Be Thou My Vision”

What motivates people to enter the mission field? Perhaps it's the huge number who have never heard the gospel, or the number of non-Christians worldwide. Sadly, despite these and other reasons, many missionaries return home—not because of lack of money or illness but because of conflicts with other missionaries. The World Evangelical Alliance reports that the top reason North American missionaries leave their assignments is friction with their peers.

The apostle Paul would sympathize. His coworker Demas forsook him because “he loved this world” (2 Timothy 4:10). Alexander the coppersmith harmed Paul, and others deserted him when he defended himself before the Roman emperor (vv. 14, 16). Yet Paul didn't quit. The Lord stood with him so he could carry out his mission work through the power of Christ.

Even proclaiming the good news can be infected by our fallen nature. If we know someone laboring for a harvest of souls in another country, we can pray for them to give any conflicts to God and remain true to their calling.

**Father,** how disputes among missionaries must grieve Your heart. Help me pay attention when I hear of those, so I can pray for Your peace and perseverance in their work. In Jesus' name, amen.

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## Passionate Prayer

**Epaphras . . . is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured** (Colossians 4:12).

**Scripture:** Colossians 4:7-15

**Song:** “Ever Will I Pray”

In his book *Power Through Prayer*, E. M. Bounds describes the prayer habits of eight men of God. Bishop Andrews prayed for most of five hours every day. Sir Henry Havelock scheduled the first two hours of the morning for alone time with God. As a result of the frequent and fervent prayers on his knees, preacher Edward Payson wore grooves into the wooden floor beside his bed.

The Bible has many examples of people who talked with God. One, Epaphras, is not a name that readily comes to mind when we think of great people of prayer. Yet in today’s reading, he appears among several to whom Paul gives special recognition. Tychicus and Onesimus were dear and faithful, and others provided comfort for Paul. But he singles out Epaphras for his prayers. This “servant of Jesus Christ” didn’t merely mention names to God for a general blessing; he prayed earnestly that the believers in Colossae would stand firm and grow in their faith. The original language communicates the idea of intense spiritual labor—the kind that wears grooves into a wooden floor.

We need passionate intercession today for God’s work in the lives of others. Make the most of your opportunity.

**Father**, keep me from hurrying through my prayer time or being content with superficial words. Help me take that time seriously to pray for others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## A Healthy Church

**Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you** (2 Corinthians 13:11).

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

**Song:** “We Are the Body of Christ”

Sometime ago, I went through a challenge in a church and received biblical instruction on repentance, unity, and a renewed commitment to Christ. It was just what I needed for my negative attitude. Refusing to let the enemy get the upper hand, I accepted the Holy Spirit’s conviction of my attitude and other areas of my life. It wasn’t long before God gave me a new passion for Christ and His church, and I became more committed than ever to the body of Christ.

That’s why Paul’s words in our reading today have a special meaning for me. Before the apostle wrote 2 Corinthians, believers in Corinth faced struggles that had disrupted their harmony. By responding to the apostle’s teaching, they moved on to repentance and set themselves right with God and each other. Paul concludes his second letter by reminding these believers to practice the things that foster a healthy church: full restoration, encouragement, unity, and peace. With these, God’s love and peace abide with His people.

Just as the human body requires attention to physical health, so the church body requires attention to spiritual health. Praise God that the same directives Paul gave to the Corinthians help us do that today.

**Father,** thank You for revealing my areas of spiritual weakness and for helping me work to change them. Continue to make me well so Your church can remain healthy. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Keep Speaking

**One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent” (Acts 18:9).**

**Scripture:** Acts 18:4-11

**Song:** “People Need the Lord”

When my father gave his heart to Christ a few years after marrying my mother, he eagerly shared his new faith with his unbelieving family. Dad’s mother and grandmother started attending church, but his stepfather wanted nothing to do with Christ. Grandma’s death many years later seemed the ideal time to approach Grandpa again about Jesus. My mother’s outreach and attempts to speak of Christ were met with his walled rejection and a stiff “No, thank you.” My initial reaction was to leave Grandpa to his own poor decision and go on with my life, but God wouldn’t let me shake him off that easily. When the time was right, I too told Grandpa of God’s love for him.

Paul would understand my feelings. He faced opposition from the Jews when he preached Jesus as Messiah. Theirs was more than polite rejection, however; it was abusive opposition (Acts 18:6). Still, the Lord didn’t let Paul off the hook. He told Paul to keep speaking the truth, assuring that He would be with him (v. 10).

It’s hard to share our faith when we face opposition, but this passage teaches us that rejection isn’t always an excuse for retreat. If we lovingly speak His truth, the Lord will be with us as He was with Paul.

**Father,** help me not give up when someone doesn’t want to hear the gospel. Give me courage to speak truth at the right time. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Preserving the Message

**“Since [the Jews’ complaint] involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things” (Acts 18:15).**

**Scripture:** Acts 18:12-17

**Song:** “Immortal, Invisible”

God’s message has faced opposition. For example, in 175 BC, Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes ordered the Jews to destroy their Scriptures and worship foreign gods—or face death. In AD 303, Roman Emperor Diocletian outlawed Christianity, killed its leaders, and burned their sacred books. Yet in the face of such antagonism, God preserved His message. Defying Antiochus Epiphanes, Judas Maccabeus saved the Scriptures from being destroyed and incited a revolt. But when Constantine succeeded Diocletian, he legalized Christianity and personally paid for new copies of the Scriptures.

Today’s reading shows God using Gallio, governor in Corinth, to keep His message alive. Under Jewish attack, Paul stood before Gallio. The apostle was no stranger to conflict, and so it’s no surprise that he didn’t back down. What is surprising is that Gallio stopped the attempt to silence Paul by refusing to decide on the matter. Gallio thus enabled Paul to embark on his third missionary journey, and the gospel continued to spread. Even when Paul was eventually killed for his faith, the good news he preached did not die with him.

The same is true today. We can take heart that whoever or whatever counters God’s message, He will perpetuate His life-giving Word in His way.

**Father,** help the gospel of Your Son to spread, no matter what comes against it. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Substitute Mother

**Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too** (Romans 16:13).

**Scripture:** Romans 16:1-2, 6-7, 12-13, 16

**Song:** “Make Me a Blessing”

I have fond memories of many friends from my youth. One is Bev, a close friend of my mother's, who is now with the Lord. Bev was more than a friend; she was a second mother to my sisters and me. When Mom underwent kidney surgery and had to stay in the hospital for three weeks, Bev stepped in and provided support to us girls, all in grade school. She cooked meals for us and came to school to hear my report on mammals. Later in life, my sisters and I knew we could talk to Bev about whatever troubled us.

Paul must have had a similar feeling for a woman we know only as the mother of Rufus. Among the people Paul commends in today's reading, she has the distinction of being like a mother to the apostle. This single verse doesn't give us much information to go on, however. Some writers wonder if Paul's real mother had rejected him for leaving Judaism. Perhaps Paul stayed in Rufus's home, where his mother provided comfort and emotional support. Whatever the situation, Rufus's mother supplied the lack in Paul's life, and Paul remembered her for it.

Has someone been like a mother to you? Commend her for it. God will bless you both.

**Father,** thank You for sending the right person to fill the lack of a mother. And help me invest in someone who needs my support. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Servant Hearts

**[Priscilla and Aquila] risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them** (Romans 16:4).

**Scripture:** Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26; Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19

**Song:** “Make Me a Servant”

Years ago, I grew to respect a certain married couple at church. They were involved in nearly every event on the calendar and invested themselves in people’s lives. The husband served in church leadership and music; his wife felt a calling to women’s Bible study and hosted many in their home. Whenever a need arose, you could count on this couple to be there—not out of duty but out of devotion to Christ and His church.

I think of this husband and wife when I read today’s Scriptures. The common denominator in them is Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple also devoted to Christ and His church. The apostle refers to them as coworkers in Christ. They opened their home to Paul and traveled with him. They were humble people, taking the preacher Apollos into their home to clarify the truth of salvation in Christ. So great was their commitment to this new “Way” (Acts 9:2), Priscilla and Aquila did more than serve it; they risked their lives for it.

It doesn’t matter whether we’re married or single; we can serve Christ and others with the same attitude that characterized Priscilla and Aquila.

**Father**, help me take the best way in ministry, even if risky. Help me see the needs You see and serve in Your love. In Jesus’ name, amen.